

Vital Links in World Evangelization

*You are worthy, for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation.
Revelation 5:9*

by Ian M. Hay

The Global Consultation On World Evangelization (GCOWE) scheduled for May 1995 has the potential to be another milestone in fulfilling the Mission of God. This mid-decadal effort to continue momentum towards *A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by AD 2000*, puts the consultation in line with efforts dating back more than 100 years. If it achieves anything like the results of similar consultations at Edinburgh, Berlin, Wheaton, Green Lake, Lausanne, Pattaya and Manila, it truly will be worth the effort and expense.

It is well, therefore, that the International Society of Frontier Missiology (ISFM) take the time and effort to debate in advance the assumptions and the process that could help GCOWE '95 clarify and achieve its goals. Delegates should be better equipped next May to make meaningful contribution.

This is to be a consultation on World Evangelization. It's purpose is biblical and it's goals laudable. In this article I wish to explore some of *the vital links in world evangelization* that will help make the consultation worthwhile.

Any meeting of ISFM presupposes big numbers. We seem always to talk in terms of billions of either reached or unreached people. For some of us with little mathematical competency it's all mind-boggling. When I hear these numbers, I always want to say, "Name Two!"

As evangelical Christians, we acknowledge our human responsibility to reach these masses clustered in unreached peoples. We should not need to take time to re-emphasize our basic

theological commitment to their lostness. Alas, however, it is necessary. For no vital link can be forged if our premise is faulty. The lostness of these unreached ought to haunt us. That is part of what being evangelical means. We bow to the sacred Scriptures as the basis for our understanding. For only God can speak authoritatively about the human condition. And He has spoken!

Years ago, soon after I began administrative responsibilities with SIM in North America, my first exposure to an inter-mission meeting of this sort was at the Wheaton Congress in 1966. One of the topics we addressed was the subject of universalism and we included the following in the declaration:

We Therefore Declare

That, we will, ourselves, be more forthright and thorough in our preaching and teaching of the testimony of the Bible on the awful reality of eternal loss through sin and unbelief.

That, we shall encourage all evangelical theologians to intensify their exegetical study of the Scriptures relating to eternal punishment and the call to redemption and reconciliation.

That, since the mission of the Church inescapably commits us to proclaim the gospel which offers men the forgiveness of sins only through faith in Jesus Christ, our verbal witness to Him should accompany our service to the poor, the sick, the needy and the oppressed.

That, the repudiation of universalism obliges all evangelicals to preach the

gospel to all men before they die in their sins. To fail to do this is to accept in practice what we deny in principle.¹

That was our commitment in 1966. Now it is 1994. With all the questions being raised regarding the final destiny of the lost, even in evangelical circles, a re-commitment to this theological base is needed if GCOWE '95 is to have any meaning. This is a vital link that cannot be ignored. As I say this, I am aware that I may be preaching to the choir. But without this biblical basis, the very existence of ISFM would be meaningless, and the projected consultation of GCOWE '95 a waste of time.

But the last paragraph of the Wheaton 1966 declaration needs fresh emphasis. It challenges us in the area of *our praxis*, as well as our orthodoxy. How do we behave? Achieving the goal outlined for AD2000 staggers the imagination. How can we reach them all? No doubt, good methodologies will come out of the consultation next May, but only if we are honestly committed to the task. The time for ivory tower theory is long past. We, the practitioners, need to be *doing the work*. We need people today with the same passion of General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, who is reported to have said:

Do something, Oh, do something! By the hell on earth these poor creatures suffer today; by the destruction on the verge of which they hover; by the abundant mercy provided for them; by the deliverance we have proved so possible; by the agony of the cross

under which I make my appeal, I plead for a united, desperate, persistent effort to save the lost.²

I want to concentrate for a moment on praxis. GCOWE '95 has stated goals. It is imperative that organizations be clear about their own goals. Clarity of purpose is required. We need to identify objectives, first, then methods. That's the proper order. Objectives must be clearly defined, then one knows precisely what can be achieved. Strategy follows and provides a framework within which objectives can be achieved. Hopefully, each of us has stated objectives, but do our corporate goals reflect our theological commitment?

This ought to be obvious, but is it? I'm afraid at times we have all been guilty of not taking the time to identify goals before embarking on some of our journeys. Some programs have been started without clearly defining how they tie in to the true purpose. Dare we ask ourselves honestly if our corporate objectives are theologically based? If so, how are we achieving them? How many unreached peoples have we and our organizations identified as reachable? How many new areas have we entered in the last dozen years? These are the pragmatic questions we must ask ourselves to see if we are indeed on target.

The three-plus billion unreached will not be reached if we don't lay plans to do it. GCOWE '95 must focus on meaningful groups that can be reached.³ Jesus Christ did not give His Church an impossible task. When He commanded us to make disciples of all the nations (ethne), He also gave us the power to do it by giving us His Holy Spirit. Here is *The Vital Link*. The practical result of this means that there are no unreached peoples, only those who are unreached.

Yet the myth persists that parts of the world are unreachable. One way to destroy that myth is to remind ourselves that places where today we see the Church flourishing were considered

unreachable only a few short years ago. We must, therefore, return to the faith and determination of our fathers.

Following the Pioneers

One of the outstanding characteristics of the past generation of mission pioneers was their burden to reach the unreached. Those of us who are old enough to have known some of that hardy breed can only stand in awe at their memory. They determined to enter doors which others considered fast shut. They felt that it was not a matter of God having shut the doors so much as the Church doing nothing to enter them.

Have we lost something of the daring which characterized our forebears? When faced by difficulties, we immediately tend to conclude that the door must be closed, that retrenchment is in order. Had the earlier mission pioneers had the same sentiments, vast areas now reached would still be unreached today. Those indomitable pioneers laughed at impossible circumstances. Rowland Bingham, founder of SIM, was a true pioneer. His favorite chorus, written by Charles Wesley taught to all SIMers, was:

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees, and looks to God alone.
Laughs at impossibilities and cries, "It shall be done."
Laughs at impossibilities, and cries, "It shall, it shall be done."

A new sense of temerity, creativity and flexibility must become the hallmark of the modern missionary endeavor. True, not all doors are open, and it would be foolhardy to stubbornly push at those doors which our Lord Jesus Christ has plainly closed. I fear, however, that this is not our problem. Our tendency is to quit too quickly in face of Satanic opposition.

Here is another *vital link—a return to the faith of our fathers*. It takes extraordinary faith to act on God's promises. All of us need to become "faith

missions" in the truest sense of that word. This means more than financial policies of support. This applies to our commitment to trust God to help us to do His will in the face of impossible circumstances. First-century Christians knew what to do when faced with problems—they prayed. That was their response no matter what the circumstances. When government edict commanded them "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18)," the Scriptures report that "When they heard this, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord (Acts 4:24)."

We face the same litany of pain, perils, and persecutions as they did. Our solution must be the same. We need for our times that same sense of godly temerity, that same faith in a God who hears and answers prayer. Truly this is *a vital link that dare not be lacking*.

GCOWE Assumptions

I would like to highlight several of the assumptions of GCOWE '95 and pinpoint the importance of those assumptions if the goals are to be achieved. These are:

- 1) The explosive growth of the Two-Thirds World Church in this century has positioned the global Church for a major evangelistic thrust in the nineties
- 2) Many Church and mission leaders now believe that genuine partnerships are the only way to take advantage of the opportunities presented by this last decade of the millennium, as we move toward the year 2000 and beyond.
- 3) Those best equipped to reach a people/nation are the Christians from that people/nation, although cross-cultural and international forces for evangelism are also required.
- 4) There is a presence of Christian leaders in every country of the world who are committed to the fulfillment of the Great Commission, who desire fellowship and network with those out-

side of their country who share a common vision.

A Major Paradigm Shift

During the last decade we have lived through a major paradigm shift in mission thinking. The late South African missiologist David J. Bosch in his seminal magnum opus, *Transforming Mission*⁴ is the first to implement the paradigm theory to missionary thinking. He has given a useful historical analysis of shifts in missionary thinking. He concludes that we are currently in such a shift leading to what he calls an “Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm”. While as a committed evangelical I differ with his inclusive conclusions, I must agree with

the fact that we are in a different era which needs altered thinking. These assumptions show the *vital links* needed to achieve these laudable goals outlined in the preliminary papers of GCOWE '95.

For more than 200 years the modern missionary movement has been a phenomenal success. The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ has become a worldwide reality. Thirty years ago, however, that movement almost came to a standstill. As news of dynamic Church growth in the Two-thirds World swept through Western churches, many came to the conclusion that the task was accomplished. Churches were told that missions from the West were a thing of the past. Recruitment sagged. Some mission societies closed their doors

Happily, that philosophy did not prevail. To the contrary, over the last twenty years a fresh breath of concern to reach the unreached billions who have not yet heard the claims of Christ has swept through the Church around the world. With that concern has come the realization that God is doing some

startling things—things that are distinct from traditional patterns. They relate to the role that non-Western churches are assuming in world evangelization to which these assumptions speak.

Some time ago, I participated in a consultation in England on the theme of “emerging missions” and their relationship to Western mission agencies. One of the major addresses was delivered by Dr. Panya Baba, who was at that time, the director of the Evangelical Missionary Society of Nigeria. It seemed strange to me to hear EMS of Nigeria

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be called an emerging mission. Beginning fifty years ago as an outgrowth of SIM work, and now having more than 900 missionaries, it is larger and older than the majority of Western societies.

Then also consider the Korean Church. More than 4000 Korean missionaries are already in place and many more are on the way. They are the wave of the future. Call them what you will, non-Western Churches are a powerful factor in reaching the world for Christ. The 200-year-old pattern of Western dominance is over. If present trends continue, the majority of Christian missionaries will soon be from non-Western countries.⁵

This of course, presents Western Churches and missionary societies with the need to rearrange their thinking and adapt to what is happening. With the necessary inclusion of all facets of the Body of Christ, there will be tensions as language, social perspectives, and cultural behavior patterns clash. There can be a tendency to feel that one's own ways are superior. Grace is needed for

each part of the Body to understand and accept the other, and thereby work and live in harmony. Western churches, which have long enjoyed the “prestige” of being the leaders in world evangelization, must come to grips with the fact that God uses whom He will to achieve His purpose and plan. The only way that the unreached of the world will be reached is for the total Church to be mobilized for missions. The beauty of it is that we now have a worldwide community through which it can be done and is being accomplished.

Western missions must be careful, however, not to come to the same kind of mistaken conclusion that was made in the '60s. We must not infer that since God is raising up non-Western mis-

sionaries, we aren't needed in the task. Our Lord wills to use all parts of His Body in taking the Gospel to every creature and to every people.

These assumptions for GCOWE'95 are more than assumptions, they are a vital link in God's chain of events. Careful strategies must be laid to utilize this strength. Most organizations here began with a very simple goal. I know ours in SIM did. The founders were challenged to penetrate new territory and to evangelize a vast areas that were totally unreached. And what pleasure there was in doing that. To be the first in a village, town, district, or nation with the gospel message—nothing can match the thrill of it! No wonder Paul, when speaking of his pioneering could say, “I magnify my ministry” (Rom. 11:13).

Of course it was not all easy. We must be honest—those old days were not all good. Often the soil was not responsive to the seed. There were tears, frustration and sorrow. Sorrow because at times the results of evan-

gelism quickly withered. The cares of the world seemed too great.

So we had to learn quickly that Christ's commission demands more than evangelism. We began to understand that to bring people to new birth through evangelism and then stop at that point is to follow a truncated commission. Discipling is crucial—the teaching of the “all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20).

Mission Stimulation

Here, then, is another *vital link*. One of the functions that Western missions have is stimulation, a word that comes from the Latin, *stimulare*, “to goad” as in herding animals. Even as Paul and his compatriots had a ministry to the early Church in two directions, so we are to arouse the churches, in both sending and receiving countries.

The New Testament teaches us that for a Church to be truly Church it must be concerned for the whole world, reaching out to the world with vigorous missionary activity. Paul honored the Church at Thessalonica for that. He

said, “From you sounded out the word of the Lord” (I Thes. 1:8). Jesus said that the evidence of a Spirit-empowered life was witness *both* in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world simultaneously (Acts 1:8). It wasn't either/or proposition, but rather both/and. Part of the goal, therefore, of GCOWE '95 must be to encourage responsible churches to be out-going in their witness; and to help provide the leadership training and biblical stimulation that brings about aggressive evangelism in the churches.

This being true, the measure of a mission's effectiveness, it seems to me, is the production of an outgoing, witnessing Church, a Church concerned for the whole world, a Church that reproduces itself. *The vital links* in this chain, will strengthen the way Western churches, missions and organizations can help GCOWE '95 which will indeed forge a strong chain connecting the vital links so that there will be a Church for Every People and the Gospel to Every Person by the Year 2000. So may it be for God's glory!

Reference

1. The Wheaton Declaration.” Harold Lindsell, ed., *The Church's World-wide Mission*. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1966) pp.224, 225.
2. I have been unable to document this quotation. It was given to me by my Scottish father. I believe it to be authentic.
3. “To reach the Unreached” A report to the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization by the Strategy Working Group. (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1978).
4. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), passim.
5. Ian M. Hay “Mission to Mission Relationships” in *Partners in the Gospel: a BGC Monograph*, ed. James H. Kraakevik and Dotsey Welliver (Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, IL: nd) p. 91.

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