

THE THIRD WAVE OF MISSION WORK

By Bob Young

I believe the church should dream big dreams. I fear we are thinking too small. I fear our vision is too limited. When the church understands what the Bible says about God's plan, God's purpose, God's dream for the world--the church will have a dream. The church should have the same plan, purpose and dream as God--to win the world for Christ!

The biblical plan for evangelism, profound because it is so simple, does not depend on technology. It does not depend on whether the church has enough money to send missionaries to every location around the world that needs the gospel. It does not depend on the things that tend to enamor the contemporary church. The biblical plan a simple plan whereby Christians win their family, neighbors, coworkers, acquaintance, and fellow countrymen to Christ, wherever they may live around the world. The Bible plan is a plan that depends on Christians winning for Christ those among whom they live.

I believe God wants the world to be won to Christ before the end of time. I also believe that the church is making little headway. In fact, statistics suggests that the church in general is falling further and further behind with every passing year. I believe the early church saw God's plan for winning the world and implemented it, but that through the years the church has gotten away from God's plan.

In the early phases, the Bible plan for evangelism included evangelists traveling to unreached areas to spread the gospel. But then, the plan was for the disciples who were made by the evangelists to pick up the cause and make more disciples. This is a plan that works. I know it works because I have observed firsthand God's people working together in churches who have the heart and passion to spread the Good News of Jesus. I have observed Christians who have little of this world's goods but who have a lot more passion than those of us who are surrounded by the comforts and conveniences of the modern world. I have taught, trained, equipped, and worked with those who are implementing the Bible plan for evangelism. I talk with them, I pray for them, I am privileged to work alongside them.

Nationals are the new wave of mission efforts! The dream of spreading the gospel broadly is becoming a reality in many places. Seeing the success that is possible using this biblical model, it is time to convince churches, church leaders, mission committees, and donors that there is a better way! It is time to cast aside the models that have developed over time and go back to the Bible model.

I write so that you will believe! Please take a moment to read what follows and pray about it! Less than a page!

Until some time in the last half of the 20th century, the history of Christian mission work was described in evangelical circles in the Western world in two stages. The first stage was the mission work we read about in the New Testament and the way the spread of Christianity continued through the first two or three centuries after Christ. This first stage is the story of the apostles going forth in obedience to the Great Commission, the story of early Christians who were scattered and went everywhere preaching the word, the story of the spread of the gospel message of salvation to the Mediterranean world, much of southern Europe, and places beyond. It is a story of Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, Carthage, and Constantinople, to name some of the principal cities where the gospel took hold.

The second stage of missions can be dated from the reintroduction of mission work in the 18th and 19th centuries. From the pioneering work of William Carey in India, and also in the work of countless others into the 19th and 20th centuries, the gospel was spread into the colonies of the European powers during the colonial era as mission work was renewed and revitalized. While the end of the colonial period was marked by World War II, the mission work that had begun continued. Returning GIs came home and made US churches aware that the

gospel had not yet gone to vast sections of the world. As a result, for the past 75 years churches in the US have sent North Americans to the far reaches of the globe with the hope of spreading the gospel in new places. In some ways, this continuing work is much like the mission work that was done during the second stage. Christians—especially ministers or evangelists—have been sent from their home nations to new places to serve as missionaries charged with sharing the Good News. This continuing work is also unlike the mission work that was done during the second stage in that those who are going have increasingly focused on physical needs and less on spiritual needs and the salvation that comes only through Jesus Christ.

Today, in what can properly be called a third wave of missions, the message of the gospel, empowered by God's Word and God's presence, is finding new energy in new places, especially in the southern hemisphere, and in what is described as the 10-40 window. Multitudes of dedicated men and women are taking the message of salvation to their own people. Hundreds and thousands are hearing about Jesus. National Christians are pioneering the gospel in their own nations—carrying the banner of the cross into places where colonial missions never went and never could go. I believe we are living in the time of a third stage of mission history—the native or national missionary movement.

It is time for churches in the US to grasp the significance of what is happening and to understand the importance of this new stage in world evangelism. More and more churches are praying for and supporting national missionaries. Still, too many churches continue to use the methods of the second stage, investing large sums of money to send North Americans to do what native missionaries are doing significantly better. The method reeks of colonialism and faces stiff challenges in many nations. Much has been written about the difference between Christianizing and Americanizing, and the method of sending North Americans is absolutely cost-inefficient in comparison to national missionaries.

The mission program of your church can be dramatically changed for the better. Church members in the US can learn to live more simply in order to support native missionaries. Churches can accomplish more with less. Our standards of materialism and leisure are being challenged.

The solution is not to quit investing in mission work. The solution is to see the value of national missionaries and to accept the renewed challenge of mission work both abroad and at home. Sometimes I hear someone say, often in opposition to sending funds to mission works, "We need to work on the mission field at home, just outside our church doors." The national missionary movement echoes a hearty, "Amen!" The way to reach the multitudes of unchurched, unbelieving persons in the US is for church members to become local missionaries. The way to reach the multitudes of unbelievers in other nations is for church members in those nations to become missionaries.

I believe the world can be reached for Christ in my generation and the next. I see more and more concerned Christians, I see an emerging mission leadership in tune with the national missionary emphasis. The heartbeat of God is for lost and dying souls. May God's people come face to face anew with the fact that every person without Jesus is lost. Every person without Jesus is a mission field; every person with Jesus is a missionary!