

THE THIRD WAVE OF MISSION WORK --1

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! The first article is less than a page!

Until sometime 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!

THE THIRD WAVE OF MISSION WORK --2

By Bob Young

[This second article in the series seeks to clarify and sharpen the changing nature of mission work in today's world. Eight mission principles to guide mission work in the third wave are identified.]

In my previous article I wrote about three waves of mission work: (1) New Testament missions, (2) the renewed focus on missions in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, and (3) a renewed national mission movement that is taking hold in many countries at the beginning of the 21st century. If you do an internet search for "Third Wave of Missions," you will find differing ideas about how to characterize the stages of mission work. The term "third wave" has various interpretations and understandings.

Some describe mission work in terms of globalization. They observe that the **first wave** of mission developed out of the first round of globalization when Europeans in the 15th century developed sailing skills to reach Africa, Asia and the Americas. They brought along the first missionaries from various religious orders. The advent of the steam engine introduced a **second wave** of globalization allowing nations to penetrate further into their colonies. Missionary societies developed to plant the church in those areas in the second wave of mission. Today the **third wave** of globalization includes air travel, internet, and cell phones. With enhanced communication and travel, it is easier to form relationships and partnership between US Christians and those in other countries, resulting in more short-term mission trips, short-term missionary work (10 years or less), and church partnerships.

With increasing frequency, the "third wave" of mission work refers to situations where indigenous "nationals" become the primary workers rather than "foreign missionaries." The work of the church is developed around national Christians. "Third wave" is also used to refer to the increased opportunities, demands, challenges, and pitfalls of the church's mission work, resulting from the "third wave of globalization."

In this article, I look briefly at the present state of mission work from the point of view of the mission field (receiving churches) rather than from the point of view of the North American (sending churches). May we see the tremendous potential of the "third wave of mission work."

It is not inaccurate to say that a new day is dawning in mission work, characterized by new dynamics. This new day urges us to revisit and restate basic mission principles, thinking in reverse, beginning with the receivers rather than the senders. The new day of mission work that is enhancing the spread of the gospel in nation and after nation is based on these principles:

- The first priority is always evangelism so that Christians are formed and churches are planted
- New Christians and new churches must be strengthened and edified, the work of evangelism must be balanced with healthy spiritual development and discipleship
- Local indigenous, national church leaders and teachers are developed and trained, learning by doing
- Healthy growing congregations select and support their own leaders, teachers, and evangelists
- The local indigenous church assumes primary financial responsibility for its work and ministry, thus becoming self-sustaining
- "Every-member" evangelism and ministry are facilitated so that the local church functions as a healthy body of Christ with a minimum of external assistance
- Non-Christians in the mission field interact primarily with indigenous church members, leaders and workers so that the gospel spreads through the natural networks of Christians in their own countries
- Missionary churches are developed, capable of duplicating themselves, planting more churches, and multiplying in extraordinary places

THE THIRD WAVE OF MISSION WORK --3

By Bob Young

[This third article in the series continues to survey of the changing nature of mission work in today's world. Three truths to guide mission work in the third wave are identified.]

Implementing the eight mission principles in the second article will reflect three truths concerning mission work.

-1- Global mission work is most effective when the effort is localized in the receiving church

The mission focus is changing from the sponsoring church to the local mission church. The question is not “what is a local sponsoring church doing?” but “what is occurring in the receiving church?” The focus is not on how much money is given or how many works are supported (the viewpoint of the sending church), but on what are the results on the field (the viewpoint of the receiving church).

For missionaries who are sent, this means (1) that missionaries are no longer the primary doers of the work but are rather equippers of nationals, (2) that missionaries move from being in charge and taking the initiative to being facilitating partners, (3) that missionaries move from owning and controlling the work to the recognition that they own nothing, control, nothing, and count nothing as their own work or effort, and (4) that missionaries move from thinking of themselves as those sent to a specific place to those who are globally present as needed to advance God's work among his people.

For local receiving churches on the mission field, this means (1) moving from dependency to self-sufficiency, (2) moving from thinking in terms of addition to thinking in terms of multiplication, (3) that the attitude shifts from competition to cooperation, and (4) that the focus is no longer on the sending church or mission organization but on the local receiving church.

Question: **How can we be better partners with national Christians, churches, and leaders?**

-2- Global mission work is committed to being site-focused and locally-directed

The mission focus is changing from a sending mentality to an empowering mentality. The mission focus changes from the one who is sent to the new work that is being developed. The sending church does not think of mission work in terms of the worker (this is our mission work) but in terms of the receiving churches (this is God's work in Chile, or Peru, or Ecuador, etc.) The sending church does not partner with a person but a work. Church “X” partners with the church in location “A.”

Clearly, all who work in mission endeavors are coworkers with God (1 Cor. 3:1-11), all with their own roles. Biblical role definition is essential if new Christians are to be empowered to do God's work. The commitment to being site-focused and locally-directed means that as soon as possible, funds will not go directly to the worker but will go to the new church entity on the mission field.

Question: **How can we empower national Christians, churches, and leaders?**

-3- Global mission work must be holistic -- focused on developing healthy Christians and churches

The mission focus is changing from counting evangelism numbers (baptisms) to a focus on developing strong, healthy, duplicating churches.

What is our role? Jesus commissioned all Christians go make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). The essence of healthy global mission work is that disciples are made and helped toward healthy spiritual development so that healthy churches are established with national leaders, churches that are committed to making disciples. Just as we North Americans are involved in mission work because of the impact the gospel has had on our lives, we must help others become involved in God's work because the gospel has impacted their lives. This means that healthy (holistic) mission work always begins with the gospel, so that more workers are developed naturally.

Question: **Who are the ones best suited for filling the various roles in holistic missions—who does evangelism, benevolence? How can we strengthen and develop national Christians and leaders?**

Global mission work is ultimately God's work. The mission focus is changing from our work to God's work. Our question must always be, “How do we discover where God is already at work to join him in that work?”

THE THIRD WAVE OF MISSION WORK --4

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[The concluding article identifies five themes and three characteristics to guide third wave mission work.]

Five key themes define the third wave and the new mission challenges.

-1- Develop a global viewpoint that is defined by the national (local) Christians and churches, providing an outlet for the capacities of the sending churches (global) -- resulting in a complex connection.

A word that is used to describe this combination is “glocal” (global and local). Globalization is evident in various factors: the rapid dissemination and consumption of information; the rise of new middle classes; rampant materialism and consumerism; massive urbanization and migration; and a new awareness of interconnectedness and interdependency at both the global and local levels. Even in mission fields, teens and youth are huge consumers of global popular culture, particularly in urban areas.

-2- Heightened cultural sensitivity is essential. While some scholars claim that globalization will shape the world into a homogenized Western culture, globalization has also led to the fragmentation and tribalization of society, with communities and countries asserting their unique cultural identities. This is evidenced by a study of religious movements in the last two decades. This heightened cultural sensitivity and defensiveness is one of the key factors in the rise of religious fundamentalism and terrorism during this third wave.

-3- Exciting gospel receptivity. The message of God is present in fresh ways, even among some groups that have historically been resistant to the gospel. This exciting fresh wave challenges conventional methodologies and should motivate us to rethink our traditional mission models.

-4- Religious animosity and rejection of colonialism and North American “missionaries.” In many countries, nationalism as an ideology is redefining religion and culture. North Americans, including missionaries, are often tolerated (because they bring dollars and “things”) but they are not always welcomed at the grassroots level of the cultures.

-5- Widening economic disparity. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Much of the increased economic benefit has not reached the poorest. While disparity has always existed between rich and poor, the gap is more pronounced.

How do we do mission work in the midst of this third wave?

The Bible clearly exhorts God’s people to understand and appropriate the times in which they live. I believe the need of the hour is to ‘understand the times’ (I Chron. 12:32), carefully ‘interpret the times’ (Luke 12:56), and serve appropriately in ‘such a time as this’ (Esther 4:14).

Failure to understand the times, as well as the people in their cultural contexts, renders us ineffective in our mission endeavors. A mission story tells of missionaries using the slogan, ‘Jesus is the answer.’ The local people responded, ‘What is the question?’ Failing to understand the times, we end up answering questions that people are not asking and not answering those questions that they are actually asking. Understanding requires a cultural sensitivity that is not developed in a brief language study and a few (5-10) years of living in another culture. This understanding is difficult for North Americans entering other cultures, but is natural and normal for nationals who have lived their entire lives in the culture.

During this third wave, it is imperative for Christians, cross-cultural mission workers, and national mission leaders to recognize that Christian mission is different from previous eras; the contexts and conditions have dramatically changed in many places. Uncritically perpetuating the mindset and methodologies of previous eras is ultimately detrimental to the cause of Christ.

Christian mission in this third wave should have three characteristics:

1. Creativity. Creativity means escaping the tendency to merely repeat the mission processes of the past, and finding new ways to accomplish God's purpose in a changing world.

2. Contextual awareness and integration. The mission context must be honored with a primary focus on helping the recipients live out the call of Christ in their lives.

3. Courage. Mission is changing. The mission community that incarnates the gospel must exhibit the life of Christ and the love of Christ in a context that is increasingly hostile to mission endeavors. Authentic Christian mission is prophetic (it has a clear message) and sacrificial (it lives out the message in the spirit of Christ).

May our Lord give us grace to be creative, contextual, and courageous 'fishers of men and women' in this third wave!

Conclusion

Mission work in the third wave requires that workers who are sent be prepared to think, be culturally aware, and be sensitive. The third wave requires that cross-cultural workers commit to working for the nationals, doing what the local churches cannot do for themselves or what they cannot do without help. The third wave is a time of partnerships, but the receivers take the initiative, extend the invitations, define what we visitors will do and how we can be most helpful, and what the local needs are. Thus, we who visit work to accomplish their goals, not our own. Our definition of mission work does not spring forth from our own individual or corporate goals but from being culturally informed as we ask how we can have the greatest impact to bring the saving message of Jesus Christ to the receiving culture. The ultimate goal is that there will be more and more Christians who will individually live out the message.

Read carefully! We want to go and we want to help because of the impact the gospel of Jesus has had on us. The best way to do mission work—to change the culture, the future, and the eternity of others is to duplicate that same impact in the lives of countless people in other cultural contexts so that they want to do the same thing in their own world.