

Trends for future mission

Paul G. Hiebert

In looking ahead to the 1990s and trying to understand the mission efforts which will take place then, we must be conscious of a number of trends that can be observed all around us.

•**Rapid population growth.** In 1900 world population stood at 1.6 billion. By 1980 it had climbed to 4.4 billion, and by 2000 this total may well exceed 6.3 billion. This population increase is particularly evident in Africa, India, and Latin America.

•**Continued poverty and oppression**—rise of the middle class. In many countries of the world there is a growing middle class, especially in many of the newly independent countries found in East and Southeast Asia or Latin America. These people are often receptive to the gospel as Protestants present it. In older churches, such as India, Zaire and Japan, many believers are second- or third-generation Christians. They should have a partnership role in mission work.

At the same time we cannot neglect the poor and oppressed. This can be a real danger. We must deal with the questions raised by the liberation theologians, even though we don't agree with their answers.

•**Rapid urbanization.** In 1900 eight of the world's 10 largest cities were in Western countries. By 2000, that will have changed drastically, and New York will be the only Western city still in the top 10. As this urban concentration moves into Asia, we need to develop urban ministries that are creative and

flexible; we must share in an urban mentality.

•**Modernism and the fundamentalist reaction.** As modernism has spread throughout the world, it has shattered old religious and cultural traditions, and in so doing has freed people to accept the gospel. At the same time, religions have fought back against this influence in a fundamentalist reaction (Hindus, Muslims, even Christians).

This response has brought increased pressure by Muslim groups to close Muslim countries to all Western evangelism. The accompanying increase in terrorism has brought a need for workers who are dedicated and willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

•**Internationalization of mission and theology.** Presently there is a tremendous shift under way in the geographical concentration of Christians. In the past, Christians have been predominantly white. That has been changing, and by now more than half of all Christians are in the two-thirds world. This calls for a stronger internationalization of the mission effort through bilateral partnerships, international teams, and international mission boards.

Another area that needs to be addressed is the internationalization of the theological endeavor. Young churches need help in theologizing within their cultures, or they are prey to theological fads that sweep the land. We need to be careful at all times to avoid overidentification with Western cultures.

One new question needs to be

answered: "foreign mission" has always been used in terms of territory. Is the time here when we need to think in terms of groups of peoples?

•**Leadership shortage.** In North America there are 1,300 people per pastor. In Europe there are more than 105,000 people for each pastor; but in the two-thirds world, there is an astonishing 614,000 people per Christian pastor. This tremendous leadership shortage calls for attention. We need to keep working at nonformal models for leadership development because of the church's inability to pay leaders and the need for a quicker training process.

•**The spread of nominalism.** In many countries of the world, Christian communities are experiencing an attack of nominalism. This can be traced, in part, to the "third-fourth generation effect." Christian nominalism is often associated with over-institutionalization which has come into being through earlier generations. There is an ongoing need for spiritual renewal in churches around the world to overcome this nominalism. In doing this we also need to encourage all churches to have a vision which extends beyond themselves. Each one needs to be world-oriented.
—*Courier, Mennonite World Conference Quarterly*

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But we've always done it this way, continued from page 6

beautiful climax to what God had been doing in our midst.

I was so amazed at the overwhelmingly positive response everyone had to the communion experience. The following day one older lady testified she could hardly believe that she as a woman was able to share the bread and wine with another person. She felt she

now really understood the meaning of Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." —*Manzini, Swaziland*

Darrell and Sherill Hostetter and their three children are currently in the States on home/study leave.