

Evangelical Missiological Society

by Kenneth B. Mulholland, Former President (July, 1999)

As a young pastor, only an unexpected death in the congregation kept me from being present in Washington, D.C., to hear Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. In his Pentecost speech, the apostle Paul cited Joel's prophecy that "Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams." Now, as president of the Evangelical Missiological Society, looking forward to September's Triennial, with the theme "Working Together to Shape the New Millennium," I, too, have a dream.

A church for every people. As the new millennium dawns, my greatest dream and earnest hope is that the vision of a vital church movement for every people group and the gospel for every person will not be diminished and that the momentum gained in the closing years of this century will not be lost. All of my other hopes are subsidiary to this grand vision that at some point during this next century every person born anywhere in the world has an opportunity to:

(1) hear, understand, and respond to the gospel message during his or her lifetime; (2) be incorporated into a local congregation and experience intimacy with the Father; (3) be empowered to exhibit his or her Spirit fruitfulness in salt and light witness as well as exercise Spirit giftedness in significant ministry.

The realization of this hope depends both upon increased cooperation and undimmed focus. The distinction between access and lostness must not be blurred, but retained and even sharpened. Lost people are everywhere, but some lost people have access to the gospel and others do not. Some of the lost live next door to church buildings, go shopping in malls that have a Christian bookstore, listen to radios that carry gospel broadcasts, sleep in hotels with Bibles in the bedside drawer, and labor with Christian people in the workplace. They may even attend Christian worship on Christmas or Easter and have Christian relatives. Their people group has been reached, but they are lost because they have not yet appropriated the gospel message.

Others who are equally lost have no such access. To them the gospel is unknown because there is no church in their geographic area, language group, or cultural frame of reference. Someone from outside will have to penetrate their world and establish a Christian movement in their midst or they will never hear. Thus, the goal of missions is to create access for the gospel among every segment of the human mosaic by initiating a vital church movement appropriate to each.

Evangelical unity. I dream of great unity and increased coordination necessary to accelerate this process, not only at the formal and symbolic level, but at the grass roots. Amid the bitter ethnic fragmentation characteristic of our time reconciliation and the example of unity are essential to maintain the credibility of the gospel.

Already, I see many signs of evangelicals coming together to reflect the God-given unity of the Body of Christ: the Lausanne Movement, with its challenge for the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world; the AD2000 Movement, with its multiple networks; the DAWN Movement, with its emphasis on national mobilization; and the World Evangelical Fellowship, with its clarion call for solidarity with the persecuted church around the globe. Associations of missions such as the EFMA, IFMA, and AIMS are working hard and working together to expand their membership, coordinate strategy, eliminate duplication, and increase efficiency. The pacesetting stance of the Southern Baptist Convention with its expressed desire to cooperate with all Great Commission Christians is creating new paradigms for denominations intent on

maximizing their global impact. And then there are the multiple national partnerships focusing together on completing the missionary task. I dream, too, of greater understanding and increased cooperation among charismatic and non-charismatic Christians called for and outlined in David Shibley's watershed book, *A Force in the Earth*.

Further, I dare to dream of deeper relationships among evangelicals found in the various branches of Christendom. While I personally could not be a signatory to the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document, I recognize the importance of supporting the witness of our brothers and sisters in the faith, whatever their ecclesiastical affiliation. I do not know what shape this will take in order to preserve doctrinal integrity while furthering biblical witness, but I desperately want it to happen.

Compassionate witness. I dream of witness driven by compassion and aimed at the whole person. I believe that mission consists of all that God has called the church, as a pilot project of the kingdom of God, to accomplish among humanity. This includes both the cultural and evangelistic mandates (doing justice and loving mercy while preaching grace). While I recognize the dynamic interplay between the two mandates, I continue to assign priority to the evangelistic mandate. Relief, development, and service ministries in the name of Christ, and accompanied by verbal witness where possible, bear witness of the Christ who not only died for our sins and rose for our justification, but by his early ministry illumined darkened minds, healed sick bodies, fed hungry people, and released tormented souls from the grip of the evil one.

Mission at the heart of scholarship. Some may call this the impossible dream, but, nevertheless, I dream that evangelical scholars on every continent and in every theological discipline will place "a church for every people and the gospel for every person" at the heart of their academic endeavor and personal lives.

Because of the great desire to work together with evangelical scholars of all disciplines, the EMS regularly conducts its regional and national meetings parallel to the Evangelical Theological Society. No more significant document emerged from the 1997 Global Consultation on World Evangelization in Pretoria than the "PAD Declaration," produced by 256 presidents and deans of training institutions, ranging from Bible schools to theological seminaries, representing 53 nations. (PAD stands for Presidents and Academic Deans). I long to see those 10 theses implemented and have committed myself to make this happen at Columbia, the school where currently I exercise leadership.

Adequate preparation. I dream that when religious liberty comes to China, missionary endeavors will not repeat the mistakes committed in the enthusiastic days following the raising of the Iron Curtain. Anticipatory strategy, serious language and culture learning, as well as ministries sensitive to the presence and witness of the existing churches need to characterize the foreign response to open doors.

Partnership. Finally, I dream of using the resources of the whole church so that emerging missions and national evangelism are enhanced without miring them in dependency, from which mission agencies have been trying to extricate themselves for the past century. Perhaps we need to employ the kind of imagery that reflects not so much the world of contractual agreements and corporate management, but more the organic imagery of the various systems of the body working together.

In his likely-to-become-a-classic, *The Church is Bigger Than You Think*, Patrick Johnstone calls the churches, mission agencies, and training schools to work together in the kind of mutually

accountable synergism that advances God's kingdom and brings glory to his name. I hope and dream that this vision, so well articulated by Johnstone, gives birth to an ecclesiology that understands schools and mission agencies as part of the church--rather than limiting the church to congregational structures. The New Testament is clear that apostolic bands as well as local congregations were part of Christ's Body.

How desperately we need churches and pastors with a global vision who, in keeping with Acts 1:8, are determined to make a global impact. For this to happen, pastors must lead their congregations to assume responsibility (either as an individual congregation or as coordinated network-ers of congregational, educational, and mission structures) for the evangelization of every person in a local geographical area. Then, that circle of accountability must be projected to geographical, ethnological, or sociological circles distant from the local church.

Concerns. I am concerned about doctrinal integrity as well as turf wars and kingdom building and the human arrogance that tries to go it alone. And I'm concerned about schools and mission agencies that heap financial burdens upon the shoulders of would-be candidates, as well as agencies that permit missionaries to bypass tough language and culture learning for short-term gains. I'm concerned about a spiritual flabbiness that substitutes consumerism for godliness and exalts self-love above self-denial. And I'm concerned about the collapse of the global economy, the implosion of Russia and Central Asia, the appeal of Islamic fundamentalism, and the relativism endemic to the West.

Present momentum, future hope. My hopes outweigh my concerns. During this century, we've seen the ratio of Christians to non-Christians in Asia decline from one in 177 to one in 12, and in Africa from one in 20 to one in three. we've seen the number of evangelicals in Latin America grow from 50,000 to more than 50 million and the population of evangelical Christians in China, India, and Brazil rival the number in the United States. The evangelical segment of the Christian church continues to expand more rapidly than either the global population or Islam. Each day sees and estimated 78,000 new Christians; each week, 1,600 new congregations are established. Most of the world's evangelical Christians now live in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. And most of the Christian world leadership doesn't come from the North Atlantic, but from the Two-Thirds World.

Within the next few years, I'll be passing the baton. When I do, I'll say, "Look ahead to the goal. The future is as bright as the promises of God. run for all you're worth, but remember, it's a team effort."