

the Occasional Bulletin

Evangelical Missiological Society

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Recognizing World View and its Relationship to Real Gospel Presentation and Understanding

T

Chris Sadowitz

he following illustrations come from one country, Japan. However, I believe that the principles contained herein are applicable to all church planting endeavors as the gospel is constantly confronting various world views.

It is of continuing concern to church leaders and those committed to world evangelization that Japan although a modern first world country is home to one of the largest unreached tribes in the world, and the following three observations are noticed by both Asians and Westerners alike. First the church in Japan has failed to evangelize itself since the end of the war. Secondly and related to the first is the failure of the church to proceed down from generation to generation. Churches grow old together and close down when the long term members die out. Third or fourth generation churches are almost unknown in Japan. And thirdly is the relatively small size of most churches in Japan. Recent surveys approximate the average church size as between seven and fifteen members.

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In observing churches, individual Christians and seekers it seems possible that church growth in Japan has not reached a church growth movement level because “accepting Christ” in a western sense of the phrase fails to go deep enough into the worldview of the Japanese. Many Japanese, by their own testimony, accepted Christ based on some personal need

in their life, or in response to some crisis. But over time problems such as nominal spiritual growth, syncretism, loss of face, and even apostasy seem to creep in. The failure of many such individuals to continue in the faith or continue sharing Christ with those around them seems to indicate either a deficiency in the manner of teaching or in their understanding of

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NATIONAL OFFICERS

President, Norman E. Allison
P.O. Box 800817, Toccoa Falls, GA 30598
(706) 886-6831, 282-6003 FAX
Email: nallison@tfc.edu

Exec. V.P., Admin., Tom A. Steffen
13800 Biola Avenue, LaMirada, CA 90639-0001
(562) 903-4844, 903-4851 FAX
Email: tom.steffen@biola.edu

Exec. V.P., Constituency Relations, Keith Eitel
P.O. Box 1889, Wake Forest, NC 27588
(919) 761-2233, 761-2232 FAX
Email: keitheitel@bigfoot.com

National V.P., Finance & Membership

Elizabeth Lightbody
820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, IL 60610
(312) 329-4421, 329-4359 FAX
Email: elizabeth.lightbody@moody.edu

National V.P., Corporate Affairs, Scott Moreau
501 E. College Avenue, Wheaton, IL 60187
(630) 752-5949, 752-7125 FAX
Email: A.S.Moreau@wheaton.edu

National V.P. Publications, Kenneth D. Gill
Billy Graham Center
Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187-5593
(630) 752-5533, 752-5916 FAX
Email: Kenneth.D.Gill@wheaton.edu

Occasional Bulletin Editor, Bob Lenz
1385 W. Hile Road, Muskegon, MI 49441
(231) 799-2178
Email: Boblenz2@cs.com

REGIONAL OFFICERS

Northeast Vice President, Larry A. Poston
1 South Boulevard, Nyack, NY 10960
(845) 358-1710, 358-4345 FAX
Email: postonla@nyack.edu

Southeast Vice President, John Mark Terry
2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280
(802) 897-4815, 897-4042 FAX
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2065 Half Day Road, Deerfield, IL 60015
(847) 317-8137, 317-8128 FAX
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3909 Swiss Avenue, Dallas, TX 75204
(214) 841-3689, 841-3697 FAX
Email: MPocock@dts.edu

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(503) 517-1894, 517-1801 FAX
Email: mneumann@westernseminary.edu

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13800 Biola Avenue, LaMirada, CA 90639-0001
(562) 903-4844, 903-4851 FAX
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3622 East Galley Road
Colorado Springs, CO 80909-4301
Email: ddiasso@comd.org

Canada Vice President, Glenn A. Flewelling
Box 4291, Three Hills AB T0M 2N0 Canada
(403) 443-5835, 443-5540 FAX
Email: glenn.flewelling@prairie.edu

the gospel, or a conflict between the gospel and their previously held beliefs. In the computer world software conflicts arise when one program is laid on top of another. It is often recommended to start from a clean slate (hard drive) when loading a new operating system. In the same way it seems that over the years Christian Theology may have been placed unwittingly upon a Japanese worldview and over time conflicts arise causing an eventual rejection of the faith in favor of ones worldview predispositions.

Writers have noted the watering down affect of 2000 years of Japanese culturally religious worldview on Christianity. Endo Shusaku in his book *Silence* notes that even the tree of Christianity when transplanted into the "mud swamp" of Japan failed to take root and flourish but was distorted, diluted, and absorbed by the Japanese world view. According to David Bennett in *Clash of World Views*:

a world view consists of the shared framework of ideas held by a particular society concerning how they perceive the world. Everyday experiences are fitted into this framework in order to give a totality of meaning and comprehension for the individual. (13)

There are at least four components of the Japanese worldview that have bearing on how deep Christian teaching can infiltrate the Japanese heart: 1) The Idea of the *Kami*; 2) The Reason of Ancestor Veneration; 3) Assumptions in Idolatry; and 4) Syncretism as a way of life.

Failure of the church planters and church leaders to understand that the complex Japanese world view provides a deeper level of assumption than philosophy or religion maybe one cause of the slow church growth not only in Japan but in Southeast Asia; and a cause of syncretistic tendencies in other Asian theologies.

1. The idea of *Kami*.

Kami is the word translated gods or spirits in Japanese. According to Shinto legend before Japan was formed these *kami* existed in a time

period called the "age of the *kami*." These various *kami* affect the phenomenal world through nature, natural phenomenon, and unexplained events. The Shinto creation story of the nation begins with the Sun goddess, Ametarasu omikami, dipping her jeweled spear into the ocean to form the islands of Japan. The emperor of Japan was believed to be of divine decent from this same sun goddess. Japan's oldest books the Kojiki and the Nihonshouki include supposed accounts of the activities of the *kami* in the affairs of human life. This belief in the existence of *kami* has fueled the firm belief of polytheism among other things and a strong sense of continuity between the human and divine. The problem then would be accepting the Christian teaching of there being only one creator God and only one way to God. Also the strong feeling of continuity between human and divine to the extent that they can become *kami* or something other than a created human, upon death draws Japanese believers away from the uniqueness of God and his uncreated, one and only reality.

Therefore there is potential for capitulation in the heart of the Japanese Christians in the teaching of God's ultimate authority to determine the way of salvation and the fate of unbelievers. Polytheism weakens their ability to comprehend the one Triune God, the fact of only one way of salvation and the need of hell.

2. The Reason of Ancestor Veneration.

Ancestor veneration gained its outward ritual forms when Buddhism entered the country around the fourth century. Buddhism taught that deceased relatives could by ritual be transformed at death into a benevolent spirit being able to confirm blessing on the living. After a period of time this spirit would join the collective of all the spirits in the bosom of Buddha called the *hotoke*. In fact in the common usage of the word *hotoke* means

dead relative, god and Buddha. It is interesting to note that throughout history Shinto and Buddhist scholars held various discussions to try and determine how the *hotoke* and *kami* were related to one another. In most cases the conclusion was that they were one and the same and this thought continues into the present. Deceased relatives are often seen as *hotoke* or *kami*, depending on who you ask. One reason this teaching gained popularity is because the Japanese hate separation and want to preserve family relationships even after death. Through Buddhist ritual their feelings were given an avenue of expression and application. In Japan the sumon bonum of life is the existence of the family or *ie*. The eternal character of the *ie* is seen as the most important thing. It ties in children to the fathers and in past times villages to the chief. Today in the minds of many it still unites people to the land and nation, the nation to the Emperor and the Emperor to the gods. The underlying world view that flows from this is the continuing relationship between the living and the dead in order to avoid separation and preserve the family line. In this thinking death has no meaning.

The other problem is denial of the distinction between created man and uncreated God. And, with the modern day practice of praying to dead ancestors for blessings and comfort, replaces the role of the Holy Spirit.

It is therefore not hard to see why Japanese Christians in trying to respect the ancestors and remain loyal to family have trouble letting go when a relative passes away. There is a tendency to act as if the deceased is still present and this is seen in actions like talking to the dead or sleeping in the same room with the cremated remains to keep them from being lonely and bowing to the deceased persons picture. There is also a temptation for the Japanese Christian to capitulate in relation to the person of the Holy Spirit. It is the Great

Comforter to whom we are to turn for help and comfort. Yet in Japan it is custom when seeking help or comfort to go to the tombs of the ancestors or bow before the family shrine called a *Butsudan* and speak with the deceased as a means of comfort. Many new converts to Christianity falter when faced with the task of telling their Buddhist parents that they have become a Christian. They know that their parents are relying on them to carry on *gyouji* (i.e. rituals to the dead) at the *Butsudan* for them when they die to ensure their passage into Buddhist heaven or *hotoke*.

3. Assumptions in Idolatry.

There is an ancient belief in Japan that objects, places or people can be habitations or locations for *kami* activity. It is not the object that is important but the spirit that indwells within. Charms or amulets made in or around a "sacred" area can be taken to people not able to get to the *kami*. We had

as a way to purify the house from evil spirits and/or bad luck; and to usher in favorable spirits and good luck. Japanese do not worship in a place weekly but demonstrate their belief in a spirit world through daily and seasonal customs. Many go to the temple on New Years day to pray for good luck and prosperity. Many go to the graves to tidy up or offer incense at a particular Shrine at the Spring Equinox and Fall Equinox to pray for a good planting and give thanks for a good harvest respectively. When questioned as to what religion they adhere to most Japanese will answer that they belong to no religion and that what there are doing is simply custom.

Related to this is the belief that the longevity and repetition equal authority. Many customs practiced in modern Japan are very old and most do not even know the original meaning of the activity in which they are engaged. They only know that it has been carried on for many centuries

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numerous gifts from friends which turned out to be amulets from various Shrines brought to our children for protection or good luck. Things in nature or nature itself have been fertile ground for idolatry. Certain people have also been idolized because of a virtuous life or attributed god-like qualities. Almost any object in Japan can be made into an idol as it is the vehicle for the spirit thus exposing the influence of pantheism.

In modern Japan many idols and temples can be seen but idolatry itself is carried on in the customs of daily life. Customs have become the way Japanese express their religiosity. For example it is custom to clean the house the last week of December

and this is proof enough for them that this is authoritative and binding. Repetition without meaning becomes the meaning. These two, idolatry and custom have led to a dichotomy in the minds of many Japanese. On the one hand they can't stop doing their customs that are rooted in religion. On the other hand they are thoroughly secular in their mindset as seen in their counseling philosophy and adherence to evolution. Their customs belie a belief in the super natural yet their daily lives demonstrate a thorough secularism totally bereft of any vestige of a true and living God who has claims on their life.

It is not too difficult for the Japanese Christian to bring idolatrous

practices into the church. We have seen Japanese become followers of a particular pastor to the extent that they follow the man rather than Christ. Catholicism finds some acceptance because the Crucifix is added to the god shelves of many Japanese as another object of worship.

Hajime Nakamura has noted that this dependence on the Japanese for sight or their desire to give their belief a form (idol) stems from the Japanese inability to comprehend the unseen transcendent idea of God.

In the first place, we should notice that the Japanese are willing to accept the phenomenal world as Absolute because of their disposition to lay a greater emphasis upon intuitive sensible concrete events, rather than upon universals. This way of thinking with emphasis upon the fluid, arresting character of observed events regards the phenomenal

is in ones being or between people is the supreme goal. In Buddhist writings the appearance of having everything together and putting on a calm demeanor has become a trade mark of the Japanese race as they are perceived as having mastered the art of controlling their emotions even in the most difficult circumstances. Syncretism helps protect this ideal of peace by preventing religious thoughts from conflicting. It is not either or in Japan but both and.

In a syncretistic society it is not surprising to find that fervency of ones faith and not the content of that faith is what is important. This is proven true in the worldview of the Japanese and is put this way in their language. "*Wasbi no atama mo shin-jin kara*" — "Even if it only the head

convictions. The pressure to try to syncretize the Word with Japanese customs and ancient beliefs is staggering. Churches that have mixed Christianity with Japanese religions abound. Even pastors have problems standing by the fundamentals of the faith because they resist syncretism. Because syncretistic secular man is the final authority he creates gods to fit his own needs; gods that can be beckoned or dispelled by rituals. Belief in the one true creator God who tells mankind what they need is challenged because many people in Japan see the Christian God as one of any number of choices. They think the God of heaven can be controlled by mere word and ritual as seen in the phrases *kamidanomii* and *yoitokini sawaranukami* when in need ask the gods; and in good times don't bother the gods lest they by annoyed and bring bad luck.

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world itself as Absolute and rejects the recognition of anything existing over and above the phenomenal world. What is widely known among the post-Meiji philosophers in the last century as the "theory that the phenomenal is actually the real" has a deep root in Japanese tradition. (350)

Christians must take the above into consideration when teaching about God, idolatry and proper worship.

4. Syncretism as a way of life.

One of the most prevalent aspects of the Japanese worldview is their predisposition to syncretize new ideas to existing older ones. It is well documented that the religions that enter Japan retain very few of their original aspects once they have merged into the Japanese worldview. In this worldview *heiwa* (peace) is one of the highest virtues to which humans can attain. *Heiwa* whether it

of a sardine it is the fervent faith of the heart that counts" (Ayabe, 24).

When many religious systems come together and their ideas conflict and remain incompatible it is impossible to base faith on credible stable, unchanging doctrine. Syncretism seeks to unify and do away with differences by ignoring them or allowing them to coexist without any real attempt to answer the discrepancies. In this kind of worldview man becomes the ultimate authority as he decides to bury truth with syncretism for the sake of surface unity. Japanese Christians face the constant challenge of taking the basic teachings of Christianity which resist syncretism (such as; "I am the way the truth and the Life"; and "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we might be saved") and internalizing them as

Conclusion

Because worldview and culture is so deep and in many cases hundreds and thousands of years old it is perhaps unwise to think a church planter unknowledgeable in the thinking patterns of a people should expect that the gospel when delivered from a Western worldview would be understood in a few short lessons.

All new information contained in our Bible studies with non Christians is received through their cultural and world view lenses. Once the church planter/church leader understands the prescription of the lenses can he bring adjustments or even a new pair of glasses to assist the new believer in understanding the fullness and uniqueness and incomparableness of the teachings of Christ.

Resources

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A Change of Life

Gailyn Van Rbeenen

These monthly missiological reflections typically do not deal with personal issues. This one is an exception. My wife and I are making a major transition in life. We believe some of you will benefit from hearing about our journey and developing ministry. We feel we must minister out of passion for God, which necessitates making difficult choices to faithfully participate in God's mission.

God has greatly blessed our lives. He used my wife Becky and I in Uganda and Kenya for fourteen years (1972-86) as church planters. I have taught missions, evangelism and church planting at Abilene Christian University (ACU) for seventeen years (1986-2003), and for much of this time Becky served with me as a Missions Associate. As we enter the third era of our life, we ask for your prayers. We have decided, after much prayer for God's guidance and advice from many Christian leaders, to move to the Metroplex (the Dallas-Ft. Worth metropolitan area) to begin an internship for evangelism and church planting, which we call Mission Alive.

THE CALL OF GOD. We have found it extremely difficult to discern the call of God for Christian ministry. Becky and I heard Darryl Tippens speak on this topic at a retreat. He said sometimes we choose our vocation with clarity, and sometimes our vocation chooses us, as in the case of Moses, Jonah, and Paul. This choosing or being chosen always requires serious listening to differentiate the voices being heard. Our communities of faith work with us to perceive God's will in our lives.

After hearing Darryl Tippens I real-

ized that in the past my vocation was chosen with clarity. Knowing God's desire that I become a missionary, I took steps to equip and prepare myself to become God's servant in Africa. The same could be said about my decision to teach missions and evangelism at ACU. I was asked to teach at Harding University on two furloughs, worked with some of those students as interns during the following summers, and grew to know that God would use me to recruit and train students for world missions.

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This third transition in life has not been that simple. My wife and I feel a passion to be used by God to teach unbelievers, nurture them to Christian maturity and equip them as Christian leaders. I have always viewed myself primarily as an evangelist and church planter and secondarily as a scholar in missions equipping. We have also grown to believe that we cannot adequately train people for evangelism and church planting within an institutional setting. Experience must go hand-in-hand with knowledge. Otherwise, learners are unable to place their new knowledge into categories and apply it to real-life situations.

In recent years we have felt a heightening dissonance between security and what we began to perceive as God's calling in our lives. We felt a tension between being comfortable in Zion and once again becoming full-time ministers. The decision has been difficult but bathed in prayer. Through these struggles we have grown to be-

lieve God is calling us at this point in life to develop an internship for evangelism and church planting. The Teacher says wisdom is determining the time in one's life and entering into it fully (Eccles. 3:1-14).

In a sermon at the 11th and Willis Church of Christ, where I am an elder, Don Morrison compared our situation to Abraham and Sarah. These parents of the Israelite nation heard God's call to leave their land for another that God would show them (Gen. 11:31-12:4). Don said in a similar manner we were giving up our ministries and secure income to go to a city that God would show us. Despite doubts, we launched out without salary or position but believing God would guide our path.

Following Don's sermon, my fellow elders surrounded Becky and I and prayed for God's blessing upon us. We were deeply touched the sermon and the elders' blessing. Although we feel inadequate to be compared with the father and mother of the Israelite nation, we concur that God truly is the God of impossibilities (Gen. 18:14). Like Abraham and Sarah, we have doubted along the way.

THE NEED. We feel that without church planting in the United States, Churches of Christ will continue to stagnate and dwindle. Most are in the maintenance mode. They look inward, taking care of their own immediate needs. They seldom see themselves as God's people on the journey through life helping fellow travelers and encouraging others to join them on this God-directed, Jesus-inspired journey.

Current trends are perturbing. Many have forgotten the biblical story depicting the reign of God

throughout human history. Exceptionally busy and preoccupied Christians have allowed the church to be only marginal in their lives and in their culture. Grounded in the Enlightenment, many have focused on knowledge about God rather than on a personal walk with God. Leaders supervise the flock rather than equip God's people for works of service. The result is a spectator Christianity. The move from rural to urban life has brought a loss of community that made the church a "place" to meet rather than a "community" of the faithful. These trends have caused the church to forget her missionary nature. Seldom does the church see herself as God's distinctive people called out through his mission and set aside for his mission.

New modeling of church life within contemporary urban culture is imperative. Learning to intentionally evangelize and plant churches is a significant key to the future of the Churches of Christ in this generation.

THE MINISTRY MODEL. A foundational principle of our ministry is incarnation—imitating that of Christ, who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). Christ entered into human life so he could communicate with and suffer for humanity. Likewise, to communicate God's ultimate sovereignty and saving grace through Jesus Christ, we must empathetically enter into the lives of searchers. We must learn from Jesus how to speak to a Jewish leader about the New Birth and to the woman at the well about Living Water. We must learn from him how to ask questions that focus issues and determine priorities (Luke 6:6-9), that force people to think and in so doing develop an allegiance (Luke 9:18-20) and that create interest by solving dilemmas (Luke 20:41-44). We must learn from him how to work intimately and personally with disciples in spiritual formation and kingdom proclamation (Mark 3:14). As searchers experience ministers who understand them and their culture and share with gentle-

ness and respect, they are frequently receptive to the message of God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ.

Our ministry model will also reflect the church planting ministry of the apostle Paul. Paul did not position himself as a local preacher. He did not initiate one church and become the preaching minister of this church in order to send out others to plant new churches. He rather saw himself as a church planter working with Timothys and Tituses to initiate and nurture new churches.

This is similar to our work in Africa. First, we sought to personally relate to the Kipsigis people of Kenya by speaking God's Word in their language and culture. We attempted to “tabernacle” among them in a weak, fallible, human way as the Divine One infallibly entered into human life. Sec-

Christ entered into human life so he could communicate with and suffer for humanity. Likewise, to communicate God's ultimate sovereignty and saving grace through Jesus Christ, we must empathetically enter into the lives of searchers.

ond, we sought to imitate the pattern of Paul by initiating multiple churches simultaneously working with numerous Timothys and Tituses.

We believe church leaders and church members cannot adequately study about evangelism and church planting in the classroom alone. Evangelism and church planting must be taught and “caught” by seeing them modeled and by personal participation. This is why Jesus selected twelve apostles so “that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). Thus apostles were trained by “following Jesus” and thereby became “fishers of men.” While the classroom is an ideal forum to teach a theology and message of evangelism and describe the goals and tasks of outreach to unbelievers, learners must also touch, taste and feel evangelism and church planting.

In other words, knowledge and experience must go hand-in-hand.

THE PURPOSE. The purpose of Mission Alive is to equip evangelists and church planters through experiential training. The end result will be the planting of multiple churches, which will grow to become responsible, reproductive, and theologically sound.

The Goals. Mission Alive will equip and guide interns to . . .

- ***Spiritually relate to God and walk with Jesus in their daily lives:*** We cannot call people into intimate relationship with God if we are not also living intimately with him.

- ***Accurately read and interpret the Bible for ministry formation:*** Plans for ministry should not be formed by human ingenuity but by the will of God revealed in scripture.

For example, a biblical understanding of the church will provide an inspired picture of God's divine community.

- ***Incarnate God's eternal gospel within local cultural contexts:*** Cultural awareness enables evangelists and church planters to define types of peoples within a cultural context, to understand how they perceive reality and socially relate to one another and explain how the Christian message intersects with every aspect of culture.

- ***Develop strategies of evangelism and church planting uniquely fitting for local churches:*** Evangelists and church planters must become incisive strategic planners. Strategy formation, however, should never stand by itself as a self-contained, “how-to” prescription. The strategic question, “Does this model of praxis reflect the purposes of God within this cultural

context?" should guide evangelists and church planters to root their decisions in the will of God.

• **Develop interpersonal skills for relating to unbelievers**, gathering new Christians into communities of believers and training Christians as leaders. Communicating the gospel is an interpersonal task which interns and apprentices can learn only through the practice of ministry.

TYPES OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES. To accomplish the purpose and goals of Mission Alive four types of learning experiences related to evangelism and church planting will be offered.

1. Evangelism and Church Planting Classes: We will teach evangelism and church planting in ministry contexts with learners not only seeing us minister but learning to minister themselves. These courses, which can be taken for graduate credit or as an audit, will provide theological, spiritual and practical ministry tools for reaching various types of unbelievers and for planting churches. By gaining knowledge and skills in one context, learners will be better equipped to enter intentionally into other communities as evangelists and church planters.

2. Congregational Training: We will invite congregations to work with us during short but intensive periods of ministry to demonstrate evangelism and church planting and to teach the practical ministry skills for becoming evangelists.

3. Internship: Interns will be invited to participate in a focused time of equipping for 3-4 months, especially in the summers. They will live in the context of ministry and be mentored to walk in intimate relationship with God and share the gospel with unbelievers. They will observe the process of church planting, and many will become apprentices at a later date.

4. Apprenticeship: Long-term cross-cultural mission teams and North American church planters will

be encouraged to undergo year-long training to become part of a church planting team and develop specific skills to communicate the gospel to unbelievers and plant churches. Many of these "apprentices" will mature into effective church planters.

In facilitating this internship we will work with mission associates, who are mature leaders having the motivation and attributes to become leaders in new church plantings. They will work with us in the mentoring of interns and apprentices.

TYPES OF CHURCH PLANTING.

We plan to mentor interns, apprentices and mission associates to work in three types of church planting. While the structures of these churches will be different because of their varying contexts, all will seek to restore God's intention for the church as revealed in Scripture.

Pray for our Transition

We ask you to pray for our transition. Pray that:

- We will not look back toward Egypt as the Israelites did.
- We will pass through the Sinai Desert without grumbling.
- We will enter the promised land of ministry to which God is leading us.
- We will not accommodate to the gods of Canaan as the Israelites did.
- God's Shema will guide our hearts: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6: 4-5).

Suburban Church Plantings.

Suburban church plantings are necessary if we are to be faithful to God. The Dallas-Ft. Worth metropolitan area, with a population of 5.3 million, is growing in all directions. It is projected that the urban extension of Dallas-Ft. Worth will reach Oklahoma City by the year 2025. Such urban expansion necessitates a vision for suburban church planting. We pray that God will give participants of Mission Alive the guidance, strength and wisdom to plant twenty-five suburban churches by 2015.

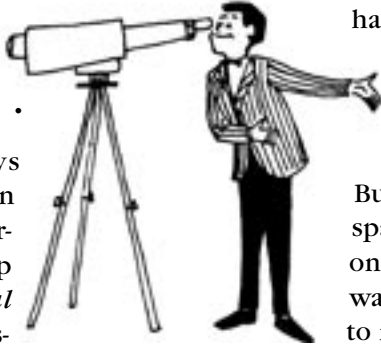
City-Wide Plantings. There is a great need for church planting in the heart of cities. Often inner-city churches have sold their buildings and moved to the suburbs, leaving the city's heart without adequate testimony. Inner-city ministries were established to minister to the poor who remained. Many of these North American inner-cities are rejuvenating. New multi-ethnic churches need to be planted. These churches might become city-wide with small groups meeting in many locations, but meeting together each Sunday. We pray that God will give participants of Mission Alive the guidance, strength, and wisdom to plant two city-wide churches by the year 2015.

Apartment and House Churches. We will work with interns to plant churches in homes and apartment complexes modeled somewhat after Mission Arlington. We want to reflect the nature of Jesus' ministry, which he launched in his hometown with the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18-19). We pray that, like Jesus, "the spirit of the Lord is on [us], because he has anointed [us] to preach good news to the poor." Some apartment and house churches will meet in homes, apartment club houses, rented rooms and member apartments during the week and with larger churches on Sunday. Others will meet in small

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As seen through the Lenz . . .

I am always thankful when we have great articles that fill up our *Occasional Bulletin*. This issue is no exception. Chris Sadowitz is an ABWE missionary in Japan, and



has given us some insightful thoughts about ministering to Japanese. Gailyn's Reflections are always timely and thought provoking. But since we have run out of space, and still want to report on a regional activity (by the way, this was the only one sent to me!), I want to include that in this issue, so will use the remaining editorial space for that.

Regional Report

The Southeastern Regional Meeting of the EMS was held in Orlando, Florida, March 19-20. Ten persons attended. The group heard presentation from Campus Crusade for Christ and the Wycliffe Bible Translators. Dr. Doug Wilson from the University of Mobile delivered a paper entitled "Presenting Jesus

Through Chronological Bible Instruction." Steve Irvin of Toccoa Falls College presented a paper on "Issues in Cross-Cultural Mentoring," and Dr. Gordon Olson gave a presentation on the theological prelude to the modern missions movement. Next year's regional meeting will be held at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

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groups three weeks a month and on the fourth will meet with other apartment and house churches. We pray that God will give participants of Mission Alive the guidance, strength and wisdom to plant 150 apartment and house churches by 2015.

We acknowledge our weakness in making such goals but feel that God desires some benchmarks to measure achievement. We set these goals with humility, knowing they are beyond any human ability to accomplish. We are weak in understanding, strength and wisdom. We realize the glory of the gospel is conveyed by "jars of clay" demonstrating God's "all-surpassing power" (2 Cor. 4:7).

Works Cited

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Evangelical Missiological Society
P.O. Box 794

Wheaton, IL 60189

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED