



KINGDOM WITHOUT BORDERS

THE UNTOLD STORY OF
GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY



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THESE ARE MY PEOPLE



WHAT IS THE FUTURE? “BACK IN THE DAY . . . ” WE SAY. BUT WHAT IS “FORWARD IN THE DAY”? WHAT’S COMING TOWARD US?

- Is a clash of civilizations inevitable—or should we eventually expect the triumph of the golden arches everywhere?
- Will we see the “end of history,” the flattening of ideologies so we can all do business more efficiently—or will we see a rise of passionate fundamentalisms?
- Will hunger, disease, illiteracy and injustice be reduced—or will disasters and wars devastate large regions and destabilize economies?
- Will we work hard to resolve conflicts and build relationships—or will broken families, depression and loneliness be widespread?
- Will the next generation die for a cause—or for an iPod?
- Will Jesus’ followers flourish—or will persecution increase?
- Will the number of churches grow—or will they splinter into factions?
- Will more Christians get training and lead with maturity—or will prideful competition preoccupy us?

- Will carefully defined “best practices” structure our ministry and mission—or will the Spirit blow where it wishes, pole-jumping all our boxes?

Yes. All of the above.

So what will hold us together in this vortex?

PAWNS IN A GLOBAL GAME

In 605 B.C., the Babylonian army rolled over Judah and marched a lot of the people to Babylon in chains. One captive was a young man named Daniel. Although he was slotted into the “gifted” group and got extra privileges, he was a slave, subject to the whim of his captors.

At one swoop Daniel lost his family. His country and culture. His girlfriend, if he had one. His career plans. His freedom and his rights—he could be thrown into a lions’ den at any moment. He even lost his name and was renamed for a pagan god. He spent the rest of his life working for megalomaniacs like Nebuchadnezzar.

Following Daniel in history were Esther and Nehemiah. All three believers lived in exile at the mercy of global forces beyond their control. All three model strategies important for us as we cope with globalization in our time, when jobs are outsourced, terrorism erupts and we sometimes feel like pawns in a giant game.

Nehemiah was called to build the wall around Jerusalem. Esther served in a larger arena. When genocide threatened her people, she was called to confront the powers and engage in advocacy with international repercussions. Nehemiah worked at the microlevel, Esther at the macrolevel.

What about Daniel? He worked at the missional level, giving words to a vision of God in an upside-down world. Up to now, God had been in the temple but now the temple was smashed. God had been in the land, but now the boundaries of the land were erased. God had been with the people, but now the people were scattered throughout the alien empire from North Africa to India. Where was God? Esther and Nehemiah needed to know before they could do their work.

God gave Daniel a vision (Dan 7). This provided the foundation on

which people like Esther and Nehemiah could build. Previously Daniel had interpreted visions for rulers. Now he received his own. In his vision the snow-white “Ancient of Days” presided from a throne blazing like fire. A hundred thousand people vibrated around him. Court books were opened, a cruel, powerful beast was judged and executed, and its body was thrown into fire.

Then the “Son of Man” entered. Clouds surrounded him as he approached the Ancient of Days. Everyone turned, and he became the focus of worship. “He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Dan 7:14).

Snagging Nebuchadnezzar. “Everlasting dominion.” A kingdom “that will never be destroyed.” These words captured the imagination of Nebuchadnezzar, that great Babylonian emperor. Although he was a brilliant military strategist, architect, philosopher and civic planner, Nebuchadnezzar had weaknesses. For example, he built a statue of himself and threw people in a red hot furnace when they wouldn’t bow to it (Dan 3). Yet during the decades that Daniel served Nebuchadnezzar they must have talked about God, because Nebuchadnezzar progressively expressed a more complete understanding of who God is. The last time we see him, Nebuchadnezzar has issued a proclamation:

To the peoples, nations, and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly!

It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

How great are his signs,

how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;

his dominion endures from generation to generation. (Dan 4:1-3)

At the end of his proclamation, Nebuchadnezzar repeated what so

impressed him: “*His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation*” (Dan 4:34, emphasis added).

What poignant longing these words convey. Every great person wants to create something that will last. I live in the same city as Bill Gates. He hopes that Microsoft will last. Meanwhile he has taken early retirement to create a legacy through philanthropy. Nebuchadnezzar hoped that his empire would endure. But in fact it lasted only a few years after his death. Then it was overthrown by the Medes and Persians

After the lions. Yet the Medo-Persian ruler Darius commented on the very same characteristic of Daniel’s God. Darius ordered Daniel thrown to the lions, then retrieved him from the den and issued a proclamation about “the God of Daniel . . . *his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end*” (Dan 6:26, emphasis added). Darius too longed for a rule that would last.

However, the Medo-Persians were overthrown by the Greeks. Not long afterward, Alexander the Great’s empire blew up and fragmented into four parts, as pictured in Daniel 11.

Only one person in this story lived in the everlasting kingdom: Daniel the slave. Because he did, because he was not totally captured by the systems of this world, he could make important contributions *to* this world. This he did in a long life of service under several emperors.

Daniel was called to put words to a vision, to articulate who God is, a God of love and power, a God who cares and who rules even when the foundations are shaking, even when the lights are going out. Microlevel work like Nehemiah’s is essential. Macrolevel work like Esther’s is too. Yet we can burn out in microlevel projects. We can burn out in macrolevel advocacy. To keep going, we will need missional vision, kingdom vision continually renewed. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov 29:18 KJV).

That’s why there is no work more important than telling the story of Jesus. He brings the vision to life. In our time it is in Jesus that we see who God is.

BODIES FOR HIRE

A few years ago I spent time in the Arabian Gulf. Hundreds of gleaming skyscrapers thrust out of the sand, row after row. Men in spotless white robes and white head cloths and women in elegant silky black designer robes and scarves swished from air-conditioned offices to air-conditioned cars.

Out in the heat were Filipinos. In the richer Gulf countries the grunt work is done by foreigners. Sometimes 80 percent of the labor force comes from outside. The Philippine economy is set up to facilitate overseas employment. Without enough jobs at home, there is a push to work in richer countries and send back foreign exchange.

Many Filipino university graduates take jobs as maids or nannies if they are women, or as construction workers if they are men. In the homes where they work they risk sexual abuse. On job sites they risk injuries. Legal protection is rare, and medical help for foreign labor is unreliable.

Meanwhile, back in the Philippines they have left their parents and brothers and sisters, and often wives and husbands and children too.

Witness to local Muslims is illegal, and in countries like Saudi Arabia even Christian worship is banned.

Yet many Filipinos have grown in their faith in this hard setting. For some nominal Christians it has been a wake-up call. They are stressed. They are spiritually starving. To help them, multilevel discipleship-training programs have been developed on the spot.

Others came prepared to witness in spite of the risk. Back home there are at least ten Philippine agencies that provide mission training for workers going abroad. On the field such laborers share their faith with office mates or house mates who show interest. And they sing. Whenever there is a lull, a Filipino sings. If he or she is a believer, Christian lyrics bubble up.

Some have done time in jail, and others have given their lives for this witness. Nevertheless, fruit grows.

Where I traveled, it was legal to worship inside a church. I sought out a Filipino service where about 150 people gathered. The worshippers

glowed. When they began to sing, the place rocked. One song focused on Jesus the king. Clerks and nannies, maids and managers belted out—

And this Kingdom's reign
 And this Kingdom's rule
 And this Kingdom's power and authority
 Jesus, God's righteousness revealed.

As the decibels rose, I squirmed and muttered under my breath, “This is a little loud, don’t you think? Let’s keep it down. Don’t you all remember where you are? Don’t you know who’s in charge?”

Then I realized they *did* know. That’s why they were so radiant and so uninhibited. They were singing to the same power and authority that Christians have honored a hundred thousand times in a hundred thousand hard places. Like Daniel they were living and loving in the kingdom of everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed. It was this cosmic reality that empowered them to be salt and light wherever their labor was needed around the world.

Someday the Arab world may be different because Christian Filipinos—and Koreans and Pakistanis and others—took lowly jobs and let the love of Christ flow through them.

FAITHFUL AND ALIVE

Different kinds of people call themselves Christians. Centuries ago some groups converted for political reasons. Today many of their members have little personal interest in Christ, though they still wear the label “Christian.” By contrast, “evangelicals” emphasize Jesus’ death and resurrection, Bible study, personal conversion, and outreach.¹ They are not necessarily members of certain churches nor bound to certain geographical regions as “Christian cultures” or “Christian nations.” Some even reject the word *Christian* and call themselves “Jesus Muslims” or “Jesus Hindus,” yet share evangelical commitments. Whatever else they call themselves, evangelicals want to be Jesus’ disciples, faithful and alive.

To be evangelical is “not just a doctrinal position with a pietistic

lifestyle attached (which is how most non-evangelicals seem to see it),” according to J. I. Packer,

but rather is an organic reinvigorating of life in Christ . . . a particular divine operation: namely, an animating and revitalizing activity whereby . . . the Holy Spirit impacts individuals and groups to reconfigure and direct their lives towards the mature fullness of Christ . . . life maintained in intensity . . . [as] vigor and enterprise overflow. . . . The end product of the Spirit’s action is lively godliness . . . radical personal convertedness . . . [and] a vivid sense of new identity in the body of Christ linked with . . . concern for . . . Christians everywhere.²

At least eighty million Chinese in China name Jesus as Lord. So do millions more Chinese outside the country. In Africa four hundred million Africans praise Jesus. There are fifteen times more Anglicans worshipping in Nigeria every Sunday than there are in Britain. There are more Free Methodists in the small countries of Rwanda and Burundi than there are in the United States. There are forty-five million evangelicals in Brazil supporting 4,700 Brazilian missionaries.

In Latin America there are more Christians than in all of the United States and Europe. The same is true in Africa, and again in Asia. By 2025 there will be as many Pentecostals as there are Hindus, and twice as many Pentecostals as Buddhists, according to Philip Jenkins in his award-winning book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. “We are currently living through one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide,” Jenkins says. “The center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Already today the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found there.” He adds, “By 2050 only about one fifth of the world’s three billion Christians will be non-Hispanic Whites.”³

Not only is Christianity the wave of the future. It is also the wave of the past. As Jenkins says, “Christianity never has been synonymous with Europe or the West.”⁴ Early Christian art was shaped in places like Syria

and Iraq and even Africa. Early New Testament manuscripts were developed in Africa. So was monasticism. In his book *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, Thomas Oden discusses seven ways that Africa helped to form the European Christian mind.

A written Gospel and written book of psalms were in the African Coptic language by A.D. 300. Today there are ten million Coptic Christians. The Syrian Orthodox church still uses Aramaic language, which is close to what Jesus spoke.

There is strong tradition that the apostle Thomas took the good news of Jesus to India, and there are documented Christian communities in that land before A.D. 200. There is tradition that Mark took the good news to Africa, as did the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized by Philip. Visiting Jews came to faith in Jesus when Peter preached in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2), and they carried the good news home to communities across North Africa and Asia, laying foundations for the first churches in those regions.

China's early records of the gospel stretch to 600. Missionaries who belonged to the Nestorian church traveled east along the Silk Road. They translated parts of the Bible and planted monasteries in many Chinese cities.

God was in all these countries before our records, of course. God created every individual person in his image. Through nature (Ps 19), conscience (Rom 2), dreams and visions (Acts 10), human witnesses, and Scripture—and today through the Internet—God speaks to those who look for him.

This revelation culminates in Jesus, the Word made flesh. “No one comes to the Father except through me,” Jesus said (Jn 14:6). “There is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved,” according to the apostle Peter (Acts 4:12). God has ways to make Jesus known to those who want to meet him.

SAVING CULTURES

Sometimes the gospel saves a whole people from annihilation. In Borneo I have worshiped with Kelabit and Lun Bawang tribespeople. Their grandfathers hunted rhinoceros. They picked fruit by swinging from

vines eighty feet above the jungle floor and rafted through class-six whitewater rapids as a routine means of transportation.

In the middle of the nineteenth century an Indian-born Britisher named James Brooke arrived. For the next hundred years, he and his successors constituted the government throughout the region. Head-hunting was prohibited. Agricultural methods were improved.

Unfortunately, more rice and more freedom to live without fear meant more fermented beverages, more partying and more heavy drinking.

Alcoholism became a major scourge. Violence erupted frequently. Families were broken. Community social structures were in tatters.

Then on the continent of Australia, several Christians felt called to serve the Lun Bawang and Kelabit people.

When they arrived, officials tried to discourage them. “Your ideals are commendable. But, frankly, it’s not worthwhile going up those mountains because in another generation those people will be gone. It’s not worthwhile to learn those languages, because they are going to disappear.”

Nevertheless, the missionaries did go up the mountains. They shared God’s good news. The people responded. Lives changed. They quit drinking. Families healed. They asked the government for schools. Today they are literate, contributing citizens. Including believers in nearby tribes, there are 150,000 followers of Jesus, and more than one thousand churches.

“If not for the gospel, you would be dead,” I blurted out one Sunday after worshipping with them.

“That’s absolutely right,” they agreed. “The gospel saved us, not only as individuals but as a people.”

Daniel, Esther and Nehemiah. Filipino and Australian and Borneo Christians. All who worship King Jesus. These are my people. I belong with them.

FLEAS ON THE DOG

But Christians can break your heart.

One Sunday evening in a tropical country Peter and Rebecca ushered me into a lovely eating place. My work introduces me to some of

the finest human beings on earth, intelligent evangelical leaders who are contextualized in a dizzying spectrum of cultures. That Sunday was no exception. I had been bathed in rich worship. Now, as the three of us sat down and opened our menus, I was thanking God for the beauty of his church in their land.

Peter threw cold water on my bliss.

“For twenty years I’ve poured my life into students,” he said. “I’ve disciplined them, cried with them, celebrated with them. Then they graduate and take good jobs. Ten years later all they can talk about is the house and the car and the promotion and the vacation and the big church remodel. The poor are still all around, but they no longer see them. It happens student generation after generation.” He sat with eyes downcast and shoulders slumped, this gifted, highly placed leader.

It was a helpful corrective to my rosy picture.

“The church is made up of sinners. The fleas come with the dog,” says Eugene Peterson.

We expect a disciplined army of committed men and women who courageously lay siege to the worldly powers. Instead we find some people who are more concerned with getting rid of the crabgrass in their lawns. We expect a community of saints who are mature in the virtues of love and mercy, and find ourselves working on a church supper where there is more gossip than there are casseroles. We expect to meet minds that are informed and shaped by the great truths and rhythms of Scripture, and find persons whose intellectual energy is barely sufficient to get them from the comics to the sports page. . . . Faith in Christ does not in itself make a person an interesting conversationalist or stimulating companion. [Sometimes you just have to] endure tedious relationships with unimaginative pilgrims.⁵

Then we realize it is not the kingdom that holds us together, but the King.

Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be.

They are but broken lights of thee
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.⁶

A PURE PILGRIMAGE CHURCH

We are in process. We are not finished. Sometimes others' sins, or our own, make us cry. Yet the thrill of the journey always returns.

When the cornerstone for a major ecumenical church was laid in Qatar in 2007, Paul Hinder, Catholic Bishop of Arabia, spoke of this journey. "We have to accept that we are expatriates in every sense of the word. We are a pure pilgrimage church. A multicultural, multilingual, multiracial church composed of the faithful more or less from all over the world."⁷

Simultaneous with the inauguration of that church in Qatar in 2008, the Evangelical Community Church of Abu Dhabi—the church where I worshiped with Filipinos—dedicated a new building extension. There were two morning services for the dedication, standing-room only. These were followed by the Filipino service, which was packed. That was followed by the Ethiopian service. That was followed by a special Chinese New Year service, for which the uncompleted building was booked in faith months in advance. About 450 Chinese workers crowded into that event, 90 percent of whom never had entered a church before. It took working in the Gulf to draw them to the gospel.

The church is on a journey, not in a box. Global flows are taking us in new directions. Not only "extreme" Gulf congregations are multicultural. The nations are in *our* neighborhoods. Wherever we live, we hardly can go to the mall without passing people from half a dozen countries.

Reaching across these cultural boundaries should feel natural. It always has been our call. Abraham was commissioned to bless *all* the families of the earth (Gen 12:3). Moses charged God's people to love the aliens as they loved themselves (Deut 10:19). David sang, "May *all* the peoples praise you" (Ps 67:5). Isaiah envisioned God's followers being light to the nations (Is 51:4). Habakkuk pictured the day when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the

waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14). Paul was propelled by a passion for the unreached peoples (Rom 15:20). John vibrated with a vision of peoples and tribes and kindreds and nations gathered together around the throne of God at the end of time (Rev 7:9-10).

Our loyalties cannot stop at the edge of our culture. While culture is a treasured gift of God, outsiders are God’s gifts too. So even though the overall emphasis of this book is indigenous believers, now and then foreign missionaries will appear. These are sojourners who have stepped out into the margins to demonstrate with their bodies God’s “pure pilgrimage church.”

IT TAKES A KINGDOM FAMILY

“I’m so hungry I could devour a rock,” Peter growled as he somersaulted into the soft sand.⁸

“Don’t think about it,” counseled Joel. “Look at that sunset.” Hunkering down, he drummed a soft beat on a piece of driftwood.

Peter got out his guitar and began to strum. He licked his lips and eyed the lapping waves of the Mediterranean. Although their homes were south of the Sahara, they had come to North Africa to further their education. The richer nations in the north had granted them scholarships. Yet the people in these nations thought of Jesus merely as a prophet. They had no idea that he was savior and king and God and friend. Peter and Joel longed for their classmates to hear this good news.

Along with other Christian students from the south, they had formed a student group. When there were ten fellowships linked across the band of solidly Muslim nations, they decided to hold a leadership-training camp.

By faith, even though they hardly had the funds to survive month by month, they had reserved a site at the beach. Twenty-seven students arrived at the camp. Then they discovered that nobody had any money for food.

So they went down to the shore and stared at the waves. As the sun crept toward the crests, they began to sing songs of praise.

A fishing boat drifted past, then pulled up on the sand nearby. The fishermen approached. “What are you doing?” they asked.

“Singing,” Peter smiled.

“Songs to God,” Joel added.

“Songs to Jesus,” Peter clarified. *Might as well let our witness shine.*

The fishermen looked at each other. “You believe in Jesus?”

“Yes.”

“Are you students?”

“Yes.”

“So you’re just sitting here singing?”

“Well, to be honest, we’d also like to be eating. But it took all our money to get here. We have no food.” Joel shrugged and forced a smile.

“At least we can sing.”

The fishermen looked at each other. “We have plenty of fish. Take some. Take lots. We’re from Korea, and we’re Christians too.”

God had brought African students from the south to the universities in Muslim lands. Over the years they would have a significant quiet witness. But they were not self-sufficient. At this camp, at least, God used members of the global church to keep them alive. Every night that week the fishing boats pulled up with fish for all the campers.

“Take as much as you like,” the fishermen said. “We pray God’s blessing on you. This is not an easy place to be a Christian.”

Encouraged, the campers returned to their universities ready to pray with those in need and to point them to Jesus.

Today one of the Africans who studied and witnessed in that region, Daniel Bourdanne, is global director of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), the movement that networks InterVarsity movements globally.

GROW UP

Disciples are more than converts. Knowing the King is more than cheerleading. If we truly love God and our neighbors, we have to apply our brains. We have to immerse ourselves in “the whole counsel of God.”⁹

Where do we find that? In Scripture stories, doctrinal themes, spiritual presence, obedient practice (because we learn by doing) and community application (because faith is not just private).

Growing up to spiritual maturity is a challenge that faces Christians everywhere. Some turn to formal institutions like Asian Graduate School of Theology, a consortium of eight seminaries that offer M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, with a home base in the Philippines. AGST models cooperative sharing of finance, personnel, library and facilities. In another partnership the South American Theological Seminary reaches from Brazil to Africa, to help the Mozambique Graduate School of Theology offer an M.A.

At the other end of the training spectrum are oral Scripture programs, as we will see in chapter nine. Mentored nonformal apprenticeships play a big part too.

Training requires financial investment. Overseas Council, based in Indianapolis, is one group that has stepped up to the plate. Over the past thirty years, OC has helped one hundred schools in sixty countries with computers, libraries, buildings, scholarships, administrative skills training and faculty development.

Maintaining academic standards is another unglamorous requirement. Various bodies like the Asian Theological Alliance sacrificially conduct accreditation visits to hold schools accountable.

God gives us brains and he expects us to develop them, whether through seminaries or private study or radio teaching or training camps or other programs. How else can we help with the issues of our day—oil, water, violence, hunger, disease, joblessness, lovelessness—unless we can think Christianly? This must be done in the context of our own culture, with its categories of community and time and justice and everyday values, if we are to create “ethnotheology” that is appropriate for our people.

Thoughtful Christians are found at all levels. Esmé Bowers of the Africa Evangelical Alliance trains women. Her books are manuals stored on her laptop. Whenever she deplanes, she considers the situation of the local women. Has war swept through? She downloads the manual on

soldiers and prostitutes. Is the region agricultural? She downloads the manual on earthkeeping.

Recently Esme conducted a workshop in Zimbabwe. There a local woman approached her. “I had twelve children,” she told Esme. “They were all married. But they all died of AIDS. All their spouses died too. Now I’m left with thirty-two grandchildren to support on a little plot of ground.”

Yet in spite of horrendous burdens, this woman had come to Esme’s workshop to be trained as a thoughtful Christian leader. She knew that every Christian needs to learn to think.

In today’s chaotic world, people are hungry for meaning. They wonder if there is any big picture. They long for explanatory paradigms. Great biblical themes like creation, stewardship of the earth, incarnation, sacrificial life-giving, resurrection, new birth, spiritual empowering, heaven and a God both powerful and personal can speak volumes. It is our privilege to present these ideas winsomely in the marketplace of ideas.

LATIN AMERICANS AND THE BEAUTY OF JESUS

One afternoon in Guatemala I listened to a courtyard fountain spill, trickle, gurgle and sing. It restored my soul. I was aware that Guatemala had problems. As we had been driving to my first meeting, my friend Armindo had received a call telling him that his partner had been shot in the leg during a car hijacking. Wrenching the steering wheel around and zooming to the hospital, Armindo took the news calmly. No big deal. He had had *two* cars stolen himself. But I was shaken. It took the soothing sound of the water later to remind me that there is also beauty in this “country of eternal spring.”

I was there to teach Guatemalans who were heading to places like Mauritania, Kurdistan and Sudan. My topic was Muslim women. Many Spanish-speaking missionaries serve in such countries. Like Jesus’ people elsewhere, Latin Americans not only worship and witness and network and grow to maturity, but also reach across borders in well-planned mission.

There is a large ethnic group in the Middle East where several hundred former Muslims follow Jesus because of the witness of a team of Latin American professionals.

When they first arrived, these Latin Americans immersed themselves in local life. “We learned what their profiles were for an ideal man and woman, and we tried to fulfill those standards,” says the leader, Abraham Duran. “We tried to walk, behave, eat, drink, talk, share, keep silence, sleep, and relate in ways that our people group considered right, proper, and ideal. . . . We tried to dispel their prejudices. . . . We never initiated apologetic discussions, but we responded. . . . People cannot see the beauty of Jesus if they see only our ugliness.”

We presented the beauty of Christ’s teachings about God, human beings, society, religious leaders, and God’s kingdom before we talked to them about who Jesus is. . . . His teaching “rings true.” . . . We think we are good, and discover that we are unable to keep “the law” or noble “New Year” or “new life” resolutions consistently. We are sure we can fix society with more education, and our best projects end in chaos. We insist that the revolution will solve the problems, and it multiplies them. We affirm that we can manage wealth and power, and they become our masters. We know we can change the world if religion is in power, and religion in power turns people into rebels and saints into monsters.

People discovered that Jesus was the hero they were looking for. They saw Jesus’ compassion demonstrated by missionaries who “took the side of justice, served the poor, healed the sick, educated the ignorant, and provided for the needy.” Most of all the missionaries prayed. Miraculous healings occurred. Dreams and visions happened. The team also was willing to suffer, and people saw their joy. During times of turmoil, people saw their peace. They practiced community, and welcomed new believers, even as they encouraged them to stay close to their families and friends.

“Jesus did not arrive from heaven as an adult and say to the monotheistic, legalistic Jews: ‘I am God Almighty fresh from heaven, and if you,

right now, will repent and put your trust in my atoning sacrifice, you will be saved,' ” says Duran. “If we want to share the good news of the gospel with our monotheistic, legalistic Muslim friends, we must follow his example—a gradual approach that will lead people to discern the truth and beauty of Jesus’ personality, teachings, and life, motivating them to be his followers.”¹⁰

These Latin Americans deliberately traded the beauties of countries like Guatemala—the colorful flowers and textiles, the familiar spices and fruits, the greenery and flowing water, the language of Cervantes—to share the beauty of Jesus.

IT’S NOT ABOUT US

“Tell me, Doctor. If you were in the uterus, would you want to come out into a world like this?”

The speaker was a pregnant woman. A nuclear bomb had just exploded, and radiation sickness was spreading. The scene is from the movie *The Day After*.

The doctor shook his head. “I can’t argue with you,” he said.

She jumped up and grabbed his lapels and begged, “Argue with me! Tell me about hope!”

Hope. That woman’s cry echoes in our hearts. We do not know the future. There may be tidal waves. Terrorism. Germs that do not respond to antibiotics. Water shortages.

Five hundred years from now our universities could be ashes. Our churches, even our denominations, might have disappeared. The United States of America could be gone.

But Jesus’ church will be alive, blossoming in a million places in several thousand languages, “salting” the earth, lighting neighborhoods, blessing broken people and connecting them with the God who made them and loves them and can empower them to live with meaning and joy in this terrifying and beautiful world.

These are my people. They tell me about hope.

I love America. When I fly home from Asia and first see land, whether the beaches of Los Angeles or the Strait of Juan de Fuca—that

blue furrow that arrows between green firs toward SeaTac airport—a lump forms in my throat. I treasure the words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” I sing “God Bless America” with feeling.

Yet the future global church may not be Western-led, and that’s OK. Let the mantle pass. We in the West can learn to follow, can’t we? True, most of the money, power, training institutions, publishing houses and international organizations still are based here. But God is doing something new in our time. People of every nation are joining in. We can too, wherever we are. This book is not primarily about us or what we should do. It is a humble celebration of the kingdom that glows from generation to generation and will never be destroyed.

“I will build my church,” Jesus said, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18 kjv). Today we have the great privilege of being part of that together, linked as never before.

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