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The State  
of  
Church Giving  
through 2005  
Abolition of the  
Institutional Enslavement of  
Overseas Missions

Excerpt: Chapter 8

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Abolition of the Institutional Enslavement of Overseas Missions*  
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chapter 8

## *Abolition of the Institutional Enslavement of Overseas Missions*

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.  
He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

Jesus quoted in John 14:12, New International Version

“But understand this: There will be terrifying times in the last days.  
...as they make a pretense of religion but deny its power.”

2 Timothy 3:1, 5, New American Bible

### **Describing Congregational and Denominational Organization regarding Overseas Missions**

Two women, members of the missions committee, described the annual fall stewardship campaign strategy in their congregation. Each fall, the time came to raise the pledges for the next year’s operating budget. The finance committee was well aware of how attractive the idea of missions was to congregation members. So the finance committee asked the missions committee to provide stories and compelling needs about ongoing missions activities, both national and local. However, the women observed with some frustration, the congregation was not informed that the actual missions line item was the last one funded each year. Therefore, the missions committee absorbed any shortfall in total annual income, and what allocation the committee did receive would probably not be available until December of the following year.<sup>1</sup>

This true story may or may not be as common as the offertory prayers over weekly collections that evoke the mission work of the church and those hurting, both across town and across the globe. As demonstrated in chapter 6 of this volume,

however, those prayers are more theoretical than practical since, on average, only about two cents of each dollar put in the offering plate will actually leave the congregation for denominational overseas missions.

The problem may be a chicken-and-egg dilemma. Are denominational missions low because congregations keep most of their income for themselves? Or have congregations limited what is sent on to the denomination for missions because of national spending priorities?

Congregation members sense that it is a complicated matter to express concern for overseas missions through denominational channels. Specifically, many denominations are committed to some form of the unified budget. Congregations send money, in many cases through regional offices, to national headquarters. The regional office takes a percentage of the funds, and sends the balance to the national office. The national office then allocates the money it receives by percentages among its various departments. These departments may include headquarters operations, educational institutions, church planting/support in the U.S., and international ministries, among others.

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Congregation members sense that it is a complicated matter to express concern for overseas missions through denominational channels.

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If a congregation desired to increase giving to overseas missions by increasing the undesignated amount it sends to the denomination, only a portion of the increase would actually be allocated to overseas missions. In the unified budget system, to increase giving for overseas missions, the congregation must, by definition, also support the expansion of the overall operating budget at the regional and national levels.

Yet, as in the congregational example above, international missions is often promoted as the poster child for the value of supporting the denomination. It is the hungry and hurting of the world who are held up as the beneficiaries of the denomination's existence. In reality, in order to increase assistance to those hurting people through undesignated giving to the denomination, the congregation must also support larger operating budgets for every other department in the denomination's bureaucracy.

It is also generally true that, independently of the denominational unified budget, a congregation may designate funds specifically for overseas needs. However, this option must be balanced with the influence that denominational officials can exert on behalf of pastor placement, and the related knowledge that such placement may be influenced by the pastor's success in raising the unified budget allocation.

The situation could be very different. Denominations already have established distribution channels. Denominations also have coordinated working relationships with counterpart church structures throughout the globe. A vast number of congregations have denominational connections. For example, two-thirds of what are termed Protestant megachurches report denominational affiliation.<sup>2</sup> So the potential is great for denominations to serve as the key facilitator between the congregation and the larger world.

Instead, present structures result in what appears to be a standoff. Most congregations struggle to raise the amount needed to completely pay denominational levies, the members are not seriously challenged about increasing giving beyond maintenance levels for the larger vision of the church, and stories about and references to missions are used as flavoring to make everyone involved feel that present levels

of activity can be viewed as significant. If a congregation does become excited about missions, information in chapter 6 of this volume suggests that the congregation may be as likely to initiate its own mission project as work through denominational channels.

If the above discussion presents an accurate description of the actual, and not theoretical, organization of most congregations and denominations, then there is an important issue to be addressed.

To the extent the above description is accurate, it may help to explain why the portion of income given to the church has been decreasing even as members have more after-tax income to spend in ways they choose. Why have churches not attracted a larger, rather than a smaller, portion of their members' rising incomes? If the description is accurate, it would help to explain that, with communication and travel and resources multiplying as never before, the church has not tried to organize itself to solve, rather than cope with, the misery on both a physical and spiritual level faced by so many in the world.

If the above description is accurate, then one might truly state that there is an institutional enslavement of overseas missions for the purpose of maintaining church organization at all levels.

On an unconscious (or conscious) level, overseas missions might be regarded in the same way as a trained animal, kept in a cage and trotted out at convenient times. Animals, such as elephants, often also provide practical services in the setup and breakdown of a circus, for example, but the animal is given limited freedom to function.

For the sake of the present discussion, let us propose that church leaders in the congregations, in the regional offices, in the national offices are not making their highest priority the highest priority given by Jesus—to love God and love your neighbor. The support for this supposition is that church leaders: (1) are not analyzing and strategizing how to double, triple or increase thirty times the amount of missions as a percent of congregational budgets; (2) are not empowering each church member to understand and act on this Great Commission/Great Commandment imperative; and (3) instead are content to focus on a maintenance of general activity that perpetuates and balances the status quo. To the degree that church leaders exhibit these behaviors, church leaders are enslaving overseas missions.

Church leaders could structure a system in which denominational departments are funded as a base of operations for organizing a powerful response, in Jesus' name, to human physical and spiritual need on a par with New Testament challenges and promises. Jesus promised his followers that they could do greater things than he did (John 14:12). The apostle Paul writes that the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is available for the church's activities (Eph. 1:18-23). However, if church leaders are content to use overseas missions as a means to perpetuate the institutions for which they feel responsible, and otherwise restrict overseas missions activities in ways that discourage open-ended congregational support, then the term the institutional enslavement of overseas missions may well apply.

To the extent the description is accurate, it may be time to begin the discussion of how to abolish the institutional enslavement of overseas missions, in order to free

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Why have churches not attracted a larger, rather than smaller, portion of their members' rising incomes?

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church members to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in the power God reportedly wants to impart to those who are willing to step out in faith.

### **The Church in the U.S. in the Midst of Miraculous Circumstances**

“Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done...Think of the wonderful works he has done, the miracles...” (1 Chronicles 16:8, 12a, New Living Translation).

The church in the United States is situated in a unique position, both globally and historically. It is true that its circumstances have grown out of a marred past and exist in an imperfect present. All the more is there a responsibility to use the remarkable opportunities for service that exist. Its present situation might almost fall within the definition of miraculous.

Consider that the United States has a \$13 trillion economy. That number has little practical meaning for most people. Perhaps the only way to gain perspective is to compare the number to other national economies. The U.S.’s \$13 trillion represents 29% of the world’s Gross National Income. The next largest economy is that of Japan, at \$5 trillion. Germany is the next largest at \$3 trillion, followed by China, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom each with about \$2 trillion. Russia’s economy represents \$639 billion while India’s is \$793 billion.<sup>3</sup>

This large U.S. economy exists in a nation that was founded on the principle of the freedom of religion. Within the present religious milieu of the U.S., 75% of the population indicated in a 2006 survey that they believe Jesus rose from the dead, and 78% believe Jesus “was the Son of God who came to earth to die for our sins.”<sup>4</sup> A 2007 poll found that 90% of the people in the U.S. believe in God.<sup>5</sup>

Freedom of religion. Economic resources. High percentage of professed belief. In such an environment, one might reasonably expect a dynamic church.

Yet the potential of the church appears to be unrealized in present practice.

### **Potential Versus Practice**

As noted in chapter 4, giving to church after 1961 did not expand in the same way as income. Although church members were 554% richer in 2005, after taxes and inflation, than their forebears were in 1933, the depth of the Great Depression, the portion of income given to the church in 2005 had shrunk by 23% compared to 1933. These facts show that the church did not provide dynamic leadership, or otherwise attract the potential increased giving that could have produced the powerful works that Jesus proposed in John 14:12 for his followers to do. The analyses in earlier chapters instead point to an organizational maintenance pattern that has been losing market share in church members’ spending patterns.

The quotes in Table 38 lend credence to this conclusion. Leaders from a variety of backgrounds describe a pattern within the contemporary church in the U.S. that may best be summarized as “lukewarm.” Lukewarm is not cold, in which no activity is taking place, nor hot, in which activity would be increasing mission exponentially. Lukewarm is just enough activity at an adequate maintenance level to keep the status quo. Given the warning in Revelation 3:15-20, the church may want to explore alternatives before encountering a Jesus who is ready to expectorate the church.

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The present situation for the church in the U.S. might almost fall within the definition of miraculous.

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**Table 38: Church Leaders Comment on the Lukewarm Church in the U.S.**

<p>Erich Bridges quotes a George Barna finding that many Americans are “comfortable” with faith but it is not a “critical factor in their decision-making.... Very limited effort is devoted to spiritual growth. Most Americans experience ‘accidental spiritual growth’ since there is generally no plan or process other than showing up at a church and absorbing a few ideas here and there. Even then, few people have a defined understanding of what they are hoping to become as followers of Christ.” Bridges observes, “It’s a discouraging analysis of the mile-wide, inch-deep landscape of American Christianity.”<sup>6</sup></p>
<p>Presbyterian (USA) pastor and organizer Robert Linthicum observed, “The church has always talked about mission, but we organize ourselves for preservation, not mission.”<sup>7</sup></p>
<p>Kenneth S. Hemphill was hired as a strategist to strengthen the commitment of Southern Baptist Convention members. In a denominational magazine column, he observed, “Many friends of the church have spoken about the anemic nature of the church in North America. Apathy is apparent as leaders resort to begging people to take positions of service. Could our ‘anemia’ be directly related to our spiritual diet? Are we larger and stronger or are we just obese?...Many people today are joining a church for its entertainment value, but they leave when there is a call for commitment to the fundamentals of Christian life such as Bible study, Scripture memory, and orthodox behavior.”<sup>8</sup></p>
<p>An editorial from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati noted that Mass attendance is declining, as is Catholic school enrollment, and that “A recent Gallup Poll found that 49 percent of Catholics do not feel that they can explain their faith to others.” While acknowledging the impact of the sexual abuse crisis and some financial scandals, the editorial also quotes U.S. Archbishop John P. Foley, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications at the Vatican, as saying “that Catholics must ask forgiveness for the times they have failed in their efforts to evangelize. The archbishop said that, while ‘it is necessary to identify the evils in society and warn people against them, our major effort should be in proclaiming the knowledge and love of our merciful savior, Jesus Christ.’ We risk being left behind not only on the geopolitical scene, but also in terms of our own salvation if we do not do all that is within our power to spread the good news.”<sup>9</sup></p>
<p>Billy Kim, president of Far Eastern Broadcasting in South Korea, on a visit to the U.S., observed that “When Jesus said ‘all power is given unto Me,’ He is speaking of the all-supplying power to fulfill the Great Commission within our generation. The only thing left is the commitment on the part of the Christian...We’ve been blessed so abundantly. The Scripture says ‘to whom much is given, much will be required.’ No other people on the planet Earth have been blessed by God Almighty as the people of the United States of America. May God grant a fresh vision, for ‘where there is no vision, people perish.’”<sup>10</sup></p>
<p>John Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association, designed to “build the community and the family among the poor” in inner-cities throughout the U.S., observed, “The Christian church is meant to be the continuation of the life of Jesus on earth. Unfortunately, I see it more [often] as a continuation of American individualism, need, and greed.”<sup>11</sup></p>
<p>“The spiritual profile of American Christianity is not unlike a lukewarm church that the Bible warns about.” David Kinnamon, quoted in The Barna Group release of its 2007 survey.<sup>12</sup></p>
<p>“ ‘The U.S. church as a whole is spiritually arrogant, greatly spiritually undernourished, and it’s just spiritually lazy,’ [New Church Specialties founder Dr. Larry] McKain commented.”<sup>13</sup></p>
<p>Christopher J.H. Wright is the international director of Langham Partnership, known in the U.S. as John Stott Ministries. In an essay on the church’s mission, he asked, “Can the West be re-evangelized? Only if we unlearn our default ethnocentric assumptions about ‘real’ Christianity (our own) and unlearn our blindness to the ways Western Christianity is infected by cultural idolatry.” He suggests that Christians in the West will have to learn from Christians in other areas of the world, changing the dynamic on giving and receiving. This shift “...makes us uncomfortably aware that what Jesus said to the Laodicean church might apply to us in the West: ‘You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked”’ (Rev. 3:17).”<sup>14</sup></p>

How do the observations in Table 38 match with the general impression of the U.S. as a religious nation? That impression is likely influenced by the fact that a low-end estimate places 60 million worshippers in church buildings each weekend, a figure that must be the envy of every television advertiser, movie producer, and sports event promoter.

However, consider another contrast. Although it would take \$5 billion additional a year to prevent about two-thirds of the 10 million annual deaths of children under five around the globe, the church has not provided the moral leadership or organizing structure to achieve that possibility. Contrast that with the entrepreneurship of retail thieves who are estimated to have cost retailers \$41.6 billion in 2006, up slightly from 2005.<sup>15</sup> One might conclude that thieves are more committed to their cause than are Christians to the mandate of Jesus to love the little children of the world.

To date, church leaders in the U.S. have not effectively engaged and challenged their members to consider the almost miraculous circumstances of great wealth and great freedom they find themselves in, resources to be harnessed in service to the God who has saved them. Many church leaders instead turn from the challenge and confrontation of those in the pews that must be undertaken, and instead look to government to solve the issues of domestic and global need. Newspapers are filled with reports of various groups of church leaders lobbying or pronouncing or presenting to various governmental agencies and officials the needs in the U.S. and globally. All this activity is going on while the same leaders do not spend an equal amount of creative energy mobilizing their own members to increase missions giving. The primary focus on government is pursued in spite of the fact that it is poor political science to ask people to vote to do something that they will not first do voluntarily. Politics is an overflow of the heart. Giving patterns suggest that the hearts of their people are just what church leaders do not have.

Peggy Noonan, former presidential speechwriter and current columnist, suggested in a 2005 column another reason that it may not be the most efficient approach to lobby government or other societal leaders to fix the problems facing the world. She summarized a general feeling about American culture: “I think that a lot of people are carrying around in their heads, unarticulated and even in some cases unnoticed, a sense that the wheels are coming off the trolley and the trolley off the tracks.” She lists a series of troubling societal signs, including “Great churches that have lost all sense of mission, and all authority.” She speculates that many of the elite who would traditionally lead the rest of Americans out of their dilemma have instead taken an attitude of seeking their own comfort and waiting to see what will happen, thereby negotiating a “separate peace” with the troubles facing society. “And that they consciously, or unconsciously, took grim comfort in this thought: I got mine. Which is what the separate peace comes down to, ‘I got mine, you get yours.’”<sup>16</sup>

If Noonan is correct, there apparently is no group that church leaders can beseech to take care of the situation, or no group that can be expected to suddenly announce a solution to make everything right, either for society, or for the church.

How is one to evaluate these circumstances, not, as the apostle Paul warned, from the perspective of “mere men” (1 Cor. 3:3b, NIV), but instead from a completely different, even cosmic footing? Is it possible that society is struggling because the

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church is emphasizing the consumer values that are consuming society, and therefore offers no counterpoint, no clear star by which to steer an alternative course? If the church in the U.S. is struggling in a lukewarm swamp, Noonan's observations would suggest that there is no cavalry coming to rescue it. Fortunately, Calvary has already come to the rescue. From that starting point, one can reflect on the dynamics that are hindering the church. Defining the problems may also help define solutions. Those solutions will likely not be implemented by a few heroic leaders, allowing the vast majority to relax in their tepid routines. The solutions need to be so clear that those strategies can be embraced, and acted on, by individual church members and congregations that will then combine in a concert of service. The overflow may well help the larger society as a byproduct. However, it should be noted that when Jesus said in Revelation 3:19-20, that he was standing at the door and knocking to get in, he was addressing not society, but the church. So the church is probably the place to begin.

***A Lack of Vested Interest in Changing the Status Quo.*** In his campaign to end slavery in England, William Wilberforce initially formed a coalition with a small fringe group of Christians who were opposed to slavery on principle. He had to argue and develop strategies to broaden the coalition to a more general audience in order to secure the necessary votes to stop the English slave trade.

Instead of a nation-state, it is denominational offices and congregational structures that hold missions within confined limits. What group within the church has a vested interest in changing the present maintenance status quo to an emphasis on missions? Consider the following.

Christian media could lead a campaign to challenge church members to increase giving, combined with congregations increasing the portion of their budgets for missions, and denominations limiting operational expenses to an inflation-adjusted amount, thus keeping international mission budgets open-ended. However, a quick scan of the advertisers who support the increasingly expensive proposition of print publishing may suggest why no magazine has led such a drumbeat. Many ads in Christian magazines are taken out by denominational institutions, such as seminaries, whose budgets are in tension with overseas missions as denominations balance the unified budget. Other advertisers are Christian colleges, facing the same support crunch as seminaries. A third major category is book publishers. Few or rare are the denominational mission agencies that place ads, and in this way naturally develop clout with Christian media outlets.

Seminaries are also not training pastors to organize congregational budgets to emphasize missions. As congregational support for undesignated giving to denominational offices declines, seminaries are more dependent on direct fundraising to continue their ministries. Thus, in training pastors, seminaries, already notoriously lax in providing future pastors with an understanding of money dynamics from either a spiritual or practical perspective,<sup>17</sup> may not be immune to the strategy of training those pastors with an eye to producing future alumni and/or ambassadors in the congregations who will financially support the seminary.

The denominational leaders who ought to be challenging, confronting, and exhorting church members to increase overseas missions outreach, are often busy

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downsizing and restructuring their departments because of decreased levels of congregational support.

Pastors are answerable to the congregation for ongoing operations. However, the individual pastor who has any desire for a career leading to a church offering top salary and benefits is often answerable to other authorities as well. It is rare that denominational standards label a pastor as a desirable leader because of a congregation's large international mission budget. Denominations generally espouse the importance of the "larger mission of the church." However, pastors understand that promotions and advancement within those structures are not meted out based on the funding of international missions. For example, two young up-and-coming pastors were asked what positive consequences would result if money were not a problem in the congregation. Both pastors agreed: Staff and buildings.<sup>18</sup> Sufficient money would not unleash new missions outreach, but rather, for those who want to advance, the focus would be on two categories for which pastors are rewarded by the denominational structure.

A 2006 survey conducted by Ellison Research for the Southern Baptist Convention's Lifeway Christian Resources, resulted in a finding consistent with the above observation. The survey polled ministers across the U.S. from a variety of Protestant communions. The survey found the most common response to the question "What would you do with an unexpected financial windfall?" was to "build, expand, or update their church's buildings and facilities" (31 percent). The next three responses were: "increase community evangelism activities" (16%); "paying off debt" (12%); and "adding staff" (10%). The idea of giving more to foreign missions and evangelism was a priority to only 7%.<sup>19</sup> The pastors' responses suggest leadership is more interested in filling up the local church than in using the local congregation as a base to carry out the Great Commission.

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The most common answer from pastors to the question, "What would you do with an unexpected windfall?" was to "build, expand or update their church's buildings and facilities."

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In light of the number of children dying whose deaths could have been prevented if churches had taken action in Jesus' name, and in light of the comments in Table 38 by a variety of leaders on the increasingly lukewarm nature of the church, is the word "irony" or "tragedy" more appropriate to describe the fact that, in a survey carried out by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center, clergy ranked highest of any profession in both job satisfaction and general happiness?<sup>20</sup>

***Consequences of Religion Being Practiced without Power.*** The ongoing task of proclaiming the grace of God was one that Jesus left to the church. He intensively trained his followers and commissioned them to carry on the work. Jesus was aware that the labors of the church would have an overflow effect on the social order. He used terms such as "salt" and "light" to communicate the impact that faithfulness could bestow on the larger society in which the church was active. Jesus also warned that lack of faithfulness would have consequences. What good is salt that has lost its flavor? A corollary question could also be posed: What happens to the stew that the salt is supposed to be flavoring, or in this case, to a society with a lukewarm church?

Church officials are very aware of the impact that decreased giving levels, a symptom of decreased faithfulness, have on their own institutions. These same leaders may also acknowledge the "trolley off the tracks," to use Peggy Noonan's metaphor for society losing its moorings. However, do these church leaders at the

local and national levels accept the possibility of their own responsibility for these cultural problems, as they withdraw from the primary mission of the church to emphasize institutional maintenance? Would a dynamic church living for others, rather than for self-preservation, have an overflow impact on what seem to be overwhelming social problems? Consider some of the social symptoms in the affluent U.S. culture that is adrift without a rudder of morality.

**People die because the church is not faithful.** Tim Stafford wrote in a 2007 *Christianity Today* cover story of the frustration of church workers in Africa who do not have resources to actually fix the problems that confront them regularly. Church people respond well financially to emergencies. But they are not being led to invest in the longer-term strategies that can prevent future crises. In his article, Stafford discusses the work of both denominational programs, and those of paradenominational groups on the front lines.

To make a lasting difference, they must help people change their lives. They know it can happen. They see it happening here and there. But the work is slow, unspectacular, and difficult to fund...

...somehow we have to go beyond the cycle of disaster and short-term response—a mode that is appropriate for tsunamis or earthquakes but not for food emergencies or chronic epidemics like AIDS. We must go on to long-term engagement. Organizations...have the people and the programs.... The volume, though, needs to grow dramatically. There is just not enough money for programs that require patience and long-term, hands-on involvement.<sup>21</sup>

Stafford's statement that there is "just not enough money" is accurate, if one considers only current church spending priorities. Based on the numbers in chapter 6 of this volume, however, from a potential perspective the statement is just not true. If giving were to increase, and congregations and denominations were to direct that increased giving to international need, billions of dollars could be applied to prevent millions of deaths resulting from chronic, rather than primarily disaster, conditions. The fact is that many people will continue to die, many who have never had the opportunity to hear of God's love through Jesus, if church members in the U.S. do not embrace and act on their potential.

**World poverty provides a breeding ground for terrorism.** While Jesus promotes faithfulness on the basis of "dying to oneself," the positive consequences of discipleship that overflow into society will undoubtedly also benefit the faithful. Consider an observation by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at a meeting of 160 charities involved in international outreach: "In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, defined as it is thus far by an unprecedented and increasing interdependence, human development is both a moral end in itself and also a central pillar of our national security...For as long as civil conflicts can beget global crises, as long as preventable diseases destroy the social fabric of entire countries and entire continents, as long as half the human race lives on less than \$2 a day, the developing world will neither be just nor will it be stable."<sup>22</sup>

**Members are not attracted to church.** Three comments on the contemporary church voice a common theme regarding the lack of members' engagement. A Gallup Poll found the greatest "practical" reason that Americans (21%) skip church is "they don't have time or they don't get around to it."<sup>23</sup> An Associated Press story reported,

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If giving were to increase, billions of dollars could prevent millions of deaths from chronic, rather than primarily disaster, conditions.

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“Organizers of the Church For Men say that guys are ‘bored stiff’ in many churches today.”<sup>24</sup> A Lifeway Resources survey found that the reason cited by 20 percent of those who switched churches was that they “did not feel engaged or involved in meaningful church work.”<sup>25</sup>

**Younger people are not attracted to be church leaders.** A major study by the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at the Wesley Theological Seminary found the number of clergy below 35 is alarmingly low in many denominations.<sup>26</sup> Church observer Martin Marty quotes an Association of Theological Schools survey for the information that “just half the men and 40 percent of the women who received master of divinity degrees last year said their first choice after seminary was pastoring a church.”<sup>27</sup> Would younger people be attracted to minister in the congregation if congregations were known as a place to empower members for dynamic service, in Jesus’ name, to a hurting world?

**Youth are acting out in the void created by a lack of strong church leadership.** Youth growing up in a culture in which the church is not providing dynamic leadership are evidencing behavior trends that may be viewed as troubling.

- The UCLA annual survey of college freshmen found the goal of being “very well-off financially” was “essential or very important” to almost 75% of the students, compared to 62.5% in 1980 and 42% in 1966. A Pew Research Center survey quoted in the same story “found that about 80 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds in this country see getting rich as a top life goal.”<sup>28</sup>
- An Associated Press analysis of national crime statistics found that “Courts have seen the number of sex offense cases involving juvenile offenders rise dramatically in recent years.”<sup>29</sup>
- A 2007 report from the American Psychological Association compiled study findings that point to the pressure on young women to act out sexually resulting in problems such as low self-esteem, eating disorders, depression, and anxiety.<sup>30</sup>
- A 2006 report found an increased number of attacks on homeless people nationally, with teenagers and young adults responsible for a large portion of them.<sup>31</sup>

What role does the church have in addressing these behaviors among youth?

In a column titled “Another ‘Me Generation’?” Southern Baptist Convention International Missions Board senior writer Erich Bridges wrote: “*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, a 2005 book published by Oxford University Press, explored the inner lives of more than 3,000 U.S. teens ages 13 to 17. The study found that in contrast to the rebellious boomers, today’s teens tend to believe in God, listen to their parents and willingly adopt their parents’ religious views. If parents model a shallow faith with few demands, however, their children imitate them.”<sup>32</sup>

S. Michael Craven reflected on a National Study of Youth and Religion report titled *Portraits of Protestant Teens*. The Protestant teens attended church more than all teens, almost half were active in the youth group, and 90% said they believed in God. However, only 55% believed in life after death, compared to 50% of all teens;

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What role does the church have in addressing troubling behavior among youth?

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19% reported having had sexual intercourse in the last year compared to 22% of “unchurched” teens; 63% of Protestant youth and 58% of all teens reported cheating in school; and 41% of Protestant teens agreed that morals are relative. Further, “more than one-third of Protestant teens say that Church ‘does not make them think about important things’ and 51 percent say that church ‘is not a good place to talk about serious issues.’ ”<sup>33</sup>

A LifeWay Research survey found that the top desire for young adults is to have relationships. “Meeting the needs of others, or social action, also proved to be another essential element to this generation with 66 percent of churchgoers and 47 percent of non-churchgoers agreeing.” Interestingly, the unchurched segment in the survey indicated that social action would be a reason they would affiliate with a church.<sup>34</sup>

***Is There Hope?*** Are the above social symptoms a result of the church in general choosing to operate on the values of “mere men” rather than on the transformed values that result from an encounter with the grace offered by the God of the universe through Jesus Christ? If one concludes that such an observation has merit, what then? Are these current social problems more intractable than the decaying Roman culture in which the church was initially founded? Has the church chosen a direction that is irrevocable? Or are the above symptoms profound, and yet not fatal?

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Are the symptoms profound but not fatal?

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The real human pain resulting from some of the behaviors described above ought to lead church members to grief and even despair. However, to stay in dialogue with the God who saves will mean that Jesus’ followers cannot wallow in misery as one more strategy to keep ourselves in the center of attention. In the Christian faith, a dreadful encounter with painful truths need not be an ending point, but instead can be an opening to broader horizons. If we will open ourselves to the healing power of God’s grace, we echo the anguish of the apostle Paul in the cry from his soul, “Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body?” (Romans 7:24, New American Bible). That cry is a first step, as we are not abandoned to despair. Instead we can also join in the resounding affirmation: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (verse 25).

## **Signs of Hope for a Movement to Abolish the Institutional Enslavement of Overseas Missions**

As human beings, we are hardwired to hope.

Consider dreams. Horrible things can happen in nightmares. Yet, we humans keep trying to respond to, figure out solutions for, confront, or work through whatever comes at us in our dreams.

Perhaps dreams are one of God’s ways to teach us the meaning of 1 Corinthians 13:7: Love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (NRSV).

We in the church should bring the same intensity, endurance and problem-solving energy to our discipleship as we do to our efforts to survive, or work through, our dreams.

Following are some points to consider in the pursuit of loving discipleship.

**Fluency in At-Scale Thinking.** One difficulty in the church is the emphasis on individualism. There is no question that the individual is precious in God's sight. Consider how our individual natures are preserved for eternity as those who "overcome" will be given a stone with a special name written on it known only to the receiver and Jesus (Rev. 2:17b).

However, our individual gifts are to be combined into a concerted effort through the body of Christ, to use the term favored in the apostle Paul's letters (see Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 10, 12, Ephesians 3, 4, 5, and Colossians 1). The image continues to provide a useful visual. An athlete, a firefighter, a lifeguard, a NASCAR driver, all depend on the body working in controlled union of purpose to accomplish the task at hand.

The church should be in similarly buff shape, although it will take some concerted effort to get there. Yet the journey is worth undertaking, as the following points illustrate.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has taken an active leadership role in addressing those basic health conditions that have resulted in the deaths of people, particularly children, around the globe. Their dynamic direction has led to creative research and implementation that, even in the short-term, is having a positive impact, and promises additional improvements in the future.

Funded by the richest people in the world, the Gates Foundation has amazing amounts of money to apply to these problems. Yet note a comment by Melinda Gates as part of a Council on Foundations panel: "Yes, we have a lot of resources, but it is a drop in the bucket compared to the goals that we have and where we're trying to go."<sup>35</sup>

What is the typical church leader's response to such a statement? It probably sounds something like, "Well, I'd like to have one of those drops, please."

On the other hand, if we are willing to no longer conform to the world's way of thinking and allow God's Spirit to renew our minds (Rom. 12:2), a few numbers may move us from envy to a new self-image.

Consider that in 2006, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation distributed \$1,562,514,000 in grants in the areas of global development, global health, and projects in the U.S. This amount was up from the grants awarded in 2005.<sup>36</sup>

That \$1.56 billion is not quite *one percent* of the additional \$168 billion that would have been available for the work of the church in 2005, if church members had given at the 10% level of income, rather than the 2.58% actually given. As discussed in chapter 6 of this volume, if church members chose to give 60% of this additional money to international missions, \$100.6 billion more could have been available to help, in Jesus' name, our hurting neighbors around the globe. There could have been \$33.5 billion more a year to address needs in the U.S. as well.

Church members did not get organized and increase giving so that there was an additional \$168 billion to impact the world in Jesus' name in 2005.

Does that mean that we will not get organized in 2007? Or 2008? Or instead will we work to become fluent in the language of hope and possibility on a scale

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The church should be in similarly buff shape, although it will take some concerted effort to get there.

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equal to both available resources and the level of need? Will we see not as “mere men” but instead with the eyes of a God who loved the world so much he did not spare even his only Son?

There is evidence of increased dialogue on these issues. The communication network enabled by the Internet encourages reflection and interaction that, a decade ago, would have occurred only in the lapsed time between the appearance of a print magazine article and the follow-up letters to the editor in the next issue. Today, statements and reactions are often separated by only minutes. On one “blog,” for example, Marty Duren, an active Southern Baptist blogger, reflected on the billions spent on gifts, make-up, and perfume, in contrast to the \$10 billion needed to provide clean water for everyone.<sup>37</sup> Such reflections provide hope that church people are exploring alternatives to established defeatist thinking about the world’s problems.

The application of additional resources would not require new delivery systems. As pointed out in Tim Stafford’s article, the strategies and delivery systems are often available but underutilized.<sup>38</sup> Lord Brian Griffiths, who describes himself as a financier and “an active member of the Church of England and the Conservative Christian fellowship,” reflected on how the church is uniquely suited to cooperate with those in the developing world to address needs. Noting that the number of those who name themselves Christians has multiplied dramatically in Africa, he wrote:

The Church in Africa is in closer touch with the poor — those living on less than one dollar per day — than any other institution. Moreover, the Church has a stable administrative infrastructure through its provinces, dioceses, and parishes, which is unrivalled and is in marked contrast to the often-failed structures of local government. The Church has a highly respected leadership (unlike the political class in Africa) who are trained, experienced, and live permanently in the communities they serve... Through the provision of schools, hospitals, clinics, dispensaries and more recently, micro-finance initiatives, the Church has a proven track record in helping the poor.

This should not surprise us. In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI stated:

*for the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being*<sup>39</sup> [italics in the original].

People revisiting the potential of the church can lay the groundwork for expanded action.

***Heart, Not Size, Defines Faithfulness.*** It is hopeful that some congregations are proving that a congregation does not have to reach a certain membership size before it can be faithful.

Several congregations are mentioned in chapter 6 as examples of faithful mission giving. Most of them have grown to have thousands of members. However, these congregations did not generally start that large. For example, the Antioch Presbyterian Church in Chonju, South Korea, had 90 attenders in 1983. Even then, it allocated at least 60% of its income to international (outside South Korea) missions. Today, when attendance is 4,000, the percent spent on international missions has grown to 78%.

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The church is uniquely suited to cooperate with those in the developing world to address needs.

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Examples of congregations with small membership that successfully emphasize missions also are present in the U.S. Further, although the outreach is undertaken for the benefit of those in need, such outreach may help the small church itself.

One example is the Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation in Pomona, California. The church was down from 2,000 members in 1939 to 80 members in 1989, and was considering closing its doors. Robert Linthicum was asked to pastor the church. He allowed six college students to use the church as a practicum, and they successfully involved the congregation in neighborhood outreach. Linthicum concluded, "If the church is caught up in trying to preserve itself and its institution, then preservation and continuance is exactly what is going to slip out of its grasp... The church will not be saved by trying to preserve it but by giving its life away in service to the world." Three important factors in mission, Linthicum found were: (1) the entire congregation focused on a mission that was embraced by most of the congregation; (2) the mission was focused not on maintaining church operations but was focused outside of the congregation; (3) the church "saw its essential task to be that of empowering and equipping its people so that they could carry out the church's mission together in the world."<sup>40</sup>

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The size of a congregation need not define its degree of faithfulness.

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The Southern Baptist Convention has what it terms an "engaging" churches strategy. Individual congregations are encouraged to focus on specific areas of the world. Randy Arnett, the SBC International Mission Board's regional leader for West Africa, observed, "The size is less important than the spirit, the commitment. Some of the most effective churches... are small churches. Churches that run 100, 200 or 300 are out there in the bushes."<sup>41</sup>

One such congregation is Mission Baptist Church in Titusville, Florida. The church has only 15 members, and 48.4 percent of its budget was set aside for domestic and international missions in a recent year. Nine of its members have been on overseas trips, and others work together to raise the funds so anyone who wants to can go. The pastor commented, "If we can do it, anybody can do it."<sup>42</sup>

A congregation with few members may not be able to generate the number of dollars that a large congregation can produce. However, small congregations can be fully as faithful as large congregations in terms of the portion of the budget spent on missions, if they so choose. Consider that the Christian Fellowship Church, in Evansville, Indiana, currently with 2,800 in attendance each week, spends a commendable third of its income on missions.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the Titusville Mission Baptist Church is able to hold its own very well in a comparison, with its 15 members and 48.4 percent of its budget focused on missions.

***Fresh Denominational Strategies.*** The "engaging" churches strategy of the Southern Baptist Convention mentioned above is one creative approach. Other strategies and developments are also surfacing in denominational offices. For example, some denominations are reviewing the structures that have produced current conditions.

• Marty Duren, a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) pastor in Georgia and an active blogger, used his blog in early 2007 to invite interested and invested people to "re:imagineer" the SBC. One respondent proposed that a first step would be to develop a common direction, and then figure out ways to pursue the common goal: "The fact that we have 42,000 churches, for example, shows how unbelievable it is

that we aren't doing more on the frontier missions front. That gives us 10 churches for every unreached people group in the world..."<sup>44</sup> Such active dialogues as these can set the stage for mobilizing members.

- In a more formal setting, a Baptist Press story reported that Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, while "cautiously optimistic" about the Cooperative Program, the denominational unified budget funding structure, expressed that "Southern Baptists must examine their methodologies and determine whether the Cooperative Program needs to be changed in some ways...acknowledging that it isn't perfect and saying it's time to ask crucial questions and adjust it to ensure its future viability."<sup>45</sup> Since Loren Mead, nationally respected church consultant, has pointed out that a surefire way to start a conflict in a congregation is to move a piece of furniture,<sup>46</sup> a leader talking about the voluntary restructuring of the denomination's unified budget, in order to empower congregation members for better service, should be recognized as a person of great courage.

- The Southern Baptist Convention has been emphasizing the importance of international mission since its inception. Its boldness in strategic thinking was evident in the willingness of the International Missions Board to set a goal of engaging all unreached people groups of 100,000 people or more by the year 2005. Although the goal had to be extended to 2008, the Southern Baptist leadership was apparently not backing down from the challenge. The IMB has now "...established a stated goal of engaging with the gospel all people groups of the world, regardless of size, by the end of 2010."<sup>47</sup>

- One denomination that has been undergoing forced restructuring under public scrutiny is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [PC(USA)]. Decrease in financial support has led to staff reductions and the reorganization of department structure. In the midst of these changes, the church is nevertheless launching a major missionary itineration, arranging for Presbyterian missionaries to visit presbyteries throughout the U.S. The initial goal of involving 120 presbyteries has been surpassed. When the plan was undertaken, "...just 15 percent of PC(USA) congregations had a financial stake in supporting PC(USA) missionaries." The goal is for 100 percent of the congregations to be involved with missionaries. One PC(USA) official was quoted as observing that the leaders could not willingly set a smaller goal: "We know it's ridiculous, but we're trying to change the culture of the PC(USA), whether it takes one year or 10 years. We have a 40-year trend of diminishing connection that we have to reverse."<sup>48</sup>

- The Roman Catholic Church has a rich tradition of articulating the commitment of Christians to global justice. In a recent statement, for example, Benedict XVI took the lead in calling for a response from the international community to aid victims of flooding in India, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and China.<sup>49</sup> There is a role for such moral leadership, and the pontiff is in a position of authority to provide it. As demonstrated in chapter 6 of this volume, leadership could also be extended to challenge the archdioceses in the U.S. to increase giving for missions. If even 60% of the potential \$56 billion from eight archdioceses were focused on meeting global needs through the extensive channels of service already established in the Catholic church, the impact, not only on flood disasters but also on going development needs, would be powerful.

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Some denominations are pursuing fresh strategies.

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• A unique recent initiative announced in 2007 might also help create the grassroots support for the Catholic cardinals to begin to mobilize their members to fund increased global outreach. Certainly, the new strategy might help integrate global missions into the very fabric of members' lives. A special credit card is now labeled the "World Missions Visa Card." A Web site states: "1% of every purchase\* is donated to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. These donations help support Catholic missionaries in more than 120 countries in the developing world. These missionaries bring the 'Good News' of Jesus to the suffering and poor. (\*See Terms and Conditions)"<sup>50</sup> A photo of the card itself includes the boldly printed words "World Missions" next to a picture of the cross-based logo of the Society. Although all credit card purchases need to be handled in the context of careful Christian stewardship, there is still something dynamic and even fun about the prospect of being reminded about world missions as each purchase is made.

• The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, recently launched Anglicans in Development. The related Web site provided the following description: "Anglicans in Development is a web-based resource from Lambeth Palace and the Anglican Communion Office. Its purpose is to support church-based programmes to deliver better education, poverty reduction and peace building to local communities in the developing world. It does this by utilizing the global networks of the Archbishop of Canterbury and his relationships with fellow bishops and church agencies to respond to local and regional needs for sustainable human development." The effort is staffed by the new position of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for International Development. The first appointment is the Rev. David Peck, who before ordination worked for an international law firm in Washington, Wall Street, and London, and as Chaplain to the Bishop of Guildford, was seconded to the Primate of All Nigeria's team to work on HIV and Education initiatives.<sup>51</sup> The Archbishop of Canterbury was quoted as observing, "One of the remarkable things is the willingness of people to work together towards addressing development goals as a sort of basic Christian imperative, even when there is tension or disagreement in other areas."<sup>52</sup>

These denominational initiatives suggest there may be a growing movement to recover a focus on missions as the primary purpose of the church. Although hopefully undertaken as an attempt to empower congregations for service, the effects of such activities may benefit denominations with stagnated or declining membership. The Faith Communities Today 2005 Survey was reported to have found that a variety of factors affect membership growth. "More important than theological orientation is the religious character of the congregation and clarity of mission and purpose," the survey highlighted. "Growing churches are clear about why they exist and about what they are to be doing."<sup>53</sup> Leadership from the national headquarters that focuses on missions might lead congregations into thriving ministries, both within and without.

***Other Strategies and Developments Suggesting Hope in the Direction of a Movement to Abolish the Institutional Enslavement of Overseas Missions.*** Other signs also exist that serve to provide hope to anyone concerned about the health of the church in the U.S. Such developments may result in the likely overflow that would benefit society from the church's increased

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Although all credit card purchases need to be handled in the context of careful Christian stewardship, there is something fun about the prospect of being reminded about world missions as each purchase is made.

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faithfulness. Certainly, these developments should lay the groundwork for helping to alleviate the physical and spiritual needs that cry for redress, both domestically and overseas.

**Megachurches Emphasizing Missions.** Some evidence exists of the maturation of the megachurch phenomenon. Initially, the focus seemed to be primarily on attracting “seekers” and the resulting growth of membership. More recently, large congregations, such as Cornerstone Church in Simi Valley, California, with 4,000 members, and the Christian Fellowship Church in Evansville, Indiana, with 2,800 weekly attenders, have emphasized the importance of missions as a larger portion of the congregational budget.

The granddaddy of the contemporary seeker-sensitive megachurch movement, Willow Creek, in Barrington, Illinois, increasingly has made a concerted effort to emphasize both domestic and global missions outreach.<sup>54</sup> For example, Pastor Bill Hybels used the 2007 Willow Creek Association Leadership Summit, viewed in person and via video feeds by an estimated 100,000 church leaders, to present a “disturbing” interview. Hybels interviewed Richard Curtis, a co-founder of the Make Poverty History Campaign. Hybels commented to those viewing the Leadership Summit, “This was a very disturbing interview for me to do...because I’m interviewing a guy who doesn’t even have his faith figured out and he’s doing 100 times more work than I am to alleviate the suffering in this world.”<sup>55</sup>

The new direction at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, has received broad media attention. Rick Warren, pastor and author, has declared that the focus of his leadership will turn to the P.E.A.C.E. plan that is designed to mobilize church members to “release the pent up latent power of the average believer in local churches around the world.”<sup>56</sup> One aspect of the P.E.A.C.E. plan is to encourage congregations to develop involvement in a specific area of the world, a strategy that might yield hope for missions development in general.

**Strategy of Country-by-Country Analysis.** Rick Warren’s P.E.A.C.E. plan has produced an elaborate Web site. On the site, registered congregations can work through preparatory training exercises, and obtain information on mission activities in specific areas of the world. A series in the *Orange Country Register* included a multipage overview of the site’s features.<sup>57</sup> For his own congregation, Rick Warren has encouraged a special ongoing relationship with the nation of Rwanda.<sup>58</sup>

Independently, former president Jimmy Carter, through the Carter Center, has demonstrated that a specific-country emphasis can impact need in a powerful way. The Carter Center has an office in Ethiopia, and intentional efforts have reduced the devastating Guinea worm disease by 99.3% in that country. In an interview for *Smithsonian* magazine, Jimmy Carter observed, “We hope to demonstrate that we can do away with malaria in a major country. It will be an example to other countries of what can be done.”<sup>59</sup>

Current First Lady Laura Bush is spokesperson for the President’s Malaria Initiative, which has chosen to focus on four countries: Mozambique, Senegal, Zambia, and Mali. Malaria is Mozambique’s leading cause of death. Various targeted initiatives hope to reduce malarial deaths by 50% over five years.<sup>60</sup>

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Intentional efforts have decreased the devastating Guinea worm disease by 99.3% in Ethiopia.

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The nation of Norway is focusing on five states in India that include 60% of India's child mortality. " 'Analysis shows that our efforts are helping. But we need to invest more and we need a global business plan to defeat child mortality by 2015,' Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said."<sup>61</sup>

The idea of focusing on country-specific needs has gained supporters in a variety of quarters. For example, the World Bank approved a new health strategy that will place a priority on understanding localized need. According to a release about the new plan, World Bank funding will be linked to a country's willingness to collect data about its particular needs and the results of efforts to impact those needs. The release quotes Cristian Baeza, the World Bank's lead health policy specialist and team leader for the health strategy: "The strategy is not a one plan fits all. It is a way to support country teams to ensure a country owned, country led, and country context appropriate strategy to improve the lives of the people."<sup>62</sup>

A discussion of the concept of a "country-by-country needs analysis" may be found in *The State of Church Giving through 2001*. By spearheading such an analysis, while engaging global needs on a scale that matches the problems, church leaders could have a powerful tool both to explain needs to church members, and to provide specific feedback about the impact of the congregation's mission dollars.<sup>63</sup> A country-by-country strategy might provide a basis to engage both the hearts and minds of church members, leading to a mobilization of more of their resources toward a common goal.

**Strategy of Setting Priorities through Global Triage.** Many areas of need vie for the attention of a person who cares about hurting neighbors. For example, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) introduce eight goals, with 18 targets, and 48 indicators to monitor.<sup>64</sup> How is one to prioritize the plethora of options? Without some focus, church members remain lethargic because they feel overwhelmed.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation made the decision to concentrate its efforts in a defined set of areas. In a 2006 interview about his shift from Microsoft to the Foundation, Bill Gates was asked "What problems do you feel need to be addressed on a global scale?" His response: "Well, 12 million children a year die who shouldn't die, so we might start with that one."<sup>65</sup>

The needs of children, whose deaths can be prevented with low-cost available strategies, might indeed be a key global priority around which church people can rally. The issue is compelling on an emotional level. It can be interpreted with immediate clarity to church members who generally feel overwhelmed by the vast array of global needs. The issue of the world's most vulnerable citizens can also be viewed as a moral imperative.

When faced with overwhelming need on a battlefield, doctors developed an approach of "triage." The dictionary defines it as "the sorting of and allocation of treatment to patients and esp. battle and disaster victims according to a system of priorities designed to maximize the number of survivors; *broadly*: the assigning of priority order to projects on the basis of where funds and resources can be best used or are most needed."<sup>66</sup>

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Through a country-by-country strategy, church leaders could have a powerful tool to inform members.

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If one were to approach the MDGs from a perspective of triage, the fact that the deaths of many children under five could be prevented would seem to be the top priority. The children will die without intervention; with low-cost, available solutions, many can live. Can there be a more basic and important place to start an expanded outpouring of compassion?

This priority of stopping child deaths may also be a key strategy that will have a positive impact on other areas of development. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway has led that nation in creative development strategies, for example, the focused relationship on five states in India, mentioned above. In one document posted on his Web site, the Prime Minister points to the moral imperative to help children. However, perhaps acknowledging that moral weight alone may not be sufficient, Prime Minister Stoltenberg outlines more practical benefits to this priority.

As an economist, I am convinced by the research in recent years that have shown the economic benefits that accrue from investing in health in general, and in children's health in particular. Professors Bloom and colleagues have shown that one third to half of the growth in East Asia from 1965 to 1990 could be attributed to reduced child mortality and its consequences.<sup>67</sup> More recently Bloom et al. found that the economic returns from vaccination of children is a staggering 12-18% on an annual basis. Scientists have also estimated that, between 1965 and 1990, child morbidity and mortality rates contributed to stifling economic growth in Africa and to about half of the unfavorable gap in economic growth rate between Africa and the rest of the world.<sup>68</sup> The health of our children affects the economic health of our nations. It makes sense. A healthy child can attend school and its cognitive development and performance will be enhanced. A healthy child can give a helping hand at home and to younger children. When a child survives, the parents need fewer children to ensure their own support in older age.<sup>69</sup>

For church leaders, using a triage approach to help church members cope with the overwhelming nature of global need may be useful. In reviewing world conditions, helping to save the lives of children who would survive with low-cost intervention would appear to be a priority. Preventing needless child deaths makes sense from an economic viewpoint, a moral viewpoint, and, as we sing the song "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world," a religious viewpoint as well. With a clear goal, church leaders would then have a reason to mobilize all church members to engage in mission.

#### **Strategy of Professional Groups Providing Resource Leadership.**

Professional organizations assemble their members to address issues of import. For example, a meeting of the Christian Medical and Dental Association, a group of 16,000 Christian doctors and dentists, met recently to discuss issues, including missions, from within their perspectives as Christians in the healing professions.<sup>70</sup> A similar organization exists for Christian economists.

These professionals could establish a national platform from which to provide the moral and technical leadership necessary to set priorities for church members. It would be natural for such a professional group to embrace an approach of global triage, emphasizing the prevention of child deaths. Their visibility and professional status might allow them to challenge church members in general. Their knowledge could also provide valuable expertise to denominational leaders who want to mobilize

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Joining Jesus in loving the little children of the world has economic as well as moral benefits.

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and empower members to pursue discipleship through active participation in reaching out to a hurting world in Jesus' name through both word and deed activities. Their expertise could, for example, develop the country-by-country needs analysis that would serve as the framework for denominational and other mission strategies.

A concern for integrating word and deed mission outreach through the gifts of Christian professionals extends across many denominations. For example, Wade Burleson, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention International Mission Board (IMB) and a pastor in Oklahoma, described a recent board meeting at which IMB President Jerry Rankin "corrected the misperception that the IMB was ONLY concerned with church planting in unreached people groups"<sup>71</sup> [emphasis in original]. Dr. Rankin pointed to a meeting of the Global Medical Alliance, a group holding the First Annual Medical Missions Mobilization Summit. The meeting, designed for Southern Baptist healthcare professionals, planned to offer the opportunity to visit with over 100 health-care missionaries, and to encourage medical mission trips.<sup>72</sup>

Whether through providing leadership for congregational mission trips, through professional advice in forming targeted denominational mission strategies, or providing clear leadership on the need to respond to global needs, Christian professionals could make a vital contribution to the goal of expanding congregational mission outreach.

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Christian professionals could make a vital contribution to the goal of expanding congregational mission outreach.

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**Strategy of Setting Budget Limits.** Another strategy for church leaders who want to abolish the institutional enslavement of overseas missions within denominational structures is to define the congregational and denominational budgets as the base funding need, on which to stand in order to reach out to a hurting world in Jesus' name. Currently, operating budgets tend to be open-ended, perhaps because they are rarely fully funded. If the budget were to be oversubscribed, there is not a clear definition of what the congregation or denomination would do with the money. This lack of specificity may help explain a peculiar response given repeatedly by congregational members in interviews exploring money dynamics in the church. Members indicated that they did not want to give the church one dollar more than the announced budget because the church would "just spend it."<sup>73</sup> Unpublished notes from the survey indicate one layman's response was that the church would "just make trouble with it." Members' distrust of how church leadership would use extra money inhibits giving levels. If global missions is the stated priority of the denomination, then announcing a defined operating budget, and promising that income received over that amount will fund global missions, may well improve giving levels.<sup>74</sup>

**Strategy of Promoting Pastors for Overseas Missions Support.** As noted above, although denominational leaders talk about the importance of missions, the pastors who are given choice assignments are generally the ones who successfully complete building campaigns and bring in new members to support the denominational structure.

Are those standards wrong? Perhaps not, if the categories of membership and building are included as only part of a broader strategy to strengthen the church and encourage broader outreach. However, if those standards dominate, then what is being fostered is maintenance of an institution rather than development of a structure

in which a dynamic body of believers can be trained and made ready for outreach to a hurting world.

What would happen if one highly-weighted component of evaluating the effectiveness of a pastor were the size of the mission budget as a portion of total spending, particularly the overseas outreach line items? What if the denomination devised within that system a means to calculate the level of priority that the congregation, under the pastor's leadership, places on preventing child deaths?

To develop this type of evaluation, the denomination would have to make some basic changes. As noted in chapter 6, many denominations do not even know how much total mission their congregations carry out, instead only asking or recording the amount of overseas missions support that goes through denominational headquarters. In contrast, many of those denominations can provide a list of how many square feet each church building occupies, and probably even the square footage of congregation-owned parsonages.

Expressing interest in mission outreach, and rewarding those pastors who successfully lead their members out of only maintainancing the institution, would be a fresh strategy to strengthen the church.

### **Enslavement or Freedom for Overseas Missions?**

Is there hope that church leaders and members will actually want to embrace their mission potential? As Christians, we are commanded to hope, and believe, and persevere.

In a recent interview, New Testament scholar N. T. Wright observed that the post-modern culture is largely committed to "neo-paganism." For example, he described the effects of worshipping Mammon: "...if you say you've just been offered a job at double the salary but you're going to stay with what you are doing, people will look at you as though you are mad, because the money imperative is just assumed to be all important. It's not just that they disagree or think you're stupid, they just cannot understand what you're talking about." The worship of sex, he said, results in the goddess Aphrodite making demands: "To resist those demands for whatever reason is just assumed to be completely incomprehensible. Somebody falls in love with the wrong person, off they go, and it's just a shoulder-shrugging thing. Of course you've got to do that because this is the imperative, this is what our culture is all about." Wright then reflects on the alternative worship of God through Jesus Christ that results in the pursuit of word and deed mission:

...Because the great emphasis in the New Testament is that the gospel is not how to escape the world; the gospel is that the crucified and risen Jesus is the Lord of the world. And that his death and Resurrection transform the world, and that transformation can happen to you. You, in turn, can be part of the transforming work. That draws together what we traditionally called evangelism, bringing people to the point where they come to know God in Christ for themselves, with working for God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. That has always been at the heart of the Lord's Prayer, and how we've managed for years to say the Lord's Prayer without realizing that Jesus really meant it is very curious.<sup>75</sup>

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Rewarding those pastors who successfully lead their members out of maintainancing the institution, would be a fresh strategy to strengthening the church.

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For giving as a portion of income to be lower in the year 2005 than at the depth of the Great Depression is also very curious. Almost of necessity, one must conclude that the business of the church is being conducted on the level of “mere men.” The church in the U.S. is not presenting a dynamic alternative to the way various secular institutions are managed, or to the worship of secular gods. Church leaders have not mobilized their members at a level of service that results in such an outpouring of compassion that the general population will not only see the good deeds but also praise God in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

It will be a challenge to move church members from what many observers term a lukewarm condition to an active engagement in the world’s problems, because of their commitment to Jesus Christ. Facing such a daunting challenge, one may ask whether the effort should be made. John Chakos reflected on that question in the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*:

Why even begin to cultivate a missions-active church if it seems that we are bucking the current?...

We notice from the very outset Jesus sent his disciples into dangerous and unsavory situations, places normally shunned by the healthy, sane and well-adjusted. The disciples, following the visionary leadership of the Master, did not offer aid from a safe distance, detached and uninvolved, but they spent their time with the sick and possessed, entering totally into their condition. And if their prayers conveyed healing, it was because they made their own the anguish of those for whom they prayed....<sup>76</sup>

Chakos continues, stating that Christians with a global awareness,

...are people who see the church not as an ethnic social club, nor a sacramental feeding station, nor a spiritual fellowship of like-minded people, nor a safe haven from the world’s problems, but the instrument of God’s redemptive plan for the world....

That Christ’s mission is to be found in the very heart of parish life and every believer and not outside of it should be very clear. The local parish must come to see itself as the mission center par excellence of the Church, something that all of us take part in and give to. Seen in this light, our growth in Christ takes on cosmic proportions because it not only affects us but the whole of humanity. We can and must make a difference.<sup>77</sup>

The position that Chakos advocates echoes the challenge of the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church. Rather than stay on the plane of “mere men,” believers are to be transformed in a way that, as Chakos observes, “takes on cosmic proportions.”

As Christians regain their heritage and organize for service, they are promised that they will be supported by the God of the Universe. The writer of Hebrews advises Jesus’ followers to “Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5, NRSV). If Christians in the U.S. are willing to embrace Christ instead of money, they will not be alone as they reach out. Consider one development that can be aptly described by the literary term, *deus ex machina*, the “machine of God.” The term is used to describe a device that resolves a plot through extraordinary outside intervention. For example, in the Darfur region of Sudan, the site of mind-numbing genocide, no human hand could have contrived a recent development there.

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Rather than stay on the plane of “mere men,” believers are to be transformed in a way that “takes on cosmic proportions.”

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The murder and rape of thousands in that area has reached horrific proportions. Still, Christian groups, including the coalition of Catholic agencies' combined efforts through Caritas Internationalis, the global alliance of Action by Churches Together, and World Vision, have chosen to stay and labor while facing overwhelming circumstances of insufficient supplies and attacks on relief workers.<sup>78</sup> International political efforts have not produced a solution. In the midst of what appears to be a completely hopeless cause, a small news item may have large implications. Using state of the art imagery equipment, scientists have located a lake hidden beneath Sudan's Darfur region. Wells will be dug, and, one geologist suggested, a result may be that the marauding nomads may no longer have to compete with farmers for water, one major cause of the conflict in the Darfur region, and so perhaps the water may facilitate an end to the conflict.<sup>79</sup> As this development unfolds, the Christian groups who have faithfully served to alleviate the suffering will have established a position from which to help implement a possible solution.

Who would have guessed the existence of a hidden lake, formed who knows when by the Creator, and that the lake might provide an unexpected solution to an ongoing tragedy that has proven to be beyond the abilities of world leaders' best efforts? How many other surprising provisions does God have waiting for those Christians who step out in faith to unbind the power of mission outreach on behalf of those suffering in the world?

It may not seem like increasing church giving levels is on a par with serving on the front lines in Darfur, or in an inner-city drug-dominated zone, or in any of the other places where brave Christians are placing themselves as a result of their faith. However, to use the apostle Paul's analogy, because the ear is not an eye, is it not a part of the body? (1 Cor. 12:16). There are far more blood corpuscles in a body than there are eyes, or noses, or ears. Without the individual corpuscles combining into the life's blood of the body, however, the eyes will not see, and ears will not hear. Without healthy corpuscles, death results.

Combining dollars that underwrite missions can enable the outreach of those on the frontlines. Without such support, the work of the church, and the church itself, becomes lukewarm, and atrophy can set in.

Once we move from the plane of "mere men," we move into uncharted territory. We do not know what surprises God has in store. However, as Jesus demonstrated while on earth, stepping out in faith unleashes power for good. Jesus promised his followers that this pattern could continue.

Church leaders and members need to consider whether to initiate a movement to abolish the institutional enslavement of overseas missions.

The most basic choices for any Christians include how much income to give to the church, and how it should be allocated within and without the church. It is when we are willing to make those choices in light of eternity that we will see all that God wants to do.

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How many other surprising provisions does God have waiting for those Christians who step out in faith to unbind the power of missions outreach on behalf of those suffering in the world?

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**Notes for Chapter 8**

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