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CONSIDERING THE GREAT COMMISSION

EVANGELISM
AND
MISSION

IN THE
WESLEYAN
SPIRIT

EDITED BY

W. STEPHEN GUNTER
ELAINE A. ROBINSON

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CONSIDERING THE GREAT COMMISSION
EVANGELISM AND MISSION IN THE WESLEYAN SPIRIT

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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The Great Commission 1910–2010

Andrew F. Walls

The Great Migration

Around 1500, a development occurred with more significance for the future of Christianity than the Reformation itself. The Great Maritime Migration began, which was to shape the modern world and have complex effects upon the world's religions. Over the years it was in process, millions of people left Europe to make their homes or seek their fortune in lands that, before 1500, Europeans had not known or had not considered accessible. Whole nations, some with vast populations, came into being as a result of the movement, and the migrants and their descendants established hegemony over much of the world and much of its trade. The movement lasted for four and a half centuries, until the system that it produced imploded during the twentieth century.¹

When the process began, Europe was more Christian than it had ever previously been. It took many centuries for Europe to become Christian; and by the time the Great Migration began, Christianity had been eclipsed in many other parts of the world where once it had been strong. Western Europeans, holding a form of Christianity heavily acculturated by centuries of interaction with the languages and cultures of Europe, became by default the representative Christians of their time. At first

they essayed the crusading mode of propagating their faith, a method developed by long competition with their Muslim neighbors, the only non-Christian people (other than Jews) of whom they had much knowledge. The Spanish Conquest of the Americas was the last of the Crusades. But in much of the rest of the world the crusading method was manifestly out of the question, especially when such a small power as Portugal was the agent. For the most part, the powers of Christendom soon tired of official attempts to promote the spread of Christianity in the non-Western world.

An alternative to the crusading model of evangelization emerged. The initiatives for it came not from official sources, generally, but from radical Christians: those for whom the faith of Christ was more important than the economic, military, and political advantages of overseas activity. The missionary movement was born, based on dedicated people whose function was to offer and persuade without the power to coerce and, unlike the crusader, frequently needing to live on terms set by another society. Born in Catholic Europe and fueled by the new devotion of the Catholic Reformation, the missionary movement had by the seventeenth century entered into genuine interaction with the cultures of China, India, Japan, and Southeast Asia. The Protestant version of the movement took longer to blossom. Beginning in a small way in Puritan North America, it took new forms in the eighteenth century under the influence of German and Central European Pietism. In the wake of the Evangelical Revival, by the early nineteenth century it had set its impression deep on European and American Protestantism as a whole.

The World Missionary Conference

The high point of the Protestant missionary movement was the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910.² It was no triumphalist celebration, but a serious attempt at a systematic and businesslike analysis of what Protestant missions had already achieved and what remained to be done. Immense labor went into preparatory documents, notably the *Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions*,³ designed so that those attending the conference could have all the available data about missions at their fingertips. Representation was carefully balanced to reflect the proportional involvement in missions of the main areas from which missionaries came, i.e., Britain, North America, and Continental

Europe, with a small place reserved for the “colonies,” the white populations of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Great pains were bestowed also to cover the entire theological spectrum represented in missions.

No conference was better prepared beforehand. Eight commissions rolled for months to produce book-length reports as a basis of discussion, and discussion itself was kept crisp and pointed by limiting contributors schooled in an age of pulpit eloquence to seven minutes each. The report that has attracted the most attention since then is that of Commission IV, titled *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions*, with its analysis of replies to a detailed questionnaire sent all over the world.⁴ But of all the volumes that together compose the record of the conference, none stands closer to the focus of the meeting than the report of Commission I, published under the title *Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World*.

The Commission was chaired by John R. Mott,⁵ who was the dominating figure at the conference. Its twenty members—eight British, eight North Americans, and four Continental Europeans—included some of the biggest names in the missionary movement at that time. The report conveys its drift in the very title of the first section: “The opportunity and the urgency of carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian world,” and in the opening statement: “It is possible today to a degree far greater than at any time in the past to give the Gospel to all the non-Christian world.”⁶ The logic is evident. For one thing, the world was now known and explored. For another, it was largely open, not only in the political sense of unimpeded access, but also in the more important sense of the attitudes of its peoples. The decision-making classes in countries such as Japan and Korea, long closed to outside ideas, were now ready to listen. In India, the outcaste and lower caste groups were recognizing the advantages of Western civilization and were taking the Christian message seriously as a result. Africa and the Pacific were at last open to mission enterprise, even if colonial governments still placed obstacles in the way of missions where there was a Muslim presence.

If the Commission was impressed by the opportunities that the contemporary situation offered, it was also insistent that those opportunities might be merely transitory. Certainly, the non-Christian religions were losing their hold on key groups in some countries; but it did not necessarily follow that those classes would become Christian. They might turn elsewhere: the old religions might re-form to meet the challenges of

modern thought, or the modern secular education spreading in Asia might create a climate unfavorable to Christianity. Islam, with the aid and protection of European governments, might become the religion of Africa. Western influences were spreading on a global scale, but the net result might be that the worst, not the best, features of Western civilization took root in Asia and Africa. The worst face of the West was already clearly visible among European and American residents in the non-Western world. Behind the present fair winds, the Commission saw unsettled weather coming.

The second and much the largest division of the report is a continent-by-continent survey of the non-Christian world, to which the *Statistical Atlas* is a companion. To the missionary situation in Asia, 142 pages are devoted, with 42 to Africa and 10 to Australasia and the Pacific. The short section "Non-Christians of the Western Hemisphere" is devoted entirely to the native peoples of the Americas, North and South, and to Asian immigrants there. This coverage points to a major lacuna in the World Missionary Conference: the organizers had aimed at theological inclusiveness; the more "catholic" expressions of Anglicanism, though to a significant degree involved in missions, had not been officially represented at earlier mission conferences, and the general theological climate of the time did not make such meeting easy. Although it required great diplomacy, the whole range of Anglican outlook was represented at the Edinburgh conference, and the organizers sought to avoid flash points where traditions might come into conflict. The greatest potential danger lay in discussions of Latin America. The focus of the conference was the unevangelized parts of the world. For many delegates, Latin America as a whole could be considered an unevangelized area; for others, only such mountain and forest peoples as had never been reached by Catholic missions could be so described. The effect was to make all reference to Latin America muted; hence, the marginal place it has in this survey.

Following the section on the Western Hemisphere, the report discusses the Jews throughout the world and then offers a final statement about "Unoccupied Sections of the World," or those areas with no missionary presence. "Unoccupied Sections of the World" first deals with areas of special difficulty of access or sparse population, such as Central Asia, but then resumes the theme of the position of Africa:

To a far greater degree than even in the case of Asia, the heart of Africa constitutes a vast unoccupied field. . . . There are therefore to be found in Africa . . . more than a third of the population of the entire continent

without any existing agency having plans actually projected for their evangelisation. These figures are overwhelming, and they become more so when it is pointed out that the extent of the effective influence of existing missionary agencies has probably been greatly overestimated. The question can seriously be raised, Has the Church more than made a beginning in the evangelisation of the Dark Continent?⁷

The last division of the report concerns factors to be taken into account in planning for evangelization of the non-Christian world. It includes the substantial chapter "The Church in the Mission Field as an Evangelistic Agency," which includes in its summation the following statement:

The small native Church, left to itself, is in danger within a generation or two of losing its tone under the influence of monotony, isolation, or ill-success. As a rule it needs the guidance and stimulus of the spiritual ideas, as well as the spiritual aids, which are supplied through contact by means of missionaries with the life of older Churches. While many noble leaders have arisen among the early converts in the field, it will take time to develop a sufficient number of men of knowledge, gifts, and character to enable the Church to stand with advantage, or even with safety, apart from foreign missionaries.⁸

The impression given by this whole division of the report is that the task of evangelization depends largely on Western missionaries. The factors to be taken into account in carrying the gospel to the non-Christian world include these: how missionaries should be deployed, how historical factors have skewed deployment, what methods missionaries should use, and the essential nature of the spiritual disciplines. The thrust of the report is about the responsibility of the Home Church, that is, the church of the fully evangelized world in Europe and North America. There are words addressed to the Home Church on the danger that increasing luxury and growing materialism may enervate it and quench the missionary spirit. Missionaries in the present situation are represented as overstretched physically, mentally, and spiritually, unable to get time for either the intellectual or the spiritual preparation for their demanding task. The Home Church must produce the missionaries and resources needed to tackle the unprecedented opportunities now being offered to evangelize the non-Christian world—before it is too late.

Almost a century later, it is at this point that the greatest difference appears between the conditions under which the older missionary

movement sought to fulfill the Great Commission and the conditions of our own day. The best analysts and thinkers of 1910 could take for granted that there was a reasonably homogeneous, fully evangelized world, and a world beyond it that was unevangelized or only partly evangelized. From the fully evangelized world of Europe and North America, the Home Church must send forth its choicest persons to carry the gospel to the non-Christian world, where the Native Church, a tender young plant, stands as earnest of the future. As the report concludes,

How to multiply the number of Christians who, with truthful lives, and with clear, unshakable faith in the character and ability of God, will, individually and collectively or corporately as a Church, wield this force [intercessory prayer] for the conversion and transformation of men, for the inauguration and energising of spiritual movements, and for the breaking down of all that exalts itself against Christ and His purposes—that is the supreme question of foreign missions.⁹

The analysts and the visionaries of 1910 realized that the hopeful signs they saw in Asia could quickly change to something much less hopeful. They could visualize the church of the West losing missionary zeal under the influence of its rapidly rising standards of living. What they could not glimpse was how soon the West, and Europe in particular, would become part of the non-Christian world. Perhaps the military language of “occupation” helped to disable them from remembering that Christian history, from the first century onward, suggests there are no permanently Christian lands. Christianity is serial in its growth, often decaying in its areas of apparent strength to start anew at or beyond its margins.

The analysts of 1910, living in an age of seaborne communications, held a maritime view of the church and of the world. The carriers of the gospel crossed the seas in order to fulfill their task.¹⁰ Though they lived when the Great European Migration had reached its climax and generally believed that the spread of Western culture was favorable to the gospel, there is little sign in their report of triumphal rejoicing in the Western empires. The principal direct references to the empires are mostly about the ways Western governments obstruct missions, and there is no shortage of reference to the negative impact of certain aspects of Western culture. And while recognizing the difficulties that anticolonial movements in Asia create for missions, they have no condemnation for nationalism in claiming:

This national and racial spirit cannot and should not be crushed or checked. It is a matter of profound concern to the Christian Church. It will have much power to hinder or to facilitate the spread of Christ's Kingdom. Christ never by reaching or example resisted or withstood the spirit of true nationalism. Wherever His principles, including those pertaining to the supreme claims of His Kingdom on earth, have had the largest right of way, they have served to strengthen national spirit and not to weaken it.¹¹

Even in India, where the national movement gave rise to a strong antimissionary feeling, the movement also denounced and discarded caste, hitherto the main obstacle to Christian preaching.¹² Nationalism should cause missionaries to deepen their work and to have the humility to realize that they must decrease while the Native Church must increase.¹³

On theology, Edinburgh 1910 has little to say. The conference ground rules, of course, precluded the introduction of topics known to be controversial among the participants; even so, it seems remarkable today that so many people, representing such a wide range of theological views, could accept that they were in agreement about what the gospel is. It seems equally remarkable that they could accept that evangelism, translation, education, medicine, literature, industrial training, and “women's work” were simply different methods of conveying it.¹⁴ The most notable questioning voice was that of the German missiologist Gustav Warneck. Warneck was not present at Edinburgh, but sent a long letter to Mott, reproduced as an appendix to the report of Commission I.¹⁵ Edinburgh 1910 reflects a certain confidence that, whatever issues may divide Christendom, there is a consensual theological deposit that is the common heritage of Christians.

The conference was a time of dreams and visions; the excitement of delegates is palpable, even in the staid pages of the official record.¹⁶ The accounts of such participants as W. H. Temple Gairdner show it still more.¹⁷ Not for nothing are the origins of the modern ecumenical movement conventionally dated from this meeting. A mere handful of Asian delegates attended amid hundreds from Europe and North America, and Africa and Latin America were essentially without indigenous representation; yet many who were present caught a first glimpse of what a truly world church might be like. The meeting was not solely visionary; most of it was severely practical, directed to systematic planning and cooperative effort.

Then and Now

The apparatus planned at Edinburgh for international missionary cooperation did come into being, but with much more difficulty than had been anticipated at the conference, and against the background of international events then unforeseen. Within a few years of the meeting came the shock of the Great War that pitted the missionary-sending countries against one another and ushered in the most violent period in modern history that was to last for the rest of the century and beyond it. The whole basis of the secure worldview that underlies the analysis of the world made by Commission I was swept away. Most surprisingly of all, the fundamental assumption on which Edinburgh thinking was founded, and indeed the missionary thinking of the whole previous century, was called into question. The Edinburgh delegates had thought of the Home Church in Europe and North America, the old Christendom, as the base for the evangelization of the rest of the world, and had assumed that it would remain so. But in the course of the twentieth century, perhaps the largest and fastest recession in Christian history (far faster, for instance, than what followed the first rise of Islam in the Middle East) set in. Its most obvious effect was in Europe, but it affected most of the lands newly settled in the Great European Migration. The effect has been slowest in the United States, but not the less clear for that. The old Christendom had lasted many centuries; around 1500, as the West newly engaged with the non-Western world and the Great Migration began, Christianity could be identified with Europe. Five centuries later, Europe could best be described as post-Christian, and Western people were no longer the representative Christians.

All this might seem to invalidate the whole vision and project of the World Missionary Conference were it not for another extraordinary aspect of twentieth-century church history. This is the extent to which the dreams and visions of the conference about the evangelization of the non-Christian world were fulfilled, though not in the way, nor always by the means, nor even in the places that the delegates expected and planned. The fact remains that, by a huge reversal of the position in 1910, the majority of Christians now live in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Pacific, and the proportion is rising. Simultaneously, with the retreat from Christianity in the West in the twentieth century—just as the visionaries of Edinburgh hoped—came a massive accession to the Christian faith in the non-Western world. The map of the Christian

church, its demographic and cultural makeup, changed more dramatically during the twentieth century than (probably) in any other since the first.

But it happened in ways that the analysts of 1910 could not have predicted. The most favorable signs about the future that were observable to them lay in Asia. They saw multitudes in Japan, in China, in India turning to new ways of thought, and thus, as it seemed, becoming open to Christian ideas as never before. The great Asian cultures had long received the heaviest deployment of missionary personnel and effort. Medical missions (the most financially intensive branch of missions) and other specialties had been developed largely with Asia in mind. Missions were considerably involved in higher education to the university level in Asia, in addition to equipping entire medical faculties there. But the Christian growth that has taken place in Asia has not always followed the patterns of missionary investment. China has indeed seen substantial, if as yet unquantifiable, Christian growth, but it has come in the second half of the twentieth century, in the teeth of official disfavor and often outright hostility. And the growth has been most pronounced in the period after missionaries were excluded from the country. Korea was somewhat cursorily treated in the Edinburgh Commission's report, since Protestant work there was then so new and the country's long period of isolation from foreign contact was so recent. (North Korea's present isolation is in some ways a reversion to tradition.) But the twentieth century—a time of frequent and varied trauma for Korea—saw Korean Christianity becoming a major force in the land, taking shape in the national movement against Japanese colonialism, burgeoning in the times of worst trouble. In recent decades, besides becoming a significant force in North America, Korean Christianity has produced hundreds of missionaries to serve in other parts of the world, including some of the most inhospitable, where Western missionaries never penetrated. If any country can be said to preserve the spirit of 1910, it is South Korea.

A whole chain of churches now stretches across the lands bordering the great mountain ranges from the Himalayas to the Southeast Asian peninsula. Most of these churches were tiny or nonexistent in 1910. Then, and for long after, Nepal was considered a country wholly closed to the Christian message; now it has a thriving church. Vigorous churches have also arisen among the complex of peoples who live in northeast India and southwest China who are neither Indic nor Han Chinese, and these, for the most part, in the twentieth century. There are

states in northeast India where Christianity is the majority religious profession. Across the frontier with Myanmar, among peoples of similar ethnic origin, Christian growth has accelerated since the expulsion of missionaries in the 1960s. In each of the countries mentioned—Nepal, India, China, Myanmar—Christians are a minority and often a small one, but taken together (and with the related Christian communities in Thailand) they form a substantial Himalayan-Arakan Christian community of which there was little trace when the conference met in Edinburgh.

Latin America, which diplomacy led the World Missionary Conference to leave aside, has now become a theater of Christian operations, which no one can possibly ignore. The peculiar history of Latin America has given it an unusual Christian trajectory. The conquest was intended to bring it within the existing Christendom; thus, Mexico became New Spain, with the expectation that its laws and customs would be those of old Spain. In the sixteenth century Latin America received the church settlement adopted in southern Europe, a settlement arising out of the conditions and controversies of sixteenth-century Europe. It received the Catholicism of the Council of Trent without going through the processes and experiences that produced the Council of Trent. For several centuries there seemed no reason to doubt the successful incorporation of Latin America within the Christendom framework derived from medieval Europe. But Latin America, though in one sense a European artifact, was no mere extension of Europe; it was a union of diverse peoples with powerful indigenous religious influences. And in the twentieth century, with rapid urbanization and huge social ferment, the lid blew off the religious pressure cooker. A theological upheaval occurred as drastic as those that befell Europe in the sixteenth century, Latin America's delayed Reformation era. As in Europe, there was a pastoral revolution within the established church; as in Europe, reforming zeal took both conservative and radical ecclesiastical forms; as in Europe, popular religious movements burst the bonds of the old church altogether. Protestantism, outside immigrant communities, had traditionally played no significant part in Latin America; at the time of the World Missionary Conference it was hardly visible there. By the end of the twentieth century, however, Protestants formed a significant portion of the population, in some Central American countries perhaps forming a majority, not of the population, but of the actively practicing Christians in the population. But the movement took an indigenous

form: the overwhelming majority of Latin American Protestants are Pentecostal. What in the West has been marginal has in Latin America become the mainstream. Latin America may be an artifact of the West, manifestly carrying the impress of influences from Europe and North America, but its potent mixture of the cultures of three continents has ensured that it has a religious dynamic of its own. Liberation theology and Pentecostal preaching and congregational life are examples of its effect, and the spread of a huge diaspora from Latin America, a further effect of the twentieth century, will ensure that its influences spread far beyond its boundaries.

The analysts of 1910 saw inland Africa as "a great unoccupied field," and questioned whether more than a beginning had been made of the evangelization of the continent. It is perhaps the change in Africa that marks the strongest contrast between the church today and the church as seen by the writers of the report of Commission I. The figure for professing Christians has risen over the period from something like 10 million to something over 300 million. Sub-Saharan Africa has become one of the Christian heartlands, and is quietly slipping into the place in the Christian world that was once occupied by Europe.

A Transformed Church

The twentieth century brought the transformation of the Christian church and opened a new chapter in Christian history. After a Western phase that lasted several centuries, the church has a new shape, a new ethnic composition, and a new cultural orientation. Christianity is again becoming a non-Western religion. There are considerable implications in this for the fulfillment of the Great Commission, making it a different matter from what appeared so plain to the delegates at Edinburgh in 1910. For one thing, North America and Europe will not be presiding at the table. The representative Christians, those by whom the quality of twenty-first-century (and doubtless twenty-second-century) Christianity will be judged, are now Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans; Western Christians are a minority (and if present trends hold, a shrinking minority) in the church. The great theaters of mission are Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America, raising key issues for Christian faith and service and determining the Christian agenda for the whole world that Christ redeemed. Western Christians, so long used to leadership since the time

of the Great Migration, will need to learn new skills as assistants and facilitators. The way that globalization works in the world leaves the West in charge. True globalization in the church could put the process into reverse.

The meeting in 1910 envisaged the "Native Church," as the churches of Africa and Asia were then designated, as a tender young plant in need of supervision. It is salutary to remember what many of those churches have encountered since those days. Is there a parallel in Christian history to the story of the church in China over the past fifty years, in terms of what it has endured and how it has emerged? Over the same period, Christian faith in many parts of Africa has been honed on endemic disaster; the normal climate of the life of faith has been war, disruption, displacement, disease, and disappointment. The churches of South Africa were called to give moral leadership to the nation in ways the Western church has not known for many centuries. Elsewhere churches, often the only functioning forms of civil society when even the state has broken down, have become salt and light to nations in distress. If suffering, persecution, and faithful wrestling with impossible situations are marks of Christian authenticity, then we may assume that God has been training certain churches for leadership in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, imparting to them accumulated knowledge of God's salvation.

Theology is one area in which that leadership may be necessary. Theology is about making Christian decisions. It is the effort to think about faith in a Christian way. The great doctrinal issues of the Trinity and Incarnation were forced on Christians by the need to explore their deepest convictions about Christ by thinking in Greek, using indigenous Greek vocabulary, categories of thought, and methods of debate. It was strenuous and painful—there is no "safe" theology. But it led to discoveries (true discoveries, though not necessarily the final ones) about who Christ is, that never could have been achieved using traditional categories, such as Messiah, alone. The great creeds that resulted can still draw us out in worship and adoration as we recite them. The discoveries came from the process of translation, moving into new intellectual territory by exploring the meaning of Christ in terms of the Greek heritage and identity. And it did not mean abandoning the past; Messiah and the other traditional titles continue to mean what they always did. It did not mean abandoning Scripture; the process made clear things that were in Scripture all the time, but clearly seen only when they were brought out by translation.

Analogous processes have occurred on other occasions as Christian faith has crossed cultural frontiers and required Christians to think in new categories and face issues never faced by Christians before. In our time we could well be entering a period of theological creativity such as the church knew in the third and fourth centuries. That period of creativity arose from the interaction of the gospel with a Hellenistic culture and a firmly established tradition of Greek thought. In our time it could arise from continued Christian interaction with the ancient cultures of Africa and Asia. Issues will arise where events, conditions, and traditions in Africa and Asia force a need for Christian decisions.

The Western theological academy is at present not well placed for leadership in the new situation. It has been too long immersed in its local concerns and often unaware of the transformation that has taken place in the church. It is often hugely ignorant of the world in which the majority of Christians live, their social and religious contexts, and the history and life of their churches. Its intellectual maps are pre-Columbian; there are vast areas of the Christian world of which they take no account. Nor are its products always readily transferable outside the West. Western theology is, in general, too small for Africa; it has been cut down to fit the small-scale universe demanded by the Enlightenment, which set and jealously guarded a frontier between the empirical world and the world of spirit. Most Africans live in a larger, more populated universe in which the frontier is continually being crossed. It is a universe that comprehends what Paul calls the principalities and powers. It requires a theology that brings Christ to bear on every part of that universe, making evident the victory over the principalities that Paul ascribes to Christ's triumphal chariot of the Cross. The new age of the church could bring a theological renaissance with new perspectives, new materials, new light on old problems, and a host of issues never faced before.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, we have a vivid account of two sharply contrasting Christian lifestyles in the early church. There was the way of life of the first believers, who had never changed their religion and still rejoiced in Torah and circumcision, understanding Jesus wholly in terms of Jewish history and experience. There was also the new Hellenistic way of being Christian that we see in Paul's letters being constructed among former pagans. For them Torah and circumcision had no place; instead, existing Hellenistic social and family life and ways of thinking had to be turned toward Christ. Both ways of life were converted lifestyles; but

neither was complete in itself. Each needed the other, for both were building blocks in the New Temple, both were functioning organs in the Body of which Christ was the head. Only as they came together could the Temple be built, the Body function, the full stature of Christ be realized.

When Ephesians was written, there were only two significant cultures and, thus, two converted lifestyles of which to take note. Not so long after the letter was written, one of those, the original Jewish, dropped out of sight. Now the Ephesian moment has returned; however, there are no longer two, but many cultures into which Christ has come by faith. The different converted lifestyles belong together; they are necessary building blocks in the New Temple designed for God's worship. They are all functioning organs in the Body of which Christ is the head. Some of the great tests of Christianity in the new age of the church will be ecumenical. This is no longer a matter of how different confessions and denominational traditions relate to one another. It is rather how our Lord's prayer that all his disciples may be one can be realized in a Body composed of African and Indian and Chinese and Korean and Hispanic and Caribbean and European and North American Christians.

Thus, we return to our starting point. The last phase of the fulfillment of the Great Commission, so well reflected in the World Missionary Conference, took place in the context of the Great Migration. Over a period of four and a half centuries, millions of people of European origin migrated to the non-Western world and, in the process, set up Western hegemony over much of it. The new phase has a different background. From the middle of the twentieth century, the Great Migration went into reverse. Multitudes from the non-Western world have migrated to the West, with the United States as the principal target. The process looks set to continue, as falling population in the developed nations calls for immigration to sustain economic viability and population pressures elsewhere force people to seek new homes. Those coming to the West include multitudes of Christians, who often transplant their churches and congregational life. It is a development that opens the possibility of realizing the Body of Christ in a truly multicultural church, or the terrible indictment of failing to do so. The same development, and the new resources that it brings, sheds new light on one of the supreme evangelistic tasks of the new phase of the Great Commission, the reevangelization of the West.

There are, in fact, several Great Commissions in the New Testament. The most familiar is that in Matthew 28:19-20. Its starting point is the

universal authority of Christ; the thrust is the disciplining of nations, with baptism and the whole teaching of Jesus shared with the nations. The commission is not to make some disciples in each nation, but to make the nations into disciples. In other words, the commission is about culture, about turning a nation's history and traditions and ways of thought, the things that make it distinctive, the roots of its identity, toward Christ. The outcome—and the process may take many generations—is that glorious diversity of converted lifestyles taken into the building of the New Temple, and pointing in its variety to the full stature of Christ.

There is also the Great Commission of John 20:21: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." The disciples are commissioned as Jesus was commissioned, with the loving authority of the head of the family. And they are sent for the purposes Jesus was sent for. They are sent to preach and to teach, certainly, but they are also sent to be and to do. They are to feed, heal, and restore people, to confront evil, to suffer, perhaps unjustly, on behalf of others. We cannot set aside either version of the Great Commission. A measure of fulfillment by earlier generations has provided our generation with resources to take up the challenge of both versions in the new age of the church.

The Great Commission in an Age of Globalization

Dana L. Robert

Since 1792, when Baptist shoemaker William Carey wrote his *Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, the Great Commission has defined what it means to be a Protestant in the broadly evangelical tradition. In his *Enquiry*, Carey argued that Christ's command in Matthew 28:19-20 was not something confined to the time of the disciples, but was a present responsibility for all his followers: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Within thirty years of Carey's position paper, denominations and groups of like-minded believers in the United Kingdom, Continental Europe, and the United States had founded missionary societies. Although the nineteenth century was designated the "Great Century" of foreign missions by historian K. S. Latourette, the twentieth century saw the greatest geographic expansion of Christianity since the conversion of Europe. At the end of the second millennium since the birth of Jesus, the gospel has spread into every part of the globe and into most of the world's major cultural groupings.

But what are the meaning and the future of the Great Commission in the twenty-first century? Not since the days of William Carey has there

been so much dissension among Christians over its meaning. While the Great Commission resonates within the hearts of Protestants as a mark of evangelical identity and faithfulness to the will of God, the context in which it operates has changed drastically over the past few decades. Just as William Carey's context lent itself to the rediscovery of the Great Commission, so today's context is raising questions about its interpretation for Christian mission.

In this essay, I wish to reflect on the meaning of the Great Commission in an age of globalization. While the gospel of Jesus Christ is timeless, the contexts in which mission takes place are always changing. We must exegete the biblical texts and the contexts for Christian mission in the twenty-first century. Christian mission, or witness to the gospel across diverse boundaries, is a process of relating the Christian faith to the ever-changing realities in the world created by God and yearning toward re-creation. Those committed to mission must reflect on it with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, to paraphrase Karl Barth. As E. Stanley Jones said, when confronted with the inexorable forces of Indian nationalism, "Evangelize the inevitable." In other words, look around the world, see what is going on, and then figure out how the gospel is relevant to that inevitable situation and context.

Is the Great Commission Finished?

The spread of Christianity into nearly every culture in the world by the late twentieth century has raised the issue for many whether the Great Commission should or can retain its centrality for Christian world mission. Has the command "Go into all the world" finally been fulfilled on the part of Jesus' followers? Mission leaders from conservative and liberal perspectives, as well as religious pluralists, are questioning whether the Great Commission is finished. Many evangelical denominations and parachurch agencies worked together during the late twentieth century to reach all the so-called unreached peoples with the gospel message. Called the AD 2000 Movement, this united push concentrated on fulfilling the Great Commission. Central to its energy was a definition of the missionary task that revolved around planting the church in every group of people by the year 2000. Defining the "nations" as ethnic groups of people rather than political entities, in 1974 at the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization, Dr. Ralph Winter proved with sta-

istics that several billion of the world's people could be reached only by cross-cultural missionaries. Rather than representing the end of the days of cross-cultural mission, as many mainline churches were arguing during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the work of reaching the mosaic of ethnic groups had just begun. Winter launched what became a massive popular movement to reach this mosaic of peoples. The Southern Baptists, Assemblies of God, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Youth With A Mission, the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, and virtually every large parachurch missionary agency united to compile databases, conduct educational programs in local churches, and distribute the unreached peoples among mission agencies and evangelical congregations. Their goal was to establish by the year 2000 a church-planting movement within every group of unreached peoples in the world. A series of major conferences emphasized that evangelicals worldwide were committing themselves to the task of finishing the Great Commission in their lifetimes.

Some leaders of the Lausanne Movement and the AD 2000 initiative have questioned whether the Great Commission is, in fact, on the verge of being completed by the successful planting of vital, evangelistic churches among every people group. The AD 2000 Movement closed its doors on March 31, 2001. According to Luis Bush, head of the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, by the end of 2000, eight out of every ten people had "access to the entire Bible in their own language." Ninety-five percent of the world's population had access to some Scriptures, but also to Christian radio broadcasts and recordings, and to the *Jesus* film. By the end of the year 2000, an estimated 80 percent of the world had heard the gospel.² In Bush's mind, the very success of Christian mission led to questions about the interpretation of the Great Commission in the twenty-first century. Ralph Winter, founder of the unreached peoples movement, noted that there are few "traditional mission fields" left.³

No less a person than Billy Graham, who has devoted his time and resources to world evangelization for many decades, has suggested that the Great Commission is being fulfilled.⁴ On December 8, 2001, during a televised Billy Graham Crusade in Fresno, California, Graham related his message to current events, as he often does, in this case to the worldwide growth of terrorism. He interpreted the events of 9/11 as signs for the second coming of Jesus Christ. One of his main reasons for heralding the imminent return of Christ is that, for the first time in human history, the gospel is being proclaimed worldwide in accordance with Matthew

24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come." In Graham's millennial vision, international terrorism and the global spread of Christianity are working together as signs of the end of the age.

On the other side of the theological spectrum, a number of missiologists are concluding that the Great Commission should no longer be emphasized as the center of Christian mission because the age of expansion is over. A subtext of this position is that Christian expansion is an embarrassing remnant of colonial history. Robert Schreier, one of the greatest North American Catholic missiologists today, argues that the paradigm of mission for the twenty-first century should be reconciliation.⁵ He is joined by other voices who argue, perhaps in reaction to narrow readings of the Great Commission, that expansion carries with it a connotation of Christian superiority and a history of Western coercion. Schreier cites 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us." Reconciliation as the twenty-first-century model for mission means the reconciliation of God with humanity through Jesus Christ, of human beings with each other in situations of violence, and of humanity with the cosmos. In this view, the Great Commission is finished not because the task of world evangelization has been completed, but because it proves inadequate in a culturally and theologically pluralistic world.

The New Age spirituality that appeals to our post-Christian Western culture provides a third set of arguments for the irrelevance of the Great Commission. Where Billy Graham sees the globalization of terrorism and of Christianity as signs of the end times, the professional futurist Gerald Celente, author of *Trends 2000*, believes that the quest for spirituality caused by the shock of the events of 9/11 will give rise to what he calls "New Millennium religion." The post-9/11 context reveals that the conditions are right for a "serious attempt to redefine spirituality, for the rise of a worldwide religion that will unite, rather than divide, the peoples of the globe."⁶ Celente predicts that Christianity and other established religions will disintegrate because of their hypocrisy, as people seek a global religion that supports their individual lifestyles. In Celente's New Age argument, the Great Commission is no longer relevant to human spirituality, which has outgrown the boundaries of any one religion.⁷

Mission as Globalization

Arguments suggesting that the Great Commission is finished have in common the discourse of "globalization." Globalization, according to sociologist of religion Roland Robertson, "refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole."⁸ It connotes the "increasing interconnectedness of the world as a single place, and the consequences and dynamics of this growing interconnectedness."⁹ Christianity, with its global outreach and expansion, participates in this phenomenon of globalization in the contemporary age. Today, in both the conservative and the progressive discussions, the worldwide spread of Christianity has become *prima facie* evidence for the decreasing importance of the Great Commission in the twenty-first century. These views are problematic for Protestants for whom the Great Commission remains central to their tradition, but who question the relationship between the missionary movement and Western expansionism or imperialism. Unease about the relationship between economic globalization and missionary Christianity is the twenty-first-century version of the twentieth-century concern about the relationship between colonialism and Christian mission. The darker side of economic globalization, with its perceived destruction of local cultures by forces of global capitalism, technologies, and consumerism and the growing imbalance between rich and poor, also raises questions about the Great Commission. Even as we celebrate the worldwide spread of Christianity, critics implicate the Great Commission as the ideological core of a dominant Western socioeconomic system of privilege. What is the relationship of the Great Commission to economic globalization? Should Westerners still go overseas as missionaries when peoples in poor parts of the world associate us with oppressive wealth, political domination, and a culture of materialism?

The events of 9/11 reminded Americans that we live in an interconnected world. Whether international markets, the Internet, or religions, no part of the globe seems beyond the reach of unifying international visions. As world economic integration relentlessly marches forward, groups of people fearful of losing their traditional worldviews deliberately reinforce their own local identities of ethnicity, race, and religion. Yet reinforcing the local aspects of one's identity and then exporting that identity to other parts of the world is, itself, part of the process of globalization. When I was growing up in southern Louisiana, things like

barbecued redfish, boiled crawfish, fried okra, and dark-roasted coffee were part of our local culture. Then with the globalization of Cajun food, blackened redfish became a choice item of cuisine all over the world. When I go to remote eateries in Zimbabwe, I can find Tabasco sauce from Avery Island, Louisiana, on the table. Something that was only recently part of a local identity, namely, Cajun food, has been redefined and modified in the brave new world of global marketing. The local is no longer separate from the global. Rather, the two are intertwined in a process sometimes referred to as "glocalization." The very identity of local culture becomes reified through the process of globalization.

As a historian, I agree with those who argue that world Christianity is one of the chief examples of what we call globalization. It is not enough merely to examine globalization as a context in which mission operates. Instead, the Great Commission itself has been an intrinsic part of the globalization process. Roland Robertson argues that religious discourse is where discussions of globalization first emerged. The following analysis suggests some of the ways in which the Protestant missionary movement, as shaped by the Great Commission, is intertwined with globalization in its varied forms.

1. Theological Basis

Today's Christianity can be considered an example of globalization because the vision of the kingdom of God has always provided the central theological framework for the Protestant mission movement.¹⁰ The practical work of cross-cultural mission has been done against the backdrop of God's reign, a vision of humankind united under the lordship of Jesus Christ, with people called from every nation, tongue, and tribe.¹¹ The good news in Jesus Christ is intended for everyone; that is, the message is a universal one.

In an age when the geographic spread of Christianity is taken for granted, it is hard to recapture how strange it seemed for missionaries to leave forever everything they had known and to venture on tiny ships into foreign lands. Going to places where they did not know the language or the customs, where they lacked medical care, friends, and protection, they went prepared to die. While the early Protestant missionaries were certainly motivated by their desire to save souls from eternal damnation rather than to become martyrs, their writings demonstrate that the great millennial vision of the Kingdom, of the Lamb upon his throne sur-

rounded by believers from all nations, was the inspiration that enabled many of them to sacrifice their lives.

In short, a primary theological warrant for the globalization of the church is the vision of the kingdom of God—the vision hoped for in the Great Commission's command to go to all nations. As believers come from all nations, they enter a universal fellowship. Yet, because the gospel must become part of each culture it enters, the many churches of the world have unique ways of living out the gospel truths in their own cultures. In some ways, then, globalization has been an intrinsic part of the missional vision for the kingdom of God. Indigenous theology within the framework of global church unity has been a self-conscious goal of the Protestant missionary movement, at least since the early twentieth century.¹²

2. Historical Connections

Historians agree that Protestantism as a global phenomenon has accompanied the spread of capitalism. While missionaries have often been the last line of defense for indigenous peoples against exploitation by commercial and political interests, the Western missionary movement and capitalism nevertheless emerged together in human history during the 1700s, and were products of the same forces. The birth of capitalism and the birth of the voluntary missionary agency were part of the same phenomenon of liberating the human being from exploitation by hereditary monarchy, chieftainship, or religious hierarchy. Capitalism and voluntary mission societies replaced the older Christendom model of missions based upon a state-supported church with a more democratizing notion that anyone could choose his or her religion, and even become a missionary to propagate particular points of view.

William Carey was breaking with a state church tradition in advocating that groups of volunteers be sent into the world to offer the Christian religion to the so-called heathen. Carey's theological reinterpretation of the Great Commission broke with the hyper-Calvinism of the eighteenth-century Baptists by arguing that people were capable of choosing to follow Christ if given the chance to do so. In short, God's grace could be appropriated by human cooperation.

Equally significant to Carey's theological formulations was his use of merchant capitalism as one means for the enactment of Christian mission. Carey noted in the *Enquiry* that merchant ships were traversing the

world for the sake of material gain. If British merchants were risking their lives halfway around the world, were not devout Christians capable of doing the same for a more noble purpose? The global reach of British trade, along with the British Empire, provided the physical means for the global spread of Protestantism. Carey used the trading company as a model for the voluntaristic missionary society. Merchants founded trading companies in which selling shares raised the cash needed to invest in trade goods and to send agents to the foreign markets. The shareholders shared the profit and losses, depending on the success of the venture. Such voluntary trading companies could be imitated by mission organizations. Members of a denomination, for example, Baptists or Anglicans, could become shareholders by virtue of providing financial support for a missionary. The venture showed a "profit" if the missionary made converts, and it failed if the missionary died or showed no results.¹³

This essentially capitalist model, known as the "voluntary society," became the norm through which Western Protestantism channeled its early missionary zeal. By the 1820s, voluntary mission-sending societies composed of like-minded people existed in the United Kingdom, Continental Europe, and the United States. Since the first task of these voluntary societies was to scout locations where missionaries could flourish, it is no wonder that many of the mission fields of the early 1800s were located in European spheres of influence—for example, India or the Middle East. Missionaries often rode on merchant ships under colonial protection to get to the mission field. Often the only other Europeans with whom they could socialize were colonial officials or merchants stationed in the various mission countries. The early nineteenth-century New England towns, which comprised the heart of American trading networks with the South Pacific and China, also provided America's first foreign missionaries.

In other words, emerging global capitalism was the unwitting midwife of the Protestant missionary movement. Being incarnate in the world of frail humanity meant using the spread of capitalism and colonialism to facilitate church expansion. Even though secular merchants and government officials were often at odds with the ethical stances of the missionaries—for example, early missionary opposition to the slave trade—the missionaries used the emerging capitalist infrastructure to spread the gospel. Antislavery missionaries connected with the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society also believed in introducing Western agriculture and commerce to help African converts improve

themselves and to thwart the European colonialists and slavers, a philosophy characterized as the "Three C's" of Christianity, commerce, and cultivation (later civilization). Another important factor in the spread of revivalistic Protestantism around the world was the stationing of evangelical soldiers in British outposts. The spread of Methodism by soldiers and colonists around the world in the early 1800s was the beginning of the globalization of evangelical Christianity. Even as Methodism remained a fairly small movement in Great Britain itself, it exploded among the transient European populations in places like North America, Australia, and India.¹⁴ The expansionism of capitalism and the geographic spread of European colonialism provided contexts in which popular Protestantism became a global phenomenon.

3. The Post-World War II Expansion of the Church

After World War II, Christianity spread throughout the world. In the year 1900, approximately one-third of the world was Christian, and Europeans composed 70.6 percent of the world's Christian population. By the year 2000, approximately one-third of the world was still Christian, but the European percentage of that total had shrunk to 28 percent. Africa and Latin America combined provided 43 percent of the total Christian population. A major demographic shift thus occurred as Christianity grew in the non-Western world, but declined in Europe and remained largely unchanged in North America.

Most missiological writings about globalization refer specifically to this demographic shift in the Christian population: the typical Christian in the twenty-first century is a Latin American or African woman. One of the most interesting factors about this rapid growth is that it largely occurred after the end of European colonialism. Even though colonialism and capitalism provided an infrastructure for the Western missionary movement, indigenous forms of Christianity that explicitly rejected Western control emerged throughout the colonial world in the early twentieth century. On the eve of the Communist takeover in China in 1948, for example, 25 percent of the Christians were already members of indigenous Chinese churches.¹⁵ And when communism drove Christianity underground, church growth continued under indigenous leadership. By the 1920s, a couple of dozen independent denominations had emerged in the Philippines. In Africa, indigenous churches were seen by the colonizers as dangerous, anticolonial movements, and were sometimes met with force.

But with the end of colonialism beginning in the 1960s, groups of Christians in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were free to assert their own identity without being accused of being lackeys of Western interests. So-called mission churches, like Anglicanism, Catholicism, and Presbyterianism, grew exponentially after independence. To take Anglicanism, for example, by the year 2000, there were 17 million baptized Anglicans in Nigeria, compared to only 2.8 million Episcopalians in the United States. At the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which is the highest consultative body of the Anglican Communion, 224 of the 775 bishops were from Africa, compared with only 139 from the United Kingdom and Europe.¹⁶

For the past twenty years, perhaps the feature of world Christianity attracting the most attention has been the rapid growth of Pentecostalism around the world. Similar to the spread of Methodism in the early 1800s, the growth of Pentecostalism has occurred as people have been displaced from their homes and have begun worshipping with Christians from other language groups and backgrounds. Its attention to healing, signs of the Spirit and a liberating ecstatic worship style provide an appealing alternative to the old-fashioned Western formality of the mainline denominations.

The globalization of world Christianity in terms of its demographic spread shows that the interaction between the global and the local, among other factors, is giving it strength. The universal nature of the gospel is a powerful attraction to Christians who have moved from place to place, are suffering under incompetent governments, and crave the connection with like-minded persons of other races and cultures. In some settings, Christianity has served as a vehicle of modernization and of ideals of individual human rights and democracy. Simultaneously, the ability of the gospel to adapt to local situations gives it vitality and relevance for the people. The interaction between the local and the global is a keen indicator of Christianity's participation in the globalization process in the early twenty-first century.

4. Structures of Mission Today

A fourth way in which mission is a part of the phenomenon of globalization is in the technological base and structural organization of mission itself. Since the first century CE, when Christians used codices, or books, in far greater numbers than members of other religions, to Gutenberg's

printing press and the first printed Bible in 1455 and the use of radio and television in the twentieth century, the spread of the gospel has relied on the cutting edge of "information technology." With its computers, databases, statisticians, and Web sites, the Great Commission is riding the wave of technological expansion just as it hitchhiked on the capitalist trading ships and colonial armies of the nineteenth century. Despite Christianity's relative poverty compared to corporate business, evangelical Christianity has one of the most highly developed technological presences of any religious force in the world. The explosion of Web-related mission information in the early twenty-first century is a revolution of information comparable to the expansion of print media on the American frontier of the early 1800s, and in West Africa in the early 1900s. As scholars have frequently demonstrated, access to new sources of information can by themselves facilitate the founding and strengthening of Christian movements in new soil. Historian Andrew Walls makes the point that the infrastructures of many missions in Africa are stronger than those of the countries themselves.¹⁷ Many of these evangelical networks have allied with others to pursue common global strategies; for example, the goal of the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement to plant a church in every people group by the year 2000 and Global Mapping, Inc. (GMI), as a clearinghouse for information about the task of world evangelization.

In The United Methodist Church, the Internet age has facilitated a more entrepreneurial, parachurch approach than the bureaucratic, corporate boardroom model that had become dominant by the 1970s. By the 1980s, it was clear that a more flexible model of mission leadership needed to evolve.¹⁸ Instead of controlling the mission initiatives of the church, the General Board of Global Ministries saw itself trying to facilitate the mission activities of a vast network of churches. With the arrival of the Internet, the board developed an impressive Web site that allows for the democratization of information in a way that was previously impossible.

In the last few years, the board has reorganized itself according to a model that recognizes the emergence of globalization. Instead of having area secretaries running programs according to their specific geographic areas of expertise, the various functions of mission education, mission personnel, local church relations, and so on have been consolidated into units that are supposed to operate globally. This model would have been impossible before the advent of cyberspace. While the jury is still out on

whether this model will work or not, the point is that even denominational structures are reflecting the globalization of Christian mission. In the case of the United Methodists, the reorganization may represent a new kind of centralization at the expense of expertise in local cultures, possibly in opposition to the concern for balancing the local and the global. Indeed, the centralization of structures and the democratization of information are aspects of globalization.

5. The Globalization of the Mission Force

The missionary force of the twenty-first century has itself been globalized. Whether within the World Council of Churches or the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization, in the last twenty-five years, much of the leadership for Protestant missions has been provided by people from the Two-thirds World. Larry Keyes calculated that by the mid-1990s, there were an estimated 88,000 missionaries from the Two-thirds World being sent by 1,600 non-Western agencies. Non-Western missions were growing more than five times faster than Western ones.¹⁹ The Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut, probably the most important residential community for missionaries on furlough, has far more Burmese and Korean missionaries than it can accommodate, whereas not long ago, its primary population was Western missionaries. Even though churches in Western countries still control most of the economic resources of the worldwide missionary movement, the missionaries from Brazil, Korea, Ghana, and other non-Western countries are the visible faces of mission in the twenty-first century. These non-Western missionaries have made the old ecumenical slogan come true: "mission to and from all six continents." Devotion to the Great Commission on the part of non-Westerners shows that its expansionary appeal is not confined to Western Christianity.

The Great Commission in a Globalized Future

For the past quarter century, mission scholars have been in agreement that world Christianity has entered an entirely new phase of global mission. The question remains what globalization means for the future of the Great Commission in the twenty-first century. Lutheran missiologist Richard Bliese suggests that, theologically, globalization points to a num-

ber of areas that demand our attention, including such things as what is traditionally referred to as "catholicity," a global theological anthropology and reflection on the human condition, Christian mission in relationship to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and the global responsibility to struggle against injustices as part of Christian witness, evangelism, and mission.²⁰

Given the historical importance of the Great Commission for Protestant missions, The United Methodist Church has more to gain by recontextualizing it for a global age than by abandoning it. Its historical importance and its commonality across varied traditions are too important to push it aside, not to mention its theological basis. Rather, we must seek a holistic and broad interpretation of the Great Commission. We must broaden it from the narrow definition of church planting among unreached peoples and avoid cynical formulations that paint it as simply the ideological heart of Western colonial oppression. The mainline churches find themselves caught between the extremes of a narrow interpretation of the Great Commission and the secular criticisms of the age. The following suggestions may help us move beyond this impasse and reaffirm the Great Commission for the twenty-first century.

1. Proclaim Christ Rather Than Western Economic Interests

First, we should break the connections between globalization in an economic sense and the theological vision of the kingdom of God. The associations among capitalism, modernization, and Great Commission Christianity can be traced back to the days of William Carey and early Methodism. In an age of globalization, it is legitimate to ask whether disproportionate attention to numerical growth owes more to Western economic and cultural expansionism, or to a gospel of prosperity, than to biblical Christianity. To the best of our abilities, our interpretation of the Great Commission must emphasize proclaiming Christ without proclaiming Western economic self-interests.

Let us reexamine the Great Commission in light of pre-expansionist models of Christian mission by using 2 Corinthians 4:5-6 as a model for twenty-first-century mission: "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the

face of Jesus Christ." One advantage of placing these words of the apostle Paul alongside the Great Commission is that they focus on the glory of God rather than on human volition, organization, and efficiency. Prior to the age of capitalist expansion, seeking to glorify God was a primary motive for Protestant mission. The God whom the Puritans sought to glorify was the Creator who inaugurated human existence by bringing light forth from darkness. Through the face of Jesus Christ, God the Creator has shone light not only in the cosmos, but also in the human heart. If our mission is to extol the glory of God, we can shift our vision away from the profit motive or the success syndrome that haunts so much of the American psyche, including missionary Christianity.

In an age in which the church has finally spread all over the world, it behooves Western Christians to focus more on what it means to be faithful to the God of Jesus Christ. Criticism of globalization has parallels with the struggle over colonialism that confronted missions after World War II. At that time, prophetic mission theologians like Hendrik Kraemer and Max Warren emphasized the separation of Christ from Western culture as a precondition for the health of world Christianity. Warren spoke about a mission of "Christian Presence" in which Western missionaries would cultivate a "theology of attention" to other peoples, cultures, and religions.²¹ Missionaries of Christian presence create a climate of integrity in which the message is proclaimed through deeds and not just words. In the wake of 9/11, the leading evangelical Islamicist, Dudley Woodberry, suggested that American missionaries have to withdraw from Muslim countries in favor of nationals from other countries.²² To avoid confusing the message with the messengers, it becomes necessary for the globalized church to decide which ethnic and national groups can most effectively witness to Jesus Christ in particular settings. If we can separate the Great Commission from capitalist expansion, then our mission is clarified as one that glorifies God rather than ourselves or our Western way of life.

"For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." These stirring words of the apostle Paul should be reclaimed as basic to the missionary message of the twenty-first century. There are quite a number of famous missionaries who became bicultural through the actual experience of being enslaved and then became effective cross-cultural communicators; for example, Ulfilas, the translator of Scripture into Gothic; St. Patrick, the English former slave of the Irish; Samuel Adjayi Crowther, a recaptured Yoruba

slave who became the first African Anglican bishop and great missionary; and Anthony Ulrich, a former slave from the West Indies who persuaded Count Zinzendorf to send Moravian missionaries to his homeland. Paul was writing to the Christians in Corinth that he was willing to be their slave for the sake of the gospel. He was willing to serve them, to be humble and not put himself forward in his efforts to glorify God. Perhaps when we talk about Pauline models of mission, we should emphasize Paul's willingness to serve as a slave rather than the usual focus on "Pauline" financial self-support. As we seek to imitate Paul in his preaching of Jesus Christ, we must be willing to proclaim Christ only, devoid of our Western egos. To see God glorified in the face of Jesus Christ means we must unmask our economic privilege as Western Christians, so that we do not make the mistake of putting our own faces where Jesus Christ's ought to be.

2. Rediscover the Great Commission as a Spiritual Discipline

A second way to emphasize the Great Commission in the twenty-first century is to rediscover it as a spiritual discipline. Those of us in the Wesleyan tradition have always considered spiritual growth an ongoing and necessary process in the Christian life. But geographic expansion is not the only definition of what it means for believers to "go into all the world"; we must bear faithful witness at home and in distant places. I do not believe that witnessing across barriers of culture, race, and nationality is a task that can ever be completed because the health of the church and our personal spiritual growth depend on it. The exploding populations in the Two-thirds World mean that there will always be a "mission field" among the evolving cultures of the world's young people, and the health of the church depends on growing and deepening our relationship to God through profound obedience to the Word. Especially for Protestants, devotion to the Great Commission is a critical marker of spiritual vitality, and points to the core of what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. We must always be prepared to testify to the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15), in our local communities and throughout the world that God has made. In the spiritual sense, the Great Commission can never be completed this side of the new creation.

3. Emphasize the Didactic Function of the Great Commission

In the twenty-first century, we should shift our focus to the second half of the Great Commission, "reaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." A shift to the didactic function of the Great Commission is not a repudiation of "going into all the world," but a corrective that resonates with previous interpretations of the Great Commission. When women first became Protestant missionaries in the early 1800s, they focused on the teaching aspect of the Great Commission. They saw themselves as teaching women around the world and helping them achieve human dignity in relation to abusive social systems.²³ Holistic mission has always put equal weight on the discipleship and evangelistic aspects of "going into all the world."²⁴ Bishop Kenneth Carder spoke of the Great Commission in his opening remarks to the Board of Discipleship in 2002, when serving as its president. He stated, "We must continue to move beyond exclusive personal experiences in terms of what it means to make disciples of Jesus Christ. . . . Making disciples of all nations has to do with transforming communities, as well as human hearts; the creation of communities of love, of grace, of justice and hospitality that look like Jesus Christ."²⁵

The urgency of the didactic function of the Great Commission becomes apparent in light of the rapid expansion of the church in the late twentieth century. In new Christian areas, there is a desperate need for religious instruction and for ethical reflection on the relationship between the gospel message and sociopolitical struggles. People may have joined the church, but their understanding of the gospel is limited by their lack of formation in Christian beliefs and practices. The hunger for basic teaching on the meaning of the Bible and the meaning of the Christian faith is overwhelming. The very success of the Great Commission as a motivator to send Christians "into all the world" means that the command to teach "everything that I have commanded you" has become an urgent priority in areas where church growth has been rapid and recent. If we fail to incorporate the teaching of the meaning of the holistic gospel in our mission work, then we will be like the sowers who threw the seed into shallow ground. The plants grew quickly, but then withered because their roots were stunted.

4. Ground Ourselves in the New Testament Church

The Great Commission in the twenty-first century must be regrounded in the New Testament church. When Christ commanded his disciples to go into all the world, he was not speaking to people whose nation was the strongest country in the world or possessed of modern technology, unlimited transportation resources, or pension plans for missionaries. Rather, the Great Commission was a sign of hope among simple, persecuted believers whose leader had been crucified and then raised from the dead. Christian tradition claims that Thomas went to India, Philip to Africa, Peter to Rome, Mark to Egypt, and Paul to Spain. The disciples witnessed across national and ethnic boundaries not because they were powerful, but because they were faithful to the vision of the kingdom of God they had glimpsed in Jesus Christ.

The true context for the Great Commission is that of the persecuted minority church, not our dominant Western culture. Like in the New Testament church, Christians in an age of globalization are rediscovering a theology of the Cross. As Christianity grows in minority communities around the world, we see renewed persecution against believers. Christians who witness in the world today must be prepared to be arrested by Islamic authorities in Saudi Arabia, captured by revolutionaries in Colombia, harassed by the Chinese government, abused for supporting minority and human rights in places like Rwanda, Indonesia, and India—or ridiculed by secular intellectuals in the West.

For those of us who are Westerners, it is difficult to disassociate ourselves from the trappings of power even if each of us takes a personal vow of poverty. We face the difficult challenge of separating Christian mission from the anonymity of modernization, and the increasing contrasts between wealth and poverty in a global economic system. We are trapped in the culture, which the rest of the world ascribes to us. I am sure I am not the only person who has had the disheartening experience of going to a poor country in the Two-thirds World only to be objectified as a representative of Western wealth, and indeed, I am part of that system even as I struggle to live out my Christian commitments. Missionaries are trapped between the needy and unreached of the world and the material resources of the West. All over the world, there are missionaries in vulnerable situations, scapegoats of the resentment against globalization and Western dominance. For North Americans, our mission in the twenty-first century may mean glorifying God as slaves, just as Paul was willing

to do in 2 Corinthians 4:5-6. The Great Commission was a victorious statement of Resurrection, but its backdrop was the experience of the Cross.

Conclusion: A Resurrection Vision

In the final analysis, to follow and live out the Great Commission in the twenty-first century means to continue anticipating God's kingdom of peace and justice for all. In other words, the Great Commission has an eschatological dimension; it commands us to work for the inbreaking kingdom of God, for the new creation, while we remain in the midst of the world still groaning toward completion. We live as signs of hope to all the world. The hope for all of God's people, united in justice and truth under Jesus Christ, is a Resurrection vision that sustains people around the world. This Christian message of hope is not finished, as God's reign presses toward fulfillment. Rather, it is the deeper meaning that lies at the heart of the Great Commission.

CHAPTER 3

The Global Mission of The United Methodist Church

Elaine A. Robinson

In The United Methodist Church, the official or formal language of "mission" can be understood in two distinct, but related senses. First, the broader and primary sense of mission refers to the basic purpose or raison d'être of the UMC: "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ."¹ In this broader perspective, we would understand the formation of disciples as the primary task of the church.² Second, mission is used in a related, but narrower sense of mission as "outreach."³ In this narrower sense of mission as outreach, the primary administrative responsibility is assigned to the General Board of Global Ministries. Although the relationship between mission as the task of the church and as outreach will figure prominently in the subsequent discussion, our primary concern in this essay will be the overarching mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ

The mission or task of making disciples, as defined and articulated by the 2004 *Book of Discipline*, can be understood as a multifaceted process. To enable us to more precisely discern the scope and contours of this mission, we might suggest there are four overlapping dimensions of the