

Key Issues for World Evangelization

by Thomas Wang

I have the great privilege of touching base with you on the topic regarding “Key Issues for World Evangelization.” I want to mention that to deal adequately with this very broad subject within this short time and space is impossible. Therefore, I will only touch on the main issues which are close to my heart. Hopefully they will strike a responsive chord in our hearts, so that together we can do something about this awesome task.

I have observed some areas that have become hindrances to effectuation of world evangelization. But I’ve also seen some things that are facilitating world evangelizing. Allow me to explain each.

Evangelism in the Church

First of all, I feel there is a lack and prioritization on evangelism among the churches and generally among us as evangelical Christians today. For whatever reason, there’s a severe lacking of evangelists and the work of evangelism. Have you noticed that? I ask myself: Where are the evangelists?

I received my first shock on this subject in the year 1982, when I was working with the KOVI movement in Hong Kong. In that year, I was asked by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association to recommend thirty Chinese delegates to the Itinerant Evangelists Congress in 1983 in Amsterdam. So I wrote to the 6,000 Chinese churches in the diaspora (outside of China mainland), and to my amazement, I could not find one single itinerant evangelist among the 6,000 churches in the diaspora—that is, according to BGEA’s definition: One who moves from place to place whose sole responsibility is evangelism. Finally I had to ask BGEA to bend

their rules, and allow so-called “evangelizing pastors” or “witnessing laymen” in order to make the quota. Nevertheless, that was a sobering reality.

Afterwards, I began to ask myself: Where are the evangelists? Why don’t the churches today produce evangelists? Why aren’t seminaries producing evangelists? Why do so few Christians aspire to be evangelists? They seem to be a vanishing breed. Furthermore, how did we get into this situation? Gradually, I have discovered a few of the main reasons:

1. Early missionaries to China and other parts of the Third World from the very beginning (and I say this with reverence and respect), spread the Gospel to the Chinese through Chinese. They often hired three or four Chinese people with minimal education and biblical training, and then sent them out as evangelists. This has created an unfortunate image of evangelists among Chinese Christians. The term “evangelist” is often taken as meaning a second-class Christian worker whose only biblical knowledge is a basic salvation story. Unfortunately, this image has lingered on to a substantial degree today. Perhaps China, in a way, represents many Third World countries in this respect. Besides this, from the beginning, the early missionaries to China did not really encourage or emphasize missions for Chinese churches as their basic responsibility—as something the churches needed to do.

2. Unlike pastors, very often evangelists had no home-base. They traveled from place to place, and on the human side, they seldom enjoyed a sense of belonging. Evangelists were floaters, going from one church to the next and

from place to place.

3. Today, at least in the developed world, no evangelist can raise a family solely on his earnings. That’s a fact—unless he is someone like a Billy Graham.

4. In an age where higher learning is idolized, it will be a miracle today for a young Christian to commit his or her life for a vocation of evangelism. The usual preferences are teaching, researching, counseling, para-church ministries, etc., granted, these are bona fide ministries. According to preferences today, among the Chinese churches, pastors come at the bottom, with missionaries still one step lower, with evangelists at the very bottom of the ladder.

5. However, perhaps the real cause of the lack of evangelism and evangelists lies behind the walls of the seminaries. Even after a casual glance into the curricula of most seminaries today, we can see the overwhelming poverty in the teaching of evangelism, much less the training of evangelists. Seminaries today are not producing evangelists because evangelism does not occupy a respectable position in their curricula. Observe most seminaries, and you’ll know what I mean.

This seems to be the natural result of seminaries that relentlessly engage in the pursuit of academic excellence (which is fine), while neglecting the very basic and original purpose for which the institution was established in the first place—the training of pastors and especially soul-winners.

It is not uncommon today to meet seminary graduates who have never personally led any one person to Christ.

Seminaries shape the students while students, who are the future pastors, shape the church. Is it any wonder why there are so few evangelists today?

6. Following in the footsteps of the seminaries, church leaders today are also contributing to this serious malady. When I say evangelists, in a way I include the missionaries also. Compare the number of workers, both clergy and laymen, in an average church. If you take those who engage in “inreach” ministries and those who engage in “outreach” ministries, it will not be difficult to see a serious imbalance. You will discover that the majority of the workers in a typical congregation serve the people within the four walls of the church, while the outreach workers are usually negligible.

So what do we suggest? How do we balance this serious imbalance? It seems to me that we have to begin with the basic reeducation of the Church, what it is and is not:

1. The Church does not exist for the purpose of seeking glory for itself, of benefiting for itself, but to bring glory to God. Why are we here, doing what we are doing? Are we seeking our own growing power and our own kingdoms?

2. The Church does not exist for the purpose of serving its own congregation alone. It exists to serve the people beyond the church walls as well.

3. The Church does not exist solely for the purpose of evangelizing the people in its own immediate area. It also exists for the purpose of evangelizing the peoples of the world. The Church does not exist to be a recipient, a reservoir, of God’s blessing for herself. It is also to be an unselfish channel to effectively convey God’s blessings that He has bestowed on the Church to the world. The Church should have a balanced distribution of its resources on local and global ministries.

5. Some suggestions to seminaries:

—Each and every seminary should have a department of evangelism

and a department of missions. Should this prove difficult, at least comprehensive courses of these subjects should be given for all.

—Evangelism and missions should be required courses for all students, and should be provided, with priority time given to the actual practice of evangelism.

—Each year, each student should be required to personally lead several persons to Christ and into a church. In a seminary in Indonesia, under the leadership of Dr. Peter Atrevianis (?) and Christian Eritika (?), their students have to establish a church before they can get a diploma.

—To graduate, students should be required to participate in at least two short-term mission trips as part of their field ministry requirement.

—In addition to academic requirements, each student in order to graduate, must provide satisfactory proof that he or she is an able soul-winner.

—Seminaries should consider establishing the following degrees: B.A. in evangelism, M.A. in evangelism, Ph.D. in evangelism. There are so many degrees in other subjects; why not in evangelism as well? Evangelism and missions should occupy high priority in what we do in the seminaries and training institutions.

Actually, we stand in need of a very basic paradigm shift. The Church has to have an in-depth teaching and understanding of what she really is all about. In Matthew 16, the Lord has given the key of the kingdom of heaven to the Church. What is that? The key of the kingdom of heaven is nothing else but the Gospel. The key brings the open door. When the Church preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ and people believe it, the heavenly doors open for them. That’s the key!

But the problem is, are the churches using the key? Are we using it? Many churches, most churches, are doing every-

thing else but evangelism. That’s the problem, that is also a great tragedy.

God has given the privilege and high honor of preaching His Word—preaching the Gospel to the Church and to the Church alone. You might say that the Church has a monopoly on the privilege of preaching the Gospel. The United Nations cannot preach the Gospel. General Motors cannot establish churches. IBM cannot send out missionaries. This is the sole responsibility, the sole privilege, the monopoly of the Church. The problem today is that we have this monopoly that nobody else can do, but yet, at the same time, we’re not doing it effectively and totally and wholeheartedly ourselves. That is the basic problem. If we have a monopoly and we’re not doing it wholeheartedly, we become the biggest hindrance to God’s will and purpose in and for the world

There has to be a basic teaching on the responsibility of the Church. No matter how big the church buildings, or whether a church has a \$100,000 organ, if we are not really evangelizing, if we are not sending out missionaries all over the world, we are not doing God’s will for Him, and as such are a hindrance to His will and purpose!

AD 2000 Movement

Another key issue which is conducive to world evangelization—this is something we are happy about—is the AD 2000 Movement which God has raised up in recent years.

In talking about the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, I must give credit to Dr. Ralph Winter, who in a real sense is the forerunner of this thinking. I had the privilege of being invited by him to participate in the Edinburgh conference in 1981. Even at that time, Dr. Winter was already advocating “A Church for Every People by the Year 2000.” What we are doing right now is actually a continuation, of what God had put into his mind years ago.

The AD 2000 Movement is a movement raised up by God in trying to renew the vision, to gather and link churches together, and to launch out a world-wide movement in different channels, from different tracks, in different countries, through different individual church people. Through this conjoined global effort, we believe it is a possible task that can be accomplished by the year 2000. Now, many people have talked to me and asked, "How can that be possible?" I always give them an illustration. I say, "If President Clinton today gave a speech in the White House, the whole country could hear him and see him; and through the satellites, the whole world can hear him instantaneously. Now if that is possible, then why is it not possible for the whole world to hear about the Word of Jesus Christ by the year 2000?" Hallelujah! This is possible!

Is it Possible?

I want to ask you this question: Is it possible? I'll try it again: Is it possible? Once again, is it possible? I asked that same question at the Second Lausanne Congress. If it is not possible, it is not that God has not given us the tools. Rather it is us. We're the hindrance—our lack of vision, lack of cooperation, lack of commitment, lack of unity, and a combination of all these.

I am so grateful to see the import and the involvement and the support of this global movement today. We are anticipating seeing a mighty tide and outpouring of the Holy Spirit among us, an unprecedented unity and commitment in a consultation in Seoul, Korea in May of next year. I have no doubt that if the movement keeps on going and growing in the next 8 months, we will have the needed cooperation and global trust to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord by the year 2000.

To reach the world for the Lord, to intensify evangelism and missions, we need all patterns of missionary thrust.

By that, I mean *all* patterns, *all* peoples—from all peoples to all peoples. For two centuries, God has used the Western missionary. They have done a marvelous job. The fact that I'm a Christian spokesman is proof of that ministry. Western missionaries came to China and brought the Gospel to my grandfather's generation. When we became Christians, we were called by God to participate into the worldwide redemptive movement.

Never forget the early Western missionaries. Never be affected by the beat of different drums. Back in Bangkok in '76, we heard about the word *moratorium*. Of course, as evangelicals, none of us believed them, nor did we agree with them. But recently, there is another type of moratorium on the horizon—another theory to come out that says that the Western missionaries cost too much money, that with the same amount of money we can have ten times more national workers. Well, mathematically speaking, that's fine; but somehow, God's adding machine is very different from ours.

I sometimes worry when I talk to my board about various projects. I'm really scared when a board member takes out an adding machine and starts doing this type of calculation. I'm really afraid of that! According to our mathematics, four minus two is two. But according to God's mathematics, it isn't. I haven't seen one church in the world become poor because of mission giving and mission sending. Just to the contrary! The more you give, the richer you become, both monetarily and spiritually. Therefore, in God's mathematics, as far as missions are concerned, four minus two is six. I've told many people that, and many have believed it and seen it work.

I believe that both the Western missionaries and the Third World missionaries will go to the final frontiers hand in hand, and shoulder to shoulder. We need global missions from the global Church. So let's give a mora-

torium to moratorium itself!

The laity, and believers themselves, are the key of evangelism, missions and world evangelization. It has been said that to get the Christian out of the pew is one of the most difficult parts in Church ministry. But the fact remains that unless the people in the pew really go out and start witnessing, church evangelization is not going to come to pass. Somehow, God's people have to move to the lost world.

Someone has made a humorous variation of the hymn, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," that says, "Like a mighty fortress march the church of God; brothers, we are treading where we've always trod. We are all divided; many bodies flee. Low in faith and less in hope, less in charity." The seriousness of this rendition is that it is true, at least to a degree.

While the first Reformation put the *Word* into the hand of the laity, today we are facing a second Reformation which must put the *work* into the hand of the lay believers. Could we, by the grace of God, pray for, promote and expect the following breakthroughs among the laity? Here are three suggestions.

1. That we, by God's grace, start a "One-One" movement in the Church. By One-One, we mean that each layman will bring one person to Christ (and into a viable church) in one year. Just that! Every Christian brings one person to Christ in one year and into a church. That is not a very difficult demand. Most Christians can do this, *if they want to*. If we were to do just that, every year the Church would double. Lay people somehow have to be moved, have to be mobilized, even if they cannot achieve 100% success. Even if we would settle for a 70% success rate, or 60% success—the growth of the Church would still be phenomenal.

2. We also need a "One-in-Ten" movement. First it was one-one, now it's one-ten. What I mean by the one-ten is more than giving one tenth of our

income in tithing; it also means giving one tenth of our time and talent for the Lord's use. We see lack of workers everywhere we go. One pastor couldn't introduce us to another pastor for two years. We need a youth pastors, we need and associate pastors, etc. There is a crying out for dedicated missionaries. If only Christians in the churches would not only give one tenth of their money but also one tenth of their talents, their time—beginning with volunteerism—things would change drastically, giving three hours a week, four hours a week, etc. Somehow the layman, the Christian in the pew, has to be involved in the Lord's work.

3. Then we need a "Fifty-in-One" movement of God. Many of you have already heard about this. This ratio differs according to the local economic and social situation. This means every fifty Christians in a given church should be able to send out one full-time missionary family. I don't mean give fifty dollars here or a hundred dollars there—no, it would mean the whole support for a Christian family to go out in full time mission service. If a church has 500 people, that church should send out ten full-time Christian missionary families or couples for world evangelization.

If we, by God's grace, will pursue in these three areas in the church, it will immensely facilitate evangelism and missions all over the world. We have mentioned sending, and talked about evangelism; and we can not get away from support and money for missions. Again I want to mention Dr. Winter in this matter. For decades he has been advocating living a war-time lifestyle. I know he doesn't always get respondents in this area, particularly from a generation that has been brainwashed by commercialism through daily television.

We should realize that commercialism is one of the biggest enemies of world evangelization. Some of you

will agree with me. My experience in the past three years through Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union bears this out. I have seen wherever commercialism creeps in, the acceptance and responsibility of evangelism creeps out. I've been to the former Soviet Union 16 times in the past three and a half years, and I can see the change. I've been in Eastern Europe six times; I can see the change remarkably clearly.

John Pritchard and others have mentioned that the Church spends over 90% of its money on itself. We are basically a commercialized and a selfish Church today. I hate to say that, but I can say it because I'm also included. I mean that I'm not blameless in this.

We must try to regain our compassion. We are a work-oriented Church today. We are also work-oriented in missions today, similarly to the efficient church that the Lord rebuked in Revelation 2:1-6. All the programs, all the work—everyone is so extremely busy (including myself), but as far as the tender mercy and compassion and love for God, sometimes it has quietly slipped away.

Recently I picked up the September 12 *Time* magazine. It had a story about a South African journalist who received a Pulitzer prize for his photojournalism. He took a picture in Sudan of a very dried up field, where so many had died of starvation. The picture was of a little girl, too weak to walk anymore, dying, crouched on the ground. Behind the little girl was a huge bug vulture, waiting in the bush. He was invited to New York to receive the prize for his photojournalism. He wine, dined, and was honored for these pictures splashed on the newspapers and magazines. Then he went home. Two months after he went home to South Africa, somebody found him sitting in his little red pickup with all the windows rolled up, with a hose connecting the exhaust to his cabin. His lungs were

filled with carbon monoxide. People around the world were shocked and asked, "Why should one in the height of his career and fame take his own life? Why?" Somebody found a note in his truck that read, "I was haunted by the vivid memories of killings, of corpses, of anger and pain, of starving and wounded children, and of trigger-happy men. The pain of life overrides the joy to the point that real joy does not exist anymore."

In the August 1993 issue of DAWN's Newsletter, there was a short article that said, "In a study of 100 of the more prominent leaders mentioned in the Bible, Dr. Bobby Clinton of Fuller Seminary found a startling statistic that less than 30% of them finished well. That means more than two thirds of them were sidetracked, usually by such sins as abuse of power, pride (ego), illicit sexual relationships, or improper use of finances. Two thirds of biblical leaders failed to leave behind the legacy of a life well lived."

The statistics for contemporary leaders are even more tragic. Some estimate that only one in five Christian leaders will reach their potential and will be able to say, together with the Apostle Paul, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." May these words—some suggestion and some reminders—follow us to the cross of our Lord so that we who are involved and committed to world evangelization may finish well. So may it be for God's great glory!

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