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MEGA TRENDS CONFRONTING THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH

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BARBADOS

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INTRODUCTION

The very broad topic assigned to me would require a full five days all by itself to adequately flesh out its full extent. Being given but a few moments, I will try to touch the mountain tops and urge that each of us spend further time reading and reflecting on these issues.

Bishop Dr. Jun Vencer of the Philippines very recently defined the global mega-trends as:

- ✿ The global economic boom
- ✿ A renaissance in the arts
- ✿ The emergence of free-market socialism – particularly in China
- ✿ The dynamic tension of global lifestyles and cultural nationalism
- ✿ The privatisation of the welfare state – education, health services, etc. being privatised.
- ✿ The rise of the Asian Pacific rim
- ✿ The decade of women in leadership
- ✿ The age of biology – microbiology, cloning, etc.
- ✿ Religious revival of the 3rd millennium – Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity are all experiencing resurgence of interest. YWAM is now saying that there is revival in New Zealand. Others are talking of a revival in sections of Argentina and throughout Brazil.
- ✿ The triumph of the individual – the right of the individual becoming more important than the common good.
- ✿ Moving from an industrial society to an information society – a revolutionary change in and of itself.
- ✿ From just technology to high tech/high touch
- ✿ From a national, or even regional, economy to a world economy
- ✿ From short-term to long-term
- ✿ From centralisation to decentralisation
- ✿ From institutional help to self-help
- ✿ From hierarchies to networking
- ✿ From North to South
- ✿ From Either/Or to multiple options

Dr. Vencer has also defined the trends in the North American Church as:

- ✿ Increasing pluralism
- ✿ Less concern for absolute truth. (Increase in breakdown of marriages, increasing number of unmarried couples)
- ✿ Experience as the basis of belief – Peter Wagner now openly teaches that doctrine needs to be formulated on the basis of experience.
- ✿ Market-driven churches flourish
- ✿ 10,000 churches with 2,000 members
- ✿ Churches designing their own programmes rather than using a denominational model.
- ✿ Lay people interested in results more than activities.

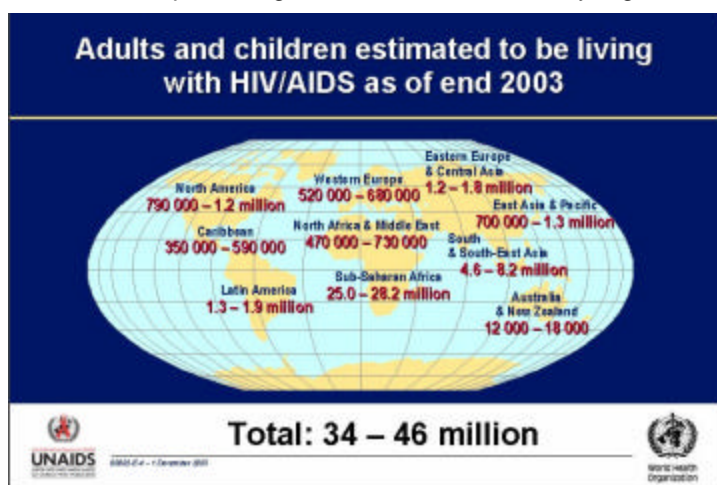
- # Community-service oriented congregations rather than being served.
- # Old denominational distinctives are disappearing
- # New ones are rising

It is critical that as church leaders we understand the times and know what the people of God in the Caribbean should do (1 Chronicles 12:32). The very life of the Church is intertwined with an understanding of the times. Dr. Feliciano Carino of the United Church of Christ (Philippines) has said: "That web of intricate human relations and complex environment of human activity that expresses itself in economics, politics, culture, and religion, and how one analyses it ... is not only a backdrop for efficiency and getting results but seminally loaded with ethical and theological significance and crucial in understanding what Divine purpose is and where Divine presence might be."¹ So let us highlight a few of the issues impacting us.

HUMAN IMMUNO-VIRUS (HIV/AIDS)

At the very top of the list of issues impacting the Church in the Caribbean must be HIV/AIDS because of the devastation that disease will continue to wreck in our island chain. We are fooling ourselves if we quietly think that this disease will not impact our ministries or the people we lead. The global statistics are staggering, with the Caribbean second only to sub-Saharan Africa in the incidence of infection. There are now an estimated 40 million persons globally infected with HIV/AIDS and the number infected is growing by 14,000 daily. The AIDS Epidemic Update December 2003 published by UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation states, "High levels of new HIV infection are persisting and are now matched by high levels of AIDS mortality."

As many as 590,000 of those infected live among us in the Caribbean. It is only a matter of time before every one of us is impacted by the disease through a death in our family or among close friends. The infection rate is also growing among children, now as many as 31,000 in the Caribbean, many of whom are being born with the disease as a result of being born to infected mothers, up to 9,000 in 2003 alone. Some 3.5 million people globally have now died.



HIV/AIDS is essentially a behaviour disease. By that I mean that one cannot catch the disease when someone else sneezes or touches a door handle. One has to become involved in very specific behaviours that involve the exchange of body fluids. The most common method of transfer of the disease in the Caribbean is through sexual contact, and the incidence of male to female infection is growing rapidly. We are long past the stage when we could sit back and rather self-righteously proclaim AIDS to be the judgment of God on homosexuals. The disease is now growing in all demographics of Caribbean society – in all age groups and among both men and women.

A study done in Kenya with assistance from World Relief (USA), demonstrated that young people in the Church had had between five and six sexual partners. I do not know whether this was before they were saved or after salvation, or both. Experience counselling young people in various Caribbean countries leads me to believe we are not very different. A proper study needs to be done. Without empirical evidence I can only say that I suspect a similar trend in the Caribbean. This means that our members are exposing themselves to the behaviour that leads to contraction of the disease. There is no question in my mind that there are members of our churches who have already contracted the disease – some know and are saying nothing while some do not yet know.

¹ Carino, Feliciano V. "Jesus Christ in Asia – Our Journey with Him." Delivered at the Global Christian Forum Asia Consultation, Hong Kong, 2004 April 30.

We have a vested interest in the behaviour of people. We preach a Christ who came to transform character and so reform behaviour. We strongly believe that the blood of Christ washes out the stain of sin and empowers people to live in accordance with the principles of Scripture. We also believe that the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is intended to equip us for evangelism *and* holy living. We therefore have a powerful contribution to make in the fight against AIDS.

The Barbados Evangelical Association has produced an education brochure on HIV/AIDS to help our young people understand the disease. We must go further. We need to be in the forefront of the battle with a strong message on abstinence.

Uganda is one of the few countries in the world where the incidence of HIV infection is significantly decreasing. The education campaign there utilises the use of condoms and abstinence. The Church is strongly interested in abstinence and we have to come to the wicket with well-thought out programmes that will encourage Caribbean young people, churched and unchurched, to abstain from sex outside of marriage and to be committed to faithful, life-long, monogamous relationships. The governments of the Caribbean have not been promoting abstinence and our people are continuing to die.

I was encouraged recently to learn that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has incorporated abstinence in its fight against AIDS. In Barbados abstinence has been left to the Church. Just last month (January 2005) a major rally sponsored by Heartbeat Ministries around the theme “keep your underwear on” saw some 3,000 youth commit themselves to virginity and chastity. We must become involved if lives/souls are to be saved for eternity. We must partner with governmental agencies in fighting this twenty-first century plague.

We have the answer. What are we doing with that answer?

GLOBALISATION

Globalisation is increasingly impacting our way of life and is a major socio-economic issue for us to grapple with. Defining globalisation has not been easy. Ramesh Ramsaran, professor in International Economic Relations at the Institute of International Relations on the UWI St. Augustine Campus, defines globalisation this was: “The essential thrust of globalisation revolves around the increasing internationalisation of production, the liberalisation and integration of markets for goods and services, the removal of restrictions on the free flow of capital across national borders, and a rapid increase in knowledge.”² These four essential thrusts of globalisation have serious implications for all of us. There is no country in the world that is not grappling with the impact of globalisation.

While many have espoused the potential benefits of globalisation not many are asking the serious questions that need to be asked and reflecting on the issues of importance to us. There are potential benefits, but I do not have the time to reflect on these. Since they are well promoted by the politicians and the media I shall leave you to glean these from the information that daily inundates us. Instead I want to ask a few questions. The scope of this paper does not permit me to give comprehensive answers to the questions I raise. I can only hope that my questions will create in you the desire to know more.

Is globalisation value-free? In other words, does globalisation come with a set of values? If it does, whose values are being promoted and inculcated in our region, in our cultures, in our churches? I want to suggest to you that globalisation is not value-free, that at its heart globalisation is driven by the acquisition ethic – the need to acquire more things – and Christians would closely equate the acquisition ethic with covetousness, greed, and the love of mammon. As Christians we have a vested interest in values. Will we examine the values of globalisation, hold them up against the values of Scripture, and lead our people in Biblical principles despite the political consequences?

What political philosophy drives globalisation? A lot of lip service is given to the political philosophy of democracy. Yet, in reality, globalisation is not driven by democracy but by oligarchy – and oligarchy is the rule of the rich. Examine the global institutions with me. The United Nations espouses the concept of

² Ramsaran, Ramesh. “The Globalisation Phenomenon in Perspective.” *Caribbean Survival and the Global Challenge*. Kingston: Ina Randle Publishers, 2002.

democracy but its Security Council gives five nations individually the power to veto decisions of which they do not approve. There can be 14 votes in favour, but only one is needed to veto. That is oligarchy, not democracy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) requires 85% of the vote to carry a decision. The USA has 16% of the votes. Effectively only those decisions approved by the USA are passed, even if the entire 84% of the remainder is in favour. Is this democracy or oligarchy? The World Bank is 51% owned by the USA. No vote can pass without the permission of the majority shareholder. Only the World Trade Organisation (WTO) actually has one vote per nation and attempts to operate as a democracy, hence the controversy that surrounds many WTO meetings. There are serious moves to change this reality in the WTO, to move the WTO from an attempt at genuine democracy to the predominant international philosophy of governance – oligarchy.

This situation has prompted George Monbiot in his book The Age of Consent³ to point out that essentially democracy stops at the border. In other words, democracy is an internal, national philosophy. Oligarchy is the international political philosophy that dominates international relations. Is this acceptable? Am I the only one concerned? Will we urge the principles of democracy in international relations? Are we content to move into an age where businessmen sitting thousands of miles away can make decisions that alter our lives and these businessmen have no accountability to the electorate of our countries? This is already the reality of globalisation.

But it's just politics and maybe some economics. Does God care? The books of Kings and Chronicles record the working of God in the political life of a nation. Daniel, Joseph, and Nehemiah were godly men chosen by God to serve in what were essentially pagan political contexts while Esther was called by God to marry a pagan, polygamous king, join his harem, and influence government policy from the bedroom.

David, the man after God's own heart, was essentially a politician and ruler and also renowned as a great worshiper. Moses, the meekest man in all the earth, was an astute politician as well as spiritual leader. Does God care? God raised up a prophet to bring revival to one of the wickedest, most pagan, gentile cities of his time – Nineveh. Jonah wrapped himself in patriotism and fled in the opposite direction. But God intervened and sent him back. Jonah preached half the message he was given, but revival broke out anyway. Does God care?

Are market forces perfect? Under the growing dominance of globalisation legislation is to be removed so that market forces will govern the economy. Yet no country in the world has ever achieved prosperity without regulations in the market place. That market forces are not perfect is clear from the major financial scandals like Enron.

It is also a reality that the unbridled movement of currency can destabilise an entire country. Ramsaran points out that "the recent financial crises in Latin America and Asia were made possible by the easy movement of capital ..." For example, when a country opens its economy and floats its currency a speculator can come in and borrow short-term the local equivalent of US\$100 million using assets held elsewhere as collateral. That speculator then uses the borrowed money to purchase US dollars and instantly negatively changes the exchange rate. He then repays the loan at the new exchange rate and pockets the difference leaving the people of that nation where he does not live in a much worse condition with a devalued currency, and spiraling prices.

Here is a hypothetical example. With the Jamaica dollar at J\$50 to US\$1, a speculator can borrow J\$5000 million. When he converts it to US dollars he forces the devaluation of the Jamaica dollar to J\$60 to US\$1 and his US\$100 million is now worth J\$6000 million. He then repays the J\$5000 and walks away a few days later with J\$1000 million, or US\$16.7 million, clear profit with no investment being made in Jamaica. Can we surrender our countries to market forces alone?

But it's just economics. Does God care? Yet David declares: "My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them"" (Psalms 35:10).

³ Monbiot, George. *The Age of Consent*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.

What is the future of the nation state? Increasingly international writers are pointing out that globalisation is taking us from independence to interdependence. Those of us who grew up in the 1960s and 70s highly value the independence of our island states. Globalisation challenges these concepts of independence. Unless we move to interdependence and surrender some of our sovereignty our nations and region will be left behind, we are told. The controversy surrounding the so-called “ship-rider agreement” not so long ago is a case in point. We see before our eyes the building of a global structure that could, but not necessarily will, facilitate the world government of the Anti-Christ. How do we respond to this?

In the midst of this is the concept of regionalisation. While we’ve been arguing about the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) – designing something that the Caribbean Policy Development Centre recently described as too bureaucratic to work – the rest of the world considers us to be a part of Latin America. In Latin America English-speaking people are statistically insignificant. Already the former Minister of Education (now Attorney General) of Barbados has called for every Barbadian child to be taught Spanish to a conversational level to cope with the realities of living in a Spanish region. How will this impact us, our self-image, and our economies? I don’t know.

Are we ready for pluralism? Pluralism is the philosophy that all truth is equal. In the post-modern philosophy that now dominates Western thinking, there are no absolute truths. We have become accustomed to structural pluralism where ethnicities and cultures live together in harmony without dominating or disrespecting each other. Are we ready to respond to spiritual pluralism where Hindu truth, Islamic truth, and Christian truth are all considered equal in our societies? Trinidad and Guyana have had to deal with this form of pluralism for a lot longer than most of us. Are we ready for our governments to invite non-Christian religions to pray and participate in national celebrations because in a post-modern democracy all religious truth is equal? Do we understand that when we object we are labeled as intolerant? How do we propose to uphold absolute truth in an age that does not recognise absolutes?

Our position on absolute truth in Jesus and the Holy Scripture defines us as fundamentalists. In a world that is at war with terrorists who are religious fundamentalists how do we define our commitment to absolute truth while respecting others’ beliefs and cultures? As Caribbean societies we have not generally grappled with this and as Evangelicals we’re at the top of the list of those defined as fundamentalist and therefore bigoted. Do we understand that this can be a step towards Christian persecution in these islands?

Before taking up the idea of persecution, let me speak briefly to the:

DECRIMINALISATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY AND PROSTITUTION

Because of the rapid spread of AIDS and the increasing domination of globalisation, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and prostitution is coming to the front of the Caribbean’s legislative agenda. The Guyana Evangelical Fellowship (GEF) produced a document to fight the inclusion of sexual preference in the country’s constitution as a protected minority in Guyana. The Barbados Evangelical Association (BEA) used GEF’s document as a basis for producing its own paper to fight the decriminalisation of buggery and prostitution in Barbados.

Are we ready to stand in the market place and use the language of the market place to fight for truth and righteousness? Do we value Proverbs 14:34, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people”? We urgently need to understand these issues of righteousness and address them in the language understood in the market place or we will find ourselves pushed further and further to the fringe of society. When we address the general society with our own buzz words they do not understand us.

We have to confront the gay agenda. This agenda is posted on the web and is not being carried out in the dark. Are we prepared to join the battle with statistics, non-Evangelical language, and a clear grasp of the issues? If we only quote Scripture we will not be heard. However, we must be clear on the biblical issues as Scripture is being twisted to mean the opposite of what the Holy Spirit intended. We must understand the practices of homosexuals and the diseases that are spread such as HPV, hepatitis, gonorrhoea, syphilis, gay bowel syndrome, and anal cancer – all potentially life-threatening.

There is quite a lot of evidence that homosexuality is not genetic. This strikes the gay agenda at its heart because they promote the concept that gays cannot change. Yet there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that gays can and do change their lifestyles, especially through the power of the Gospel. There is also quite a large amount of empirical evidence to demonstrate that gay and lesbian relationships have more than double the violence that heterosexual couples experience.

We can only successfully confront this issue when we understand all the ramifications and are able to frame our concerns in the language of the market place with an unapologetically biblical foundation.

On the matter of the decriminalisation of prostitution in order to legitimise the “sex industry” we must also be vigilant. A decriminalised sex industry aids the trafficking in women and children. According to Time magazine of October 20, 2003 some 500,000 women and children are trafficked to Europe annually for the sex industry. In January 2004 the US Government reported that some 4 million women and children are trafficked annually across the world into prostitution and slavery. These numbers are staggering and most of these women are from the Developing World. It is noteworthy that the trafficking of women and children is now considered more lucrative than the drug trade because women and children can be “re-used.”

We cannot shrug this off as irrelevant to the Caribbean. Women from Haiti and the Dominican Republic are already being trafficked to other Caribbean islands for the purposes of prostitution. Evidence now exists to suggest that 100,000 women and children are being trafficked from Latin America annually, more than 80% for sexual purposes. BEA has urged the Government of Barbados to ensure that the Caribbean Single Market and Economy has strong legislation that defines prostitution as violence against women, criminalises the men who use women in this manner, and provides stiff penalties for this kind of trafficking. We need other voices to be raised on this matter ... and soon.

The decriminalisation of homosexuality and prostitution will potentially unravel the moral fabric of the Caribbean in a hurry. We ignore this at the peril of our people.

PERSECUTION

If the gay agenda succeeds we will be several steps closer to the active persecution of Evangelical Christians in the Caribbean. At first this sounds a bit ridiculous. Yet history teaches us that persecution is the norm for Christians and we are living in the exception. It is only a matter of time before we revert to the norm. Rev. Richard Howell, General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, recently pointed out that “The Church in Asia understands the theology of the cross – extreme suffering. It is the concept of suffering – pain – that brings the Church together.”⁴ So does the Church of the Middle East, the Church of Eastern Europe, the Church of North Africa, the Church in Columbia and other Latin American countries. When will it be our turn again?

Pluralism cannot accept our belief in absolute truth. We are therefore branded as intolerant and pushed to the fringe of society. The gay agenda defines us as bigoted. The former state churches portray us as “small, wayside” churches. Disinformation is the first step towards persecution.

In North America and Europe Christians who reject gay lifestyles are seen as people who hate and these things are being redefined as “hate crimes.” On these continents there are also attempts to redefine the Bible as “hate literature” because of its strong stance against homosexuality. A pastor in Scandinavia was recently sentenced to one month in jail for preaching against homosexuality.

These are all early signs and do not by any means indicate that persecution is inevitable. However, are we prepared to think through the Biblical position on persecution and begin to prayerfully prepare our people? According to Hebrews 12:2 there is a joy that is connected to the aftermath of the cross – but the cross must be first endured. I have heard a number of Christian leaders from countries where the Church is actively persecuted ask that when we pray that we not pray for the persecution to cease, but pray that they will be faithful to Jesus in the midst of the persecution. They count it an honour and a joy to suffer for Him. How do we plan to respond to persecution in our islands?

⁴ Personal comments made in the opening session of the Global Christian Forum Asia Consultation, 2004 April 30.

During this CONECAR we have included a workshop on preparing the Caribbean Church for persecution. I hope we've been able to take advantage of this opportunity to learn from someone who has studied this in detail. A number of Bible training institutions in the West are now providing courses on suffering as they prepare the next generation of Church leaders. Please heed my call and prepare pour people.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is also changing the way we live and the way we do ministry. The current technology has ushered in the information age. We're connected like never before. The computer has made possible email and the worldwide web. Communication that used to be expensive and slow is now fast and cheap. The cell phone has given us new mobility while staying connected. Just last year (2004) my Mum had a heart attack and six weeks later went home to be with the Lord. Since every family member has a cell phone it was easy to monitor the situation wherever we were and quickly respond as needed.

I grew up in an oral generation when story-telling was an art and mass entertainment was the radio. The generation now growing up is very visual. Cable television has given many of our homes incredible choices in home entertainment. The computer and computer games have moved our young people into a visual entertainment experience unimaginable to us older ones. As information has mushroomed, the way we handle that information has changed. Television news stories used to be 3-5 minutes. They are now down to less than a minute and full of visual images. More and more people are turning to the internet for news rather than the newspaper.

How does this impact our ministry?

It's a no brainer that the computer is an effective way to track membership.

It is an increasingly easier way to study in sermon preparation. Excellent study material is now available on CD that can be loaded onto our computers. This reduces time in studying as we can now access information in a couple of clicks on the computer rather than searching through books and ending up with several heavy volumes surrounding us. Those volumes are all available on CD and we can make better use of our time.

Some of us have also figured out that utilising computer technology during the worship can enhance the worship experience. Instead of using hymnbooks and memory we can project the words of the hymns and choruses we are using in a service. We reduce long-term expense in having to replace hymnbooks and can create a flow in worship that is not possible when the worship leader has to stop to announce the next song to be sung. It means greater preparation on the part of our worship leaders and musicians, and that is a good thing.

The technology is also available to enhance the experience of our people during the preaching of the Word. As I am doing in this presentation, the visual aspects of available technology can enable our people to more readily interact with the material we are preaching and when we are able to use seeing as well as hearing we significantly increase the retention capacity of our people. There is also the reality that we now know that people think in different ways. Some are very linear and logical while some need graphics to enable them to understand. This means we preachers have to learn new skills – for example, how to use PowerPoint – or we need to prepare Sundays' sermons by Wednesday so that some gifted volunteer in the congregation can prepare the PowerPoint for us. It is also increasingly easy to download material from the Internet, as I did with the information on AIDS shared earlier in this presentation.

Everything going on around us should also suggest that we need to reduce the time of our sermons. Now I realise I'm venturing onto dangerous ground because the preaching of the Word is paramount. At the same time the generation in which we live is increasingly dealing with speed. A monologue for 60 minutes is no longer considered an effective way to communicate. The Jewish methodology for preaching was to sit and interact with the audience, answering questions and responding to comments. We have embraced the methodology of Greek oratory and monologue. There is nothing wrong with that, but as the world around us changes we need to rethink methodology if there is a more effective way to present the Word of God so that Word has a real opportunity to transform the hearers as they interact with it. This means

change, and change is intimidating. It does not mean we've been wrong all these years. It is that the world around us is changing and we need to adapt to the environment in which we now minister.

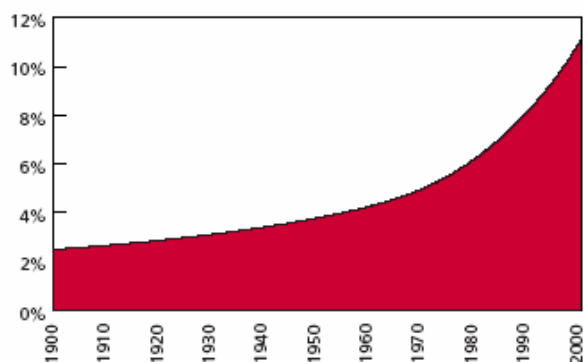
The cell phone provides a new way to mobilise a prayer network. The use of texting is a cheap, quick method of passing a prayer request so that people get it quickly and concisely and can start praying immediately without having to be at home to receive a phone call or fax or download an email. As cell phones spread further through our cultures, texting will become a way of life as it has done in many countries in Asia. I was quite amused recently in the Philippines to see a large road sign that read, "No texting while crossing street." It is not unusual in Manila to see people walking down the street texting on their cell phones. Barbados has only very recently liberalised the telephone industry. Already two members of my extended family communicate with me almost exclusively by text. We can harness this technology if we think outside the box.

EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Many of us grew up with a good British colonial education based on memorisation and regurgitation in the exam. This system served us well in the past, particularly to produce good colonials who were not analytical. This system is being superseded by an education system that teaches our children to think analytically and critically. Are we ready for a generation of young people who will analyse our sermons and think in critical terms – not critical in the sense of criticising but in the sense of being strategic in their thinking? The relationship between pastor and congregation will change and new leadership skills will be needed. Can we engage the changes needed in such a way that we lead our people into the future rather than struggle with our people at every turn?

UNPRECEDENTED CHURCH GROWTH

In the midst of all of this we have seen the Church grow globally in an unprecedented manner. During the twentieth century we've seen the number of Christians grow from less than 3% of the world's population to over 10%. Just in the last 30 years we've seen amazing progress. In 1974 only half the world's population had ready access to the Gospel. That has now grown to two-thirds, with just one-third without ready access. Still we face the reality that 74% of our missionaries and full-time workers are concentrating on the areas already saturated with Jesus' eternity-changing message. May I remind us of the words of Jesus in *Matthew 24:14*, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."



OUR RESPONSE

Our default setting for response is that this all points to the soon return of Jesus. That response should cause us to live more holy and work harder. However, if that is our only response we're a bit like the ostrich with his head in the sand and his butt in the air! Steve Murrell writing in *Evangelicals Today* magazine comments: "Because of our rapture-any-moment mentality, the separation of church and state deception and our evangelical obsession with the individual, we have missed half of the point of the Matthew 28 apostolic mandate. We make disciples but we do not disciple nations. We reach out to people groups, but not to political groups. We expect moral change, but not societal change."⁵

We need to ensure that we deal with existing realities and leave for the next generation a better ministry, if Jesus has not returned. I am old enough to remember that in the mid-twentieth century everyone seemed to believe that Jesus would be back before 1984. Then there was a lot of hype and focus on the year 2000. We're still here in 2005 and a new generation is growing up. What heritage are we preparing

⁵ Murrell, Steve. "God and Government." *Evangelicals Today*, Volume XXX Number 02. Manila: Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, March-April 2004.

to leave them? In October 2003 I visited the city of Uppsala in Sweden to attend a global peace conference. Uppsala has the National Cathedral of the Church of Sweden. It is an imposing structure designed to impress. It took 175 years to build. That's generational thinking. Can we engage in such thinking? Could we start something that would take 50 years to come to fruition, far less 175 years?



May I suggest a few things to fashion our response:

1. A strategic, analytical examination of the "Church." The word "church" has become associated with building, programme, and institution. Biblically "church" is none of these things – it is people. Church does not exist to maintain the *status quo*. Church exists to foment revolution in lifestyles through biblical discipleship, to challenge the structures of evil in society, and to build God's kingdom in the hearts of men and women. Robert Lewis has defined church as: "A community of people who stand firm in the truth over time against raging currents of opposition and who present living proof of a loving God to a watching world."⁶ My own definition of the Church is: "A universal community of people in blood covenant with God being disciplined to be radically different and expressed as a local community of people."
2. Once we define "church" as people, we need to enable and empower the people to function as church (salt and light) in the society. We have restricted church to Sunday morning at a specific time, in a specific location, with a specific programme or order of service. Yet if church is people then church is church 24/7. Church remains church every morning, but we have been conditioned by our mindset to equip the church to function when it is gathered on Sunday morning and have not equipped it to function as church 24/7. Lewis has written: "The truth is finally revealed: *Anything* done in the name of Christ, in the name of love is ministry. *Anything*.... We must broaden and enrich the concept of personal ministry: we must bless, affirm, and be willing to release our people into areas that may not directly benefit the church (local congregation) itself."⁷

My challenge to us all in the light of all that is happening around us regionally and globally, is to equip the church to function as the church 24/7 when we are scattered through the community and not only when we're gathered in our buildings. Any proclamation of the love of God to a dying world without incarnation of that love in practical expression is a hollow and irrelevant message. The Church is consumed with talking inside its buildings while this post-modern generation longs to see a practical demonstration of the reality of Christ outside on the street. We have to balance public proclamation of the "Good News" with congregational incarnation of that Good News in the community. While we've all caught the truth that salvation is the gift of God and not of works, many of our people are yet to grasp the very next verse: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). Let us release them and equip them to do good works in the world that the world might see the glory of God and that His glory might fill the earth like the waters cover the sea.

Dr. Wonsuk Ma, a Korean who serves as Vice President for Academic Affairs of the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (Philippines), in a paper presented April 30, 2004 at the Global Christian Forum Asia Consultation, strongly made the point that evangelicals globally have historically empowered the poor and made God "Someone who is immensely involved in our daily [lives]."⁸ This pungently highlights our powerful heritage spanning well over two centuries. Let us claim that heritage and make it a practical part of our worship and ministry. We are in danger of becoming so heavenly minded we become no earthly good.

I would like to suggest that Peter was not just thinking about the Church gathered when he said, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may

⁶ Lewis, Robert. *The Church of Irresistible Influence*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

⁷ Ibid, p.99.

⁸ Dr. Wonsuk Ma. "Jesus Christ in Asia: Our Journey With Him as Pentecostal Believers. Paper presented to the Global Christian Forum Asia Consultation, Hong Kong, 2004 April 30.

be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Christians have altered the course of nations.

Around 500 A.D. Ireland was a pagan nation steeped in slave-trading and idolatry. One man changed the course of Irish history, Patrick. During some 30 years of ministry Patrick helped plant 700 churches and schools, trained over 3,000 missionaries, and brought an end to slavery in Ireland. He changed a nation in less than one generation.

William Wilberforce devoted his life to serving God in the British House of Commons by ending African chattel slavery and reforming the morals of the United Kingdom. William Wilberforce toiled for 46 years, only achieving the end of African slavery in the British Empire three days before his death. Here in our islands, men like former slave Baptist Deacon Sharpe of Jamaica⁹ gave their lives in pursuit of the abolition of slavery. A statue of Deacon Sharpe today stands in Montego Bay with the Deacon holding an open Bible in his hands. This was the church scattered penetrating the society with salt and light to transform society.

In 1768 a young Scots pastor, John Witherspoon, resigned his pastorate in Scotland and moved to the New World to become president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). While many of Witherspoon's students became pastors and missionaries one became president of the new USA, 10 became cabinet members, 21 senators, 39 congressmen, one supreme court justice, one-fifth of those who signed the American Declaration of Independence, and one-sixth of the delegates to the US Constitution Convention. Witherspoon is called “the man who shaped the men who shaped America.” The Church scattered throughout the society, disciplining and transforming society by being agents of change just as salt and light are agents of change in nature.

More recently, Jember Teferra was the wife of the former mayor of Addis Ababa during the last years of Haile Selassie's reign in Ethiopia. The coup that overthrew the emperor landed Jember's husband in prison. She carried two meals a day to the prison for him for three years. Then she spent five years in prison herself with 150 women who hated her privileged position. After her release, Jember went to England to earn her master's degree in community development. Then she returned home to work with 40,000 inner-city people, helping them build houses, working to provide schools, jobs, sewers, toilets and well-baby clinics. She has become the “conscience of the city” there in the slums.¹⁰

One person submitted to the Lordship of Jesus can make a difference.

3. It is urgent that we move outside the box in which we think and plan. Our boxes were developed during a time and by conditions that have changed significantly. Our boxes were not wrong in the time they were developed. Now we need to step outside of these boxes and ask the Holy Spirit to empower us to think in terms of our contemporary situations so that our message remains relevant.
4. As we move outside the think-box we've been given by those who have gone before, we will see brand new opportunities for ministry that will significantly impact the society in which we minister. We must remain constantly open to God and allow Him to show us new openings and unusual opportunities.
5. The Church must provide apostolic leadership within the community. By this I do not just mean conferring the title “apostle” on a few leaders within the Church gathered, but equipping the Church scattered to take apostolic ministry throughout the society – to the marketplace, the school, the village, the corporate boardroom, etc. Ezekiel makes an interesting comment about Sodom, “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen” (Ezekiel 16:49-50). Do we know any

⁹ Sherlock, Philip and Hazel Bennett. *The Story of the Jamaican People*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.

¹⁰ Bakke, Ray. *A Theology as Big as the City*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

communities where the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer? Do we need to enable and equip blood-bought, Spirit-filled, sold-out disciples to go make a difference?

6. The Church must be a prophetic voice in the community. Again, I do not mean a few leaders within the Church gathered speaking to national issues. I mean the Church scattered empowered to speak into every committee they are on, every business or social meeting in which they participate, in their schools and work places anointed by the Holy Spirit to speak into their situations with the power of God to see change.

There is a quote from Shakespeare that some of you know I'm very fond of. In the play Julius Caesar, Shakespeare gives Brutus a memorable speech. Caesar has been assassinated and the battle for the empire is joined. Brutus and Cassius are in heated discussion, and Brutus says, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea we are now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures."¹¹

The current is full! Take it now!

¹¹ Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 3.