# The Straight Line: A New Paradigm in World Missions

Our response as mission leaders and facilitators helping to maintain vital connections, DRAWING new ones for missionaries and ENABLING new ministry, will be directly dependent on our commitment to sharing both the ownership of the mission vision and its resources to carry out the task to reach the unreached world for Christ. This is the straight line paradigm we need to adopt.

by Eric Watt

hat is the shortest distance between A and Z? A straight line, right? Therefore, in our ever-changing world, the process of getting through the clutter of information to make sound decisions, build effective strategies, and actually impact the unreached world with the Gospel is taking new form.

In earlier eras evangelism was carried out free form by individual evangelists who went "as the Spirit led," and there was great initial success. But, as the centuries rolled on, great barriers were erected to the Gospel-restrictive governments, persecution, opposing religions and the like. These obstacles required huge resources to surmount. Without resources or know-how to overcome these obstacles, evangelists took their cue from global corporations and organized large denominational and para-church miniswith the power to recruit the resources necessary, including personnel, diplomacy, and emergency mobilization. Individual evangelists joined these organizations and relied on their leaders to direct them to the best place to work.

The "chiefs" (denominational leaders, mission executives, megaorganization CEO's, etc.) became the most effective ones to lead. Individual evangelists could accomplish some good, but only the "chiefs" had the knowledge base, the resources, and the experience to

plan the large initiatives necessary to do the job and especially to penetrate restricted access nations. Since the 1970s, the positive influence of this mission organizational model has achieved phenomenal results.

Though each model has been effective during the era for which it was designed, corporate driven missions has been fueled and, at times, hampered by the necessity of honoring the desires of their respective constituencies over the priority of world evangelization. Some organizations have maintained their commitment to world evangelization by tirelessly motivating and mobilizing their constituency with renewed vision for the unreached. The positive result of such persuasive power has been the ability of Wycliffe, Gospel Recordings, The JESUS Film Project, and others to provide effective tools in hundreds of new languages for the first time.

Others, perhaps more confined to meeting the obligation of their constituencies (some denominations, for instance), continue to direct resources where a large number of similar resources already exist. The negative impact of this strategy is self evident and common—missionaries "tripping" over each other, overlapping evangelistic initiatives in "responsive" fields with little resources remaining for the final frontiers.

## NEW STRUCTURES

However, the usefulness of each of these models of itinerant evangelism and corporate structure is changing. Today, the world has grown so complex, with hundreds of countries, thousands of cities, and tens of thousands of people groups, all inter-relating in a complex maze of culture, religion and language, that the corporate headquarters can't know nor effectively direct everything. Now, it is the mission worker who (along with others in his network) must become knowledgeable in his niche-the city or people group he has targeted-and must be able to advise the corporate headquarters on an evangelistic strategy that also incorporates a network of other organizations.

Does this mean, then, that the missionary agency/corporate headquarters with its role in casting vision for world evangelization should be abandoned? Not at all. Without this vital role Christians would be tempted to lessen their commitment to the Great Commission. However, the old paradigm is giving way to new and changing roles. In every area of global life-from the secular to religiousthe "straight line" process (sparked by new technologies in communications and information) has caused a shift in the relationship between the corporate headquarters and the field. While the missionary remains the servant of his people group, the corporate headquarters, in effect, is

becoming the servant of the missionary.

The AD2000 Movement has helped to foster this new paradigm in missions by catalyzing the Christians (not just the professional missions industry) toward the unreached people of the 10/40 Window. It is now a fairly common experience for a church to "adopt" a people group or send their own teams and students to become active mobilizing on behalf of an unreached people, and even for prospective career missionaries to approach various agencies with a pre-selected field (people group) of interest.

#### Directive Ownership

As churches, students, business persons, health care professionals and other individuals catch the vision for the Gospel for Every Person and the Church for Every People, they also desire directive ownership in that vision. I can still remember an intense conversation in 1992 between a friend and his missions executive. In the process of field assignment. the executive's initial question, "Are you committed to the XYZ missions organization or not?" led to finding ways to serve both the vision of the agency and the mission. My friend's initial concerns were not a matter of institutional allegiance, but they were centered on a call to minister among a people group and not serve wherever the agency might want to send his family. The resolution was found by each party recognizing their need for ownership in the vision by mutually affirming the calls of both the individual and the missions agency.

A good example is my friend Victor (who lives in New Delhi, India) who has established a core advisory team for his church planting effort. He looks to key individuals in the United States and Singapore and his organizational leaders in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) for assistance in building the strategy God has given him for New Delhi. He is not an associate or appointed national leader of a North American or European mission

organization, nor is he an employee implementing someone else's vision. These, of course, are not negatives but they do represent a different mind-set. God chose Victor to impact the unreached in New Delhi, and Victor's "straight line" detours past marching orders from those he does not know, a place to work, or a

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monthly stipend—God has birthed a vision in his heart. What Victor needs is to draw a "straight line" connecting his vision with the accountability and resources necessary to see it accomplished.

No doubt your "straight line" is changing, too. Mine has. In 1990, my wife and I were privileged to go through a training offered by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board. At the heart of this personal re-orientation to missions was the concept of facilitating other organizations and individuals to work among unreached people where God was about to work (Luke 10:1-3). We committed at that time to focus our ministry in Central Asia and to also help others serve Strategy Coordinators/Facilitators. Soon afterwards, I began helping people re-draw their "straight lines" to build effective mission strategies linking vision with resources (knowledge, finance, personnel) in North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Subcontinent, China and Southeast Asia.

We have grown together, striving for both an orthodoxy (valid core beliefs) and a flexible orthopraxy (Scriptural valid practices) for mission and church planting.

### THE BIG CHANGE

In the process, we have stumbled into something big-as big as a sea-change for a naval fleet. The "straight line" between the local church and the seasoned field veteran no longer needs a massive corporate headquarters to direct their efforts. Instead, it needs a facilitator to help MAINTAIN the connections and DRAW NEW ones. The difference is as big as the difference between a single mainframe computer driving thousands of otherwise powerless terminals, and the Internet quietly connecting tens of thousands of powerful, independent personal computers with a simple protocol enabling global communications.

Victor, for example, finds "straight line" connecting with hundreds (I hope it will soon be thousands) of other Christians living around the globe whose focus is the same thing—a thriving New Testament style witness of Christ and His Kingdom among the peoples living in New Delhi. When he has a project, we help him implement it. When he comes up against a barrier that he can't solve locally, we attempt to find some piece of knowledge that will help him overcome it. When he needs something done, like a Scripture translated, a copy of the "JESUS" Film, etc., we attempt to help him get it done. When he needs personal and spiritual accountability we are there to help offer resources and relationships.

### The AD 2000 MOVEMENT

This movement has captured the ethos of this change. Yes, there are the dangers of "lone rangers" wreaking havoc in sensitive areas and individuals/ churches seeming to do more harm than good. But there is the reality that millions of people are praying to the Lord of the Harvest; hundreds of new, developing

world missions organizations are at work among the unreached, and local churches committing to pray, to give, and to go in an unprecedented manner. One of the strategic abilities of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement has been its ability to bring together those working through different paradigms to a common focus and goal. As a catalyst, the Movement has awakened a sleeping giant—the Church—and has caused her to pray!

This catalyst role may be a larger part of the future of a mission organization. In this new role we must refrain from recruiting workers, and instead allow ourselves to be recruited. As the Body of Christ continues to catch the vision of God's work in the Harvest, she will want to play her rightful role. Prayer movements, church mobilization and short-term mission endeavors are increasingly looking for places where they can "plug in." In this respect our role as missions leaders should be to strategically mobilize as well as fan into flame the gifts and callings evident in their lives.

We must also seek out people whose vision matches the vision God has given to us in world evangelization, and then do everything we can to assist them—serving them with connections rather than attempting to direct them with orders. Admittedly, this sounds risky. Allowing individuals, churches, students, etc. to more actively engage in the missionary enterprise does create risk, but also pays great rewards.

Last year during the political and economic crisis in Indonesia, a friend of mine (an American) stayed behind when many other expatriates temporarily left the country. Many people desired to communicate with him and share their hopes, concerns and prayers. Years ago, before the changes in technology, letters would have crossed the oceans, or phone lines would have been jammed by concerned friends and relatives. These would have offered a brief insight into the tragedy of each day.

But today, Clark, sent by an agency and serving the church planting efforts of an indigenous church movement, communicated to us directly through email. We began to interface without an intermediary, discussing everything from CNN to the spiritual needs of the people there.

What happened? Churches in Los Angeles, aware of the need in Indonesia and inspired by a ministry in Houston, began to provide containers of relief supplies to the needy in Indonesia. The Christians in Indonesia took these food and clothing goods and used city-wide distributions to express the love and mercy of Christ. The organization Clark serves with, Indonesian Harvest Outreach, did not set an agenda nor direct the needs of the local churches. They caught the vision of facilitating the resources of churches in one part of the globe to meet the real needs of Christians in Indonesia. The Indonesians on the other hand did not require a directive from an agency or a national organization. They got together, requested a blessing from the new PM (which they received) and began to use "Love Indonesia" as an evangelism outreach to those in need. Soon hundreds of churches across the archipelago were working together physically demonstrating God's love, and simultaneously providing thousands of their fellow Indonesians an opportunity to receive physical and spiritual nourishment in Jesus' name.

#### Conclusion

The straight line in tomorrow's missionary endeavor will connect the wealth of the good of the past with the opportunities of tomorrow. Our response as facilitators helping to maintain connections, draw new ones and enable new ministry activities will be directly dependent on our commitment to sharing ownership of the vision and of the resources to carry out the task, especially the frontier mission task of reaching those who remain unreached, who are still untargeted and unevangelized.



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