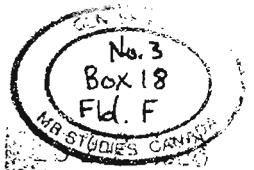# WORLD TRENDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSIONS

Paul G. Hiebert

In missions, as in many other areas of life, we look to the future, but plan for the past. This is not surprising for we have only the past to learn from by experience. Yet we live in a day of such rapid change that past experience is no longer sufficient to help us plan for the future. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the study of present trends in order to plan for the future, futurology as it has come to be known, is becoming an increasingly important part of modern thought, both in the world (J. Naisbitt, A. Toffler, P. Berger), and in the church (T. Sine, D. Hesselgrave, D. McKenna). One sign of this is the fact that the Association for the Evangelical Professors, in conjunction with the EFMA/IFMA 1987 meetings, dealt with megatrends in missions.

Certainly we must seek to understand the future in the light of present trends, but to this we must add a thorough understanding of the movement of history, and of Biblical prophecy. That we are moving towards global crises, the preaching of the Gospel in all the earth, a falling away from faith and the return of the Lord seems increasingly clear. But what implications do these have for us as a church, particularly in keeping the faith, and ministering to the world? As people of God we must seek to understand the times, but we dare not let that replace our dependence as a covenant community upon the guidance of God.

Here we will explore several critical trends in the world, and then examine some of the implications of these trends for Mennonite Brethren missions. They are based on social science observations (itself one of these trends), and need to be tested both in terms of our understanding of the Bible and history.

OUR CHANGING WORLD

We live not only in a world of change, but in a world in which change is taking place at an ever increasingly rapid rate. The results of this include identity crises (individual and corporate), future shock, rising stress in sociocultural systems, inter-generational conflicts, and reactionary efforts to turn back the march of time.

What are some of the forces changing the world so rapidly? Here we will examine seven which, in particular, affect us as Mennonite Brethren and our program of world missions. These seven are not autonomous. They interact in complex ways: reinforcing, rechanneling or blocking one another, depending upon particular historical settings. But all are at work in the modern world, and we must be cognizant of them in our planning of missions.

Population Growth and the Growing Crisis of Resources

Sometime during 1987 the world population quietly passed the five billion mark. When William Carey left for India in 1800 A.D., the world had less then one billion people. It took roughly one hundred years (1830 - 1930) for it to add a second billion; thirty years (1930 - 1960) to add a third billion; fifteen years (1960 - 1975) to add a fourth billion; and eleven to add the fifth billion. Another billion and more will be added by the end of the century. Estimates vary from eleven to thirteen billion as the number at which the population will plateau sometime in the next century or two.

Most of this growth is taking place in the countries that can least afford more people. 92 percent of the world's population increase is occurring in the 'developing' countries that are already plagued by poverty and underemployment. In Asia and Latin America roughly one half of the present population is under fifteen years of age. The average age in Africa

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is 22, compared to 35 in the West. In many countries the number of jobs, homes and other basic human needs will have to double in the next two decades in order to care for those who are already born.

This population explosion is precipitating economic crises and instabilities of profound proportions. The gulf between rich and poor nations, and between rich and poor within the nations has increased dramatically in the past century (Table 1). While some segments of the world society are unbelievably wealthy, a growing number are dehumanized by a grinding poverty hard for us to imagine. David Barrett points out that 780 million people today live in absolute poverty, a condition defined by the World Bank as a condition "so characterized by malnutrition, illiteracy and disease as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency (Barrett 1982:5). Roughly 500 of these needy are on the edge of starvation, and another 1.5 billion are malnourished.

TABLE 1
THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR NATIONS

	Less Dev. Nations	More Dev. Nations
Population	3.4 billion	1.1 billion
Per capita GNP	$ 597	$ 6,468
Life expectancy	56 years	72 years
Literacy rate	52%	99 %
Per capita educ. expend.	$ 18	$ 286
Per capita health expend.	$ 6.5	$ 199
Per capita military expend.	$ 29	$ 300

(SIM 1982)

Food is not the only resource in short supply. Regional water shortages are becoming more severe. And firewood, the basic fuel for much of the world, is becoming increasingly scarce as forests are depleted. Agricultural soils continue to deteriorate, and deserts expand.

Population growth and competition for resources and power is leading to an increase in global confrontations between the strong and the weak, and to a greater geopolitical instability. Post-independence Africa has witnessed 11 wars, more than 50 coups, and the assassination of at least 12 heads of states. Thirty-four of Black Africa's 45 states are either one party regimes or under military rule.

The same is true on a global scale. Wally Kroeker notes that between 1900 A.D. and 1941 A.D an estimated 24 international and civil wars occurred. The number since World War II had risen to 130 by the late 1970s (Kroeker 1984:5). Senator Mark Hatfield pointed out that in 1983 A.D. 40 little wars were being waged throughout the world involving some four million soldiers. The cost was $700 billion - $140 for every person on earth, 17 million refugees and countless lives (Kroeker 1984:3). The dollar figure equals the total income of the poorest one half of the world. It amounts to twice the amount the world spend on food, and five times the amount spent on housing, and 2,300 times the amount spent working for peace.

This violence has led to a sharp rise in terrorism. Missionaries in South and Central America, the Philippines, and Africa have been held hostage or killed. Others have left their work for fear of reprisals. And behind this violence looms the threat of nuclear war - a very real threat that increasingly terrorizes the young.

Ron Sider, Tom Sine, David McKenna and others have pointed out that the church and missions can no longer ignore these sociopolitical realities. On the one hand, our attempts to be apolitical are themselves seen as political

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statements. We are branded by the countries from which we come, and our very presence is often taken to be a political act. On the other hand, the Gospel does address the issues of poverty and oppression. To preach less than this is to truncate the Gospel.

Modernization

If one looks at the world scene from a missionary point of view, surely one striking fact is the inexorable march of modernity around the world. In lands once called Christendome, the church has yielded to its spread. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, secularism, one of the "acids of modernity," is beginning to dissolve the most enduring of religious beliefs.

This spread of modernity is one of the greatest missionary movements of our age. Schools have appeared in the remotest of villages, and children around the world are learning a science, mathematics, and history divorced from a faith in God. Universities, hospitals and research laboratories have become the status symbols of nationhood.

As Newbigin points out, modernity is both a blessing and a curse for missions. It breaks the tight hold traditional religions have upon their people, and therefore frees them to convert to Christianity. But in its present form it also erodes belief in all religions including Christianity. In country after country where the Gospel has taken root, by the third and fourth generation Christians have become secularized and nominal. Even if Christian missions are totally successful, there is a real danger that the world will end not with a living church but with nominal Christianity. Modernity as we know it opens the doors for Christian missions, but is itself a threat to the Gospel.

Modernity is made up of several strands. One is the emphasis on this world and material prosperity that emerged out of reformation (Weber 1958).

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A second was the renaissance revival of neoPlatonic dualism between spirit and matter that led to a science divorced from religion. A third was the replacement of the organic view of the universe that dominated the middle ages with a mechanical view of reality (Berger 1973). At first this was applied to nature. The result was the natural sciences and technology whose temple is the factory in which nature could be shaped by human hands. Later it was extended to humans. The result was the social sciences, and, social engineering whose cathedral is the bureaucracy in which humans are managed to achieve goals other then themselves.

A fourth strand in modernism is a stress on individualism and self-fulfillment. The pursuit of comfort and pleasure are but expressions of this (Bellah 1985). The result is an increasingly fragmented society in which ties to kin, community and kind are eroding. Even relationships such as marriage which were once seen as sacrament, became covenant, then contract, and now irrelevant (Bloom 1987).

Globalization

Until the sixteenth century, it is estimated that the average person never traveled more than ten miles from home in a lifetime. The world was made up of localized societies often unaware of each other's existence. Two hundred years ago large regions of the world remained unmapped.

Today we in the west think nothing of traveling a thousand miles to attend one meeting. It is easier and faster for us to travel around the world than it was for our forefathers a century ago to cross Canada or the United States. Even ordinary people have access to almost instantaneous communication with much of the earth. The world has become one vast network of relationships in which few live unaffected by what is happening on other parts of the globe.

Initially globalization enabled the west to dominate the rest of the
world. Today globalization is shattering that western domination. Japanese
own nine of the world's ten biggest banks, and control more of the financial
market than North America and Europe combined. Singapore, Korea, and Taiwan
are challenging to manufacturing dominance of Japan. And China is leaving
its isolation and becoming a world power.

Globalization is also reconfiguring relationships. The West Coast of
North America is closer in many ways to Tokyo, Seoul, Manila and Singapore
than to the East Coast. And multi-national corporations evade the
constraints of local markets and control of governments.

Discovery of 'Culture'

One consequence of globalization is the discovery by people that they
have culture. So long as people interacted with others of their own
cultures, they were largely unaware of their own cultural presuppositions.
They equated their culture with the 'natural way' of doing things. Other
people and ways were discounted as 'primitive,' 'uncivilized,' and 'pagan.'

The experience first-hand of people in other lands has led both to the
discovery of culture itself, and to a growing interest in ethnic and
national identity and pride. Old religions, festivals, medicines and arts
are being revived, and 'Africanization,' 'Indian theology,' and 'shinchen'
(Emperor veneration in Japan) are terms of pride and cultural dignity.

Globalization has also led to an awareness of cultural differences, and
of problems of cross-cultural communication and relationships. A recent
issue of Time Magazine discussed tensions American executives face working
in Japanese factories in the U.S. Yes, it said, they would have to eat
suchi and observe the elaborate Japanese protocols of introduction. Yes,
the Japanese leaders wanted to promote Americans to the top positions in the

companies, but were not sure they could learn the Japanese ways of thinking in less then twenty or thirty years. Businesses and governments around the world are working at bridging the cultural differences that divide them.

Pluralism

One consequence of globalization is pluralism. People of different cultures once separated by great distances now live as next door neighbors. For example, Los Angeles has large populations of Mexicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Arabs, Iranians, Armenians, Israelis, Sri Lankans, Malaysians, Burmese, Indians and Samoans. In its public school system classes are taught in 67 languages. Forty percent of the kindergarten students in Beverly Hills study English as a second language. Most speak Farsi (from Iran) as their primary language. The same picture is increasingly true of many other parts of the world. In Africa peoples of many tribes mix in the cities, in India migrants from different linguist regions work in the same city offices.

Increasingly people also face religious pluralism first-hand. At the beginning of this century Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs were in Arabia, India, Thailand and China. Today the Regent's Park Mosque is one of the most beautiful worship centers in London, and in nearby Brent, Muslims pray in what was once a Reformed Church building. In east London they use an old synagogue. Mosques and Hindu temples complete with idols are being built in Washington D.C., Los Angeles and other North American cities.

What does this all mean? Racial and cultural clashes are common around the world as local communities are invaded by outsiders. And deep inter-generational tensions emerge as children of migrants reject the ways of their parents.

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A more fundamental question has to do with peaceful coexistence. How can people of such different cultures and religions live together in the same communities? One answer is to require everyone to convert or at least acquiesce to the beliefs of the dominant culture. But this conflicts with the growing sense of cultural pride and identity most people have. And it frequently leads to conflicts. The easy answer is institute a caste system in which each community is encapsulated and is required to leave other groups believe and act as they wish. But what then holds a city or nation together? And what happens to truth and meaning in the face of this relativism.

Urbanization

The world is rapidly becoming not a global village but a global city. We are living in the middle of the greatest exodus the earth has ever seen as people around the world move from fields and villages to exploding urban centers. An estimated one billion people world will migrate to cities in the 1980s alone. In 1900 A.D. only 5.5 % of the world's population lived in cities with populations over 100,000 people. By 2000 A.D. this will have risen to 38%, and by 2050 A.D. more than 75%. In 1900 A.D. there were no cities with five million inhabitants. By 2000 A.D. there will be 65. Twenty-four of these will have more than ten million. More than 430 will have more than one million people in them!

In the past urbanization characterized the west. Today it is occurring most rapidly in the two-thirds world (see Table 2). Mexico City is growing at a rate of 80,000 per month, and by the year 2000 A.D. it will be the largest city in the world with 31 million people in it. In 1900 A.D. 9 out of the top 10 cities were in the so-called Christian West, with New York at the top. In 2000 A.D. New York will be the only western city in the top

TABLE 2
THE URBAN POPULATION OF THE WORLD
(in millions)

	1950	1985	2020
Two-thirds World	332	1,256	3,606
Western World	404	757	1,048
(N. Am, USSR, Europe, Australia, N.Z.)			

ten, and it will be number seven. By 2030 A.D., no western city will be in the top ten cities of the world. Seven of them will be in Asia, two in Latin America, and one (Mexico City) in North America. The settings for most of these cities will be the Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim worlds.

Along with urbanization goes networking. The cities of the world are linked to each other by planes, ships, mail, telecommunications, telephones, computers, and satellite communications. What happens in one affects the others almost instantly.

The Fundamentalist Reaction

It should not surprise us in the face of the world wide onslaught of modernity, science and urbanization that most major religious are experiencing a revival of fundamentalism. Today fundamentalist movements in Islam (such as the Islamic Jihad), Hinduism (R.S.S. and Jan Sangh) and Buddhism are resisting the spread of modernity, and of Christianity which they see as the bearer of modernity. They are also seeking to revive old religious ways and draw Christian converts back into their folds.

One consequence of this fundamentalist reaction is a growing rejection in many countries of the west and its cultural practices. This collides with the forces of modernity at work in many of these countries, creating tremendous internal tensions and conflicts. We often assume that the ultimate outcome is certain, and that modernity will triumph. But the final outcome is not clear.

Reaction to modernity, however, is not limited to Asia and Africa. There is an explosion of spiritism in South America, and a spread of New Age cults and teachings in North America and Europe, affecting even Christian churches (Groothuis 1986, Hunt 1985). The former is a reversion to African traditional religions, the latter an influx of Hindu and Buddhist idealism. The challenge to the Christian church is no longer confined to mission to the lost. It is now threatened with an erosion of its home base, with heresy (Matt 24:10-11, 24; 2 Thes. 2:3; 2 Peter 2:1-3), and with materialistic self-love (Luke 12:19-21; Rev. 3:17).

OUR CHANGING CHURCH

How will these trends affect our M. B. mission programs? And what plans should we make in the light of them? We will look at some of the implications of these currents for the church and missions in general, and for the Mennonite Brethren in particular.

Population Growth and Crisis of Resources

The tremendous population growth means that the mission task is greater than ever. Despite the successes of the modern mission movement, there are more now who have never heard the Gospel sufficiently to make a meaningful decision to follow Christ than when William Carey went to India almost two centuries ago. While the Evangelical and Charismatic churches continue to grow rapidly, the percentage of all Christians has remained the same, or dropped slightly during this century. In contrast to this, the percentage of Muslims and secularists, world wide, is growing.

The implications for the Mennonite Brethren are great. As Christians we are responsible along with other believers to proclaim the Gospel so that all may hear and be saved. We have expanded the number of places in which we work, but in many of these our force is small. In India and Africa we

have Mennonite Brethren churches, but we tend to forget that the populations we pledged to evangelize have more than doubled. Few others are laboring in these areas. If the people in them are to hear the Gospel, we must proclaim it. We need to develop more effective partnerships between the M.B. churches in North America, Africa and India to evangelize fully the territories we took as our responsibility before God and the greater church.

The growing socioeconomic crises and political conflicts are a great challenge to the church. Unlike many on the evangelical scene, we as Mennonite Brethren have emphasized the need to proclaim a whole Gospel rooted in a theology of the Kingdom of God. In many ways we are more prepared to minister in a broken world. But we in North America are not free from the dualism that has divided western missions into evangelism and the social gospel. Where we evangelize we need to be aware of the felt needs of the people. But equally, we must make certain that where we minister to human material, psychological and social needs, we are forthright in proclaiming salvation. Anything less is not the gospel.

One long range effect of world-wide human crises is donor fatigue. Following the famine in Ethiopia, there was an outpouring of contributions. After two years, however, these declined markedly despite continued desperate needs there and in other parts of the world. So far, the Mennonite Brethren have maintained a high level of contributions for human need, but we dare not take this for granted.

Modernization

Modernity, born in part out of the reformation, is a great blessing and a great danger for the church. It has enabled us to deal with human needs such as food, health, transportation, and communication. It has also focused our attention increasingly on ourselves and this worldly comfort.

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Abroad it is breaking down the strangle hold traditional religions have on people (Newbigin 1962), but it is also bringing in secularism and nominalism.

One consequence of modern individualism in missions is a shift in focus from the task to the person of the missionary. Increasingly candidates on the broader mission scene ask the question, "What is in it for me? Will I find self-fulfillment in missions?" Few speak of a calling to a task for which they are willing to give their whole life, and to die if necessary. The result is a marked increase in Protestant missions of short term ministries as people give a few years to God, or see how they enjoy the work. James Aiken (1987:7) writes,

> Pursuing wealth as a sign of God's favor has adversely affected other ministries. Charles Farrah, theology professor at Oral Roberts University, blames prosperity preaching for the charismatic movement's inability to produce long-term missionaries: "If people are concerned about upward mobility, missions isn't a good field to choose."

The same can be said of most noncharismatics as well.

A second consequence of individualism is entrepreneurship and independence in missions. During the 1970s, a record-setting 150 new mission agencies were formed in North America alone, most of them not affiliated with a denomination or church body (Mission Handbook, 13th ed. pp. 593-594). If anything the pace of forming new parachurch agencies has increased in the 1980s. David Barrett (1987:25) estimates that between 1980 and 1987 the total church income worldwide increased from 64.5 to 79 billion dollars U.S. (22%), and that by the year 2000 it will rise to no more than 80 billion dollars (24% over 1980). Parachurch and institutional income, he says increased from 35.8 to 60 billion dollars in the same time (67%), and by 2000 will jump to 120 billion (235%) Those not willing to work whin the constraints of a church community feel free to set up their own mission agencies.

The effects of this on church mission agencies, including the Mennonite Brethren mission program, are already being felt. Many early parachurch mission agencies were established for specialized ministries such as Bible translation, radio broadcasting, and relief in which inter-denominational cooperation is important. Now most parachurch agencies are focusing on planting churches which is ironic since they have weak ecclesiologies and few strong church ties.

For the Mennonite Brethren this means increasing competition for missionaries and resources. Parachurch agencies can make exciting, personalized appeals to churches because they are rarely caught up in the more difficult task of nurturing converts to maturity. There is more immediate excitement in giving birth to a child than in raising it. Moreover, these agencies are often specialized which appeals to particular audiences in the church.

This appeal of entrepreneurial missions will grow as our own commitment to individualism grows, and our view of the church shifts from community to club. Unfortunately, many North Americans see denominations as different franchises, and local churches as filling stations where they can stop periodically to satisfy their needs. This entrepreneurship in missions can create a short-term increase in mission interest, but in the long run it will undermine the church as a committed Christian community. What this says to us as Mennonite Brethren is that we need to be flexible, and to strike a balance between our corporate and personal visions.

Finally, the technological revolution is changing the face of missions, for good and bad. We now can travel and survive anywhere in the world. And media opens doors for communicating with more people than ever before. This media explosion is reflected in the rapid growth in Christian literature, radio and television (Table 3).

TABLE 3

CHRISTIAN MEDIA

Media	1900	1985	2000
Christian Literature:			
New Christian books pr. yr.	2,200	20,800	25,000
Christian periodicals	3,500	21,000	35,000
Bibles distributed	5,452,600	43,000,000	70,000,000
Christian Broadcasting:			
Christian radio/TV stns.	0	1,580	4,000
Monthly audience			
-for Christian stations	0	370,000,000	600,000,000
-for all Christian prgrms.	0	1,090,000,000	2,150,000,000

(Barrett 1985:51)

Mass media have been particularly effective in spreading information. They have been less effective in leading people to personal commitments to Christ, and least effective in bringing converts together into assemblies of believers. Consequently we cannot look to media as the primary means of evangelism and missions. There a danger of substituting travel for mission work, and media for personal witness based on relationships of love and trust. The basis of God's mission to the world, as he showed in Christ, is still people.

Globalization

Today missions, and the globalization to which it contributed, are changing the face of the church. Today it is international. No longer is the west the center of Christianity (Table 4). There are centers in many parts of the world. By the end of this century Barrett estimates that the nber of Christians on any continent will be in Africa. Large churches have also arisen in Latin America, China, and North India.

This globalization of the church calls for cooperative mission programs in which churches in different lands form partnerships in outreach. It

TABLE 4
GLOBALIZATION OF THE CHURCH

	1900 millions	%	1980 millions	%	2000 millions	%
Christians in the West	471	84	547	38	592	29
Christian in the Communist World			254	18	444	22
Christians in the Two-thirds World	87	16	632	44	984	49
Christians as % of World Pop.		34.4		32.8		32.3
Muslims as % of World Pop.		12.4		17.1		19.2
Hindus as % of World Pop. (excluding New Age, etc)		12.5		13.5		13.7
Buddhists as % of World Pop.		7.8		6.2		5.7
Secularists as % of World Pop.		.2		21.3		21.3

(from Barrett 1982)

calls for multinational mission teams that are identified less with any one country. And it calls for cooperation between churches in different lands in building one another in faith and life.

One result of this world-wide spread of the church has been the rapid increase in the number nonwestern missionaries as young churches catch the vision of missions. In 1980 A.D. the number of missionaries sent out by churches in Asia was estimated to be 4,980. By 1985 A.D. this number had grown to 10,210. In 1990 A.D. the figure could rise to 20,000 (Pate 1986:1). An equal number of missionaries is being sent out by Africa, Latin America and the Pacific Islands. By the end of the century the number of missionaries sent by two-third's world churches will probably equal or

exceed those sent by the west. Many of these missionaries will go to people in other cultures in their own or neighboring countries. Others, however, will go to other parts of the world, and to regions where western missionaries are not permitted to enter.

Another result of this rapid growth of the church in the nonWestern world is a critical shortage of Christian leaders (Table 5). Not only does the West have material riches, compared to the rest of the world it has an abundance of Christian leaders, schools, publications and facilities. In the long run the shortage of leaders will seriously affect both the outreach and the spiritual maturity of the churches around the world.

TABLE 5
CHRISTIAN LEADERS: 1980

	National Leaders (thousands)	Foreign Leaders (thousands)	General Population per Leader
North America	755	22	1,300
Europe	1,014	46	105,000
Two-thirds World	815	180	614,000

(from Barrett 1982)

What implications does globalization have for M.B. missions? First, we need to work further on rooting out colonial survivals, whether these be in attitudes or in organization. We in North America are only one part of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and no longer the majority. And our oneness in Christ must transcend our national loyalties.

This means we must find new ways of relating as churches in different lands. At present the Board of Missions and Services is our liaison with

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conference leaders in other lands, but this can be seen as paternalistic. As new conferences are formed, we need to build ties between their conference leaders and ours, their boards of reference and council and ours, and their boards of missions and ours.

This partnership should lead to mutual cooperation in mission outreach: in working towards international mission teams, joint mission projects, and mutual exhortation in the mission task. We are making a beginning in our cooperative efforts with Japan and India, and in the Curitiba consultation. We need, also, to assist our sister churches in developing mission programs and training missionaries.

Second, we need to place high priority on developing leadership in our young churches. This is crucial both to their maturity and to their growth. Along with this, we need to involve upper level leaders from these churches in the world-wide leadership network that helps bridge national differences and should increasingly play a role in planning world mission strategies.

Third, we need to recognize that globalization will blur the lines between home and foreign missions, and challenge us to rethink the way we organize our outreach. In the past missions was ministry outside our Mennonite communities, and foreign missions were the highest priority. Today with the world moving to our doorsteps, there is a growing voice calling us to do missions at home. In 1970, to evangelize the Mien we would have had to send a missionary to Laos at great expense. Now those doors are closed, but we can evangelize many of them in Fresno, Visalia and San Jose. If we are not careful, there will be increasing competition between home and foreign mission programs in our churches that can only hurt the mission cause (Toews 1987). On a denominational level we need to reorganize our mission outreach in line with world realities so that there is coordination between our outreach abroad and at home.

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A third consequence of globalization is growing ecumenism among evangelicals by means of networks and cooperative ventures rather than by bureaucratic organization. Clearly we need to work with other missions and churches. There is much we cannot do alone, and there is need to avoid wasteful duplication. We need, however, to choose our partners carefully, and affirm publically our theological distinctives. Otherwise these ventures will be reduced to minimum common theological denominations, and to a diversion of our central calling.

Cultural Sensitivity

The growing world awareness of culture and cultural differences, and of the social sciences that deal with these, is having a profound effect on missions. Whereas in the past, theology was the dominant theme in mission writings, today it is increasingly the social sciences. "It is also clear," Hesselgrave notes (1987:303), "that Evangelicals tend to place a greater value on the methods and conclusions of the social sciences than do Ecumenists."

Three areas in missions, in particular, have been influenced by the social sciences. The first is strategizing for world evangelization. In the past, a high priority was placed on prayer and God's guidance. Today it is on "people groups," "homogeneous units," "receptivity," and "people movements." Sociological insights have, indeed, helped us understand how social dynamics influence the growth of the church, but there is great danger when human planning replaces God's guidance as the foundation for mission outreach.

The second area is contextualization. In the past, great emphasis was placed on the need for missionaries to identify with the cultures in which they served, and for missions to recognize and encourage the autonomy of

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young churches. Today the emphasis has shifted to contextualizing the Gospel message itself, not only in translating it into other languges, but also adapting it to fit the worldview of local cultures. Here linguistics and anthropology have much to offer in helping us to communicate the Gospel in ways people understand with their hearts as well as their minds. The danger is that we bend the Gospel to fit the culture, and ignore its prophetic call to radical discipleship.

The third area is leadership. Today, more than technology, the west is using and exporting organizational management based on a mechanistic world view. Objectives, production, cost efficiency, and above all techniques and control are the unquestioned good. While all this can help us become more accountable in an age of extreme individualism, the danger is that planning replaces prayer, and humans replace God at the center of missions.

As Mennonite Brethren, we are not unaffected by these trends in home and foreign missions, despite our theology of God's leading and of the church as a community of believers gifted and responsible to one another. We need to examine carefully, the impact the social sciences are making on us: selecting those things that are best, but returning to our theological foundations for our mission work.

Pluralism

Increasingly the church in North America is facing the question of pluralism. As long as Hindus and Muslims lived in distant lands, it was easy for people at home to hold to the uniqueness of Christ, and to call for their conversion. But now Hindus and Muslims are our neighbors and associates at work. Can we declare them lost and seek to convert them? And do they have a right to seek to win our children to Islam or Hinduism?

The initial effect of pluralism is to weaken our conviction in absolutes, particularly religious absolutes. We must seek to understand our neighbors, and in understanding them we dare not call them wrong (Bloom 1987) for we must love them. But this leads to relativism, to an acceptance of Jesus as a way, not the only way. True love is hard love. It is not simply positive regard. It warns when danger is at hand, and judges when others are wrong.

In the long run pluralism left unresolved by an appeal to universals and absolutes leads to a lose of history. There may be many stories, but no big story - no encompasing framework within which meaning is found. This loss of a sense of our place in history is evident among modern Mennonite Brethren. Without a sense of history, however, we do not know where we are, nor where we are headed.

Pluralism often leads to caste systems in which each group lives encapsulated within a larger sociocultural order. This is the simple solution to dealing with differences. But the underlying requirement of a caste system is that none seek to convert the others, and that there be a minimum and regulation of inter-group relationships. There is no room for mission.

The other easy solution to pluralism is to seek some uniformity in a minimum common denominator, and to relegate differences to private opinion. We are one in our humanity, or Christianity, or Americanness. This, too, cuts the nerve of missionary endeavors. The difficult solution to pluralism is to take differences seriously, but to continue a dialogue in which we seek to understand one another, but are free to convert one another. E. Stanley Jones pointed out that one of the most convincing evidences of the truth of the Gospel is that it can stand any examination and comparison, and triumph.

As Mennonite Brethren, we must consciously deal with the pluralism we now face, or we will be in danger of losing our missionary spirit. We are no longer isolated communities. How then do we live in a pluralistic world and remain missionary? I believe the answer lies in part in a return to our understanding of the church as a counter-culture, an outpost of the Kingdom of God.

Urbanization

The cities are the mission challenge of the future. They are the centers that create and control the changes now taking place in the world. They are centers from which evil is spread (Ellul 1970). They are also centers from which the Gospel can spread, if we can reach them for Christ. The church and the Mennonite Brethren have come to realize this only belatedly.

How do we reach the city for Christ? Our methods in missions and evangelism were developed in tribal and rural settings. The city is another kind of animal, and unless we understand it, we are in danger of using old methods, even if they are unsuccessful, simply because we know no better ones.

It is not enough, as Mennonite Brethren, for us to shift our priorities to the cities. We need to study cities where we plan to work. We need to examine carefully the mission strategies we use to make certain they are appropriate for the urban context. And we need to learn from and work with other Christians working in cities. Any city is too large for any one church or denomination to evangelize.

Fundamentalist Reaction

The fundamentalist reaction around the world is having a profound effect on missions. Much of the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist worlds are

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closing their doors to missionaries working directly in evangelism and church planting. Over 2.2 billion people now live with de facto restrictions on their religious freedom. 3.1 billion live in nations where missionary entry is restricted or prophibited (Barrett 1982:5).

Clearly, we explore new ways to proclaim the Gospel in these lands. This may be by strengthening the hand of churches and Christians already in these countries, even though these may not be Mennonite Brethren. We have a precident in this in our work with the African Independent Churches. Or it may be through partnerships with Mennonite Brethren churches in other lands. Japanese, Koreans, and especially Mexicans are welcome in countries closed to North American missionaries.

A second consequence of the fundamentalist reaction is conscious attempts in other religions to win Christain converts back into their folds. Often this is through preaching and mission outreach in Christian communities. Sometimes it takes more subtle forms. For example, in India the government gives educational grants and jobs to untouchables, but not to untouchables who have become Christians. It is highly profitable for Christians, therefore, to revert to Hinduism, particularly now that North American missions no longer subsidize education for Christians.

Increasingly the pressure to reconvert is open persecution. Barrett (1987:25) estimates that the number of Christian martyrs in 1986 was almost ten times the number in 1900. Other Christians are second class citizens in their nations.

Not surprisingly, the church under persecution often thrives. This has been true in China, Uganda and Indonesia. In other cases it is demoralized and weakened, as in parts of India.

As Mennonite Brethren, we need to rethink our relationships with our sister churches in lands where there is subtle or open opposition to

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Christianity. What is our responsiblity as North Americans for our Indian brothers and sisters who, already poor, lose the educational opportunities missions once offered them? It is too simple to say, in the name of self-support, that they must fund their own education. And what is our responsibilty in China, or in other countries when persecution comes?

We need, also, to rethink missions in hostile environments. Are we content to work only in low-risk settings?

Renewal

So far we have examined some of the trends on the world scene and their implications for Christian missions. There are another set of forces affecting missions, namely those at work in our churches in North America. Among these are institutionalization and nominalism. Denominations and churches, like individuals, need to be renewed continually, otherwise they become in-grown, rigid and irrelevant in a changing world. New planning for missions in view of the world's needs are of little use if we as a North American church do not experience the renewal of our spiritual life. The two go hand in hand. A dynamic mission in the world renews the church, and renewal revives the vision of mission.

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POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. With the continued population explosion, we will see increasing
   famines in the third-world in the coming decade. Already Ethiopia
   is again sliding into starvation. The rains failed in parts of
   India and a shortage may develop there shortly. Other parts of the
   world are in need. On the other hand, we in the west have a
   surplus of food.
         In the past there has been widespread public giving for relief
   projects, but this is usually short lived as 'donor fatigue' sets
   in. What responsibility does the church have for dealing with the
   growing food shortage in many crucial parts of the world? What
   part do the M.B.'s have in this broader picture?

2. We are now facing cultural and religious pluralism in North America.
   This raises tough questions. For example, if we allow prayers in
   schools must we permit Christian, Muslim and Hindu prayers if
   students from these faiths are in the class-room? More seriously,
   we need to evangelize others, but they, in turn, claim the right to
   evangelize our children. How can we remain Christian and
   evangelistic and not create tensions that upset the society?

3. What impact has modernity, with its emphasis on this world,and
   material wselbeing, and consumerism, affected our M.B. churches?
   How can we keep a Biblical perspective on our possessions and life-
   styles in a society in which all the emphasis is on affluence and
   comfort?

4. As we become part of a world M.B. conference, how should the North
   American conferences relate to conferences in Japan, India, Africa
   and elsewhere? Should we have a central mission agency? Should we
   share funds in cooperative evangelistic outreach? What problems
   arise when we do work for cooperation and partnership?