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COMMENTS ON HANS KASDORF'S PAPER
MISSION FUTURE : ISSUES WE FACE

Introduction

1. Since Hans Kasdorf started his reflections while looking at the granite gargoyles at King's College, Aberdeen, I shall start my comments while watching vultures circle their prey in the tropical sun of Rwanda. The contrasting symbols are not that remote from our discussion. The mature architecture of Scotland expresses the solid values of a society now long removed from theological debates of the 16th century, the political turmoil of the 17th and the sweat-shops of an industrializing country in the 19th. The circling vultures may yet take everything in this struggling land in the highlands of central Africa. But the dreams of these people are the dreams of all peoples throughout history : that their collective endeavors will conquer all obstacles and, one day, predators will only be seen in stone as reminders of years long past.

2. Aspirations and the struggle to attain those goals are the common lot of mankind. Kasdorf gives us a sense of the opportunities for the Gospel to give perspective and Christian values to these struggling people. He sees the many religions of the shifting populations and calls us to first understand their beliefs and values, to walk with them and show them a better way through Christ. Kasdorf also deals with poverty and wealth feeling sorry for people caught in one or the other extreme. By raising the poverty issue here -in the context of a missions consultation- he confirms the social concerns always felt by mission societies, especially in the era of modern missions of the 19th and 20th centuries. The often heated debate within evangelical sending groups on the role of the church in offering welfare services abroad is less acute in Mennonite circles. Man is one. His physical and spiritual well-being are interrelated. That the church should help the poor as part of its evangelizing mission is not really questioned in our circles. But how we do it, for whom, for how long, is always debated. So we'll do it again.

3. I will start my comments by weaving Kasdorf's three main themes of (i) Religious Pluralism, (ii) Shifting Populations and (iii) Poverty into the dialogue and then add a few paragraphs on (iv) the historic stages of the Church's role in the social sectors, (v) the political setting in which contemporary missions are called to operate and (vi) operational guidelines to promote more mature relationships between sending missions and the younger churches.

Six Issues that won't go away

(i) An Ever Smaller World

4. The world has become very small. When but two generations ago our missionaries went to "distant heathen lands" they went to what Kasdorf calls M3 countries : beyond cultural and language boundaries. Now the converts of those first evangelizing efforts are the parents of pastors, professors and presidents. We meet at conferences, cross paths in airports, visit in each others homes. There is a comfortable feeling of respect and affection as we meet cross-cultural friends who worship the same risen Lord.

5. But if transportation and communications can bring together new friends and colleagues they also bring together total strangers with differing cultural values and other religions. Kasdorf rightly emphasizes a need to understand those values and religions as a prerequisite to better presenting the claims of Christ. Well-informed pastors can sensitize their parishoners to understand and respect other religions, both as a way of living with "strange" neighbors in this global village, as well as a better means of leading them to a knowledge of a better way. Yet, there are so many values already common to all cultures - and the longer I live among them the more I see the similarities of our ways - that evangelism does not need to wait. Courtesy, expressions of friendship, help in time of family needs bridge barriers of language and folkways. We have all seen totally naive people -really culturally dumb people- win neighbors to Christ because of their open acceptance of families as they are and not waiting for them to become people in our image. The future missionaries of this smaller village world will be the neighbors who accept the strangers within their midst and laugh and cry with them in their struggles to attain their aspirations.

6. If there is need for adjustment to increased diversity there is also an increased commonality. Hamburgers, blue jeans and hollywood movies are everywhere. American ways are imitated though not always admired. But it's not only a one way street. Tacos and enchaladas are eaten in Canada. African cooks can make Indian curry. Though the curse of Babel still leaves us with thousands of languages, a person speaking but 10 languages could speak to 70 % of the world's population and modern commerce has made English the lingua franca of the world. I can see evangelization efforts taking greater advantage in the future of truly global characters, in stories and movies, to portray universal frailties and common heros. There will indeed be pluralism in the short run, but common cultural denominators will overtake the long run.

ii) More People on a Fixed Land Mass

7. Kasdorf's shifting populations are the consequence of improved communications which first spread the image of a better life in the city or in another land and then offer easy transportation to get there. The mix of nationalities in Los Angeles is dramatic but less threatening to individuals in a megalopolis with many ethnic communities which offer social solace to the in-group, than the sudden influx of Pakistani Muslims in south Winnipeg or Sikhs in the Fraser Valley. As long as jobs were plentiful in Northern Europe and Gastarbeiter were thought a temporary phenomenon the locals were quiet. When those temporaries brought their families and settled down, however, calls were heard for tighter immigration laws and toughened border controls. (Perhaps one reason the Mennonites of Frunze and Tashkent have more religious freedom than Mennonites in some other parts of the Soviet Union is the fear ethnic Russians have of their own Asian and Muslim populations pressing in from East and South. The Mennonites make good foremen in the factories and act as a cultural bridge. The ethnic Russian wants the Mennonites to be relatively happy so that they will stay in Central Asia).

8. If there is a natural pull to migrate to lands with more opportunities, there is a similar pull within countries to move from the farm to the city. There is both push and pull that forces people to the cities. A push off the land because there's not enough land to provide jobs. A pull to the city where the bustle may just possibly offer a job. That trend will continue for another generation but can be expected to slow as food prices go up to feed an ever growing population, and rural life becomes more attractive again. By then of course, improved roads and communications make the village less isolated anyway.

iii) Poverty

9. That Kasdorf lists poverty as an issue in missions is indicative of our changing perceptions over the past generation. Our early missionaries to Asia and Africa at the turn of the century often spoke of health and education needs. Mission societies responded by offering medical and educational services as a natural expression of evangelization. But to make poverty an issue in the future role of missions is to open a dimension which few missionaries will be able to handle beyond hand-outs and relief measures. If eradication of poverty becomes a major purpose of missions, we're in for rough times with our constituency. Not because poverty is not a pervading cancer, but rather because its definition and its eradication are so elusive. But since he brought it up, let's have a quick look at poverty.

10. Everybody feels himself poorer than someone else. This sense of relative poverty pervades the value systems of both capitalism and communism. The former encourages production with rewards that promote "getting ahead of the neighbor", thus relatively less poor. The latter encourages egalitarianism at the expense of productive incentives, resulting in more or less equal relative poverty for all. That is not always bad, since it can reduce social tension. But neither system fully alleviates relative poverty.

11. In order to look at poverty in more objective terms some researchers have tried to define absolute poverty : a level of material degradation below which the body dies, or at least the struggle of life is not worth pursuing. The following criteria help to begin to define absolute poverty say, for an adult :

- 1) Adults have a caloric intake of less than 2400 calories/day
- 2) 50 % or more of time and/or money is spent on getting those 2400 calories/day.
- 3) Insufficient clothing to maintain proper body temperature
- 4) Unable to keep that basic clothing infest free
- 5) Housing that does not protect from the elements, disease-carrying insects and rodents.
- 6) More than an hour from clean water

- 7) More than an hour from cooking fuel
- 8) More than an hour from basic medical services
- 9) Sanitary installations unavailable or inadequate
- 10) Illiterate and innumerate

12. Even this definition of absolute poverty is relative but it is useful in trying to define minimal thresholds for existence in the global village. In countries of Europe and North America -with money economies and higher standards of living-poverty is now defined at more than \$ 4000/year/adult. That measure of relative poverty is also useful. It helps to prod the public conscience. But in the global village any income/or service level above absolute poverty is relative. And relative poverty is measured against one's neighbor. A peasant in India who has a bullock to work his field and a donkey to pull his cart may live higher in his society's standards of comfort than the seminary prof in California with a car and a bicycle.

13. Kasdorf is bothered by the rich. He would like to pass the hat among the rich so that they will transfer their excess resources to the poor and thereafter also live more simply (consume less). At first glance that formula appears attractive. The premise is that the world's wealth is a given pie and that when the grabbing rich take less there will be more left for the poor. The pie approach proved quite successful in countries where wealth had been accumulated in tangibles (land, factories) by a fairly small number of people so that with swift confiscation and distribution there was a period of exhilaration among the masses as they partook at the feast. But eventually land must be worked, factories must produce, or all the people fall below the absolute poverty line and die. In the morning of that first day when all go back to work all are theoretically equally rich/poor. By evening some are already richer than others ; either because their land was better, they worked harder, or they planted better seeds. So another distribution of wealth is again tempting. But the contributions of distribution to the alleviation of poverty are temporary. We must look elsewhere for long term solutions to poverty.

14. The world's wealth is not a static pie. Wealth is created. It is human ingenuity and work (head and hands) that create wealth. When people are allowed some freedom to maneuver, some access to the means of production, they will create wealth. Witness the surge in food production in India and China over the last five years when price incentives were offered to individual producers. However, as soon as we talk of individual producers we risk encouraging personal accumulation and "a better life" for that producer and his family. At what point is the increasing wealth of a creative poor man no longer acceptable? When is he rich?

15. A certain level of acceptable individual wealth is needed to pull up the poor on an ongoing sustainable basis. The wealthy by their investments create jobs, the wealthy by their personal consumption create still more jobs. They eat out more, they buy more clothes, they build more houses, they stay in hotels, they go to concerts. They practice excesses, and create jobs. We need them to create the sustainable end to poverty. Yet we also want them to live modestly, and to support seminaries and missionaries. In our market economies one man's consumption is another man's production. What would be the result if the rich -whatever that means- were stripped of all their resources?

16. There is a third element to modern wealth. Money is mobile and cannot be contained under one country's legislation. Unlike the lands and factories which were owned by citizen families at the turn of the century, by far the greatest holdings of the today's rich are held in cash, stocks and bonds. The variety of financial instruments that can be transferred to another country in a minute is astounding. If an investor doesn't like pending legislation in one country he merely transfers it to an investor-friendly country. Witness the current contest among the industrialized countries to attract investors. Within that competitive climate, the poorer developing countries have little chance of catching the interest of investors which could create the jobs these poor countries so badly need. Indeed, industrialized countries can afford to moderately equalize the distribution of wealth since other factors of investment security are offered. But the poorer countries need a take-off period in which they

allow job-creating investors to become "filthy" rich in order to attract still more job-creating investors. (There is a period in which the Hondas and Tatas are appreciated for their creation of jobs - as were the Carnegies and Rockefellers in their day. The condemnations come later, not from the very poor, but from the relatively poor). Later at cruising speed -when the absolute poor have been pulled up to the relative poor- governments can moderate tax holidays and extend the social sectors. But, we're getting into sustainable development, taxation and trade and that's afield of this consultation. These comments are added merely to illustrate the complexities and the apparent contradictions to Christian values in trying to alleviate poverty on a global level.

iv) Social Services of the Church/Missions

17. Having rejected economic development programs for the relatively rich/poor as a proper role of the church I'll now try to suggest where, in fact, the church should maintain social services as part of evangelism. The services of health, education and relief to the helpless have always been a part of the church's role in the frontier and will continue to be so in any pioneering venture or missions outpost.

18. The church is always called on to meet human need. As in early America the church ran schools, hospitals and welfare programs, so now in poor developing countries the church runs these services as a natural response to need. As countries develop, governments take over many of these functions to serve the masses. That happened in pioneer America and is again happening in the Third World. There are, however, two levels of social intervention in which the church needs to remain active even in the maturing industrialized societies. It needs i) to remain the prophetic example, the cutting edge, to correct social wrongs, and ii) it needs to maintain examples of excellence in those areas where the state has assumed its responsibilities for the masses. These guidelines will serve us well in the decades to come as we ponder not only the role of foreign missions but also the eternal challenge of the church to unsettle the comfortable.

v) The Church and Civil Government

19. Mennonite mission societies have grown out of varied experiences with governments and are today operating under a full political spectrum of governments. Some have lived too recently with terror and tend to appreciate security. Others have only faint memories of capricious governments, and are tempted by the quick fix of revolution. Our mission societies now operate within contexts of affluence and freedom (say, Japan) as well as poverty and restricted opportunities (India and others). The exhilarating growth of the church in Africa has come at a time of increased corruption and declining standards of living. The Latin American church is generally free to worship, but the social and political settings rarely encourage a better life among the absolute poor.

20. The good intentions of evangelization and churchplanting will continue to be frustrated by hostile and/or corrupt governments. Not only are the results of proclaiming the Good News, of running schools and hospitals and agricultural centers diminished by the constant trade offs between bakshish and/or further red tape ; the church leaders themselves are tempted to adapt to the "local way of doing things". The political decisions, economic policies and operating styles of many governments encourage poverty and social decline. No amount of external priming will lead to economic take-off and social well-being. But wherever it can the church stays and continues to witness. (It was the missions that kept peasants alive in Haiti during those long years under Papa and Baby Doc when the large development agencies refused to do business there.) The more desperate the social and economic plight of a country the more important will be the presence of the church for both evangelism and physical nurture to the absolute poor. In countries where governments by their actions show that they truly seek the wellbeing of their people many agencies will support economic growth and the church can play its eternal role of presenting the gospel and being the prophetic voice.

vi) Relationships to new churches

21. The next thirty years will see a maturing of relationships between the sending mission and receiving church. There will be less transfer of funds for operating expenses, although there will be another generation of matching gifts for capital investments in church buildings, Bible schools, hospitals and equipment. For the healthy growth of these new churches and their emerging agencies external funds will be more carefully tied to investments the new church can sustain over the long term. Whatever funds are transferred will require more careful accountability. The donors will continue to be generous, but to receive without careful accountability is to lead not only to atrophy in the indignization process but to encourage corruption. Anywhere in the world.

22. We can anticipate a much broader exchange of pastors, scholars and laymen. The maturing relationships will see us exchanging experiences at conferences and less formal meetings. We will encourage the twinning of local churches for mutual nurture. Friendships will develop between families and, instead of two weeks in Hawaii, we'll go and visit our Christian friends in Rio, Kinshasa or Patna. We may even take up the writing of letters again. We could write our own epistles of encouragement to the churches in Bobo Dioulasso and Harbin. Our feeling of closeness in this global Christian community will grow as we deliberately set our will and time toward fellowship in Christ.

SUMMARY

23. What shall we then say about the pattern of things to come over the next generation, say to the year 2020 if the Lord tarry ?

- i) Improved transportation and the electronic age in an ever smaller world will accelerate the mix of peoples, ideas and religions. The greatest threat to Christianity will be secularism, not other religions.

- ii) Population pressures will increase. For yet a while rural masses will move to the cities, and urban "elites of the Third World" will seek jobs in the industrialized countries. Tighter immigration laws of Europe and North America will become difficult to enforce as pressures mount to live a better life here on earth. Helping developing countries create more jobs at home will do more to lessen the pressure for "lebensraum" than higher protective walls against goods and people.
- iii) The proportion of the world's population living in absolute poverty has remained fairly constant, at about 16 percent, over the past 20 years. That still means their numbers increase daily but their growth as a share of the total population has been arrested. That bit of good news is due to the remarkable increase of production in Asia at a time when Africa was falling back. Asia has shown the way out of abject poverty : 1) increase prices to producers of agricultural commodities and thus become self-sufficient in food, and 2) market internationally acceptable manufactured goods at competitive prices using plentiful low-cost labor. Trade across the Pacific is now greater than across the Atlantic and will continue to grow as low-cost labor from mainland China follows the productive example of Japan, Hong-Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Korea. The church will continue its relief role to the absolute poor, especially in Africa. It will have only a minor economic role among the relatively poor.
- iv) Therefore the social services arm of evangelism will continue to help the helpless. The church will also sharpen its perception of prophetic models that point the way in response to ever-changing social issues in industrialized societies.

- v) Missions will more clearly focus their interventions abroad, depending on the behaviour of host governments. The more repressive and reactionary the political setting, the more creative and tenacious will be the church to at least maintain a presence. The more liberal and free the society the more aggressive will be evangelism and the prophetic voice.

- vi) There will be fewer distinctions that separate missions and emerging churches. There will be greater dialogue among equals, reverse campaigns of revival and renewal, less transfer of money, more emphasis on collectively seeking God's answers in His Word.

24. To make it happen will require the concerted determination of God's happy children on earth. Clear heads, skilled hands and warm hearts will draw a host of men and women to confess Jesus as Lord within a growing fellowship in a smaller world.

KIGALI, RWANDA
ALL SAINTS DAY, 1987.

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