



Transcriptions

Heritage, Happenings, and Hope

Ted Ward

Annotation: *11th International Conference on Medical Missions (ICMM), 1987* Location possibly Methodist camp at St. Simons Island, GA. In this closing address, Ted Ward affirms the heritage of medical missions, describes developments in medical missions, and reiterates challenges to modern missions. He ends with a statement of hope in light of initiatives presented at the conference and with the persisting realization of God's kingdom work.



We should start with something that we all feel that has to be said, in summary, after an experience such as this. It is good for us to have been here. And I think we share something of the experience that Peter reflected when he said that at the Mount of Transfiguration. We have seen our Lord in a new light. It's been good for us to come together around a consciousness of history and heritage and to quest for hope. There is in this organization and among you, as professionals, a keen awareness of your history and that is good. It has been good for us to be reminded of our Ebenezers. Health Service ministries, indeed, have a venerable tradition; involvement in the outreach of the church since the very days of Luke and Paul. And we have come here to worship by remembering, and by seeking God's perfect will. And we have come with a sense of heritage. A heritage that is rich in courage, rich in compassion, and rich in a burden for sharing. Sharing of those things that can make life more manageable and sharing in those things that makes life more meaningful.

We have enjoyed, here, warm camaraderie; our spirits have been encouraged. It was good to be reminded warmly by Bill Bennett that a life given to Christ's command is still a viable option. We identify here with a common cause. And we have attempted to see the tasks more clearly and we have accepted well Dave Howard's reminder that in times of change God's persistent Word is *fear not*. And I'm sure that every one of us, in our own experiences and in our own ways, has felt the gentle but sure Spirit of Christ at work among us and in our hearts. No small part of that has been due to the fact that we have enjoyed a resource that has been set aside in God's Creation; set aside for dedication to such purposes as ours here. And we have felt this dedication, even in the staff here and in the marvelous colleagues in MAP, who have facilitated a good experience for us.

It is good to reflect always on the eras of our so-called modern mission era. An era wherein technologies have taken their place coming into action in missions. Our heritage goes back beyond that, though. Modern missions began as an era of bravery. Much of the 19th and much of the early 20th century was devoted to missions as acts of sheer bravery as people followed the call of God into difficult roles. Many of us here have lived through an era we might call the era of welcome—a much shorter era, for sure—an era in which the voice of the gospel was welcome sometimes because of the rice and health that it brought along with it, but nevertheless welcome. And we have lived into a yet third era, the era of closed and closing fields. And it is tempting yet for us in this sort of reflection to wonder where God intends us to take our future. But I suspect that we are sitting at the very hinge point of history when yet a new era beyond the closed-ness enters. And I have no proper name for it yet because I don't think we have lived to see it in its fullness, but right now I'm taking Matthew 10:16 to call it the era of shrewdness. The era of shrewdness, because re-entry depends extensively on new modes. I would call it the era of cleverness were not the word clever so badly bound up with human trickery. But I take the word shrewdness as our Lord instructed his disciples to be shrewd.

We have seen God at work. We have seen God at work in literature, not very old and dusty, about the opening of China, for example, to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And many colleagues in the fields of health professions were part-and-parcel of that opening. We have seen God close China and we didn't even think it was God doing it. That lesson, perhaps, is hard to learn: that God is still in command even when he sets us aside for a time, and even when he insists that there are yet other ways that he has to bring about a hearing of the gospel that people might confront Christ. And now we have seen God re-open China, but unfortunately for our vision he has not re-opened it on our terms; and somehow we wish to scold God that he did it wrong. That is what the challenge of change is all about: to recognize that, when God moves, it oftentimes requires us to behave fundamentally differently.

This conference has been good for this, though I'm a bit fretful that a large portion of what we have discussed and examined here deals with matters that, by the year 1995 or so, will largely be water over the dam. I wonder where we will yet get that somewhat farther look into the future that will enable us to do more than simply solve, day-by-day, the contemporary moment problems and begin to catch something of the larger grasp that is there for us as we see something of God's plan for a new future unfolding. I think we've dealt here more with aspects of change in the sense of changes in our environments than we have been willing and able to face changes that these changes in the environment require of our behaviors and our procedures. If change around us is threatening, the necessity of our own change is even more threatening, but we need to be on top of it.

There are yet remaining questions this conference does not close out very much. For healthcare professionals the question is, institutions, technologies, people. How to fit these together? What are the emerging models of service? For mission planners, for churches, and for agencies the issues remain evangelization, church planting, community, resourcing. How do these fit together? What are the models of kingdom service? As this conference closes, I would wonder for the next International Conference on Missionary Medicine if some sort of a title might be put together: Putting Healthcare Together in Jesus' Name because the issue is somehow yet escaping us. How do we fit the bits and pieces together? In good analytic style—I suspect partly because of the nature of the training of many of the people in this situation—in good analytic style, we now have all the parts laid out and named. We are marvelous taxonomists. The issue is how good are we at synthesis? How good are we at putting it all back together again?

There's a particularly troublesome problem with reference to the effective use of our institutions. And we've dealt with that in many ways, but we still have the great burden of effort yet ahead of us. Westerners, especially North Americans, have been great institution builders. The 20th century will be characterized in church history as the building era for schools, colleges, seminaries, hospitals, clinics, medical schools; but even more problems are remaining. And I see these problems myself most clearly in the educational sector because, if you think you've got trouble, you ought to see what it's like in the educational institutions of this mission world.

I've just returned from an assignment in a certain Andean Republic working with a certain denomination headquartered in Canada in regard to a venerable theological seminary that is again at stake having been cycled back and forth from the national church, back to the mission board, back to the national church, now beginning its third cycle. The hard facts are these: it graduates approximately 2.7 pastors for the churches each year; almost 25% of the resources coming into the church in that nation are devoted to this seminary; that denomination has 235 churches only 31 of which have seminary degreed pastors. I don't know how good you are at quick math, but that tells you that there's 200 plus churches with no seminary-trained pastors—and of these, 150 churches say they don't want a seminary-trained pastor because the last one that they had didn't understand their frame of reference.

And in this consultation, a clear consensus emerged around four points. First, the seminary is not meeting the needs of the churches. Second, if resources were made available regional and localized theological education could better meet the needs of the churches. So far, so good. Third, the symbolic value of that seminary is vital to the image of the church in that country thus, any additional resources becoming available to the church should be used to expand the seminary. Thus, point four in the consensus, no funds will be available for regionalization of theological education. That's what I call not coping with change.

I think the churches well-planted in various parts of the world and certainly the churches even in the North American context can only take so much of this fooling around. Frankly, I am expecting a virtually worldwide revolution in theological education by the year 2000 led by churches who are attempting to recapture the initiative from the ineffectual institutions that have been trying to serve them. Is there a parallel here for healthcare? I certainly wouldn't want to go a-meddling in your business, or would I?

Not long ago I was arriving early at a church for a missionary conference where I was speaking and I was the first one there, which often happens, and I was sitting contemplating the whole scenery. And, as a banner across the platform, were these words, Look to the Fields White for Harvest. And I thought, well that's what you would expect for a missionary conference in a local church. Not bad, not bad. But then I began musing on the fact that that came from John 4, a chapter that is loaded with surprises. I think John, in his marvelous style, packed into that section of his gospel the impact that Jesus made when he did with people what they weren't expecting. You go through there, there's the whole unexpected encounter with the woman at the well of Sychar. There's the reaction of the disciples when they come back. And they said, I thought we wanted to give you something to eat? That's why we went to town, to get the food. And he says, I'm not hungry. Then they ask, who's been feeding him on the side? What's going on here? All kinds of surprise, all kinds of change. It was in that context when our Lord said those words, do you not say, four months more, and then the harvest?

Sitting in that quiet church, it suddenly dawned on me that that Word was not simply a missionary command, but, more explicitly, it was a challenge to the kind of reasoning that is created by knowing too much. These people knew their agriculture, and if someone had said, I want you to go out to the harvest, their response would have been, uh-uh, this is June; that's July, August, September, October. Here's when our Lord said, I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields; they are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper is out there drawing his wages. Now if that's not a picture of our Lord cautioning people not to be too smart; not to be too stuck in the way they've always looked at things; not to be stuck in the rightness of their habits—technically correct but closed to new insights, thus, incapable of change. This can get to us because we're institution managers, we're maintainers, we're perpetuators. We tend to want our world to stay the way we built it. And our Lord is saying if I were to come to tell you myself that I'm already paying people out there you'd want to argue agronomy. Don't be so scientifically smart. The issue is partly a matter of being habituated by our own experiences without the necessary humility to realize the limitations of our own experiences. We can hope and pray that we will succumb neither to the fear of change nor to the stubbornness that is born of conventional wisdom.

We well know the verse in Proverbs. The verse is, "Trust in the Lord," Proverbs 3, "with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him and he shall direct your path." And there are times when those of us that are scientifically trained and those of us that are empirically oriented want to see the data and it becomes very hard for us not to lean on our understanding of the data.

The lack of orientation to the future can get us in a great deal of trouble. Business as usual is not a good watchword for our time. But I tell you, that doctrinaire images of the future also mean trouble and we should be very cautious. David Stewart reminded us, "The future is easy to foretell; it is the past that is impossible to understand." Now, he may be right, but I have to hope he's not. I think we have to try our very best to understand our past in order to reduce some of the past experiences that seems to be conundrum to some sort of principles that will guide us into the future. The basic problem is still with us. Educating our donors and our supporters has fallen behind. One of our key problems is that many of the white elephant institutions make good sense to our donors. In fact, paternalistic posture makes good sense to many of our donors. It comes natural for Americans. Face it, it's very hard for North Americans to grasp the importance of community-based healthcare. Indeed, what sorts of models of Christian community have North American Christians

ever seen? The saddest problem is that medicine is still perceived by so many among our donors more as bait than as the functional part of the whole gospel. Few of your supporting churches really understand what it is to become Christ's communities.

We need to face the facts of life. First of all healthcare personnel in missions is essentially a stable commodity. David Van Reken suggested the number of about 1,100 people since 1900, and one of the things that ought to strike you in that is that it doesn't sound much like a growing number during a time where our total population in the country has quadrupled. Second fact of life: evangelical missions, especially the faith missions, are not growing proportional to the North American population. Third fact of life: Americans especially must face up to the fact that, on a per capita basis, the United States is in the bottom 25% of the 20 missionary-sending Western nations; and we still keep kidding ourselves into thinking we're doing a great job for Jesus. If you want to see the facts, take a look at Bob Coote's article in the 1987 brand new handbook of Missions—maybe 1986; released in '87. At any rate, it came out very late.

These three facts of life are humbling. God is bringing on-line new organizations and new modes. If there's anything that's true of this group, is that this group does not represent many of those new modes. This group is a kind of a memorial society. The fourth fact of life is a broken front of development in the post-colonial nations. Post-colonial nations now differ widely in terms of what's going on, what conditions they are in, where they are in the development process. No longer does flat-out standard approaches work everywhere interchangeably. You've got to be very, very sensitive to that.

Fifth of my points is that paternalism is out. A lot of people haven't noticed it yet, but it's out. Nowhere does paternalism go unchallenged today. There are people still trying to get away with it, but they're losing points fast. Paternalism is out. Ten years ago we used to talk about it as if somehow we could do something about it. Today, that one, too, is water over the dam. Another fact of life, the sixth in my list, is the desire of every nation, even the poorest nation, to behave like the richest. And this causes them to do all sorts of funny things in a bureaucratic way. And even their own bureaucracies clash on every side. It's very hard to get things done. Rules, regulations, visas, work permits, re-examinations for credentialing, and all the rest of it. How do you cope?

The seventh and eighth on my list are a paradox. Seventh is good news. Christian communities are emerging left and right, many of them with a very large view of the gospel: a commitment of the gospel to all people. Last summer in Malawi, I learned a new piece of language. We were working with a group of nationals in in community-based health trying to get them to come to grips with the question of who should be on community health councils. And, of course, the vested interest there is that the right answer is, you've got to get the Christians involved. And every time we'd lead up to that, they'd kind of shy away like something was going on that they weren't quite sure that we wanted to hear, and/or they weren't quite sure how to say it. And as it turned out, we finally recognized in this consultation that the problem was that these Christians, leaders, lay leaders within that country—some medically trained people, some lay persons, many involved in community health education—they weren't parsing their world the same way we parse it. We parse it in terms of Christians and non-Christians and then we get particular in terms of the different kinds of Christians. They parse their world, not in terms of Christians and non-Christians, they parse their world in terms of Christians and not yet Christians. And I submit to you that makes a great deal of difference how you look at people, and how you look at organizations, and how you

plan and how do you decide who ought to be on a community council? They saw no reason not to have the not yet Christians on the community council because that was where they could see Christ at work most clearly. You say, oh, but they'll corrupt the thing and they'll drag it away from the voice of the gospel. Well, our Malawian brethren did not agree with that premise. Now they could be very, very wrong, but then what do they know?

And the eighth point is the paradox. The same time Christian communities are emerging all over the world with a much broader view of the gospel and a willingness to take Christ literally in terms of how he picked up on Isaiah 61 in terms of the wholeness of human poverty. North American Christianity is still writing closed over this nation and this nation and this situation and closed, closed, closed. We write closed all over everything. It is very easy to be pessimistic if you're in the habit of using the word closed.

And, at this point, I want to shift my list away from observations as to what I'm calling The Facts of Life to make a few suggestions. First of which is, let's exercise hope and quit talking open and closed. Just quit it; just—we don't need the words. God is in command, that's all you need. If God thought in terms of open and closed, how could he have ever dreamed up the idea of slipping past Caesar and Herod with a baby in Bethlehem? I submit it takes a different kind of mentality to think up one like that.

Second suggestion: let's get the word foreign out once and for all and quit using it, too. The fact in our era is that the church is alive and well across the world. We're almost inclined to say in the *whole* world though many of us know that there are vast areas of movement yet needed. The task today is to complete the internationalizing of the church. There is already an international community of leadership. There is an international community of expertise. And I think, in some respects, those communities are reflected right here. There is an international community of encouragement. And never lose sight of the fact that the movement of the church toward other churches in other nations began when the Jerusalem people heard that God was doing a great work in Antioch. The first missionary was picked, not because he was a tremendous evangelizer, but because he was a tremendous encourager. And they sent him to encourage because that God was at work in another place.

This is where we are today. You don't hear much about braindrain anymore, and that's why. In many areas, much more than in Christian circles, it's conceded that anybody who goes out of his own nation for graduate education becomes part of a world community in that profession or discipline. He is not expected, she is not expected, such persons are not expected to go home again. You search the Bible for go home again messages, and how many do you find? I'll tell you one you find. You find it in Jerusalem where they weren't sure what to do with Saul. And much to their chagrin, they set him packing back to Tarsus. There's your biblical precedent. Recognize that we are, as Christians in the world, we will see others from other nations in our world, as well. In fact, we should be stimulating that, not discouraging it. Now I know the importance of leadership within the church and a place where the church is short of leadership. I know all those arguments. But I still believe that it is the utmost of paternalism and arrogance to try to control where others must serve Jesus. Who controls where *you* serve Jesus? Are you not free to follow the Spirit of God in your life? But of course, then, we're Americans.

Third suggestion: let's keep capital investments minimal. Christians often make mistakes. They make big mistakes with big properties. Fourth suggestion: let's plan everything with closed-end timetables. And, by the way, there is a very, very interesting precedent in Scripture for this. Dear man, Nehemiah, royal though he was, reduced to virtually a house slave, had the sheer gall and guts to give an answer when a rather amazing response came from King Artaxerxes, sounds like a feasible idea, Mr. Nehemiah. How long would you like to be gone? Remember that question in Nehemiah 2 verse 6? Nehemiah said, I set a time. I love it, I love it. I gave him an answer. I set a time. I didn't reject his question by saying, I don't know yet. I'll have to go and take a look and see what it'll take. It may take us many years. Let's make an open-ended contract. Time can always be renegotiated, but the idea of a closed-end experience has a very different feel in a society from an open-ended experience. Open-ended experiences are almost always paternal; closed-end experiences are almost always oriented toward assistance. Very simple suggestion: I would not want to make it an ultimate doctrine. I've warned you as I try to warn myself, there are no ultimate dogmas. But certainly it's a feasible suggestion. In fact, if you put those two together with one more, it adds up to something very interesting.

My fifth suggestion, the one that caps this series, is let's plan everything we do with a clear-cut relationship to evangelization and church planting, not just spreading technology around with a perfunctory nod to God now and then. What we can do with these principles: the principle of minimal capital investment, the minimal of planning everything with closed-end times, and the principle of clear-cut relationship to evangelization, I believe could solve most of the dilemmas we face today about institutional transformation, responsibility, and ownership. I think if mission organizations were to get serious about those three principles, many of our so-called problems of today would largely be dealt with. They would not fade away as if by magic, but they could be dealt with systematically and we could come out at the other end of that tunnel finding a bright new future for the relationship between institutions and the agencies that wish to work internationally to facilitate the development of the church.

And sixth: let's search for new and emerging patterns in mission just as we search for new and emerging ideas in healthcare ministries. We're in a time of search. We're in a time when we ought to recognize that many of the shibboleths and the language that we have so glibly bought like full-time Christian service, career missionary, and all the rest, would be strange even to the apostle Paul. If anything, he was a nomad. If anything, he behaved in very short timeframes, relatively speaking. He expected things to happen because others were involved. He was part of a team. He didn't expect to take all the glory and all the responsibility. He shared.

Within this, a few specifics, because I'm trying to hear you in terms of where you're at, in terms of what some new images might be. Now some of these I didn't glean from the conference. Some of them are kind of like my creative response to what I'm hearing at the conference, but try me.

What about some new patterns of overseas service as kind of norms instead of continuing to hold this go now, stay forever image which largely hasn't been used for about forty years but we still keep talking it as if it were? Why not a 5/10/15 pattern? Now, a 5/10/15 pattern. Notice your calendar, notice when you heard it. It was here. This isn't, you know—I'm trying to invent. Okay? Because I think that's where we are. 5/10/15. First of all, you work off your residencies and pay the big bills; then you enter into 5 years of overseas service, and the kids are relatively little. Then you do

10 years in a North American service as part of a group and you solidify things, get the kids through school, and get your life pretty well organized. Then you're in a period of very productive service for 15 years overseas. That's called a 5/10/15 plan. Why don't we make that the norm? You say well, it isn't biblical. Well, I submit that there isn't any such thing as a formula of service overseas that is quote "biblical". There're all kinds of models. Can a person really be committed to Christ and do that? Maybe when he comes back home he'll be sucked in by the materialism of our society. Good grief! If the only reason you're going overseas is to escape temptation, forget it. Another little suggestion coming out of this. What about expanding the Christian practice groups in North America to include medical students and new health service professionals from overseas? Hummm, boy, a lot of your church folk that won't buy that. Well, get the Bible after them. What about joint international health education groups in major cities of the world staffed by rotating internationalists who keep up their credentials in two or three countries? There's an idea.

What about international continuing education teams that might take the international clinic idea a step closer to making long-term impact on the quality of health service instead of moving in with a ship and sitting tied up in the harbor doing eye operations? Why not come in with a large block of time and really engage in a year or two of continuing education in certain specialties? Never mind the clinical function of all that focus it on the educational task.

Another idea, what about nomadic international teams of health professionals along with applied social scientists and nonformal education people who could do one-year training with the churches of a region in order to bring online some community-based healthcare that could be well articulated with secondary and tertiary national schemes, or even mission hospitals? It's possible.

One of the things I've learned across my career of involvement with nations is that whatever we dream up, whatever we think, whatever we think clever, whatever schemes we manage; if these are of God, we find it confirmed because God is already doing them somewhere. It is just intriguing, if not actually uncanny, that there is never an idea that does not somewhere already have its precedent where God is at work. It is not our place to gen up cute ideas and sell them to God. Hey, God, I got a great idea for you. There are parachurch organizations still in our times who talk that way to God if not, in fact, in their prayers, in their publications, and in their whole outlook on service. Never assume that God needs you that much. Never assume that God is in trouble without you. Always ask, What is God doing and where can I help? Whatever lies just around the corner is already happening somewhere.

One of the key values of an event such as the ICMM is the possibility of discovering and evaluating nuances. Each of us goes away with new insights, new hopes, and for me there are several. Frankly, just to name one, I think the most encouraging was Paul Seale's carefully wrought model of community-based healthcare within a timeframe to constructive church planting. I've never seen it so clearly organized and done. I'm thankful to be here for that alone.

We come to the close of a great celebration of world Christians in health ministries. As we leave this place, I think every one of us has a sense that we hear our Lord and we see our Lord more clearly than ever. And we hear him say, "And surely, I am with you always."

And they sang a new song, "Thou art worthy, worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and every language and every people and every nation. You have made them to be a

kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on earth. To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honor and glory, empower forever and forever.

And the great company of God's people said . . . *Amen.*