



Implications of Developing Mission Strategies for Mk¹

Ted Ward

Here I am, as a person interested in your topic and intending to labor and learn with you all week, fighting off a number of temptations.

First of all, fighting off the temptation to look at this entire subject simply as an educator—to direct the conference's attention to schools, schooling, and the sorts of educational experiences that make sense in a complex world. But I cannot yield to that temptation because this conference has a larger domain. Unlike so many conferences on missionary schooling and missionary children's schooling; missionary development and missionary children's development, this one is concerned with the entire missionary kid (MK) context: home, family, Church, and community.

It is also tempting for me, as a college professor, to go off on a side track and deal with matters of re-entry; defining re-entry, as we often do, largely in terms of competence in the American college. As a professor and administrator in an American university that has many MKs, there are a number of things I could say about that. Clearly, there are some good stories as well as some tragic stories.

As a researcher who has committed more than 20 years to the field of education in developing nations and who, during all that time, worked extensively for the missionary community, I am tempted to steer you in the direction of what we can know about the third culture. The *third culture*, a term coined a number of years ago by my colleague, Ruth Useem, is one about which I have increasing misgivings. I am afraid that whether it is used with the romantic notion that third culture equals world citizen or simply as a sociologist's tool, there is a real possibility that third culture may come to denote a cultural misfit, someone unable to function well in either the first or second culture; and, thus, having to create an emergency or survival culture.

As a father, as the father of a missionary, and as a grandfather, I am tempted to identify with the anxieties of new missionaries today who see themselves taking children deeper into a very troubled world, often with inadequate support.

As a missions consultant, I am tempted, instead, to divert to the main topic of this evening: *trends in missions as they affect, ultimately, the welfare of missionary kids*. We will not talk tonight about a future we have not yet seen, but about trends already unfolding before us.

I approach this topic as a world Christian more than as an educator, professor, researcher, or father. You see, I believe in what we are doing. I believe in what you are. I believe in Christians being committed to the worldwide fellowship of Christ and the global mission of the church. I see MKs as part of the frontier in missions, not as a hindrance or headache, but as a special blessing. Yet this special blessing brings with it a special obligation that the whole Christian community shares together.

¹ Ted Ward. Implications of Developing Mission Strategies for MKs. In Beth Tetzels and Patricia Mortensen (eds). *New Directions in Missions: Implications for MKs*. Manila, Philippines: Compendium of the International Conference on Missionary Kids, November 5-9, 1984. The Editors' Note: A new book is available by Dr. Ward, containing several appendices with valuable resources for those preparing to move cross-culturally. Ted Ward. *Living Overseas*. New York: The Free Press Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1984

I see my purposes on this keynote occasion as the following:

1. First, to begin a process of reflecting critically upon the state of overseas missions, identifying trends and current realities as they affect missionaries' family life and, most particularly, examining ways the nurturance of MKs can be enhanced.
2. My purpose is to sound the alarm on matters of unintended misdirection and drift of the missionary enterprise, especially as these impact negatively on MKs.
3. My purpose is to identify the basis for hope—an inescapable Christian responsibility—that as the world becomes more internationalized and interdependent, Christian leadership will emerge in the late years of this century with even more credibility and vigor than in the early years.

Before I continue, let me apologize to the many of you who are natives of nations other than the United States. As an American speaking at what is, by virtue of its primary sponsorship, a rather American sort of conference, I will refer from time to time to American problems and contexts. We all have a good deal to learn from each other, and it won't hurt to be honest about our own national perspectives. Although I identify myself as a world Christian, I believe one's credibility as a world Christian depends quite extensively on one's credibility as a person of a given nation. As an American, I speak with American concerns and anxieties. Much of my criticism is directed toward my own nation and our perspectives.

Current Trends

I highlight here seven trends that, in my judgment, affect missions and missionary families.

1. Expansion and Re-discovery in Missions

As I see it, we are facing a time of expansion and re-discovery in missions. Since World War II and the expansion of overseas missions, we have seen increasing stress on mission support systems that has reached a point of crisis in our time. I do not believe this is because of the short-term missionary era; nor because we are approaching the retirement of Korean War- and World War II-era missionaries nearly so much as it is a matter of steady growth having strained the support system progressively over time.

We now face the promise of even greater expansion. Recent reports from some of the more enterprising centers for world missions in the United States suggest a virtual doubling of missionary personnel in the next four to seven years. This is due, in part, to the re-discovery of the frontier in missions, an exciting phenomenon in itself. Having realized that the church is indeed planted, and having played with the romantic notion that this somehow means everyone else can go home and leave the national churches to finish a little mopping-up operation, we suddenly discover that all over the place are peoples hidden from the Gospel's influence. This re-discovery of the frontline of evangelism will force missionaries back into action.

It is probable that the next few years will bring a tremendous resurgence of missionary interest in languages. And as language study goes, so goes term length. Generally, people who invest time and effort in language study tend to stay longer on the missionary frontier.

2. Urbanization

A second and related trend is urbanization. We are suddenly waking up to the sociological reality of a world that is largely urbanized. As the percentage of the world population living in cities increases, it becomes obvious that many, if not most, of these so-called hidden peoples are, in fact, urban. Major missionary groups, some represented

right here, are mounting substantial new efforts and large-scale deployment of missionaries into cities in Latin American, Europe, and Asia. To some extent, this phenomenon is touching Africa; though perhaps this is the continent least touched at this point.

I worry a bit about the nature of the missionary community, because the recruitment of missionaries in the United States is still largely a suburban and small-town phenomenon. We are now putting into some of the most congested and incredibly dense cities in the world, people who have virtually no skills for coping with urban life. It is possible that one of the great needs of our times is an internship situation that includes urban living skills with the rest of cultural coping. Children will be especially affected because those whose cultural background is largely non-urban will find themselves developing a set of skills totally unknown at home.

3. The Planted Church

A third phenomenon is the emergence of the planted church. Some mission organizations are still having trouble coping with their own successes. One earmark of the planted church is an accountable Christian community, which cannot be treated like a colony. There is, in some cases, a great deal of colonial behavior, even within the church.

Closer to the family, I suspect we will see the influence of this new era in many more teams of multinational missionaries. I assume that the role of the lone missionary is largely over and that much of our future work will be done in teams, as it was in New Testament times. Increasing numbers of international teams raise the possibility that many of our model communities may become multi-cultural, rather than mono-cultural enclaves. How well will the people from your nation cope with this?

Another factor in the internalization of the mission team and emergence of the planted church is the matter of life-style. I refer particularly to conspicuous wealth. Few missionaries from my country like to think of themselves as wealthy. Few nationals I know think of them as anything else. Therein is quite a rub. Skills of co-operation in families and among children are desperately needed.

4. Tension over Issues of Justice

The fourth trend is increased tension over social justice issues. It is no great secret that one of the greatest confrontations lays ahead in the post-revolutionary countries where Christians will be called on increasingly to take a stand on justice issues. It has been possible for North American missionaries to operate in a largely apolitical manner; congratulating themselves, in fact, on being able to stay above politics. But in many parts of the world, politics and life are no more separable than are religion and life.

The missionary community is in serious need of help, and families are the place where it can be focused. We need help to deal with moral and ethical issues in Christian perspective. Christianity, in a time of oppression, must be more than Scripture texts memorized; it must be principles of God's righteousness lived. Our youngsters especially need moral and ethical clarity. Frankly, I wonder how much of it they are getting in schools committed primarily to academic excellence.

5. Religious Extremism

Fifth, religious extremism and anti-religious biases are on the increase. I bring you no news. Witness the pro-Khomeini forces and Sikhism, closed borders and the visa game. Christians will be tempted to respond with their own forms of extremism. Clearly, much

of the conflict we call terrorism today has religion at its heart. I wonder, is Christianity any different? Are we purveying the skills of peacemakers? In handling our children, do we convey the Scriptural philosophy that it is the other cheek to be turned, not simply the retaliation to be measured? In their homes and educational experiences, MKs need much help with the Christian response to challenge, to differences in religion and culture, and to personal threat. If we are going to have youngsters outside our own country during the years ahead, they must have help in advance with matters that are sure to arise.

6. Broader Missions Support

The sixth trend is the broader involvement of individuals and churches in supporting missions. You may feel I must be referring to all churches and people except those supporting you—they seem not to be all that much broader and more involved, I suspect—but one can show this trend statistically and also by the nature of denominational relationships with churches. You can see it even in some dealings of the inter-denominational and independent boards and churches. The wall of separation between pew and missionary is coming down. As a matter of fact, here are some exciting new opportunities for building networks and support groups. It is likely that whole new systems of financial support may emerge, perhaps much to the chagrin of missionary boards because some will be calculated to get the missionary closer and more responsive to the church.

Right now we need creative plans to put this broader base of human resources into play. It gives us an especially promising moment to raise serious questions about the kinds of support networks needed for preparing missionary kids to go overseas, supporting them on the field, and helping them as they return home.

7. Family Instability

The seventh trend is a shift in the nature and needs of families. Thirty percent of American children are from divorced families. Three out of every ten American women of all ages are divorced. What little research has looked expressly at church people in contrast to non-church people suggests that church people are not different. They are close to the national norm—including those from the evangelical community. Some estimate that as many as half of the couples going into missions now do so with incipient marital difficulties, to say nothing of problems with their children. It is closer to the truth to suggest that, in their fervent desire to fill vacant slots, missions are taking serious risks in sending unstable homes to the field.

More American Christians Overseas

From time to time I am called upon to consult in matters of trends not yet visible, which is something like crystal ball gazing, but we do it on more rational grounds. I would like to share with you one trend that is just around the corner. I think of it as basically good news which may change much of what we have been talking about, potentially for the better.

I see substantially more American Christians going overseas in the years ahead. Now, I did not say substantially more missionaries, though that is obviously true. That trend is already in place. I believe we will soon see increasing numbers of Americans going into international careers, and many of these people will be Christians. This will fight a current trend of antipathy toward international careers that has been characteristic in the United States for about 15 years now.

Already I have heard from contacts in American community churches overseas that a larger percentage of their congregations than ever before are evangelical Christians. Twenty years ago,

American community church congregations had a reputation for being largely the country club set who wanted to do something a little different to break the boredom on Sundays. But, today, we hear that American communities are becoming characterized as Christian witness communities.

One characteristic of the MK contribution to our nation early in this century was the creation of a tremendous pool of well-fitted, multicultural people who could go into international careers. This has not been true in the last 15 or 20 years, but it seems to be coming true again.

At the Urbana Missionary Conference in 1969, I was asked to give a paper on, what was then, an unpopular topic: the moonlighting missionary or the tent-maker—the person who has a viable career overseas and is also steadfast and outspoken in his or her witness for Jesus Christ. As recently as 1969, many people argued that the trend wouldn't last. As a matter of fact, I was not trying to promote something; I was trying to respect something that has always existed. And, of course, the missionary community is not necessarily threatened by such a trend, but is perhaps encouraged by it.

I believe this same function of more American Christians being willing to go overseas will be reflected in a significant number of new youth corps approaches. As the Peace Corps is diminishing in the United States it becomes obvious that we need other outlets for the eagerness of youth to make a contribution in a needy world. And that is on the secular side. On the Christian side, we have seen the attempt to make short-term project work. We are now at the edge of a new series of successors to these less-clearly defined short-term experiences which may put more emphasis on such practical opportunities as language teaching in the People's Republic of China and business community openings in the Islamic world.

Some consequences of this shift are important for your interests here tonight. It will mean that many more small children will be in missions than are today. We will begin to see many more overseas births. One effect of this kind of youth movement is that young people tend to marry in such a movement and stay on with it. Also, we may see people recruited as missionaries who are already residents of a country—Canadians who are already in Jamaica, Americans who are already in Haiti—and their children coming along as a younger generation of MKs than we have ever thought about.

So much of our MK discussion centers on schools. If I am half right, the need of the near future will be pre-school work for families trying to cope with the increasing difficulty of raising kids who have no particular cultural identity, because they are born in one country but of a different culture.

There are some consequences. For one thing, the wide door for new and expanding schools that this movement will surely create raises many questions about what sorts of schools will rush into the gap. What do we really want? There seems to be a major choice: do we want more schools which are an exclusive resource for missions, or will we switch to more schools that are themselves seen as a missionary outreach?

I wish I could get missionary educators to come to grips with the fact that a school overseas inevitably involves people other than the missionary community, and that it ought to include a multicultural body of students. When it does, the school is part of the missionary enterprise, not just a service arm. I wish more people recognized that the missionary school overseas is a significant point of entry into a culture. Now I know as well as you do that every nation has various restrictions on who can and cannot attend your school, and whom you can and cannot hire. Yet, in country after country, after all the reasons things will not work, I point out many opportunities left for things that will work. I believe an outreach-type of school has a much greater chance of being a proper place of nurturance for the internationalists of the future, which would be a fulfilling way to see our MKs.

What sort of pre-field preparation will be needed for these new hordes of MKs? Several of the major groups preparing missionaries now are giving attention to this problem. The August 1984 issue

of *Focus*, Missionary Internship's magazine, addressed this problem head-on. The new Southern Baptist facility in Virginia has a strong emphasis on it.

I am hopeful, because I think that in God's time and way, he will energize his people to make more of the resources and opportunities that exist in and around the missionary family, toward the ultimate strengthening of the Christian community world-wide.

Sounding the Alarm

My second purpose in speaking tonight is to sound a few alarms. I recognize that every one of them is highly controversial. You should understand that I am presenting one person's opinion, but it is an opinion based not on hearsay, conjecture, or speculation, but on experience in the communities we serve together. My involvement is not by any means only with missionary schools. I spend an equal amount of time in all four species of American schools overseas: the so-called international schools, the so-called American schools, the so-called missionary schools, and, of course that great army of schools we call the Department of Defense dependents' schools.

Many of my observations are based on experiences in one sector or another, but I must confess that in the last ten years I have seen fewer and fewer distinctions among these schools. There is almost an amalgamation going on; all four are becoming more alike.

1. Rootlessness

I would like to sound an alarm about the rootlessness and lack of identity of the American family overseas, missionary and otherwise. There are some problems underlying this:

- a) The internal migration within the United States has continued; in fact, it is virtually at fever pitch. Freedom of movement is ultimately de-stabilizing in a society. Americans find it very easy to move from one place to another in the US.
- b) They find it easy to move their possessions. Materialism within a society makes movement relatively trivial because you can take things and move them, or you can buy a new thing when you get there. If your whole life is focused on things, you don't really need roots . . . or do you? Roots are things like tradition, hopes, values, friends, and families. Good-bye, for many MKs and other American children means, "I'll never see you again" when it ought to mean, "So long for now".
- c) An underlying problem in this rootlessness is the persistence of the authority crisis in Western society. Americans have not completely gotten over the '70s; I doubt that we will. There is a great deal of suspicion about authority; a great deal of challenging of authority. This is one reason we are having so much family breakdown in the United States.
- d) Ambivalence about the rightness of being overseas is increasingly an American anxiety. When parents (missionary or otherwise) are ambivalent about whether they should be where they are, children pick it up very quickly and it leads them to further disorientation and rootlessness.
- e) Also among these problems is the ease of international travel. There is much more whimsical coming and going than there used to be. "Mommy, in our class today, our teacher asked where we were from. Where are we from? I was born in Indonesia. I've lived in Michigan; but you're from California and Daddy isn't. Where am I from?" Do you realize how short a leap it is from that question to the much more basic question, "Mommy, who am I?" Kids need help with this.

2. Enclave Schools:

Alarm # two: Enclave schools with expatriate teachers, who are even more temporary than the missionaries, are not the answer for today's MKs. What a tragedy it would be if we had more such schools in which children grow up inured to the very world for which God gave his Son. Some parents are, in desperation, driven to the home-schooling movement. Indeed, home-schooling may provide a viable alternative for a few. I am impressed with the cooperative schools in which parents, in small clusters, pool their expertise and create a small-group home-schooling movement. But I am certain that some mission-sponsored schools are already counter-productive for the missionary community.

When we accept with little challenge the Western world's quest for excellence and then make all sorts of noise about how excellent we are striving to be, we fall into the same kind of gullible ignorance that has characterized the American fascination with Japanese "cram" schools—schools which even the Japanese look on with disfavor.²

If you take values seriously, you learn that not only success in college is important. When schools select their educators only on the basis of their expertise as teachers or, worse yet, simply look at the question of availability, it often leads to insufficient regard for their sense of mission. I challenge mission boards to take MK educators' sense of mission just as seriously as they take that criterion for MKs' parents.

Schools, which are protective pockets of Western isolation, have no place in a missionary community. When we inculcate into our children limitations in intercultural skills and intercultural commitments, we are damaging our children. When we emphasize defensiveness and discomfort that adults have about their presence in a foreign country and pass that along to children in the form of education, we have not honored Christ.

Parents today, as never before, have a sense of anxiety about going overseas. For various reasons there is almost a sense of guilt about having taken one's children out of the home culture. Parents need to have their anxiety and guilt alleviated in order to help their children gain the most from the challenge of a cross-cultural experience.

² [See later critiques of this attitude (1987): http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1987-01-10/news/8701030450_1_japanese-education-study-of-american-education-suicide-rate]