



Avoiding the *Real* Y2K Problem in Missions¹

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Understanding the possibilities:

What could be worse than having all the data disappear and all the computers go on strike?

Where would we be if the doors would close to evangelization *everywhere*?

How likely is the Y2K problem?

How likely is the closing of doors?

The *real* Y2K problem: unawareness of the ways we are flirting with danger.

Missions in the 21st century must be based on different assumptions.

Taking the danger seriously, the hazards:

Bravado:

1. Surely it won't happen.
2. If it does, we will surely be able to fix it.
3. We can find another way to get on with our work.

Blindness to the Signs:

1. Rigid paradigms (One way to do things. Our way or NO way.)
2. Limited perspective. (Perspectivism undeveloped. Myopia [near-sightedness]. Cultural bias.)
3. Complacency. (Self-satisfaction. Over-estimation of the adequacy of our present ways.)

Unwillingness to Change:

1. Misplaced faith. (In our skills and technologies, rather than in God's providence.)
2. Misunderstanding of our place in God's plan. (We are servants, not commanders.)

What is needed most in order to get ready for the REAL Y2K problem:

1. **Put primary emphasis on relationship-building.** Insist that all overseas work be built upon well developed relationships that always include national Christian advisors and staff as well as appropriate host-government liaison persons whenever possible.
2. **Change to a responsive mode.** Minimize the "planned in the USA" approaches to missionary programs. Treat the planning process more as a service in itself rather than as a means to further initiatives from the US.
3. **Develop and reward a can-do attitude and facilitation style.** Bureaucratic delays and exhibitions of unnecessary assertions of authority and autonomy in field-liaison and home-office decision-makers and program support officers should be replaced by a more clear-cut posture and behavior of serving rather than controlling.

¹ Ted Ward. Avoiding the *Real* Y2K Problem in Missions. Workshop Outline, May 1999

4. **Reconceptualize stewardship** in terms of the responsibilities to be shared by all of God's people rather than just an accounting and auditing function on the part of donors. "Stewardship" can no longer be used as a disguise for long-armed and heavy-handed control. All of human interaction involves risk. Absolute guarantees against "misuse of funds" or "irresponsible decisions" are not possible. The willingness to wisely trust must replace overseeing that meddles and attempts to control in a non-trusting manner.