



Exciting Rediscovery in Missions¹

Ted Ward

We are facing a time of exciting rediscovery in missions. It is possible that in the next four to seven years *the total number of missionary personnel will double*; partly because of the *discovery of the "hidden peoples."* These are blocks of people who have been hidden from the Gospel's influence, and the rediscovery of front-line evangelism will bring missionaries into more action. A number of trends are emerging:

1. *It is probable that we will see a tremendous resurgence of missionary interest in languages.* Generally, people who invest time and effort in language study stay longer on the missionary frontier.
2. A second trend has to do with the fact that *our world is becoming more urban.* As the percentage of the world's population living in cities increases, it becomes obvious that many of these *"hidden people" are urban.* In Latin America, Europe, and Asia, major missionary groups are mounting substantial new efforts and large-scale deployment of missionary forces into the cities. This deployment, however, is worrisome because the recruitment of missionaries is largely still from suburban and small-town backgrounds. And now we are placing these people into some of the most congested, incredibly dense, difficult-to-deal-with cities in the world. These *missionaries have virtually no skills to help them cope with urban life*, and their children will be deeply affected by this. Why? Because children whose relatives, background, and cultural identity are largely non-urban will find themselves needing a set of skills totally unknown to the family and friends "back home".
3. A third factor is the *emergence of the planted church.* We will see this influence in terms of *missionary teams that are multi-national.* I assume that the role of the lonely missionary is almost over and that much of *what we do in the future will be done in teams, even as it was in New Testament times.* As these international teams form, many of our missionary communities will become multi-cultural rather than mono-cultural enclaves. Another factor in the internationalization of the mission team is *the matter of lifestyle and conspicuous wealth.* Relatively few missionaries like to think of themselves as wealthy. Relatively few nationals think of them as anything else. Therein is quite a rub. An adjustment of standards of living will be required, and this adjustment will demand real co-operation within families and will especially affect the way we handle our children.
4. A fourth concern is *the increased tension over social justice issues.* One of the greatest confrontations lying ahead in the post-revolutionary countries is that *Christians are going to be called on to take a stand on justice issues.* Politics and life are no more separable than religion and life. Americans, however, tend to dichotomize everything: pork and beans, black and white, politicians and good people; this sort of dichotomy doesn't wash. Our

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children need moral and ethical clarity. Frankly, I wonder how much of it they are getting in schools that are primarily committed to academic excellence.

I bring you no “new” news when I state that *religious extremism and anti-religious biases are on the increase*. Much of the terrorism today has religion at its heart. MKs [Missionary Kids]² *need help and a clear focus on the matter of Christian response to challenge and indifference in the areas of religion, culture, and personal threat*. If we take children outside their own countries, we must prepare them to meet the tensions that are sure to arise.

Broader involvement of individual churches in mission support is likely. A new system of financial support may emerge; systems which will draw missionaries closer and make them more responsive to the people from supporting churches. I see a need for support networks for MKs and for churches to become involved with young people; especially to smooth the MKs’ return from overseas experience.

Still another trend has to do with shifts in the nature and the needs of families. *At this writing, 30% of American children are from divorced families*. It reflects an ostrich posture to say that church people are different. What little research that has been done regarding the churchd in contrast to the non-churchd, suggests that church people, including the evangelical community, aren’t much different in divorce rates and family instability than the national norms. Some believe that half of the couples going into missions have incipient marital difficulties. Unfortunately, many mission agencies, because of their fervent desire to fill vacant slots, are taking serious chances by sending unstable homes to the mission field.



There is good news. Substantially more North Americans will be going overseas in the years ahead. Christians are found more frequently in international careers. One of the contributions of MKs to our country’s world stature during the early part of this century was the creation of a large pool of well-fitted, multi-cultural people who grew up in missionary homes and then went into international careers as adults. This can become true again. A large number of North American Christians are living in China, though China is as closed to missionaries today as when Mao was alive. The teaching of the English language in China and the various business opportunities in the Islamic world are remarkable doors through which Christians are moving into “closed” areas. The Gospel is being heard. Young people going into these careers often make long-term commitments. Their children can strengthen the outreach of the Gospel if they are nurtured and educated to see themselves as world Christians. This is the big task for mission boards and missionary schools—the development of world Christians.

² Ted Ward was the keynote speaker at the International Conference on Missionary Kids held in Manila, the Philippines. This article is an excerpt from his speech. He and his wife, Margaret, are parents of five grown children, called internationalists by their father, and several grandchildren.