



## Transcriptions

### Overseas Service

Ted Ward

**Annotation:** *Urbana, 1970.* Ted Ward tells of the large numbers of professional and technical internationalists who vastly outnumber missionaries overseas. He encourages college students to consider the importance of sharing Christ with strategically placed people in other nations who could not be reached by conventional missionaries.



The lights were dim, the engine noise was muffled, but I couldn't sleep. It was my first non-stop flight directly into the heart of Africa and we were high over the mid-Atlantic. At least, I hoped we were still high; this seemed like a rather poor time for swimming. But I needed to stretch. I shuffled down the aisle to the front of the cabin, turned and started slowly back. These hundred or more sleeping passengers were largely unknown to me, but suddenly they took on a very specific meaning. It wasn't tourist season and, anyway, we were headed for destinations that aren't very popular with the tourist trade. No, these travelers were a small sample of the international set, the employed jet set, if you prefer: professional and technical workers to the world, families, businessmen, young couples, a few were Africans headed home, but most were Americans and Europeans moving back to their assignments where they would be working shoulder-to-shoulder with Africans. It had crossed my mind, during cocktail time several hours earlier, to glance around and try to spot the likely missionaries using their abstinence as an oversimplified clue. Even then it was clear that most of this sizable squad of travelers were part of the huge traffic of international workers, but now what really struck me in that dark aisle was that this great ship of the sky and

dozens like it were plowing through the Atlantic horizon many times each week with just such loads as this. Indeed, working overseas involves thousands and thousands of Americans. Not only are Protestant missionaries considerably outnumbered by other overseas Americans (probably about 40 to 1) but in the last dozen or more years, the rate of increase of non-missionary overseas Americans has been greater than the rate of the growth of the missionary population.

Now it is easy to misunderstand the implications of these facts. We must be careful to recognize overseas employment for what it is: a major way to enrich your cross-cultural experience while productively employed in your specialty; and not to glamorize it for what it isn't: a substitute for organized missions and the mission society sort of approach to world mission of the church. Indeed, there are some rather practical problems in being an independent layman missionary and these problems are rather thoroughly, even somewhat pessimistically, reviewed in a pamphlet entitled, "Don't Turn off the Mission Boards" by Forsburg and Traa. [Unable to locate document.]

There are problems, for sure, but we ought to look into the matter anyway. In order that you can see yourself and your career in a world perspective, the program of Urbana '70 is being broadened through this presentation; broadened in order to make sure that you're aware of the role being played on the world scene by a swelling crowd of internationalists. The internationalists are men and women of various occupations whose careers are played out across international boundaries; people from one country who are employed in a different country. These people, native to one culture and voluntarily transplanted into another, some anthropologists are now calling "the people of the third culture." Their lifestyles and values are drawn from the cultural systems of both their former and their present communities and, thus, they conform to neither but create new and unique patterns of living. Many of us here have served in this third culture. It is quite a stimulating experience. Getting free of some of the limitations of one's own culture is a great way to gain perspective and to develop new appreciations for people and for other ways of life. The internationalist is quite often a professionally trained or executive-type person. He was successful and respected in his organization or his institution at home and, thus, he was offered an assignment overseas. He then became a branch manager, corporate representative, research coordinator, or counselor person in some exotic place across an ocean. And let's face it, for the American with wanderlust almost any place is exotic, for a few weeks anyway.

We Americans come from a tradition of exploring and wandering. Most of our great-great-grandfathers were adventurous travelers and the tendency still seems to be in our blood. I'm convinced that part of the reason Americans have been as useful as they have been in extending Christ's church overseas is because, in comparison with many others in the family of man, we are less community-centered, less family-oriented, and less geographically limited. And, of course, Americans have had more money to use for long-distance wandering.

From the statistical review of the nation's workforce provided by the Bureau of Census, the number of Americans engaged in overseas work can be determined. It is perhaps hard to believe, but at the time of this study just a year ago, 1 out of every 140 Americans was living overseas. Of the male labor force of the United States calculated at 51 million, there are 437,000 employed overseas, nearly half a million. That represents nearly 1 man working overseas for each 117 men working in the States. Please note that the United States Armed Forces personnel are not included in these data.

Further, the figures, as given here, are conservative since they do not include non-employed dependents; nor do they include tourists and short-term employed persons. Certainly, you can get

the point: for an American, working overseas is not at all uncommon. The total U.S. workforce overseas is almost as large as that of a major metropolitan labor center such as Atlanta or Dallas; much larger, for example, than the tri-state metropolitan region around Cincinnati. In fact, it is a quantity of workers greater than all the firemen and policemen of every city in the United States all put together.

To personalize these data, we can look closer at your age brackets and educational categories. You are soon to enter your prime years of employability. During these years from 25-44, nearly 1.4% of the male American population is involved in long-term overseas experience. For these same years of prime employability, the college-educated sub-group is employed overseas at a much higher rate -- 2.1%. If we were to assume that you, here, are a random sample of American college students, we could predict that more than 1 of each 50 of you will spend a substantial amount of your career outside the United States. But, you are not a random group. You are much more attuned to international opportunities than would be typical. That's why you're here. Your awareness and sensitivity to the overseas opportunities and needs places you in a group apart. This factor will have the effect, conservatively, of doubling the probability that you will go overseas to work. Add the fact that many of you are committed to the Christian proposition for worldwide evangelism and it follows that you are one of the people that, no more than easy arm's reach from where you sit, will be an internationalist.

Opportunities for women and the demand for trained husband-and-wife teams are increasing, thus, we have reason to include the women, here, as well as the men. Just for fun, right now try to predict which of the people near you will be the internationalist. Now try an experiment: reach out and touch his or her shoulder. Go ahead. Now, the reactions likely vary from, "Who, me?" to "Are you kidding?" But quite seriously, were we all to gather here 10 years from now, your experiences would very likely have fulfilled these informal predictions.

Many of you will become missionaries in the classical sense. Certainly, the day of organized missions is far from over, but not all of you who become internationalists will be full-time missionaries. Not by a long shot. The number of Americans going overseas in non-missionary roles is increasing at a higher rate than the missionary force. In the 20 years from 1949 to '69, the number of Protestant, that is denominational and independent American missionaries, rose from about 16,000 to about 33,000, or a bit more than doubling. The number of total American civilians overseas during that same period went from 491,000 to 1,399,000, almost tripling. Unless our nation reverts to an isolationist stance, these trends are likely to continue and you are likely to be part of the action whether as a missionary or as American worker expatriate.

Now, just what is the American worker expatriate? First, he's an American then he becomes a member of that growing community of internationalists sharing his skills and abilities with the world community of man. His skills are particularly needed in the developing nations where his emotional bias and his aspirations must be committed to working himself out of a job, training and helping workers to take their rightful place in their own emerging nation. But the beauty of all this is that an exciting career can be built around a series of experiences in which you dig in, help others, and get out. There is only one sort of person who will be miserable in the role of the new internationalist: that is the person who wants to settle down and lock himself into one steady role and to protect his status quo for life. If you are this sort of person, turn off your hearing aid; I'm not on your wavelength.

Now, what does an overseas career look like? Although there are occasionally some wild and fascinating variations, ordinarily the American family overseas continues to be involved in an American-style community. Far too often, it is a ghetto of the elite complete with a chain link fence and armed guard. Of course, there can be plenty of involvement with the foreign nationals, but there are also the American-type schools and the American-style friendship patterns. As a witness for Christ within this community the opportunities are rather as they are at home in the States, neither distinctly better nor worse. Starry-eyed visions of becoming a part-time missionary are often unfulfilled. Was it Shakespeare or perhaps Hezekiah who first said it, "Airplane riding doth not a missionary make?" Isolation and loneliness can hit you pretty hard when you discover how much you need support and encouragement from fellow Christians. Establishing satisfying interaction with the national community is usually a long and difficult task. Now what is the typical length of foreign service by the overseas American? Observations suggest that the number of years overseas averages somewhere from 8 to 12. There seem to be three different patterns: First, the limited assignment from 1 to 5 years; second, the career experience from 8 to 20 years overseas; and then third, there are a few lifetime people: those who really cut their ties to America taking satisfaction in the thought of being buried in the soil of their adopted and beloved country. These lifetime people are a minority though their number is growing in such countries as Israel and for a while, at least, Sweden and Canada.

Very few Americans, even those who are altruistic and highly motivated, are able to change their lifestyles enough to step down to the economic realities of "going on the national economy." This phrase refers to learning to live on the salary that a local national person would be paid for doing the job that you're paid 3 to 20 times as much to do in the United States. Yes, the lifetime people are very rare. You may prefer, instead, to think of yourself as a career or limited-assignment person. Most of the American community overseas are temporary residents. Most do not renounce their citizenship in the United States. Most return to the U.S. for a month or more of furlough or vacation at 1- to 4-year intervals. Most live at salary standards far above the local population. In fact, many live like kings and are hated for it. Most can save enough of their so-called "hardship allowance" while overseas to allow an improvement of their standard of living even after they return to the United States. Many is the swimming pool that's been built on a hardship allowance.

Indeed, the American community in Paris, in London, in Buenos Aires, in Berlin, in Rome, Nairobi, Manila, Melbourne, Singapore, New Delhi; these constitute large unevangelized fields of Americans in themselves. And these spiritually needy Americans are upper middle class and above, in our terms, and almost always upper class in local terms. There's a message here: missions have tended to leave the rest of the American community alone overseas. Although the primary justification of foreign missions is, of course, reaching the citizens of the host nation, the witness to and among Americans overseas should not be neglected. Careful reading of Acts 16 indicates that Paul, as the first missionary to Europe, went first to relate to a person of his own religious and cultural background. Christian businessmen, engineers, teachers, and government agents are needed to infiltrate the overseas community of Americans, and vital work for Christ needs to be done in English by wives of businessmen and government staff persons. Is this where God wants you? If so, there's a price to pay. You'll have to be a missionary on an overtime basis. It's harder and, in some respects, less productive to be a self-supported missionary than to be a church-supported missionary.

Following are a few specific comments on overseas employment as it could affect you:

First, business and industry constitutes the largest category of employment overseas for Americans. Opportunities in this private sector typically involve considerable freedom and, in fact, free time to engage in outside activities of the sort that can make your other career as a missionary as extensive as you wish. There are some restrictive exceptions, particularly in the Arab countries.

Government service positions are a bit more strictly defined. Since the representative of the government is, more or less, on display most of the time, whether the occasions are formal or informal, there is some restriction on involvement in sectarian ventures. But the occasions and the contacts for personal influence and private conversations about Christ can be both numerous and consequential. Think of the importance of sharing Christ with strategically placed people in other nations. There are people to be reached by laymen that missionaries can't even get to. Ambassador John Gordon Mein, for one, found it possible to be both Ambassador for the United States and Ambassador for Christ at the same time. His assignment in Guatemala was cut short by an assassin's bullet but not before he had established, in one more country, that Americans can live and speak for the transforming power of the Gospel of Christ. While on the subject of Guatemala, you should know that our current ambassador is an active member of a Spanish language Protestant congregation of believers in the capital; a church that began as a mission church. A wide array of positions are available in government service from career posts in the diplomatic service to limited-term positions in civilian support system roles related to the Armed Forces. There are positions requiring various levels of education and various degrees of career commitment.

And rather than to neglect it altogether, the Peace Corps and other quasi-governmental operations should be mentioned as one of the ways through which young Americans can give substantially of themselves for the sake of humanity. Like most experiences in life, a term in the Peace Corps can be as valuable or as trite as you make it. A really dedicated young man or woman can make a most worthy start toward a career as an internationalist through an assignment as a Peace Corps volunteer. A short-term mission assignment or even a summer overseas can serve the same purpose though, in general, the longer the better.

The demand for professional workers overseas is very real. Since my own experiences are more in research and development than in industry or government, I am particularly aware of the huge American stake in overseas research and research on international affairs. Just one example: the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies recently counted a roster of 416 U.S. professors who are scholarly experts on Japan. They are located on 135 different campuses in the United States. These specialists were primarily responsible for the 15 million dollars spent on Japanese studies last year. This illustration deals just with Japan, not even one of the so-called "underdeveloped nations" where an immense American involvement still continues despite war cutbacks. These millions for research and training were spent by and through projects in which overseas Americans are involved. Consider: thousands of Americans are choosing international research and development as a career. Is this for you? Many of you intend to be teachers when you graduate. You have likely heard about the thousands of teachers engaged in the education of dependents of overseas Americans, but there is even a more exciting job to do. Especially in the rapidly developing nations, education in the national schools and in the nonformal educational programs promises to continue to become a major employment field for overseas Americans.

One major difficulty with this category of service is that teachers' salaries and the local economies are often incredibly low, but many teaching positions are subsidized through USAID or similar or similar government or foundation programs. Several of my friends have taught in literacy programs, small farm management, family nutrition, and family planning; not the typical subjects of the American curriculum, but American-trained teaching skills can be useful in a variety of subjects.

Yes, there are even opportunities for productive relationships between internationalists and traditional missionaries. Missionaries and Christian internationalists must learn to help each other. This sort of cooperation can be extremely important in strengthening and enriching the impact of missions on the local scene. There is a rub in all of this: regardless of the way you go, the length of time you're there, or the roles you play, you should plan to learn the language. Many Americans overseas fail to take the local languages seriously. Without a doubt, our monolingual culture makes Americans linguistically handicapped. So when you add a bit of laziness to ineptness, it isn't surprising that avoiding language learning is so common. Of course, English is a marvelously handy language and, in most cities of the world, it is possible to make your way rather well with nothing but English. Nevertheless, if you intend to double in missions, you will need the local language. Knowing the language of the people is part of what it takes to be a beautiful American and you have to want to get close to the people. You need to take a real interest in their condition, their need, their hopes, their past, and their beauty as people.

Why should we encourage American Christians to go overseas? We live in the reality of the one-world era. The involvement of all nations and the problems that affect any one nation is both a matter of atomic energy and of total ecology. There is no feasibility in isolation, from a pragmatic viewpoint. From a Christian viewpoint, there is no feasibility in separateness. We are in the world. Christ is building his church in this world. We are partners in this singular venture. As American Christians, the riches of our land and of ourselves, in the light of the impoverished majority in the world, makes us even more profoundly debtors to all men. We have obligations. Christians must not be counted among the more selfish people of our own nation. We should seek out many ways to share. Sharing is not just a matter of monetary wealth, but involves ourselves, our lives, and our careers. Americans are sharing. They are sharing in all sorts of capacities and roles. Should you, as Christian Americans, not be aware of your potentialities as internationalists, even as you're aware of your opportunities in church financed mission?

Another reason for Christians to be involved as members of the general American community overseas is the need to provide a balanced American image. If the only American Christians that non-Americans ever see are the church-supported missionaries, they might get the impression that all Christians should drop out of everything else in order to be full-time employees of the church. They might also assume that the more prosperous Americans, whom they likely envy for their worldly goods, are rarely Christians. Thus, it could seem that God doesn't even prosper the very people who are called by his name.

Further, going overseas as a secular worker is one way to help enlighten the church of Jesus Christ in the United States. Of all the supposedly sophisticated Christian groups of this world, the church in America is one of the most distinctly culture bound. Overseas experience of the American church members might do much to reduce the parochial and narrow views of how God works and what God wants in a life. Mission board members, pastors, deacons, as well as parishioners in general, need a high degree of cross-cultural sensitivity and profound Christian love for human variations. As we work together to reduce the American-ness of our Christianity and to rely more on

the Scriptural models of faith and love, we have better claim on the orthodoxy of community and the orthodoxy of compassion that Francis Schaeffer talks about.

Cross-cultural communication and the insights of anthropology can make a constructive difference in the church at home. We can all work toward the day when a majority of church members have had some first-hand experience in productively relating to others whose cultural backgrounds are different. That would be a great day. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has a cross-cultural appeal, but most American Christianity does not. I'm eager for the day when alumni of the Peace Corps and short-term missionary programs become deacons. And even better, what a great thing it would be for a local church to deliberately take on an overseas experience through the eyes of 3 or 4 families of internationalists.

In summary, here are a few specific suggestions:

- First, for those of you who are trying to select a major field of study, select a field that will prepare you for a versatile career in the United States and in the world.
- For those of you who are planning on graduate school, consider a graduate program that includes overseas learning experiences.
- For those of you who are going to be college and university faculty members, give special consideration to institutions that are involved in overseas contracts and will give you a chance to participate as part of your assignment, now or later.
- For all of you, take some studies in cross-cultural understanding, area studies in geography, sociology, and history of specific world regions.
- One further suggestion: get some cross-cultural experiences now by learning to work in an American sub-cultural setting somewhere near where you live or where you go to school.

Americans are going overseas to carry on the business, the research, the training, and the cooperative development which is part of the worldwide involvement and obligation of a profoundly indebted nation. Should Christians be among them?