

ANOTHER LOOK AT MISSIONS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

By Dr. Jack L. Arnold

Missions are at another crossroads in the history of Christianity. The Church is growing by leaps and bounds in the Third World, modern technology and travel affects world missions, true Christianity in the United States is becoming weaker by the day and Christians are more and more distrustful of traditional mission organizations. It is time to take another look at modern missions as we move into the Third Millennium.

There are myriad's of needs on the mission field today. The gospel must go to the 10/40 window so that the Muslim and Hindu worlds can be reached for Christ. The many wars and natural disasters create an environment where there is a great need to provide food and medicine to those in some kind of crisis. There is the need for true Christians to unite around Christ and Scripture to be a major force against secularism, the rise of the Muslim religion and the cults. These are just a few of the needs in modern missions.

However, the greatest need in my opinion, and the opinion of most missiologists who are on the cutting edge of world missions, is to train the pastors and Christian leaders in the Third World countries where the gospel is spreading like wildfire. There are millions of people coming to Christ in China, Asia, Africa, South America and Eastern Europe. It is estimated that right now there is a need to train two million pastors to meet the needs of an exploding Church and by the year 2015 that number will escalate to five million.

How can we accomplish this monumental task? Certainly not by the traditional method of training men for the gospel of Christ through Bible schools and seminaries. By the old methods, the most men and women who could be trained in a fifteen-year period at the maximum would be five hundred thousand. While there will always be a need for formal theological and Biblical training, it is time to rethink missions strategy so that a maximum amount of people can be trained for gospel ministry.

You may think the best way to train national pastors is to bring them to the USA for training in some evangelical Bible school or seminary. But in reality this is the worst method. Why? Statistics show that 95% of all foreign students who come to this country to train, whether Christian or non-Christian, never return to their native countries. They get a taste of the good life in the States and they have no desire to live in the standard conditions of their countries. I can't blame them because life in Third World countries is very hard, but this does not solve the need for national pastors to be trained so they can reach their own people. Furthermore, it is much more economical to send one pastor overseas for several weeks to train 300 national pastors for around \$3000 than to send one national pastor (and most likely his family) to the States for three years for approximately \$90,000.

The key to training pastors is to keep them in their own countries and bring the Biblical and theological training to them. How can we do this and what role do American pastors and churches play in this strategy? America is a great and wealthy country and there are still many fine believers in this nation. Yet the materialism in America is sapping Christians of spiritual vitality and the church is growing more indifferent and apostate. Americans abroad are not well accepted by many countries because of our wealth and misuse of that wealth in foreign politics.

American Christians still have two wonderful resources going for them. The first is trained pastors who have a thousand times more knowledge of the Bible and theology than do most national pastors. The second is the money that American Christians have, and if they committed just a small portion of that money to training pastors, perhaps the world could be evangelized in a few years. God has

richly blessed American Christians with educational resources and wealth and with a little commitment there could be revival abroad and hopefully at home.

God is raising up an army to meet this need of trained pastors in the Third World. Recently over a hundred organizations met, all of which are committed to training pastors. Unfortunately, many still do not want to get together so as to pool resources because of doctrinal and philosophical differences but at least there is a desire to begin to work loosely together.

One of these organizations God has raised up is Equipping Pastors International, Inc. (EPI). In 1997, God called Dr. Jack L. Arnold out of his Presbyterian (PCA) pastorate of eleven years and gave him the vision of training pastors worldwide. EPI is an independent, tax exempt missionary organization that exists to train pastors anywhere in the world. The main burden of EPI is to give practical Biblical and theological training to Third World pastors who never get an opportunity to any formal training. For instance, in Uganda only about 6% of the Pentecostal pastors have any formal training. Yet, the Pentecostal Church is reaching millions in that country, especially in the countryside and villages. The Pentecostal Christians are full of spiritual life but they have hardly any training. What is their need? To get their pastors equipped so they can reach their own people with the truths of Scripture. The Pentecostals in Uganda have asked EPI to come and train their pastors and have indicated that they will open doors in Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and the Sudan. This is an incredible opportunity! These kinds of opportunities are also developing to teach Anglican pastors (The Church of Uganda) and it has been indicated that the doors will swing wide open to train these dear Christians. There are also open doors with Presbyterians.

How then can EPI do this monumental task? We can't but God can! The plan is very simple. EPI gets American pastors to commit for two weeks a year to go to some country where EPI has set up contacts to train national pastors. The local churches give money for the pastor to travel and some extra money to help feed the pastors when they come to the conference. The amount will be about \$3000/per person. The pastor (and perhaps his wife) gets the experience of a cross-cultural ministry and the church gets the blessing of a fired-up pastor for Christ and missions when he returns. When the pastors go to another country they do not have to learn the language or the culture. They teach Biblical principles and the national Christians will make the material culturally relevant. These pastors will also leave notes for the national pastors to do future study. Many of these national pastors will preach these notes for months and even years to come. With this system, American pastors do not have to leave the States for long periods of time but they can go to hungry hearts and change a foreign culture by teaching God's Word in a simple practical way to national pastors.

EPI is a ministry of multiplication. For instance, if 50 American pastors each teaches and equips 300 national pastors, and these pastors return to their local churches of at least 300 and teach the truths they have learned, EPI has reached 4.5 million people. Through a ministry of multiplication one gets "the biggest bang for his missionary buck" and reaps the most spiritual dividends.

EPI does not start anything new overseas. It works with existing denominations, churches and Christian organizations that want their leaders trained. EPI has a sovereign grace emphasis but obviously must have a broader doctrinal statement because it works across denominational lines.

This is a new age for missions and we all must set forth strategies that will meet the needs of a rapidly expanding church in the world. Pastors in Third World countries do not need academic degrees. They need knowledge of God's Word and how to apply it. A few will be fortunate enough to get a degree from an institution but the vast majority will get needed knowledge as organizations like EPI take the Bible school and the seminary to national pastors.

*A new age for missions demands a new paradigm
to accomplish the Great Commission in this generation.*