

WORLD INQUIRY PREFACE-PURPOSE-PEOPLE-PROCESS-PARADIGM

Luis Bush

Jesus said to his followers, in reference to God the Father: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Mt. 6:33a). Seeking the Kingdom of God results in personal and cultural transformation which has emerged as a unifying vision for the mission of the Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century. God is on a mission of transformation. A global transformation movement has begun. It's God's movement. This book reports on some of the contributions, the considerations, the context and conclusions regarding *transformation as mission*.

The thesis of this book is that God is calling His servants to act as catalysts in mobilizing the whole body of Christ to bless the nations through the transformation of people, churches and culture.

Almost three years ago I *began a journey in the listening mode*. The World Inquiry, short for *Evangelizing our World Inquiry*, was born out of a simple desire to hear what God was saying to his people. An e-mail in August of 2000 from Paul McKaughan, President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies, prompted me to embark on this quest by a personal e-mail when he wrote:

I don't know of any time in my 35 years of mission experience that I have seen or felt mission executives readier and more willing to change and adapt. At the same time, I also don't know of any period in my career that there is less certainty about what changes to make. The future is uncertain. We know it will be greatly different but are not sure in which ways it will be different. We know that the patterns of the past are showing "wear" and are in need of repair. In many ways the fit between our strategies and way of thinking does not fit our present reality well. We know that they probably won't move us into the future God has for us. Yet the new paradigms that help us interpret and organize our strategies for the future have not become clear. We seem to be in a time of parenthesis between what God blessed in the past and what He has not yet made clear for the future.

The interest in taking “the journey of the listening mode” was further enhanced during the final months of the year 2000. An abiding question in my own mind was: *Where do we go from here in world evangelization?* The encouragement of my fifteen-year accountability/support group led me to reflect on this question by means of a doctoral study at the former Fuller School of World Mission, now School of Intercultural Studies (Fuller) under the active and able oversight of Wilbert Shenk, Chuck Van Engen and Sherwood Lingenfelter. While looking through the lenses of the Scriptures, theology, missiologists, church history, global mission conferences, the AD2000 Movement and Christian leadership, it soon became clear that the focus of the dissertation, which was completed May 2002, would more appropriately be on informing the question, rather than seeking to provide answers.

And so, began a quest to know the mind of God through the burdens, visions and dreams of his people as we move into the future. A World Inquiry compressed the reflective process into a practical instrument. The World Inquiry started out as an exercise to probe the minds and hearts of evangelical leaders in the major cities of the world. The Inquiry began and has continued not as a rigorous, methodologically-driven

research project, but rather a "listening venture" that sought to tune in to God's voice through His people, especially those voices and leaders who are now emerging onto their local, regional and national scenes in the Two-Thirds World. I was reminded of the words of John Stott in his book titled: *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, "Life is a pilgrimage of learning, a voyage of discovery, in which our mistaken views are corrected, our distorted notions adjusted, our shallow opinions deepened and some of our vast ignorance's diminished."

As we listened to one another and sought God through His Word to hear what the Spirit was saying to the Church, we saw streams of church and mission emerging on the periphery of mainline ecclesiastical and mission structures; we shared the visions on the hearts of God's servants; and we heard from respected missiologists as to what fresh missiological paradigms are emerging.

Fuller Theological Seminary sponsored the World Inquiry, providing advice at various stages of the research, design and conduct of the inquiry process. It was conducted in collaboration with the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, with a view to a presentation of the findings at this World Evangelization Issues Forum. This brings this journey of the listening mode through the World Inquiry to an end. The preliminary findings were presented, reviewed and discussed in May 2003 in Seoul, Korea by an International Coalition of 120 missiologists, practitioners, and church and mission leaders chaired by Sang-Bok David Kim.

Purpose of Inquiry

The purpose of the World Inquiry was to listen to hear and look for expressions of the *missio Dei* (the mission of God). In using the term *missio Dei* the emphasis was on the perfectly pure motive and essence of the mission of God, or that which finds its root and foundation in the character of God. We sought to listen to what God is doing and saying by collecting insights, beliefs, and attitudes with regard to:

- The people and the programs God are using;
- The challenges to God's mission via factors external to the churches;
- The obstacles internal to the churches;
- What God is calling us to as the body of Christ;
- What services can a global structure committed to world evangelization offer;
- The identification of a compelling, unifying paradigm; and
- The identification of emerging leaders, and of streams of church and mission.

People to be Listened to

The emergence of Christian leadership in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, combined with the initiative towards world evangelization efforts over the last Twenty-five years of the twentieth century from these regions, demanded that their ideas help shape the direction of world evangelization in the twenty-first

century. It is clear that many wish to do so; the question is how to help catalyze the true reflective inputs and resultant directions.

One of the major trends is the “Shift in geographical and vital center of gravity of the Church from the West and North to the East and South.” Out of this new spiritual nerve center, initiative for world mission has grown exponentially. “As Christianity has globalized, indigenous missions have sprung up around the world.” The Christian mission and church leaders from all around the world express their view of what the Spirit is saying to the Church at this time. However, more than ever before that expression is coming from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In light of the fact that the Christian majority is now to be found outside the West and missionary initiatives from the churches of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are at the cutting-edge of the Christian world mission, we must ask: What kind of theology of mission will best serve the global Christian mission in the future? What fresh theological resources can be brought to bear on this new phase of the Christian missions.

The active participation of Christian leaders from the world in shaping twenty-first century world evangelization initiatives is crucial for this Inquiry. Almost 7,000 Christian church and mission leaders from more than 800 cities. Of the total people involved, more than 90% were from the Majority World.

We were watching to see whether a fresh missiology would emerge that both deepened and extended our witness through the Gospel. We prayed that information might mesh with relationships of the broader world community to foster increased evangelization, so that there can be a significant advance in the Christian Movement over the next quarter century.

Process of Inquiry - a Personal Interpretation

The World Inquiry process can be illustrated from the remarks of Richard Howell, the General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India. The commentary reflects Howell's own perceptions in the third week of a month-long series of sixteen inquiries in India. It came in the context of Richard waiting for a delayed flight from Calcutta to go to the thirteenth major city inquiry in India on Jan 22, 2003.

The Inquiry process, starting January 6, 2003 to the present day, has confirmed God's timing. I have seen this to be a timing of God for India. Personally, the different streams have converged in my life through the Inquiry process to give me a more integrated view of ministry, in my personal life and at a conceptual level. It has clarified how to implement the vision. It has also shown me there is no need for polarities that are man-made primarily because our vision is small. If the vision is of God and His Kingdom, then the process of renewing is unleashed. God has opened my eyes to something very wonderful-His Kingdom-which I have preached before and struggled over in the past. The unfolding of it will still take time-but the journey for me has begun.

Looking back, I can interpret recent ministerial developments, talking to people of other faiths, relationship with ecumenicals and Catholics-this process has helped to interpret the meaning of these developments. There is definitely a personal renewal deep down. God has touched the core of my being.

It was seeing what happened in the inquiries in Ludhiana, then Chandigarh, where I became a convert to this. It got a hold of me. It came from people. The baby was born. It has been one reconfirmation after another.

The day before yesterday, it was Serampore, at the college that William Carey founded. There were SO involved in the Inquiry including the Principal, VP, faculty of the seminary, pastors and Christian leaders in the community, and the graduating class of the seminary. The principal kept saying, "This is the kind of meeting I had been hoping to have for a long time." Amazingly, with such a varied group present, in part because of the minority they are as Christians in the Serampore city, a definitive city-based initiative birthed with vision statement, mission statement, and core group, including representation of all the constituencies present at the meeting. Yesterday we had the Kolkata event despite the visit of the President of India to the city. Several of the key leaders had indicated they were going to stay for one half-day. In the end, they stayed through to 4p.m., and with deep conviction, a city-based initiative was birthed with ten in the core group. It is the birthing of a vision for cities that will bring focus and integration for doing mission in the cities. It will be a movement of transformation that will bring the various streams together in partnership to impact the cities and the nation.

It is the mission in the cities that will also have a ripple effect in to the towns and villages. I am excited, really excited, for the impact on the evangelical movement-and more so because the ecumenical church is looking to the evangelical church for the spiritual vitality to transform the ecumenical churches and leadership itself. So, what I am talking about is that this new movement will lead to renewal.

When I say *it is birthing*, I refer to the Inquiry process which is bringing together a wide range of Christian leadership in the cities; and the initiative is birthing in the broader base of the Christian church in India. The need for transformation, the need for vision and united prayer, has been stated in the Inquiry focus groups. The issue is not only the transformation of the city as the goal; it's the transformation of the churches going on at the same time.

The Church in India is all saying it needs transformation, and what is emerging has the potential of bringing dramatic transformation to the Church. The vision is broadening the base of church/mission leader involvement, while at the same time calling for and igniting a spirit of renewal. It is not only the city and the Church that needs transformation, it is the Christian leader and his family and other Christians that do.

Paradigm Emerging

As reported and extensively discussed at the World Inquiry International Coalition preliminary findings event in Seoul in May 2003, *mission as transformation* emerged out of the review of the results of the five different lenses used in the World Inquiry process to discern *missio Dei*. These lenses were

- The more structured quantitative survey of individuals and the qualitative survey of focus group;
- Forty-eight documented emerging streams of church and mission, presented for the most part by the author/leader of that stream in Seoul;

- The reflection of respected missiologists on the world, by Delia Nuetsch Olver; the church, by Wilbert Shenk; and her mission in the world, by Rene Padilla;
- The burden and vision on the hearts of God's servants in many places; plus
- The city-based action plans that emerged in the Inquiry consultations in sixteen cities in India. India Evangelical Fellowship Secretary Richard Howell made the statement at the conclusion of the first phase of inquiries in that country: "A national transformation movement has begun in India." In this instance leaders from different traditions and ethnic backgrounds who conducted the survey responded immediately to the consensual transformational vision of the group and determined to take action based upon that common vision.

All five lenses used in the World Inquiry process showed that mission as transformation has emerged as a new compelling, unifying paradigm at the beginning of the twenty-first century. *Mission as transformation* is built upon four foundational pillars of truth. First, we are living in a broken world; second, individuals are being called to be conformed to the image of Christ; third, churches are being challenged to be renewed and reformed to align with God's greater purposes; and fourth, cities, communities, peoples and nations are being transformed.

This book is the final of six books reporting on the outcomes based on the different lenses through which the World Inquiry was conducted. All the books reveal the transformational theme emerging. Three of the authors selected titles using the term itself as in *Transforming Church and Mission* by Rene Padilla, *Transformation from the Periphery, Emerging Streams of Church and Mission* by Paul Pierson, and *Transformational Action* by Richard Howell.

In this book I reflect on mission as transformation by considering 1) the context within the last fifty and one hundred years, 2) some contributions toward the transformation of communities, cities and countries and 3) the considerations regarding transformation as a paradigm of *missio Dei* and consequently the mission of the Church and God's servants in the 21st Century.