

**Trends in Modern Missions**  
**Week 7**  
**Slightly edited from CHBC's Core Seminar**

**Intro: The “traditional missionary model” and the advent of “modern missions”**

Last we looked at three examples of pioneer missionaries: William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and briefly John Paton. Each of these missionaries exhibited the characteristics of the “traditional model of missions.” They were Word-focused, Church-centric, Faithfulness-oriented.

→ **Discussion Question:** Can anyone share an example from last week of how Carey, Judson, and Paton modeled any of these characteristics?

Today, we’re going to examine three shifts in modern missions that took place in the twentieth century. Now, not all these shifts are for the worse. As we’ll see, many of the shifts were responses to changes that resulted from gospel advance and modern technology. So as we dive into this class, we need to think critically and biblically about these methods, like the Bereans, and not just disregard something because it is new, but examine it to see if it is biblical.

Just a note: we’ll be talking some about the IMB in this class. That’s just the acronym for the International Mission Board, which is the missions sending agency of the over 40,000 churches that comprise the Southern Baptist Convention.

*1910 and shifts in modern missions*

Also, a note on periodization. The year 1910 is typically considered a turning point in world missions. The years 1792 to 1910 are often called “the Great Century” of missions, inaugurated in 1792 by William Carey’s voyage to India. During that period, of just over 100 years, roughly corresponding to the nineteenth century, Protestant Christians poured themselves into the missionary task, perhaps unlike any era since the Apostles.<sup>1</sup> But in June of 1910, 1,200 representatives of 160

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<sup>1</sup> One missiologist writes, “Never before had so many Christians moved to so many vast and remote parts of the Globe and communicated the gospel across so many cultural boundaries.” Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Kregel Academic, 2010), 256-257.

mission agencies came together for one of the largest gatherings of missionaries in history—the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910.<sup>2</sup> In some ways, it’s like every Protestant denomination from every major nation engaged tirelessly in world missions for a century—and then finally came up for air and to regroup in 1910. It’s like everyone had been running so hard, that they finally stopped, looked around, and asked, “Hey, where are we?” “How’s it going?” “What’s left to be done?”

As they looked around, what they saw was stunning: 1/3 of the world’s population could be considered Christian (of course, most of these lived in Europe). But still, most nations in the world had foreign missions established with converts among local believers. But there was still a lot of work to be done. What were the next steps?

Between 1910 and today, we’ll talk about three major shifts in twentieth century missions:

1. First, a shift in the way “nations” are understood, from political boundaries to ethnic people groups.
2. Second, a focus on eschatology and a sense of urgency in “finishing the mission.”
3. Third, the rise of church planting movements and rapid methods of multiplication.

## II. Unreached People-Group

Perhaps the main shift in missions in the 20th century was toward thinking of the Great Commission in terms of “people groups” rather than nations. This was an idea championed by Ralph Winter at the 1974 Lausanne Conference for World Evangelization, and since then, it has become a staple in evangelical missiology.<sup>3</sup> The idea is that by “all nations” in Matthew 28:19 (*panta ta ethne*), Jesus was referring to distinct “ethnolinguistic groups,” and not discrete nations.

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<sup>2</sup> Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 53. Dana Robert writes, “Edinburgh 1910... was the high point of western missionary optimism about the conversion of the world to Christianity” (53-54)

<sup>3</sup> Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 23.

At a meeting of Lausanne in 1982, they defined “a people group” as “the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”<sup>4</sup> The IMB, for instance, defines an unreached people group as, “A homogeneous population group identified by a common Language, heritage and religion.”<sup>5</sup>

So depending on your definition, the number of people groups in the world can vary from. Some say 24,000. Others say 17,000. Some suggest 11,500 or 13,000.<sup>6</sup> Such calculations are often done to identify progress toward world evangelization. So depending on your definition, there may be anywhere from 4,000 to 8,000 “people groups” that are considered “unreached” with the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

But even then, what is meant by “unreached”? According to the IMB, a people group is considered “unreached” if they had “no church movement having sufficient strength, resources and commitment to sustain and ensure the continuous multiplication of churches.”<sup>8</sup> What does that mean? In short, they explain, unreached is any place where “a people group in which less than 2% of the population is evangelical Christians.”<sup>9</sup>

But hold on, where in Scripture do we read of a 2% threshold of evangelical Christians to be considered ‘reached’? In the effort to *quantify* the Great Commission and to track progress toward its completion, there runs the risk of creating arbitrary definitions for the sake of creating dazzling statistics. Oftentimes these statistics are well-intentioned to generate zeal for missions. But what does the Bible have to say about people groups?

*So what does the Bible say about “people groups”?*

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<sup>4</sup> 1982 Lausanne Committee Chicago meeting.

<sup>5</sup> Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 29.

<sup>6</sup> The Joshua Project, “How Many People Groups Are There?”  
[https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/how\\_many\\_people\\_groups\\_are\\_there](https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/how_many_people_groups_are_there)

<sup>7</sup> The Joshua Project, “How Many People Groups Are There?”  
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<sup>8</sup> Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 29.

<sup>9</sup> Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 29.

**First, Christ has died for a definite group of people called his “church”** (Cf. Acts 20:28; Titus 2:14).

Acts 20:28: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

Titus 2:11-14: “... who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

What do these passages teach us? *There is no way that the Holy Spirit will fail to convert those whom God has elected, and for whom Christ has died.*

**Second, we see that Christ’s bride, the church, will consist of people from every tribe, and language, and nation.**

Revelation 5:9: “... Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation”

Revelation 7:9-10: After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...”

Daniel 7:13-14: “... And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him.”

This is language of “all people, nations, and languages” was used earlier in Daniel to describe the worship due to King Nebuchadnezzar. But Daniel is saying, no, that worship belongs only to the Son of Man—to the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

As we sing in *O Church Arise*, “Christ will have the prize for which He died: An inheritance of nations.

**Third, Christ’s mandate to his church, therefore, necessarily involves preaching the gospel to all peoples.**

Matthew 28:18-20: <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

If Christ has died for a definite people, and if that definite people will include all *kinds* of people, then our proclamation of the gospel should be to all *kinds* of people. This is what William Carey understood in 1792 as we saw last week...

→ **Discussion question:** What are potential downsides of overdefining “people groups”?

Unfortunately, a good amount of misunderstandings and misapplications of this principle have developed. In many cases, manufactured definitions of *ethne* and *unreached* have been used to create arbitrary goals and standards.<sup>10</sup>

### III. An Encroaching Timeline

Another shift in twentieth-century missions is a focus on the Second Coming of Christ as the motivation for world evangelization. This often goes hand-in-hand with a tight definition of “people groups” and what it means for “all nations” to be “reached” with the gospel.

A common thread in missions has been to assume that Jesus’ return is being delayed until the Great Commission has been accomplished. Therefore, if we can calculate the total number of people groups and calculate how many remain unreached, then we can channel resources accordingly and make Jesus come back as quickly as possible.

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, Wycliffe Bible Translators claims that “1 in 5 people are still waiting for the bible in their own language.”# You hear that and your heart sinks. After all, as they explain on their website, “unless people have the Bible in the language they understand best, they cannot read his message of life, hope and salvation.”

But hold on. The a full-Bible translation is available in 717 languages, making it the most widely translated book in the history of the World. And the full New Testament is available in another 1,582. And portions of the Bible are available in another 1,196 languages. So there are 3,495 languages with a full or partial Bible translation *currently available*. Add those together, those languages represent over 7 billion people, who have all or part of the Bible available in their native language. So what does Wycliffe mean when they claim that “1 in 5 people are still waiting for the bible in their own language”?#

They’ve taken the number of languages with a complete Bible translation divided by the total number of known languages in the world and created a statistic that makes people feel guilty and therefore more likely to give money. But that statistic does not represent the reality, that nearly 99% of the earth’s population has the Bible available in their *native heart language*, and the remaining 1% can most likely understand or read a language that the Bible has already been translated into.

Unfortunately, this philosophy drives much missionary work today.

But while we certainly desire for Jesus to come soon and we absolutely want all people to hear the gospel, we need to evaluate our expectations in light of Scripture. So... What does the Bible say about Christ's second coming?

*What does the Bible say about Christ's second coming?*

**Jesus will return bodily** (Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 1:7) **to gather his elect** (Matthew 24:30-31) **and to judge his enemies** (Zephaniah 1:15-18).

We see this in passages like Acts 1:11: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

1 Thess. 4:16: "The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God..."

Matthew 24:30-31: <sup>30</sup> Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

That day of judgment for the ungodly will be a day of rejoicing for the righteous.

**Second, Before Jesus' return, the gospel will** (in some sense) **be preached to all nations** (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10).

Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Mark 13:10: "And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all the nations."

**Third, the time of Christ's coming is known only to the Father** (Matt. 24:36, 42-44; Acts 1:6).

Matthew 24:36, 42-44: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father... keep watch because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Mark 13:32: “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

Acts 1:6-8: “So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Now, we go through all this because some missions organizations in the twentieth century have treated their digital dashboards of how many “People Groups” remain unreached like “countdown timers” for Christ’s Second Coming. As if we could know that once we get to that last people group over the 2% threshold of Christians—\*Snap\*—Jesus comes back. At the best, such strategies motivate radical sacrifice. At the worst, the ‘urgency’ of the hour demands doing ‘whatever it takes’ regardless of whether or not that means neglecting other aspects of the Christian life. But what is it that Jesus said? “concerning that day or that hour, no one knows” (Mark 13:32).

→ **Discussion Question #1:** If it’s true that Jesus is coming back but that we cannot know when he will return, and we aren’t meant to, what posture does Jesus intend for us to have in regard to missions?

Now, both of these ideas—of an unreached people group focus and an encroaching timeline of Christ’s return—come together very practically in the third shift we’ll look at in this class: church planting movements.

#### **IV. Church Planting Movements**

Church Planting Movements show what happens when you wed an over-defined version of ‘people group thinking’ to an encroaching eschatological timeline. We’re going to talk about Church Planting Movements because it has been one of

the defining missions strategies of the International Mission Board, among other agencies, during the last forty years.

For a deep dive into this topic, I highly recommend you read an article by John Massey, a professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, called "[Wrinkling Time in the Missionary Task: A Theological Review of Church Planting Movements Methodology](#)."<sup>11</sup>

Between 1980 and 2000, the International Mission Board (IMB) shifted its focus to research and evangelize the unreached peoples of the world. Up until that point, the IMB operated within the traditional missionary paradigm. But by recovering the biblical meaning of *panta ta ethne* and restoring the focus of missions from "world evangelism" (a never ending task) to "world evangelization" (a definite target) the Board narrowed its focus from institution building in reached or partially reached countries to unreached people groups in the 10/40 window. What they found was that the remaining unreached people groups are unreached for a reason. Most reside in countries that are politically closed and hostile to missionary work. As a result, the Board began to embrace alternative "platforms" and methods for reaching UPGs. This was a shift from an earlier practice to only operate in countries where missionaries could legally obtain visas "as missionaries." Moreover, rather than focusing on the question, "What can I do to evangelize the people group?" they began to ask "what will it take to evangelize the people group?"<sup>12</sup>

This led to a new approach to missions initially called the "Non-Residential Missionary" model or NRM for short. The goal of the role was to focus exclusively on one particular unreached people group, residing by necessity "outside that segment or it's country (because legal residence is prohibited or otherwise impossible)" (Page 52). By working through local believers (i.e. National Partners) they hoped to train believers to bring the gospel to the people group that they could not access themselves. That is, instead of doing the work of evangelism themselves, their work was to be a catalyst by "training" local leaders who would in turn disciple others, and so forth. In other words, the focus was shifting off of the missionary being the primary agent of evangelism to a catalyst for evangelism.

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<sup>11</sup> John D. Massey, "Wrinkling Time in the Missionary Task: A Theological Review of Church Planting Movements Methodology," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 55/1 (Fall 2012), 100-137.

<sup>12</sup> R. Bruce Carlton and E. Coye Still III, *Strategy Coordinator: Changing the Course of Southern Baptist Missions* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 54.

It didn't matter so much who was doing the witnessing, only that it was being done.

Over time, the IMB began to receive better and better reports from fruit from the field. In 1998, they reported four "Church Planting Movements" among the unreached people groups they were targeting. By 2001 they were tracking 35 church planting movements. In 2003, they reported that they had "assessed and confirmed seven church-planting movements," and were tracking 42 reported movements.<sup>13</sup>

A note from one former missionary from GRBC: All of this methodology was the backdrop for our training with the IMB. We were appointed as IMB missionaries, trained, and sent in 2002, around the exact time that this methodology was becoming prevalent. Some of us, who had gone to Southeastern Seminary, felt like some of the training we received at the IMB wasn't quite right. There was actually some conflict about this between us and the personnel at the Board who were training us. But CPM's and rapid reproduction were being presenting as THE way to do missions.

What were these "Church Planting Movements"? In his initial draft report to the Board, David Garrison, the head of this program at the IMB, defined a CPM as "a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment."<sup>14</sup> He later updated the definition, dropping the term exponential, to "a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment."<sup>15</sup>

As Garrison and his team studied these purported "movements," they identified 10 shared characteristics. Some of them were basic and general: prayer, abundant seed sowing, intentional church planting, scriptural authority, and local lay leadership. Others were more specific and questionable: rapid reproduction, churches planting churches, cell or house churches, and supernatural signs and wonders. (Note: that last item, "Supernatural signs and wonders" never made it into the print edition because the leadership at the IMB was concerned about how it would sit with its churches. Instead, they swapped it out for a tenth characteristic: healthy

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<sup>13</sup> Carlton, 176.

<sup>14</sup> Carlton, 177.

<sup>15</sup> Carlton, 177. In a video produced by the Board and in Garrison's book on CPM, he defined "rapid growth" as "growth that outpaces the population growth of a people group" (Carlton, 178).

churches—coincidentally the same year Crossway published *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*).

In any case, problems emerged when the IMB took these 10 characteristics of ‘church planting movements’ and turned them into their missionary method. In other words, they attempted to reverse engineer CPMs. So for instance, immediately the Board began to push the “house-church model” on their missionaries. Since all the church planting movements had used house churches, all missionaries should support house churches.<sup>16</sup> But here’s the problem: when they tried the same methods out elsewhere—they didn’t always get the same results.

News of these developments spread within the missions community and across the Southern Baptist Convention. As reports of these alleged “movements” spread, Garrison quickly set to work in identifying a common set of conditions in which these movements occurred. First in a booklet in 2000 entitled, “Church Planting Movements” which later became a full-length book in 2004. It’s difficult to emphasize how influential this idea of “Church Planting Movements” has been on missions. But these shifts leave us with important and lingering questions:

What is the job of a missionary? To share the gospel and start churches or train leaders and facilitate movements?

What responsibility do missionaries have to ensure sound doctrine and protect the true gospel? To train local believers over an extended period of time or just give them enough to train someone else and trust the Holy Spirit for the rest?

More importantly, what determines our missionary method? Should our missionary methods be determined by what works or by what Scripture teaches?

→ **Discussion question #1:** What are some of the positive aspects of the church planting movements shift within the IMB?

→ **Discussion question #2:** What are some of the potential pitfalls or dangers of adopting a church planting movement model of missions?

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<sup>16</sup> Carlton, 192.

## Conclusion: What's the alternative?

In conclusion, what should the Christian posture be in light of God's promises about the unreached and Christ's second coming? Turn with me to Matthew 28:18-20. As I read this, I want you to pay attention to the "alls" in the passage:

<sup>18</sup> "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus asserts that "all authority" belongs to him. He instructs his disciples to make disciples of "all nations." Moreover, they are to teach "all nations" to observe, not some, but "all" of his commandments. But there's a fourth "all" that often goes overlooked. How long is this to go on for? "Always"—that is, "to the end of the age"—until Christ returns. In other words, we are not told to just run around the planet, baptizing people like it's a game of tag, but do the long, hard, plodding work of building churches that *last*.<sup>17</sup> What the world needs is not more radical reformers but more patient plodders.

A second thought, it has often been observed that missions in the 21st century will be less of "us" going to them and more of "everyone going from everywhere to everywhere."<sup>18</sup> As we think about the 10/40 window and the difficulty for Americans to get into those difficult to access places—maybe Americans aren't the solution. Maybe God is going to use African believers, Brazilian believers, South Korean, and Chinese believers to bring the gospel to those hardest to reach places. Our missions strategy as a local church—and as the American church as a whole—needs to be less about how *we* can be the solution—and more about what we can do to help.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jesus intends for his followers to bring all nations under the sway of all of his commandments until enters into his inheritance. God has set his Son—Jesus—as King on Zion, his holy hill. It is our job to "make the nations his heritage, and the ends of the earth his possession" (Ps. 2:5, 8).

<sup>18</sup> D.A. Carson, "Ongoing Imperative for World Mission" in Martin I. Klauber, Scott M. Manetsch, and Erwin Lutzer, *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions* (B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 181.

<sup>19</sup> What happened between 1910 and today has been described as the "Great Reversal." "Christianity still constitutes roughly 1/3 of the global population. That is, "In the 20th century, "the majority of Christians moved from the North Atlantic to the Southern Hemisphere and Asia."# Just consider a few statistics. In 1910 Asia was 2.4% Christian; in 2010 Asia was about 9% Christian. In 1910 Africa was 9.4% Christian; in 2010 Africa was 48%

God is the great orchestrator of history—he’s the hero. He will finish the mission because he has set his Son—Jesus—as King on Zion, his holy hill. He will make the nations his heritage, and the ends of the earth his possession (Ps. 2:5, 8).

Let’s pray.