Evangelical Missions Quarterly

# EMQ

## Who Really IS an Apostle?

A Symposium

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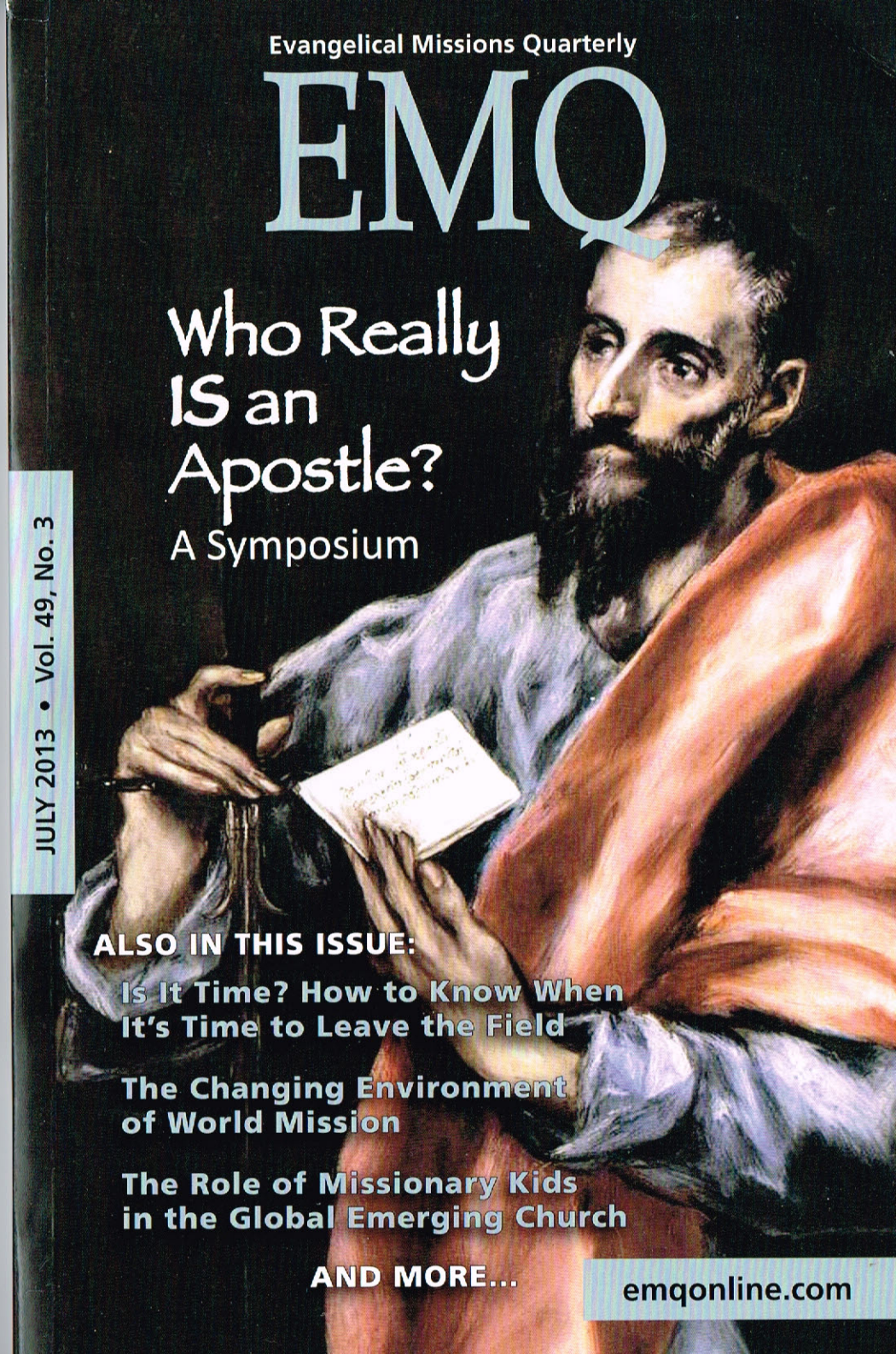

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**Is It Time? How to Know When It's Time to Leave the Field**

**The Changing Environment of World Mission**

**The Role of Missionary Kids in the Global Emerging Church**

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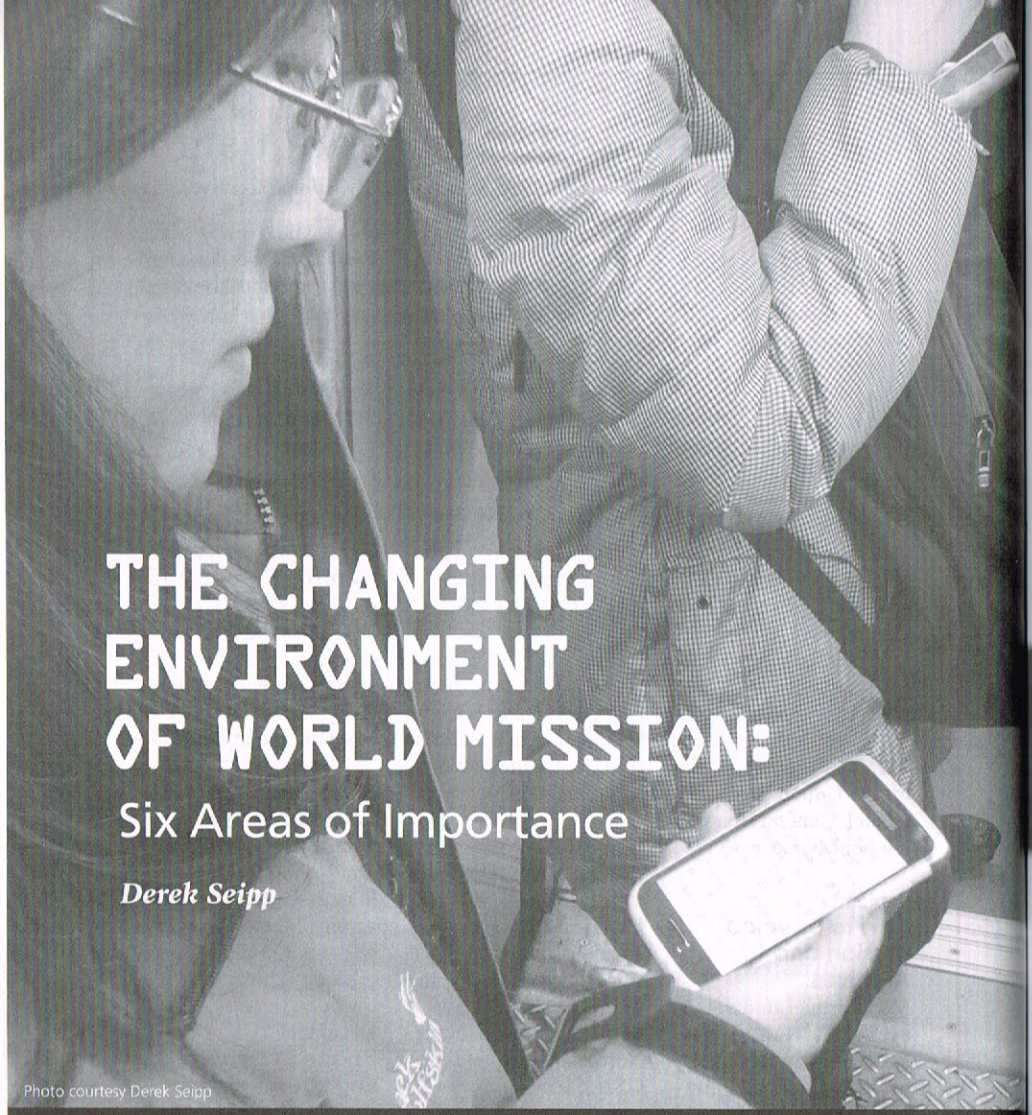

# THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF WORLD MISSION:

## Six Areas of Importance

*Derek Seipp*

Photo courtesy Derek Seipp

**The environment in which missions exists has changed dramatically from a century ago.** Missionaries once rode steam ships, waving goodbye to family, not knowing if they would ever see them again. Communication was slow and cumbersome; often, they wouldn't know if their urgent pleas for assistance were heard. It was months before any reply came; sometimes years before practical assistance was given in response.

Today, we live in an instant age. Email is out of style because it isn't fast enough. We use video chat to connect with co-workers on multiple continents, to let grandparents read bedtime stories to grandkids, and to teach groups in multiple countries at once. Blogs share our stories, social networking connects us with prayer partners, and relatively inexpensive air travel gets us almost anywhere in the world in twenty-four hours.

The people we minister to have changed as well. Widespread use of technology has led to a worldwide phenomenon sociologists call "Deculturation", which simply means that from Shanghai to Sao Paulo, Phnom Penh to Peoria, and Mombasa to Manhattan, young people share startlingly similar characteristics. Much of it is due to ever cheaper Internet-connected devices coupled with higher standards of living. Deculturation isn't slowing down; in fact, it's speeding up. And it's happening worldwide. We must, therefore, ask ourselves, *Is the mission industry keeping up with these changes?* Below are six areas we must consider as we ask this question.

**Widespread use of technology** has led to a worldwide phenomenon sociologists call "Deculturation". Deculturation isn't slowing down, in fact it's speeding up.

### #1: TECHNOLOGY

Although a few mission agencies are taking advantage of new technology, we haven't begun to tap into the missiological potential sitting at our fingertips. The thought that technology reduces reproducibility isn't true anymore. Don't believe me? The Internet is everywhere. It is common practice for Chinese farmers to download Chinese worship MP3s with PowerPoint slides to use in their village worship services. National believers are integrating technology faster than their missionary counterparts. Believers in Cambodia now share audio Bible stories wirelessly via Bluetooth connections on their phones.

We haven't yet seen what technology can do to revolutionize our methodologies. Indeed, it appears that missionary methods are lagging the ingenuity of believers in these "developing areas." Computers and smart phones put a web browser, a communications client, a video and audio player, and an e-book reader into almost every household.

Some argue that in two years still only half the world will be online. They say that half the world is still not connected. This statistic doesn't reflect the Internet's ubiquitous reach. Don't believe me? Let's go back to the Chinese example. All it takes is for one farmer with a computer to provide a high-tech worship experience for an entire "unconnected" village. Yes, ninety-nine out of one hundred villag-

ers are not connected, but one is. And that one is radically changing the worship service. It isn't a good use of time debating whether what is happening is good or bad. It is happening, and will continue at an increasing rate. The question is whether missionaries can recognize the full potential for technology to bring a truly multiplicative impact to our work.

Missionaries should be asking how multimedia, the Internet, and soon universal access to e-books could have an exponential effect in multiplying disciples, church leaders, and churches. How can technology spur church-planting movements? How can non-resident missionaries utilize technology to support national believers in their efforts? Interestingly enough, most missionaries already use much of this technology themselves. How can national believers benefit from a high-tech mission force?

## #2: THE MATURING NATIONAL CHURCH

Marty Shaw, Jr. and Enoch Wan (2004) write that missions "from the West to everywhere" is over. The next mission movement will be from "everywhere to everywhere." Although there are nowhere near enough churches in the world today, and there are still entire people groups without churches, most people groups are near a church that has reached the full level of maturity as described by Ralph Winter (1996). Most localities have moved past the pioneering and paternal stages. The question is not so much where to send new missionaries who work at a high cultural distance (Winter and Koch 2000), but how to partner and participate with these nearby mature churches.

Too many missionaries still operate from a pioneering and paternalistic standpoint and miss the potential of being facilitators of participation for the sake of multiplying our efforts into new pioneering efforts. Early indicators show that Chinese churches are responding to Indian church-planting methodologies much better than Western models. This has a lot to do with cultural nearness. How can missionaries facilitate the process of a church-planting movement in Botswana, influencing the unreached of Bangladesh?

## #3: THE CHANGING WORKFORCE

As these churches mature with increasingly trained clergy, how should the role of missionaries change? Many mission agencies, in an effort to grow their numbers, send out a minimally-trained mission workforce. In fact, trends show that the amount of training missionaries receive is decreasing. Yet, as national churches mature, missionary training must mature as well. The missionary force of tomorrow requires a specialty training and experience to meet these challenges.

Such a radical change will require new structures and a new set of skills. Outdated missionary structures will not work in this maturing global/national church environment. How can mission agencies prepare for this scenario? How can a better trained mission force be attracted to fulfill a higher level of service? How would the arts, multimedia, and distance education fit into this new world?

The good news is that God may be preparing a force ready to change the mission endeavor in ways that line up with these potential new mission drivers. Young people today focus intensely on developing themselves and their ideas, identities, and capacities. Continuing education is necessary as new missionaries are likely to focus on building their resumes. New missionaries may think little of changing missionary organizations every three to four years in order to increase their learning potential. How can missionary organizations change to focus on developing the individual? How can human resource departments provide continuing education opportunities to help feed the growing need for personal professional growth?

One potential opportunity lies in the fact that boomers are retiring from ministry, and many are highly trained and open to second careers in foreign missions. These retirees may provide the needed intellectual capital, and stimulate the "anywhere to anywhere" movement. Will our existing structures attract this kind of workforce? How could such a large pool of potential missionaries be tapped?

## #4: RECRUITMENT AND CHANGING U.S. DEMOGRAPHICS

The current missionary force sent out from America is overwhelmingly white. This does not reflect the American demographic. A shining star is that the African American Church has matured and is now sending increasing numbers of missionaries.

A demographic change is rapidly occurring in America, with an influx of Hispanics who are overwhelmingly Christian (37% of believers claim to be evangelical). It should also be noted that they energetically share their faith. By 2050, Hispanics will make up 30% of the U.S. population. This represents a tremendous opportunity for a new source of missionary recruits. How could the mission community work with the emerging Latino population to produce the next wave of missionaries?

## #5: MISSION GIVING

Most people with whom I talk believe that the recent downturn in mission giving is short term and will correct itself as the economy improves. This may not be the case. New giving trends are emerging. Indicators point to a long-term sharp decline in giving to local churches, a mild decline in international mission giving, but a sharp increase to local missions and ministries. There is also an increased perspective of seeing mission giving as a "kingdom investment." Missionaries who make a strong strategic case for their ministries are likely to benefit from this scenario. Overall, are missionaries prepared for a new reality of decreasing giving?

## #6: PREPARING FOR POTENTIAL WILDCARDS

Multiple sources predict the advent of a significant increase in oil prices sometime in the next few decades. Any number of factors could lead to this scenario—wars, political unrest, or various nations' burgeoning insatiable desire for oil. The aftermath of this spike in oil prices would lead to a prolonged recession, decimating mission giving. Missionaries around the world would experience high inflation and airfare costs would soar out of control.

Instead of increased oil prices, perhaps the U.S. dollar will decline. The results would be strikingly similar. Would missionary organizations feel the responsibility to cover costs such as airfare or an increase in living? Yes, God would probably provide, but would our current mission structures survive?

## Moving Forward

God has a way of letting change produce new wineskins. He has always called us to be as the men of Issachar, who understand the times (1 Chron. 12:22). The environment has changed around us and the future of missions is very different from today. The question is, *Can we rise to the challenge?*

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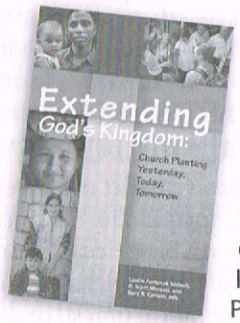
# Extending God's Kingdom:

## Church Planting Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow




**Over thirty experienced church-planting practitioners and missiologists** share successes, failures, and hopes for the future in this compilation of the "best-of" articles on church planting from *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. Articles are divided into six sections: The Church Planter, Biblical Guidelines for Church Planting, The Church Plant (what it looks like), Church-planting Strategy (how to do it), Partnership & Church Planting, and Case Studies.

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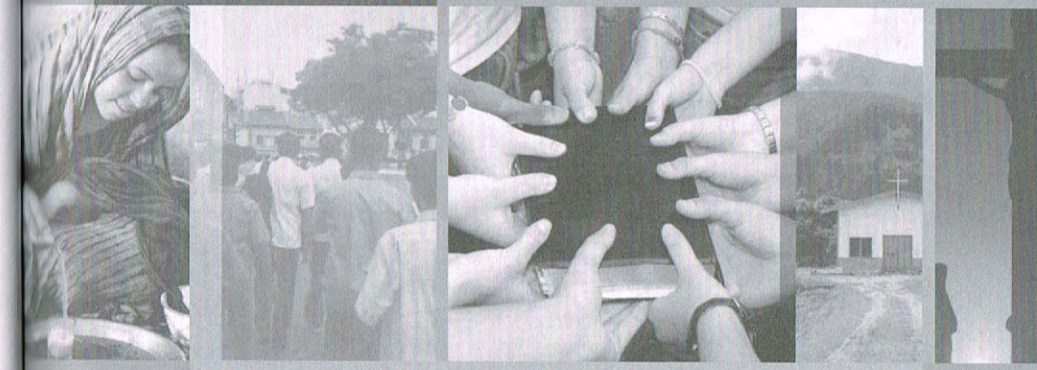

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