



“This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through”—is that good enough for today?

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

This time we have a very delicate issue. Dealing with it here are three very different articles.

The issue has dogged the tracks of earnest Christian workers for the last 100 years:

What is God’s Mission?

- Is it to “declare” His glory in all the nations?
- Does that mean to “tell” or to “portray” or both?
- And, are we to *command* His will?

The issue has been expressed in countless different ways:

- Word versus deed?
- Preach versus do good works?
- Minister to the body or to the spirit?
- Do evangelism or social action?
- Get people to heaven or help them now in this life?
- Teach them truths or command them to obey all that Jesus taught?
- Is it to seek for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven?

You can easily think of other ways to describe the issue.

The three different articles are

1. My own
 2. One by Steve Saint
 3. An excerpt from Christopher Wright’s *The Mission of God*.
- » Mine tries to explain where Evangelicals have been historically and where we are heading right now—a new thesis.
- » Steve’s is a gripping personal true story of the merger of the two—as only he can tell it!



Ralph D. Winter is the Editor of *Mission Frontiers* and the General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship.

» Wright’s is biblical, disturbing, and truly cogent, as well as personal.

The 1st Article (R. Winter)

My thesis is (read carefully) that *Evangelicals are quite different from what they were in Lincoln’s day* not because of a change of theology (which was the effect not the cause), but *because of a loss of social power*.

People can still talk about heaven even if they are powerless on earth. That has happened.

My lengthy article describes in some detail how the Evangelicals who founded and ran this country for a hundred years (1776 to 1876, roughly) had bold, society-wide ideas of how God’s will ought to work out in this life, in our society and in our world. They enforced honesty in both public life and business (inventing Dunn and Bradstreet). They created coeducation, banned liquor and slavery, urged use of whole foods, and a hundred other things. They even sang of “alabaster cities gleaming . . . undimmed by human tears.”

But then an immigration avalanche occurred. Between 1876 and 1930 an inundation mainly from southern Europe *tripled our population*, and removed Evangelicals from leadership.

Meanwhile, literally millions of new, socially-powerless Moody converts became the vibrant, groping mainstream of the Evangelicals. Now they sang “This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”

Now, they backed away from major social problems and labeled those who did not do so as *liberals* (they often were). They banned the very word *Kingdom*. Prophecy conferences, “last days” talk became prominent.

They no longer expected our national “good to be crowned with brotherhood,” which was written by a

devout school teacher in 1900 reflecting the previous era.

For us latter-day Evangelicals, this world was hopeless and was getting worse by the second. “Let’s wait for Jesus to return,” we said. From 1900 to the 1970s we only gradually emerged from an underground movement dominated by 157 Bible Institutes.

Those schools eventually adopted standard practices and their graduates began showing up in the professions, as mayors, as congressmen and senators. Carter made it to the presidency in 1977, etc. Today this increased visibility of other-worldly Evangelicals sends shock waves of fear through many non-church people. They seem to have appeared out of nowhere.

But our rising social power has only gradually recreated extensive commitment to solving the problems of this world. Increased attacks on religion, and on fundamentalists (and Christians) in particular, point to the general lack of prominence of Evangelical organizations in the spheres of social and commercial leadership nor in fighting corruption, disease and poverty.

We say “That’s for Bill Gates.” Alternatively, many Evangelicals are gravitating into an increased religious firepower of healings, prosperity and the miraculous, all dominated still by a focus on the next world not “thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven.”

But this is only a thumbnail sketch of many more details in my long article (which is an excerpt from a still longer one).

The 2nd Article (Steve Saint)

Steve is the instigator and promoter of the movie *End of the Spear*, and the truly brilliant writer of the even more exciting book by the same title.

His much shorter article here, written for this issue, bristles with gut-wrenching reality. He too believes that we must not separate God’s love into word and deed, and that they complement each other.

He gives just a hint of the calamitous background of his own upbringing in the jungle and now the astonishing combination of word and deed among one of the most isolated and savage tribes on the face of the earth.

Evangelicals today are quite different from what they were in Lincoln's day—not because of a change of theology (which was the effect not the cause)—but because of a loss of social power.

The 3rd Article (Chris Wright)

What we print here is a small excerpt from a ponderous "magisterial" work of many years. *The Mission of God, Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, (Intervarsity Press, 2006). Who would be better able to attempt a nearly 600 page book on that subject? Missionary, professor, Principal of the superb All Nations Christian College in England (see the web site www.langhampartnership.org/chris-wright/biography).

What we have excerpted is spell-bindingly crucial—and disturbing. He describes his own pilgrimage from earlier thinking. He describes thoughts from John Stott (with whom he now works closely as the new International Director of John Stott Ministries).

Okay, we have gotten over the idea that a faith in certain truths with no practical outworking in daily life is not the kind

of biblical faith that saves. In the Bible there is no artificial distinction between true heart faith and heart obedience.

Faith in certain truths concerns reconciliation with God. Once saved, the question this book raises becomes urgent: What is the Mission of God? What is life supposed to be like for the saved individual? Is it to be a life filled with good works? "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven (Matt. 5:16)," and "We are God's handiwork created ... to do good works (Eph 2:10)."

And doesn't the Gospel of the Kingdom entail the declaration of *the commands of God* (Matt 28:20) *not just the truths of salvation?*

Massive structural changes have taken place around the world due to missions. Education, medicine, politics and industry are radically different because of

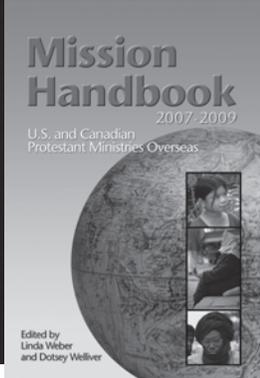
thousands of creative missionaries. At this moment mission agencies are carrying an immense load of responsibility in all of these areas.

Missions to the Rescue, and Rescuing Missions

National Geographic highlights the work of the little Kaleen Mission Hospital in Zambia. Both Johns Hopkins and the Gates foundation assist a tiny mission hospital in Zimbabwe. Missions have led the way. But donors sometimes don't want to hear about such efforts.

Enormous Evangelical wealth of skill and funds are being frittered away on relative trivialities, lacking a clear theology of demonstrating God's glory in this world.

Others are losing their faith because it would appear that our God has no Enemy who is destroying God's creation—that lets God take the blame for our inactivity at the front line. 🌐



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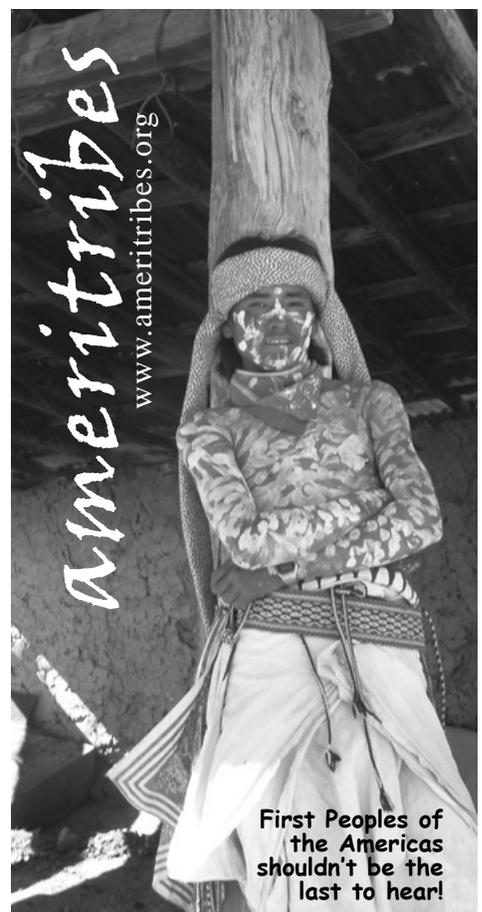
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