

# EDITORIAL COMMENT



## A Compelling, God-Sized Vision

RICK WOOD, EDITOR, *MISSION FRONTIERS*

### Dear Reader,

From the Haystack Prayer Meeting in 1806 to the Cambridge Seven and the Student Volunteer Movement of 1886, students of previous generations have been a uniquely powerful force in the cause of world evangelization. They literally helped to transform the world of their day by not only bringing the gospel to the unreached but also by starting schools and hospitals around the world. Their consecration to the glory of God in all the earth illustrates to us today what our students can accomplish if we challenge them with a comparable vision.

More recently, the young men and women who served during World War II started a new mission movement of their own upon their return from the battlefields of Europe and Asia. Thousands of new career missionaries emerged from the crucible of suffering and death that was World War II. This rather extreme government-funded “short-term mission trip” mobilized them with the vision of a hurting world that needed Christ. Hundreds of new mission agencies and mission efforts were started by these battle-hardened veterans. We stand today on the shoulders of these heroes that make up “The Greatest Generation.” Many of the organizations they birthed during this time are still with us today. The Urbana mission conventions started just after World War II, and the U.S. Center for World Mission was founded by a naval veteran.

### Will They Pick Up the Baton?

Each generation of believers has the privilege and responsibility of taking up the baton of the Great Commission from the previous generation and carrying it ever closer to the ultimate goal of seeing people from every tribe and

tongue worshipping Jesus and glorifying God with their lives. We have made incredible progress over the last 100 years, but much is left to be done.

Now a new generation of teens and twenties are coming onto the scene, and it is their turn to pick up the baton and run with it. But will they? That is the question for each new generation. Will they carry on where the previous generation has left off? Or will earlier progress be left to wither as other things grab their affections and attention?

In this issue we present a number of student mobilization efforts designed to make sure that the latest generation finds its place in God’s global mission to reach all peoples. Take note of the various opportunities for involvement starting on page 6.

### It’s Our Job, Too

It should not be the sole responsibility of a few campus ministries to raise up a new generation of missionaries with a biblical vision of God’s heart for all peoples. This vision should be at the heart of every Bible-believing church. These specialized student ministries are still needed because the Church as a whole has missed the big picture of what God wants us to do in this world. The local church could be mobilizing college students in large numbers with a God-sized vision to go out and change the world for Christ. But most students have to accidentally run into a specialized campus ministry like The Traveling Team in order to get the vision for which they’re looking.

The common message throughout this issue is that the latest generation is looking for a compelling, God-sized vision to which to give their lives. When that vision is presented to them, many respond enthusiastically.

### A Clear Choice

The latest generation is being presented with stark choices. They can live solely for self, pursuing the pleasures and materialism of this world while being inundated by the anti-biblical worldviews that are spewed at them daily from much of academia and the popular media. Or they can catch the vision of Christ’s global mission and live lives of meaning, purpose and impact. Most young people choose the first path because they have never been presented with the compelling vision of glorifying God with their lives in service to His kingdom.

While our youth are being drawn by the siren song of the culture to an antibiblical agenda for their lives, what is the message our young people are hearing from the Church today? Some hear, “Come to Christ and have an abundant life here and now. Stay out of trouble. Develop a great home, family and career. Stay safe and comfortable.” But if all the Church offers is a better way to live for self, then are we not simply providing a cleaned-up version of what the world is already selling, but not doing as good a job at marketing it?

If we are to succeed in saving the latest generation from the culture’s enticements and mobilizing them to active involvement in mission, the Church must be even more determined and effective than the world’s cultural elites in presenting a clear, compelling vision that will empower our students to make the right choice of what to do with their lives.

### Will We Let Them Go?

As the Church, are we willing to challenge and release our young people to take on the tough problems in our world, or would we rather just keep them safe? Dr. Ralph Winter spent his life challenging

people to find solutions to the most pervasive and systemic problems that plague our world. I believe our young people can be the solution to the world's problems, if we let them.

Last year in this editorial spot, Dr. Winter introduced two teenagers, Alex and Brett Harris, who wrote the book, *Do Hard Things*. Dr. Winter said in that editorial from July-August 2008, "This exciting book lays out irrefutably the fact that today's teenagers are what-they-are because society does not expect (even allow) much from them. This is not just a theory. An enormous response to their web site, [www.TheRebellion.com](http://www.TheRebellion.com), and their face-to-face conferences literally all over the world, reveal a huge, powerful, and deep-seated exasperation on the part of millions of bright young people who (especially in the Western world) are essentially deprived of opportunity to do their best—through 'low expectations' of society."

Diane West elaborates on this problem in her book, *The Death of the Grownup: How America's Arrested Development Threatens Western Civilization* (St.

Martin's Press, 2007). In this book she says, "There was a time, literally, when there were no teenagers." John Stonestreet of Summit Ministries comments further in his article, *Our Adolescent Culture*, which is available on our website, [www.missionfrontiers.org](http://www.missionfrontiers.org). He says,

West argues that adolescence didn't always exist. In fact, it is a quite recent phenomenon. The word "teenager" wasn't really used until 1941, after all. In virtually every other culture in the history of the world, prior to late 20th century Western culture, kids became adults. Not so anymore. They now become teenagers, or, to put it in more sociologically acceptable terms, they become adolescents... Today, of course, adolescence is considered a fixed stage of development. We expect students will lose their minds from ages 13-18. "Kids will be kids," we say. Only we aren't referring to kids anymore, we're talking about 15-year-olds. In other cultures, "teenagers" were marrying, farming, fighting wars, writing books, and in one case, bearing the Messiah.

A more recent example from American history is John Quincy Adams, the sixth U.S. president, who spent three years as a secretary on a mission to St. Petersburg,

Russia to obtain recognition of the new United States. He was only 14 years old at the time, but had already learned French and Dutch. Travel in those days was highly dangerous, yet his family permitted him to take on these important responsibilities, and the adults of his time were not afraid to give the responsibilities to him.

Previous generations did not expect or permit their young people to remain idle and be entertained during their "teenage years" or later. Why should we? Perhaps if we challenge them to take on the real problems in our neighborhoods and the world in the name of Christ, they along with the rest of the world will discover the Church and the God we serve to be far more relevant and attractive than they have imagined.

Our students do not need more entertainment. They want to be challenged with the vision that captured the hearts of previous generations of students and that compelled them to serve the peoples of the world. They want a vision worth living and dying for. We have it. Let's give it to them. f



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