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Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

The Asian tsunami—which *no one* could have stopped—is radically different from the Darfur genocide happening right now in a bleak corner of Sudan—which *could* be stopped.

Darfur is far worse than the turmoil and tragedy in either Indonesia or Iraq, for Darfur is the scene of “two million homeless, hungry and traumatized people,” to borrow a line from the moving portrayal by Susan Sutton (pp. 8-13).

Yet the whole world is rushing to help out with what happened *suddenly* in Asia. This is so human. If a problem builds *slowly*, humans tend not to react. How horrible!

The Subtle, Deadly Peril of What Goes *Slowly* Wrong!

Much of this issue of MF depicts developments that have gone terribly wrong—*slowly*—but have been hardly noticed.

Let's first note two examples of the bizarre phenomenon of human blindness to slow and harmful processes.

1. *Darfur*. Things have gone terribly wrong in Sudan for so long that it is hard for the world to react appropriately and effectively any longer. The world has become accustomed to ignoring Sudan.
2. *Oil*. Even before 2010 the oil shortage will be so serious that it will present one of the largest crises in all human history. Yet we go on guzzling petroleum fuels as if they were not fast running out.

Just think, every day we have so

many huge planes in the air filled with heavy Americans that we need to spend a million gallons of additional jet fuel *per day* due to increased obesity in the last ten years (*Berkeley Wellness Letter*, Feb. '05). That's just the *increase*! What is the *total* used per day?

Though the prices of fossil fuels continue to skyrocket, we can't even plant, harvest or process food without that source of energy.

We blindly continue to consume so much oil that the entire resources of the Alaskan Prudhoe field would be saved *in one year* if U.S. cars got *one more mile per gallon*. Yet instead, at the very moment when fossil fuels are getting dangerously low, we have moved madly to millions of top-heavy, gas-guzzling SUVs! And now China is also scavenging the earth for petroleum resources to fuel its mighty industrial explosion.

Are humans taking this all into account? No!

Okay, these are illustrations of peril appearing *slowly*. What about our article on “house churches” in this issue? What does that have to do with slow peril?

House Churches to the Rescue

Actually, the trend to house churches is a phenomenon which runs counter to the long and slow drift of American churches away from extended families. The American church today is strikingly more and more a place for family fragments, and even seeks to *replace* natural families!

The New Testament “church” was a worshipping household like that of Cornelius, Lydia, or Crispus, and was called an *eklesia*, a word that does not mean what we understand “church” to mean.

What happened to us (slowly)?

Modern age-stratified, highly specialized society has become Satan's Weapon of Mass Destruction of the family—precisely where worship and accountability are supposed to be primary! The church has mindlessly followed the world's pattern: a family driving up to a church door is instantly chopped into pieces.

Our lengthened school system also snatches our children away. Far worse, it isolates the generations. Over 300 years it has (slowly) gone from three years of schooling (as with Harvard in its first century—students without previous schooling) to 17 years of incarceration today. Whatever the merits of that long tunnel of isolation from adult responsibilities, such a system postpones marriage and in so doing pries apart the generations so that grandparents are really old. (We no longer see grandparents in their 30s!)

That means that little Johnny will *never see his father obeying his own father*. Three- and four-generation households, which once joined churches together, and had family-level worship, are now almost universally reduced to “nuclear” families (e.g. family fragments). The grandparent generation is no longer a stabilizing factor, divorce has skyrocketed, wives are abused, children go wrong, etc.

This happened slowly, over 300 years. Thus, today we are blind to what has happened — but must deal with the consequences.

Missionaries to the Rescue?

Those of us who have lived overseas, where most societies have not yet been “Westernized” and stacked against normal marriage age, may be among the only ones who can even perceive—much less unravel—the reality of this tragedy.

Small Groups Instead?

Unfortunately, many congregations today have the idea that getting people into small groups is all that is necessary. However, extended families can be small groups, but small groups cannot readily become extended families.

Pastors, frantic to do more than preach generalities to crowds on Sunday, may hope to get most of their congregations into small groups. Sure, those



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family fragments out there in the pews desperately need to rise above their individualism and isolation. Thus, a non-family, artificial small group is better than nothing.

In such churches you may never hear a word about what could and should go on at the family level. I myself, in Evangelical churches all my life, have never heard a sermon on how or why families ought to have family devotions.

But it is clearly better – as well as more important – to make every real family a small group than to try to make small groups into artificial families.

No book I know is a better family handbook than the truly marvelous book by Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families*. Next best is the one (we republished) by an Asbury Seminary professor, Dr.

Donald Joy, *Risk-Proofing Your Family*. (See page 20 to order.)

Yes, House Churches to the Rescue!

All over the world it is gradually becoming clear that you can build a big church out of small groups, but big churches without families remaining intact aren't worth much.

Last I heard, the most famous large church (in Korea) had 800,000 members meeting in 21 auditoriums and 15 identical services a week. But the secret was that behind all this once-a-week celebration were 52,000 (!) neighborhood fellowships mainly based on extended families.

The house church phenomenon could be revolutionary. It just may be that the most valuable gift missions can give back to the American church is a renewed sense of the family as God intended it to be. 🌐

The Impossible Challenge

We're pleased to announce that finally the 480-page (8.5 x 11) reprint of the first four harrowing years behind this bulletin, *Mission Frontiers*, is now truly available. Entitled *The Impossible Challenge*, this volume sums up the first two incredible years of this project and then gives month-by-month accounts of the next four. Over 400 pictures had to be specially scanned and many other labors invested.

The volume will now be sent directly from the printer in St. Louis to all who have already provided their addresses.

For additional copies or copies for additional people, send \$12 per copy to Betty Leung, 1539 E. Howard Street, Pasadena, CA, 91104. Or, phone her with a credit-card order at 626-296-7501.

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- ✍ The February 7 issue of *TIME* names Ralph Winter as one of the 25 most influential Evangelicals in the U.S.—a pleasant surprise! However, the text adjacent to his photograph is so misleading that we've posted a modification on the USCWM

Website (www.uscwm.org). Take a look, and tell us what you think.

- ✍ The latest (October-December 2004) issue of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* (IJFM) features presentations from the 2004 annual meeting of the International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM). Topics include: "Underground Church Movements: The Surprising Role of Women's Networks" (Rebecca

Lewis); "Church-Planting Movements vs. Insider Movements" (David Garrison); "The Key to Insider Movements: The 'Devoted' of Acts" (Kevin Higgins); and "The Most Precarious Mission Frontier" (Ralph Winter). For further information or to subscribe to the IJFM, go to www.ijfm.org.

- ✍ Specialized resources in the *Perspectives* Family now include the third edition of the *Condensed World Mission Course* (CWMC), featuring a single volume of 160 pages. More information is available at www.lsint.org. Also, the *Operation Worldview* Video Series is now available in a "Perspectives Family" version that allows users to "customize" the series to focus on their own ministries; see www.mission1.org.
- ✍ During May 6-8, 2005 the Rethinking Forum is sponsoring a weekend conference on the Hindu-Christian interface from the perspective of the

Rethinking Movement in Indian church history. The consultation will present various stimulating perspectives on service for Christ among Hindus. Although scholarly resource people will be present, the focus will be on practical service. This conference in the New York City area will close by lunch on Sunday following a worship service. For more information, contact info@thinkingforum.com or rethinkingforum@comcast.net.

- ✍ The year 2005 will feature much discussion of the Millennium Development Goals promoted by the United Nations and private voluntary agencies. To take good advantage of this opportunity, the World Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network are facilitating a global campaign to deepen Christian engagement with the poor and to influence leaders of rich and poor nations to fulfill their public promise to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to halve absolute global poverty by 2015. To learn more, go to www.micahchallenge.org.

- ✍ Readers of *Mission Frontiers* may recall our May-June 2003 cover story on "The Missing Piece in Global Mission Strategy?" The missing piece was there identified as a global-level association of mission agencies, comparable to the International Missionary Council which performed admirably in the first half of the 20th century but which drifted from its founding purposes in the second half. To reconstitute this "missing piece," delegates from at least 30 mission agencies are scheduled to gather in Amsterdam April 18-21 to found the Global Network of Mission Structures. Look for further reports in future issues of *Mission Frontiers*.

Darrell Dorr

Darrell Dorr is the Managing Editor of *Mission Frontiers*.

Joint Gathering of Leaders of Mission Agencies, Churches,
and Relief-and-Development Organizations

Synergistic Kingdom Advance among the **Least and the Lost**

September 12-15, 2005 — Denver, Colorado

This fall the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA) is jointly meeting with the International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM), the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations (AERDO), the Alliance for Missions Advancement (AFMA), and Churches Together. Seeking to encourage deeper evangelical engagement with a range of issues, the gathering will include "hands-on" networking between organizations as well

as strategic presentations and forums to clarify core issues in global mission. Older and younger leaders, strategists, and field practitioners will discuss issues such as:

- Dealing with the AIDS crisis together
- Becoming a "Christian" in a post-Christian world
- Rebuilding in Asia after the tsunami
- Doing church where there is no church

Watch for more information at www.efmamissions.org,
or call (770) 457-6677.

Desert Rose:

Hope Amidst Horror

for the Peoples of Darfur

Susan Sutton

When God planted His gardens around the world, He chose thorn trees and rocks for the Darfur region of Sudan and neighboring Chad. Painted in various shades of yellows and browns, the landscape of this sun-baked region just below the Sahara has its own kind of harsh beauty. The peoples who live here deserve the world's respect. Life is hard, yet they eke out a living from thin and unpromising soil.

Welcome to the transition zone between northern and southern Africa. Most people are subsistence farmers who sell their produce on straw mats in the daily markets, or merchants who hawk their wares from rickety tables or cluttered shops. Years are remembered by a good rain or a devastating drought. Hopes are for a good harvest and for children to live and, if Allah wills, to get a good education.

That is, if Allah wills *and* the evil spirits don't get their way. The peoples of the sub-Saharan straddling Chad and Sudan are Muslim, but theirs is a folk Islam in which superstition compromises religious orthodoxy. Small leather pouches con-

taining Qur'anic verses are draped on the necks of children and

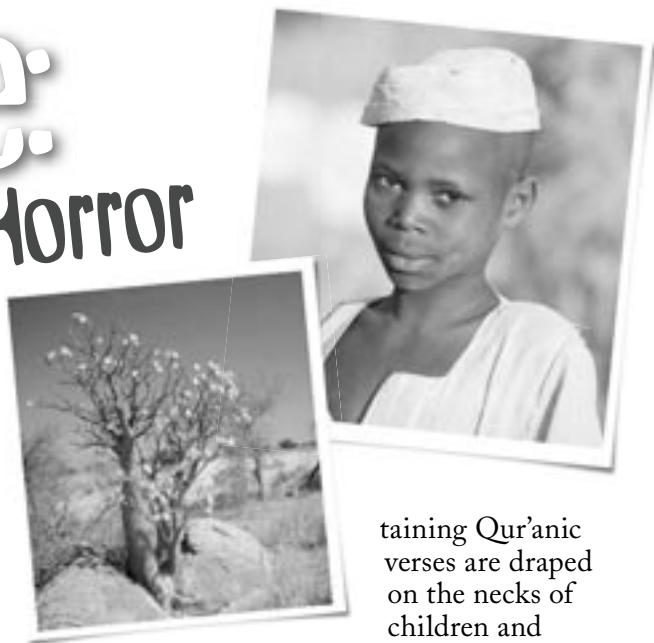
animals, soldiers and

young brides – their protection from evil. Muslim holy men write verses from the Qur'an on wooden boards, wash the ink into a bowl, and then sell the "drink" as a potion to guarantee anything from getting a wife to keeping bullets from penetrating the body. Pakistani teachers may travel throughout the region preaching a purer Islam, but they have a hard time rooting out the deeply embedded African way of viewing the world.

Nine months of *assef* (dry weather) and three months of *alharif* (rains) make up the rhythm of life, and laughter is found in them all. Women meet and gossip at local wells. Children giggle over games played with stones or dried goat pellets in the streets. Celebrations abound: births and marriages, circumcisions, and the return of friends after long journeys.

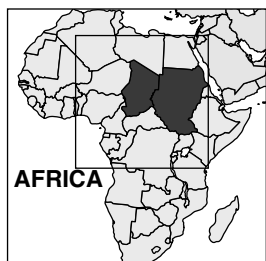
But laughter has died in Darfur, a region of western Sudan roughly the size of Texas. For two years, instead of gossiping, women have whispered tales of rape and murdered husbands and sons. Instead of playing in the streets, children have fled from aerial bombing and mysterious horsemen with guns. Nearly two million homeless, hungry, and traumatized people now wander or huddle in Darfur and the neighboring provinces of Chad.

*Susan and Louis Sutton, with their three children, served for 13 years in northeastern Chad through medical, educational, and church-planting ministries. They are currently directors of WEC International's U.S. sending base. Susan is the author of three books: *A Quiet Center*, *A Sure Path*, and *Sun Song*.*



Nearly two million homeless, hungry, and traumatized people now wander or huddle in Darfur and the neighboring provinces of Chad.

The world has taken notice, thanks largely to concerned Christians who persisted in bringing Darfur to the attention of influential politicians. No one wants another Rwanda. In fact, before the tsunami struck Asia on December



26, the United Nations had identified Darfur as “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.” In July 2004 the U.S. Congress passed a resolution declaring the Darfur situation to be “genocide.” Though the Asia tsunami crisis surpasses Darfur in the reported loss of life and the destruction of property – meriting the tremendous response of aid – the Darfur crisis is dominated by a heart-

wrenching difference: the enormous destruction comes from human hands rather than nature.

Making Sense of the Headlines

Many questions persist for outsiders trying to make sense of the news headlines emerging from this region. What exactly is going on? Are the accusations of “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing” true? Is the conflict religious or tribal or political? Are any disciples of Jesus resident in the region and acting as salt and light toward long-term solutions? Is Darfur merely a black hole of chaos, or do we see any signs of hope?

The answers are numerous and as complex as Africa itself. To live and work in sub-Saharan Africa is to understand that woven through the fabric of daily life are threads that reinforce its complexity, including *ethnic threads* (Arab vs. African), *economic threads* (herder vs. sedentary farmer), and *political threads* (traditional leaders vs. appointed civil government officials).

Ethnic threads. The peoples of western Sudan and northeastern Chad are rich in an ethnic

diversity. Tribal names roll off the tongue: *Abu Charib*, *Mimi*, *Maba*, *Masmaje*, *Assangori* in Chad, and *Fur*, *Zane*, *Mondari*, *Moru*, *Murie*, *Midob* in Sudan. Some people groups spill across the porous border as if there were no border at

all: Sudanese make weekly trips to Chad to buy and sell in the markets, while Chadians walk or ride donkeys and horses to attend mosques or visit relatives in Sudan. Five predominant ethnic groups claim eastern Chad and western Sudan as their common home: the Masalit, Zaghawa, Tama, Daju, and Arabs with their sub-clans. The Fur, a group distinctive to Sudan (Darfur literally means “country of the Fur”), could well join the list if the present crisis causes refugees to settle permanently among their neighbors in Chad.

Ethnic identities remain strong, but often the various people groups mingle as good neighbors in marketplaces, mosques, and homes. They often intermarry.

Farmers and merchants in rural villages may speak different ethnic languages, but they share the common trade language of Arabic. Less sedentary nomads wander up and down the borders living in convenient portable “tents” of woven mats and wood that can be dismantled and transported on the back of a camel. Some, however, settle in bush towns and plant fields of their own, blurring the ethnic lines even further.

In northeastern Chad the diversity normally works. Sudan, however, has chosen to write a different story. Over the last decades the central



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government of Sudan, located in Khartoum, has increasingly emphasized an ethnic line of distinction between the black African peoples (Masalit, Zaghawa, and Fur) and their lighter-skinned Arab neighbors (collectively termed Baggara). Local Arabs have been politically favored over black Africans, even though the latter are more representative of the population. Grievances voiced by ethnic Africans against Arab neighbors have not been addressed adequately, if at all. The message received from an Arab-dominated government is clear: all may be Muslim in Darfur, but not all are considered equal.

Economic threads. The age-old conflict over land has intensified.

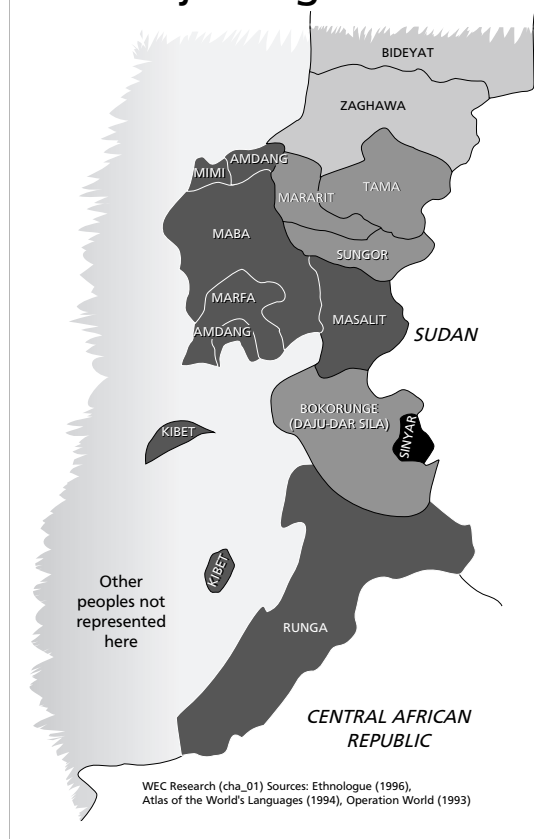
Fur farmers resent camel-riding Arabs who trample fields as they search for pastureland. But it is not just the herders versus the farmers. Arab nomads resent Zaghawa herdsmen who make seasonal forays into Arab-occupied grazing areas. Regular droughts and increasing desertification heighten the conflict, as herdsmen must push further south to find land

suitable for grazing, competing with each other and with farmers for what they need to survive. Tribes who share the same religion find it hard to share the same land.

Political threads. Sudan's government has done a poor job of handling these conflicts, leaving grievances to simmer, then boil, then explode.

Darfur is one of the least evangelized areas on earth. Less than 50 disciples of Jesus are known among all Darfur's peoples.

CHAD: Eastern Peoples Adjoining Sudan



WEC Research (cha_01) Sources: Ethnologue (1996), Atlas of the World's Languages (1994), Operation World (1993)

While Sudan recently inched towards a resolution of its (separate) civil war between the north and south, two new rebel groups formed in western Darfur: the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Not wanting these new rebel groups to inspire other regions of the country, Khartoum has struck back in force with the *janjawid*. These “demon horsemen” or “armed horsemen,” depending on who is translating, were originally recruited and sent south to attack regions held by the southern rebel army. Khartoum then armed more of them to help counter the rebels in Darfur. In the guise of subduing rebel soldiers, the government began

a campaign of bombing villages from the air while the *janjawid* have run a ground campaign of burning and pillaging villages, murdering men and boys, and raping women and young girls. Government response to armed rebels has morphed into a systematic terrorization and slaughter of innocent civilians.

Muslims are shocked and angered that other Muslims are threatening them. One worker in the region reports, “Probably the greatest seismic upheaval from this conflict ... is the worldview/paradigm shift of these black African tribes being attacked by their



The Peoples of Darfur

One worker in the region offers the following survey of Darfur's peoples. For supplemental information on these peoples, see sources such as www.worldchristiandatabase.com and www.joshuaproject.net.

People Group	Estimated Population	Known Believers
Baggara	215,000	1
Bargo	1,400	1-3
Barno	unknown	0
Bederia	503,000	0
Beni Amir	unknown	0
Beni Helba	15,000	0
Berti	171,000	0
Bideyat	44,000	0
Birged	95,000	0
Daju	134,000	0
Falata	418,000	1
Fulani	131,000	0
Fur	710,000	4-8
Gimr	100,000	0
Habania	unknown	0
Hawara (Jalaba)	unknown	0
Humir	55,000	0
Khuzam	16,000	0
Maba	191,000	5
Massalit	168,000	2-3
Meidob	62,000	0
Mima	75,000	0
Rizeigat	249,000	0
Sara (=Sinyar)	21,000	0
Songar	21,000	0
Taelba	unknown	0
Tama	88,000	0
Tarjam	5,000	0
Tunjur	163,000	0
Zaghawa	155,000	20-30
Ziadia	unknown	0
Total	6,000,000	34-51

Muslim brothers/government.... We hear story after story of these persecuted tribes scratching their heads and asking, "What have our Muslim brothers ever done for us? What has our Muslim government ever done for us?" As a result, some are questioning Islam.

Darfur Today

In just a few years, Darfur has evolved from a typical sub-Saharan region of Africa – where diverse ethnic groups may squabble but generally live together in peace – to what it has now become: a region where fear reigns. The statistics are appalling. The World Health Organization estimates that 70,000 have died in 22 months, either from fighting or from starvation and disease; another survey suggests that the death toll may be closer to 200,000. Nearly two million people have fled villages under attack; they are officially "Internally Displaced Peoples", living in their own country but unable to go home and dependent on aid groups. Another 200,000 have fled across the border into Chad, where other aid workers have massed.

"The solution is to pray, pray, and pray again."

Patrick Johnstone, author of the acclaimed prayer guide, *Operation World*, has characterized Darfur as one of the least evangelized areas on earth. Less than 50 disciples of Jesus are known among all Darfur's peoples. Yet a millennium ago many Sudanese, including the Fur, were Christians – possibly spiritual heirs of the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8. (Some historians claim that the eunuch was Sudanese.) Is there hope for today?

Yet God Is At Work!

Yes, out of the pain and chaos, hope is emerging in Darfur.

- Humanitarian organizations are responding with courage and determination to what Franklin Graham of Samaritan's Purse has rightly called "a very difficult and dangerous mission." Christian aid organizations and churches have the opportunity to express the love of Christ by their presence and compassion.
- Some Sudanese Christians are reaching out to the region, working with Christian aid organizations and sometimes working

alongside concerned Muslims. The Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), a partner of the Mennonite Central Committee, has a presence in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur. An American branch, SCC-USA, is actively involved in helping Sudanese churches reach out to this region.

God is also at work across the border! Chad offers an open door to reach the peoples of this region.

- WEC International, Mission Protestante Franco-Suisse au Tchad (MPFST), and other agencies have been working in eastern Chad for decades, offering health, educational, development and social programs. Although workers from these agencies cannot openly evangelize, God is using their presence to impart truth and catalyze an increasing interest in the gospel. Many believe that God's time has come for northeastern Chad.
- In the last ten years small groups of Muslim-background believers in Jesus have gathered in different towns.
- Bible translation is underway in four languages in the region.

Missionaries must be willing to persevere in hard conditions. A call to this region can't be taken lightly.

The southern Chadian church is growing in mission vision. In the past, southerners who worked in the north as civil servants saw their government transfer as "exile," only to be endured until they could return south. Now many are recognizing God's hand behind their assignment and want to be active witnesses for Christ.

Persevere in Prayer

There is a saying in Darfur: "The solution to the crisis requires three things: security, secu-

rity, and more security." The Church can just as strongly respond: "The solution is to pray, pray, and pray again." Those who do not grow weary in prayer will open doors for the gospel in Darfur, and hearts in Chad, and will usher in God's time to move among the peoples of this region.

Share Christ's Compassion for the Suffering



Churches and individuals can respond immediately by supporting Christian humanitarian organizations to enable the light of Christ to penetrate the area through compassionate care. Check the Internet to see what a variety of organizations – such as Samaritan's Purse, CARE, CORD, World Vision, the Mennonite Central Committee, and others you know – are doing in Darfur.

Commit for the Long Haul

Churches can adopt people groups of this region and begin praying for them. Contact mission agencies already at work long-term in the area and begin praying for them. The Leprosy Mission International has a presence in Darfur but has only two laborers. The Mission Protestante Franco-Suisse runs an orphanage, a pre-school, and several bush clinics. WEC International focuses on the Masalit, the Maba, the Tama, Assangori and Arabic-speaking nomads of the region, but there are not yet viable teams for all of these. Seek the Lord of the harvest to thrust out laborers into a region where the laborers are notably few and far between. One worker in the region comments, "Once the eye of the world is off the region and some of the non-governmental organizations pack up and move on to the next CNN crisis, then we can build the long-term relationships required to change lives."

Count the Cost of Pioneering

The door is open now in Chad for long-term commitment to developmental, social, educational and health projects in areas that border Sudan. Local authorities ask for missionaries to teach in their local schools, work in their hospitals, help them learn

How to Pray and How to Learn More

- Pray for aid organizations in Darfur to have access and freedom to do their work. Pray for their protection, for humanitarian efforts are subject to attack.
- Pray that God will awaken a mission vision in the Sudanese Church to reach their country for Christ. A history of oppressive dominance, fear, and hostility must be overcome, but God's Spirit can change hearts and give courage to reach out to Muslims in their own country.
- Pray for the Sudan Council of Churches to have an impact in Darfur as well as be a healing influence on a nation that now hopes to recover from civil war.
- Pray that God will open doors for the peoples of this region to encounter the truth of Christ through radio, the witness of Sudanese Christians, and Christian literature in Arabic.
- Plead with God to send out long-term laborers for both western Sudan and eastern Chad.
- Pray for effective, long-lasting solutions to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the displaced peoples and refugees. Pray also for open doors and open hearts in ministry to subgroups of these peoples now living in the U.S. and other countries.
- To obtain a 12-point "Darfur Prayer Focus" bulletin issued by the New Sudan Consultation, go to the *Mission Frontiers* Website (missionfrontiers.org) and look for the bulletin posted with other articles related to the March-April 2005 issue.
- Inquiries about service and requests for prayer information may be directed to WEC International's U.S. sending base (dirsec@compuserve.com, or www.wecusa.org), who will consult with cooperating agencies in determining replies.

English, and develop health and social programs.

But even apart from the Darfur crisis, this region is not an easy place to live. Conditions in refugee camps are not that different from normal life for many village peoples here. To reach them, missionaries must be willing to persevere in hard conditions. Temperatures can reach 120°F, *harmattan* winds blow dust everywhere, electricity is either erratic or non-existent, travel is difficult, and poverty lingers at the door every day. To work effectively in Chad requires learning at least French and Arabic, and potentially a third (ethnic) language. Sudan's government language is English, but to be effective in Darfur will require a knowledge of Arabic before going on to an ethnic language. A call to this region can't be taken lightly.

Finding Hope Amidst the Horror

There's more to the garden of Darfur and Chad than flinty soil, rocks, and thorn trees. God has placed a remarkable plant in this region – the desert rose, which blooms in unlikely places, emerging from clumps of rock and dirt. The desert rose also blooms at unlikely times; during the rains its branches remain bare, but at some point during the dry season, when all other plants wither or die, the desert rose blossoms. It sprouts a bouquet of delicate pink flowers, displaying its glory in stark contrast to the bleak surroundings.

The desert rose is a symbol of surprise and a sign of hope. "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom," declares the prophet Isaiah (35:1). The parched land of Darfur and eastern Chad *will* bring forth fruit. But this will require faithful people committed to long-term praying. It will require persevering laborers who love these peoples with Christ's love and serve them with His strength. Look to the desert rose as a bright reminder that the Living God can bring astonishing beauty out of great suffering. 🌍



The Bridge of ~~SATAN~~ has been broken

A Tale of Transformation Among the Sheko

Harold Kurtz and Caroline Kurtz

Editor's note: as we seek God for the peoples of Chad and Sudan (see pages 8-13), we can gain encouragement from reports of God at work among peoples elsewhere. Here is one profile in transformation that can feed biblical hope. Lord, do it again and again!

In November 2004 we spent a fabulous three weeks in Ethiopia, visiting outreach projects that take the Good News of Jesus to unreached peoples. Our sister church in Ethiopia, Mekene Yesus (The House of Jesus), has grown by four million members in the last fifty years! Yet unreached people groups still remain in this country.

It was like driving back into the Book of Acts, for the gospel is "out of control" in that area!

Four times in our travels we literally came to the end of the road, each time continuing by car on a bone-shaking track so that we could connect with a different people group. It was like driving back into the Book of Acts, for the gospel is "out of control" in that area! It was thrilling to hear the stories of Jesus coming into lives in power and signs and wonders. We heard stories of Jesus appearing in visions and dreams, of miraculous healings, of deliverance from demon possession. We heard stories of biblical blessing transmitted from one people to another.



Harold Kurtz

For example, after Ethiopia's socialist regime expelled Presbyterian missionaries from the area in 1978, the Church among the Bench people was forced underground in persecution. Yet – nurtured by the Bible translated into their language during that season – Bench Christians grew in number and emerged from the crucible seasoned and committed to Jesus.

After they experienced God's care and sustaining presence during hardship, the Bench Christians became relentless evangelists, and some became cross-cultural missionaries. They headed out to share the Good News with neighboring tribes, including the Sheko, an isolated, forest-dwelling people living in remote settlements and with pockets of population dispersed by the invasion of larger tribes into their traditional area. Bench missionaries spent days in the forest with the Sheko.

Finally, seven years ago, a Sheko woman accepted Jesus. Her transformed life made the gospel come alive, and a people movement began, with profound influence throughout this tribe of some 30,000. For example, so many Sheko have become followers

A former missionary in Ethiopia, Harold Kurtz now is Senior Associate for the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship (www.pff.net). His daughter, Caroline Kurtz, has also served as a missionary in East Africa and is now an Associate Director of the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship.



Caroline Kurtz



Ato Haile, a Bench leader from Mekane Yesus, plays the local instrument, the Kirar, as the Sheko sing, "The bridge of Satan is broken and now we cross on the Bread of Life."

of Jesus, and the gospel has had such an effect on their lives, that when elections are held to choose representatives for community and government service, only Christians are elected. Even non-Christians, they say, will only vote for a Christian because they know the Christians will be honest, won't steal money, and won't abuse their power.

The Sheko have been an abused people and a quarry of slaves for others. They spoke to us of three times in the last century when they thought their tribe might disappear. During the occupation in the Second World War, the Italians abused them; then a disease decimated them and they scattered into isolated settlements in the forest to escape contagion. Then, as they learned to market their forest coffee, a more insidious affliction spread among them: with their newfound wealth they began to buy forms of locally-made alcohol. The tribe erupted into internal violence, with brother killing brother, daughters and mothers killing one another, and fathers and sons involved in bloody brawls. They were being destroyed from within.

Yet now that the gospel has come, the century-old tradition of revenge killings (both within the tribe and between the Sheko and other tribes) has stopped. The Sheko declare, "Jesus has saved our tribe and given us peace."

The remote Sheko are illiterate and without a single school (government or private). In Gurfarda, the largest and most populous Sheko center, there is only one Bible and one reader, a 12-year-old boy who can read and write in Amharic, the language of his education. When the

Christians gather, this boy reads the Bible to them, and those who are bilingual discuss the Word of God and translate it into their mother tongue.

When someone is sick, the Sheko call for the elders to come and bring the Bible. The elders gather around the sick person, open the Bible as a symbol of God's presence and promises, and pray for healing in the name of Jesus. Miracles happen. "We have no clinics," they told us. "We only have God."

The Sheko village we visited is a new one, a settlement that has grown up in the forest beside a stream and around the "mother" church for the surrounding population. The village is beautifully kept, with clear, clean paths and blooming flowers. Their grass-roofed church building seats over 300 but has now grown too small, so poles are being collected to expand the building.

The Sheko Christians in this village welcomed us – the first white people who had ever visited them – with great joy. They brought out a bowl of wild honey in the comb, and a few stray larvae, for us to share. (Sheko honey is famous all over Ethiopia.) We dipped into the common honey bowl with our fingers. It was like a communion service commemorating our oneness in the company of Jesus. In the church building the Sheko Christians formed a group around us and, to the joyful beat of the drum, sang one of their favorite songs with a chorus that celebrates, "The bridge of Satan has been broken, and now we cross on the Bread of Life."

They apologized that the church elders were not present, for the elders had gone to assist the development of churches in more remote Sheko villages a five-day walk away. So the circle of blessing widens further! Before leaving, Bench and American Christians prayed with Sheko sisters and brothers about how we might give the growing Sheko Church the right kind of assistance in response to God's great harvest among their people. ☉

**The Sheko declare,
"Jesus has saved our tribe and given us peace."**



Launching house CHURCH Movements

Rad Zdero

Editor's note: many missionaries among unreached peoples are discovering that house churches may be key to discipling these peoples. Yet these same missionaries may have little practical experience with house churches, either in their first or adopted cultures. The following is excerpted by permission from *The Global House Church Movement* (William Carey Library, 2004), where Rad Zdero portrays the challenge of launching house church movements in a variety of cultures. To order copies of this book, see pages 20-21.

This chapter suggests four strategic steps that may help house church trends in various countries become rapidly growing people movements.

1

Starting New House Churches

It has been recognized that numerically the most effective way of reaching people for Christ is the genesis of new churches.

Church growth guru Peter Wagner, based on his research, has stated that "the single most effective way to evangelize is to plant new churches."²³¹ But, how is

this to be done? The key words to best facilitate this process are: *deliberate, rapid, small, saturation, and volunteers.*

Deliberate. A conscious effort should be made to plant New Testament-style house churches among unreached people

pockets. Why should this be done? The reason is simple: new churches don't just happen. Missiological studies have concluded that church planting movements are customarily preceded by a deliberate

strategy to begin new disciple-making communities.

²³² An example of this, described earlier in this book, was the formation of 3500 house churches (totaling 70,000 people) in one Indian state in the late 1990s as the result of an intentional planting strategy.²³³

Rapid. House churches need to blueprint themselves with a healthy emphasis on evangelism, the goal being multiplying their house church into two or sending a team to start a new one. Multiplying house churches typically grow large enough to form a second group within 6-9 months.²³⁴ Otherwise, they may eventually stagnate and fold. Our house church network in Toronto has taken on the realistic slogan "every house church, start a house church, every year". Doing the math, in ten years there could be as many as 1000 house churches in the region. This is a reasonable goal given that doubling a house church only means going from, say, ten to twenty people over the course of an entire year.

Small. House churches should not grow too large before they decide to multiply. Otherwise, the loss of intimacy, openness, and interaction will eventu-

ally compromise the group's attractiveness and plateau the numbers. Currently around the globe, explosive Christian conversion growth from church planting movements is characterized by the reproduction of multiplying house churches and cell groups of no more than 10-30 people.

²³⁵ It is known that smaller churches experience a proportionally higher growth rate than larger churches: 1-100

A conscious effort should be made to plant New Testament-style house churches among unreached people pockets.



Rad Zdero earned his Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from Queen's University in Kingston, Canada. He has participated in, led, and started cell groups and house churches for the last 18 years. He is co-founder of House Church Canada.



member church (63% growth in 5 years), 100-200 (23%), 200-300 (17%), 300-400 (7%), and over 1000 (4%).²³⁶ In other words, churches tend to plateau in numbers as they get larger, making the necessity of continually sending out groups from existing churches to start new ones obvious. Given their mobility, flexibility, simplicity, and low cost, small house churches are the most strategic choice in reaching the masses.

Saturation-Focused. Every neighbourhood, apartment complex, work setting, and educational institute should be considered as a potential area for a new house church. Conventional churches are not able to penetrate into many segments of society, necessitating a restructuring and re-strategizing towards a more mobile and flexible approach that can do the job. Specifically, the idea gaining attention among mission organizations and missiologists is the planting of a church for every 500 to 1000 people so that as many people as possible will have a Christian community nearby.²³⁷

Volunteer-Led. The weight of responsibility and leadership for emerging house church movements should be placed squarely on the shoulders of grass-roots volunteers, or so-called lay people. Traditional approaches to church planting and missionary work have always employed, quite literally, the services of the professionally trained. However, current research shows that the extent to which rapid church planting movements are birthed depends on the degree to which indigenous non-professionals are encouraged, trained, and released.²³⁸ Professionals — although having a real role as coaches and strategists and mobile overseers of house church networks — need to give way to a new wave of volunteer Christian leaders from the grassroots.

Conscientiously implementing these ingredients builds momentum in exposing more and more people to Christ in the context of house church as well as developing subsequent generations of leaders.

2

House Church Networks

As more home churches emerge, they will need to become part of citywide networks if the momentum is to increase further on local, regional, and national levels.

Ways of Linking. The way these networks function practically was addressed in detail in the previous chapter. But, to recap briefly, there are five concrete ways house churches can be interlocked into a tight web: occasional citywide gatherings of all house churches; house-to-house meeting patterns; monthly leadership training of house church leaders; traveling apostolic coaching of a network; and multiplying networks of networks of house churches.

Biblical Reasons. As detailed in Chapter 3, “Church, First-Century Style”, we saw that house churches of the first century were not an ocean of little groups scattered across the vast reaches of the Roman Empire. There were mechanisms that connected them together into a movement that outlived the very empire that soon would seek to contain its growth. The specific strands used to weave the web of this fledgling movement were mobile apostolic workers who brought vision and instruction to the churches, as well as house-to-house meeting patterns and citywide gatherings that brought into reality the truth of the unity of the body of Christ....

Concerns of Independent House Churches. To some involved in home churches, this idea (of clustering house churches) is tantamount to heresy because of their strong theological conviction regarding the

autonomy of each house church. So, any attempt to build a web of house churches working together, on whatever level, will be viewed with suspicion. For some, another factor may be the hurt experienced at the hands of traditional church leadership that was too controlling. However, as argued both from a pragmatic and biblical perspective, some sort of connectivity needs to be present. Consequently, those of us called to this work need to use our own common sense and lessons from the practice of the early church by implementing house church networks that will form the fabric for the emergence of full-fledged movements in successive generations.

3

The Role of Traditional Local Churches

This author proposes that more traditional congregations — which use the “cathedral” model of a special man



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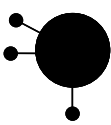
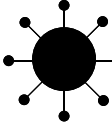
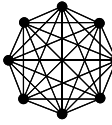
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performing a special service in a special building — can still have a role in the emergence of house church movements. I am personally aware of traditional churches that have already taken the following steps.

COMPARISON CHART OF CHURCH MODELS

The chart contrasts the three classic models of church prevalent today: Traditional Church, Cell Church, and New Testament-style House Churches.

Comparison Chart of Church Models

	TRADITIONAL CHURCH	CELL CHURCH	HOUSE CHURCHES
Organizational Principle	Church <i>WITH</i> small groups	Church <i>OF</i> small groups	Church <i>IS</i> small groups
Organizational Diagram	<p><i>Hub</i></p>  <p>Black Circle = Large Group</p>	<p><i>Hub and Spokes</i></p>  <p>Black Dots = Small Groups</p>	<p><i>Network</i></p>  <p>Black Dots = House Churches</p>
Size of Meetings	Large Group with some Small Groups	Equal Emphasis on both Large and Small Groups	Small Groups: Primary HC Network: Supplement
Format of Meetings	Programmed Ritual and Passive Audience	Large Group: Programmed Small Group: Open	Open: Participatory and Interactive
Purpose of Meetings	One-man show	Large Group: One-Man Show Small Group: Mutual Benefit	Mutual Benefit

Commissioning House Church Missionaries.

Although many in the conventional churches likely will never make the emotional and intellectual paradigm shift to house church networks, they can, however, fully release and support those who have made that leap to go out and start them. In other words, conventional churches that are mission-minded and want to plant churches should give serious consideration to planting fully functioning and self-sustaining house church networks. This may scare some churches and pastors who don't want to let go of capable people. However, rather than viewing this as a loss, it makes a world of difference if it is seen as a viable missionary endeavor to grow the kingdom. A local congregation may, in fact, choose to adopt house church planters and financially support them the same way they already buttress more traditional missionaries and para-church workers.

Transitioning to a House Church Network. There are some conventional congregations that will be able to make the transition as an entire community towards selling the building and reorganizing as a house church network. This will free up their resources and time to help the poor, support missions work overseas, help mobile house church planters, and develop local leadership. There are some that have made such a jump.

But, it is unlikely that very traditional churches will make such a shift all at once, if at all. It may require some intermediate steps.

For congregations that really don't have any experience with small groups, this may involve simply beginning to develop a strong small groups ministry over a number of years that primarily involves people already in that church. For those with a mature small groups ministry, this may involve taking the next step of shifting these small groups towards being evangelistic cell groups, which often can begin to look more and more like house churches. For those local congregations that are cell-based churches with an equal emphasis on home cell groups and Sunday morning celebrations, the final step may be to drop the building and programs and reorganize as a tight network of house churches.

This shift along the spectrum can be described as occurring from "church *with* small groups" to "church *of* small groups" to the more biblical and strategic principle that "church *is* small groups". Each of these steps can move the local Body of Christ into a more functional unity as a citywide church as practiced in the first three centuries.

4

The Role of Denominations and Missions Groups

Although I believe denominations are in no way God's best for the Body of Christ — rather, the citywide or regional church was the apostolic New Testament pattern — we need to work with what we have at the present time in order to usher in long-term changes. So, the entire people of God need to get behind house churches in one way or another for a movement to really explode in Western nations as they are in most other parts of the world. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there are currently some denominations and missions groups that are supporting house church planting efforts, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, Dove Christian Fellowship International, The Free Methodist Church in Canada, The Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada, and the Navigators of Canada. These organizations are having a role to play in initiating and undergirding house church movements.

Realize. Denominations and missions groups need to understand that New Testament-style house churches have a different DNA from small groups, cell groups, or para-church ministries. They are not appendages of conventional congregations. Rather, they are fully functioning churches in and of themselves that network with others of like mind in their city or region. They do not require nor desire church buildings, expensive programs, professional clergy, or highly choreographed services. Gatherings are open, interactive, and family-type meetings around the Lord's Supper as a full meal. They focus on relationships, discipleship, and neighbourhood outreach....

Release. Organizations that wish to endorse house church efforts from within their own ranks will be faced with the challenge of fully releasing leaders to function according to the DNA built into house church movements. Because house church networks desire to re-establish ancient apostolic patterns and practices for church life, denominations will need to avoid the temptation of trying to force these leaders into long-established traditional roles and categories. Because they are typically at the grassroots, most house church leaders functioning on local and trans-local levels will be so-called lay people. They will need to be given the same freedom as more traditional leaders to function in their calling from God to lead, train, and oversee the next generation of house church leaders.

Reinforce. Established Christian organizations, as already mentioned, are supporting house church efforts by funneling money to aid church planters to get new works off the ground and by offering these leaders resources in the way of seminary-equivalent courses, church planting workshops, training materials, regional leadership networks, etc. This kind of support may

accelerate the emergence of house church networks, which might lay dormant in isolated and scattered groups.

Recognize. Denominations and mission agencies also bring recognition and validity to house churches in the eyes of the broader Christian community. This legitimacy, in turn, can open the door for increased openness to future participation by individuals and other denominations not currently involved. Moreover, particularly in North America, the only choice most Christians have is that of the traditional local church. Denominations and missions groups can provide the additional option of house churches to members that have never been completely at home in more traditional settings.

Reform. There may even come a day when some smaller denominations will be prepared to sell all their property and entirely reorganize as regional networks of house churches. They can choose to undergo their own mini-reformation back to apostolic practices. The fact that even a single denomination or mission group would be brave enough to do this would be a serious clarion call to others toward a significant reformation in church structure, something many Christian leaders have been seeking and talking about for years. This would mimic what is already going on in other parts of the world with the house church movement. 🌐

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²³¹ Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, Gospel Light/Regal Books: Ventura, CA, 1990, p.

11 (quote used by permission).

²³² David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, p. 34.

²³³ James Rutz with Victor Choudhrie, "House Church Explosion in India", *House-2-House Magazine*, Issue 2, 2002, www.house2house.tv

²³⁴ Wolfgang Simson, p. 107.

²³⁵ David Garrison, p. 35.

²³⁶ Wolfgang Simson, p. 248.

²³⁷ Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House*, 2001, pp. 55-60.

²³⁸ David Garrison, p. 35.



Are Your Dreams Strategic?

Greg H. Parsons



All of us have felt the repercussions of the Asian tsunami on December 26. We have wondered why. We have prayed that God will bring good out of the suffering. We have contributed to relief efforts. We have grieved for those who lost loved ones.

When you think and pray about the long-term impact of an event like the tsunami, what do you “dream” that God might want to do? Once things are stabilized and systems are restored, what might be most strategic?

The secular media have reported on various activities in the recovery efforts. One story portrayed the various approaches of different Christian groups – how they went about their work and shared their faith. While organizations must focus on relief at first, some have the big picture in mind and plan for longer-term efforts. Short-term efforts have their place, but they can’t replace relationships, language learning and – most of all – Christ’s love through someone in long-term proximity.

I’ve been wondering: are Christians willing to fund the long-term efforts, too? Historically, which make a more lasting impact?

I’m reminded of an illustration. Since the USCWM is in the Los Angeles area, over the years we’ve hosted a variety of guests who have wanted to “make an impact” on Hollywood. Perhaps, they’ve hoped, they could make a high-quality film to share the gospel in some way. Often, they’ve wanted to win an Academy Award – not for themselves, of course, but so they could share the gospel on global television.

Yesterday the Academy Award nominations for 2004 were announced, and I saw an interview with the former

director of the Academy Awards about Mel Gibson’s *Passion of the Christ* and why it received only three minor nominations – none in major categories. The man interviewed has worked in the industry for more than 40 years. Then it hit me: if someone really wanted to impact Hollywood for the gospel, why wouldn’t they work hard for 20 years for someone like that man? Why would we think that saying a gospel speech on TV is the best approach simply because a lot of people would hear it?

I’m for taking every opportunity to share our faith, but if Jesus thought that people needed to hear certain words in a certain order, you would think He would have been a lot clearer in what He said. Beyond “repent” and “believe” there are no simple formulas – certainly none that produce automatic results. Perhaps our culture is so bent on efficiency that we’ve honed the message to “steps to get right” rather than “a relationship worth seeking” – like the pearl of great price. Then we go overseas to areas where the gospel has rarely been clearly proclaimed, and we want quick results there, too. But that is clearly not enough!

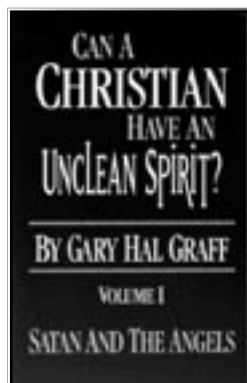
We need people – like a growing number of Indonesian believers – who will go and spend 20 years if necessary, learning the best way to relate to peoples like the three million Aceh. Without understanding the language and culture, we may not know which doors are really open – we may walk through the wrong ones.

We can also “dream” in our prayers. We can dream and pray that the armed conflicts in Aceh and the north of Sri Lanka will end. We can pray for an end to persecution of believers in these places. There aren’t many (if any) fellowships of Aceh believers, and in much of Sri Lanka – among some 92% of its population – it is the same. Millions of people in thousands of people groups in Asia don’t yet have followers of Christ in their cultures.

Let’s dream together and pray that will change. 🌐



Rev. Greg Parsons is General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission. He’s been on staff at the USCWM for 22 years.



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