

Great God! The Nations of the Earth

Thomas Gibbons (1720–1785)

Great God! the nations of the earth
Are by creation thine;
And in thy works, by all beheld,
Thy radiant glories shine.

But, Lord! thy greater love has sent
Thy gospel to mankind,
Unveiling what rich stores of grace
Are treasured in thy mind.

Lord! when shall these glad tidings spread
The spacious earth around,
Till every tribe and every soul
Shall hear the joyful sound?

Smile, Lord, on each divine attempt
To spread the gospel's rays,
And build on sin's demolished throne
The temples of thy grace.

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ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Advance the Gospel: A Report from Kansas City

Jeff Straub

I am in Kansas City this week at the first of what may become a new biennial conference aimed at encouraging young people to consider foreign missions. In the tradition of the Student Volunteer Movement, Urbana, and Student Global Initiative (SGI), a group of concerned pastors and others began meeting and praying about starting a conference for college- and seminary-aged individuals to focus on the continuing need of world evangelism and church planting. Dave Doran and the Intercity Baptist Church hosted SGI for about fourteen years in the early years of the new century. SGI's last conference was a few years ago. Tim Barr (a Central grad who has been teaching periodically in a restricted access country) and several others organized Advance the Gospel this week in Kansas City. The conference has brought together about two dozen speakers from North America and Africa. We are meeting in the facilities of the Tri-City Baptist Church of Blue Springs, MO, where Tim recently became pastor after a number of years in Adrian, MN.

On Thursday, Dave Doran started the conference off with a message on "God Centered Missions" from 2 Corinthians 4:15. He emphasized that missions is first and foremost about the glory of God. God is advancing his glory among the nations and believers are called to join God in promoting his glory. On Thursday night, Ken Mbugua, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church of Nairobi, Kenya, spoke from Romans 1:1-6 on the Preeminence of Christ in Missions.

The evening ended with a round table discussion on training nationals with three individuals who have been heavily involved in this ministry. It stressed the importance of life-on-life mentoring as a starting point for theological education. (Due to concerns about security and the fact that several participants are working in restricted access places, I cannot use their names or places of ministry in this report.) Training nationals is an important part of the church planting process. Nationals need to assume the leadership of churches newly planted and they need training.

Mission agencies, seminaries, and ministries of helps are also represented at the conference in the display area. It has been good to catch up with ministry friends scattered far and wide in the Lord's work and to hear of



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the progress of the gospel around the world. In addition to general sessions focused mainly on preaching the Word, the conference includes a number of workshops by practitioners who are bringing years of expertise to the conversation about gospel advance.

On Friday, I am to give a workshop on the global presence of Pentecostalism and its impact on missions. As this conference meets, a memorial service is to be held in Orlando, FL, for Reinhard Bonnke, a German-born Pentecostal evangelist who died in early December. Throughout Bonnke's career, he promoted Pentecostal and prosperity teaching across the African continent and around the world. Some have referred to him as "the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul," claiming he was responsible for 79 million conversions worldwide. This highlights the prominence and presence of global Pentecostalism. Africa has about one billion people on the continent, about half of which are professing Christians—with about half of those claiming some form of Pentecostalism. In 1970, there were an estimated 60 million Pentecostals worldwide. This number is projected to be 1100% greater in 2020: about 770 million Pentecostals globally. Under the Pentecostal umbrella, one finds traditional Pentecostals like the Assemblies of God, Charismatics, new Pentecostals, prosperity gospellers, and Africa Initiated Churches. While there is not a clear set of Pentecostal tenets to which all of these groups adhere, there are common themes that they hold. Chief among these is the prominence of the Holy Spirit's power for life and ministry. Additional emphases include tongues, the continuing gift of prophecy, faith healing, and the like. The problem is that many Pentecostals are promoting a false version of Christianity, especially with the emphasis on the prosperity gospel. Africa, as a generally poor 2/3 world area, is highly susceptible to this pernicious error. My workshop will try to show how global Pentecostalism is impacting the modern mission/church planting efforts.

Other workshops include a session on business as missions, the role of single women in the mission field, working with ethnic groups who have moved among us to the USA, and working with Muslims. While many of these workshops are not directly related to church planting, they contribute to the work of missions and should be aimed at facilitating church planting movements in countries where the missionaries minister.

A number of students from colleges and seminaries, including some from the Twin Cities and Central, are at the conference. There is good excitement for the meetings and real interest among those in attendance. I met a high school senior tonight who is from the area and is considering enrolling in Bob Jones next year, eventually planning to go to Cambodia as a missionary. I am glad to see that kind of missions interest. While the conference is modest in size, there is a good representation of interested young people. I am reminded of the importance of reaching the right person at the right time. Remember the story of Edward Kimball, the Chicago shoe salesman who

influenced Dwight L Moody with the gospel? Who knows whether the next great missionary evangelist is among us this week.

We need to continue to challenge our churches to promote missions among our youth and to support missions heavily in our church's budgets. We simply cannot give too much to missions, either by way of personnel or funds. Churches who make missions going and giving a top priority tend to be stronger, more vibrant churches.

I was encouraged to think about global missions while a student and God used my student years to ultimately direct me toward a lifetime of Christian service. When I entered Bible school, I had no clear direction, but Mission Prayer Band and a couple of summer mission teams helped open my eyes to the needs of the world. While I am not a career missionary as such (God having providentially redirected my life through a family medical need), I still have the privilege of being involved in missions through overseas teaching, teaching missions at Central, and encouraging my students to consider global missions.

I trust the Lord will use AtG this week in the lives of a number of young people (and maybe some older people) to place their futures at the Lord's disposal to bear the goodness around the world. Thank you Tim Barr and the rest of the AtG team for this conference, and thanks to the good people of Tri-City for hosting this meeting. SDG!



This essay is by Jeff Straub, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
