From Uplook, 2003

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A Friend Indeed (January-February 2003)

From Uplook, January-February 2003. Editorial.

He is no mirage!

Desert daylight is harsh and strong, blanching the landscape, bleeding the colors from the sand and sky. Only in the early morning and at dusk does the scene take on the scarlets and golds of the sun. Does it often seem that way with our lives? In the early hours of childhood, experiences seem so vivid, life's joys are pure and bright. Even it's little sorrows, though sharp, can often be kissed away. And at the other end of life, too, with the encroaching shadows, the things that matter seem to come back into focus. The superficial things—the clothes we wear, the food we eat, our trinkets and toys—seem more willing to loosen their hold on us. As our bodies begin to fail us and temporal hopes recede, we are forced back to simple pleasures, basic needs, and the growing certainty that our limited days should be filled with the things that matter most.

But in the middle years, the harsh realities of human experience seem to bleach the life out of us. The gale-force wind of adversity, emotional storms within us, the increasingly parched world around us, and the glaring searchlight of divine justice—these all combine to leave us gasping for something bigger than ourselves. Something secure to give us refuge from the incessantly changing winds. Something to harbor us, a haven where the inner storms somehow cannot reach us. A special kind of water, imported from a Better Land, that will

slake our parched souls. And relief from the seemingly merciless rays of divine light that expose us, not for what people think we are, but for what we really are. How far must we search, how many mirages must disappoint us, how many burning steps across the heartless sandscape before we find such a place?

It is the testimony of the world that no such place exists. But, thank the Lord, it is the testimony of God Himself that there is a Person who exactly meets these longings of the wilderness pilgrim.

Among his many canvasses of the Messiah, the inspired word-painter Isaiah describes how it is possible to bring back the color to the wind-swept, storm-battered, desert-parched, sun-beaten soul: “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa. 32:2).

Reading the verse, I can feel the relief flooding in, washing over my spirit. Drink in those blessed words! An hiding place…a covert… rivers of water…the shadow of a great rock…. This Man of whom Isaiah speaks is absolutely everything we need for the pilgrim journey! There is protection and provision, sustenance and shade. He is the continuing security of a hiding place from the blazing sirocco, interposing Himself between us and its blistering, blinding heat. “A very present help,” He provides the ready availability of a covert when out of nowhere an untimely storm catches us, vulnerable and exposed. He slakes our thirst from a river that flows from Himself, our smitten Rock. And when in our weariness—weary perhaps with the hardness of the way, or worse still, the hardness of our

own hearts—we drop to our knees in despair, we find the "Rock that followed them" through that "great and terrible wilderness" is still ready to provide the blessed shadow of Himself as our refuge.

Whatever else we may apply from this portrait of heaven's lovely Man, let us take to our hearts three life-sustaining truths. First, it is obvious that the need is all ours; the provision is all in Him. Second, when feeling my soul is like a desert wasteland, I need to flee to Him, not from Him. He never yet turned one away, nor ever will. And finally, the journey is often long and hard, but it will surely bring us at last to a land where no storm sweeps its landscape, no weariness plagues its inhabitants. And the Man who traversed the desert with us will meet us on the last mile and bring us safely Home.

The Inspired Word (January-February 2003)

From Uplook, January-February 2003. Article.

My elders and I have been discussing an important matter: To what extent is the Bible crafted in the words of eloquent men “borne along by the Spirit of God,” and to what extent did God select the very words used to express His mind? —Query from Quebec

It was interesting to hear about your discussions with your elders regarding the issue of inspiration. It obviously is a complex matter and in a way has mystery associated with it similar to the Incarnation. Both the living Word and the written Word are the linking of what is both human and divine.

I think we can say in a general way that the whole Word of God is inspired and that it is inspired in every part (verbal plenary inspiration). Thus “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35). “And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Lk. 4:4). Or see the contrast in the Lord’s High Priestly prayer: “For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them...I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (Jn. 17:8, 14). Both the Word and the words are God-given.

This can be seen in Galatians, for instance, where in 3:16 the argument hinges on the word “seed” being singular, not plural. In 4:9 the argument is based on the

passive rather than the active voice. There are many other examples of such careful word distinctions.

But specifically how was this done? Here is the point where I think both you and the elders could be right at the same time, but about different passages.

Some sections of Scripture were given by direct dictation: “Thus saith the Lord…” There was no creativity needed to simply copy down what the Lord was saying. This sort of inspiration by direct revelation occurs hundreds, maybe thousands of times, in the Bible.

Some passages were given in such a way that when the author was done, he still didn’t know what it meant. An example is Daniel after completing the prophetic section of his book: “And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” (12:8-9). So obviously what he wrote was given to him from heaven in such a way that he understood the words but not the meaning of them.

Then there are some passages that were not inspired at the time of their original writing but became part of the inspired Word when they were quoted in the Bible. The lies of men (for example, David saying that the king’s business required haste—he wasn’t on royal business at all), the words of the devil, quotations from pagan poets and philosophers (e.g., Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12), and quotes from apocryphal books were not inspired when originally spoken or written but became so when included in the Word—and I believe the authors were “borne along by the Holy Spirit” to include these lies,

devilish quotes and pagan philosophies, or else they would not be there.

There are also many passages which are evidently the inspired Word but were the result of the Lord picking up a particular instrument to accomplish a specific task. In other words, God used certain men to write certain books because their personality, vocabulary, life experiences, etc., made each one the right man for the job. I'm sure the Lord could have overruled who they were and how they expressed themselves to say what He wanted to say—He did that with Balaam. But I think we can agree that Peter and Paul and James and John wrote differently and that those differences reflect something about them personally.

When we read Peter's epistles in particular, we see his life experiences coming out on every page. How could Paul have written such a book? He would have to have been constantly referring to Peter's life to explain such words as the stones and the Rock, being "eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16) on the holy mount, being as sheep going astray, etc.

So, yes, the men were "borne along" by the Holy Spirit. And yes, it is the Word that is God-breathed. And "every word of God is pure" (Prov. 30:5). And yet the personalities of the writers peek through their writings. The Book is human and divine, the words of men but the very Word of God.

You are right in carefully stating that the holy men who wrote were Spirit-borne and that the resultant Word is God-breathed. Could God have used any man to write any book? He could have, just as surely as He used Balaam to bless Israel (or his donkey to rebuke the

prophet!). But Paul was a “chosen vessel” because the Lord thought Paul was the right man for the job in communicating the gospel to the Gentiles.

I appreciate your concern in not asking me to choose between the two positions. It is a similar problem when one brother appears to emphasize Christ’s humanity or deity at the expense of the other. He may not mean to do it, may not actually be doing it, but you can understand why brethren get skittish with such important doctrines involved.

So your brethren are concerned about how your ministry is perceived, and want others to think of you as dependable and orthodox. It is possible to say something that is true, but to leave a false or unsettling impression. If I said the Lord Jesus was “unsaved” on the cross, it would be consistent with the verse, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save” (Mt. 27:42). There was no ram caught in the thicket to be a substitute for Him. It may be true in a certain sense, but it could be very unsettling to young believers who could misconstrue it. So in speaking about the influence of these authors, we must constantly underline the overriding principle that the process was controlled by God in such a way that every word is the word God would have used if He Himself took pen to paper.

I trust the Lord will give you good discernment as to how you approach this matter and hope these notes will help rather than hinder “the unity of the faith.”

Cross-Country Seeking (March 2003)

From Uplook, March 2003. Editorial.

What were Christians at Vancouver and Toronto looking for?

How well I remember attending conferences in my youth when in my heart there was nothing but an undefined longing, a vague spiritual hunger for something I didn't have. If you had asked me why I was attending, I would have been hard pressed to tell you. It was more than the crowd of like-minded believers, the good singing, the hope of learning from the Word. I may have been looking for a fresh awakening in my Christian life, a new insight into some Scripture passage (like Rom. 6–8) that would unlock latent power to give me a greater measure of victory in my life. In more wistful moments, I might have told you that I was looking for a cosmic embrace, a divine hug that would tell me His love was unchanged, that there was still hope for me, that I hadn't failed so miserably that I was permanently on the shelf.

Whenever Christians gather under the sound of God's Word, in some sense—as has often been prayed—"the needs are as varied as the faces." But obviously there is overlap, many people coming with a few basic needs and hopes. Are these laid out for us somewhere in the Lord's great Diagnostic Manual?

I've written before that conferences were God's idea. He called His ancient people together at least three times a year for the feasts and fasts in Jerusalem. Why? And is there a correlation between the reasons for Israel's

conferences and ours? Note that the first four were Spring conferences; the last three in the Fall.

1. They came together to remember the Passover lamb and that they were a redeemed people. Called “the LORD’S Passover,” it took them back to the “beginning of months” when on the same night they were delivered from wrath, bondage and poverty. And such is the blessed experience today where Christ is “lifted up.”

2. The Feast of Unleavened Bread drove home the point that redeemed people are also to be holy people. It was time to come clean. Paul links these first two reasons as they were historically and as they ought to be experientially: “Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). Holiness is born in the heart through Calvary love.

3. The Firstfruits Feast not only was a portend of the coming harvest but a reminder that everything they enjoyed came from the Lord. Their token gift sheaf expressed the truth that it all belonged to God. Our conferences should herald the truth of the sovereign rights of “the Lord of the harvest” and we should celebrate the joy of the harvest made possible by “Christ the first fruits” (1 Cor. 15:23).

4. Pentecost would mean something different to the Jews of Canaan than to the early Church, “when the day of Pentecost was FULLY come” (Acts 2:1). It was the one festival prescribed for the first day of the week, following the seventh sabbath. Of course it was the birthday of the Church. And how important at our conferences to reaffirm our commitment to that which “Christ also loved…and gave Himself for” (Eph. 5:25).

5. The trumpet blowing memorial heralded the beginning of the civil New Year (New Year's conferences are 3500 years old!). And as surely as Israel awaits the call to return, so we wait for Heaven's trumpet blast. How good it is at our conferences to collectively anticipate the dawning of that Day without a sunset.

6. This calling together by trumpet also introduced the Day of Atonement. While not exactly the same, it answers morally to the Judgment Seat of Christ and the setting right of our affairs at the start of the Long Day. It is a fitting theme for us, our meeting at the Bema, and the need to set things right before then, if possible.

7. Succot, the dwelling in booths, points back to the time when God "tabernacled among us" but also anticipates the time when it will be said, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). That is the one conference that will not end with goodbyes. And I'm registered to go.

Clay Soldiers (April 2003)

From Uplook, April 2003. Editorial.

The emperor ALMOST had the right idea.

Just about half-way between the time that Malachi laid down his pen, closing off the Old Testament, and the moment when the living Word would appear on earth, a boy was born in far-off China. Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BC) in his fifty eventful years is credited with unifying China and is recognized as the first emperor of China. His centralized government standardized currency, weights and measures, and the Chinese language. He built a network of roadways and linked together (using 500,000 laborers) the great fortifications of the seven previously warring states, thus linking up the Great Wall. In all, he employed two million people (about 10 percent of China's population at that time) in constructing his various grand projects.

One of these projects, however, lay hidden from sight until one day in the early spring of 1974. Three men from Xiyang in Shaanxi province (not far from China's ancient capital, Xi'an) were out digging a well on the edge of the village. Their spades struck a layer of hard earth. They dug further and unearthed a "pottery man," its legs and feet solid, its head and torso hollow. They didn't know what to make of it. But a visiting official informed Beijing, and by July of that year an archeological excavation was underway.

Over the next two years, in three great pits, they found nearly 8000 life-sized terracotta warriors with horses and more than 100 wooden war chariots. Each soldier is

a unique work of art. Apart from the most obvious differences—their positions in the vanguard, main body, flanks or rearguard; and their roles as archers, infantry, cavalry, charioteers, and various officers—there are more subtle distinctions. Heights vary. So do weights (I noticed that generally the higher the rank the fuller the figure!). But it was the expressions on the faces that amazed me. Some features are lively, anticipating action; others are serious, thoughtful, reserved. It is even possible for Chinese anthropologists to guess from what part of China many of the soldiers would have come. The terracotta army of Qin Shi Huang is heralded by some as “the eighth wonder of the world.”

I couldn’t help thinking of a far grander clay army than the one I saw near Xi’an. I was reminded of the words of 2 Corinthians 4:7 as Paul spoke of the gospel troops sent out to conquer hearts for the Saviour, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” And so it is that in China today the Lord has raised up, and continues to recruit, a mighty army of believers. Unlike the emperor’s soldiers, who were empty, the King of king’s warriors are the repositories of this world’s richest commodity—the glorious plan of salvation. Fragile they may seem, but every attempt to break them only exposes the treasure inside. The words with which Paul continues could well have been written about the Lord’s underground army in China: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor. 4:8-10). What

stories they might tell how the Lord Jesus has been manifested through their suffering for Him!

Although the present government of China does not recognize those in the unregistered church, conservative estimates place the number at 75 to 100 million. Some who work there say it is not unreasonable to think that, like the day of Pentecost, there are perhaps 3,000 saved every day.

I dare say the Christians in China—without our financial resources, without our religious freedom—are doing a fair bit better job at fulfilling the Great Commission than are believers in the West. But the ongoing need of China is enormous. Its population increases (in spite of massive birth control efforts) by the population of Australia every year. Various articles in this issue will bring before you some of the needs not only in China but elsewhere, and some tips on how to enlist in God’s terracotta army.

The Uplook...At Last! (April 2003)

From Uplook, April 2003. Article.

Why this issue took so long to get on the way.

Let me begin by apologizing to those whose announcements in the Front Lines section of this magazine are past due. I hope it doesn't affect those who attended your conference and trust the Lord blessed your event in spite of my tardiness. (This might be a good spot to remind all those who send in news items to have them to us at least three months prior to your event!)

Now a word of explanation. Circumstances dictated that I needed to write the bulk of this issue on China alone. That was fine, and I set aside 10-12 days to do the final assembly. What I didn't know was that several funerals would intervene. Two of these were at some distance and involved several days of travel. I was honored to attend and participate, but it meant that this magazine had to wait untouched for more than a week. So I thought I might take a page to tell you a little about two of these, special friends of mine.

For the last month, almost daily, we have been receiving news of some dear friends going home. Without question, a generation is passing. Of course the passing of a generation is not a new phenomenon. Solomon wrote: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever" (Eccl. 1:4). There are at least two factors, however, that make this passage so dramatic.

First, there is a startling gap in the ranks immediately behind this passing generation. Those from the late 50s to the late 60s are rare in assembly fellowship. Of the few that attend, even fewer are suited to take leadership. Many people ask why this is. I confess that post mortems are not a happy occupation. But a few observations may help. This missing generation were born just after two World Wars and the Great Depression; they knew little of personal hardship, hearing only about it in the anecdotes told by their parents.

They were also the first generation to go almost wholesale to college—it seems, whether the Lord had called them or not. It was expected by society, and many of them unfortunately went unprepared and unarmed to their spiritual slaughter. These were the days before Francis Schaeffer, Josh McDowell, and Creation Science Research to arm young believers for the coming attack. They went like sheep thrown to a pack of wolves. Many did well educationally and, later, financially, but often suffered spiritually.

Add to this intellectual assault the rampant hostility of their peers in the world. Given everything they wanted, that generation rebelled en masse. They were anti everything—ani-war, anti-big business, anti-government, anti-establishment, anti-institution, anti-morality, and anti-God. Theirs was the generation of draft dodgers, war protesters, pot smokers, love-ins, situation ethics, the “God is dead” philosophy, and the rise of the rebel as folk-hero. It was a wonder any of our young people in that era survived the onslaught.

But it isn't just the missing generation that makes these older Christians' passage so abrupt and costly. It is the quality of their lives. We are not only going to miss them personally; I'm afraid we are going to miss having that caliber of Christians among us to watch, learn from, and emulate. Let me tell you about these two friends who went Home within days of each other. Their lives were very different in some ways, but shared the common qualities that made their generation so valuable.

Ed Harlow at 94 was born on one edge of that era, and Bob McEachern at 74 was at the other. Ed lived in Toronto and Chicago and New York and Africa and Florida, and travelled throughout every continent of the world (except Antarctica). Bob McEachern rarely travelled more than 100 miles from his home.

Ed's ministry was public—among other things doing missionary work in the Congo, starting the world's largest Bible correspondence school, and, with his hard-working wife, was founder of a publishing house that led the charge for commentaries in limited-vocabulary English for ESL students. Bob's ministry was quiet and unassuming—a consistent testimony in his community as an honest businessman and compassionate friend, an encourager of scores of young people, a faithful elder, and with his dear wife a generous giver and hospitable host to hundreds of grateful recipients. But let me tell you something they had in common.

Ed Harlow came from a home that was not only believing but taught him the truth concerning New Testament Church life. Until his dying day—although gracious and accepting to all God's people—he was passionate both about the gospel and about Church

truth. One of the last times I talked with him, we discussed the delights of remembering the Lord simply every week, something he had done for so long without it ever losing its freshness or delight.

Bob McEachern, on the other hand, didn't hear the gospel until out of his teens, but when he trusted the Lord it became his life-long love. He never got over being saved and found his place at the Lord's Supper every week. Canadian winters couldn't provide weather severe enough to keep him from bringing his family on country roads into town every Sunday morning. In fact he was on his way to meet with the Christians when his final heart attack occurred, "because," he said, "the Lord will be there."

Some cringe when they hear that. Don't get legalistic about it, they say. When you hear some people talk about "the assemblies," they say, you would think they were the only Christians around. We know lots of lovely believers who don't meet the way we do, they say.

Granted. Some people do get prideful and exclusive in their thinking. Some people do get legalistic. It's a problem as old as Corinthians and Galatians. But does that mean that if you love the truth and hold it unashamedly up for all to see—since the Church is supposed to be the pillar of the truth, 1 Tim. 3:15—it makes you bigoted or legalistic? I think not!

Let me tell you, the next generation, a secret. Many of these older folk (Bob McEachern included) paid a steep price for leaving denominationalism and gathering simply in the name of the Lord Jesus. Many of their relatives cut them off. Sometimes their old friends would cross the street to avoid them. They knew that wherever

the Word of God was preached in sincerity and truth, His Spirit would be there to bless it. But they also believed that the Lord Himself drew near in a real and special way when they gathered simply “unto Him.” They knew there were many dear and devoted Christians in various churches who met under various names but they wanted to meet just to Him. They thought the Lord Jesus was the only One who deserved that place of honor and would give it to no other man, even though it often ostracized them.

Those who knew both Bob and Ed would tell you that neither of them had a sectarian bone in their bodies. But they loved the truth and enjoyed the ongoing experience of gathering every Lord’s Day with others to personally meet with their Saviour whom they loved and to tell Him so.

If I were summing up what I appreciated about Dr. Harlow and how he influenced me, it would be in the two words, passion and vision. He understood that vision was not human creativity but seeing things God’s way. He saw the big picture: in the words of the Lord Jesus, “The field is the world” (Mt. 13:38).

He never lost focus. I called him up last winter and said, “Ed, I want to come over and visit. What should we talk about?”

“Tell me how to cover the world with gospel literature,” he replied without hesitation. At age 94!

He always looked calm and collected, but in R. E. Harlow’s soul there burned a passion for Christ, for His Church, for His Word, for His people. And the fire never went out. Now we need the next generation to lay aside their personal agendas and career plans to let the Lord

light their fire, to catch a vision of a needy world, and put their minds and money and might—all of it—on the altar for our worthy Lord.

When I think of Bob McEachern, I think of genuine warmth and winsomeness. His face reflected the glow of the Master. When you came into his presence, you knew you were in the company of a humble servant who kept himself in the love of God (Jude 1:21). Bob made you want to live like he did: "…in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor 1:12).

We'll sorely miss men like these. But, thank God, it's not too late for the rest of us to follow in their track.

Rise up, O men of God;
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and mind and soul and strength
To serve the King of kings.

The European Church (April 2003)

From Uplook, April 2003. Article.

Is it having to go underground?

There has been a growing trend among European countries to disparage and even outlaw certain forms of Christianity in the name of cracking down on cults. Many Europeans are now asking themselves what they must do to maintain their beliefs without interference from their governments. For some, the answer is to go underground. Christian groups that have not had a traditional presence in those countries are the hardest hit by these new laws. Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Orthodox churches, which are well established in many European countries, are generally left alone. However, many Evangelical, Pentecostal and non-denominational groups are now being looked upon as cults and potential threats.

Earlier this year, France took steps to control the activities of certain religious groups by passing its anti-cult law. The law makes “mental manipulation” a crime. Anyone found guilty of causing “a state of psychological or physical subjection resulting from serious and repeated pressures or techniques designed to alter judgment” faces five years imprisonment. Courts also have the authority to dissolve religious groups and to impose heavy fines.

The new law also includes a ban on advertising or opening religious centers near schools, hospitals or retirement homes. Targeting the youth is also illegal. One pastor commented, “If we want to have children’s

church, Sunday school, that can be seen as influencing minors. If we do work for old people, it's preying on the vulnerable. If we want to have a time of prayer and fasting, it's seen as deprivation of food and sleep." There is great fear that this law could be used to outlaw evangelism outright. Repeated attempts to share the gospel to someone could be considered criminal.

France is not the only country looking at classifying Evangelical groups as cults or sects. In parts of Switzerland, the home of reformer John Calvin and a country whose flag dates back 700 years as a symbol of the Christian faith, Evangelicals are experiencing the same backlash. Groups not associated with traditional Catholic or Protestant organizations are considered sects and many Evangelical churches have found themselves stereotyped in the media as dangerous cults. Sweden's churches are also facing great controversy over legislation that could prevent pastors from speaking negatively about homosexuality. A church sermon describing homosexual practice as sinful "might" constitute a criminal offense under the new law. Anyone convicted would face up to two years in prison.

Belarus has passed the most repressive of all legislation this year by outlawing unregistered religious activity. The new law requires all religious literature to be pre-approved. The legislation also bans foreign citizens from leading religious organizations, restricts publishing and education to major faith groups, and bans all but occasional small religious meetings in private homes.

Over a dozen European countries are now looking for ways to contain faith groups. Ironically, the country with the biggest underground church—China—is now

observing the European methods and taking notes. Chinese leaders are even looking to French laws as a model for monitoring future religious activities in their own country.

Related Links:

<http://www.cbn.com/CBNNews/CWN/030102FranceCults.asp>France Passes Controversial Anti-Cult Law—CBN

<http://cbn.org/CBNNews/CWN/120602europe.asp> The Coming Underground Church in Europe—CBN

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/009/15.22.html> 'Hate Speech' Law Could Chill Sermons—Christianity Today

<http://news.christiansunite.com/religion/religion02654.shtml>Belarusian President Signs New Law To Make Religious Oppression Official—ChristiansUnite

The Challenge of China (April 2003)

From Uplook, April 2003. Article.

Are you ignoring one-sixth of the world's population?

I have had merely a taste from the vast smorgasbord of emotions, impressions, and experiences that are China. So this brief assessment will give you only a fleeting glimpse of the land and its people. My intention is not to give you a detailed travelog but some facts that may help you in your prayer ministry for the Chinese people and for this mysterious land.

The challenges of China are as massive and complex as its population. Please pray as you read.

The Numerical Challenge

One out of every six people in the world is Chinese. And it is estimated that by the year 2025, the population could reach 2 billion.

To add to the challenge, the majority of China's people live in rural villages, scattered through the countryside, making them much less accessible than those in the major cities. Even using liberal statistics, there are still more than one billion lost souls in China, souls that are "loved Above."

However, assuming 75 million believers in China, if every true Christian there was able to share the gospel with about 18 distinct Chinese people, the whole country would be evangelised!

The Linguistic Challenge

For those used to the relative simplicity of the alphabets used in most of the world, the complexity of the Chinese character system can be daunting. In classical Chinese, each character is based on one or more of 214 radicals (also called primitives or roots). These radicals are arranged in order of complexity from one to seventeen strokes.

The language includes about 600 pictographs (this group includes most of the radicals) which are simplified drawings of an object, and 700 ideographs made by combining two or more pictographs to form a new character. Add to that 20,000 more phonetic characters that are formed from combining radicals brought together for their sound rather than their meaning.

Although Chairman Mao simplified the language somewhat, it still is a bewildering language to foreigners and requires extensive study to become proficient enough to share the gospel.

Add to this The Literacy Challenge. With one-quarter of the population unable to read their own language, this adds appreciably to the difficulty of establishing a solid evangelical work, especially in the rural areas.

The Political Challenge

China’s modern history has been one long struggle for the common people. Following the routing of Chiang Kaishek’s Nationalist Revolutionary Army and its flight to Taiwan, Mao Zedong proclaimed the foundation of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949. The 1950s and 1960s saw the first Five Year Plan, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, when the

Red Guard was launched, closing universities, killing intellectuals, and attempting to eradicate China's past. After the death of Mao, a power struggle between the "moderates" and radicals ensued, with "moderate" Deng Xiaoping finally establishing a six-member Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 1977.

As one Communist regime after another fell in eastern Europe, calls increased for democracy and personal freedoms in China. This social unrest climaxed in the bloody Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, an attempt to suppress the desire to break out of the Communist mould.

However, as China continues to open its doors to Western business interests, it also finds rising expectations in its citizens for those Western freedoms as well.

It seems that China today has welcomed almost everything the West has to offer—except Christianity. While Communism is officially atheistic, the regime has agreed to a peaceful coexistence with other religions—Islam, Taoism, Buddhism, etc. It does officially recognize the "Three Self Patriotic Movement," a network of state-authorized churches, but continues to persecute those who refuse to submit to the Communist government as head of the Church (a ludicrous position at best).

The Cultural Challenge

The Chinese claim a cultural history reaching back 4500 years. But during the Zhou period (c. 1100-221 BC), at the time of the emergence of Confucianism, there arose the concept of the "mandate of heaven." China is known to its people as "The Middle Kingdom" because it is seen

to sit between heaven and earth, with the right to rule over the other nations. Anyone seeking to bring the gospel to the Chinese may well be confronted with the attitude, “we are the people.”

The Chinese were the inventors of paper about AD 100. They invented block printing in the 9th Century, the moveable press in the 11th Century; and by 1750 had printed more books than the rest of the world combined. Their building prowess, workmanship in metals, agricultural skills, and sciences and philosophies leave us with the conclusion, as one veteran missionary said, that we have only the gospel to give them.

The Doctrinal Challenge

One positive effect of the Communist regime seeking to suppress, or at least limit, religious expression in the country is that they have banned the Jehovah’s Witness and Mormon cults (although they are active in Hong Kong). However, the Chinese Church suffers from its share of false teachings, including home-grown heresies like “Lightning in the East,” “Ling-ling,” “Established King” and “Cold Water.”

The doctrinal stability of the Church there is all the more uncertain because of the dramatic number of new converts (some say as many as approximately 3000 daily —Pentecost every day!). As well, there is a paucity of good Bible teaching material and a very limited number of teachers and shepherds for the new converts. There is a heroic effort being made to bring in Bibles and Christian literature from the West and to produce both printed literature and CDs containing Bible teaching aids within China itself. There are also, for those willing to take the risk, Bibles available at the “Three Self”

bookstores in China. But the need is far greater than can be obtained at the present time.

Even when materials are printed, add to this The Logistical Challenge. Once the material is ready, how do you distribute it across the country and get it safely into the hands of those who need it, without endangering them through contact with Westerners? Here we see the need of a sovereign, superintending God who can protect His flock from the wolves and get the green grass to His little lambs.

The Manpower Challenge

China needs the gospel and then biblical teaching for those who receive heaven's good news. Where will she find those who can help her in this monumental challenge?

How thankful we are for those who regularly take risks travelling in and out of China with help for the believers there. Please pray for their safety and for the good success of their journeys, not only into China but into other needy countries in southeast Asia.

There is also a cadre of Christian business people and educators (especially those teaching English as a second language) who have continuous opportunities in personal testimony because their skills, services or products are in demand there. God give them opportunities, boldness, and wisdom to function well "as sheep in the midst of wolves" that they might be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mt. 10:16).

Will You Take the Challenge?

There is one category of servants for China in which we all qualify: as prayer warriors. This kind of help requires no plane flights, visas, border crossings, language study or surruptitious meetings. In my travels among assemblies I hear most prayer for needs in North America, much prayer for Africa, less prayer for India, South America, and Russia with its former sattelites, little prayer for the Muslim world and southeast Asia (and almost no prayer for Western Europe, the Caribbean, Australia and the islands of the sea). Perhaps we need more balance in our intercession to the God "who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Here are some prayer pointers for China:

• PRAISE for the surviving, reviving, and thriving of the Church in China. Undoubtedly one of the great stories of the 20th century.

• PRAY for continued opportunities in the gospel, more freedom and protection for the believers.

• PRAISE for changes in opening China to the rest of the world. While this has unfortunately brought growing materialistic attitudes, it has also allowed Christians to enter through educational and business opportunities and bring the gospel with them.

• PRAY for the raising up of godly shepherds and teachers to care for the many new believers, and protection from the false cults abounding.

Facts at Your Fingertips about China

Area: 9,573,000 sq. km. (mainland)

Population: 1.3 billion (1/6 world pop.) of which 93% are Han Chinese, plus 55 minorities.

Capital City: Beijing (pop. 13.8 million), other key cities: Shanghai (14.2), Tianjin (10.3), Guangzhou (6.4), Shenyang (5.7), Changchun (5.6), Harbin (5.4), Chengdu (5.2). There are 85 other cities with populations exceeding one million.

Religions: The majority hold a blend of Confucian folk wisdom, Taoism (also spelled Daoism), and Buddhism. Their primary religious activities surround ancester worship and appeasement of the gods adopted from Taoism. There are also approximately 14 million Muslims.

Not Without a Witness (April 2003)

From Uplook, April 2003. Review.

The hidden message in Chinese characters

While in Hong Kong recently, I acquired a book entitled The Discovery of Genesis: How the Truths of Genesis were Found Hidden in the Chinese Language. It is co-authored by C. H. Kang, a former missionary to China now residing in Singapore, and Dr. Ethel R. Nelson, a medical pathologist who worked for many years in Thailand. The book is published by Concordia.

The main premise of the book is to show that the essential message of Genesis can be found in the ancient classical Chinese characters. Among other things, the authors show that the 4,500 years of Chinese history takes us back approximately to the time of the confounding of the languages at Babel. After that time, and for some centuries, the written languages of the Egyptians, Sumerians, and the residents of Mesopotamia were also pictorial. We are most familiar with the Egyptian hieroglyphs. But, the authors contend, the Chinese—separated from the rest of the world by distance, mountains, and the divinely provided language barrier after the Tower of Babel fiasco—did not have their characters evolve into an alphabet as did the other nations further to the east.

The authors also seek to show that the original prevailing belief in China was monotheistic (Chapter 2). In fact they go on to explain their conviction that these root Chinese characters are pictographs of some of the foundational stories unfolded in the book of Genesis.

Following this, the majority of the book is given to dissecting the complex Chinese characters and demonstrating that these pictographs are built on truth commonly known by the world community until the time of the spreading out of the nations, and later included by Moses in the early record of our Bible. I will give some examples towards the end of this article.

Kang and Nelson attempt to forestall several objections to their thesis. For example, how do we know that these characters were not changed to their present form (with their latent gospel message) by Christian missionaries in fairly recent times? Is it not possible that the characters examined are actually phonetic rather than pictographic, in other words chosen for how they sound rather than how they look? Is it not possible that the symbolism is based on pagan rather than theistic sources? The authors take their time to seek a reply for each of these issues; whether satisfying to the reader you will have to decide.

Whether you find every explanation of the character composition convincing (I found some of them a stretch), there is much helpful background material in the book—about the Chinese history, culture, language, and prevailing religions, for example—comprehensive endnotes, and a lengthy bibliography. At 140 pages (paper), I found it an intriguing read.

Before I give you one or two samples from the book, let me show you some of the book's explanations for the way the Chinese characters were constructed.

First, they give us some of the radicals, the most primitive of the characters, which are simplified representations of the words themselves. For example:

here is the character for cliff

for roof or house

for streams or to flow

for mouth or person

for field or garden

for man or person

(four different radicals)

The authors then show how more complex characters or radicals are formed by combining or adding to existing radicals. They use the basic symbol for man to show how this works.

Here is the basic symbol for man But when a man gets married, he is pictured literally as two men

Here is another excerpt from the book, explaining the construction of various characters from the symbol for mouth:

[A passage here could not be read in the PDF.]

As the book progresses, many examples are given to show, in the authors' reckoning, how closely aligned these characters are to the biblical story of creation as found in Genesis. Here is an excerpt from page 41.

[A passage here could not be read in the PDF.]

In Conclusion

The authors present many other fascinating combinations. For example, the word for righteousness, they state, is composed of a combination of the symbol for sheep over the character for I or me. The word for large ship is a boat with eight people. Is it possible that

for all these centuries the Chinese people have had the gospel at their fingertips?

The Start of Iraqi Hostilities (April 2003)

From Uplook, April 2003. Article.

Don’t forget that Abraham was an Iraqi, too!

The present land of Iraq straddles the ancient river valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates. In fact one of its old names was Mesopotamia, meaning “the land between the rivers.” The region’s earliest mention is found in the Bible’s very first account of geographical locations, giving the names of the four waterways that branched from the main river which flowed from Eden: “…And the fourth river is Euphrates” (Gen. 2:14).

No need to recount the sad story of the Fall and expulsion from Eden—its grievous effects are all too well-known. But that rebellious act would become a philosophy of formal contempt against the true God, and would find a permanent home at a site “between the rivers” where the Tigris draws closest to the Euphrates in its 900-mile journey to the Persian Gulf.

The tower of Babel (originally called Bab-el, “the gate to God” and changed to Babel, “confusion”) became the scene of the first confederate showdown between God and rebel-mankind. It happened in one of the chief cities of Nimrod, a warlord from the line of Ham (Gen. 10:9-10). He was brother to the progenitors of the Canaanites and Egyptians, among others.

There at Babel, eastward from the region near Ararat, a plan was drawn up that directly contradicted the decree of heaven. God had said, “Fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1,

NKJV). But they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (11:4, NKJV). It seems they were well along in the project—perhaps having finished the tower and were working to complete the city, v. 8—when God intervened. Confounding their language, He forced them to separate: “So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city” (v. 8, NKJV).

But the human race did not cease in their attempts to return to their original plan. In fact the Bible could well be called “a tale of two cities.” The other city, besides Babel (later called by the Greek form, Babylon) was, of course, Jerusalem. There, instead of the words, “Let us make a name for ourselves” may be written, “the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name” (Deut. 12:21). The two cities are found juxtaposed especially in the books of Daniel, Jeremiah and Revelation. In fact Babylon is mentioned 260 times in Scripture until its demise “in one hour” (see details in Rev. 17 and 18).

It is believed that the remains of the original tower still exist, called in Arabic, Birs Nimrud. The tower’s height is estimated to have been 660 feet taller than the Great Pyramid at Giza. Hislop, in his well-known book, The Two Babylons, describes the religion of Babel and its serpentine journey through Persia, Egypt, Greece and Rome, continuing to this day.

As I write this, the fate of Sadaam Hussein is unknown to the West. He has seen himself as a modern

Nebuchadnezzar, having huge billboards of himself and the ancient Babylonian monarch portrayed standing together. It would seem Hussein's attitude could well be expressed in the words of his hero, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30).

If only he had responded to the monumental lesson of Nebuchadnezzar's humbling and had also spoken these words truthfully, "Now I…praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (v. 37). If it was not beyond God's power to bring Nebuchadnezzar to the foot of His throne, it would not be beyond His grace to bring Sadaam Hussein to the foot of the cross.

Sadly, it seems, Iraq's present dictator is more like Belshazzar in his defiance of the God of Daniel. Of him it could be said (as Daniel said of Belshazzar), "Thou…hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this" (5:22).

John records the death-throes of Babylon (whether literal or mystical) and the last great battle: "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev. 17:14). This will be the war to end all wars. Our hearts respond, "Come, Prince of Peace!"

We Need the Blessed Hope (May 2003)

From Uplook, May 2003. Editorial.

It's dark—very dark—without the daystar in our hearts.

My maternal great-grandparents came to Canada in 1888 from the northeast coast of Scotland where for generations they had been fishermen on the North Sea. They settled in Montreal at first, at that time a city of 175,000. Montreal's death rate was highest in the country—33 per thousand in 1884. In 1885, over 3,000 died of smallpox. In 1891, a severe epidemic of scarlet fever and diphtheria swept across the city and hundreds, especially little children, died. My great-grandfather was involved in the grim task of making coffins. They could not make them fast enough. And the Last Enemy did not bypass their home.

Mary (7 years), Rachel (between 2 and 3), and Maggie (1 year) all died in one week in March of 1891. Richard, an infant, had predeceased them by a few days. Another sister, Helen, was given up for dead but survived. It was a grief never healed in my great-grandmother. Every March opened the wound again.

Mary, before the Lord took her, had shown herself to be a child of mature spiritual awareness. As she lay on her deathbed, her mother heard her singing the deeply meaningful words of Mary Shekleton's hymn,

> *It passeth knowledge, that dear love of Thine,*
> *Lord Jesus, Saviour, yet this soul of mine*
> *Would of Thy love, in all its breadth and length,*

Its height and depth, its everlasting strength,
Know more and more.

Before the disease sapped her life, Mary was a vibrant, happy girl. Early every morning she would skip down the stairs into the kitchen to help her mother prepare breakfast for the growing family. Often, as she pulled back the curtains to let in the sun, she would look into the morning sky and ask, “Do you think He’ll come today, Mommy?”

When I was a little boy, it seemed every meeting I attended, every message I heard preached, contained reminders that the Lord was on His way. “Any day,” they would say. “Maranatha; the Lord is coming.” It was indeed a blessed hope. It was a motivating, comforting, separating, purifying, fortifying, stimulating hope. It was real. They didn’t argue eschatology. They looked up and said, “Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.”

By the time I was in my teens, things had changed. Preaching on prophecy was the popular thing in evangelicalism. These were the days of The Late, Great Planet Earth and endless chatter in the media of a nuclear war between the superpowers. Christians were captivated about talk of The Beast, a super computer in Brussels, and the rise of the European Union. They were looking for “signs” everywhere. But fewer Christians seemed to be looking for the Son—more looking into the future, less looking for the Saviour. As one preacher told me, “You can fill an auditorium far easier talking about the Antichrist than you can about the Christ.”

What can we say about the situation today? Some assemblies never hear a message about the Lord’s return because there are divergent views among the

believers as to the timing of His coming. The subject is considered “controversial” and better left alone. Perhaps a more subtle reason is the growing affluence among Christians and the resultant “heaven can wait” attitude. Life is comfy here; why think about leaving?

This issue is dedicated to the belief that, while it is good to be busy in the Lord’s service here, leaving is a VERY good idea. The brightest days for the Church are still future. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2).

Do YOU think He’ll come today? He could, you know.

PS: To catch the flavor of my grandfather’s generation I have mostly taken excerpts from the books he read concerning the Lord’s return.

Is the Rapture Imminent? (May 2003)

From Uplook, May 2003. Article.

The answer is Yes—if we understand the term.

There are two fundamental questions on the issue of imminency. First, did the New Testament saints believe in it? And second, what does imminence really mean?

The first question should be easy to answer. If the New Testament believers were waiting expectantly for the Lord to return, surely it would say so in the epistles. And of course they do, in profusion. For example:

Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus… (1 Cor. 1:7).

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come (1 Cor. 11:26).

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:20).

…Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven… (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not [precede] them which are asleep (1 Thess. 4:15).

And…I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23).

For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry (Heb. 10:37).

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord…Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh (Jas. 5:7-8).

And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming (1 Jn. 2:28).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John (Rev. 1:1).

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown…Behold, I come quickly… And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be…He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come [quickly], Lord Jesus (Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20).

This sampling should clearly and convincingly indicate the spirit of expectancy in the hearts of the Christians at the dawn of Church history.

But, say some, we have some other verses to quote. What about Jesus' prophesying the destruction of the temple? And what about Peter being told how he would die? And all those signs that had to come to pass? And what about the historical sketch of the Church age given in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3? Obviously they couldn't believe in an "any-moment" return of Christ before all these events came to pass, could they?

This is the reason why Question 2 is so important. The imminent return of Christ does NOT mean that He could

return at any time. The Lord Jesus Himself told us that the Father has a specific time in mind when He will send His Son back to receive His people (Mt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32). God has a specific moment on His calendar set for the return of Christ.

When we speak of the imminent return of Christ we mean that as far as we are concerned He could come at any time. But because the Father knows the exact time, He is of course free to reveal—through His Son, His Spirit, or His servants who wrote the Scriptures—events such as were mentioned in the previous paragraph. But that does not abrogate imminency for us.

When the Lord Jesus said that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17), or that “the time is at hand” (Rev. 22:10), what did He mean? Is a period of 2000 years “at hand”? Perhaps, if we use the explanation given in 2 Peter 3:8, making the interval only two days in length. Rather, I think the meaning is this: If I have a glass of water “at hand” I do not necessarily pick it up immediately, but there is nothing to stop me from doing it. So there is no fulfillment of prophecy, no event, no good reason, to keep the Lord from returning for His Church EXCEPT the longsuffering grace of God who is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

Little People? (July-August 2003)

From Uplook, July-August 2003. Editorial.

Good things sometimes DO come in small packages.

Having just returned from the country roads, quaint towns and compact cars in Ireland, I am forceably reminded that I am in the land of Bigger is Better. Not just highways and big cars and tall buildings, but super highways sixteen lanes across and SUVs and Hummers and skyscrapers so big they make perfect targets for terrorists. I'm reminded of Solomon's words in describing his experiments to find the secret of life. After all, he was the original King of Big: "I made me great works; I builded me houses…I made me gardens and orchards…I got me servants and maidens…also I had great possessions of great and small cattle…I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great.…" (Eccl 2:4-9)—and he doesn't even mention his 700 wives! So what is the beginning and end of the matter? "I made me great works…So I was great." But that isn't the last time he mentions "great" in the chapter. See the conclusion to his bold experiment, "This also is vanity and a great evil" (v. 21).

How different his father's words as he stood one night under the stars. "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" (Ps. 8:3-4). What indeed, David. Man that cannot proportionately

jump as high as a flea or carry as much as an ant. Man that can be killed by a mosquito or immobilized by a virus. Man who gives gold medals to people who can't run half the speed of a cheetah or lift a fraction of the load of a horse. It is said that after a hectic day of world affairs at the White House, President Franklin Roosevelt asked to have his wheelchair rolled out under the vault of space. Gazing up into its majestic greatness, he said to his aide, "We can go to bed now; we're small enough."

And yet there is a kind of greatness to be known among the sons of men. The Truly Great King, who visited the little blue planet dressed in a carpenter's work clothes, said: "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them…But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your servant: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (Mk. 10:42-44). It was the path of greatness which He Himself modeled for us (see Phil. 2).

It has been our privilege to know such great men and women who, not seeking great things for themselves (Jer. 45:5), have sought instead "the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Mt. 6:33). Though seeming to be of that company described in Paul's words—"not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble…the weak things of the world…and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen" (1 Cor 1:26-29)—yet such descriptions do not tell the whole story.

Such humble folk—yes, including those in your local fellowship—are members of heaven's royal family, soon to be vice-regents of the whole universe. We have been

made as rich as God can make us, “heirs of God” (Rom. 8:17), making Solomon (or Bill Gates) look like a charity case by comparison. These bodies, thought still in their “humiliation,” are the home-away-from-Home of the holy Trinity (1 Cor. 3:17). Our minds have been enlightened with truths greater than Einstein ever imagined, for we “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16); we are the confidants of God. And every one of us has been equipped and empowered by the Spirit, using prayer, the Word of God, and dependence on Him, to do “greater works” than even the Lord Jesus did when He was here. I wouldn’t believe it unless He had said it. And He did say it! (Jn. 14:12). So how is it going? I hope this issue will encourage you in your ministry for the Lord.

The Good News Exprest (July-August 2003)

From Uplook, July-August 2003. Article.

They wanted more people and overlooked the little ones.

At a recent Workers' Conference on beautiful Whidbey Island near Seattle, WA, I had a chat with Rob Brennan. He and his wife Cindy serve the Lord in western Canada where his passion is the gospel. They and their three daughters make their home in Mission, BC.

Rob first heard the gospel as a boy in Salmon Arm, BC, where Harold Wagler faithfully evangelized. Rob professed salvation in those days but in the following years he wandered far from the Lord. He married Cindy when she was unsaved. Things in the family went from bad to worse. His father was arrested in Alberta for crimes he had committed, and called Rob's mother, Dixie, to tell her to forget him and get on with her life. But she had been only recently saved (in June of 1974) and determined, by God's grace, to stand by her husband and family.

Rob's father was saved while in prison. Then his wife, Cindy trusted the Lord. In fact, since Dixie was converted, twenty-seven members of the family have professed salvation! And Rob was restored to the Lord. Now his desire is for as many sinners to join him on the heavenly road as possible.

The town of Mission, where the Brennans fellowship at an assembly, is a working man's town, and has more than it's share of welfare cases and families who have

hit hard times. The assembly, too, has had its ups and downs. The Christians some time back began praying that the Lord would swell their dwindling numbers, but He didn't seem to answer their prayers.

Then one day the believers noticed scores of children in the neighborhood around their assembly building. They had been looking right over these little people's heads, expecting the Lord to provide adults. Instead it seemed He wanted them to grow their own!

A Friday night children's program was arranged—simple, with no crafts, the same pool of 12-15 children's songs used each week, an often repeated Bible memory verse, and a story from the Word of God.

Then Rob was able to buy a used bus in good condition from the local school board for $3400. With another $1200 in materials, and the professional help of his brother, the renamed "Good News Exprest" was painted in the colors of the Wordless Book—black inscribed with the words of Romans 6:23; red with 1 Peter 1:18-19; white with Isaiah 1:18; gold with John 14:2; and the green over the top of the bus. The bus proved to be a hit with the kids! The first week 17 children came, ranging in age from 5 to 14; the second week there were 24; then 24, 33 and so it grew. Now they average 50-60 per week, with more than 200 different attendees over the season. Half of these would be Native children. Many are ghetto dwellers, where mattresses and sofas litter the outdoor landscape. At one stop 14 children gather at the corner waiting for pickup. Three sisters who attend live in a crack house on the corner.

I know the Brennans would appreciate your prayers for the work in Mission and for their labors elsewhere as

the Lord leads. And perhaps some readers will be inspired by the work of grace first in the Brennan family and them through them for His glory.

“Forbidden!” (September 2003)

From Uplook, September 2003. Editorial.

Standing for a moment on the Skull’s crown

Golgotha, a Greek rendering of the Hebrew gulgôleth, means simply “the skull.” Some suggest it was the place where David brought the head of Goliath after his victory in the vale of Elah (see 1 Sam 17:54), thus giving it this name. If so, it is a fitting picture of his Greater Son who also, in apparent weakness, dealt the deathblow to the enemy’s head (Gen. 3:15) and by it delivered His people from the one under whose bondage they had been held “through fear of death” (Heb. 2:15).

But what is a skull? It is, as Harold St. John writes, “a human head shorn of its dignity and beauty, with no light in the eye sockets, an empty vacuum in the brain space, and with none of that grace of hair which is the sign of men’s strength and woman’s glory. It is Mark’s way of reminding us that when a man rejects Jesus Christ, all the lights of the world die down; there is nothing but a grinning, bony death’s head.”

Yes, Golgotha, the Skull, is the end to man’s reasonings, death to his arguments, the grave of his glory—apart from the Saviour. So writes Paul concerning the enigma of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

On my first visit to Israel, I had the privilege of being accompanied by my wife. Louise is a contented woman and has little interest in seeing the sights her husband sees in his trips around the world. But she was eager to see the land where the Saviour lived, and especially to see the hill where He died.

The hill is obviously not as it was in Jesus' day. Around it's perimeter are the jagged disarray of apartments and shops of East Jerusalem. At the base of the cliff, where people point to the orbitae, or eyesockets of the skull, there sprawls a grim bus station (ironically the Bethlehem-Jerusalem line). On the southwest exposure is a gash in the skull, called to this day Jeremiah's Grotto (now a banana warehouse!). It is thought that the weeping prophet wrote his Laments here. If so, the sad refrain often applied to the Saviour—"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow…" (Lam. 1:12)—would have been written from the same vantage point as the Crucified, overlooking the city from the north.

What all this congestion means, of course, is that it is now impossible to get to the summit of Calvary, where the skull wears as its ghoulish crown a Muslim cemetery. Well, almost impossible. We walked entirely around the hill, finding no way to get up there…until we saw a boy returning from school. A long staircase, barred by a high gate, ascended to a caretaker's cottage in the graveyard (where the boy obviously lived). Stooping down, the little fellow inadvertently showed us the secret when he pushed a bar that opened the gate.

Louise had found her answer. Waiting a few moments until the way was clear—or so we thought—we gingerly ascended the steps like alley cats on the prowl. We did reach the summit. Louise did get some good photographs. We did get a view that is rarely had these days. But we also did get our share of attention.

Suddenly we were spotted—non-Muslims in a Muslim graveyard! "Forbidden! Forbidden!" shouted the

caretaker and his boy as they raced in our direction. (Louise continued to calmly take photos.) “Forbidden!” as the shout was taken up by male and female voices. Young. Old. In the street. From the apartment windows. We were surrounded. Tugging at Louise’s sleeve, I finally convinced her to beat with me a hurried retreat.

How grateful should we be that the true path to Calvary is never barred. We are not forbidden but bidden to come—in salvation, in confession, in service, in personal devotion and public remembrance. The road winds upward from humble hearts to heaven’s throne where the Lamb once slain now wears many diadems and where the song of the drunkard has given way to the anthem of the redeemed.

What Happened at the Cross? (September 2003)

From Uplook, September 2003. Article.

Eight amazing things that were accomplished at Calvary.

1. It was the fulfillment of a multitude of specific prophecies: “These things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled” (Jn. 19:36). The number of prophecies, time period between prophecy and fulfillment, improbability of them happening in the natural course of events, and the specificity of the details gives the lie to the idea that the cross was a surprise to Jesus, caused by His own missteps, and turned to advantage by His followers after the fact.

Here is a sampling: betrayed by an acquaintance (Ps. 41:9 with Mt. 26:47-50); sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:13 with Mt. 26:14-16); His disciples would abandon Him in the crisis (Zech. 13:7 with Mt. 26:31); He went voluntarily (Ps. 40:6-8 with Jn. 12:27-33); would not speak in His own defense (Isa. 53:7 with Mt. 27:13-14); dishonored and shamed (Ps. 69:19 with Mk. 15:16-20); smitten, spit on, visage marred (Isa. 50:6; 52:14 with Mk. 14:27); hands and feet pierced, wounded (Micah 5:1; Isa. 53:5-6 with Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:22; Jn. 19:16-18); they tore His garment but cast lots for His vesture (Ps. 22:18 with Mt. 27:35; Jn. 19:23-24); died between thieves (Isa. 53:12 with Mk. 15:28); mocked by the crowd (Ps. 22:7-8 with Mt. 27:45); forsaken by God (Ps. 22:1 with Mk. 15:34); given vinegar to drink (Ps. 69:21 with Mt. 27:48); not a bone broken (Ps. 34:20 with

Jn. 19:31-36); His side pierced (Zech. 12:10 with Jn. 19:34, 37).

2. Many types found their Antitype: to take only a few OT pictures provided by the journey from Egypt to Canaan, He was the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), emphasizing His perfection and substitutionary death; our Leader who brought us through "…not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 Jn. 5:6), emphasizing victory over all our enemies; the tree cut down at Marah, making life's bitter experiences sweet; the smitten Rock from which we receive the river of the Spirit (1 Cor. 10:4); the bronze serpent (Jn. 3:14), suggesting the truth that Christ was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin" (Rom. 8:3); and the manna (Jn. 6:30-51) which God provided to satisfy our souls.

3. The absolute claims of the law were satisfied: Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17). "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:20-22). "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4). "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God

sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

4. It was the crowning expression of the love, wisdom and power of God revealed: Of course the love of God was revealed, but especially in the love of Christ. We see His love for the Father that day: "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence" (Jn. 14:31). We see His love for the Church, His beloved Bride: "…Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). And, perhaps most heartwarming to us, He showed His love for each individual sinner: "…the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). And what of the wisdom and power of God? "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:23-25).

Think of the miracles that occurred that day at Calvary. There were three main ones: i. Darkness at noon (Lk. 23:44-45) as a shroud to hide the solemn scene from men but also prefigured the "blackness of darkness" which will be the part of the Christ rejecter; ii. The rending of the veil in the temple (Mt. 17:51) tells of the access provided through the the fact that "It is finished!" (see Heb. 10:20). iii. The miraculous earthquake causing the graves of some believers to open (Mt. 27:52), showing that death was "swallowed up in victory," that creation had a great interest in the cross, and that Calvary had superceded Sinai. Who else would

have thought of such a plan? Or could have afforded it? Or would have been willing to do it? (see Rom. 12:32-36). Only the Godhead!

5. A ransom sufficient to redeem every sinner was made: It was a price so lavish that by it He became poor and believers become as rich as He now is! “The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Mt. 13:44-46). “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

6. The whole human race has been drawn to the cross, either in salvation or condemnation: The Lord Jesus made these three promises: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:14-15). “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things” (Jn. 8:28). “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me” (Jn. 12:31-32). What do they mean? That the uplifted Man (uplifted by men) is i) the only salvation for humanity, ii) God’s own glorious idea, and iii) the death blow to the devil. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

7. The massive foundation was laid that would sustain the Church, the Kingdom, and the world to come: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:19-20). “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste (be let down)” (Isa. 28:16). The death of Christ was designed to restore man’s confidence in God, to provide a solid basis for the life of every individual who puts his trust in the Lord.

8.At the cross, the Lord Jesus became or voluntarily “was made” four remarkable things: “Jesus…was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). “…being in the form of God, [He] thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might

come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:13-14).

When a Sinner Repents (September 2003)

From Uplook, September 2003. Article.

A brief sketch of this “so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3).

The doctrinal view of salvation

The gospel is “so great salvation” because of—

• its Divine Source, for it is “the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1).

• its Matchless Provision, for it is “the gospel of His Son” (Rom. 1:9).

• its Prophetic Claim (Rom. 1:16), for it is “the gospel of Christ [Messiah]” promised before.

• its Universal Availability, for it is “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24) which has “appeared to all men.”

• its Wonderful Results, for it is “the gospel of peace” (Rom. 10:15).

• its Illuminating Revelation, for it is “the glorious gospel” (2 Cor. 4:4) or “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.”

What does this gospel include?

1. Justification: this is the judicial act of God by which He declares righteous the one who believes on Christ. There are at least two main aspects to this:

i) remission of the penalty for sin: “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

ii) imputation of righteousness: we are “not only pardoned from past sins, but supplied with a positive righteousness” (Theissen).

2. Regeneration: this is the communication of divine life to the believing sinner; being “born from above.”

i) reconciliation; restored favor with God: the enjoyment of fellowship with the Members of the Trinity based on our being “accepted in the Beloved.”

ii) sanctification: dramatic life changes that occur through the now indwelling Spirit, the process by which the believer is actually made righteous.

3. Adoption and Union with Christ:

i) Union with Christ: Note three wonderful consequences: eternal security (Jn. 10:28-30); fruitfulness (Jn. 15:5); and the availability of spiritual gifts for the enriching of the Body (Eph. 4:15-16).

ii) Adoption: son-planning in eternity (Eph. 1:5); son-making at salvation (Gal. 4:5); son-placing at the “unveiling” (Rom. 8:23).

The experiential view of salvation

How does a sinner “come to Christ”? There are various descriptions—look and live, repent and believe the gospel, receive Him, etc.—that point to the same basic act on the part of the sinner, but Paul puts it succinctly: “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus

Christ" (Acts 20:21). What are the elements in conversion?

1. SAVED BY GRACE (see Eph. 2:5). This speaks of the unmerited disposition and provision of God toward rebellious creatures.

2. SAVED BY REPENTING AND BELIEVING (Mk. 1:15). That is, turning from sin and to God for salvation.

3. SAVED BY FAITH (see Lk. 7:50). This is the empty hand outstretched to receive the gift of God; such faith which comes by truly hearing the Word.

4. SAVED BY HIS BLOOD (see Rom. 5:9). This is the sacred currency provided: we are "redeemed…by the precious blood of Christ."

5. SAVED BY HIS LIFE (see Rom. 5:10). The ongoing work begun at the moment of salvation and continuing until we are like Christ.

6. SAVED BY THE NAME (Acts 4:12). These is only one Saviour; all past, present, and future souls who "call on the name of the LORD"—whether they have specifically heard about the Lord Jesus or not—are saved through Him alone.

The blessed results that immediately occur

1. DEATH TO LIFE: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life" (Jn. 5:24).

2. DISTANCE TO NEARNESS: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

3. BONDAGE TO LIBERTY: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

4. POVERTY TO RICHES: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

5. STRANGER TO CITIZEN: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19).

6. DARKNESS TO LIGHT: “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified” (Acts 26:18).

7. SINFUL TO RIGHTEOUS: “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, [the One] who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

8. CONDEMNED TO JUSTIFIED: “As by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Rom. 5:18).

9. ENEMY TO FRIEND: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled” (Col. 1:21).

10. LOST TO FOUND: “It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Lk. 15:32).

The Cross in the Believer's Life (September 2003)

From Uplook, September 2003. Article.

What does it mean in our daily experience?

1. The role of the cross in devotedness: There is a drawing and compelling power in the lavish gift of Christ's life that stirs thinking believers to "follow the Lamb" wherever He leads. "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:12-14). The logic leads us to only one conclusion: "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15).

The role of the cross in personal holiness and victory over sin: As surely as Christ dealt with the penalty of sin, so in His death He is the answer to its raging influence and the conspiracy between my flesh within and the world system around me: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me…But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 2:20; 6:14). So whatever the present struggle in my life, the intended outcome is obvious: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be

destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

The role of the cross in character development: Coming by faith to the cross is a crisis that becomes a process: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:20-21).

2. The role of the cross in confession: Better to spend time at the cross in adoration than confession, but when we need cleansing, the Lord is standing by. It is not a fresh application of the blood but a fresh appreciation of the blood that we need. "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:7-9). Paul would encourage to be proactive; don't wait until you fall down —get down at the foot of the cross. You cannot have resurrection life without first identifying with His death for us: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11).

The role of the cross in worship: Religionists would have a crossless Christ or a Christless cross. The rest of the world would just like to forget Christ and the cross. But

we are here behind enemy lines to raise the blood-red banner of the cross: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show [declare] the Lord’s death till He come” (1 Cor. 11:26). Heaven agrees! “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Rev. 5:13).

The role of the cross in prayer: The cross tells out the generosity of the heart of the One we approach in supplication: “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). But the cross also provides wonderful accessibility: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19-22).

The role of the cross in evangelism: What other gospel is there worth preaching? None! What other belief offers a Saviour? None! Who else but Christ can save to the uttermost? None! “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24). God help us to tell our world about the once crucified but now resurrected and exalted Christ—

nothing less, nothing more, nothing else: "…[We] preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" (1 Cor. 1:17).

The role of the cross in personal relationships: The Lord could not have put it in any stronger terms, could He! "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you…Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 4:32; 5:25). He provides both the pattern to follow and the motive to do it. "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:13). Do we need peace among us? He is the blessed Peacemaker. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). See also Eph. 2:13-16.

The role of the cross in enduring and suffering: Feel like you're going under? What a load He bore! Feel like you can't go on? What a race He has run! "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2). The writer will go on to say: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood" (v. 4). But He did! If you look to Him, you can't look down any more. You will have to look into heaven, because that is where He is.

The role of the cross in stewardship and good works: Titus, writes Paul, that was the point! To cure us of self-willed works for our own ends and captivate us with doing good works: “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). It is impossible to be stingy with our giving if we visit the cross first and ask the Lord how much we should give. How much did He give? “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver…Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:7, 15). But it is not just example; it is enabling that He provides: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14).

So living, dying, let me bring
My strength, my solace from this spring,
That He who lives to be my King
Once died to be my Saviour.
—Dora Greenwell

Details Do Matter (October 2003)

From Uplook, October 2003. Editorial.

Sometimes seemingly minor things have major implications.

When Solomon was set to build the temple, a suitable dwelling place for the all glorious God, he explained the details of his plan:

Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of divers colors, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance (1 Chron. 29:2).

I think we can draw three obvious applications from this materials list that was to be used for the magnificent home of Jehovah on earth.

First, the king had to know the difference between wood things and gold things. It is a recurring tendency in temple building to confuse such things, a tendency not limited to Solomon's day. In fact Paul, a thousand years later, addressed his own instructions on temple building to "…all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:2). This is what he wrote:

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if

any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward (1 Cor. 3:10-14).

Obviously it still matters how we go about building the temple of the Lord today, for, as Paul concludes, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:15-16). How important it is, then, to do things so that they are pleasing to the gracious Spirit who dwells within.

But there is a second application we also would do well to note. Don't make wood things into gold things. In other words, don't make more of a thing than God does. How often this tendency has dogged the pathway of Church history. Not everything is of equal value in the sight of God. It is possible to spend so much time debating the timing of the Lord's coming that we lose the joy of the hope of His coming. It is a danger that we become known merely for our idiosyncrasies. We can make much of the head covering and little of the Lord's practical Headship; we can be known as those "very particular about breaking bread, but not too particular about breaking hearts." It is possible to pay careful attention to the essential activities mentioned in Acts 2:42, but forget the activities recorded in the rest of the chapter—loving each other in practical ways, sharing our time and our goods with one another. We can become known for our loyalty to truth but not for our

love and kindness, or for our “gladness and singleness of heart” (v. 46).

But I would like to quickly add a third application from Solomon’s checklist. The bronze and iron things had their place in the temple as surely as the gold and silver. No, they were not as valuable, or perhaps as attractive to the eye. But they also must have their place if the temple was to be complete. As the Lord said to the Pharisees, “Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Mt. 23:23). May the Lord help us to “take heed” of such details in our God-given building project.

Missionary Graveyard (October 2003)

From Uplook, October 2003. Article.

Christians can find hope in the strangest places.

Japan, like other countries resistant to the gospel, has been called a missionary graveyard. It is meant metaphorically now, used to describe a country where missionary dreams of mighty exploits for God often withered, where hope can die an untimely death, and where prayers seem to go unanswered. Of course there have been times in Japanese history when the words “missionary graveyard” were all too literal.

Some form of Christianity was thought to have arrived in the Far East, possibly in Japan, by the early 600s. Nestorian* missionaries certainly had established churches in China by that time. However the gospel failed to take root in the hearts of the Japanese. Instead, in the late 6th Century, the Indian philosophy of Buddhism was linked in an unholy union with polytheistic Shintoism to enwrap the minds of the people of Japan in almost unbroken darkness for the next millennium. It seems that it was not until 1549 when any light at all pierced the spiritual darkness in Japan. In that year, the Portuguese Jesuit, Francis Xavier, arrived, bringing the message of the one true God, but with a gospel distorted by Rome’s ritualism. Xavier stayed only for two years, being convinced that if the Japanese people were to be converted, it must be through China. He died in Macau the following year (1552). By the early 1600s perhaps 300,000 Japanese claimed Christianity; it is impossible to know how many were real believers. But the ruling shoguns became alarmed, convinced these

missionary efforts were a guise for Western imperialism; they determined to crush this upstart religion. In a chapter little known in Church history, for the next 250 years those professing Christianity were ruthlessly persecuted. Many who claimed Christ were themselves crucified, often with their whole families. Others were burned at the stake, boiled alive, or drowned. Some scholars have claimed it to be the most sustained and brutal persecution in history. Anti-Christian laws were not repealed until 1873—due to severe international pressure. By 1880, a Japanese New Testament was published, the Old Testament following in 1887. William G. Smith, commended from an assembly in Bath, England, arrived in 1888. Soon others followed. Today there are perhaps 160 assemblies in the country, and the work is growing steadily.

But the price has been substantial. Dr. Eitel, well-known chief of the Changsa Hospital, wrote: “Over Japan, even more than over China, lies the charged weight of demonic influence. Our missionaries there are constantly exposed to this invisible attack. This… presents to the Christian worker a perpetual threat. Without his being aware of it, the missionary’s emotional and mental strength is being exhausted, his faith is being exceedingly taxed. Consequently, there come… nervous breakdowns, and quick fatigue” (quoted in That the World May Know, Vol. 7, p. 368).

But there is hope to be found even in a graveyard. Recently, while visiting the resort town of Karuizawa, about 50 miles northwest of Tokyo, I happened on a “Foreigner’s Cemetery.” It was surrounded by a large Japanese graveyard filled with Buddhist shrines to the dead. My path led me on a long arc past hundreds of

memorials to the emptiness of pagan worship. Over it all could be written the words: “…without Christ,… having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). So it was with great relief that I came to the little walled section for “Foreigners.” Oh, how different! No shrines; no flowers to appease ancestors; no food for their God. Instead, carved on the tombs of missionary stalwarts, and their children—some only days old—were words like these: “With Christ, which is far better”; “Asleep in Jesus”; “At Home”; “Oh grave, where is thy sting?” and other similar ringing expressions of the triumph of the Saviour. It is such a message of absolute assurance and certainty beyond death that is Japan’s—and the world’s —only hope.

* Nestorius (d. 451) was embroiled in early debate regarding the person of Christ. He refused to approve the term theotokos (“mother of God”) as applied to Mary. He asserted she bore not the Godhead but “a man who was the organ of the Godhead.” His teaching was rejected for making too sharp a division between Christ’s deity and humanity.

Do the Next Thing (October 2003)

From Uplook, October 2003. Article.

What is the need of the hour?

How fortunate David was to have men in his kingdom "that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32). No wonder that the verse concludes with these words: "and all their brethren were at their commandment."

It is not enough to cling to the four activities mentioned in Acts 2:42 and believe that by this our local church qualifies as a "New Testament assembly." You cannot have a New Testament assembly without New Testament life. This life will manifest itself in many ways, just as physical life manifests itself. A growing child will be always learning new things, will have a voracious appetite for good food, and will use the energy from that food in exercising itself. A child has a zest for life and joy in discovery. There should be a development in loving relationships, an increased capacity for work, and a growing awareness for the needs of others.

Does that describe your assembly? It certainly describes the churches in Acts. So if this is not the case, is there anything that can be done?

The following graph demonstrates the three essential ingredients for spiritual progress, all provided by God.

1. NEEDS An understanding of our spiritual needs is provided by the Lord of the churches who walks in the midst of the lampstands, and assesses each one: "I know thy works."

2. ASSETS A proper appraisal of our spiritual resources comes through understanding how the Father has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ."

3. VISION Vision is not natural creativity, but a sight of things as the illuminating Spirit sees the situation (as it really is) and what needs to be done about it.

* You can't do everything at once! This is where to find the next thing to be done.

See what happens when only one or two of the ingredients are understood:

NEEDS without ASSETS or VISION = DESPAIR

To see just the problems without understanding the resources we have in God causes believers to lose hope.

ASSETS without NEEDS or VISION = PRIDE

To occupy ourselves with our assets yet never see the needs is the Laodicean problem: "rich…in need of nothing."

VISION without NEEDS or ASSETS = FRUITLESSNESS

Some want to blaze a trail for God but have no understanding of the needs of God's people. Much ado about nothing.

NEEDS & ASSETS without VISION = INACTION

Not understanding what the Spirit is presently doing (or wanting to do) keeps us from co-operating with Him.

ASSETS & VISION without NEEDS = WASTEFULNESS

We can understand our resources and want to move forward, but without knowing the needs, we fritter away opportunities.

VISION & NEEDS without ASSETS = FRUSTRATION

Some see the church's needs and want to help but are blind to the amazing equipment God has waiting for them to use.

NEEDS & ASSETS & VISION = THE NEXT THING TO DO

When the Son—"that Great Shepherd of the sheep"—has shown us the needs of His people, and "the Father of Lights, from whom comes every perfect gift" has unfolded His resources, and the Spirit who is "with you" and "in you" has given us Heaven's view of the way ahead, it is then our privilege, indeed our bounden duty, to obediently get moving in dependence on the Lord, in co-operation with like-minded believers, and for the glory of God.

The Truth About a Lie (November-December 2003)

From Uplook, November-December 2003. Editorial.

It's one of the devil's favorites.

Sometimes it's hard to tell when we have believed a lie from the devil and when our own deceitful hearts have tricked us. Of course, Scripture warns us not to excuse ourselves by blaming others for our own misdeeds (see Jas. 1:13-14). But there is no question that the devil "is a liar, and the father of it" (Jn. 8:44), and, with 6000 years of experience, his skills of deception are finely honed.

One of the deceiver's nefarious specialties is stated in 2 Corinthians 4:4: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Anyone involved in evangelism hears the lies that he uses, over and over again. "You're too young; there's plenty of time to be saved." "You're too bad; God doesn't want someone like you." "You're not perfect but you're better than many people; think of all the good things you have done. God can't ask for any more than that." The lies are so predictable, but the devil keeps using them because they work.

The apostle also warns that we can be accomplices in keeping people from Christ. Instead of "veiling" the minds of those who do not believe, we can veil the gospel. "But if our gospel be hid (veiled), it is hid to them that are lost" (4:3). And it is just at this point that the devil feeds a lie to God's people. "There's no use

witnessing today," he says. "No one is interested in hearing about your God, or trusting in your Jesus."

I had just returned to the U.S. after twenty-four days in Japan, and was shortly leaving for three weeks in the U.K. I saw no sense in adjusting my body clock twice. So I decided for the few days at home I would rise at 2:30 each morning. In this way I would be ready for a 7:30 AM wake-up call when I arrived in Scotland.

Heading for the Uplook office the first morning in Grand Rapids, I stopped at a 24-hour pancake restaurant. It was just 3 AM when I entered. Not surprisingly, I had the place to myself. The waitress, a young lady named Michelle, asked if I worked the night shift. I briefly explained to her my Japan/Scotland schedule.

"Do you travel for business?" she inquired. "Yes," I replied, "but in my business I don't sell things; I give them away." With a startled look, she asked, "Are you a missionary?" "Good guess! What do you know about missionaries?" She grew pensive. "Nothing at all, really. My parents were so busy we never went to church. I've never owned a Bible. But I know that I need God in my life." She asked if I minded if she sat down at the table to talk. For thirty minutes we had an uninterrupted conversation about the things of God. I promised to bring her a Bible. She said she would be working there two days later.

When I arrived again at 3 AM as I had promised, Michelle was delighted to receive her Bible, surprised that I had returned. But she already had a customer, and so another waitress named Kellee came to serve me.

"Michelle has been telling me what you told her the other day," she said. "May I ask you a question? How do

you know when you should speak to someone about God?”

I was taken aback by the question, and began giving her a convoluted explanation of the leading of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. But I could see from her face that I had completely missed the mark.

After a moment’s hesitation, she said, “Well, I was wondering because you were in here some time ago, and I served you, and you never spoke to me about God.”

The comment wasn’t meant to sting, but I can still feel the smart. I know that regularly I cross paths with people who want to hear about the Lord. If my feet are “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15), the Lord will use me. God help me not to veil the gospel!

The Art of Coming Down (November-December 2003)

From Uplook, November-December 2003. Article.

Some years ago our family had a few days' rest at the seashore. Our (then) six-year-old wanted to try her hand at flying a kite. So we visited a kite store and made the proud purchase of a lovely rainbow-colored one. "All the instructions are inside the package," we were informed by the smiling sales clerk. I wanted to make sure, because more than 30 years had passed since I lost my last kite in a large oak tree near our home.

The next morning the two of us happily headed for the beach with the kite, 500 feet of line and high hopes. The beach was already crowded and it took a few minutes to find a clear spot for the launch. Dad held the line; little smiling Moira held her rainbow kite. A steady breeze blew at my back as the kite took wing.

Not too much line, I told myself as I watched it scamper up an invisible ladder of wind toward the sun. The instructions had told us to give more slack if the kite began to dive. It kept diving and I kept giving it more line. Every time it dipped, in my mind I could see it diving into some highpowered New York lawyer basking on the beach who was recovering from abdominal surgery. I was getting frantic now; beads of perspiration dotted my forehead. Thousands of beach-goers lay placidly sunning, ignorant that far above them in the morning sky lurked my "killer kite."

Panic set in when I reached the end of the line. Too late I discovered that the instructions had informed me how to

get the kite up, but not HOW TO GET IT DOWN! The only solution was to chase the thing along the shore, trying all the while to rewind the string without infringing on its freedom. All I had to do was hold the line with one hand, wind it up with the other, run faster than the kite, and avoid the strangers sprawled on the beach.

I now discovered that, while the kite had exalted itself by the foot, I was humbling it by the inch. It takes a very long time to reel in five hundred feet of line by the inch.

As I stood panting beside the now unresisting kite, the lesson came to me. How like that kite I was. How ready to receive praise; how slow to receive correction. Opportunities for advancement are quickly grasped; opportunities for servanthood lie neglected all around. Like the kite, I tugged at restraint, longing to be free, not realizing that “freedom” from the one who is controlling means being at the mercy of every adverse wind.

Peter, who had learned from the Master the art of coming down, wrote: “Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet. 5:5-6). When you feel the tug of His hand on the line of your life, yield to His will and learn the sweet blessing in the art of coming down.

At Risk (November-December 2003)

From Uplook, November-December 2003. Article.

Fishing, farming, fighting, finance—every picture Jesus used of His work expressed the risk involved in the plan

We don't think much about it, I suppose, but Christmas was a risky business. It's risky for a young woman, expectant for the first time, to be away from family in that condition. Risky to travel, too, especially over rough roads, not to mention having a lack of medical personnel on hand. And such unsanitary conditions! But that wasn't the half of it. Think of the risk taken by the wise men in committing months to following... a star? Where would it lead them? Over dangerous territory to be sure, and in (and out) of the clutches of Herod (and the Enemy behind him). Just imagine all the hope of humanity, the completion of the will of God, and the fulfilling of the prophetic Scriptures resting in that little Babe, object of a manhunt so ruthless as to wipe out a whole generation of children in a vain attempt to destroy Him. Yes, it is a very risky thing to shine light into a world where "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (Jn. 3:19), where the "Prince of darkness grim" was vehement in his schemes to put out that Light. And when at last, after shining His benevolent rays upon those that "sit in darkness" and as a "light to lighten the Gentiles," when they sought to once and forever put out that Light at the place called Calvary, it seemed that the plan of God had failed. Even the disciples thought so. But then, "at the rising of the sun" (Mk. 16:2) on the first day of the week, the Light broke again over the dark and brooding horizon of man's

hopelessness. It reflected from the faces of His wondering disciples, and has been doing so ever since. Now little lights revealing His glory twinkle in the darkness across the whole human landscape. And the Light shall win the Day. It should come as no surprise that it's still risky business to "let your light so shine." But it is a risk that must be taken if that Light is to rescue the perishing.

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