

LEADER'S GUIDE

OMEGA

A Three-Dimensional Model of the Six Frontiers of Mission Today

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Global Mapping International

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Purpose: This set of ten maps and graphs enables you to broaden people's understanding of six major aspects of the one goal of mission, which is to reorient people toward the Omega, Jesus Christ. As they get the picture of the "Six Frontiers of Mission" they will be motivated to participate in more of what God is doing in the world today. Suggestions for prayer, discussion and action are provided for each Frontier.¹

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¹ Transparencies 2, 3, and 6 are based on the "Status of Global Evangelization" wall map which shows all 7000+ of the world's known people groups (technically these are "language groups," ethno-linguistic groups as identified in the *Ethnologue* published by the Summer Institute of Linguistics). The map designates each one with a color indicating the extent of evangelization. The color range, from the most evangelized groups to the least evangelized, is purple, green, yellow, light red and dark red. An inset on the wall map defines the exact meaning of each color. The wall map does not contain any of the special text or information that has been added to the transparencies in the Omega map set.

The wall map was prepared from data gathered worldwide by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and is available from their office. Phone 1-800-866-3621 or fax 1-804-254-8980. The 24 x 36 inch size is \$5.00. The 36 x 64 inch size is \$9.95.

Summary

The Omega Model of mission is an attempt to diagram the goal of mission, taking into account the biblical foundations of mission as well as the main ways that mission is interpreted by different blocks of Christians today. According to the Omega Model, the goal of mission is to reorient everyone and everything to the Omega Point, who is Jesus the Messiah.

While focusing on the goal of mission, the Model combines into one coherent picture several issues that are usually seen as important but separate matters. These include the evangelization of unreached peoples, divisions among various blocks of Christians (such as evangelicals, ecumenicals, Catholics and Pentecostals), the relation between evangelism and social action, the problems of persecution and idolatry and the power struggle between Christ and Satan. This is admittedly an ambitious agenda for any model, especially one like this that tries to be simple without being simplistic.

The Model suggests six “frontiers” of mission today. One is the people who have never heard the gospel or never been persuaded by the version they did hear. Four of the frontiers are four different kinds of people who already call themselves Christians. The sixth frontier is the “anti-Christians.”

As this study unfolds, we will consider the following aspects of each frontier:

- What is the main function and goal of being witnesses on this frontier?
- What group(s) or type(s) of people are to be found on this frontier, and in what parts of the world are they concentrated?
- What is the key biblical text for mission on this frontier?
- When we pray for this frontier, exactly whom are we praying for?
- What is God already doing on this frontier?
- How can we move with God on this frontier?
- What ripple effects would occur if the people on this frontier were reoriented toward Omega?

The aim of this guide is to help people see mission from a fresh perspective that will motivate them to become involved in mission on new frontiers. The guide holds up a mirror for the church today. May those who see themselves not walk away and forget what they look like (Jas. 1:24).

Note: All Scripture quotations in this guide are from the New International Version.

Introduction

Why we need a new model of mission

Our Western mind-set, our church structures, our English language and our view of the cross have combined to give us American evangelicals a view of “missions” which is seriously out of touch with the biblical reality of mission, and it is high time for a major overhaul of our view. This guide and map set are an attempt in that direction. May God use it to get us all reoriented to the center of his will.

Problem #1: Pigeonholing mission

Being good Westerners, we approach life analytically. We sort things into categories—“a place for everything and everything in its place.” When we come to the concept of “mission,” we naturally want to fit it somewhere into our larger concept of Christianity, which in turn fits into our concept of life as a whole.

We have ended up with “mission” in a pigeonhole, boxed in by two unbiblical ideas. First, we talk of mission as if it only concerned our activity toward non-Christians. A church’s activity toward its own members is put into the “Christian education” pigeonhole. A church’s activity toward other churches is put into the pigeonhole labeled “partnership” or “ecumenism.”

Second, we talk about “mission” as if it only referred to what happens overseas. We have missionaries, a missions budget, missions prayer meetings, missions conferences, missions trips, missions committees and even missions pastors. All of these familiar structures, intended to enlarge the missions pigeonhole, actually reinforce one wall of the pigeonhole, the idea that real mission is primarily overseas. We turn the Great Commission into the great “go” mission, and those who don’t “go” (overseas) are relegated to the role of “mission supporters.”

Problem #2: Mistranslating the source of our mission

Without Jesus we would have no mission. Our mission is rooted in him and in the phrase he repeatedly used to summarize his message. It functioned almost as his theme song or signature tune— “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Mt. 4:17).

Today people wrongly take this to mean something like, “Stop doing those bad things because the world is about to end in judgment.” No wonder they do not go wild over such “good news” as this! No wonder Bible teachers look elsewhere for key “mission” texts! But before looking elsewhere, we need to take a closer look to see what Jesus really meant by “repent,” “kingdom,” and “heaven.” Something has been lost in translation, and our understanding of mission has suffered tremendously.

- “Repent” in English focuses on what we are repenting of. In Greek (*metanoia*) the focus is on what we are turning toward, regardless of what we are turning from. It is close to what we mean when we say, “Heads up!” or the soldier’s alarm, “Incoming!” Drop whatever else you were doing (good or bad) and react instantly and appropriately to the new, unexpected thing that is about to hit you. In a word, “reorient” yourself.
- “Kingdom” in English focuses on the domain of the king. In Greek (*basileia*) it focuses on the power connection between the king and his domain as well as the effects of the power on

the domain. Some writers call this God's "rule," God's "reign," or God's "new order." Throughout this guide I will use the best English rendition I have seen, God's "liberating control" (Johannes Verkuyl).

- "Heaven" in English refers to the other world, especially in the future. In Greek as written by first-century Jews like the author Matthew, it is used as a polite substitute for the word "God" (compare Mk. 1:15).

Put it all together and Jesus' message comes out in modern English, "Reorient yourselves because God's liberating control is arriving," or more colloquially, "Heads up! God is taking charge now." That was Jesus' "good news" and it is ours too. We reorient our lives toward this new paradoxical fact of "control" that sets us free. We call others to do the same. This is our mission, giving people a "Heads up!" to the wonderful news that this sorry world, which has been spinning out of control for far too long, is finally coming back under the control of its Maker. Is that cool or what?

⇔ DISCUSS. Compare the standard translation, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near," the common misinterpretation, "Stop doing those bad things because the world is about to end in judgment," and the suggested versions, "Reorient yourselves because God's liberating control is arriving," or "Heads up! God is taking charge now." What kind of impact do you think each of these four statements would have on your non-Christian friends?

⇔ DISCUSS. What do you recall from Jesus' ministry or teaching that would make a lot of sense if the suggested versions ("Reorient yourselves . . ." etc.) are accurate summaries of the main point of his teaching?

Problem #3: Misinterpreting the cross as the center of mission

We have tended to interpret Jesus' mission in terms of the cross instead of interpreting the cross in terms of Jesus' mission. This is no hairsplitting distinction. It is a very fundamental mistake with disastrous consequences for our understanding of our own mission. Our faulty line of thought goes like this: "Jesus' mission was to die on the cross. Therefore our mission is to tell about the cross, explaining the cross as the answer to the religious and eternal needs of all people." This attempt to make the cross "central" to our theology actually backfires and compromises our mission, narrowing the influence of the cross in an unbiblical way.

Jesus' did not preach that his mission was to die on the cross.² The apostles did not preach the cross that way in any of the sermons and speeches recorded in the book of Acts. Even Paul, whom we imagine to be the favorite source of our theology of the cross, fits the cross into a larger picture of Jesus' mission. (We miss a great deal of his theology of the cross because we can't think Jewish and appreciate his distinction between Jews and Gentiles; see Eph. 2:11-22.)³

² He did repeatedly predict his death on the cross, but without saying it was his "mission," and he did once say he came to "give his life a ransom for many," but this was in a private session with the twelve disciples and in context (Mk. 10:45) it was a supporting illustration to prove a different main point (servant leadership).

³ I Jn. 4:10 says that God sent Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, a sign of how much he loves us. Nothing I have said should take away one iota from this truth. My point is that I John does not say this is the whole mission, nor does it go into any details about the way this part of the mission relates to the other parts which are described in other Scriptures. In many other passages where Jesus is described as the one who brings salvation, we automati-

What then is the bigger picture that puts the cross into proper perspective? Jesus' mission as the "Messiah"; that is, the God-appointed leader of the charge to establish God's liberating control throughout the world and the universe. Jesus was not "born to die," he was "born to be King" (see Mt. 2:2). He died because some people refused to believe he was sent to be king, the rightful heir to the thrones they were sitting on (Mt. 26:63-65). The cross was the united, last-ditch attempt by human beings and spiritual forces to prevent him from taking power.

As an attempt to block Jesus' messianic mission, the cross turned out to be the most spectacular failure in history. Not only did it fail to stop Jesus, it underlined the fact that his mission was unstoppable. Not only did it fail to take God by surprise, it gave God an opportunity to reveal just how prepared he was to deal with it. He had worked it into his plan long before (Acts 2:23). Not only did God overturn the challenge by raising Christ from death, he transformed the challenge into an atoning sacrifice for the benefit of all humanity! Not only did God burst through the flimsy barricade of death, he picked up the broken pieces of the barricade and used them to build a new platform for the resurrected Jesus to stand on as he continues his mission. Every time people look at this odd platform made of splintered wood, they remember the failed attempt to block the mission. For the opponents of Jesus, the whole cross affair turned out to be a fiasco, a supreme exercise in futility, a complete and utter disaster.

How does the cross look to us? Yes it means atonement through Christ's blood, yes we find forgiveness of our sins there, yes it opens the door to eternal life for us, but why narrow our message down to those wonderful religious parts of the much larger picture of Jesus the Messiah? The cross is a religious truth, but it is much more. The cross is the second of five definitive milestones in the Messiah's extension of God's liberating control.

The first was his baptism with the Holy Spirit and the miracles and teaching (about God's liberating control) he did by the power of the Spirit. The third was the resurrection, God overturning a human verdict and frustrating the opponents of the mission. The fourth was Pentecost, the launching of the extension of Christ's mission by proxy through his followers under the power of the Holy Spirit. The fifth will be Christ's return to earth to take power in person.

When we talk about the "Omega" in the Omega Model, we mean the total Messiah at all five of these milestones. Together they provide the framework that highlights the multiple levels of the real meaning of the cross. They also point clearly to what our own mission must be.

Our mission has to be seen as an interim or transitional mission, sandwiched between the time when Jesus was here on earth carrying out his mission in person and when he will return in person to complete it. Ours is not exactly the same as his mission and certainly not a substitute for it, but it is very closely linked to it. We are the ones in whom and through whom the living, working Jesus is extending God's liberating control today. He is taking over our lives, freeing us as he goes. The takeover happens through the presence of the Holy Spirit, who vitally integrates us with Jesus and the rest of his followers. We experience his power and become charged with it, able to spark some of it across to other people.

This could be why Jesus strictly ordered his followers not to announce his resurrection until he sent the Holy Spirit to give them power (Lk. 24:48-49, Acts 1:8). Consider the alternative. Without the Holy Spirit, Jesus' followers could have lived with a great memory of his ministry, a great theology of atonement through the cross, a great story of his resurrection, and a great hope of his

cally think of salvation as the cross without noticing that the passage actually has the broader idea of salvation behind it, an idea linking salvation with the arrival of God's liberating control.

return. They could have talked in glowing terms about God’s liberating control but the bottom line would have been, “If Jesus is not here, the control is stalled or, at best, limping along in some spiritualized form.”

Our mission is to show that God’s liberating control is still on the move in the real world. The Omega is not only the one who “was” and who “is to come”; he is also the one who “is” (Rev. 1:8). Right here, right now. Sometimes he confirms his presence with outright miracles of healing, words of prophecy or other signs of his presence and power, but whether or not we do miracles in his name, we *are* miracles. We can sense his liberating, controlling presence and testify that he is making us over from the inside out. We do not merely have Jesus “in our hearts”; we have him in our blood. Once Jesus is percolating in our blood, we have mission in the blood.

Jesus has sent us on our mission just as the Father had sent him on his mission (Jn. 20:21). While learning and enjoying what God’s liberating control means for us, we also call everyone else to reorient their lives toward the Omega. The call automatically involves a rejection of the only sin that really matters—being oriented toward anything or anyone except the Omega. All other sins are mere footnotes.

God’s liberating control does not work by picking off a few easy sins around the fringes of our lives and gradually working up to the bigger ones. God goes straight for the jugular of sin, which is misorientation. Once he gets us oriented toward the Omega, he has our sinfulness by the throat. Our old misoriented self may flail and thrash around for awhile but it cannot survive. The “Hound of Heaven” will kill it and we will be free of its distraction, absolutely focused on Christ.

Though it is exhilarating to be liberated, we cannot afford to spend all our time partying just yet. We still have a mission, a job to do before time runs out. We are to call people to reorient themselves to Christ, coax them, command them, pull them in—whatever it takes. We just have to do it, and do it now. It will be too late when we reach the fifth milestone of the messianic mission, the sudden blinding flash of Christ’s return.

- ⇔ DISCUSS. Jesus is described above as “the Messiah, the God-appointed leader of the charge to establish God’s liberating control throughout the world and the universe.” How does that view of Jesus compare with the way you usually picture him?
- ⇔ DISCUSS. As Christians we are “learning and enjoying what God’s liberating control means for us.” Suppose a non-Christian friend hears this for the first time and says, “I don’t get what you mean by ‘living under God’s liberating control.’ What does it mean for you? What have you learned or enjoyed about it lately?” How would you answer?

Transparency 1

The Omega Model

The Omega Model represents our mission by using a cubic framework. In the diagram Omega (“Ω”) represents Christ and his liberating control (or “kingdom”). Omega is shown as the top, back, right corner of the cube. In other words, Christ is the point where all three dimensions of the cube reach their maximum and converge. The goal of our mission is to lift up Jesus and watch him draw people to himself, bringing them under his liberating control.

People are currently to be found at various places around the cube, depending on how far they have moved toward Christ and how much emphasis they have put on each of the three dimensions. The fundamental problem made obvious by the cube is that most people do not move straight toward Omega. They move toward a position that majors on only one or two of the three dimensions,⁴ and they become lopsided “Christians” (if we can call them “Christians” at all).

In order to get people oriented to Omega, we have to take into consideration their current position relative to Omega. We can’t just say to everyone, “You need to emphasize our favorite dimension of Omega more.” That might be true for some people but not for others. As we study the cube, we will see that it suggests at least eight positions or categories where people could be, some of which could be subdivided into several others. In this guide we will consider only the six positions I believe are actually the most commonly held today. These are the “six frontiers of mission,” six different aspects of our one God-given mission—getting people to reorient themselves toward the Omega Point.

Five of the six positions are marked on the model as follows:

1. the furthest point from Omega, no Christian knowledge, faith or life
2. focus on the first dimension, church doctrine, membership and life
3. focus on the second dimension, individual spiritual experience, zeal and power
4. focus on the third dimension, society; ordinary life in this world
5. focus on Bible study (a combination of the first and second dimensions)

The sixth position will be explained later.

As this study unfolds, we will consider the following aspects of each frontier:

- What is the main function and goal of being witnesses on this frontier?
- What group(s) or type(s) of people are to be found on this frontier, and in what parts of the world are they concentrated?
- What is the key biblical text for mission on this frontier?
- When we pray for this frontier, exactly whom are we praying for?
- What is God already doing on this frontier?
- How can we move with God on this frontier?
- What ripple effects would occur if the people on this frontier were reoriented toward Omega?

⁴ Most Christians will claim that they value all three dimensions; however, what they actually do is redefine one or two of the less emphasized dimensions in terms of the one dimension they see as central. For example, Bible-oriented Christians will say they are “world-oriented” as the Omega Model says they should be. But what they often mean is that they are deeply concerned about the eternal spiritual destiny of unevangelized people in the world, not about current economic or social matters.

Some Limitations of the Omega Model

Any model or diagram highlights certain aspects of the truth and overlooks or even distorts others. The Omega Model is no exception. For example, the gradual aspects of conversion are far easier to picture in this model than a decisive, one-time conversion experience. The priority of the First Frontier (unreached peoples) over the other five is not as obvious in the Model as it is in reality.

The biggest problem with the Model is that the Omega, Jesus Christ, appears in a fixed position, not doing anything or going anywhere. People might take this to mean that Jesus has done his work and is now sitting down, waiting for people to turn to him, recognize him and worship him. The truth is that the Omega is actively, powerfully reaching out to people anywhere in the cube, no matter which way they are oriented right now. This emphasis comes through if we consider three biblical images of Christ and his work. To help us remember them we will relate each one to the shape of the letter omega.

Omega as a magnet (John 12:32)

Jesus said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” Jesus was literally lifted up on the cross, and then lifted up to the right hand of God. We lift him up figuratively today through our prayer, our worship and our witness. When he is lifted up in any of these senses, he exerts a magnetic power, drawing people to him. On the Omega Model, he is not sitting idly at the Omega Point waiting to be noticed. He is radiating his magnetic force field throughout the cube. He is actively drawing people to himself. The letter Omega reminds us of this because, without the two horizontal marks at the base, it looks like a magnet.

Omega and the empty tomb (Acts 2:32)

In his sermon on Pentecost Day, Peter said, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” The Omega was dead but is alive again—personally, physically, permanently alive. “It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:24).

As we witness to this literally earth-shaking fact, we call people to reorient themselves not to a good set of religious teachings but to a resurrected Person who cares about them. He not only accepted death on their behalf, he rose from death and ordered his followers to help everyone everywhere reorient themselves toward him. Furthermore, he empowered his followers through the Holy Spirit so their message would get everyone’s attention. He is not dead. He is not a bystander who might as well be dead. He is the living one who through the Holy Spirit propels his followers out toward the rest of the world with the good news of his victory over death (Acts 2:33).

The letter omega reminds us of the risen Lord if we cover up part of it with a circle. The omega becomes a tomb, and the circle is the stone rolled away from the entrance.

Omega as the head of the body (Col. 1:17-18)

Paul wrote, “He [Jesus] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” Jesus the Omega is the cosmic integrating point and the head of the body. We can properly say that the whole body is “oriented” toward the head, but this does not mean it is merely watching the head. It is in constant, dynamic communication with the head.

The letter omega reminds us of Christ as the head of the body because its shape looks like the outline of a head and shoulders.

Though the Omega Model is a cube and appears to be a static block, the Omega Person is not static. As a magnet, a resurrected person and the head of the church, Jesus keeps on sending his truth, power and love out in all directions from the Omega Point via the Holy Spirit. Our mission is to conduct that truth, power and love so that people turn and worship the Source of it all.

Transparency 2

First Frontier: Evangelizing the Disoriented or Misoriented

Where is Frontier 1? Who are the “disoriented” or “misoriented”?

As we saw on the Omega cube, Point 1 is at the front, bottom left corner, as far from Omega as one can get. Frontier 1 people have little or no knowledge of Christ (width of the cube), no experience of belonging to Christ (height) and they do not live in Christ’s way (depth). In today’s terminology these are mostly the “unreached peoples,” especially those in the “10/40 Window,” shown as a black rectangle on this map.⁵

The dark red areas are language groups which are the least evangelized (or “most unreached”) groups in the world. The light red areas are other language groups where the gospel is seldom heard. Obviously most of the red areas are inside the rectangular “window.” These people may be called “disoriented” if their lives have no central orientation point or “misoriented” if they have a central point other than the Omega. In our globalizing world today, many of the formerly “misoriented” people are becoming “disoriented” as the value centers of their traditional cultures and religions are facing the competition of modern Western values.

In the last twenty-five years the need to evangelize “unreached peoples” has been rightly and very successfully emphasized by the MARC Division of World Vision International, the U.S. Center for World Mission, the AD2000 and Beyond Movement (including the Joshua Project), the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement training course, and many others.⁶ If we are not aware of the First Frontier, we don’t know the first thing about mission. We have to let these people know that by turning to the Omega, they can be saved from their disorientation or misorientation.

The key text for the First Frontier

Mt. 24:14. ***“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations [peoples], and then the end will come.”*** No doubt about it—God’s will is that every last “unreached” people be reached with the good news.

Let us pray for First Frontier people:

- ✝ People who have never heard the name of Jesus
- ✝ People who have never met a Christian
- ✝ People who have never seen a Bible or a church building
- ✝ People who do not know what the symbol of the cross stands for
- ✝ People who have no interest in God

⁵ The 10/40 Window is the parts of North Africa, southern Europe and Asia between the 10th and 40th parallels north. The vast majority of the world’s least evangelized people groups live in this area, where Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are the dominant religions.

⁶ The promoters of the “unreached peoples” view of mission felt that by the mid-1970s many missionary-sending organizations had become bogged down in institutional programs such as education and health. Meanwhile there were hundreds if not thousands of people groups who still had never heard the gospel at all.

- † People who suffer hunger, degradation, addiction or victimization so severe that they cannot imagine the possibility of hearing good news

What is already happening on Frontier 1?

- ⇔ DISCUSS. What missionaries on your prayer list are working in an unreached people group (as opposed to an area where there has been a local church for a long time)? What country are they in? Do you know what language group they are evangelizing and how they are going about it? What mission organization supports their work? How can we encourage them?

God is at work in new ways on Frontier 1. Here are some examples. You may want to add to the list or share what you know about these situations.

- China. Phenomenal growth of all kinds of churches in the last 50 years in spite of government restrictions.
- India. Thousands of Indian Christians doing pioneer evangelism among unreached groups in their own vast country.
- Nepal, Albania and Mongolia. Growing congregations in three of the countries that were most tightly closed to the gospel only a few years ago.
- Middle East. Recent conversions in places where Christian witness seemed to have no effect for decades or centuries; new evangelistic opportunities via videos and satellite TV in the region.
- Unmentionable locations. More and more “don’t mention Jesus when you write to me” missionaries; that is, people who are working among unreached groups in areas controlled by governments hostile to Christianity.

How can we move with God on Frontier 1?

The goal of mission on Frontier 1 is to get the gospel heard by the disoriented peoples for the first time. In some cases this means extending traditional methods like Bible translation and radio to additional languages. In other cases non-traditional methods may be needed. For example, satellite TV has opened up the Middle East to certain kinds of Christian programming. English language teachers go to many countries. “Tentmaking”⁷ is often used as a form of “creative access” into countries where public evangelism is illegal.

- ⇔ DISCUSS. Frontier 1 is a problem for mission organizations today not because of a lack of ideas or opportunities but because of a lack of people and supporters. Where are the people who have what it takes for Frontier 1 evangelism? Where are the churches that are ready to do whatever it takes to support them? What is the hold-up?
- ⇔ DISCUSS. Many churches and organizations “adopt” one language group as their long-term focus for prayer (and also for evangelization if they have the resources). Several centers provide information on how to go about this.⁸ If our group were

⁷ Tentmaking is doing secular employment to be self-supporting in a location where one wants to witness for Christ. This may be in business, education, development or (less often) embassy work.

⁸ For further information on how your group could “adopt” an unreached people group for prayer and possibly for action, contact any of the following:

voting today about looking into adopting an unreached people group ourselves, would you vote for it or against it? What pros and cons do you see in this method?

What if Frontier 1 people were reoriented toward Omega?

We are tempted to think that if we reached the disoriented, the church could say, “Mission accomplished.” In other words, we are used to thinking there is only one “frontier of mission.” It is true that success on this frontier would bring great rejoicing in heaven and on earth; however, success here is not a substitute for action on the other five frontiers of mission.

The assumption underlying the unreached peoples approach to mission was that people move in a fairly straight line from Point 1 toward Omega; that is, that their awareness of the gospel increases in a balanced way, eventually turning into Christian commitment which grows in a balanced way toward completeness in Christ. Our task is then quite simple. We measure the extent of their awareness and commitment to determine how evangelized they are; then we aim our efforts at the least evangelized.

Theoretically this view should be true, but in practice people rarely move toward Omega in a straight line. Their own bias or the bias of the particular Christian or group presenting the gospel to them tends to make them very lopsided. This has gone on for so long that we now have whole camps or families of lopsided Christians, all thinking they are mature in Christ because they have done well on one or perhaps two of the three dimensions of Christ’s liberating control.

Even worse, they are often competing with each other or even attacking each other, each group insisting that its own strong dimension is the “real” heart of Christianity while the strong dimensions of other groups are peripheral or even unnecessary. Deliberately or not, they undermine each other’s attempts to get the gospel out to the world. To do God’s mission in the world today, we have to get over this. It is no mere distraction from mission. It drives a dagger through the heart of mission, undermining the credibility of anything else we say or do in Jesus’ name. Our unity was given as a belief-compelling sign that Jesus really is the Messiah, that he is with us, that his glory rests on us and that God loves us (Jn. 17:20-23).

Four of these kinds of lopsidedness will be discussed as the next four frontiers of mission.

AD2000 Web site: www.ad2000.org; Phone 719-576-2000; Fax 719-576-2685
Adopt-A-People Campaign, US Center for World Mission Web site: www.uscwm.org/mobilization/re-sources/aap.html; Phone 6026-398-2200; Fax 626-398-2263
Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse Web site: www.aapc.net; Phone 719-574-7001; Fax 719-574-7005
Caleb Project Web site: www.calebproject.org; Phone 303-730-4170; Fax 303-730-4177
Christian Information Network Web site: www.christian-info.com; Phone 719-522-1040; Fax 719-548-9000

Transparency 3

Second Frontier: Awakening the Church-Oriented Christians

Where is Frontier 2? Who are the “church-oriented Christians”?

“Church-oriented Christians” are people who assume that their church represents them to God and therefore they don’t have to deal with God very much themselves. The baptism they receive from the church is their guarantee of membership. They do not have to participate in the life of the church or show that the life of God is at work in them; they only have to avoid getting kicked out (losing membership). The church tells them what God wants. It collects enough money to employ professional clergy who do whatever they do to keep the church going.

Where are the church-oriented Christians? If you say you have one living next door, you may be right. But on a global scale these people are concentrated in certain areas where for centuries or even millennia the Roman Catholic or the Orthodox Church has been seen as the official church for a nation or an ethnic group. To be a Serb is to be a member of an Orthodox Church. To be a Pole is to be a Catholic, etc.

These areas are approximately the yellow areas on the map.⁹ The Roman Catholic Church has been dominant in southern Europe and Latin America. The Orthodox Churches have been dominant in Eastern Europe and Russia. There are also large church-oriented Christian groups in places like Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt, though these do not show in yellow on the map.¹⁰ In all these areas, church buildings would have a prominent place in many of the towns and cities, and many non-Christians would think they know what Christianity is.

Though many church-oriented Christians are only superficially committed to Christianity, this is not necessarily so. Some, especially Orthodox churches in Islamic or formerly communist countries, have suffered greatly because they held onto their church/Christian identity. They are like the church in Ephesus, described in Rev. 2:3-4, “You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love.”

The key text for the Second Frontier

Mt. 3:8-9, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”

This was John the Baptist’s wake-up call to the Jewish religious leaders of his day. They assumed that their ethnic pedigree of descent from Abraham was a religious passport to God’s favor. John calls them to “repentance,” which is reorientation. He does not mention any specific sins of which

⁹ The color key on the “Status of Global Evangelization” wall map (from which this map is derived) describes the yellow areas as “unevangelized” people groups but perhaps “under-evangelized” would be more accurate. Many are areas where Christianity has been a recognized religion or even an official, national religion for a thousand years or more.

¹⁰ For example, the Coptic Church has perhaps 20% of the population of Egypt, but they are almost entirely of the Coptic ethnic group, with their own Coptic language unrelated to Arabic. However, these people are spread throughout Egypt and thus do not show on the map at all; they are never a linguistic majority in any one mappable area.

they are to repent. He says, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance,” that is, “Show me the kinds of action that come from reorienting your lives toward the liberating control of God.”

John also warns them that “the ax is already at the root of the trees” (Mt. 3:10). Church-oriented people are almost always proud of their roots, just like the Jews of John’s time. John’s point was that the fruit on the tree was much more important than the root of the tree, so much more that any unfruitful tree would be chopped through at the root.

Many church-oriented Christians (especially in the Eastern Orthodox family) have admirably endured hardships under communist or Islamic governments, but their love for God and zeal for the life of God have burned low.

Let us pray for Second Frontier people:

- † People who were baptized and perhaps married in a church, but have nothing else to do with the church
- † People who think that Christianity means attending church, participating in communion, and trying to be a good person
- † People who think that religion is determined by your ethnic group; that is, if you are from this group, you are automatically a Christian, if you are from that group you are automatically a Muslim, etc.
- † People whose churches do not give them any help or encouragement to study the Bible
- † People who suppose that the clergy are the “real” Christians and that ordinary people will always be further from God than the clergy
- † People who know the Christian message but seem unmotivated to share it

What is already happening on Frontier 2?

- ↔ DISCUSS. What missionaries on your prayer list are working in a part of the world where most Christians are church-oriented? What country are they in? What mission organization supports their work?
- ↔ DISCUSS. Most evangelicals advise church-oriented Christians to leave their ancient churches and join new, more biblical churches. Do you know of any people who are working to bring biblical life, reform and renewal within an ancient church that has lost its spiritual vitality?

God is at work in new ways on Frontier 2. Here are some examples. You may want to add to the list or share what you know about these situations.

- Britain. After decades of declining membership, British churches are seeing revival and evangelism through “Alpha” groups (a series of evangelistic discussion meetings in homes), a method developed in an Anglican congregation.
- Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Orthodox churches are pushing for more biblical theology in the World Council of Churches.
- Egypt. A weekly Bible lecture given by the “Pope” of the Coptic Church is attended by thousands.
- Ethiopia. A Bible study and renewal movement started in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with five people in 1990. Now there are about 200,000 meeting in home groups.

- Tanzania and Kenya. Weekly small-group Bible studies among Catholics in Tanzania have changed the church in the past 25 years. A youth campaign among Kenyan Catholics used the slogan, “Jesus Christ in the heart and on the lips of every Catholic youth.”
- Brazil. Inside the Catholic Church, thousands of “Base Christian Communities” have developed as centers of spiritual life and community action. At the same time, millions of nominal Catholics have left that church and joined evangelical churches, which in Brazil are usually charismatic.

How can we move with God on Frontier 2?

The goal of work on Frontier 2 is to get the gospel into the hearts of people who already have a lot of it in their church liturgy or their national tradition. How do we bring renewal to church-oriented Christians and fossilized churches? Unfortunately we have barely begun to think about this as a part of mission. Our usual approach has been to try to get individual converts to leave the ancient churches. We want to demolish the old house and build a brand new one; we don’t do restorations. Are we writing off churches that God has not written off?

- ⇔ DISCUSS. When we pray about mission, we pray all over the world but when did we last pray for revival in the Catholic Church or any of the Orthodox churches? What would be the pros and cons of putting that item onto our mission prayer list?
- ⇔ DISCUSS. Suppose someone comes to our church who feels a calling to work on Frontier 2. He or she intends to cultivate a relationship with one of these church-oriented denominations overseas and work for revival from the inside. Would we call that “mission”? Would we consider giving that person any support from our “mission” budget?
- ⇔ DISCUSS. Suppose someone claims to have had a vision in which God said that fifty people from your congregation should switch churches for a year. They are to go in groups of ten or fifteen and become part of four or five dead or dying churches in your community. Their mission is to love the people in those churches and pray that God will revive them. The “missionaries” are to spark this revival without becoming voting members or taking any official positions of power. Would you consider being one of the fifty? Why or why not?

What if Frontier 2 people were reoriented toward Omega?

If the church-oriented Christians of the world were ignited with the Spirit’s fire, how much impact would it have on the evangelization of the world? You do the math. Today there are about 400,000 cross-cultural missionaries (140,000 Protestant), but there are about 1,100,000,000 adherents of Orthodox and Catholic churches. In other words Orthodox and Catholic adherents outnumber cross-cultural missionaries about 2750 to 1.

Many of these 1.1 billion Orthodox and Catholic adherents already live in the 10/40 Window, especially in the Islamic part of it. The Muslims there think they know what Christianity is because they have had an “Orthodox” church among them for almost two millennia. If those ancient, ethnically static churches suddenly changed and began reaching out in love across ethnic lines to their Muslim neighbors, the Muslims would demand an explanation: “What happened to those people? We have known them as enemies for centuries. Now they are treating us as friends! What is going on?” When the Orthodox Christians answer those questions, they evangelize.

Transparency 4

Third Frontier: Teaching the Experience-Oriented Christians

Where is Frontier 3? Who are the “experience-oriented” Christians?

Experience-oriented Christians are often recent converts who belong to churches, groups or movements founded by a visionary leader during the last 100 years or even the last decade. They seek and promote religious experience, usually described as an experience of the Holy Spirit. They tend to be long on healing and visions but short on theology. Some of their least trained leaders are courting heresy and a few have already married it. However, the experience-oriented churches still show spiritual power, they praise God and Christ, and they evangelize anything that moves. That is why they have tens of millions of members, and they are the fastest growing churches in the world.

Though many of these “experience-oriented churches” could be called “house churches,” some have grown to become large movements and built huge church buildings. The Kimbanguist Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, has one church building which is estimated to hold 37,000 people. That is not exactly a “house church”! Yet the Kimbanguist denomination with 3-5 million members is still very largely a “house church” movement, typical of the “experience-oriented” type in many ways.

Where are the experience-oriented Christians? In Latin America most are in small charismatic groups. In Africa most of them are called “African independent churches” or “African indigenous churches.” In China they are called “the house church movement.” In the West some are in the “cell church” movement or the “New Apostolic” movement. All these labels are fuzzy, and all these people are invisible on the “Status of Global Evangelization” map, so we have done a new map based on statistics in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. What we call “experience-oriented churches” are (except in the West) roughly the same as what the *Encyclopedia* calls “non-white indigenous” groups. Light blue indicates countries where more than 9% of all who call themselves “Christians” are “experience-oriented” members. Dark blue indicates countries with more than 20%.¹¹

The key text for the Third Frontier

Mk 9:38-40, “**Teacher, said John, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’ Do not stop him, Jesus said. No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.**” What we call “experience-oriented” Christians are often seen by older churches as being “out of control,” but Jesus obviously took a dim view of the way his disciples tried to establish their control over this Third Frontier person.

Let us pray for Third Frontier people:

¹¹ The percentages on our map are all too low because thousands of congregations that get counted as Anglicans, Methodists, etc. are functionally much closer to the beliefs and practices of the “experience-oriented churches” than they are to the official positions of their denominations. No one is willing to estimate their number, so we have simply used the “non-white indigenous” figures as explained above. The figure for China, 38%, is shown with a question mark because China data is far more debatable than data for other countries shown.

- † People who belong to churches whose leaders trust their own visions as much or more than they trust the Scripture
- † People (even congregational ministers and leaders) who can't read the Bible because they don't know how to read or they cannot get a copy of the Bible in a language they can read
- † People who are being led astray by false teachers, wolves in sheep's clothing
- † People who give too much honor to their church's founding prophet or leader, maybe even as much honor as they give to Christ or the Holy Spirit
- † People who are depending on emotions to keep their faith alive
- † People who belong to congregations where all the members have become Christians in the last 2-3 years
- † People whose faith is very unbalanced, perhaps emphasizing one narrow belief as if it were the key to all of Christianity
- † People who think that the main way to show zeal for God is to keep a lot of church rules and regulations
- † People who used to belong to experience-oriented churches but have drifted away, disillusioned by the lack of solid teaching
- † People who think they are the only real Christians because only they show zeal in a particular way or with a particular teaching

What is already happening on Frontier 3?

⇔ DISCUSS. What missionaries on your prayer list are working to disciple people who belong to experience-oriented churches and to help their churches become more biblical? What country are they in? What mission organization supports their work?

God is at work in new ways on Frontier 3. Here are some examples. You may want to add to the list or share what you know about these situations.

- House churches in China. Because of these small congregations, which often have a heavy emphasis on healing and the Holy Spirit, the number of Christians in China has multiplied by 20 to 30 times (2000-3000%) during the last fifty years.
- African Indigenous Churches (AICs) in Nigeria. Huge churches with strange names like "The Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim" are strengthening their theology, forming councils and joining forces with older churches in national and international associations.
- In at least eight African countries, African Indigenous Churches have invited overseas mission agencies to send Bible teachers or other resource people to assist them.
- Latin American explosion of small charismatic churches. Many church-oriented people are being reborn through the witness of the charismatic churches.

How can we move with God on Frontier 3?

The goal for Frontier 3 is to get the gospel really understood by people who are 110% committed to what they understand so far. How do we teach these experience-oriented Christians? As with Frontier 2, we have not yet given much thought to this as an aspect of mission.

One thing is sure. The work on Frontier 3 will not happen by itself. Experience-oriented people are often skeptical of people from other churches, who seem like Pharisees with all their doctrines and regulations. What can the experience-oriented members learn from people who lack the

power of the Spirit? Some of them do realize they need more teaching about the Bible and are prepared to get it wherever they can. But they do not want teachers who treat them as if they are “disoriented” or who begin by attacking them for their mistakes, nor do they want to sit under the tutelage of “teachers” who seem ignorant of the power of God.

⇔ DISCUSS. Suppose you were a leader of a Frontier 3 experience-oriented church. Your church had grown from 5 to 90 members in three years, even though you yourself have only been a Christian for four years and you have no Bible training. You hear that a foreigner is arriving in town and starting Bible classes for leaders like you. What will you want to know about that foreigner before you decide to join his class?

What if the people on Frontier 3 people were reoriented toward Omega?

The experience-oriented people (Frontier 3) may be the key to Frontiers 1 and 2 because they live on those frontiers. In China they challenge disoriented peoples (Frontier 1) to come to Christ. In Africa and Latin America they challenge church-oriented Christians (Frontier 2) to wake up. Though they understand less of the gospel than many of the older missionary-sending churches, they still manage to communicate more of it on Frontiers 1 and 2. Their spiritual life spills over to others.

Transparency 5

Fourth Frontier: Preaching to the World-Oriented Christians

Where is Frontier 4? Who are the “world-oriented” Christians?

“World-oriented” Christians are mostly Westerners, affected to a very large degree by the secularization of Europe and North America. “World-oriented” may sound like “worldly” (carnal) but it has nothing to do with worldliness. Unlike the “worldly” people who get sucked in by the temptations of this world, “world-oriented” people want to fight against the effects of sin in the world; that is, they want to do good in practical ways and campaign to improve the world. They get involved in programs to get rid of racism, poverty, oppression of women, pollution, etc. Though they may be passionately committed to this down-to-earth humanitarian agenda, they often see the “religious” side of Christianity as old-fashioned, optional or just plain wrong. Church membership, doctrine, Bible-reading and worship are tangential to their lives, valued only as far as they contribute to the task of changing the world.

Most of the world-oriented Christians are found in the churches often called “mainline” Protestant—Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and to a much lesser extent, Baptists. The National Council of Churches in the USA and the World Council of Churches link these and other groups in pursuit of projects that are mostly of a world-oriented type.

It can be expected that while Frontier 4 churches lose their emphasis on personal religious experience, the Bible and the church, they will also lose members. Transparency 5 shows how serious this has become for the “mainline” Protestant churches. In North America and Europe where the world-oriented agenda has been promoted the most and the church and the Bible have been emphasized least, there were actually 14 million fewer adherents in 1990 than in 1960, a 10% drop.¹² These churches not only failed to win converts during this period. They did not even retain the loyalty of millions of the children of those who were members in 1960.

In the rest of the world the mainline Protestant churches were somewhat less world-oriented than their North American and European cousins and they grew by about 23 million in Africa and 14 million in Asia. However, if we combine the totals for all mainline Protestants worldwide from 1960-1990, we see that they grew only a total of 17%, less than half a per cent per year, while the world population grew 75%. Meanwhile the Catholic and Orthodox churches (roughly equivalent to our “church-oriented” category, Frontier 2) grew by 52% and the Pentecostals and “indigenous marginals”¹³ (roughly equivalent to our “experience-oriented” category, Frontier 3) grew by a whopping 567%, more than seven times the rate of world population growth.

The key text for the Fourth Frontier

¹² The drop would be larger if it were not for the growth of the relatively few congregations in the mainline Protestant denominations which have not become as world-oriented as the rest. These congregations have continued to emphasize the Bible, personal conversion and the Holy Spirit at the local level even though these things have faded away at the denominational level.

¹³ These are groups like the African independent churches and the Chinese house churches. They are “indigenous” because they were started by local people, not planted directly by foreign missions. They are “marginal” in that they often do not associate with other churches (or the other churches deliberately marginalize them). Their theology also is sometimes on the margins of what can be called Christian.

Mk. 12:24, “**Jesus replied, ‘Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?’**” Jesus is replying to a trick question from the Sadducees, a question that was intended to show how silly it is to include the idea of life after death in a religious belief system. The Sadducees were religious leaders, apparently from the wealthy and powerful class in Jewish society at the time, who were not interested in religious speculations or regulations (trademarks of the Pharisees). Their agenda was much more down-to-earth. They imagined it was up to them to promote the welfare of the Jewish nation as a whole, and they took this to mean that they should accommodate themselves to the two dominant earthly realities of their day—Hellenistic (Greek-based) culture and the government of the Roman Empire.

Jesus’ challenge to these “world-oriented” religious leaders was two-pronged. He accused them of not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God. The Sadducees did “know” the Scriptures at one level. In fact, they saw themselves as the ones who were protecting the genuine, original Scriptures from later ideas and traditions such as life after death. Jesus’ point was that they had only used the Scriptures for their own purposes. They had fit the Scriptures in around their own values instead of realizing what the Scriptures were really pointing to. As for the power of God, they didn’t know that at any level. They had heard that Jesus healed people and cast out demons, but they were clueless in that area. No wonder they got viciously jealous when the disciples began doing many healing miracles in Jesus’ name (Acts 5:15-17).

Frontier 4, the world-oriented Christians, may be the best-hidden mission frontier in the world today. It is not hidden in some far-off corner of the mountains of Tajikistan. It is right under our noses, hidden inside some church building we drive by every day. When we think “mission,” this frontier rarely if ever crosses our minds.

Let us pray for Fourth Frontier people:

- ✝ People who think that Christian faith is only good to the extent that it contributes to social action
- ✝ People who are adamant about political correctness but indifferent about theological correctness
- ✝ People who think Christianity is only one of several good religions that should work together for a better world
- ✝ People who think the heart of the Christian message is, “Be good.”
- ✝ People who are watching their churches dwindle in membership and vitality
- ✝ People who have worn themselves out trying to do good in their programs for change, and who despair at the lack of results
- ✝ People who call themselves Christians but do not believe in healing miracles or evil spirits
- ✝ People who have gone to church every Sunday for decades without hearing a single sermon about heaven or hell

What is already happening on Frontier 4?

- ⇔ DISCUSS: The Sadducees became jealous when they saw the disciples do healing miracles (Acts 5:15-17). What signs of divine life are so obvious in your church and so conspicuously absent from the “world-oriented” churches in your community that those churches are jealous of your church or would be if they knew what is going on?

God is at work in a fascinating way on Frontier 4. Nearly every “world-oriented” church in the Western world is part of a denominational family that now has more members overseas than in the West. The “daughter” churches have outgrown the “mother” churches. In nearly every case these daughter churches have far more knowledge of the Scriptures and the power of God than the “mother” churches have. The daughters are more evangelical, more concerned about non-Christians, more inclined to be charismatic, more prayerful, and (not surprisingly) much faster-growing.

As the daughter churches are coming of age, they are starting to question some apparent signs of theological senility in the mother churches. The older churches seem to have forgotten who they are. For example, a group of non-Western Anglican bishops recently sent a joint letter to the Episcopal bishops in the USA (who are part of the Anglican denominational family), taking the American bishops to task for their open view on homosexuality.

This is the beginning of a completely new trend—the first shall be last and the last first. Churches in the West will increasingly become accountable theologically and spiritually to the non-Western churches in their denominational families. Churches outside the West will increasingly be able to preach to Frontier 4 people through the international structures of the denominational family.

How can we move with God on Frontier 4?

The goal for Frontier 4 is to preach the Scriptures and the power of God to people who have reduced Christianity to good deeds and social ethics. We have seen that God has set the stage for work on this frontier by growing churches in the non-Western world but not much work is actually underway yet. Is it time for you to promote it? Consider the following hypothetical case.

- ⇔ DISCUSS: Though your church is not Methodist,¹⁴ the Methodist Church in Kenya has made a contact with a member of your congregation who lived in Kenya for a couple of years. They say they feel called to send some Methodists from Kenya to lead seminars on prayer and healing in Methodist churches in the USA. The American Methodists won't pay for the program. The Kenyan Methodists say the American refusal only shows how badly the program is needed, and they think the American Methodists would agree if they could see the effects of a few pilot projects. The Kenyan Methodists can't afford to pay to send their people to lead the experimental seminars. Will you donate any money to enable some Kenyans to come and run one of these seminars at a Methodist church in your community if that church agrees to host it?
- ⇔ DISCUSS: One approach to mission among Frontier 4 people is to attack them for being “liberals.” Jesus' words to the Sadducees seem to be an attack—“Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?” However, this is actually Jesus' response to the Sadducees' attack on him. What attack, if any, are the “liberals” making on your church? Who is implying that your church is too religious, that you believe too many unnecessary things? How are you responding to demonstrate that you do know both the Scriptures and the power of God?

What if the people on Frontier 4 were reoriented to Omega?

¹⁴ If your church is in fact Methodist, change the name of the church in the example to some other Protestant denomination found in your community.

Frontier 4 people have a form of godliness (a concern about repairing and preventing the damage of sin on the world) but they deny its power. Non-Christians get a very wrong impression of Christianity from world-oriented Christians. Throughout North America and Europe, dying main-line Protestant congregations make Christianity look like a dying or dead religion. If Frontier 4 people came to know the Scriptures and the power of God, all this disinformation would cease.

In addition, a new relationship of interdependence would form between the Western and non-Western churches. The Frontier 4 people in the Western churches have tended to look down on the enthusiasm of the non-Western groups as if it were a childish kind of religion. They have supposed that mature religion is religion stripped of its religiosity and boiled down to its humanitarian aspects. If the Western churches learned the power of God from the non-Western churches, such a condescending attitude would become a thing of the past. A new unity would emerge, and unity is a compelling part of the church's testimony to what God did through Jesus (Jn. 17:20-23).

This would be doubly true in our day and age when the West dominates the world economically, politically, linguistically, technologically and culturally. God has not allowed the West to dominate the world spiritually. God has chosen the "weak" things of the world to convey the spiritual power that the "strong" do not have. If Fourth Frontier Western Christians would have their lives transformed by contact with non-Western Christians, Christ would be lifted up as unique, the one leveler of cultures, the one center who can unite Western and non-Western peoples in himself.

Transparency 6

Fifth Frontier: Prophecy to the Bible-Oriented Christians

Where is Frontier 5? Who are the “Bible-oriented Christians”?

Bible-oriented Christians are those who center their Christian faith on the authority of the Bible. On the Omega cube they are at Point 5, which can be seen as a combination of the “church-oriented” and “experience-oriented” positions (Points 2 and 3). However, the Bible-oriented Christians criticize the church-oriented ones for lacking the dimension of personal religious experience (“a personal relationship with Christ”) and they criticize the experience-oriented ones for going overboard on experience, losing the doctrinal control provided by Scripture and the church.

Bible-oriented Christians save their harshest criticism for the world-oriented Christians, who do not emphasize the Bible, religious experience or the church. Note that on the Omega cube the Bible-oriented people are diagonally across the cube from the world-oriented ones (Point 4). Where one is strong, the other is weak and vice versa. This is why there is so much tension between the two groups, who are often described as “evangelicals” and “ecumenicals.” It is also why there is so much promise and so much creative tension in the works of mission theologians like David Bosch, Stephen Neill and Lesslie Newbigin, all of whom lived with one foot firmly planted in each camp.

Transparency 6 is a map of the suffering in the world. Life is relatively easy in the yellow countries and progressively harder as the shades turn to dark red. The green “raindrop” areas on the map are people groups where evangelicals are numerous. Notice that the raindrops are concentrated in two parts of the world, the least suffering (yellow) and the most suffering (dark red). What God wants on Frontier 5 is a deep conversion of these Bible-oriented Christians, a conversion from a two-dimensional, phony “faith” to a three-dimensional religious life including love for the created world and the human beings, body and soul, who populate it.

Ironically this conversion will make the Bible-oriented people more world-oriented and less world-oriented at the same time. The rich focus their lives on the increase and protection of wealth; the poor focus theirs on the envy and pursuit of it. This conversion will increase a new and proper way of being “world-oriented” which is related not to wealth but to people and society. This is the kind of world-orientedness we find in the Lord’s Prayer, which is a prayer for the transformation of this world under the kingly control of Christ, the Omega (Mt. 6:9-13).

Concern about transforming the world is not simply a matter of giving away a little more money. As I Cor. 13:3 says, “If I give all I possess to the poor . . . but have not love, I gain nothing.” God wants a deep change in the Fifth Frontier people, integrating their religious activity like Bible study with world-oriented love. This gives them new eyes. It enables those who have been looking for Christ in the Bible to start seeing Christ in the world; that is, any physical help or encouragement given to any needy person is literally given to Christ himself (Mt. 25:38-40). To put love into action toward the needy is to complete the pulsating love cycle—love flows from Christ to us and we give it back to him by giving to the needy.

The key text for the Fifth Frontier

I Jn. 4:20, “**For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.**” It is simply not possible for a person to focus life on “loving God” through Bible study, church attendance and “personal relationship with Christ” and at the same time to fail to love his brother. Nor is it possible to say that loving a brother or sister ends with loving his or her soul.

Love smashes through that kind of sham distinction. Love is interested in people’s welfare, not merely their religious welfare. By reducing the gospel to a “religious” message, Bible-oriented people put a box around their love and earn themselves the prophetic rebuke of I John 4. Love will not live in captivity; it cannot be domesticated. If we try to box it in, it will either break out or die.

Let us pray for Fifth Frontier people:

- † People who think that religion is about the soul and the next world as opposed to the body and this world
- † People who think that religion is an individual, private matter as opposed to anything to do with society, history or creation
- † People who are caught up in religious revivals like the huge one that went on for thirty years in Rwanda but never touched the down-to-earth issue of tribalism that exploded into genocide by “Christians” against “Christians”
- † People struggling with situations where bribery and corruption are demanded of everyone as the normal way of getting anything done
- † People who know the Bible very well but do not know the first thing about the joy of giving
- † People who can pass a theological exam with flying colors but who never do anything to better their neighborhoods and communities
- † People who never miss a meeting at church and never have a meeting with their neighbors
- † People who want to know as much as possible about the Bible and as little as possible about inner cities or the Third World.
- † People who “give their lives to God” but still consider their money to be their own except for a certain percentage that “belongs to God”
- † People who have resigned themselves to poverty and see religious meetings as an occasional escape from their desperate situation in this world
- † People who think they are too poor to give anything away

What is already happening on Frontier 5?

- ⇔ DISCUSS. What missionaries on your prayer list are conveying Christ’s love by serving, encouraging and empowering the needy? How would your prayers for those people change if you began to think of the needy as personifications¹⁵ of Christ? In the light of Matthew 25:38-40, is that the way we should see the needy?
- ⇔ DISCUSS: What appeals have you heard lately for people to care for the needy or get involved in efforts to improve the world? How do you usually react?

¹⁵ A “personification” is not an “incarnation” or a “reincarnation” but a human representation, a human being who is a concrete example of something not immediately visible. Usually the “something” is an abstraction. For example we might say, “He is humility personified.”

God is at work on Frontier 5. Here are some past and present examples. You may want to add to the list or share what you know about these trends.

- In international gatherings in the past three decades, Latin American evangelicals such as Orlando Costas and Samuel Escobar have steadily pushed Western evangelicals toward recognizing the need for being properly “world-oriented.”
- The World Evangelical Fellowship has recently begun promoting a five-pronged mission thrust in which concern for social and physical matters is prominent.
- The International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians, led by Vinay Samuel of India and Christopher Sugden of Britain, has steadily pushed for the integration of evangelical theology and Christ-like compassion.
- A growing number of American evangelicals such as Jim Wallis, Ron Sider, Bryant Myers and Roger Greenway are calling evangelicals to “holistic” mission.

How can we move with God on Frontier 5?

The goal of mission on Frontier 5 is to get Christians to *be* good news, not just to know it and talk about it (or give money to send other people around the world to talk about it).

- ⇔ DISCUSS. Besides giving money away, what do you think it means for Christians to *be* good news? What is the difference between people you know who *are* good news and those who just believe in it or talk about it?
- ⇔ DISCUSS. Jesus once asked, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Lk. 6:46) What are some of the many things he said about money that we need to hear and obey?
- ⇔ DISCUSS. Many Bible-oriented Christians are afraid that if we increase our emphasis on physical, economic, social and political matters as part of our “mission” in the world, that will take away resources that would have been used for evangelism. What would you say about this concern?

What if Frontier 5 people were reoriented toward Omega?

We began this explanation of Frontier 5 by noting how much the Bible-oriented people criticize everyone else. Unless their concern about truth is matched and balanced by their concern about the world, these people will come across as judgmental or even hateful. However, if evangelicals (especially Western ones) got swept up in a tidal wave of gospel-driven love for the hurting people of the world, they would transform themselves and perhaps their whole countries.

Their evangelistic efforts would have far more integrity and credibility. Their good works and their loving attitude would bring glory to God around the world (Mt. 5:16). The whole world would know that God is alive and the Christian message is true because they could see it breaking down the indifference of Christians in rich countries.

Talk is cheap. The best form of witness is to do something sacrificial that demands an explanation. That is what Jesus did on the cross, the original “love in action” that we can pass on by our love in action, whether we are rich or poor. When people ask us to explain our startling action, they are asking us to tell them the gospel. Let’s give them something to talk about!

Transparency 7

From Lopsidedness to Idolatry

Frontiers 2-5 are all people and groups who think they are the “real” Christians, but as we have seen, they are all lopsided in one way or the other. They suppose that when they have reached the maximum point on one or two of the dimensions of the cube, they have arrived. From their self-confident position, they point out how far the others have strayed from “real” Christianity. This is a picture of polarization and division.

What is needed is for them all to reorient themselves toward the Omega Point on the cube instead of claiming that their own Point (2, 3, 4 or 5) is the same as the Omega Point. Jesus Christ, the true Omega, cannot be reduced to one dimension. His lordship or control is three-dimensional. As John 14:6 puts it, he is the Way (which the world-oriented emphasize), the Truth (which the church-oriented and Bible-oriented emphasize) and the Life (which the experience-oriented emphasize).

By missing his three-dimensional control, various groups of Christians have set up their own standards for measuring Christianity. The oldest of these is called “orthodoxy,” or literally, “correct praise.” The word orthodoxy has come to be focused on doctrines more than praise or worship. The church is seen by the “church-oriented” groups (Point 2) as the authority that defines and enforces these doctrines. The claim of “papal infallibility” is one indication of this view. The evangelical view of biblical infallibility (Point 4) is a similar attempt to define and enforce orthodoxy but it does not allow any one church to have control of the process.

A more recent standard for measuring Christianity is “orthopraxis,” “correct practice.” This is advocated by the world-oriented Christians who are more concerned about works than about religious experience or doctrine. A third standard could be called “orthopyre,” “correct fire,” that is, correct evidence of the fire, life and power of the Holy Spirit.

As people reorient themselves toward Omega and begin moving toward Omega, they discover that they are converging. The convergence is not a goal in itself; it is only a byproduct of reorientation to Omega. But what a byproduct! As the churches converge, they communicate a well-balanced gospel which orients unreached people much more directly toward Christ in his wholeness. The half-truths of points 2, 3, 4 and 5 are no longer as distracting as they were.

The call for lopsided Christians to reorient to Omega and converge is not merely a call for “Christian unity” or for more effective witness. It is a life-and-death call to prevent idolatry among Christians. The danger is real and the cube illustrates it clearly. When a person or group reaches corner 2, 3, 4 or 5, there is a terrific temptation to choose a new point of orientation that would keep them moving in the same direction; that is, to become even more lopsided in that way. These new points of orientation are shown as points 2A, 3A, 4A and 5A, and they are all idols.¹⁶ They do not look like “idols” because they are not bad things in themselves and they are not consciously worshiped; nevertheless they subtly manage to function as idols—false gods.

¹⁶ There is already a word like “idolatry” in use for one of these problems—“bibliolatry” means treating the Bible rather than God as the bedrock of faith. We could coin three other terms for the other problems: ecclesiolatry, trusting the church as a functional substitute for the Head of the Church; charismolatry, seeking the gifts of the Holy Spirit more than Christ; and seculolatry, treating the “humanization” of the world as if it were more important than the Christianization of the world.

Notice that a person who starts at Point 1 and moves toward any of the other points (such as Point 2) is gradually getting closer to Omega until he or she reaches Point 2. While approaching Point 2, people can still see Omega out of the corner of their eyes. But as soon as people move beyond Point 2 toward 2A, they start moving away from Omega and letting Omega gradually slip out of view behind them. Fixation on Point 2A causes them to lose sight of Omega or Christ. Point 2A becomes a phony substitute for Christ, which is the literal meaning of the Greek word usually translated “anti-Christ.”

“Mission” means pulling people’s attention back to Christ, not letting lopsidedness turn into idolatry. Just as mission on Frontier 1 means pulling people out of idolatry, mission on the other four Frontiers means preventing them from slipping into idolatry of a new kind. All of this is “repentance” or reorientation, emphasizing what they are turning toward rather than what they are turning away from.

In practice this can mean humbling or even humiliation for all the lopsided people. When they turn toward Omega (instead of toward 2A, 3A, etc.) they quit holding up orthodoxy, orthopraxis or orthopyre as the final measure of Christianity. They turn away from their strong dimension(s) and realize how weak they are in the other dimension(s). They may even have to ask for help or guidance from the people who are strong in those areas. However, the goal is never to move from one lopsided corner to another, such as from Point 2 to Point 3. It is always to help each other move toward Omega, the point of absolute integrity, the fullness of all the dimensions.

Transparency 8

Thinking outside the Box

While discussing idolatry we ventured “outside the box,” and we need to do that again in order to find the Sixth Frontier of mission. Transparency 8 shows a second cube which is a reverse image of the first one. The upper cube represents truth; the lower one represents falsehood. If people at Point 1 are drawn into the upper cube, they come under Omega’s control and feel liberated. If instead they move into the lower cube, they come under its control and feel dominated, oppressed, possessed.

The reason is not hard to see. At the bottom of the second cube is the Greek letter delta (Δ), standing for the word *diabolos*, the “diabolical” enemy of Christ. He has a mission of his own, which is to thwart the mission of Jesus Christ. He will use all the powers at his command to get that to happen.

His strategy is to subvert each of the three dimensions of the Omega cube. In opposition to the truth dimension, he specializes in lies and distortions as part of a massive disinformation campaign. In opposition to the religious experience dimension, he promotes intellectual doubts and spiritual frigidity. In opposition to the “love-in-action” dimension, he turns hearts to stone and keeps hands idle.

Though his success rate falls a million miles short of what he would like, he is such a convincing liar that he does actually entrap some people. Few of them become out and out “Satanists” but that does not bother him much. He is very pleased if in practice they oppose the Omega as vehemently as he does. We may call these people the “anti-Christians,” the enemies of everything that Christians stand for.

Satan manipulates them into working for his top priority—to shut up all those Christians who are involved in the mission of calling others to reorient themselves to the Omega Point. These people embody the Holy Spirit, their living connection to the power of the Omega Point. Of course that power is vastly superior to the enemy’s power on every front. The truth exposes his lies, miraculous signs such as healing and exorcism expose his weakness, loving deeds expose his coldness and emptiness. He knows all of this painfully well but still he fights his losing battle, snarling to the end, trying to take as many people down with him as he can.

Transparency 9

Sixth Frontier: Blessing the Anti-Christians

Where is Frontier 6? Who are the “anti-Christians”?

For many years the anti-Christians were primarily the communist governments. With the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, the picture is changing drastically. Even in countries that are still communist (like China and Cuba) the governments are not enforcing their anti-Christian laws quite as strictly as they used to. But harassment and persecution of Christians is still very common in these and many other countries, which can be grouped loosely into four types:

- 1) countries radically committed to Islam as a national religion (such as Saudi Arabia and Iran)
- 2) countries where Islamic rulers feel politically threatened by large blocs of Christians in the country (such as Sudan and, until recently, Nigeria)
- 3) countries where persecution is done unofficially by Hindu or Muslim fundamentalist groups that the government is unwilling or unable to control; in such cases the government may see Christian evangelization as a provocative act and try to restrict it (such as Indonesia and India)
- 4) countries that remain hard-line communist states (such as North Korea and Laos)

In pluralistic or democratic countries, the enemy’s tactic is usually not government regulation of religion but an assortment of informal ridicule and hassle throughout the society. This can be surprisingly effective. Christians who enjoy the comforts of a democratic society soon learn that it is easier and more comfortable to keep their faith a secret. They decide not to fight the battle necessary to win a hearing. They content themselves with the thought that the society is leaving them perfectly “free” to assemble for worship as they wish, and they even thank God for this “freedom.” They do not see that containment of their witness is the enemy’s first victory, and that those who remain contained will eventually wither away in their church buildings. As has been said, “The church lives by mission as a fire lives by burning.”

The key text for the Sixth Frontier

Lk. 6:27-28, ***“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”*** Jesus knew the Sixth Frontier would be a huge challenge for his followers and he prepared them very carefully to deal with it. He taught them that they should never be surprised by persecution, feel like passive victims or try to fight fire with fire. Instead they should always keep the initiative, a loving initiative, toward their persecutors.

Let us pray for Sixth Frontier people:

- ✠ People who think that Christianity has to be opposed because it is not what God wants for the world
- ✠ People who think that Christianity like all religions is a delusion since there is no God
- ✠ People who think that Christians have to be opposed because they are always trying to make laws that interfere with other people’s lifestyles
- ✠ People who are demon-possessed or demon-influenced to attack Christians

- † People in power whose corruption and oppressiveness is rightly criticized by Christians
- † People who are against Christians because they had a bad experience in a church or with a so-called Christian
- † People who think that all Christians are fakes and hypocrites
- † People who think that Christianity is fine for Christians, but they should not try to convert others
- † People who think that Christianity will undermine their own culture, family or nation
- † People who think that Jesus was a good teacher but that “Christianity” was something he never intended (his followers created it out of their misunderstanding of him)

What is already happening on Frontier 6?

- ⇔ DISCUSS. What missionaries on your prayer list are working in an anti-Christian area? What region are they in? (they may not want people to mention the specific country).
- ⇔ DISCUSS. What “anti-Christians” forces do you encounter personally? Where and how do they do things that make you feel like keeping your mouth shut about Christ? How do you battle these forces and get your mouth open?

God is at work in new ways on Frontier 6. Here are some examples. You may want to add to the list or share what you know about these situations.

- India. It is estimated that during 1998 there were more attacks on Christians in India than in the previous 50 years put together. Churches were burned, people were beaten by mobs, a few were raped or murdered. On December 4th, 1998, the Christians held a national non-violent protest day, appealing to all levels of the Indian government to uphold the constitutional rights of India’s minorities.
- Indonesia. Since the national crisis of 1998, which included some attacks on Christians, there has been more openness to hearing the gospel than ever before. Local Christians and foreign missionaries cannot explain it but they are seeing it on a wide scale. People who never listened are listening now, and some are coming to Christ.
- Anti-Western feelings. In the past in many places like India, China, the Middle East, and among traditional cultures in Africa, the anti-Christians did not like Christianity because they considered it a foreign religion or even a political tool of foreign governments. This objection loses its force as local Christian movements grow and as they show there is a way to be a true Christian without betraying one’s culture or nation.
- China. For decades only one Protestant denomination has been legally recognized by the Chinese government. All house churches were unofficial and therefore illegal. The government is considering changing the law that bans them.
- Cuba. In 1998 Cuba allowed a visit from the Pope and the public celebration of Christmas, and in 1999 permission was granted for the first open-air Protestant evangelistic concerts/meetings.

How can we move with God on Frontier 6?

Unlike the first Five Frontiers, the Sixth Frontier is not one that God sends us out to seek. Instead it comes to us. When it strikes, how do we bless the anti-Christians? Any way we can. We need to

bless them, bless them up, down and sideways, bless them steadily, bless them persistently whether they change or not. Persecution is a fight to the finish, and at the finish our blessing has to outlast their persecution.

There are many warnings and instructions in the New Testament about dealing with our persecutors. Besides blessing them we also have to be “wise as serpents, harmless as doves;” that is, not give our enemies any pretext to attack us. When put on the spot, we need to depend on the Holy Spirit to tell us what to say rather than try to plan it out ahead of time (Mt. 10:16, 19). But even before we are on the spot, we are to teach and explain the gospel as best we can, clearing up the misunderstandings our enemies may have.

Sometimes God takes care of the Sixth Frontier himself. The Apostle Paul was a “Sixth Frontier” person before his conversion. He was not converted by any strategy of the Christians. God had his own “Damascus road” method (Acts 9:1-19), possibly prepared by the way Stephen accepted his martyrdom as Paul held the coats of his executioners (Acts 7:57-60).

⇔ DISCUSS. Christians have suffered severe restriction and persecution in countries like Sudan, China, Saudi Arabia and North Korea. What have you heard about the persecution of missionaries or local Christians there or elsewhere during the past year?

⇔ DISCUSS. What can Christians who live in “the land of the free” do in order to “mourn with those who mourn” under persecution (Ro. 12:15)? How do you keep yourself from forgetting all about the persecuted Christians as you go about your daily life?

⇔ DISCUSS. What is your estimate of the ratio of time we spend praying for Christians under persecution to the time we spend blessing their persecutors? 2 to 1, 10 to 1, 100 to 1? Other? What do you think the ratio should be?


What if Frontier 6 people were reoriented toward Omega?

The greatest missionary in the history of the church was a converted anti-Christian, the Apostle Paul. How can the gates of hell prevail when people who are leading the battle against Christianity switch sides and lead the charge against hell? All hell won't break loose; all hell will break down! Imagine the impact if only a handful of Muslims and Hindus who are leading the persecution of Christians would be converted.

Transparency 10

The Key Text for Each Frontier

Frontier 1: The Disoriented or Misoriented, Mt. 24:14 (red background)

 “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world. . .”


Matthew 24:14 says that the good news must be told to all peoples. The red areas on the First Frontier map are the peoples who up till today have had least opportunity to hear. The concept of the 10/40 Window (shown on Transparency 2) rightly calls attention to these groups.

Frontier 2: Church-oriented Christians, Mt. 3:9 (yellow background)

 “Do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’. . .”

Church-oriented Christians, many of whom are in the yellow areas of the Second Frontier map, need a wake-up call. Ethnic identity, baptism and church membership are not the “fruits” in keeping with reorientation toward Omega. The real fruits are spiritual vitality, compassion for the world and a deeper commitment to the church itself.

Frontier 3: Experience-oriented Christians, Mk. 9:40 (blue background)

 “Whoever is not against us is for us.”


Mark 9:40 shows us how to approach experience-oriented Christians, indicated by the blue countries on the Third Frontier map. In verses 38 and 39 (just before this quote), we see that the disciples were very much like us. They saw a man driving out demons in Jesus’ name and they told him to stop because he was “not one of us.” Jesus told them not to interfere, and he is telling us the same thing today. Experience-oriented people are working miracles in his name, and we should not get in their way. Instead we need to figure out what God has already done in their lives, what they already understand and what they are missing. Then we can teach them as well as grow together with them toward maturity.

Frontier 4: World-oriented Christians, Mk 12:24 (purple background)

 “. . .you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”

The Fourth Frontier graph shows the decline of churches that have reduced the gospel to a humanitarian message. Fourth Frontier people need preaching, but they have tuned out most biblical preachers. They need preaching like Jesus gave the Sadducees—a fresh, brilliant biblical insight that pinpoints the central mistake of their current way of looking at God and his word, coming from a person who is obviously living and working by the power of God.


Frontier 5: Bible-oriented Christians, I Jn. 4:20 (green background)

 “For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”

The prophetic challenge of I John may grate on our ears harder than any of the other texts. It exposes the fact that we Christians in the green “raindrop” areas on the Fifth Frontier map are still far from the Omega Point. We may have been teaching Sunday School for 40 years. We may have attended lots of prayer meetings for missionaries. Our Bible knowledge and our “personal relationship with Christ” seem to be fine, but we still have to face the fact that our compassion for this world is superficial. In flat contradiction to the Scripture we say we revere, we have separated

“love for God” from concern about the problems and pains of our brothers and sisters in this world.

Frontier 6: Anti-Christians, Lk. 6:28 (orange background)

 “Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

There have been many enemies of Christianity through the centuries. Persecution goes on today in many places, as we saw in the orange areas on the Sixth Frontier map. If we love our enemies, we must bless them. This is a sign to them, a sign that God is doing some new thing they cannot comprehend. Perhaps the salve for their eyes will be the blood from our wounds.

Conclusion

We have taken a global look at the Six Frontiers, but the same Six Frontiers can probably be found in your neighborhood, workplace or school. You probably know people who are typical of each of the Frontiers. These are the challenges for Christians who are taking God’s love anywhere in his creation.

The more we pay attention to all six verses and all Six Frontiers, the closer we come to fulfilling the common motto, **“The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.”** The whole gospel is the Omega gospel, the call to reorient our lives to receive the liberating control of Jesus Christ. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new! . . . I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life’” (Rev. 21:5-6).

As we carry the news of Omega to the Six Frontiers, we are ever more closely in step with the coming announcement: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). In other words, “What had been under the oppressive sway of Delta has come under the liberating control of Omega.” Long live the King! Hallelujah!

The Omega Prayer

Leader: Our Father in heaven, accomplish your mission.

Response: Yes, Lord, accomplish your mission.

Leader: Shepherd of lost sheep, stretch us to evangelize the disoriented, turning them to you, the Omega.

Response: May your name be known and respected.

Leader: Reviver of the dry bones, empower us to awaken the church-oriented Christians, helping them to look beyond the church to you, the Omega.

Response: May your liberating control come.

Leader: Master teacher, guide us to teach the experience-oriented Christians, helping them to look beyond their experience to you, the Omega.

Response: May your liberating control come.

Leader: Living Word and truth, inspire us to preach to the world-oriented Christians, helping them to look beyond the world to you, the Omega.

Response: May your will be done.

Leader: You who are love in action, give us prophetic words for the Bible-oriented Christians, helping them to look beyond the Bible to you, the Omega.

Response: May your will be done.

Leader: Crucified and forgiving Lord, bless the anti-Christians who hate us just like they hate you.

Response: May all who see us see beyond us to you.

Leader: Our Father in heaven, accomplish your mission.

Response: Yes, Lord, accomplish your mission. Yes.