

The World is Changing

By Steve Saint

January 2008

Change in the way things are done:

Surgery
Communications
Car industry
Manufacturing in general

Change in who is leading new trends:

India leading in medical services
Medical holiday / offshore health services
India coming on fast in Technical Services
India becoming a major leader in Information Technology
China overnight becoming a major buyer of energy, steel, plastics
Why? Because they are becoming the world's leading manufacture

Can you remember when the term "Made in Japan" was used to poke fun? You know, we would turn over a friend's new 'china' and say, "What, 'china' made in Japan!" and everyone would laugh. Remember, "Made in Japan" used to be synonymous with "Cheap". Speaking of Japan, I remember when 'Honda' meant motorcycles. Now, you say "Honda" and most people will think of their Accord, the most popular car probably in the entire world. By the way, I just read that Toyota is very soon, if they aren't already the world's largest car manufacturer passing up Ford.

While we are on the subject of car manufacturers, I hate to bring up the subject but Chrysler is struggling to stay alive and now, so is General Motors. In my lifetime we have gone from absolute domination of the automobile industry to having the U.S. car industry on life support. We relaxed while we became obsolete. Not long ago they were copying us. Now, it appears our only hope is to copy them.

But watch out Japan. Korea is nipping at your heels and China is gunning for a big share of the auto industry. I just saw a new Kia, Amanti in 'Consumer Reports' that looks like a Mercedes, only for about a third the price. And the 'Reports' gave it high marks.

We used to be the manufacturing center of the world. Not any more? I bought a shop grinder not too long ago. It had a heavy duty motor with a grinding wheel on one side and a heavy metal brush on the other side. It came with its own stand and a goose neck light and a couple of other bells and whistles. Cost? \$39.00.

How can anyone possibly sell a grinder with a light and a stand in a nice box, shipped half way around the world – for \$39.00? It is no wonder we are no longer a center of manufacturing. Why don't you do your own little experiment to see where our goods are coming from. Go to Wall Mart and see where the clothes and toys and appliances you buy are coming from.

I have spent a lot of time trying to find a solution to a fundamental problem that plagued mission efforts in the last century – Dependency. I have to confess that I just naturally think of 'Dependency' as others depending on us. My bad! Have you realized how dependent we are becoming on other countries? Not just for manufactured goods but also for key services. My wife Ginny just recently ran across some statistics on the Internet under the heading "Interesting Facts About India." This is from "An Official Website For Tourism Guild of Agra". It probably caught Ginny's attention

because we just came back from a trip to India in which I-Tec, the mission we work for (the Indigenous Peoples' Technology and Education Center) helped train some Indian Christians to be Lay Dental Technicians so they could minister to the physical as well as the spiritual needs of hurting people in their country who don't have access to medical or dental care.

The Agra web site gives the following statistics amongst others. It states that :

13% of Xerox employees are Indians
17% of Intel employees are Indians
28% of IBM employees are Indians
34% of Microsoft employees are Indians

It also claims that:

36% of NASA employees are Indians (and finally, get this)
38% of Doctors in America are Indian

I would like to verify some of these numbers before believing them but I hesitate to just write them off either. There really are some startling changes taking place in the world these days. My mind began to race as all kinds of information I have stored away in unrelated parts of my memory started to congeal around these statistics. Our oldest son Shaun has just begun a surgical practice in a nearby Florida community. A list of other doctors working at the hospital shocked me. The great majority of them have Indian and Pakistani last names.

I also just recently found out that a significant Information Technology company that started right here in our little city in Central Florida has now moved almost all of its operation to India. Have you called for product service recently? You very likely talked to someone in India and the product you were calling about was made in some other foreign country. I'm telling you, our world is changing and the implications take my breath away sometimes. I find myself wondering what the future is going to be like for my growing number of grandchildren. It is risky to try to predict what is going to take place in the future, especially in a time of rapid change. But, I'm going to take a chance and tell you what I think is going to have to change in the future as a result of changes that have already been taking place in our world.

I predict that the standard of living in the U.S. which has long been the highest in the world is going to start falling as other countries catch up. For a long time we have been buying more goods from the rest of the world than we have been able to sell them. Politicians use terms like "balance of trade deficit." What is really happening is that our country is going into debt to other countries. If you think I'm exaggerating, look at what has been happening to the value of the U.S. dollar. We are losing ground rapidly even against Canada's currency. Not too long ago it took about one and a third Canadian dollars to equal one U.S. dollar. I just checked, and for the first time that I can ever remember it happening, the Canadian Dollar is actually worth more than ours.

We can't compete in manufacturing. More and more of our service industry and Information Technology industry is being moved off shore. Where can we compete any more? Fortunately we are still the best idea people in the world. And, we are still the most innovative society on earth. Computers, Cell Phones, GPS technology, the Internet, super production farming, and most other world changing innovations have their roots right here in our incredible country. Whenever there is a need for a big solution in our world, the solution will most likely say "Made in the U.S.A."

The same is true in Missions. Big changes are taking place. We still have a key role to play if

we are willing, but it is not what it used to be. The Christian church in North America was once the major exporter of Christ's Gospel to the rest of the world. We have long thought about world missions as being "From the West to the Rest". That is still the way most Christians in North America see it. But that is not the way it is anymore. The reality is that the United States is quickly becoming to world missions what we have become to the global automotive industry. We are still a player, and we can still make a serious contribution but only if we snap out of our stupor, take an honest look at who we are, what we have to offer and how we are perceived by the rest of the world. We need to accept a limited role concentrating on what we have to offer that the rest of the missions world needs. Let me be even more frank, I hope without being offensive. I believe that if the global missions industry did not need and want our 'money', many of them and maybe even most of them would not want our help in reaching their regions for Christ.

I honestly believe that if our brothers and sisters in the developing world were not dependent on our incredible wealth, many of our 'Short Term Mission' excursions into their world would not find a warm reception. In fact, I think many of these adventure vacations, no matter how well intentioned, would have a difficult time finding some place to go and something to build or paint. And I think that a growing number of our long term missions undertakings would find foreign countries closed to us. Actually, that is already happening. Many doors are already closing to our 'Old Model' missionary efforts.

It would be reasonable to ask yourself why I concern myself with what is happening in North American missions outside of the small role God has called me to, which is figuring out how to train and equip indigenous believers to reach their own people. The answer is super simple. I have had the opportunity to live on both sides of missions. The sending side and the receiving side. The reason I feel a responsibility to say publicly that I think we are on our way out as a major contributor to World Missionary Efforts.

When I think of North American Missions I think of cup holders. The last U.S. car I owned before buying my current Isuzu Rodeo was designed and built here in the U.S. You know what my most frequent complaint about that car was – that's right, it had no cup holders. I ate lunch in my car on the go and there was no place to put my cup. I know that seems like a small thing but every Japanese car back then had cup holders. I got the idea that U.S. car companies just didn't care what the marketplace needed or wanted. I think that is precisely what is happening in missions here in the U.S. I feel bad about the cup-holder issue as I look back. Not that I didn't have cup-holders for so many years but that I never did anything about it to my car dealer and I never wrote Chrysler about their oversight. Do you think they would have put cup holders into the next year's model just because of a call or letter from me? I don't think so. But what if thousands of us had been loyal enough to point out what we saw as a small but crucial flaw in North American automobiles.

The easiest thing for me to do regarding the slide toward oblivion that I perceive in North American missions is simply to say nothing and next time 'buy Japanese'. But I think that would be irresponsible. The responsible thing to do about the cup-holders would have been to say something about it. I think it is much more important to say something about trends that I see in North American Missions. Consider a little story hidden away back in Ezekiel chapter 33. The setting is an old fortress city surrounded by a barrier wall with towers on it. This passage of the Bible tells that the people in the city obviously have to go outside the city to work their fields. While they are outside the city, they are exposed to their enemies. So, it was their custom to put watch-men in the towers along the city wall who would watch for the approach of any enemies and who would then warn the people.

There is a warning in this little passage if we read a little further on. It says that if the watch-man sees an enemy coming and warns the people they have two choices. They can heed the warning and run back inside the city walls, in which case they will be safe. Or, they can ignore the watch-man's warning and keep on working their fields in which case they might be killed or taken into captivity as slaves. That part is obvious. But there is another option and the lesson of this Bible passage is in this last part.

It says, (this is my paraphrase) If the watch-man sees the enemy coming and doesn't warn the people outside the walls, they will suffer the same fate as if they had been warned but ignored the warning." The result for the people in the fields is the same. But here is the principle that God wanted me to know about this last alternative. If I am the watch-man and I see something bad about to happen and I don't warn those who can't see what I can; they will suffer but I will be held responsible by God for their fate.

World change sometimes comes slowly but it can also take place very quickly. Did you realize that at the beginning of World War II, some countries still had cavalry regiments. When Germany invaded Poland soldiers on one side actually attacked tanks on the other side with sabers and small rifles. Germany overran Poland in just a few days because Poland was out of touch with the times. I honestly believe that traditional North American Missionary efforts are out of touch with the realities of today's world. And good motives are not an excuse for poor stewardship of the opportunities and resources that God has entrusted to us to share His message with our world.

My concern isn't just what will happen to people around the world if we don't tell them of God's offer of redemption through Jesus. My concern is also for us. I think there is a direct correlation between our obedience to do what God tells us to do and His blessings on our country. European spiritual fervor expressed itself in the opening of modern world missions. As European companies ventured into the world to establish trading routes, they took the Gospel with them to places it had never reached before. European names like Martin Luther were at the center of Christian church reformation that led to a new world missionary movement. William Carey considered the 'father of modern missions' was European. So were many other famous Christian names like Livingston and Taylor and Wycliffe.

It wasn't really very long ago that main land Europe was at the center of world missions. Next it was the small but powerful island nations called Great Britain. Now, just a few decades later, those countries that were the major exporters of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are now the most secular nations on earth. The Christian church fared better under atheistic communism in Eastern Europe than it has in the free countries of Western Europe.

Do you know what I hear from Christians in Africa and Asia and South America. They say they are afraid that North America is going the way that Europe went. Our main line denominations are less and less committed to the Bible as their only rule of faith and conduct. As an example, many in those churches openly advocate for the ordination and acceptance of actively homosexual church leaders. And the situation is not all that much better in more conservative, fundamental churches if they are all lumped together as a whole. Divorce is as high as the national average or very close to it. Promiscuity of our children is up and integrity is down. And missions is characterized more by tradition than Christ's Great Commission. Modern mission trends in the U.S. are dictated more by what makes us feel significant than what will actually get the job done. We are thinking much more about 'adventure and challenge' and much less about 'obedience and sacrifice'.

I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that the dominant view in those parts of the world where we send most North American missionaries is that we are:

1. Dominating – we feel that we should control ministry when we are involved. We believe in the “Golden Rule”, he who controls the gold makes the rules.
2. Arrogant – we feel that we know best what the receivers of our work need and
3. We don't listen – we think a good partnership is where we talk and others listen.
4. Looking for Feel Good Ministry – missions has become about us instead of about the people who need to know God loves them and has a plan for them.

This is what Christians have told me when I have honestly asked them to tell me their honest view of North American Missions as a whole. That is what Christians in other countries frequently tell me when I ask them what they think about North American Missions. But do you know what they say when I ask them if we still have anything to offer them in reaching their countries for Christ? They tell me they need three primary things we have to offer that no one else really has:

1. They want our money. - Unfortunately just giving money is a mixed blessing. It usually creates just about as many problems as it fixes. But we could use our money to create jobs for Christians in other parts of the world so they can support their own ministries. When we just give money we end up we end up in ‘control’ and the national believers we call ‘partners’ see us as dominating and arrogant.
2. They want our friendship. – Many of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world are part of a persecuted minority. They need to know that they aren't forgotten. They want to know that they aren't alone. Our friendship, if humbly given, is a great encouragement to them. Even if they don't like our dominating and arrogant attitude or the fact that we don't often listen to them, they want to emulate what we have done just not the way we have done it.
3. They want us to help them figure out how to do what God has called them to do. We aren't just creative when it comes to inventing new technologies. We are also extremely creative when it comes to figuring out how to overcome logistical barriers and technological obstacles. We are also masterful organizers.

I just made a call from my cell phone driving down the road and talked to a friend who told me he was in Bethlehem – half way around the world. The world really is changing fast. I've got a tiny electronic device in my pocket, about the size of my little finger that contains the manuscripts for the last three books I've written and there is room for about twenty more. How can that be? My car has almost a hundred thousand miles on it and all I've had to do to it is change the oil twenty five times and the tires and wipers once. We can fall asleep on an airliner and wake up in Europe or Africa or South America without making a stop. It doesn't even seem incredible any more.

We also have the possibility of accomplishing Christ's commission to tell everyone that he loves them, wants to be reconciled to them and already paid for their freedom. We can't do it by ourselves but we can still be an important part, if we will play our part. In our world we are the front line troops. In the rest of the world our role is different. The part we can best play there is to train and equip God Followers who are already there to do what God has called them to do.

That is what we are doing at Itec. Thank you for helping and for being a critical part of what we do!