

The Story of the Battle for Our Planet

The Little-known and Hazardous Task of Declaring God’s Glory among All Peoples

An Overview of the World Christian Foundations Program

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Overview

Foundational Premise:

God is the Lord of History but we are locked in a cosmic struggle.

Restoring God’s Glory

God is at work in history through the Holy Spirit, reestablishing His glory through “general” and “special revelation,” partnering with humans, in the task of defeating The Evil One and restoring Creation through Jesus Christ.

Perspectives Core Idea:

God initiates and advances work in history to accomplish His purpose.

The Mission Task

The Bible makes it clear that our mission is to glorify God among all peoples and that this is essentially a battle against “the works of darkness.” “The chief end of man is to glorify God” goes the familiar catechism, but to do that requires us, together in mission with the Son of God, to “destroy the works of the Devil” (1 John 3:8). Thus, the task of humans who accept Christ as Lord and Savior is to discover God’s glory through His Word, and through His works (nature, science, history), appreciate it (worship) and to join Him in mission to declare that glory by seeking to destroy the “works of the Devil.”

Five Mysteries

In setting out in this awesome, cosmic mission certain matters may never be completely clear. As we look into these mysteries there are implications for our present role in the overall story.

First Mystery: Where did the universe come from?

Where did matter come from?

Robert Jastrow’s book, *God and the Astronomers*, suggests that at the point scientists thought they were getting closer to the whole question of the origin of the universe, suddenly and unexpectedly they discovered many inexplicable things:

- matter seems to have come literally almost from nothing

- what were thought to be stars were actually whole galaxies.
- the universe is incredibly delicate: with a slight change in the amount of hydrogen or other elements, the whole universe would collapse or blow apart.

St. Augustine asked, “Who can understand this mystery, or explain it to others?”

Ralph Winter has called this the “Age of the Dumbfounded Scientist.”

WCF Core Idea:

God initiates a relationship with mankind through general and special revelation.

It is our task to take the book of God’s words without ignoring or despising the book of His works. This is very much a part of the missionary task. Wherever you go in the world, you will find the people are much more alive to the realities of science than of the Bible, through sheer exposure. Those who would declare His glory must be prepared fully and worshipfully to recognize God in His handiwork in creation.

—Ralph D. Winter

Second Mystery: How did life get started? What is its story?

In addition to the mystery of the appearance of the “inorganic” universe, which consists of atoms and their subatomic particles, gyrations of electrons, the molecules that they form, crystals, and electromagnetic radiation, which is a whole world in itself and itself an amazing pantheon of beauty in creation, there is an even more incredible reality in the appearance of the world of “living matter.”

All forms of life are variations of inorganic matter, built, however, around one atom, carbon, and defined by the zipper-like DNA, the double-helix molecule which itself has two billion atoms in each molecule, and replicates itself. This is the nature of life. Organic matter is far more complex in many ways than inorganic matter.

However, man’s best attempts to understand life have relentlessly revealed a jarring factor. The apparent fact of “intelligent design” in both inorganic and organic matter strongly argues for an “intelligent designer,” whom we would like to believe is also benevolent. Not often discussed is one of the most distressing aspects of life, namely, the appearance (fairly late in the story of the development of life) of vicious, predatory forms of life at all levels of size, from bacteria to visible creatures. This jarring, puzzling factor could be called the sub-mystery of the incongruous presence of “intelligent *evil* design.”

Foundational Premise:

God reveals himself, but an evil power appears to be distorting both general and special revelation

In one sense this is substantially a course in enjoying the incredible beauty and complexity of God’s handiwork. At this time in history we are surfeited with a profusion of evidences of God’s creative power, and, therefore, we should be the most worshipful, the most joyous, the most exuberant of all believers in history.

Yet at the same time we are forced to be seriously aware of the evidence of violence and distortion in the picture .
—Ralph D. Winter

Third Mystery: When, why, and how did God create human life: an unusually intelligent, reflecting, thinking species, homo sapiens?

The fact that the DNA molecule can be programmed in such a way as to produce a human being so radically different from all other life is itself incredible. It just awes you. It's a basis for worship. It's grounds for amazement about God, and leaves all science befuddled. At the same time there continues to be the "jarring factor"—a major feature of homo sapiens, as with earlier forms of life, is the amazing prominence of violence and evil. The earliest remains of human life are bashed in, roasted skulls. The "when" is not so mysterious as the "how" and "why," which lead us to further wonder and challenge.

Fourth Mystery: Where did civilizations come from? How did they begin?

From what we have been able to discover about the early endeavors of true homo sapiens there do not seem to be gradually more sophisticated precursors to the high ("archaic") civilizations. Rather they seem to appear suddenly as already complicated social reality.

What we do find, however, is the opposite, namely, a gradual *decline* in almost every case. That is, the people who built the Stonehenge monument were more sophisticated than those who centuries later added huge monoliths in trying to "repair" it. The Sumerian civilization was already 800 years in decline at the time of Abraham. The story of Egypt is a story of decline since there is no story building up to the place where they could figure out how to make the incredibly precise pyramids—which appear at the beginning of their history. The Indus Valley displays advanced civilization at its earliest point. The Aztecs, the Incas, each had more advanced civilizations behind them.

Again, within this mystery is the demonic element. The ancient civilizations buried alive hundreds of people with their god-kings. Human sacrifices and violence were central to the ancient sophisticated civilizations.

Atrocities have been committed between different forms of animal life and human life for a long time. If God is not the author of that kind of behavior it would seem to be work of The Evil One. Even at the level of the DNA molecule, something has obviously been tampered with or we would not see suddenly toward the end of the long story of life so many forms of life that destroy life. From that time until this at every point we see evidence of a demonic distortion of creation.

WCF Core Idea:

Creation at all levels was corrupted by intelligent evil. The basic plot of history is thus the progressive conquest of a distorted and darkened world.

WCF Core Idea:

God continues to reveal Himself to all peoples at all times.

Perspectives Core Idea:

God accomplishes His purpose by triumphing over evil in order to rescue and bless people and to restore the full glory of His creation throughout the earth.

Perspectives Core Idea:

God calls His people to join Him in fulfilling His purpose.

WCF Core Idea:

The advance of the Kingdom consists not merely of the rescue of humans but includes the restoration of a corrupted creation and the defeat of the Evil One.

Perspectives Core Idea:

God's work in history has continuity and will come to an ultimate culmination.

Fifth Mystery: What is God going to do about the vast distortion of His purposes?

This is the mystery, now, which is the major theme of the Bible itself—a plan to counteract evil, the single story of God's re-conquering of a planet which has been distorted from God's intent and seduced out of His fellowship. An understanding of this mystery begins to bring meaning into all else. All of written history is the unfolding of this fifth mystery.

The Divine response: a plan to defeat The Evil One, restore creation, and reclaim all the peoples of the earth. A principal means for this is the redemption of man through a chosen nation, on the basis of "the lamb slain before the foundations of the world."

All this was not supposed to have been a mystery down through Jewish history, since it was made clear to Abraham in Genesis 12:3—that a chosen people was called to be blessed and to be a blessing, called to special service not just survival.

However, this way of looking at things—radically different from current Evangelical thinking—allows us to understand the appearance of human beings as an additional creation for the specific purpose of aiding in the restoration of what already had been created—a process referred to as advancing God's Kingdom. In 1 John we read (3:8) "the Son of God appeared for this purpose that He might destroy the works of the devil." By contrast, however, through the seduction of homo sapiens, human history has become for the most part a story of human self-salvation rather than of redeemed humans being counted among the forces seeking the conquest of evil.

Once restored in repentance and faith, in the blessing of God, redeemed man is now expected to resume his original purpose, to work with God for the restoration of all creation, and in the process make crystal clear that Satan and not God is the initiator of evil and depravity.

It may well be that neither a full restoration of creation nor even the full restoration of humans will take place before the end of time. Meanwhile, humans must continue not just to resist but to fight Satan, joining with the Son of God in the destruction of all Satan's works.

What has been the brief, 4,000-year record of Kingdom advance, that is, what is the record of events since the plan of reconquest was given to Abraham—a story so complex that for most people it is simply meaningless?

The Kingdom Strikes Back: the First 2000 Years

There really are only two main subjects in the last 4000 years: the biblical revelation itself and then the impact of that

Foundational Premise:

God desires humans to work with Him as agents in history for His purposes.

Perspectives Core Idea:

The Bible is a unified story of God's purpose.

WCF Core Idea:

Missions is the basis for the Bible. The Great Commission is the backbone of the whole Bible.

WCF Core Idea:

The Bible shows God carrying out His redemptive purpose through a covenant relationship with His people and redeeming all of mankind through Jesus, the Messiah for all peoples.

revelation. All of human history in the last 4000 years relates directly or indirectly to that simple, single picture.

All through the Old Testament you can see that God is in the mission business, whether His people recognized their role in redemption or not. This portion of our Bibles, earlier called the "Septuagint," portrays the groping and stumbling experience of a chosen nation reflecting marvelous and brilliant godliness and yet tragic, human shortcomings.

The children of Israel were pushed into Egypt and eventual slavery there, but apparently left a witness behind. The northern group virtually disappeared in dispersion possibly planting synagogues throughout the Roman empire.

Examples of the God's Mission in the Old Testament:

- Abimelech is an example of those who fear God without knowing Him through special revelation. (Mission strategy: look for and expect to find "a man of peace" who has been seeking God and will welcome knowledge of Christ.)
- Pharaoh recognizes the work of God in Joseph's life
- A witness to God's power and glory is left in Egypt during slavery and the Exodus.
- Naaman the Syrian receives a witness from the Jewish slave girl.
- Many of the Psalms speak of declaring God's glory among all nations.
- Isaiah 49:6: "You are to be my salvation to the ends of the earth, a light to the nations."
- Jonah was a reluctant witness in preaching to Ninevah.
- Babylonian captivity: God meant for Israel to go to the nations with their knowledge of God. (This experience also enabled God's people to better understand the existence of an Evil One without accepting the Zoroastrian dualistic concept of an evil God as well as a good God.)
- The selection of documents which we call the Old Testament and then their translation of into Greek (the Septuagint) was a key mission milestone.
- Before Jesus appeared, genuine biblical faith had expanded through a Jewish ethnic vehicle into the whole Roman empire and in the form of tiny enclaves to the ends of the earth.

Old Testament salvation is in continuity with New Testament salvation which gives even greater knowledge of God through Jesus: "in His face we see the glory of God." The basis all along for the reality of a gospel that God seeks the reconciliation of all of the peoples of the earth, becomes even more clear when Christ appears.

The Kingdom Strikes Back: the Basis for the Second Half of the Story

Foundational Premise:

On the basis of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God defeats evil and redeems and restores humanity and creation.

WCF Core Idea:

The essence of the church is to be missionary

WCF Core Idea:

A characteristic of biblical faith is the willingness to take upon itself the cultural clothes of every tradition. True faith always is evidenced in true obedience, but the form of that obedience is always cul-

Global history has seen no greater impact from any other person than Jesus. —Ralph D. Winter

Shortly after Jesus' ministry, different ethnic vehicles accepted and carried the biblical faith further into all the earth, no longer just Jewish. (Much later, in the 20th century, the faith would go even beyond what people call "Christianity.")

New Testament Contributions to the Story:

- The major new factor is the incarnation, death and resurrection of the very Son of God, which confirms and greatly enhances the very real power of General Revelation, making it much easier to extend the glory of God to all nations.
- The Four Gospels make clear the disturbing discrepancy between the meaning of the Bible and religious traditions. The basic theme, first established in the Old Testament, is underscored: heart faith—not just outward compliance with religious forms—is essential to please God.
- The rest of of the New Testament describes how faith flowed beyond Jewish ethnic boundaries.
 - The gospel was taken in all directions: China, India, Africa, Europe. But some versions of Christianity did not survive or prosper or didn't become missionary. What made the difference? Rodney Stark and Philip Jenkins suggest several reasons:
 - * A state religion, not heart-felt by the people (Stark: where you have a state church, you have a weak church.)
 - * Nominal Christianity, perhaps imposed by conquest, not heart-felt by the people
 - * Lack of Scriptures in the common language
 - * Over-accommodation with the local culture; pagan cultures are glad to add on another god
 - Judaizers: required proselytization (cultural conversion) to be acceptable to God.
 - Peter had to explain his experience with the household of Cornelius to the Jerusalem elders.
 - Marcion, on the other hand, monoculturally Greek, wouldn't acknowledge any validity in the Hebrew tradition.
- The New Testament anticipates the opposition that may arise every time the Gospel takes on new cultural clothing.

Tension between heart faith and culturally defined obedience arises again and again down through history whenever the faith flows from the forms of one cultural tradition to another. —Ralph D. Winter

tural.

Arabic garments for the faith were fashioned in the 7th century to avoid the Roman culture. The tensions ever since between Islam and Christianity are legendary.

We need to perceive clearly that the Bible is a handbook for missionary cross-cultural strategy that portrays and predicts how authentic biblical knowledge of God and the cause of His advancing Kingdom can transcend cultural boundaries.

—Ralph D. Winter

WCF Core Idea:

As a result of the influence of Augustine’s neoplatonist theology, there is a disconnect in evangelical’ minds: we need to attribute evil to Satan, not to God

WCF Core Idea:

Our task of glorifying God and advancing the Kingdom involves defeating evil wherever it is found.

- The New Testament portrays evil embodied in an adversarial personage, Satan. To this day Western Christianity is confused by Augustine’s neoplatonic perspective of a God who is Himself the author of evil and suffering. But he was reacting against the Zoroastrian dualism (belief in two gods: one good and one evil) which was believed by the Manichaeans with whom he had belonged. As a result ever since in the Western tradition of Christianity we tend to be “resigned” to evil as something we must allow God to work through for good *without any deliberate effort on our part to understand and destroy the source of evil.*
- Thus, the New Testament often speaks in military terms. The Kingdom of God manifested in the church will contest the kingdom of darkness (“the gates of hell will not prevail against it”); we are called as soldiers, not just survivors who are mainly candidates for heaven. The love of Christ constrains us to go to deliver people (and God’s creation) from the actual power of sin and disease and fear, and then enlist them in the mission to which God has called us all, the destruction of the works of Satan, that His Kingdom might come as His will is done on earth, and His glory rightfully restored.

The Bible makes it clear that our mission is to glorify God among all peoples and that this is essentially a battle to recapture them from darkness and evil.

The Kingdom Strikes Back: the Second Half

Once Jesus appeared, a new element entered into human affairs. His blood was already the basis of the Gospel, although previously not clear to the people of God. Those who came to know the details about the person of Jesus began to grow into a new transnational movement, greatly hastening the extension of the Kingdom of God. This movement built significantly on the foundation of centuries of Jewish witness and has changed the world.

A good way to tell that story is in 400-year epochs; each beginning in chaos or extreme difficulty and ending in a flourishing of the Gospel in a new cultural basin.

0–400: The Gospel Goes to the Romans

- Persecution of Jews and Christians occurred relatively rarely

WCF Core Idea:

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are authentic, unique, and central to history.

from the time of the book of Acts until the 4th century AD.

- In 300 AD even the most severe persecution under Diocletian failed to conquer Christianity.
- Constantine seized the emperor's throne and made peace with the Christian movement.
- State funds were diverted from pagan to Christian leaders. (This eventually resulted in state-supported priests who often knew little of the truth of the Gospel.)
- The faith became identified with a major military power and caused immediate, massive persecution of Christians outside the Empire. (This was a major factor later in the felt need for a Semitic-Arabic-Muslim version of the faith.)
- Relative peace allowed the preservation of records, including firming up the contents of the New Testament and the translation of the Bible into Latin.
- The last hundred years of this period could be called the Classical Renaissance, culminating in the triumph of the faith in a major cultural basin—the Roman empire. This included outlying populations such as Celtic and Gothic tribes.

Only to the extent that our faith can put on other clothes can it ever become a truly universal faith.

400–800: The Gospel Goes to the Barbarians

- Constantine had moved the seat of the empire to Constantinople.
- Due to pressure from the steppes of Asia, the Romans were forced to withdraw their legions out of southern England; invasion of former Roman Britain then by Angles and Saxons caused chaos and uncertainty.
- The tribes pushed out of the steppes of Asia by the Huns eventually over-ran Rome and much of Western Europe.
- The chief and most durable social reality in Western Europe was the monastic movement that planted hundreds of Bible study centers.
- In the middle of this period, Christians outside the empire, to the south and east, became absorbed in the Semitic alternative, Islam, which won over Christians in the anti-Roman areas of the Middle East, and North Africa.
- From Celtic Christianity in Ireland and northern Britain came the most advanced scholarship. Such scholarship brought literacy and Biblical knowledge back to the continent after it had been lost in the chaos of conquest.
- The final century of the 400–800 period is called the Carolingian Renaissance ending in a flourishing of the faith in central Europe under Charlemagne.

800–1200: The Gospel Goes to the Vikings

- By now Europe is confronted by what Churchill called “two

WCF Core Idea:

The mission task is to extend biblical faith, preaching Christ, not Christianity, preaching the Bible, not all the twists and turns of our enormously complex historical tradition.

WCF Core Idea:

God builds His church throughout culture and history.

massive external assaults”: Muslims from the south and Vikings from the north.

- The Vikings’ eventual conversion to Christianity prepared the way for the Crusades.
- After 250 years, the Viking raids were a horror of the past, and a number of positive developments had begun:
 - Cluny reform
 - Cistercians
 - Universities
 - Cathedrals
 - Friars (Franciscans and Dominicans) who moved out into the rest of the world, taking the Gospel with them.
- At the end of this period we have thus a flourishing often called the Medieval Renaissance.

1200–1600: The Gospel Fails to Go East

This 400 year era does not showcase a new cultural basin. The expansion of the faith had run into a dead end street. Western Europe was a geographical cul-de-sac, open only to the East. The Crusades went that direction, but were doomed to failure because the Crusaders (descendants of the Vikings) were not far beyond tribalism, while the societies they tried to conquer had the culture and training of the Roman Empire.

- As with the other eras, this one begins with chaos: the Black Plague.
- It ends with “The Renaissance.”
- The Friars and the Universities began to be a major influence.
- The greatest surge forward derived from the Bible through the invention of moveable type.
- Printed material entered the bloodstream of Europe stimulating science, statesmanship, industry and technology: Western Civilization.
- This development, starting in Gutenberg’s day (when there were more Muslims in the world than Christians) produced twice as many Christians as Muslims and brought profound changes in society which decisively moved beyond Islam.
- According to Rodney Stark, true science arose only once in history: in Christian Europe. A necessary condition was the belief in one true God who had created an orderly universe and who wanted His people to investigate and admire his handiwork.
- Within this period is a major transition parallel to the transition from Jewish to Greek culture, the shift from Latin to German: the Reformation; a release of northern peoples from Mediterranean customs in which the faith had been packaged.

Perspectives Core Idea

The Christian movement has brought about positive social transformation.

WCF Core Idea:

God is at work in all cultures and wants to redeem them for His glory.

WCF Core Idea:

The gospel has almost always been carried across significant cultural and geographic barriers by small, focused, committed communities—mission

1600–2000: The Gospel Goes around the World

- Catholic missionaries encompassed the world on colonial ships.

structures.

WCF Core Idea:

Key leaders who have sought God more deeply and have listened to Him more profoundly have been used by God to make new breakthroughs.

WCF Core Idea:

Unreached peoples are those cultures or societies in which there is no indigenous church movement. They are held at a distance from the gospel by boundaries of prejudice and culture.

WCF Core Idea:

The urgent need for radical contextualization is an incredibly new frontier. God does not require people to give up their cultural identity to be followers of Jesus.

WCF Core Idea:

Since humankind's first rebellion against God, humanity (socially, spiritually, psychologically, physically, culturally) has been affected by

Between 1600 and 1800 Catholic missionaries encompassed the world with a massive head start over Protestants who 200 years after the Reformation had still not found the Great Commission in the Bible.

—Ralph D. Winter

- The French Revolution and the following Napoleonic wars massively disrupt this period of Catholic missions midway by causing Catholic missionaries to lose their sending base.
- The British empire began to rise and Protestant missions as well, going out to the Coastlands, later Inland. William Carey in India and Hudson Taylor in China were pioneers in these early eras of Protestant missions.
- The third era of modern missions has focused on specific overlooked people groups. Cameron Townsend (founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators), Donald McGavran (Church Growth Movement), and Ralph Winter (best known for the call to reach the hidden or unreached peoples, but also a pioneer in missiological thinking in a number of other frontiers) are examples of pioneers in people group thinking.
- This period concludes with the Evangelical Awakening. (Although massive secularization also takes place, revealing superficiality in the shallow faith of the majority.)
- Toward the end of the period, African, Indian and Chinese followers of Christ are forging new cultural vehicles, often taken for heresy.

The Final Moments: Beyond World War II

Perhaps the most significant event of the second millennium occurred just after World War II. After 500 years of Western conquest of the entire planet, the whole non-western world was by 1945 under the direct or closely indirect control of Western political states.

But in the next 25 years following World War II something happened on the world level that had never happened before and would never happen again. Over thirty years ago I wrote about this period of "Unbelievable Years" in a small book by that title.

While at the beginning of 1945, 99.5% of the non-western world was controlled by the West, 25 years later, at the end of 1969, only .5% was still under Western control. Empires that had lasted centuries collapsed.

Take another 25 years and it became clear that many of the original regimes of these new nation states would not make it. Robert Kaplan's famous essay on "The Coming Anarchy" predicted a breakdown into pervasive chaos. Meanwhile totalitarian regimes were replaced as embryonic "democracy" was chosen over either Communism or Fascism, a shift so profound as often to mean more governmental instability.

Today it seems as though nuclear weapons are available to any nation, as the West's technology is rapidly adopted in much of the world.

evils.

Perspectives Core Idea:

Completing the task requires effective cross-cultural evangelism that follows communication patterns within cultures.

Perspectives Core Ideas:

The progress of world evangelization can be measured in part in terms of church-planting movements within people groups.

Completing the mission task requires the initiation and growth of church-planting movements that follow social avenues of influence.

Perspectives Core Ideas:

The mission task can and will be completed.

Completing the task requires collaborative efforts of churches and mission agencies from diverse cultures and traditions.

Perspectives Core Idea:

Completing the task requires strategic wholism in which community development is integrated with church planting. [We must be allied against all evil if we do not want to misrepresent God.]

Three major factors in the 21st century are competing for allegiance: Free market economy, Christianity, and Islam.

Rodney Stark's thesis in his book, *One True God*, is that when there is religious pluralism, tolerance and civility among the religions is increased and there is an increase in personal piety. The religion becomes the choice of the common man, not the state religion to be accepted casually. Because of free market competition there is the effort to explain one's faith to others which keeps it stronger and alive. But conflict is inevitable between the people of monotheistic faiths in the absence of free market economy. Philip Jenkins believes international politics of the coming decades are likely to revolve around interfaith conflict, above all, the clash between Christianity and Islam.

Because of this likelihood there is a need for priority to be given to fruits of the Spirit, the distinctive character of Christ-followers, especially humility. New Testament warnings about humility and discretion are not just laudable Christian virtues, they can make the difference between life and death.

Jenkins' main thesis, in *The Next Christendom*, is that the era of Western Christianity has passed and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning. The South's Pentecostal style of Christianity will become the norm as they become the majority of Christian believers on this planet.

Across the global South, Jenkins sees a common pattern of development.

- Initially westerners try to impose their own ideas of Christianity as it should be, often backed up by the force of colonial political power.

- This evangelism gains some followers, usually people on the margins of society

- Other people move beyond the colonial matrix, as they demand ever more accommodation with local ways

- In yet other cases, believers form wholly new churches, so different that traditional minded observers wonder whether these have moved beyond the bounds of Christianity itself.

In this light, training for leaders of the mission movements of the Global South becomes crucial. This can help the new surge of missions avoid the mistakes of the past and profit from what has been learned from those mistakes. As people move to the cities, Christian congregations replace the family networks that prevailed in the older villages. The growth of Southern churches in response to urbanization compares to similar growth in early Christianity in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

The gospel is not just about dispensing good news. It's also about a battle. Humans were created to restore creation by advancing God's kingdom. The corruption of creation by intelligent evil has turned the story of our planet into the story of a battle. Unfortunately, there is a widespread blindness to the corruption of all creation and our responsibility to restore it.

What valid generalizations can we make about the near and far future? And how does all this fit into our story of God's

kingdom expanding without retreat, beginning just yesterday with the appearance of homo sapiens?

There are gigantic, unprecedented changes. The number one evidence is skyrocketing global population, due principally to the conquest of many diseases and the relative reduction of war. (In 2002 more people died in traffic accidents around the world than in war.)

Furthermore, despite the amazing progress medicine has made in understanding and treating many diseases after they occur it is not at all clear that we are making any permanent gains against the pathogenic origins of disease. And, in regard to war—that other major menace of mankind—the worst rash of wars may be just ahead.

So where is the kingdom of God in all this?

One generalization is safe: things are getting both worse and better at the same time. It is by no means a completely uneven contest much less one that favors evil. Many believers see only the negatives and grasp at teachings about a rapture that will rescue the faithful before things get too bad. Others see only the good and are unprepared to seriously attack the evils, some of them having the opinion that this is “The best of all possible worlds” and that evils themselves originate with the mysterious purposes of God rather than a Satanic intelligence.

But is it merely an expanding Kingdom we should keep in sight? Or can it better be stated as the restoration of the true glory of God and the progressive defeat of a major, celestial counter being?

WCF Core Idea:

The advance of the Kingdom consists not merely of the rescue of humans but must include the restoration of a corrupted creation and the defeat of the Evil One.

WCF Core Idea:

God calls people from all tribes, nations, and linguistic groups to follow Him: to repent of sin, turn to Him through Jesus and be re-enlisted in the cosmic battle against evil.

WCF Core Idea:

At the end of history, all of creation will be restored. Lions will lie down with lambs. Disease will have disappeared. God will reign in heaven and earth.

In this light I personally have come to the conclusion that the most serious frontier in missions is the high wall between our faith community and a world truly awed by the explorations of science. These two books—nature and scripture—have been given to us to enable us to get closer to God, the former speaks in a voice heard in every language and tongue, the latter must be painstakingly translated into thousands of those tongues.

—Ralph D. Winter