



## Abstract

# THE HOME MISSION BOARD OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION IN PANAMA, 1905-1974: ANALYSIS OF A STRATEGY TO ESTABLISH INDIGENOUS CONGREGATIONS

Glenn Edwin Nicholson

Why did Southern Baptist mission efforts not experience greater growth in Panama? The Home Mission Board had sent its first missionary to the country in 1905. When the work was transferred to the Foreign Mission Board in 1974, only 42 churches had been established. By 2000 the number of churches had doubled, from 42 to 96, but this growth was significantly less than the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Assemblies of God, or the Church of God (Cleveland). Although these denominations had arrived in Panama later than the Baptists, they, by the year 2000, had founded 1350 churches.

This research focuses on the efforts of the Home Mission Board, traces the beginning of their ministry in the Canal Zone during the construction of the Panama Canal, and then explores the expansion of the work into the interior of the country. Whether the goal of the Home Mission Board was to establish an indigenous church or simply to facilitate the establishment and growth of Baptist churches in Panama, the research reveals that the strategy formulated by the Board did not achieve its intended goal. The study contributes missiologically by showing the weaknesses of that strategy, and asserts that strategy formulation should be informed by an awareness of the historical development of the country and the cultures of its various peoples. The study also contributes missiologically by showing why strategy formulation should be informed by

a comparative study with other churches that are experiencing greater growth. Lastly, the study argues that any denomination proclaiming the gospel in a foreign land should be aware of the dominant religious expression in that country. In Panama, Roman Catholicism has impacted the lives of the people for hundreds of years.

Based on these insights, the particular strengths and weaknesses of a strategy to establish indigenous churches in Panama were assessed and suggestions for strengthening that strategy are proposed. Panama has a diverse population, including the Spanish-speaking Panamanians who have been influenced by Roman Catholicism, the West Indians who remained in the country after the construction of the Panama Canal was finished, and the Cuna Indians whose numbers were decimated by the Spanish during the conquest of Central and South America. The Home Mission Board, however, was applying the same strategy in every situation. Although it was asserted that the Panamanians were receptive to the gospel, there was no attempt to understand who was receptive or why. The dissertation therefore explores why the West Indians, Panamanians and Cuna Indians were receptive to the gospel and recommends that a different strategy be formulated and implemented for each people group in Panama.

The dissertation also recommends that the strategy of the Home Mission Board be compared with that of the Foursquare Gospel, the Assemblies of God and the Church of God who were experiencing significant growth in Panama. Since Pentecostals have been influenced by the books of the Anglican missionary Roland Allen, the dissertation explores how his insights have shaped their missionary understanding and the extent to which Southern Baptists have also been influenced by his writings.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation entitled

THE HOME MISSION BOARD OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

IN PANAMA, 1905-1974:

ANALYSIS OF THE STRATEGY TO ESTABLISH INDIGENOUS  
CONGREGATIONS

written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of


Doctor of Philosophy

has been read and approved by the undersigned members of

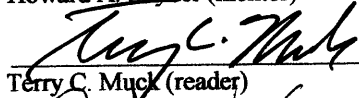
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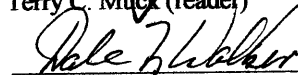
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Date: May 2005

THE HOME MISSION BOARD OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION  
IN PANAMA, 1905-1974:  
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A Dissertation

submitted to

the Faculty of the E. Stanley Jones School  
of World Mission and Evangelism,  
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2005

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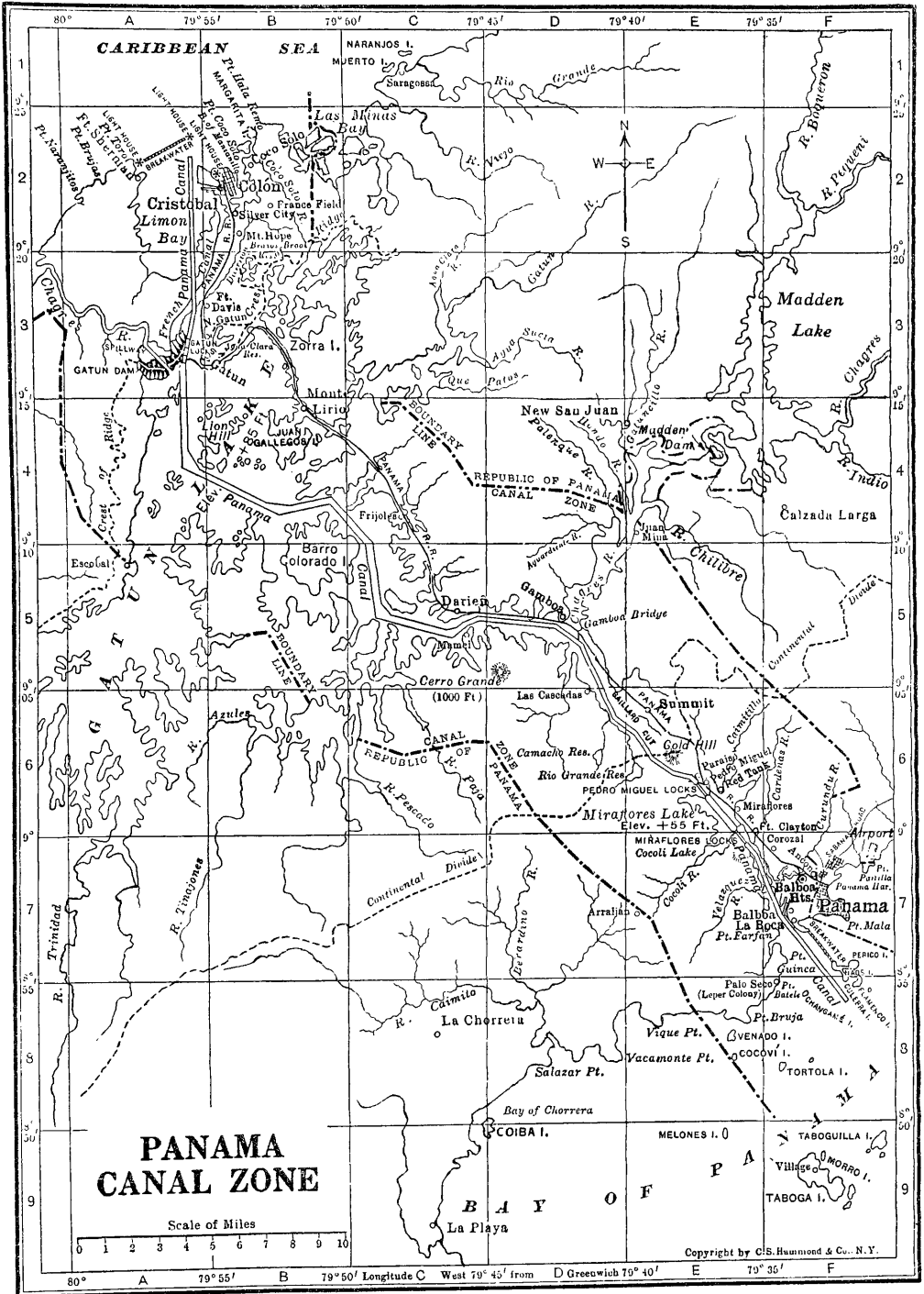
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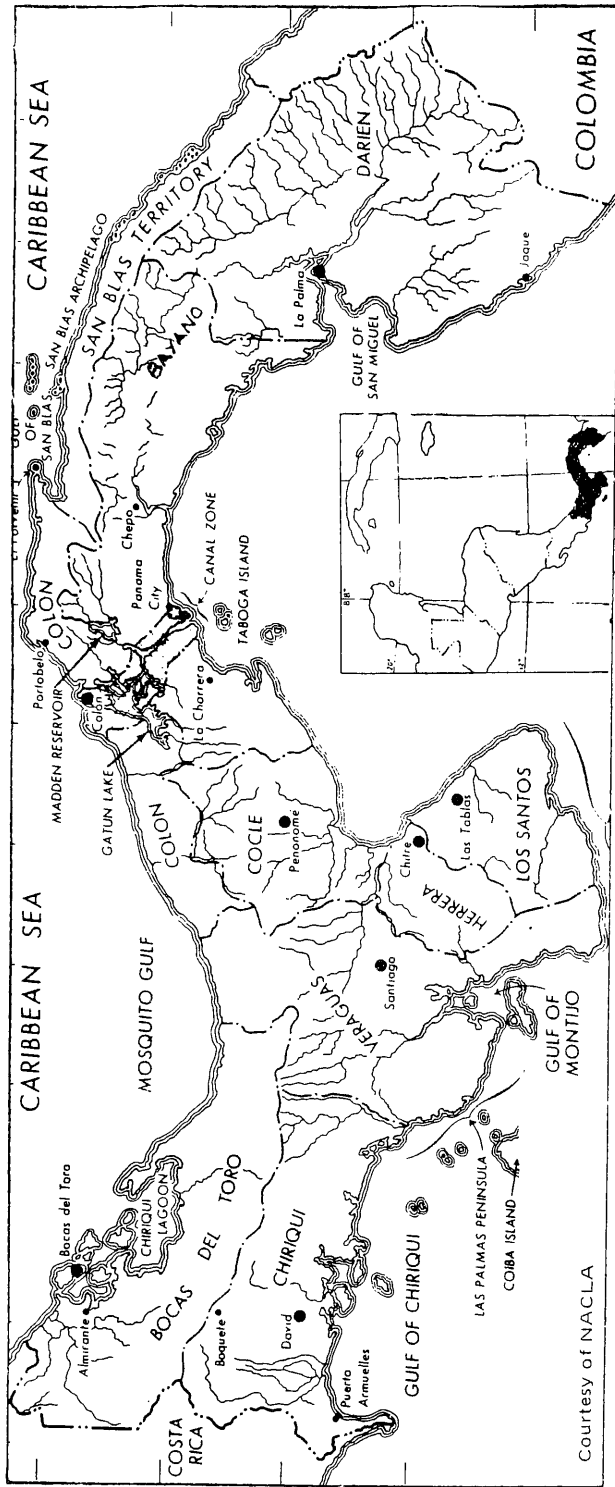
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CARIBBEAN SEA

**PANAMA  
CANAL ZONE**

80° A 79° 55' B 79° 50' Longitude C West 79° 45' from D Greenwich 79° 40' E 79° 35' F



Courtesy of NACLA

(Wheaton 1976:8)

## PANAMA CANAL TIMELINE

CNN In-Depth Specials –Panama Canal Handover – Canal Timeline

<b>1513</b>
Vasco Nuñez de Balboa crosses the Isthmus of Panama from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans.
<b>1534</b>
Charles I of Spain (Holy Roman Emperor Charles V) orders a survey of the proposed canal route across the isthmus. The survey comes back “impossible.”
<b>1848</b>
Discovery of gold in California sparks interest in the United States in a shipping route across the isthmus.
<b>1852</b>
U.S. Army Capt. Ulysses S. Grant leads a military detachment of several hundred men and their dependents across isthmus en route to California; 150 men, women and children die from a cholera epidemic.
<b>1869</b>
Now president, Grant orders surveys for a canal that are conducted in Tehuantepec, Mexico, and in the Darien region of Panama, a province of Colombia.
<b>1876</b>
French committee begins study for an isthmus canal. U.S. canal commission favors Nicaragua route.
<b>1878</b>
French naval officer Lucien Wyse explores two possible canal routes for company headed by Ferdinand de Lesseps, choosing the one that is now the current route. Wyse signs agreement with Colombia for French company to build canal. Treaty calls for canal to revert to Colombia after 99 years.
<b>1879</b>
French hold a congress in Paris on the building of the canal, consider 14 proposals, including Wyse’s. Final decision comes down to three routes: De Lesseps/Wyse’s sea-level canal and another French proposal for a lock canal across Colombia’s Panama province, and the U.S. Nicaragua plan. De Lesseps’ plan wins.
<b>1880</b>
French break ground on canal in Panama on January 1.
<b>1881</b>
First construction crews arrive; first employee dies of yellow fever.

<b>1884-85</b>	Work force of 19,000 reached; workers die of yellow fever and malaria almost daily.
<b>1887</b>	Committee recommends lock canal as costs rise.
<b>1888</b>	French abandon sea level canal and begin work on a lock canal.
<b>1889</b>	Canal company dissolved and work on the canal stops.
<b>1893-94</b>	Wyse renegotiates agreement with Colombia and begins working for new canal company.
<b>1894</b>	First ships sail from France to begin excavation of the Culebra Cut.
<b>1898</b>	New plan presented for lock canal with two lakes and eight sets of locks. But half of company's capital is already gone, and the company offers itself for sale to the United States.
<b>1899</b>	President William McKinley orders new U.S. canal commission to study canal possibilities in light of French failure. Nicaragua route again favored.
<b>1902</b>	Congress backs Nicaragua route, but Theodore Roosevelt, now president after McKinley's assassination pushes Panama. Roosevelt tries to buy rights to dig canal from Colombia, but Colombia refuses.
<b>1903</b>	Roosevelt backs Panamanian uprising against Colombia by stationing warships offshore. Panama declares independence on November 3, and the United States signs a treaty with Panama allowing it to build the canal. The treaty also creates a Canal Zone, a sovereign part of the United States 10 miles wide that splits Panama in half.
<b>1904</b>	United States buys French company's rights and properties, begins construction on May 4.

<b>1905</b>
Last case of yellow fever in Panama City on November 11; Col. William Gorgas has successfully eradicated the disease from the isthmus.
<b>1906</b>
U.S. approves project as a lock canal. Roosevelt, in the first trip by a U.S. president outside the country while in office, visits the site on November 6.
<b>1907</b>
First earth slide on American work site dumps 382,277 cubic meters (500,000 cubic yards) of material into work area. Slide moves 4.2 meters (14 feet) every 24 hours for 10 days. It is still a slide surveillance area.
<b>1909</b>
First concrete poured for locks at Gatun on August 24. Locks take four years to complete.
<b>1913</b>
Steam shovels digging from opposite sides of the isthmus meet in the middle. Maximum job force reached on March 26: 44,733. Last rock lifted from the canal on September 10. Earthquake shakes a scare into the builders on September 30, but no damage was reported. October 10: President Woodrow Wilson pushes the button that relays, via telegraph, the signal to blow up the center of the dike that was keeping Atlantic waters from Pacific waters.
<b>1914</b>
In January, first complete passage of the completed canal by an ocean-going, self-propelled vessel, the old French crane boat Alexandre La Valley. Official opening day is August 15. The U.S.S. Ancon, piloted by Capt. John A. Constantine, makes first official passage in 9 hours, 40 minutes.
<b>1931</b>
Arnulfo Arias Madrid overthrows the government in a bloody coup after which his brother Harmodio is elected president, an episode that prefaces an era of political and economic turmoil that endures until the 1970s.
<b>1940</b>
With World War II under way in Europe and the Far East, the United States asks Panama for air landing fields, roads, warning stations and antiaircraft batteries outside the Canal Zone. Arnulfo Arias, the newly elected president who sympathizes with fascism, demands cash and other property. While in Havana in October 1941, he is overthrown by his own military and replaced by Ricardo de la Guardia. The United States gets the sites following the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, and gives them back after the war.
<b>1955</b>

President Jose Remon, elected in 1952, is assassinated.

**1958-59**

A state of siege is imposed by the United States in the Canal Zone following student riots against the regime of President Ernesto de la Guardia, elected in 1956. Nine people are killed. Outside the zone, life is not good for most Panamanians, and nationalism proliferates.

**1964**

Panama cuts diplomatic relations with the United States and demands reparations following the riots provoked by a scuffle on January 9 involving American and Panamanian school boys over flying each nation's flag over Balboa High School. Several thousand people participate, 23 Panamanians and four U.S. Marines are killed, and many more are injured. An international commission ultimately upholds the United States.

**1968**

Arias wins the presidency but after 11 days in office he is overthrown by a junta of National Guard officers led by Col. (later Gen.) Omar Torrijos Herrera.

**1972**

Torrijos handpicks a National Assembly that gives him dictatorial powers. He embarks on an impressive public works program that drives the country toward economic disaster.

**1977**

U. S. President Jimmy Carter and Torrijos sign treaty in Washington on September 7 that promises the United States will hand control of the waterway to Panama on December 31, 1999. Both parties pledge that the canal will remain open, safe, neutral and accessible to all vessels.

**1979**

The Panama Canal Company, the Canal Zone and its government go out of business and are replaced by the Panama Canal Commission that will operate the Canal for the 20-year transition period.

**1981-87**

Torrijos dies in a plane crash and dictatorial powers ultimately are assumed by one of his two army successors, Col. Manuel Noriega Moreno, once chief of the secret police and an operative of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Noriega shuts down the free press and militarizes government services in a campaign of general repression.

**1987**

Noriega is accused by the National Guard's deputy commander of trafficking in narcotics for the Colombian drug cartels, murdering political opponents, and rigging elections.



**1988**

Noriega is indicted by a U.S. federal court in Miami on drug trafficking and racketeering charges.

**1989**

When Guillermo Endara, a Noriega opponent, is elected president by a wide margin, Noriega nullifies the election and installs a crony as president on September 1. On October 3, Noriega survives a bloody coup. On December 15 he coerces more dictatorial powers from the legislature, which declares war against the United States. Panamanian soldiers a day later kill an unarmed American Marine officer dressed in civilian clothes.

**1989**

Worried the canal may be in jeopardy, President George Bush on December 19 orders troops to invade Panama in the name of capturing Noriega and bringing him to trial, protecting U.S. citizens, and restoring order. The invasion ends two weeks later when Noriega is seized and transported to Miami where he is later tried and convicted.

**1999**

United States to hand over control of the canal to Panama on December 31.

## CHAPTER 1

### Strategy of the Home Mission Board: Overview

As of July 2004, the population of Panama was approximately 3.001 million (GESource 2005:1), “the most heterogeneous in all Central America due to the immigration of various people to work on and service the Canal” (Holland 1981:123). The majority of the people, 70 percent, are *mestizo*, “tracing their genealogies back to intermarriage between the indigenous peoples of the region and the Spanish who arrived to conquer” (Bensenville Community Public Library 2002:1). Fourteen percent of the population is West Indian. The first West Indians were “part of an English-speaking imported labor force from the West Indies who arrived to work on Panama’s banana plantations, then to construct the trans-isthmus railway beginning in the 1850s, and finally to build the Panama Canal” (Bensenville Community Public Library 2002:1). While ten percent of the population is white, the remaining six percent is Amerindian such as the Cuna and the Guaymi.

In 1987, my wife and I were commissioned to serve in Panama as missionaries of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega ruled the country and he would remain in power until the United States launched a military attack on December 20, 1989, and later captured him and sent him to a prison in Florida.

During my first term, my family and I lived in David. David was the third largest city in the country and the capital of the Chiriqui Province. As a field evangelist to both the Chiriqui Baptist Association and later the Rio Chame Baptist Association, I primarily

focused my efforts on the Spanish-speaking population of the country. During my first term I visited and preached in churches in both urban and rural settings. The Baptist church in David, where my wife and I were members, had established several preaching points in the area and a mission in an isolated area known as Entre Rios. Several churches in the Chiriqui Baptist Association also conducted Vacation Bible Schools and a medical team from the United States was sent to an area in which the people had limited medical and dental care.

When our three children were older, we moved to the resort community of Coronado near Panama City, and I became involved with the Chame Baptist Association. The churches, like those in the Chiriqui Baptist Association, were establishing preaching points in the nearby communities. The expansion of the work, however, seemed haphazard, with no clearly delineated goal and no overarching strategy to determine the direction in which the work should take or how to utilize the resources that were available. I listened as pastors and members of the local churches discussed the work that God had given them to do and I became aware of their financial difficulties. I, however, was not the first missionary they had seen. My ministry was only a continuation of the work that had been begun, not by the Foreign Mission Board, but by the Home Mission Board, several years earlier.

In 1905, two years after Panama had declared its independence from Colombia, the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention sent its first missionary, J. L. Wise, to minister to the North Americans who had come from the United States to dig the Panama Canal. In the years that followed, Baptist churches were established, not only among the North Americans who remained to protect and maintain the Panama Canal

after its completion, but also among the West Indians, the Cuna Indians, and the thousands of Spanish-speaking Panamanians. When the work was transferred to the Foreign Mission Board in 1975, Baptists could be found “among all five of the dominant cultural patterns of the republic” (Knight 1965:1).

Our Baptist may be a *campesino* living in a small town or village of the interior, whose hut, diet, and farming methods are almost the same as in pre-Columbian Indian days. He is little involved in the everyday world of politics and national economy, since he is so isolated and self-sufficient.

Our Baptist may be the cosmopolitan who lives in one of the large urban centers near the Panama Canal. He is in daily contact with the races of the world as they mingle in the crowded streets, pass through the busy Canal, or ask for his services. He is somewhere between his country cousin and the gadget-conscious, well-to-do United States citizen who has come to live in his country.

Our Baptist just might be one of these citizens of the country of *Norte Americana*, serving in the military or with the Panama Canal Company. He has transported a near duplicate of middle-class life in the United States to a ten-mile-wide strip of Panama.

There’s a good chance that our Baptist will be one of the British West Indian Negro immigrants, whose ability to speak English and to live and work well in the tropics provided the brute strength to build the Canal. He had come to Panama for the work on the banana plantations, but when hardy workers for the Canal were needed, he came in greater numbers with thousands of others. He may have been a Baptist before coming to Panama. Because he continues to hold his British citizenship, expecting to someday to return to Jamaica or to one of the other West Indian islands of the Caribbean, he has been called “the man without a country.”

Our Baptist might also be one of the small groups of tribal Indians, first citizens of Panama. He could live in the primitive, isolated jungles of Darien to the east or in the mountains and along the streams of the west. He might live on one of those pearl-like islands of San Blas which ring Panama on the Caribbean side and to which Baptists have brought Christ, education, and some the culture-shattering ways of modern man. (Knight 1965:3)

*The Church Development Depth Study: Panama* was prepared in 1972 by the six-member Latin American Depth Study Committee at the request of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The opening paragraph of the thirty-six page

study indicates that “the purpose of the study was to provide the Home Mission Board information about the factors which have contributed to or hindered the Baptist witness in Panama” (Home Mission Board 1972:1). In the same year, A. Clark Scanlon prepared another study, the *Background Report: Panama*. In this thirteen page report, the list of factors which contributed to or retarded the growth of Baptist churches in Panama are succinctly stated but are not discussed as fully as those found in the *Church Development Depth Study*. The factors in both the study and the report were seemingly listed randomly, not in the order of their importance. When the factors from the report are combined, however, with those discussed in the *Church Development Depth Study*, a clearer picture emerges as to what was thought to have contributed to or hindered the growth of Baptist churches in Panama.

Table 1.1. Factors Influencing Growth  
*Church Development Depth Study: Panama*

<b>POSITIVE FACTORS</b>
(1) An Early Beginning
(2) Home Mission Board Emphasis on Church Growth
(3) Trained Leadership
(4) Bible Translation for the Cuna Indians
(5) The Use of Institutions
(6) Use of Baptist Literature
(7) Home Mission Board Steps Toward Nationalization of the Work
(8) The Development of the National Convention
(9) Progress in Stewardship
<b>NEGATIVE FACTORS</b>
(1) Political Tension
(2) The Southern Baptist Convention Image of the Convention
(3) Loss of Members
(4) Problems of Ministerial Leadership
(5) A Weak Program of Religious Education and Lay Involvement
(6) Lack of a Literature Ministry
(7) Lack of Unity
(8) Late Emphasis on Baptist Work

(9) Lack of Strategic Planning
--------------------------------

Table 1.2. Factors Influencing Growth  
Background Report: Panama

<b>POSITIVE FACTORS</b>
(1) Early arrival of Baptist witness
(2) Spirit of tolerance in Panama and Republic
(3) Among Cuna Indians of San Blas
a. Translation of Bible into Cuna
b. Doors opened by schools
c. Presentation of the Gospel by a son of the people
(4) Increased efforts in Spanish language beginning in 1941
(5) Strategy to plant churches in unreached areas of entire republic
(6) Missionary outreach of churches in the Canal Zone
(7) Support given by Home Mission Board to church planting
a. Supporting of large number of pastors and workers dedicated to church extension
b. Provision of meeting places
c. Training of Panamanians in stewardship and evangelism by special teams from U.S.
d. Evangelistic campaigns with personnel from U.S.
(8) Capable English-speaking (non-missionary) leadership
(9) A clear statement of aim to establish churches
(10) Lay training for outreach
(11) Sound stewardship teaching has helped to triple number of self-supporting churches in recent years
(12) Financial strength of many churches
<b>NEGATIVE FACTORS</b>
(1) Lack of conservation of results
(2) Political disturbances and international friction in 1964 hurt some
(3) A number of graduates some ordained are leaving the ministry
(4) Lack of members with leadership ability
(5) Resentment of number of Panamanians of having headquarters for Baptist Work in the Canal Zone
(6) Lack of Christian education to help members develop
(7) Lack of unity within the convention
(8) Current dearth of young people dedicating themselves to the ministry
(9) Lack of a well-developed bookstore and literature program to undergird the development of the churches
(10) Over dependence on U.S. programs, personnel, and finances
<p>Panama has been administered as a State convention, a plan adequate for the Zone, but disastrous for the Republic, especially in a day of fervent nationalism.</p>

A high percentage of churches are subsidized after many years of existence.	
(11)	The heterogeneous nature of the population has made the projection of a unified program of work more difficult
(12)	Racial segregation and the resultant resentment has probably retarded the evangelistic response
(13)	The emigration of large numbers of English-speaking West Indians has weakened some of those churches
(14)	Large number of unemployed men has made stewardship development more difficult
(15)	The early use of numbers of non-Panamanian pastors in Spanish-speaking work was a detriment

Both studies also briefly discussed the history of Panama and the religious background of the country. A significant difference between the two studies, however, is that the *Church Development Depth Study* also examined the “methodology employed in the development of Baptist work in Panama” (Home Mission Board 1972:6).

Almost fifty years earlier, in 1925, Reverend Wright Barnes, then professor of Church History at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Forth Worth, Texas, wrote the article “An Adequate Program for Cuba and Panama.” He insisted that

it must not be forgotten that the ultimate objective in mission work is a self-governing native Christianity. This holds with any people in any land. Some day, be the time far or near, the Home and Foreign Boards will withdraw from Latin America and the Baptist churches will be completely self-supporting and self-governing. The program of the Home Mission Board must have that objective in view and must be so planned as that a native leadership shall be ready to lead into a deeper understanding of and a larger work in the kingdom of God. (1925:9)

Barnes did not explain how the churches would become self-supporting and self-governing, and he gave no indication as to how long the boards would remain in Latin America. This objective, however, was reaffirmed forty years later by L. D. Wood, superintendent of the Panama Baptist Mission in the Canal Zone from 1960 to 1965. He

asserted, “Home Mission Board strategy in Panama is to develop a Baptist constituency that is indigenous, self-determining, cooperative, self-supporting, and self-propagating” (1965:7). Wood seems to be describing the objective of the Home Mission Board, not its strategy. He, however, did not reveal whether this was the objective of the Home Mission Board when it began its work in Panama, or whether the Board later adopted this as the objective when the work was expanded to include the country of Panama.

Strategy has been defined as “a mutually-agreed means to achieve the ends which have been determined by a particular group” (Wagner 1971:16) or “an overall approach, plan, or way of describing how we will go about reaching our goal or solving our problem” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:16). Assuming that the objective of the Home Mission Board was to establish indigenous churches in Panama, what strategy was employed to realize that goal? Beginning on page six of the *Church Development Depth Study*, the most significant aspects of the “overall strategy which had been followed by the Home Mission Board in Panama” (Home Mission Board 1972:6-10) were presented and discussed:

- (1) Administration by a Missionary Superintendent
- (2) Receiving of Work Started by Other Groups
- (3) Heavy Financial Subsidy
- (4) Emphasis on Theological Education
- (5) Use of Area Missionaries
- (6) The Medical Ministry to the Cuna Indians
- (7) The Development of the Convention

As these sections are read, the question is asked, “Did the application of this strategy effectively produce churches which were self-determining, self-propagating, and self supporting?” At first glance, it seems that “receiving the work started by other groups” did not directly contribute to the establishing of indigenous churches in the country of



Panama and other factors such as “heavy financial subsidy” appear to undermine the intended purpose of the missionaries. The study does not point beyond itself to any convincing evidence that would support the conclusion that the application of this particular strategy resulted in the establishment of indigenous Baptist churches in Panama. Assuming that certain factors contributed to or hindered growth can be misleading. When each factor is examined, it may be learned that certain factors, thought to contribute to growth, did not. Further study may reveal that other factors, never considered by the Latin American Depth Study Committee, contributed more to the success or failure of the venture. How can the assertion that these factors contributed to the establishment of indigenous Baptist churches in Panama be substantiated or refuted?

The *Church Development Depth Study* referred to two books that offered significant insights into missionary activity in Latin America. The first, *Latin American Church Growth*, was written to “describe factors which retard and those which accelerate the establishment of soundly Christian churches” in Latin America and to “estimate the degree of responsiveness to the Christian message that the masses in Latin America are likely to exhibit in the years ahead” (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:18). This book has become “a standard reference volume on church growth in Latin America” (McClung 1986:114). Donald McGavran, former dean of the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary and author of several books including *Understanding Church Growth*, initiated the study by carefully selecting the researchers who “had proved themselves in the Latin American world of Christian mission, had received theological training, and were able to communicate in Spanish or Portuguese” (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:20). He remarked that the book “casts reliable

light on how the gospel is communicated and how it is not, what methods God is blessing to an increase of baptized believers and what methods He [sic] is not, and what makes a church multiply and what does not” (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:xxiv). It would be thought that the committee would have compared the factors that supposedly contributed to or retarded the growth of Baptist churches in Panama with information from this book, but there is no indication that they did.

The *Church Development Depth Study* insisted that the objective of the Home Mission Board was “to promote the growth of the churches” (Home Mission Board 1972:10). This emphasis, according to the study, “stands in marked contrast with that of the Methodists who in sixty-six years of work have created a fine self-supporting school of 2,000 students, but whose 10 churches have a total membership of only 600 including baptized children” (Home Mission Board 1972:10). *Protestant Growth and A Changing Panama*, a thesis written by Charles Owen Butler and mentioned in the study (1972:4), analyzed the growth of the Methodist Episcopal and the Foursquare Gospel churches in Panama. Butler attributes the lack of growth among the Methodists to the fact that “increased personnel and funds were primarily devoted to institutional education” (1964:44). “An unexamined thesis of Panama Methodism,” Butler later explained, “was that churches are planted by the inauguration of school work” (1964:47). Of the ten churches that had been founded, it is not known if any of them were established, either directly or indirectly, through an emphasis on institutional education. The increased investment in personnel and funds, however, could be justified only if a correlation could be shown between the existence of schools and the founding of churches.

The Home Mission Board did not place an emphasis on institutional education, but, according to the *Church Development Depth Study*, institutions were significant elements in the methodology employed in the development of Baptist work in Panama. In a separate section (Home Mission Board 1972:11), the use of institutions, like the Panama Baptist Theological Seminary located in Arriaján and the Marvel Iglesias Clinic in the San Blas Islands, was included among the factors which contributed to the growth of the churches. It is not known why the thesis or assumption of Panama Methodism was never questioned. Assumptions never questioned or proven can continue to consume resources that could have been used in a more productive manner. Missionaries can be asked to invest their lives in activities that do not contribute significantly to advance the cause of Christ in a foreign land and financial resources can be squandered. How many denominations, like the Methodists, have blindly pursued a course of action, foolishly imagining that it will result in the strengthening of God's work, never realizing that the course of action takes them further from where they want to be. Butler later insists that growth among Methodists was hindered for three reasons.

There was the assumption about the church and the school, how the former could not begin nor grow without the latter. Yet, even with the school, the Church did not grow.

And now there is the assumption about the ministry . . . the assumption that the Church will grow when each local congregation has its own national pastor, preferably ordained, and, if necessary, paid by foreign money. So the missionary chooses his candidate, packs him off to school; but this candidate has learned too well the non-growth principles of the missionary; and the candidate returns and accepts an appointment, and, like the missionary, 'runs the show.' And the congregation comes, hears the sermon, and returns home. But the Church does not grow.

And there is the assumption about the Church and the church building, how the former cannot exist without the latter. And so veritable mansions are built and impressive doors are thrown open wide. But few walk in and those who do walk in say, 'The mission built this church, let her repair it.' And the Church does not grow. (1964:55)

It could be expected that the members of Latin American Depth Study Committee, if they had read Butler's analysis, would have asked themselves if any of these assumptions had significantly influenced the development of the strategy of the Home Mission Board in Panama. Butler's analysis suggests that any denomination that follows a similar course of action can expect the same results, the Church will not grow. It can be argued that each of these assumptions could find a parallel in the expanding work of the Home Mission Board. Although the material in Butler's thesis and the book *Latin American Church Growth* could have been helpful to reaffirm or discredit the strategy employed by missionaries who served with the Home Mission Board, there is no evidence that this was ever done.

In addition to the Methodist Episcopal Church, the *Latin America Depth Study* briefly mentioned three other denominations: the Roman Catholic Church, the Assemblies of God (Springfield) and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. However, references to these other denominations do not seem to have had a significant impact upon either evaluating the strategy that was being utilized by the Home Mission Board or developing a more effective strategy to establish Baptist churches in Panama.

Roman Catholicism has dominated the religious scene in Panama and has influenced Central and South America for more than five hundred years. The members of the Latin American Depth Study Committee acknowledged that the Roman Catholic Church "claims 93 percent of the population, but, as it is true in most Latin American countries, the majority maintains only a nominal, tenuous relationship to the Roman Catholic Church" (Home Mission Board 1972:3). The members of the committee,

however, did not explore why so many Roman Catholics were only nominally attached to the church. According to Read, Monterroso, and Johnson,

the nominal Christianity of the Latin American Catholic is generally recognized by Roman Catholic, Protestant, and secular writers. It is a problem that continues to plague the Roman Catholic Church even today. Most persons in Latin America are only nominally Catholic. Only a small percentage of Catholics in Latin America attend mass as often as once a year. (1969:257)

Since Read, Monterroso, and Johnson were speaking about Latin America in general, their conclusion may not specifically apply to Panama. Holland's assessment of the Roman Catholic Church in Panama, however, is revealing.

Although the presence of the Catholic faith is felt in most aspects of Panamanian life, its impact is relatively weak on most *Panameños*. While birth, marriage and death are generally marked by religious rites and many of the national holidays are religious celebrations, a style of renewed life and signs of a redeemed community are largely absent" (1981:124)

More than twenty years later it was reported, "Though Panama is nominally Catholic, Catholicism is often an irrelevant cultural heritage and the church seen as a supporter of the blatantly corrupt ruling class" (Johnstone 1993:437). Since the majority of the Panamanians were Roman Catholics, it can be suggested that an understanding of the Catholic Church and its impact upon the Panamanians would have been helpful in formulating strategy.

Rudolf Obermuller insisted, "We should really note with deep regret that four centuries have not borne more fruit and we should firmly resolve to find the right approach to evangelism ourselves, by learning from the troubles and mistakes of the Roman Church" (1957:57). Robert Wood expressed concern that the Roman Catholic Church had not experienced greater numerical growth. "For centuries the Catholic church has considered it her mission to bring salvation – and even earthly happiness – to man,

and rightly so, but the fact is that after nearly 2,000 years, only one sixth of the world is Catholic” (1964:9). The rise of Islam and the Protestant Reformation both retarded the growth of Roman Catholicism, but the principal cause, according to Wood, was that the “Church has concentrated almost entirely on the message of the Gospel, without having carefully considered the method of delivery, the mentality of the missionary, or – most important of all – the whole cultural context of the people receiving the knowledge of Christ and his Church” (1964:10). Wood’s conclusion can become a criterion by which any missionary strategy can be analyzed. The communication of the gospel requires more than an understanding of the message that is to be shared. The process of communication involves the person through whom and by whom the message is being proclaimed and it also involves the people to whom and with whom the gospel is being shared. On the one hand, the gospel that is being proclaimed must be examined to determine if the message is in harmony with biblical revelation. On the other hand, any strategy that places an emphasis on proclaiming the gospel while ignoring the people with whom that gospel is being shared is incomplete. What is absent, however, from Wood’s list of factors is the spiritual dimension, particularly, the role of the Holy Spirit.

Salamao Ferraz argued, “Since Latin America is by tradition Roman Catholic, the evangelical missions working here ought before all else to understand the soul of the Roman Catholic Church, her ideals, her bright side and her strong points, as well as her weaknesses” (1927:73). Before Roman Catholicism is criticized, it must be understood that all denominations have weaknesses and strengths. The standard by which the Roman Catholic Church is evaluated is the same standard by which all denominations can be measured. Ferraz’ suggestion would require more than a cursory glance at the Roman

Catholic Church. Too often its weaknesses are seen but not its strengths. It can be assumed, however, that any missionary strategy which failed to consider why the Catholic church had not grown was not only seriously flawed, but possibly also unknowingly perpetuated its mistakes.

The following statistics (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:140), that were included in the *Church Development Depth Study* (Home Mission Board 1972:4) and the *Background Report* (Scanlon 1972:9), compared the membership of several Protestant denominations in the country of Panama in 1967.

Church of the Foursquare Gospel	13,288
Seventh Day Adventist Church	6,210
Baptist Convention	5,500
Episcopal Church	4,682
Other Baptists	2,749
Other Pentecostal Churches	1,329
Union Churches	1,006
Other Churches	2,055

Although the “other Baptists” are not identified, it can be assumed that the “Baptist Convention” refers to the churches included in the Panama Baptist Convention. As would be expected, the Methodists are not included in the list. While the members of the churches of other denominations numbered in the thousands, their members numbered in the hundreds. According to these statistics the churches that were members of the Baptist Convention were not growing as rapidly as the Church of the Foursquare Gospel or as slowly as the Episcopal Church. Read, Monterroso, and Johnson caution, however, that the statistics can be misleading because they do not identify the particular segments of society or homogeneous units in which those churches were established. While the membership of the Church of the Foursquare Gospel was ninety-five percent Spanish-speaking (1969:140), two thirds of the members of the Baptist churches were either West

Indians or Amerindians. The remaining third were Spanish-speaking Panamanians and the North Americans who were living in the Canal Zone (Read, Monterroso and Johnson 1969:140).

In the discussion about financial subsidy, the *Church Development Study* mentioned the Church of the Foursquare Gospel “whose 180 churches and 80 meeting places received no fraternal aid” (Home Mission Board 1972:8). It can be assumed that this fraternal aid would have come from the United States. According to the study, “these churches contribute approximately \$20,000 US a year to a national missions fund to support provincial supervisors” (Home Mission Board 1972:8). Writing in 1964, Butler had already noticed the insignificant growth of the Methodists when compared to the Foursquare Gospel. “Methodism’s 500 members and eleven churches in Panama, a result of fifty-eight years of mission labor, stand in sharp contrast to the Foursquare Gospel’s 10,000 members and 128 churches, a result of thirty-six years of mission effort” (Butler 1964:68). At the time the study was published, the Panama Baptist Convention included only 42 churches, more than the Methodists but significantly less than the Foursquare Gospel. Missionaries representing the Home Mission Board had been laboring in the country of Panama for more than sixty years. The Foursquare Gospel, on the other hand, had begun its work in 1928, almost twenty years after Wise had come to Panama, and by 1964 it had already established three times the number of Baptist churches reported in 1971.

The Church of the Foursquare Gospel, founded by Aimee Semple McPherson in 1924, sent Dr. Arthur F. Edwards and his wife to Panama as its first missionaries. Instead of working in the Canal Zone among the North Americans and the West Indians, these



first missionaries chose Panama City, the capital of the country, as the place where they would begin their ministry. This was “the first concentrated effort to evangelize and plant churches among the Hispanic population” (Holland 1981:132).

When they arrived in the Panama, the Edwards family sought to follow the pattern of Paul’s missionary work in the book of Acts. Thus they, like so many of the early Foursquare pioneer missionaries, focused on a major population center – in this case, Panama City – as the point of entry and a base for the expansion of the gospel. They expected miracles to accompany the preaching of the Word. New converts were baptized in water and filled with the Holy Spirit. A church was established and believers were disciplined. Leaders were trained and the church was nationalized as soon as possible. Through experienced and gifted leaders the gospel was taken throughout the region and country with special focus on groups yet unreached with the gospel. (Amstutz 1994:64)

From this report, certain significant factors can be identified that contributed to the growth of the Foursquare Gospel churches in Panama.

1. Focus on a major population center as a point of entry and a base for the expansion of the gospel
2. Expect miracles to accompany the preaching of the Word.
3. Establish churches.
4. Disciple believers.
5. Train leaders.
6. Nationalize the church as soon as possible.

These factors can be compared with those factors thought to contribute to the growth of Baptist churches in the country of Panama to see if there are any similarities or differences. Edwards’ son Leland, who also served as a missionary to Panama with his parents, explained why his father began his ministry in Panama City.

Dad was an avid student of the Word and The Acts of the Apostles was a book that became his manual for missionary work. He outlined and analyzed it from beginning to end and just had the simple belief that what happened then would happen in Panama. He went to Panama City because the Apostle Paul always went to major population centers to start a church. In Panama City he would find people that could read and write (good education). Also it was a center of trade, government, education and the life of the country flowed into it and out of it. (2001a:1)

Whether Edwards came to this conclusion only through the study of Acts, or whether the writings of Roland Allen also influenced him, is not known. Allen, an Anglican missionary to China from 1895 to 1904, has been the “most powerful influence in the development of Pentecostal missiology” (Burgess and McGee 1988:621).

With the publication of his books *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (1912) and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It* (1927), Allen unwittingly shaped the future course of Pentecostal missions. Through these books several key individuals were able to mold a new generation of missionaries. Allen's emphasis on the Pauline methods of church planting, as seen in the book of Acts, naturally appealed to the Pentecostals who believed that the dynamic power (“signs of wonders”) of the New Testament church had been restored. (Burgess and McGee 1988:621)

Allen, after examining the missionary methods of the apostle Paul, concluded that this missionary preferred “to establish centres of Christian life in two or three important places from which the knowledge might spread into the country round” (1962a:12).

Almost twenty years after beginning his ministry in Panama City, Edwards reported,

Through our American missionaries and National workers we have gone out and established stations in the key cities and villages, from Darien Province near the Colombian border to Chiriqui Province and the Costa Rican border. From these key cities and villages we are working out to the surrounding villages.

An idea of the future possibilities may be gathered from the fact that around Colon in Colon Province there are 238 villages. Around David in Chiriqui Province, there are 728 villages. Surrounding Panama City as the center of Panama Province are 469 villages; around Chitre are 638 villages; around Yavisa in the Darien Province there are 126 villages; around Santiago as a center are 1057 villages. (1947:5)

Although Panama City was chosen as the first strategic center from which the gospel would be proclaimed, Edwards also realized that the larger cities in the different provinces of Panama could also become centers from which the gospel could be taken into the outlying areas. It is not known if Edwards determined the number of villages

surrounding these different cities by referring to a map of the country or if he personally visited each area. He had, however, conceived of a strategy that he thought could be utilized to effectively take the gospel throughout the country of Panama.

As indicated in the statistics, the Foursquare Gospel Church became the largest Protestant denomination in the country of Panama. However, the *Church Development Study* also noted that “a recent arrival in Panama is the Assemblies of God denomination which after only five years in the country now reports 800 baptized members” (Home Mission Board 1972:4). The Assemblies of God had begun work in the country in 1967. A crusade led by David and Doris Godwin, the first missionaries of that denomination to Panama, resulted in the establishment of the first Assembly of God church in Panama City. The church

soon became one of the largest evangelical churches of that city. In a short time it was fully self-supporting with a full-time staff of several workers. Within two years, more than 15 outstations were manned by the new converts. A variety of radio broadcasts – up to 11 daily in Panama City – were supported by the new church, and it later provided the facilities for the first Assemblies of God Bible school in Panama. (Godwin 1984:15)

Not only was the church self-supporting, it was also innovative, utilizing radio to proclaim the gospel. The church was also self-propagating, having established more than 15 outstations. What is most significant, however, was that the new converts had been given an opportunity to participate in the expanding ministry of the church.

Although not mentioned in the study or the report, the Church of God would also experience significant growth in Panama. The Church of God, together with the Foursquare Gospel and the Assemblies of God, represented the broader Pentecostal movement in Panama. Pentecostals,

generally speaking, are aggressive in their evangelistic outreach. Not waiting for people to come to the churches, they go to them where they are

on the street corners or in the homes. They preach a simple, experience-centered message which is easily explained and easily understood. They seek to minister to the needs of the people where they are. They pray for the sick to be healed, for the alcoholics to be delivered, for the sinner that they might find the Savior. Assimilating the new members into a warm Christian community, they seek to nurture them in the faith. They try to provide jobs for those who are unemployed. They trust their laymen, using them in witness from the time they first become Christians. Their pastors usually emerge from among these laymen who have had on-the-job training in giving their testimonies on street corners, in teaching Sunday school classes, in preaching in worship services, and in helping at new preaching points. Helping their members discover their spiritual gifts and use them for the glory of God is a top priority for Pentecostals. They regard church going not as a dull duty, but as a joyful privilege. They use music that is lively and rhythmic, and they encourage those who can play instruments to use them in worship services. They give opportunities for congregational participation through clapping, singing, dancing, praying, testifying, and the exercise of spiritual gifts. They widen their outreach by starting new congregations in other areas. (Culpepper 1977:50)

Too often the members of the more traditional churches, distracted negatively by an emphasis on speaking in tongues or healing, fail to perceive the strengths of this movement. The presence of the Holy Spirit is manifested not only in the gifts of tongues and healing, but also in a vibrant fellowship that is an often-emphasized dimension of this often studied phenomenon. "In Pentecostal communities, a fraternal world is created which welcomes, prays, celebrates, shares, and restores, helping the believer to get away from the individualistic, competitive, and almost savage social climate and to find an answer to sickness, death, unemployment, and the disintegration of the family" (Ortega 1996:175).

The strengths and weaknesses of the strategy to establish indigenous Baptist churches in Panama could possibly have been more clearly discerned through a comparison with another denomination, such as the Foursquare Gospel or the Assemblies of God or the Church of God, which was experiencing phenomenal growth. Such a

comparative study might have revealed where missteps were taken and suggested alternatives, which, if pursued, could have strengthened existing work and caused growth where earlier little or none was apparent.

### Significance of the Study

Both the *Church Development Depth Study* and the *Background Report* acknowledged the comparative lack of qualitative and quantitative growth among the Baptist churches in Panama. In the *Background Report*, Scanlon (1972:12) mentioned, “There is a decline in the number of new churches, after 1966. The general rate of growth has been 4 percent a year, not very rapid for Latin America.” The *Church Development Depth Study* stated that the “1963 meeting of the convention reported a total of 5,989 members, which, in light of the fact that there were 6,182 members reported in 1971, would indicate that there has been little significant growth in the last eight years” (Home Mission Board 1972:6). The failure to significantly increase the number of members was not the only problem that Baptist churches faced. According to the *Church Development Depth Study*, “statistics reveal that with 2,234 persons baptized in the last 6 years, there was a net membership gain of only 970. This represents a loss of 55 percent. Although much of the loss may have resulted from emigration, it is also probably true that many members are being lost through poor conservation efforts by the churches themselves” (Home Mission Board 1972:15). The study, however, did not identify which churches were experiencing these losses, and for that reason, it is not known whether this loss was occurring among the Panamanians, the West Indians, or the Cuna Indians.

Later statistics from the Foreign Mission Board indicate that this was a chronic problem that has not yet been resolved. Poor conservation efforts also caused a serious

loss of members after the Foreign Mission Board assumed responsibility for the work. In 1990, Jim Slack, Research and Church Growth Analyst with the Foreign Mission Board, prepared the *Church Growth Indicators Analysis* which examined the growth of the Baptist churches in Panama from 1976-1989. According to Slack,

The churches have baptized 6,386 people in 14 years. Recorded membership gains during this same period of time lists 1,240. This means that 5,146 members have disappeared from the churches in 14 years. Thus the churches are losing 367.57 members each year while baptizing only 456.1 per year. Based upon averages, the churches lose 80.6% of the baptisms. From 1983 through 1989 there have been 3,282 baptisms and a record of 1,148 net additions to the local churches. Considering these figures over the past 7 years, 2,134 of the baptisms in the local churches are absent from the records. The loss rate for the last 7 years is 65.02%. This is somewhat improved over the entire period but it is still one of the worst backdoor situations that I have found in FMB areas of work. (1990:4)

The following information, supplied by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, lists the later statistics that were not included in Slack's original analysis.

Table 1.3. Foreign Mission Board, 1975-1995

YEAR	CHURCHES	PREACHING POINTS	BAPTISMS	MEMBERS
1975	43	72	420	6219
1976	47	63	440	6534
1977	52	64	509	6393
1978	54	67	501	5966
1979	57	66	372	6245
1980	56	64	435	6315
1981	57	63	410	6171
1982	59	64	437	6311
1983	65	62	567	7217
1984	68	71	503	7858
1985	71	82	393	6686
1986	73	74	435	6928
1987	78	76	439	7063
1988	81	80	515	7279
1989	82	97	430	7459

1990	87	97	586	7782
1991	85	104	706	8511
1992	86	87	393	8369
1993	86	87	393	8369
1994	89	102	380	7735
1995	91	111	262	7319

The total number of baptisms, beginning in 1976 and ending in 1995, was 9,106. It is understood that, during this time period, several of the members could have died or could have left the country. If all the members had been retained, however, the total membership, at the end of 1995, would have been 15,325, more than twice the number recorded in 1995. However, by 1995 membership had only increased by 1100.

*Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World* (Barrett and Reapsome 1988:61) lists “28 Major Currently Existing Strategy Committees Concerned to Implement World Evangelization.” The list includes two committees representing the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Global Evangelization Strategy Consultation and Global Strategy Group. Barrett and Reapsome observed,

The startling fact is that, if you examine the ongoing minutes of each of these committees, you will find that in almost all cases none of them either mentions, or has any relationship to, any of the other committees. They might as well be evangelizing different planets. Most totally ignore all the rest. Most do not know of the existence of all but one or two of the others. Most do not care anyway. (Barrett and Reapsome 1988:60)

The committees were facing the same task, but instead of sharing information and ideas that could have contributed to improved missionary activity, each committee was acting independently. It is not known how much reproduction of effort was being done.

Although the members of the Latin American Depth Study Committee knew which denominations were growing more slowly or more rapidly than the Baptists, there is no indication that the committee examined each denomination to determine why it was

or was not experiencing significant growth. No one had asked, “Why were Baptists not growing as rapidly as the Church of the Foursquare Gospel or the Seventh Day Adventist Church?” No one had asked, “Why were other denominations like the Episcopal Church, growing more slowly than the Baptists?” Having completed that task, the committee could have then applied what was learned to discover why Baptist churches were or were not growing.

How can mistakes be discovered and methods improved if the missionaries serving with the Home Mission Board could not explain why their own denomination was or was not experiencing significant growth? According to the *Church Development Depth Study*,

There is little indication that the concept of strategic planning has been used in Panama Baptist work. Because of the manner in which the work has been administered, the pastors and missionaries have not been accustomed to think in national terms. Questionnaires reveal that the missionaries have no concept of target groups to which they are attempting to minister. The majority of the missionaries indicated that strategic planning is badly needed. Perhaps most significant of all, the majority of missionaries could express no idea as to the reasons why Baptist work is progressing more rapidly than certain denominations and more slowly than others. (Home Mission Board 1972:17)

It can be argued that the formulation of missionary strategy is significantly weakened when it is not known why a particular denomination is or is not growing. If the Baptist churches were not experiencing growth, should they discard the methods that were being utilized? If the strengths and weaknesses of each method had not been discerned, what needed to be kept could have been discarded and what should have been discarded could have been kept. By comparing themselves with those denominations that were not experiencing growth, Baptists could have discovered if they were repeating their mistakes. By comparing themselves with those denominations that were experiencing



growth, the Baptists perhaps could have found ways to improve their strategy that would have resulted in more significant growth.

In 1972 the Latin American Depth Study Committee of the Foreign Mission Board advised,

More than the current 72,000 out of 11 million Southern Baptists need to read the *Commission* if Baptists are to know missions. They need to see that Baptist church growth is not an isolated phenomenon. When other groups with a fraction of our investment in personnel and money multiply Christians and churches faster than we do we need to know where and why this is taking place. (Foreign Mission Board Minutes 1973:23)

There is no evidence that a study was conducted to provide this information. Additional statistics, showing not only the investment in personnel and money but also the number of churches that had been established and the number of members, could have dramatically shown the difference between the Baptists and other denominations.

Southern Baptists are investing millions of dollars in missionary activity and are sending thousands of missionaries throughout the world. Such commitment demands the formulation of a missionary strategy which most effectively utilizes those resources and which results in churches which can not only grow quantitatively and qualitatively, but which also can reproduce themselves. Twenty-five years later, in 1998, the Foreign Mission Board prepared the *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study* which identified the problems which the Panama Baptist Mission was facing and suggested ways in which those problems could be corrected. The study never mentioned the Roman Catholic Church and seldom referred to the Pentecostals. When Pentecostals were mentioned, they, in one instance, were perceived to be a threat to the vigor of Baptist churches in the area.

Baptist doctrine among church members seems to be lacking in several areas: (1) the security of the believer (26% believe a person can lose his/her salvation); (2) in demon possession among Christians (34% believe that Christians can be demon-possessed); (3) that the Holy Spirit is received separately after salvation (34% believe this); and (4) in baptism and church membership (59% say that it is not a requirement for church membership). These member viewpoints reflect popular Pentecostal teachings in many charismatic churches. Pentecostal beliefs get into Baptist churches in a number of ways including peer pressure from Christian neighbors, listening to Christian radio stations dominated by Pentecostal teaching and from visiting Pentecostal-sponsored meetings. (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:5)

The report does not explore why members of Baptist churches were visiting Pentecostal-sponsored meetings. It is not known why the members of Baptist churches were yielding to the pressure of Christian neighbors, supposedly Pentecostals. It is not known why Christian radio stations were dominated by Pentecostal teaching. Why weren't these same radio stations being used by Baptists to share the gospel with those in Panama?

The study concluded with the section "Future Research" in which it was stated, "Information is incomplete in terms of what Great Commission Christian agencies are targeting people groups and population segments in Panama" (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:22). It was recommended that "the Strategy Leader should take the lead in discovering what GCC organizations are targeting Panama, their success rate, in order to see if the Mission should partner with them in their endeavors" (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:22). The only action taken by the Panama Baptist Mission, however, was to suggest that the "Strategy Leader may assign this research to a task force" (1998a:34).

Although the *Panama Church Growth Study* does not define the phrase "Great Commission Christian," a definition is found in another booklet, *Something New Under the Sun*, published by the Foreign Mission Board in 1999. A Great Commission Christian is "an evangelical Christian actively engaged in or committed to the fulfillment of the

Great Commission” (Foreign Mission Board 1999:51). The narrow definition can be compared with this broader definition. Great Commission Christians are “believers in Christ who are aware of the implications of Christ’s Great Commission, who have accepted its personal challenge in their lives and ministries, are attempting to obey his commands and mandates and who seek to influence the body of Christ to implement it” (Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson 2001 1:28). The question is asked by Southern Baptists, however, “Surely you don’t expect us to work with all so-called Christians? Many of these Christians are Christian in name only and have no personal relationship with Jesus Christ” (Foreign Mission Board 1999:29). A partnership with those who have no knowledge of Christ is unthinkable, but what of those, from other denominations, who, like many Baptists, have a personal relationship with Christ? When the goal or objective is church planting,

the principle governing who we work with is the New Testament model for a church. For us, this is synonymous with a Baptist or *baptistic* church model. At this level, the scope of potential partners is further reduced. Christian agencies and individuals that support evangelism without regard for church starting are less helpful at this level. Likewise, many Protestant denominations, if they don’t advocate believer’s baptism, would be unacceptable, because they wouldn’t have a New Testament church model in mind. Baptist missionaries also hesitate to partner with fellow evangelicals if they conclude that their teaching distorts the gospel by emphasizing one aspect of the church at the expense of the whole. (Foreign Mission Board 1999:34)

This attitude is not unusual among Southern Baptists. In 1910 the Southern Baptist Convention met in Baltimore. Wise’s report in 1907 to the Home Mission Board expressed his opposition to the “idea of church union” (Southern Baptist Convention 1910: 265). “The idea,” he explained, “is to cut loose from all denominations and form a Union Church, having affiliations with no denomination, no discipline, no requirements

for membership, no clear idea as to what the gospel is or how the ordinances are to be administered” (Southern Baptist Convention 1910:266). The Committee on Cuba and Panama affirmed both Wise’s and the Home Mission Board’s position on this issue.

The Committee suggests no recommendations to the Board, but approve the policy of having no tangling alliances with other Christian bodies that can in any way compromise or endanger the purity of our doctrines and practices as Baptists. There should, of course, be Christian comity, love, and cooperation, as far as is consistent with the teachings of the word of God, but Southern Baptists are not ready to merge, in their mission fields, at home, or elsewhere, with any body or bodies of Christians that stand for doctrines or practices which we deem out of harmony with the teachings of our Lord. (Southern Baptist Convention 1910a:18)

Following the report, E. C. Dargan, a member of the committee, addressed the convention.

I believe in Christian unity and love, but I do not believe that any other church on the top side of God’s earth is as good as a Baptist church, and I don’t want others to believe it. I am not open to conviction on that point, and if that be narrow, I am going to die in a narrow bed and sleep in a narrow coffin and wake up a narrow little soul on the Resurrection morning. If I am not a Baptist, “I am nothing, nohow.” (Masters 1910d:14)

In a later editorial which appeared in *The Home Field*, it was noted, “Both by its evident approval of Dr. Dargan’s ringing address and the unanimous adoption of the report which he read, the Convention, in no uncertain spirit, manifested its approval of a clear-cut Baptist system of religious propagandism” (Masters 1910d:15).

Instead of limiting those with whom the Foreign Mission Board would partner by narrowly defining the term “Great Commission Christian,” Barrett and Reapsome argue that the formulation of effective missionary strategy requires the participation of all Christians, regardless of denomination.

1. *Accept all Great Commission Christians.* We are not going to get anywhere fresh until we realize that we are out of touch with millions of others who are clearly also Great Commission Christians. We

should accept those who profess personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and who desire to bring others to faith in him as well, in obedience to Christ's Great Commission. With millions of others so confessing, we form one single body of Great Commission Christians dedicated to obeying that Commission.

2. *Relate to other Great Commission agencies.* We should seek to relate to other Christian agencies that work to fulfill the Great Commission. We are not talking about dealing with other doctrines, dogmas, modes of baptisms, theologies, ecclesiologies, nor organic church union. (1988:62)

While partnership between the Foreign Mission Board and other agencies or denominations may never occur, at least the Board could learn from those who are participating in the same worldwide task that God has given to His people. Both the Roman Catholic Church and Pentecostals have followed Wagner's advice.

One of the most valuable exercises for a missionary is to make a careful study of evangelistic methods currently being used in his area, determining which methods God has obviously blessed, and which methods He has not. If he acts on what he discovers, he may find that he has developed a strategy which will bear abundant fruit. (1973b:157)

Finding much to imitate in the Pentecostal movement, such as its evangelistic and pastoral methods, the Roman Catholic Church, according to Gaxiola-Gaxiola, "intends to adopt the good points from the Pentecostals and to make Catholics feel that they do not have to go somewhere else for the satisfaction of their emotional and religious needs" (1991:125). As for the Pentecostals, they "tend to be innovative and adventurous and observe what patterns God is blessing to the conversion of sinners and the growth of His Church, and to using those" (McGavran 1977:99). Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal churches have shown greater flexibility than the Baptists. They both challenge the Southern Baptists to look beyond themselves to reflect upon Roman Catholicism and the Pentecostal movement whose growth deserves more attention than a

few sentences in the *Church Development Depth Study* or the *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study*.

Justo L. González, a Cuban and former Assistant Professor of World Christianity at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, argues that the historic churches such as the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Episcopalians “can never hope, like the Roman Catholic renewal, to embrace the majority of the population. Nor can they even hope, like their Pentecostal brethren, to become a significant minority competing for the allegiance of the Latin American masses” (1972:284). He later adds, “Religiously, the future of Latin America is in a renewed Catholicism and/or a matured Pentecostalism” (1972:286). The willingness of Baptists, however, to assume a comparatively insignificant role in the missionary activity in Latin America is debatable and perhaps unnecessary. The strategy to establish indigenous churches in Panama could be modified and greater quantitative and qualitative growth could possibly be experienced.

González traces Roman Catholic renewal to two sources, the Second Vatican Council and the presence of Protestantism. Such individuals as Forrest L. Knapp and Robert Speer had anticipated this renewal. Knapp’s opinion that the Roman Catholic Church “may itself be strengthened as a result of the presence of Protestants” (1942:1528) had been expressed much earlier by Speer who wrote, “The presence of Protestant missions will shame the Church into a self-cleansing, and introduce the forces, or support whatever inner forces there may already be, which may correct and vivify it” (1911:171).

While the historic churches will continue to proclaim the gospel and involve themselves in addressing social needs, their greatest contribution, according to González, will be toward the maturing of the Pentecostal movement.

The growth of Pentecostalism is forcing it to face issues which up to now it has ignored. When it was a small movement, confined to the marginal elements in society, the question of Christian faith and social responsibility was easy to answer. But, what happens when, as in Brazil and Chile, the Pentecostal movement grows to such proportions that politicians begin wooing the Pentecostal vote? Likewise, the question of Christianity and culture is easily answered in a community most of whose members are drawn from the culturally deprived strata of society. But, what happens when the children of the early converts, while attempting to retain their faith, join the mainstream of the modern world? These are questions to which the historic churches have given a great deal of thought, and in which they can make a significant contribution to the Pentecostal movement. (1972:285)

The emergence of the Pentecostal movement has been seen as the greatest challenge to the Roman Catholic Church. Its phenomenal growth, according to González, can be attributed to a variety of reasons. “There is no doubt that the emotional nature of Pentecostal worship is very appealing to many. To others, the tightly knit Pentecostal community is a place where they can gain the identity which they have lost in the crowded city. It is also true that Pentecostalism has spread almost exclusively to the lower classes” (1972:283).

Several who have examined the Pentecostal movement agree with the conclusion of Benjamin F. Gutiérrez, “While the Catholic church and the historic Protestant churches are empty, the Pentecostal churches grow because they satisfy the needs of the people” (1996:17). Edgar Moros Ruano insists that the movement satisfies such needs and aspirations as the search for belonging, a sense of community, the search for answers to life, the search for a cultural identity, the need to be recognized, the search for

transcendence, the need for spiritual guidance, the need for vision, and the need to participate and to make a commitment (1996:160). Bernardo L. Campos M. describes Pentecostalism as

a movement of symbolic protest in a society that denies fulfillment and participation to the dispossessed; it is a grassroots movement born of the traditional cultures struggling to cope with massive change; and it is a movement capable of being a channel for social change and of offering hope for a better world. (1996:50)

Douglas Petersen explains that

there has been increasing scholarly support for growing Latin American Pentecostalism as essentially a social movement provoked by the disruptive conditions of life experienced by the common people, thus making social or personal crisis - and its solutions - one of its distinguishing features. (1994:24)

This brief analysis of the Pentecostal movement describes the impact that it has had upon the people of Latin America. The analysis also can suggest ways in which the Pentecostal movement has differed from the Baptist effort. Was the Baptist effort a grassroots movement? Was it a channel for social change? Did it offer hope for a better world?

### Statement of the Problem

The labors of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention ended in 1974 when responsibility for the country was transferred to the Foreign Mission Board. The significance of this period of time is emphasized in the *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study* that was prepared by the Foreign Mission Board in 1998. "The Home Mission Board and its history colors everything that has been done here, including such things as dependency, subsidy, pastor attitudes and perspective on missionary roles and responsibilities, stewardship and even Convention and association structures" (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:14). The Foreign Mission Board did not initiate the work in the



country of Panama, but followed in the footsteps of the Home Mission Board. It inherited the churches and institutions such as the Panama Baptist Theological Institute and the Marvel Iglesias Medical Center. What was given to them was the outgrowth of a strategy that encouraged subsidy and provided funds for the building of churches.

From 1905 to 1974, Baptist work in Panama under the direction of the Home Mission Board did not grow as rapidly as could have been expected, given the apparent receptivity of the people.

Prior to the 1940s, Southern Baptist work was largely limited to the Canal Zone and the port cities of Colon and Panama, among the North Americans and West Indians. Overall, Baptist growth was slow. Only 125 members were reported in 1925, but by 1935 membership totaled 1,250. However, only a slight gain was recorded during the next 20 years; in 1955, there were 1,845 members.

In the 1940s increased efforts were made by the Home Mission Board to evangelize and plant churches in Spanish-speaking communities. Two Hispanic churches were soon organized: the First Baptist Church of Panama City (1943) and La Chorrera Baptist Church (1946). Independent mission work among the Kuna Indians on the San Blas Islands was incorporated into the Home Mission Board in the 1950s. The Panama Baptist Convention was organized in 1959 representing four different cultures: West Indian, North American, Kuna and Hispanic Panameños.

Between 1955 and 1967, Baptist work increased from 1,845 to 5,568 members. The membership increased between 1955 and 1960, from 1,845 to 4,464, was largely due to the addition of six Kuna congregations and six West Indian churches in Bocas del Toro. In the mid-1960s, one-third of Baptist membership was West Indian, one-third was Amerindian (Kuna) and the other one-third of Baptist membership was distributed among Americans in the Canal Zone and Hispanics in Panama.

The total membership of the Baptist Convention of Panama reached 6,245 in 1979 among 57 churches and 66 missions. However, the membership has been somewhat static since 1971, when 6,114 were reported. In 1979, Baptist membership by ethnic groups was 24% Kuna, 35% West Indian, 28% Hispanic and 13% North American. (Holland 1981:131)

During this same period, the Foursquare Gospel and later the Assemblies of God, at times laboring among the same people as the Baptists, reported greater growth. The failure of

the Baptists to experience significant growth can be attributed to the assumption that an effective missionary strategy for Panama can be formulated and implemented without understanding the Pentecostal movement or the Roman Catholic Church or the historical background of the country or the various cultures of the people among whom the missionaries were working. This dissertation, focusing upon the Home Mission Board, and to a lesser extent the Foreign Mission Board, will attempt to show the correctness or incorrectness of that assumption.

This dissertation will analyze, not only the goal, but also the strategy or strategies employed by the Home Mission Board in the country of Panama from 1905 to 1974, and will examine the growth of the Pentecostal movement in Panama during this period for insights that are relevant to evaluating Baptist strategy. Principles of Church Growth will be added to an analysis of the historical development of the country and the cultures of its various peoples. This will provide a larger framework in which the proposed research will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What were the explicit or implicit goals of the Home Mission Board strategy in Panama? This will be answered by a careful study of relevant documents from the Home Mission Board and other sources, as identified in the Literature Review.
2. What church growth strategy or strategies did the Home Mission Board employ in Panama? These will be discerned and analyzed based upon relevant documents from the Home Mission Board and other sources, as discussed in the Literature Review.
3. Assuming that a significant goal was to establish a Baptist church which was self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing, did the strategy result in the effective planting and multiplication of indigenous churches in Panama? Why or why not? This will be answered by an analysis of Baptist statistics, when available, and other data, including an analysis of the Panamanian context in the light of church growth theory.

4. How can this analysis be further informed by comparison with Pentecostal strategy in Panama? This will be answered by a comparison of Baptist with Pentecostal strategy in Panama, noting significant similarities and differences. The sources for making this comparison are identified in the Literature Review.

5. Based on this examination of the strategies of the Baptists and Pentecostals and the application of church growth principles, what were the major strengths and weaknesses of the Home Mission Board's strategy to establish indigenous churches in Panama? What significant insights can be identified for the formulation of missionary strategy?

Referring to the goal or objective of the Home Mission Board in Panama, L. D. Wood maintained, "The major method of ministering to the people is through starting churches and missions wherever possible. Local self-determination, self-support, self-propagation and cooperation are the basic aims of your Home Mission Board for the people of this Republic" (1965:6). The establishment of indigenous churches, although a goal or aim of the Home Mission Board, was in fact a noted strength of the Pentecostal movement. "Students of church growth, while recognizing the spiritual vitality of the Pentecostal movement, emphasize the indigenous nature of the movement in each country as one key to its growth" (Culpepper 1977:50). Justo L. González also understood that one of the strengths of the Pentecostals was their ability to establish indigenous churches. "While we in the historic churches are discussing indigenization and singing European and North American music, the Pentecostals -- who don't know and probably don't care what the word 'indigenization' means -- are singing Latin American rhythms to the accompaniment of guitars and maracas" (1972:284).

Both the Assemblies of God (Springfield) and the Foursquare Gospel included the establishing of indigenous churches as a significant objective in their missionary activity. As early as 1921 the minutes of the Assemblies of God indicated that "the

Pauline example will be followed so far as possible, by seeking out neglected regions where the Gospel has not yet been preached, lest we build upon another foundation” and that “it shall be our purpose to seek to establish self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing native churches” (Assemblies of God 1921:61). Several years later, Loren Triplett, executive director, Division of Foreign Missions, for the Assemblies of God (Springfield), wrote an article entitled “A God-Given Strategy.”

Today, the strategy of our ministry is focused and strong. When you send your sons and daughters to the ever-increasing number of nations which the Lord of the harvest has opened to us, they will be involved with one or more of the following:

1. The widest possible evangelization of the spiritually lost through every available means.
2. The establishment of indigenous churches after the New Testament pattern.
3. The training of national believers to proclaim the gospel to their own people and to other nations.
4. The showing of compassion for suffering people in a manner representing the love of Jesus Christ.

These four sentences enfold the mission of our church overseas. Valiant missionaries have dedicated their entire lives to fulfill these God-given responsibilities. (1993:30)

The establishing of an indigenous church was also a significant goal for the Foursquare Gospel. Leland B. Edwards, former missionary to Panama, explains, “As a local church is established and matures, pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets and apostles rise up and function fully in their gifts. Divine enablement rests upon them. The Church becomes self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating” (1986:10). If the Home Mission Board was attempting to establish indigenous churches in the country of Panama, it seems that it could have profited from learning how the Pentecostals were accomplishing this same objective.

## Definitions

### 1. Home and Foreign Mission Boards of the Southern Baptist Convention

The names of both the Home Mission and the Foreign Mission Boards were changed in 1997. The Home Mission Board is now the North American Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board is now the International Mission Board. While sources prior to that date refer to either the Home Mission Board or the Foreign Mission Board, sources after that date will refer to the North American Mission Board or the International Mission Board. To avoid confusion the names of the boards at the time of the Home Mission Board sent missionaries to Panama will be used.

### 2. Church

In response to the question, What is a Baptist church? Reverend George W. McDaniel answered, “A gospel church is an organized body of baptized believers, equal in rank and privilege, administering its affairs under the headship of Christ, united in the belief of what He has taught, covenanting to do what He has commanded, and co-operating with other like bodies in kingdom movements” (1919:8). This definition sufficiently describes a church while allowing its members freedom to develop church polity, organizational methods, articles of faith, and a church covenant, if it is desired.

### 3. Indigenous Church

The materials from the Home Mission Board, the Foursquare Gospel, and the Assemblies of God define an indigenous church as self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting. Although this definition will not be satisfactory when it is viewed in the light of present day church growth theory, this was how the indigenous church was

defined by those denominations which were attempting to establish churches in the country of Panama during this time period.

#### 4. Church Growth

The American Society for Church Growth defines church growth as

That careful discipline which investigates the nature, the function, and the health of Christian churches, as they relate to the effective implementation of the Lord's Great Commission to make disciples of all peoples (Matthew 28:19-20). It is a spiritual conviction, yet it is practical, combining the eternal principles of God's Word with the practical insights of social and behavioral sciences. (2003:1)

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The work of the Home Mission Board will be examined from the perspective of both church growth theory and strategy theory. By the application of church growth theory, the ministry of the Home Mission Board can be evaluated to determine whether growth was occurring and also to explain why or why it did not occur. To evaluate the strategy of the Home Mission Board, however, criteria must be chosen. What factors should be considered when strategy is formulated? These criteria will include the essential factors such as "a careful analysis of the situation we face," "an objective evaluation of the resources we have available," and "a decision on how to deploy our forces so as to get the greatest effectiveness from them" (Cook 1963:54).

#### **Church Growth Theory**

McGavran, the father of the church growth movement, was a missionary to India and later served as a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is recognized as the father of the Church Growth Movement. McGavran and several others who served on the faculty of the school have contributed to the understanding of church growth. These

include Arthur F. Glasser, Dean and Professor of Theology, Ralph D. Winter, Professor of Historical Development of the Christian Movement, Alan R. Tippett, Professor of Missionary Anthropology, Charles H. Kraft, Associate Professor of Missionary Anthropology, and C. Peter Wagner, Associate Professor of Latin American Affairs. To this list will be added J. Waskom Pickett who also served as a missionary to India. His insights influenced McGavran's understanding of people movements.

*Understanding Church Growth* (McGavran 1970) was utilized because the revised version (McGavran 1980) was expanded to include illustrations from North America.

As American leaders studied the 1970 *Understanding Church Growth* (which they considered the basic book) they found its illustrations came largely from overseas. Some Americans, therefore, were tempted to think that church growth principles did not apply to the United States. Wiser men realized that they applied fully as much and asked me to revise the 1970 edition so they would easily be seen to do so. (McGavran 1980:vii)

The revision, therefore, discusses the same principles that were presented in the earlier book, showing, however, that these principles were equally applicable to the North American scene. "A church growth principle is universal, can be applied in any cultural context, but has to be properly interpreted and applied. Principles contribute to the growth of churches but do not exclusively cause the growth of churches" (McGavran and Arn 1977:15). Wagner, in the article "'Church Growth': More Than a Man, a Magazine, a School, a Book," lists six distinctives that are significant for understanding the church growth movement (1973:11-19). These distinctives were summarized by Elmer Towns in *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (McIntosh 2004).

1. Nongrowth displeases God
2. Numerical growth of a church is a priority with God
3. Disciples are tangible, identifiable, countable people

4. Limited time, money and resources require strategy based on results
5. Social and behavioral sciences are valid tools in encouraging and measuring church growth
6. Research is essential for maximum growth (Towns 2004:40)

J. R. McQuilkin, graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary and president of Columbia Bible College and Columbia Graduate School of Bible and Missions, reduces the number of these principles to five, again summarized by Towns.

1. The importance of numerical growth
2. The necessity of focusing evangelism on receptive groups
3. People movements, or the homogeneous principle
4. Use of science as a valid tool to determine strategy and principles
5. Right method guarantees large response (2004:40)

Before examining each of these principles, it must be acknowledged that the Church Growth Movement has its defenders and its detractors. The movement has been criticized for its “over reliance on human techniques” and its “weak theology of the church” (Hestenes 2004:263). Pentecostals “fear that the Church Growth Movement may tend to overemphasize the socio-anthropological explanations for the growth of pentecostalism” (McClung 1986:116). Several have expressed concern that the principles may not rest upon a firm theological foundation. Larry L. McSwain, Associate Professor of Church and Community at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, asserted, “Much of the theory of the church growth movement is based more upon sociology than theology” (1980:524). McGavran, however, denied that accusation. In his book *Understanding Church Growth*, he twice asserted, “Church growth is no mere sociological process” (1970:16-17). McQuilken concluded, “None of the presuppositions, rightly understood, need be in conflict with biblical teaching. However, only two were seen to flow directly from biblical mandate, two more seemed to be well derived from biblical principle, and one was seen to be extrabiblical, lacking both mandate and principle for validation”



(1974:73). While “the importance of numerical growth” and “and the necessity of focusing evangelism on receptive groups” unquestionably rest firmly on a biblical foundation, the last principle, “right method guarantees large response,” is suspect. McQuilken, however, was less emphatic than Towns implies. While McQuilken expressed the last principle in this way, “If these principles are followed, large church growth will often result” (1974:67), Towns insisted, “Right methods guarantees large response”

This last principle emphasizes pragmatism, another area in which the Church Growth Movement has been criticized. “Church-growth people do not hesitate to use whatever means God provides to do the best possible in reaching their goals. They are not very much interested in what should bring unbelievers to Christ, but they are acutely interested in what does, in fact, bring unbelievers to Christ” (Wagner 1973a:14). What did McQuilken mean, however, when he asserted that large church growth will often result if these principles are followed? Are the principles validated when more than two thousand accept Christ, but repudiated when less than twenty respond favorably to the claims of Christ?

The emphasis on quantitative growth in the Church Growth Movement is unmistakable. “Numerical growth is not the only task of the Church. But biblically it does have a very high priority, and God is glorified when new members are added to the Church” (Wagner 1973:286). The Baptists, however, did not experience significant numerical growth.

Prior to the 1940s, Southern Baptist work was largely limited to the Canal Zone and the port cities of Colon and Panama, among North Americans and West Indians. Overall, Baptist growth was slow. Only 125 members were reported in 1925, but by 1935 membership totaled 1,250. However,

only a slight gain was recorded the next twenty years; in 1955, there were 1,845 members. (Holland 1981:131)

In the report “Focus on Growth: Panama,” Scanlon asserted,

The very nature of a healthy organization requires growth. The Baptist churches in Panama and Canal Zone are no exception. After several years of reaching a plateau, churches in their March Convention reported the greatest number of baptisms in the life of Baptists in Panama.

Still with slightly less than 7,000 members in a nation of one and one-half million, Baptists yearn to see more people won to Christ and brought into fellowship with New Testament Churches. (1974:1)

In 1973 the Panama Baptist Convention reported a membership of 6,775. In 2000, more than twenty-five years later, the membership had grown to 6,897, an increase of only 142.

J. Waskom Pickett, missionary to India and the original pioneer in modern Church Growth research, argued, “Generally speaking, slow growth indicates something wrong with the quality of life of the church. It both reflects and produces churches that lack either the urge to make disciples or the triumphant faith necessary to translate such urge into effective endeavor” (1963:11). Alan R. Tippett, missionary to Fiji and professor of mission and anthropology at Fuller Theological Seminary, also supports Pickett’s conclusions. He writes, “The attitude that we must expect slow growth distresses me. It is quite foreign to the New Testament, which on the contrary, has a rich range of picturesque imagery that shows that growth is to be expected - both physical, numerical growth from outside and spiritual qualitative growth from within” (1970:12). Arthur F. Glasser, also of Fuller’s faculty, insists that

God wills the growth of His Church. A chief and irreplaceable element in her ministry is the proclamation of the Gospel to all mankind and incorporation of those who believe into her communal life. Only through the deliberate multiplications of vast numbers of new congregations all over the world will the Church be able to evangelize this generation. When she ceases to perform this mission, something fundamental is lost in her

very essence as the people of God in the midst of the nations. The church that does not grow is out of the will of God. (1973:52)

It is useless to proceed to the other principles if it cannot be shown that God desires His Church to grow. Having reached that conclusion, then it can be asked whether or not a church is growing. Not only is it beneficial to know why a church is growing, it is also helpful to discern when and why a church is not growing.

A subtler problem is whether there should be less emphasis on the growth of the church and more emphasis on the health of the church. It is argued that a healthy church will grow. When the indigenous church model is considered, it would be thought, rightly or wrongly, that a healthy church would be self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting. This principle, however, should not be interpreted to suggest that the health of the church alone is sufficient to attract the lost to Christ. The emphasis upon the health of the church “is both a gain and a loss; a gain if ‘health’ is described holistically in biblical terms; a loss if outreach is de-emphasized and new people are not sought and won to Christ and his mission” (Hestenes 2004:263).

It is also understood that some churches are in situations that are not conducive for growth. “The leader of the racially transitional church, the church in the declining rural community or the community experiencing population loss faces the depression, loss of status, and immobility of serving a declining church” (McSwain 1980:525). This would be descriptive of the churches in the Canal Zone (Scanlon 1974:4) whose members were North Americans, serving with the United States military or the Panama Canal Commission. One pastor wrote, “On a single Sunday we lost over 40 members due to their being transferred” (Reverend Edmund Stallworth, pastor of the Cocoli Baptist

Church). Another noted, “In a single week we lost 150 families” (Reverend Gary Inman, associate pastor of the Balboa Heights Baptist Church).

The focus on receptive people should not be interpreted to mean that those resistant to Christ would be overlooked or neglected. Understanding that resources are finite, those resources should be invested among those people who are most willing to hear and most likely to respond positively to the gospel message. The majority of the resources, both in terms of finances and personnel, will be directed toward the receptive.

It has been argued that “the clearest church growth principle that has emerged from Pickett to McGavran is the principle of receptivity. Receptive people are those who are most likely to hear the gospel message positively as a result of a personal crisis, social dislocation, and/or the internal working of the Holy Spirit” (Rainer 1998:487). This principle, therefore, examines those factors which indicate that a certain people, among others, would be more willing to hear the gospel. To determine receptivity, McGavran asks,

*Are groups of persons becoming Christians? As Jesus Christ is proclaimed to this population and His obedient servants witness to Him, do individuals, families, and chains of families come to faith in Him? Is any denomination working in similar peoples planting self-propagating congregations? If the answers are in the affirmative, the homogeneous unit concerned is receptive. (1970:228)*

However, his questions only assume that another denomination has already begun to proclaim the gospel to a particular people group. If a certain denomination is considering preaching to a people who have never heard the gospel, how can receptivity be determined? Shearer suggests that a conversion-readiness questionnaire could be utilized which would reflect “(a) the amount of dissatisfaction a person has with his culture, (b) the amount of dissatisfaction he has with his present religion, (c) the strength of bond

with his family and clan, (d) the amount of freedom he has to change, and (e) the part his family or clan group plays in a decision to change” (1973:163). Even if such a questionnaire is not used, his questions could be kept in mind to determine not only receptivity but also if these people would more likely respond to the gospel as individuals or as a group. Shearer is not suggesting, however, that a people must be willing to abandon their culture before they will be willing to hear the claims of Christ. He is acknowledging that they can be dissatisfied with certain aspects of their culture. And it is not enough to know that a people are dissatisfied with their present religion. It must also be discovered why they are dissatisfied.

Several other factors may also suggest that a particular people are receptive to the gospel. “They may be political, religious, cultural, sociological, or economic. Such items as migration, conquest, nationalism, natural disasters, depression, spiritual vacuums, and social disintegration are some of the myriad forces that the degree of responsiveness” (Tippett 1973:104). This is the reason why not only the historical development of a country must be examined, but also the cultures of its various peoples. Again and again these factors have shaped the lives of those living in Central and South America. The Spanish conquest of the New World, the emergence of Peru and Colombia and Panama and Mexico as nations and the struggle of the indigenous peoples to maintain their way of life have all left their imprint upon that part of the world.

*How Churches Grow* (McGavran 1973) suggests another indicator for receptivity. McGavran first refers to Confucianists, Buddhists and others that “know nothing about their religion, have never read their own scriptures, nor have any intention of bringing their personal conduct into harmony with them” (1973:50), and then he asserts,

This large number of nominal believers gives great hint that people are not nearly as fixed in other moulds as we think. There are hundreds of millions who are Muslims, Hindus, Confucianists, and Buddhists only in the sense that logs in a boom are parts of a system. Once what holds them is gone, they will be available for rearrangement. (1973:51)

Although McGavran describes a religious context which is dissimilar to that in Panama, his argument can be applied to the thousands who are only nominally attached to the Roman Catholic Church in Panama.

The Church Growth Movement has also been criticized for the emphasis on people movements, also referred to as multi-individual, mutually interdependent conversion. This principle is questioned because some doubt the validity of the conversion of those who came to Christ as a result of a people movement. Another area of concern is the homogenous unit principle, “Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers” (McGavran 1970:198). Some see this as an emphasis upon establishing a mono-cultural church instead of the more biblical multi-cultural church. “As a strategy of conversion, the homogeneous unit principle is sound,” but “the multi-cultural church is a healthier church than the mono-cultural church” (McSwain 1980:530).

As for the last principle, science a valid tool, Wagner and others have pointed out that the Church Growth Movement has benefited from insights from other fields of study including sociology and anthropology. From a biblical point of view, the identification and application of these insights is not specifically endorsed by Scripture, but does not violate Scriptural teaching. “Improved strategy will, other things being equal, result in a more fruitful evangelistic work, and thus be more pleasing to God. Far from reflecting

lack of spirituality, well-honed strategy is a mark of maturity and competence in God's work" (Wagner 1973a:14).

### Strategy Theory

*The Strategy Process* (Mintzberg, Lampel, Quinn, and Ghoshal 2003) challenges a narrow concept of strategy. According to the traditional understanding of strategy, a plan is first formulated and then implemented. A plan is "some sort of consciously intended course of action, a guideline (or set of guidelines) to deal with a situation" (Mintzberg 2003:4) or the "pattern or plan that integrates the organizations major goals, policies and action sequences into a cohesive whole" (Quinn 2003:10). Unlike the traditional view of strategy, however, strategy can also be viewed as a pattern or stream of actions.

Before the Latin American Depth Study Committee discussed the methodology employed in the development of Baptist work in Panama, the members explained, "The following methods of work impressed the Committee as having formed significant aspects of the overall strategy which has been followed by the Home Mission Board in Panama" (Home Mission Board 1972:67). There is no suggestion that the committee was referring to a detailed strategy that had been carefully enunciated by the Home Mission Board. Even when a strategy has been devised and formulated,

one must look at the actual emerging pattern of the enterprise's operant goals, policies, and major programs to see what its true strategy is. Whether it is consciously set forth in advance or is simply a widely held understanding resulting from a stream of decisions, this pattern becomes the real strategy of the enterprise. (Quinn 2003:11)

The committee, having examined the activities of the Home Mission Board in Panama, inferred that its strategy emphasized certain factors including heavy financial subsidy and the receiving of work started by other groups.

Strategy can also be viewed as the perspective or worldview of the organization and implies “an ingrained way of perceiving the world” (Mintzberg 2003:9). As expected, the worldview of the Home Mission Board would be different from that of a business enterprise. In a sermon preached in 1809, Leigh Richmond, who served as a rector in Turvey, a small village in England, and chaplain to the Duke of York, contrasted the worldviews of a statesman, traveler and merchant with that of a Christian. It is especially important, when applying business principles to evaluate the strategy of the Home Mission Board, to understand the contrasting worldviews of a Christian and a merchant.

The merchant takes up the map (of the world), and eagerly traverses the delineation of seas, continents, and islands, with anxious inquiry as to the pecuniary profit and loss of trade and merchandise. His thoughts are absorbed in considering how much may be gained by his speculations to some distant island or foreign shore. He meditates on the track of his vessel upon the ocean, marks its course upon the hazardous waves, and is full of agitation with respect to its fate. There is his golden treasure, and his heart is there also. As he views the world’s map, he conjectures, hopes, fears; and, with much solicitude, contemplates his future gains, or dreads impending losses. The map is again laid down, and he has done with it. (Grimshawe 1840:145).

The building of the Panama Canal was a commercial enterprise. By building a bridge of water connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, businesses could expect greater profits because their products could be more easily and quickly be sent to their consumers. The Home Mission Board had sent missionaries there, not merchantmen, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.



When the Christian beholds the world's map, he has a subject of investigation far beyond them all. What they have overlooked and disregarded is everything to him. His great inquiry is, "Show me the visible kingdom of Christ: name the countries where Christ is worshiped. Oh, when shall the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of Our Lord and his Christ: When shall the heathen fear the name of the Lord?" (Grimshawe 1840:146)

In the article "Evaluating Business Strategy," Richard R. Rumelt, strategy professor at the University of California in Los Angeles, defines strategy evaluation as "the appraisal of plans and the results of plans that centrally concern or affect the basic mission of an enterprise" (2003:87). Both he and James Brian Quinn, author of *Strategies of Change: Logical Incrementalism* (Irwin 1980), have proposed several criteria by which a strategy can be evaluated. In the article "Strategies for Change," excerpted from the book, Quinn argues that "one needs some guidelines to define an effective strategic structure" (2003:15) and then discusses several criteria, including

*Clear, decisive objectives:* Are all efforts directed toward clearly understood, decisive, and attainable goals?

*Maintaining the initiative:* Does the strategy preserve the freedom of action and enhance commitment? Does it set the pace and determine the course of events rather than reacting to them?

*Concentration:* Does the strategy concentrate superior power at the place and time likely to be decisive? Has the strategy defined precisely what will make the enterprise superior in power – that is, "best" in critical dimensions – in relation to its opponents.

*Flexibility:* Has the strategy purposely built in resource buffers and dimensions for flexibility and maneuver?

*Coordinated and committed leadership:* Does the strategy provide responsible, committed leadership for each of its major goals?

*Security:* Does the strategy secure resource bases and all vital operating points for the enterprise?

By examining these criteria, questions are generated. Is the strategy sufficiently flexible to respond to changing situations such as a natural disaster or a military coup? Does the strategy effectively identify and utilize the available resources? Does the strategy identify those who will implement the strategy?

Richard R. Rumelt's criteria by which a strategy can be evaluated are more concise.

*Consistency:* The strategy must not present mutually inconsistent goals and policies.

*Consonance:* The strategy must represent an adaptive response to the external environment and to the critical changes occurring within it.

*Advantage:* The strategy must provide for the creation and/or maintenance of a competitive advantage in the selected area of activity.

*Feasibility:* The strategy must neither overtax available resources nor create unsolvable sub problems. (Rumelt 2003:81)

Before examining each of these criteria, Rumelt asserts, "A strategy that fails to meet one of these criteria is strongly suspect. It fails to perform one of the key functions that are necessary for the survival of a business" (2003:81). It may be argued that these criteria can be applied to a business enterprise, but have no significance for evaluating a strategy to establish indigenous churches in Panama. Rumelt, however, insists, "Experience within a particular industry or other setting will permit the analyst to sharpen these criteria and add other things that are appropriate to the situation at hand" (2003:81).

To evaluate the strategy of the Home Mission Board, the first principle, consistency, requires the most modification. "Policies are rules or guidelines that express the limits within which action should occur" (Quinn 2003:10). For foreign missionaries serving with the Foreign Mission Board in Central America during the time I was in

Panama, those policies were outlined by the Foreign Mission Board, the Area Director for Middle America and Canada in Guatemala City, Guatemala, and the Panama Baptist Mission. The concern in this dissertation, however, is not the relationship between goals and policies, but whether the application of the strategy of the Home Mission Board resulted in the establishing of indigenous churches.

Strategy has been defined as “an overall approach, plan, or way of describing how we will go about reaching our goal or solving our problem” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:16). Having stated that the goal of the Home Mission Board was to establish a church that was self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, the strategy becomes the blueprint by which that goal will be achieved. If by following the blueprint a church emerges which is not self-sustaining, self-governing, and self-propagating, there is apparent inconsistency between the goal and the strategy of the Home Mission Board.

The second principle, consonance, “defines the way a business relates to its environment” (Rumelt 2003:82). For a business, the environment has been defined as “the pattern of all external conditions and influences that affect its life and development” (Andrews 2003:74). Those influences are technological, physical, social, and political. “In all these categories change is taking place at varying rates – fastest in technology, less rapidly in politics” (Andrews 2003:75). What the country of Panama is today has been influenced by a myriad of factors, such as the construction of the Panama Canal, the immigration of the West Indians, and the rule of the oligarchy, whose control of the political process in the country has left many disenfranchised. Each of these events has left an unmistakable imprint upon the country of Panama. Strategy can not only be

formulated, it also needs to be flexible enough to respond to changing technological, social, and political situations as they arise.

For the purpose of the dissertation the environment will also be defined as the people who live there, particularly the West Indians, the Spanish-speaking Panamanians, and the Cuna Indians. “The single most important element in planning strategies for evangelism is an understanding of the people to be evangelized” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:109). To understand the people, it is important to examine the historical development of the country and the unique cultures or meaning systems of its people. The meaning system of a particular people consists of three dimensions: meanings, needs, and behaviors.

The first dimension deals with what people think and how they think – their perceptions and perspectives as they attempt to reconstruct meaning from their world. Only bridging concepts can make the Christian faith understandable to a people. If the gospel does not make sense to them, they will reject it. The second dimension stresses relevance. The gospel must meet the deepest aspirations, needs, and motives of a people or it will be rejected because it is peripheral to life. The third dimension is concerned with the roles, social structures, institutions, and relationship networks which structure a people’s way of life. Behavioral patterns and relationships are important to the cultural viability of Christian faith and the actual manner in which evangelism can be carried out. Christianity has to be incarnated not only as a response to the gospel but also as a response from within the cultural patterns of a specific people. If Christianity is not culturally authentic, it can never gain the vitality it needs to transform a culture from within. (Dayton and Fraser 1980:148)

This becomes a framework for evaluating the ministry of the Home Mission Board in Panama.

Strategy as position, the third principle, “encourages us to look at organizations in their competitive environment – how they find their positions and protect them in order to meet competition, avoid it, or subvert it” (Mintzberg 2003:9) and “focuses on the

differences among firms rather than their common missions” (Rumelt 2003:83). For the purpose of the dissertation, the firms are identified as the Roman Catholic Church, the Home Mission Board, and those denominations that have experienced significant growth in Panama, the Foursquare Gospel Church, the Assemblies of God, and later the Church of God.

The last principle, feasibility, asks the question, “Can the strategy be attempted within the physical, human, and financial resources available?” (Rumelt 2003:85). For the evaluation of the strategy of the Home Mission Board, the list is too narrow and has to be broadened to include the resources that God has also provided for the accomplishment of a worldwide task. “A well-formulated strategy helps to marshal and allocate an organization’s resources into a unique and viable posture based on its relative internal competencies and shortcomings, anticipated changes in the environment, and contingent moves by intelligent opponents” (Quinn 2003:10). By applying this principle, it will be learned what resources were available to accomplish the task of establishing indigenous churches in Panama. It may be discovered that there was too great an emphasis on physical resources and too little emphasis on spiritual resources. It may also be learned that the Pentecostal movement has more effectively utilized available resources than the Baptists.

Lloyd Grant McClung, Jr., Gary B. McGee, Melvin L. Hodges, and John L. Amstutz have been the most outstanding spokespersons and the most prolific writers for the denominations that have experienced significant growth in Panama. McClung is Assistant Professor of Missions and Church Growth at the Church of God School of Theology in Cleveland, Tennessee. McGee is Associate Professor of Theology and

Church History at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri. Hodges served as a missionary with the Assemblies of God in El Salvador and later was the field director for Latin America and the West Indies. As for the Foursquare Gospel, Amstutz is Missions Trainer and Consultant for Foursquare Missions International. McClung has explained the reasons for the significant growth of the Pentecostal movement.

#### A Literal Biblicism

Pentecostals have been marked by their exactness in following a literal interpretation of Scripture, so much that they have been characterized as “people of ‘the Book.’” For pentecostals the issue of biblical authority is non-negotiable and is the beginning point for missions theology and strategy. Every major pentecostal group has strong statements regarding the authority of Scripture.

#### An Experiential Christianity

In spite of accusations of shallow hermeneutics and subjectivity, pentecostals have remained insistent that God is to be personally experienced though the Holy Spirit. For us, there need not be any polarization between doctrine and experience.

#### The Personality and Power of the Holy Spirit

For pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is personally active, living in and directing his servants. The Holy Spirit is not just a force or influence but personally and powerfully potent on the frontiers of mission.

#### A Strong Christology

Since the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying evidence of speaking in tongues have been central to pentecostal experience, the movement has been criticized for too much emphasis upon one person of the Godhead, namely, the Holy Spirit. Early pentecostal writings reveal the opposite. Pentecostal literature is replete with a strong Christology. For pentecostals, Jesus is personally present in the experience of empowerment as the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33). They believe in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which lifts up Jesus Christ (Jn. 15:26; 16:14-15).

#### An Urgent Missiology

Eschatological urgency is at the heart of understanding the missionary fervor of early pentecostalism. Eschatology “belongs to the essence of Pentecostalism.” Pentecostal missiology cannot be rightly understood

apart from its roots found in premillennialism, dispensationalism, and the belief in the imminent return of Christ. (1988:2)

*Called and Empowered* (Dempster 1991) includes a chapter written by Peter Wagner. He discusses nine factors which have contributed to the growth of this movement, including a biblical theology of evangelism, a high level of faith, a reliance on prayer, and a burden for the poor. His discussion is broadened in his book *What Are We Missing*, formerly titled *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming*. An incomplete list of the factors that has caused Pentecostal growth is found in “What Makes Pentecostal Churches Grow?” (McGavran 1977). Among those factors, McGavran emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostals emphasize utter yieldedness to the Holy Spirit, and believe that God stands at our very elbows, knocking at the door of our hearts, speaking in our intuition and dreams. Pentecostals believe that God our Heavenly Father is instantly available, and powerful. He is simply waiting for the soul to open the door. This common Christian doctrine is believed by all denominations, but Pentecostals appear to believe it more than most others. (1977:98)

“Indigenous Churches in Latin America” (Nida 1961) also broadly focuses on indigenous churches, which would also be descriptive of the Pentecostal churches in general, and discusses their most important features:

(1) emphasis upon divine healing (often to the extent of regarding the use of medicines as evidence of weakness of faith), (2) the belief in speaking in tongues (though some groups insist on interpretation for any occurrence of tongues and, hence, tend to make such demonstrations more orderly and controlled), (3) the filling of the Spirit (as evidence by healing or the gift of tongues), (4) deep emotional fervor, often exhibited in dancing, shouting, and crying, (5) general adherence to a kind of “holiness doctrine” characteristic of certain forms of Wesleyanism, (6) importance of prayer (prayer is generally engaged in by all the congregation, orally and simultaneously), and (7) a type of literal biblicism which takes the Bible seriously but uncritically. (Nida 1961:98)

There is a parallel between McClung's explanation for the growth of Pentecostalism and its emphasis on restorationism. *Fire from Heaven* (Cox 1995) devotes three chapters to this significant theme. "My own conviction is that pentecostals have touched so many people because they have restored something. But they have done it in a very particular way. They have enabled countless people to recover on a quite personal level, three dimensions of the elemental spirituality that I call "primal speech," "primal piety," and "primal hope" (Cox 1995:82). Primal speech and primal piety focus on the renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism and how He manifests His presence through His gifts such as speaking in tongues, miracles and healing. Primal hope is a reminder that Christ promised that He would return. Early pentecostals

believed that they were living at the end of the present world age, not at what turned out to be the beginning of a new epoch. They did not think that they were forging a radically new form of Christianity, but restoring the original. Confronting what they took to be a massive defection of the established churches from the true Christian faith, they believed that they were reclaiming it (or rather, that God was restoring it through them). They did not see themselves as synthesizing anything. On the contrary, they saw themselves as purifying a church that had become diluted, dehydrated, and despoiled. (Cox 1995:102)

The Foursquare Gospel is a representative of the broader Pentecostal movement that has been discussed in numerous articles and books. While missionaries from the more traditional churches question faith healing,

Pentecostals accept the fact that most men and women today believe that demons and evil spirits (varying forms of Satan and dark thoughts) do invade them, bind them, and rule over them. Pentecostals believe that the mighty Name of Jesus drives out evil spirits and heals all manner of sicknesses. (McGavran 1977:98)

Many people in the world have not found in the Christianity to which they have been introduced the solutions to problems which they face in their daily lives. Can this God



protect them when their lives are threatened? Can He heal them when they are sick? How can they abandon a religious system that has answers to these questions and accept a Christianity that presents a God who is powerless to help them? *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Stoll 1990) asserts, If missionaries from the historic churches “wished to compete with Pentecostals, they would have to help Latin Americans wrestle with evil spirits in a church context. They would have to make some allowance for faith healing, exorcism, and the like” (Stoll 1990b:77).

*The Indigenous Church* (Hodges 1953) “describes how the Assemblies of God put indigenous church principles into operation in Central America” (McGavran 1970:340). This book “proved to be the most significant book on mission strategy and theology that the organization had produced” (McGee 1986:3) and its “uniqueness consisted in its practical nature and fusion of indigenous principles and Pentecostal theology” (McGee 1986:3). While the Church Growth Movement has been criticized, rightly or wrongly, for a lack of a theological foundation, the Pentecostals argue that their theological foundation is the book of Acts.

### **Methodology**

Determining the causes for the comparative lack of growth from 1905 to 1974, when the Home Mission Board was in Panama, will require historical research, a methodology that is discussed in *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (Leedy 1997) under the broader heading of qualitative research designs. Historical research, according to Leedy, “makes every effort to go back as nearly as possible to the original event or source – a newspaper clipping, an original memo, a diary entry, a witness to the event – and from such basic sources attempts to establish a rationale and coherence that will

culminate in a revelation – an insight into the meaning of the event” (Leedy 1997:174). A weakness in Leedy’s discussion, however, is that he does not describe the steps that are involved in this research. *Research Methods in Librarianship* (Busha and Harter 1980) explains that

the conduct of historical research entails the following steps: (a) the recognition of a historical problem or the identification of a need for certain historical knowledge; (b) the gathering of as much pertinent information about the problem or topic as possible; (c) if appropriate, the forming of hypotheses that tentatively explain relationships between historical factors (variables); (d) the rigorous collection and organization of evidence, and the verification of the authenticity and veracity of information and its sources; (e) the selection, organization, and analysis of the most pertinent collected evidence, and the drawing of conclusions; and (f) the recording of conclusions in a meaningful narrative. (Busha and Harter 1980:91)

The research, primarily historical, archival and statistical, focuses on the strategy that was utilized by the Home Mission Board to establish churches in Panama. In selecting the material that will be utilized for the proposed dissertation, articles or books that were written at the time the event occurred will be most important. Kwast explains that “the information of greatest value is usually found in primary sources, recorded by eyewitnesses who actually experienced the events of history being studied” (1973:296). Secondary resources on the other hand were “recorded by people who were not present at the events described” (1973:296). McGavran warns, “Articles in missionary magazines have limited value. Their promotional bias is overwhelming, and save in reporting great growth in progress, they seldom mention the subject” (1970:133). The value of these articles from the Home Mission Board, the Foursquare Gospel, and the other denominations may be diminished to some degree by the supposed bias of the authors. Several of the articles, however, were written by the missionaries themselves such as

Wise and Edwards and others such as Carpenter who served as pastor of the Balboa Baptist Church in the Canal Zone. They were therefore eyewitnesses to the unfolding events as missionary activity expanded in the country of Panama. This is not to suggest that promotional bias is not present in the articles that they wrote. It must therefore be kept in mind that their assertions must be supported by reliable historical data.

No records remain of the efforts of the missionaries who were sent to Panama by the Home Mission Board in the archives in Atlanta, Georgia. What was preserved was sent to the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee. I was able to examine the minutes of the Home Mission Board and the Una Roberts Lawrence Collection. She was Home Mission Board mission study editor from 1926 to 1947. Included in this collection are copies of articles found in the official publications of the Home Mission Board and lengthy correspondence between her and several Jamaicans who were serving as pastors of the West Indian churches in Panama shortly after the Great Depression when the Home Mission Board was facing severe financial problems.

Several articles pertaining to the work in Panama in *Our Home Field*, 1905-1915, *Home and Foreign Fields*, 1915-1939, and *Home Missions*, 1930-1974, were included in the official publications of the Home Mission Board. When both foreign and domestic missions were combined in one magazine, greater attention was given to efforts overseas than to what was happening at home. In other publications the number of articles describing what was happening in Cuba, the only other foreign country to which the Home Mission Board sent missionaries, greatly outnumbered the articles on Panama.

In addition to the articles in different magazines and the minutes from the Home Mission Board, I have also collected the material that was recorded in the annuals of the

Southern Baptist Convention from 1905 to 1975, the year in which its work was transferred to the Foreign Mission Board. The factors that contributed to and hindered the growth of Baptist churches in Panama and the strategy that was utilized are discussed in the *Church Development Depth Study: Panama* (Home Mission Board 1972), the *Background Report: Panama* (Scanlon 1972), and briefly in *Handclasp of the Americas* (Carpenter 1949). Not only is Carpenter's completed copy found in the library but also a rough draft. When compared, it is discovered what he omitted from the printed copy of his book.

As for the Foursquare Gospel, its story is recorded in *The Vine and the Branches: A History of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel* (Van Cleave 1992). I have also read the articles about Panama in such publications as *The Foursquare Missionary*, *The Bridal Call*, the *Foursquare Crusader* and the *Pentecostal Evangel* and I have read several articles from *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* and books such as *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Stoll 1990), *Tongues of Fire* (Martin 1990), and *What Are We Missing?* (Wagner 1978), to understand the missionary strategy of the Pentecostal movement and its dynamic, and at times controversial, emphasis on the gifts of tongues and healing, and its appeal to those living in Central and South America.

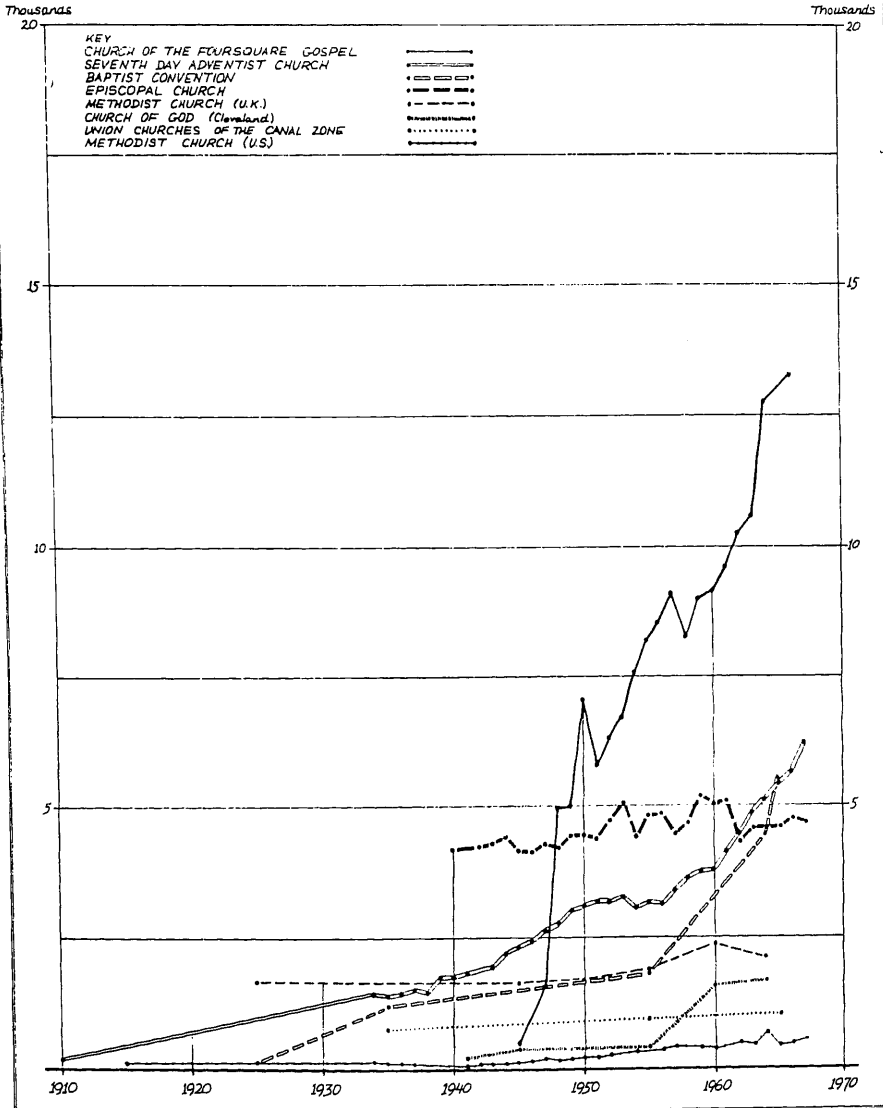
McGavran cautions that "exact understanding of the increase of the church is prevented partly by haphazard or inaccurate membership accounting" (1970:71) and later insists, "All thinking about the church should be done against the graph of growth, because when done without exact knowledge of how the church has and has not grown, it is likely to find itself in error" (1970:109). The graph found in *Latin American Church*

*Growth* (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:141) reflects the growth in the membership of the evangelical churches in Panama from 1910 to 1970. While this graph indicates that several denominations had experienced a gradual but consistent increase in their membership, the growth of the Foursquare Gospel churches is shown by an almost vertical line. The sharp increase in number of members of the Baptist churches from 1955 to 1967 “was largely due to the addition of six Kuna congregations and six West Indian churches in Bocas del Toro region” (Holland 1981:131).

The preparation of such a graph for the Home Mission Board is impossible, however, because few statistics remain from the time in which missionaries from the Home Mission Board served in the Canal Zone and the country of Panama. The early Southern Baptist Convention annuals did include a statistical analysis of the growth of the work in the country. However, this analysis did not appear in every annual, and in later annuals such an analysis was not included. In the early annuals, missionaries on the field reported on individual churches, both black and white, but at times their reports were sent too late to be included in the annuals. Because the statistics were not preserved, they will be of little value in determining why Baptist churches grew or failed to grow in Panama.

The statistics that do appear in the annuals of the Southern Baptist Convention further hinder analysis because only the total number of churches is given. According to Reverend Alcides Lozano, former Executive Secretary for the Panama Baptist Convention, “we can outline the presence of Baptists in Panama in the following way: The West Indian Epoch; the Anglo-Saxon and West Indian Epoch in the Canal Area; The Spanish, or Latin, Epoch; and to extend a bit more, we can talk about the Kuna Indian

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presence in 1955” (1995:3, 4). Read warns that “in order for church membership totals to be meaningful, these homogeneous units must be recognized and recorded separately” (1969:138). Those homogeneous units, while not reflected in a list of the number of churches, are emphasized in the associational reports. The *Background Report* listed six associations (Foreign Mission Board 1972:10).

1. Bocas Baptist Association. Organized 12/15/53. Formerly a part of the Jamaica Baptist Union. 6 churches. 578 members.
2. Interior Baptist Association. 10/11/63. Most of Western Area of Panama excepting Bocas Province. 5 churches. 597 members.
3. Panama Baptist Association. Spanish-speaking churches of Central Panama. Organized 1957. 7 churches. 1,661 members.
4. Central Panama Baptist Association. 11/6/53. Composed of West Indians, English-speaking. 7 churches. 1,661 members.
5. Canal Zone Association. 12/8/53. Employees of Panama Canal and military. 5 churches. 1,783 members.
6. San Blas Baptist Association. 10/58. 8 churches on San Blas Archipelago. Work begun under Mr. And Mrs. Lonnie Iglesias. Came under Southern Baptists in 1955. 1,009 members.

These associations not only identified the geographical location of the churches but also indicated whether the members were West Indian, North American, Spanish-speaking Panamanian, or Cuna Indian. The statistics from the associations, therefore, can be useful in discovering not only where growth was or was not occurring, geographically, but also the social group among whom this was happening. A further comparison with the population in a particular province in the country or the population of a particular segment of society could have revealed the extent to which Baptist influence had impacted the country of Panama and its people.

The statistics that are available also do not reflect the age or the gender of the members of the Baptist churches. The study of the country of Panama prepared by Patrick Johnstone (1993:437) identifies the loss of youth as one of the major challenges facing evangelicals. “The demographers tell us that 50.3% of the present population in Latin America are under 20 years of age. The churches themselves must decide what changes in their program, strategy and emphases should be made, in view of this surprising fact” (Rycroft and Clemmer 1960:1). As long as the statistics do not reflect the age of those who become members of the Baptist churches, it will not be known if those churches are effectively proclaiming the Gospel to this segment of society. In addition to this, Holland argues that Panamanian men have little interest in the Catholic Church. “Only 20% of the people regularly attend Mass. Those who attend regularly, mostly women and children, frequently are only complying with expected social norms and are not acting from deep religious convictions” (1981:124). If the statistics fail to identify the gender of the members of the churches, it will not be known if men were now finding a reason to attend church.

Another factor that obscured the value of available statistics was the failure to identify terms. Both the Home Mission Board and later the Foreign Mission Board emphasized the need to establish churches. The *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study* admitted however,

There exists no clear consensus among nationals or missionaries as to what is a church, mission, or preaching point. Some feel comfortable with the traditional approach of starting with a Bible study/preaching point, leading it to become a mission, and then constituting it into a church, while others believe that a group formed as a result of Bible study and witness is a church from the start. (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:8)



If the traditional approach is accepted, how much time is required before a preaching point becomes a church? The study reveals that “over the past 20 years in Panama, on average, it takes 33 years to mature preaching points into new churches” (1998a:1). The report does not describe the steps that have to be taken before a preaching point becomes a church, nor does it explain why this process requires more than thirty years.

Although the statistics from the Home Mission Board were not preserved, it can be shown from *Operation World* (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001) and the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson 2001) that the Pentecostal denominations experienced greater growth in Panama than the Baptists. While *Operation World* (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001) lists both the members and the affiliates of the churches, the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson 2001) only includes the number of those affiliated with a particular denomination. “Adult/confirmed members,” according to Johnstone and Mandryk, is “the figure usually used by Baptists, Pentecostals and Free Churches” (2001:xx). Affiliates “represents the whole Christian community or inclusive membership, which includes children, non-member adherents, etc. This is the figure usually used by Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and many Reformed Churches” (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001:xx).

What was the cause for the slight growth experienced by the Baptists? McGavran suggested that lack of growth could be attributed to either the resistance of the population or the mistakes of the Church, or both (1970:144). If it is assumed that the peoples of Panama were receptive to the gospel, then the reason or reasons why Baptists were not experienced significant growth could be found through an analysis of the methods or strategy of the Home Mission Board. Although the objective or goal of both the Home

Mission Board and the Pentecostals in Panama was to establish indigenous churches, Pentecostals have experienced greater growth than the Baptists. This growth suggested that the strategy of the Pentecostals was effective, or at least more effective than that of employed by the Home Mission Board. The strategy of the Home Mission Board will be evaluated by applying the principles of feasibility, consistency, consonance, and advantage.

Chapter three will focus on the principle of feasibility. The material will be examined to discover the resources that were utilized by the Home Mission Board, both physical and spiritual, and to learn how those resources were employed in winning people to Christ and establishing churches in the country of Panama. This chapter will show the interest of the Southern Baptist Convention in occupying Central and South America as a mission field shortly after its organization. Entry into Panama, however, was delayed until the United States began building the Panama Canal in 1904.

The work of the Home Mission Board, during its early years, was limited to the Canal Zone, but later the work was extended to the country of Panama itself. The causes for this lengthy delay will be explored. The chapter will also briefly examine whether work by the Home Mission Board in the interior of the country could be justified, or should have been turned over to the Foreign Mission Board much earlier than was done.

The next chapter will examine the matter of consistency. Can it be shown that the strategy that was utilized would or did result in a church that was self-governing, self-propagating, or self-supporting? Was there consistency between the proposed goal and the strategy that was utilized to accomplish that goal? It is understood that not only can the strategy be flawed, but also the goal. It can be asked, therefore, whether the three-self

model adequately defines the concept of the church or whether the three-self model needs to be expanded, modified, or replaced by another model. These questions will be briefly addressed in the last chapter of the dissertation. The intent of the dissertation, however, is not to assess the goal of the Home Mission Board, but to evaluate the strategy that was employed.

Turning to the principle of consonance, both the historical development of the country and the cultures of its various peoples will be examined. Dayton and Fraser insist, “Methodology that is ill conceived and applied without regard for the culture and context of a people leaves us with no humanly justifiable reason for believing that anything is happening that will further the evangelization of a people” (1980:259). The question will be asked, “Were the peoples of Panama receptive to the gospel?” and more importantly, “Why?” It will be suggested that the question cannot be answered without understanding the historical development of the country of Panama and the diverse cultures of its people. And it will be argued that the relevancy of the gospel cannot be demonstrated if the needs of the people are not known.

Finally the principle of advantage will be applied to both the Home Mission Board and the Pentecostal movement. For hundreds of years the Roman Catholic Church exerted its influence on the peoples of Panama and Central America. The coming of the Pentecostal movement, more than the presence of Baptists, threatened its monopolistic hold on the people by giving them other religious choices.

*Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Allen 1962) and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Allen 1962) provide a larger framework for evaluating the Pentecostal movement. By applying Allen's principles to the work of the Pentecostals,

this chapter will demonstrate how the Pentecostal movement has positioned itself to challenge the Roman Catholic Church and how it appeals to those living in Latin America. By comparing the Pentecostal movement with writings of Allen, it can be seen to what degree he has influenced this movement and where the Pentecostal movement has begun to deviate from his conclusions. By applying those same principles to the work of the Baptists, it may be shown why the Baptists are not challenging the Roman Catholic Church and why it presumably does not appeal to those living in Latin America.

## CHAPTER 2

### Overview of Christian Missions in Panama

This chapter will review the material necessary to understand the inception and the later expansion of the ministry of the Baptists in Panama. The review begins with the Jamaica Baptist Union and then examines the material that describes the ministry of the Home Mission Board in Panama. To this will be added information about the historical development of the country and the cultures of its various peoples. Included in this analysis will also be information from the Foreign Mission Board, including minutes, annual reports, statistics, and articles from *The Commission Magazine*. This will be followed by material necessary to understand the Pentecostal movement, especially the three denominations that have experienced the greatest growth in Panama.

#### The Baptist Experience

The story of the Jamaica Baptist Union that sent pastors to Bocas del Toro and the Canal Zone in the latter half of the nineteenth century has been told in *Glorious Liberty* (Tucker 1914). Several of the missionaries to Jamaica, sent by the English Baptist Missionary Society, died on the island or had to return to England because of illness. The formation of the Jamaica Baptist Union was an outgrowth of the efforts of these missionaries. The work of the Jamaica Baptist Union in the Canal Zone ended in 1908 when the Home Mission Board accepted the responsibility for ministering to the West Indians.

I have extracted information about the ministry of the Home Mission Board in Panama from 1905 to 1974 from its magazines and books, the minutes of the Home Mission Board, the reports which examined the growth or lack of growth of the Baptist

churches in Panama, and the annuals of the Southern Baptist Convention. The official publications of the Home Mission Board such as *Our Home Field*, *Home and Foreign Fields*, and *Home Missions* and the annuals of the Southern Baptist Convention discuss these first efforts and the later expansion of the work that would include both the Cuna Indians and the Spanish-speaking Panamanians.

While the brief discussions concerning the work in Panama in *The History of the Home Mission Board* (Lawrence 1958) and *Baptist Home Missions* (Masters 1914) are not helpful in determining what facilitated or hindered the growth of Baptist churches in Panama, the former book does discuss the embezzlement of funds by the treasurer of the Home Mission Board which contributed to its financial difficulties before and after the Great Depression. Of greater significance are discussions about the factors that both contributed to and hindered the growth of Baptist churches in Panama. These factors are examined in the *Church Development Depth Study: Panama* (Home Mission Board 1972) and the *Background Report: Panama* (Scanlon 1972). The factors included in the *Background Report: Panama* prepared by A. Clark Scanlon are succinctly stated in simple sentences with little or no explanation as to how those factors positively or negatively influenced the growth of Baptist churches in the country. When Scanlon prepared his background report, he consulted “Work in Panama,” written by Joe Carl Johnson, “Brief History of Baptist Work in Panama,” written by Helen Stuart, and “La Obra Bautista en Panama,” written by Aura S. de Dawkins. The latter two writings unfortunately cannot be found, but I am continuing to search for them. In addition to these studies, *Handclasp of the Americas* (Carpenter n.d.) shares a short list of factors that were detrimental to the growth of Baptist churches in the country.

While it was not the original intent of this dissertation to examine the efforts of the Foreign Mission Board to establish churches in Panama, I wanted to learn if the problems that hindered the work under the Home Mission Board have continued with the Foreign Mission Board. *The Program Base Design for Panama*, first prepared in 1976 and revised in 1980, states, “A major purpose will be that of establishment of indigenous churches which are self-governing, self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-expressing” (Foreign Mission Board 1980:36). This shows that although the Home Mission Board transferred its work in Panama to the Foreign Mission Board, the goal to establish indigenous churches has remained the same. I have examined the minutes of the Foreign Mission Board, as well as textual reports, yearly statistics and other materials that are found in the archives of the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia. I have also acquired copies of the *Church Growth Indicators Analysis* (Slack 1990) for the years 1976-1989 and the *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study*. This study was prepared in 1998 by the Foreign Mission Board and identified several factors that had hindered the growth of Baptist churches in the country of Panama and also mentioned some ways in which the problems could be corrected. The *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study* consists of two documents. The first analyzed the situation in Panama and recommended that the Panama Baptist Mission implement certain changes. In the second document, the Panama Baptist Mission discussed if and how it would make those changes.

### Panama Culturally

Since the work of the Home Mission Board included the West Indians, the Spanish-speaking Panamanians, and the Cuna Indians, information was collected which

focused on each of these peoples. Although the Home Mission Board began its ministry to the Spanish-speaking Panamanians, little or nothing is said about the social context of the Latin American people. *Understanding Latin Americans* (Nida 1974) examines not only the religious values of the Latin American people but also a social structure that is radically different from that experienced by North Americans. The Latin American context will remain an enigma until three basis sets of values are understood: “(1) authoritarianism versus individualism (*personalismo*), (2) idealism (*quijotismo*) versus realism (*sanchismo*), and (3) *machismo* versus *hembrismo*” (Nida 1974:11). Many books have been written about the construction of the Panama Canal. Fewer books have been written specifically about the West Indians who worked in the banana plantations of Bocas del Toro and dug the Panama Canal. *Black Labor on a White Canal* (Conniff 1985) describes their living conditions and the labor policy that condemned the West Indians to remain as second-class citizens.

Beginning in 1955, when the Home Mission Board assumed responsibility for the San Blas Islands, several articles appeared in *Home Missions* that described the Cuna Indians and the work Home Mission Board missionaries were doing among them. In addition to the articles, *Anna Coope, Sky Pilot* (Coope 1917), the autobiography of the first independent missionary to the islands, shows her determination to bring the gospel to the Cuna Indians despite the resistance of the Roman Catholic Church. She sent Lonnie Iglesias, one of her first students, to the United States to be educated. He and his wife later returned to the islands as missionaries. *Messenger to the Golden People: The Story of Lonnie Iglesias* (Iglesias 1967) recounts his childhood, the death of his brother Claudio, his education in the United States and Venezuela, and his marriage to Marvel. I



*Married a San Blas Indian: The Story of Marvel Elya Iglesias* (Morgan 1958) relates Marvel's marriage to Lonnie and the adjustments she had to make when she went to the San Blas Islands to live. *Cuna* (Kelly 1966) describes the author's lengthy visit to the San Blas Islands prior to the 1964 riot in which several Panamanians were killed. Although this includes insights into the culture of the Cuna Indians, its value is questionable. "Documents produced by trained and experienced field observers are usually superior to those of casual arm-chair promoters" (Kwast 1973:298).

Of greater value are *Land of the Moon Children: The Primitive San Blas Culture in Flux* (Keeler 1956), *San Blas Cuna Acculturation: An Introduction* (Stout 1947), and *The Republic of Panama and its People, With Special Reference to the Indians* (Bell 1909) that describe various aspects of the culture of this people. It would be thought that there would be some overlapping since these books discussed the culture of the Cuna Indians. *Land of the Moon Children* (Keeler 1956) examines the Cuna concept of heaven. Coming to a fork in the road, the wicked choose the Road of Flowers to the left, but "the good always choose the Thorny Road to the right that leads directly to the City of Heaven" (Keeler 1956:63)

Sitting with the records near the City of Heaven is the Great Judge, Olowikpalele, who tries the soul, and gives it free entry to Heaven or condemns it to delays, anxieties, or increasing punishments according to the degree of sins the person committed in the flesh. (Keeler 1956:63)

This account is in some ways similar to what is written in the Bible, but there are also significant differences. It was thought that this story, if substantiated, would be an "appropriate cultural analogy by which the Gospel might be made understandable" (Shenk 1991:108) to the Cuna people. The religious beliefs that are discussed in the other books differ, however, and the accuracy of this story cannot be verified. By examining

the religious beliefs and ceremonies of the Cuna people, there felt needs can also be identified.

### Panama Historically

To understand the work of the Home Mission Board, it is important to place it in its historical setting. A brief analysis of the historical development of the country of Panama can be found in *Panama: A Country Study* (Meditz and Hanratty 1989), a revision of an earlier book by the same title (Nyrop 1980). The historical section in both books (Nyrop 1981:vii and Meditz and Hanratty 1987:vii) follows the same outline.

THE CONQUEST  
 THE SPANISH COLONY  
 THE COLOMBIA DEPARTMENT  
 THE UNITED STATES PROTECTORATE  
 THE BISECTED REPUBLIC  
 THE NEGOTIATION OF NEW TREATIES  
 THE POST-TORRIJOS ERA

The construction of the Panama Canal has been a blessing and a curse for the country. “Since its completion in 1914 the Panama Canal has been Panama’s economic base, and the United States presence has been the republic’s major source of frustration” (Meditz and Hanratty 1989:3). The book also traces the growth of the elite and its economic and political stranglehold upon the country and examines the role of the West Indian and Amerindian in Panamanian society. Having studied this material, the reader has a general understanding of the significant stages in the historical development of the country of Panama. By placing the work of the Home Mission board within this larger historical framework, it is possible to understand what was happening both in the Canal Zone and in the country of Panama when its missionaries were serving there.

Three books, *Before the Five Frontiers: Panama from 1821 to 1903* (Perez-Vernero 1978), *We Answer Only to God: Politics and the Military in Panama, 1903-1947* (Percy 1998), and *The Time of the Tyrants* (Koster and Sánchez 1990), examine the history of Panama from its independence from Spain until the arrest and imprisonment of the dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega. It is difficult to follow the development of the first book, especially the discussion about the Thousand Days' War when Panama became a bloody battlefield in a Colombian civil war. It is helpful to read general information about this period before studying this book. The second explains how the military, which at first was a tool used by those in power to maintain control over the country, later seized control of the country.

*We Answer Only to God: Politics and the Military in Panama, 1903-1947* (Percy 1998), *Panama, The Canal and the United States: A Guide to Issues and References* (Leonard 1993), and "Panama: Obstacles to Democracy and Sovereignty" (Priestly 1990) describe the significant role of the elite or ruling oligarchy in the country's development.

Panama's economy had always been controlled by the white or light-skinned oligarchy. This dominant bloc is made up of three main groups: the commercial and real-estate bourgeoisie, the land-owning bourgeoisie, and the modernizing entrepreneurs who emerged in the 1950s spearheading the import-substitution industrialization process. Since 1904, the oligarchy has dominated Panamanian politics by restricting the electoral process to personalist and non-programmatic political parties. Its economic power depends on the exploitation of Panama's non-white national and foreign labor force. (Priestly 1990:93)

The influence of the oligarchy briefly ended when the dictator General Omar Torrijos came to power in 1968.

Until 1968, Panamanian politics could be described as a tribal affair as public office passed between families of the oligarchy who had wealth, aristocratic background or both. From October 1968 to December 1989 the tribal politics remained, but instead of the civilian oligarchy, military

officers became the politicians. In both instances the vast majority of the Panamanians, mostly unskilled and poverty stricken, remained outside the political arena. (Leonard 1993:7)

In December 1989 the United States invaded Panama, and the following January the dictator Noriega was arrested and imprisoned in the United States. The oligarchy returned to power.

*The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Bethell 1990), although less helpful than the other books, occasionally mentions the oligarchy. It discusses the Panama Canal Zone and the country of Panama in separate chapters. It is a reminder that, although the Canal Zone existed within the national boundaries of the country, the lives of the Zonians were often separated and isolated from that of the Panamanians.

### The Pentecostal Experience

The greatest growth in the country of Panama has been experienced by denominations that can be described as Pentecostal: the Four Square Gospel, the Church of God, and the Assembly of God. Unlike the missionaries sent by Home Mission Board, the Foursquare Gospel, for the most part, limited its work to the Spanish-speaking population of the country. The Foursquare Gospel has published several articles about the work in Panama in magazines such as *The Foursquare Magazine*, *The Bridal Call*, and the *Foursquare Crusader*. Dr. Arthur F. Edwards' four articles in the *Foursquare Magazine*, "Fishing in Panama," were written from December 1944 to June 1945 and describe his background as a banker, how he became involved with the Foursquare Gospel, and the early efforts to establish churches in the country of Panama. In this series of articles, he explained the importance of miracles in his ministry. "Healing has been a great door-opener in our ministry. God has promised to follow up the preaching of the

Word with signs following and that is just what He has done for us. Through the years we have had many hundreds of healings – blind given sight; deaf ears stopped; the dumb spake, as well as all kinds of diseases healed, even to elephantitis” (Edwards 1945a:20).

“The Worldwide Expansion of the Foursquare Church” (Eim 1986), examines the life of the founder of the Foursquare Gospel, Aimee Semple McPherson, and includes a lengthy bibliography that refers to different publications of the Foursquare Gospel. The dissertation is helpful to understand the dynamic personality of the twice-married evangelist and the factors that nourished her missionary fervor. *Protestant Growth and a Changing Panama* (Butler 1964), compares the Foursquare Gospel with the Episcopal Methodist Church in Panama. Other than in the area of education, the Methodists have played an insignificant role in Panama. Butler, himself a Methodist missionary to Panama, explains that the emphasis on education has overshadowed the attempt to establish churches in the country. His analysis of the growth of Foursquare Gospel lacks depth. He conducted an interview with Leland Edwards, the son of the first missionaries who were sent by the Foursquare Gospel to Panama. However, the factors that contributed to the growth of churches that he discovered through this interview, combined with Eugene Nida’s analysis of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America, are not fully developed. He does not explain how what he has learned about the phenomenal growth of the Foursquare Gospel can be applied to correct the stagnate growth of the Methodist Church.

Chapters 1 and 6 of *The Vine and the Branches: A History of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel* (Van Cleave 1992) describe the founding of this denomination and the sending of Edwards and his wife to Panama. The article

“Foursquare Missions: Doing More with Less” (Amstutz 1994) analyzes the strategy of the Foursquare Gospel. He first refers to what C. Peter Wagner describes as “360-degree missions” (see *On the Crest of the Wave*, pages 164-165) and then explains,

Today Foursquare missions’ four stage strategy is as follows: stage I – initiate evangelism and church planting; stage II – nurture disciples and leaders; stage III – nationalize structure and outreach; and , stage IV – bridge into new cultures and countries by sending and supporting cross-cultural missionaries. Such “full-circle” 360 degree development of a national church is “infinitely reproducible” and makes possible the fulfillment of commission of the Lord of the Church to disciple all nations/peoples. (1994:69)

*Historia de las Asambleas de Dios en Panamá* or the *History of the Assemblies of God in Panama* (Stokes 1976) is a brief account ministry of David Godwin and his wife and the founding of the first church in Panama City. The book speaks at length about the annual conferences. Although several churches were established in and around Panama City and in the interior of the country, little is said about how this was done. The concluding statement (Stokes 1976:16) not only indicated the challenge which the Assemblies of God faced in Panama but also emphasized the resources that were available to accomplish the task of proclaiming the gospel in that country. “Almas en el país para alcanzar con el Pleno Evangelio – mas de 1,500,000. Recursos disponibles . . . . Toda la potestad de Dios en cielo!” (Souls in the country to reach with the full gospel – more than 1,500,000. Resources available. . . . All the power of God in heaven and earth!).

## CHAPTER 3

### Evaluating the Strategy of the Home Mission Board: The Principle of Feasibility

*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* defines the word "feasible" as "capable of being done or carried out." The Southern Baptist Convention was organized in 1845 "to promote Foreign and Domestic Missions" (Southern Baptist Convention 1845:3). Those who met to organize the convention and to approve its constitution understood that

the task of preaching the gospel to a lost world is a task which Heaven has assigned to us. Fundamentally, we do not summon a single soul to the task, we only voice God's call to his people. The missionaries in home fields and foreign lands are not the ones who summon the churches to contribute men and money for the evangelization of the world. Christ does that. In a word, the summons was issued by Almighty God through his Son, Jesus Christ, and it is to every one who accepts Christ as Savior. (Lawrence 1935a:9)

The principle of feasibility involves discovering how both boards defined their task, and also determining what resources were, according to their opinion, necessary and available to accomplish the task. The principle of feasibility also involves strategy or "the overall plan, principles, or ways by which resources and opportunities will be utilized in the task" (Smith 1998:434). The question is asked, "Can the strategy be attempted within the physical, human and financial resources available?" (Rumelt 2003:85). When this question is applied to missionary activity, however, this list is inadequate and has to be expanded. The list ignores the resources that God contributes toward the success of this venture.

Not only is the command from God, but the power is also from God. The task is terrific, but the resources are infinite. If we had the faith to catch the vision of the unseen, we could say as we looked upon the 'horses and

chariots of the Lord,' 'Those for us are more than those against us.' It is only as the problems connected with our task drive us to God and cause us to seek his wisdom and grace and power that we can be assured of success in this great missionary enterprise. (Lawrence 1935:9)

The list also overlooks other resources that only the community of the faithful can supply. "If we would send the Gospel into all the world we must have behind our efforts the resources and the vital life of an evangelized people. Three things are necessary: (1) motive, (2) money, and (3) men" (Southern Baptist Convention 1939:287). Of the three, motive is the most important. Unless the Christian community views humankind as God does, money will not be sacrificially invested in the cause of missions and the members of the local churches will remain at home, indifferent to the plight of millions living without Christ in the United States and throughout the world.

The Board of Domestic Missions (later known as the Home Mission Board) with its office in Marion, Alabama, recognized that its field of labor covered fourteen states in the South, from Texas to Virginia.

The command is, 'begin at Jerusalem.' What wisdom shines forth in this direction! Is this the land from whence are to flow streams for the healing and gladdening the nations of the earth? Their purifying efficacy will depend upon the purity of the fountain from which they flow. Is our country to send forth light to those sitting in darkness? We should make manifest the glory and blessing of that light. Are wealth and talent needful in this work? It is by domestic missionary labor, attended by the divine blessing, wealth and talent are to be sanctified and fitted to the Lord's work. Hence, it is easy to see, that the ultimate prosperity of the foreign mission enterprise depends much upon the successful operation of the domestic department. (Southern Baptist Convention 1846b:34)

Meanwhile, the Board of Foreign Missions (later known as the Foreign Mission Board) was located in Richmond, Virginia. In its first report, the Board looked beyond the United States to define its field of labor. "In lifting up their eyes they were not at a loss to



find whole nations of men involved in spiritual darkness, and needing the light of the Gospel” (Southern Baptist Convention 1846a:21).

While the task of the Home Mission Board was “the Christianization of America, the aim of the Foreign Mission Board was “the evangelization of the world” (Gray, Mrs. B. D. 1913b:26). Articles in the official magazines of the Home Mission Board later discussed the purpose of the Board and explained how the labors of the Home Mission Board in the United States contributed to the success of the Foreign Mission Board abroad. The objective of the Home Mission Board was not only “the evangelization of the homeland,” but also “the mobilization of the Christianized in the homeland as a base of supplies for the army of missionaries that go abroad to tell the story to the lost in lands afar” (Lawrence 1935a:9). Having evangelized those living in the homeland, the Home Mission Board accepted the responsibility to “develop and conserve their sacred energies for the conquest of the world” (Winburn 1912:9). From their numbers, it was therefore expected that men and women would be sent as missionaries to foreign lands. The Christian community at home was also responsible for supplying the necessary financial resources to sustain missionary activities beyond the United States. It was asserted that, “if we could but win the Southland to Christ, her money – consecrated to His service – would become a golden channel through which the Gospel would flow for the salvation of the nations” (Lawrence 1931:3). Lastly, the evangelization of the homeland was “to produce in the homeland a sample of the redeeming power of the gospel of Christ as a background and dynamic for the missionaries who go abroad to preach that gospel” (Lawrence 1935a:9).

The Foreign Mission Board sent its first missionaries to China and Liberia in 1846, followed by Nigeria in 1850. The Board of Foreign Missions, in that same year, met in Hampton, Virginia. The Committee on New Fields had been formed to investigate the possibility of sending missionaries to other parts of the world.

This committee, after serious consideration, selected France, Germany, Switzerland, Palestine, Mexico, Central and South America, as important points, to which the attention of the Board might be profitably directed. Considering the above sections of the missionary field, with the almost incredible facilities which are now afforded for immediate and secure occupation, the paucity of missionary stations with which it is studded, the numbers and ample resources of the churches of which the Southern Baptist Convention is composed, the committee expressed their belief 'that it is the imperative duty of the Board to adopt prompt and suitable measures to occupy, with faithful and competent missionaries, one or more of the places above indicated.' (Foreign Mission Board 1850:35)

This report from the Foreign Mission Board revealed the optimism with which the Board approached the task of missions. The existing records do not indicate the number of members in Southern Baptist churches in that year. A year earlier, however, the members numbered 404,600 and by 1851 the number of members had increased to 423,507 (Barnes 1954:306). Mission gifts were not recorded until 1885 when 1,013,160 Southern Baptists gave \$202,170 to mission causes. The report also indicated the urgency of the task and suggested that there were inherent dangers in sending missionaries overseas. In the selection of missionaries, the committee was guided by the Constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention. "Missionaries appointed by any of the Boards of this Convention, must, previous to their appointment, furnish evidence of genuine piety, fervent zeal in their Master's cause and talents which fit them for the service for which they offer themselves" (Southern Baptist Convention 1845:4). The committee's conclusion that there were "a paucity of mission stations" is reminiscent of William

Carey's "An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens," written in 1792. Before proposing that missionaries be sent overseas, he dismissed the thought that the Great Commission was not binding on the churches of his day. He then examined the state of the world as he knew it, he considered the obstacles that lay ahead and how to overcome them, and then he explained how the task could be commenced. The committee was concerned about finding an area that could be immediately and securely occupied by missionaries. Is an area secure only when there is the absence of religious persecution, or when every threat of disease is removed, or when inhabitants who once threatened the lives of strangers, now are willing for them to come? Is the call of God sufficient to compel men and women to leave their homes and take the gospel to distant lands even when the threat remains? The committee not only observed that certain fields could be immediately and securely occupied, but also that apparently little was being done to bring men and women to Christ in those countries.

When the Southern Baptist Convention met in Nashville, Tennessee the following year, in 1851, the Board of Foreign Missions was challenged to "establish missions, so soon as suitable missionaries and funds may justify it, in any or all of the cities of Havana, Mexico, Rio Janeiro, Valparaiso, and Panama – or any other part of South America which in their judgment may call for it" (Southern Baptist Convention 1851:11). At first glance, it seems surprising that the Board included Panama in this list. Four of the cities mentioned were ports and three others, including Panama City, were capital cities. While the other cities, however, were located in the countries of Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, and Chile, Panama, in 1851, was an easily overlooked appendage of Colombia. Why did the Board of Foreign Missions mention Panama?

The Spanish, during the 1500s, had built the Royal Road across the narrow Isthmus, over which gold from Peru was transported to Cadiz in Spain. After declaring its independence from Spain in 1821, Panama had become a member of the confederation of Grand Colombia, along with Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. When Venezuela and Ecuador seceded from the union in 1831, Panama aligned itself with Colombia and faded into obscurity. The relationship between them was never harmonious.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Colombia stagnated politically and economically under 96 changes of government over a period of 82 years. This social anarchy, which included a series of civil wars, had a disastrous effect on Panamanian society. Furthermore, Colombia treated the isthmus as a poor and unimportant fiefdom, exploited by individual military officials and tax collectors which were sent by Colombia to govern this backward *departamento*. (Wheaton 1976:10)

The discovery of gold in California in 1849 reawakened worldwide interest in Panama. "It was no longer the forgotten province of a mis-governed federation. The days had passed when the inhabitants could cut each other's throats without attracting attention. The world had need of Panama, once more, as a traffic route" (Edwards 1911:418).

In 1848 both California and Oregon became territories of the United States, but travel from the Atlantic Coast was difficult. "There were at first but two ways of reaching the Pacific Coast. One was by ship around Cape Horn, a distance of some 12,000 miles, and the other by a journey of 3,000 miles in prairie schooners or other pioneer contrivances from the Missouri River across the plains" (Bennett 1915:235). Panama, however, offered a third alternative. In 1850, the same year in which California became a state, construction of a railroad began which would connect Aspinwall, later known as Colon, with Panama City.

It was a short line, but the difficulties surrounding its construction were enormous. For nearly half the year the country was deluged in rain, so that

the working gangs, in addition to being drenched from the clouds, were obliged to wade in mud and water from two to four feet deep. For the first few miles out from the Atlantic terminal the route lay through a deep morass covered with a dense jungle, reeking with malaria, and abounding in noxious reptiles and insects, Thence the greater part of the line was through a rugged country where chasms, turbulent rivers, and mountain torrents had to be crossed. Materials of all sorts as well as laboring men had to be brought from long distances. The workers were constantly attacked with malaria, and, though the whole working party were changed every week, it was necessary to keep constantly importing others to take the place of those who fell sick and died. (Bennett 1915:240)

As work on the railroad progressed, thousands were crossing Panama on their way to the gold fields in California. During this same period of time, while the Foreign Mission Board delayed sending missionaries to Panama, the minutes of the Board of Missions of the Episcopal Church on October 5, 1852, indicated that denomination's willingness to begin work there.

Resolved, That in dependence upon Almighty God, the Foreign Committee will take immediate steps for the commencement of a Mission to Central and South America.

Resolved, That the town of Aspinwall, on the Isthmus of Panama, be adopted as the first station.

Resolved, That the committee will take immediate steps to send to that part, as soon as practicable, a well qualified missionary.

Resolved, That information of this purpose be given to the Panama Rail-Road Company, and they be respectfully requested to cooperate with the Committee, in whatever manner they may deem best. (Kater 1988:148)

If the Foreign Mission Board had been successful in finding missionaries to go to Panama, they would have faced the same circumstances as Reverend James W. Cooke, the first Anglican priest to Panama, encountered in 1853. His death soon after arriving in the country could have been the fate of any missionary sent to Panama before the eradication of yellow fever and malaria. While the Baptists and Anglicans shared the

same determination to send missionaries to Panama, the Anglicans found someone to go to Panama while the Baptists did not. In 1856 construction on Christ Church-By-the-Sea, “the first non-Catholic church in Panama” (Kater 1988:150), was begun in Colon. The building was not constructed from materials found in Panama, but “was built in the American style fashionable at that time, using red stone brought from the United States” (Kater 1988:150).

Meanwhile the search for missionaries who would be willing to go to Central or South America continued. The Board of Foreign Missions, meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1852, acknowledged,

The occupation of this field [South America] is rendered specially difficult by the rigorous civil enactments of the various States, all of which are under the control of the Roman Catholic system of religion. If, however, we could obtain men adapted to the work who should engage in colporteur labors, in connection with the preaching of the gospel, it is probable that access to some of the large cities might be gained. None, however, have yet presented themselves to the Board as volunteers for this service. (Foreign Mission Board 1852:37)

The Board was undaunted by the challenge faced by Southern Baptists to expand the work in China and Africa and to initiate work in Europe and Central and South America. Speaking about Southern Baptists, the Board concluded, “Their resources are equal to the exigencies of the times. Their numbers, intelligence and pecuniary ability, qualify them to take an elevated position, as witnesses to the idolatrous nations of the world” (Foreign Mission Board 1852:38). The Southern Baptist Convention in that year consisted of 5,817 churches with a membership of 467,334. Although the mission gifts for that year were not recorded, by 1885 Southern Baptists were giving more than two hundred thousand dollars to mission causes. By the year 1900, mission gifts would increase to \$881,219, while membership would climb to 1,675,996 (Barnes 1954:306). Resources can be

invested in worthy causes or squandered. The task to which these resources would be committed was world evangelization. The nations, their number not known, were perceived to be idolatrous. An investment of those resources could give untold thousands the opportunity to receive God's proffered gift of eternal life and to transfer allegiance from heathen gods to the living God.

The greatest hindrance for the expansion of missionary activity, however, was found at home. "Too many of the churches of the south," the board admitted, "are slumbering over their responsibilities" (Foreign Mission Board 1852:37). How serious the indictment! While thousands, perhaps millions, at home and abroad were dying without Christ, churches were asleep. They failed to respond, not because of obstacles, real or imaginary overseas, but because of indifference.

Hundreds of men might be usefully employed in destitute portions of the south, and the south-west. Were this work really interesting the hearts, and employing the hands of our brethern, it might appear to be some extenuation of the guilt of neglecting the foreign field. But the fact stares us in the face, that the home department is as lamentably destitute as the other. And it will still continue to be so, until a radical change in the views and spirit of Christ's followers shall have taken place. The missionary spirit is not a diffusive element in our churches. To live for Christ, to pray, to contribute and labor for the elevation of his kingdom and spread of his triumph, is not the ruling passion of the heart. How can our missionary operations be otherwise than sickly, when the spirit of missions abides not among us? (Foreign Mission Board 1852:37)

Lack of missionary zeal could not be attributed to a scarcity of funds and the churches had a sufficient membership from which it could be expected that several would be willing to serve Christ as his missionaries. What is not mentioned in the report, however, was that some churches were infected by a Calvinism that opposed missions and other churches feared the recently established Southern Baptist Convention, thinking that it would threaten their self-determination.

The Southern Baptist Convention met in Baltimore in 1853. The Committee on New Foreign Fields reported,

We are deeply impressed with the importance of vigorously sustaining existing stations, and avoiding any such expansion of our efforts as may tend to enfeeble them. A prudent policy demands, in the judgment of your committee, a concentration rather than a wide dispersion of the resources of our Foreign Board. At the same time, however, we warmly recommend the occupation of promising new fields, to which the providence of God may point. (Southern Baptist Convention 1853b:17)

Having suggested the occupation of British Honduras, the committee then emphasized the “importance of occupying, at as early a period as practicable, the cities of South America recommended by the last Convention, especially the important city of Panama” (Southern Baptist Convention 1853b:17). The Board of Foreign Missions responded,

It was recommended to the Board to establish missions so soon as suitable missionaries and funds may justify it, in any or all of the cities of Havana, Mexico, Rio Janeiro, Valparaiso and Panama, or in any other part of South America which in their judgment may call for it. These direct instructions have not been overlooked. Inquiries have been made in reference to those portions which might be regarded as accessible. In most of the cities above named, by special legal interdict, a barrier to the commencement of a mission is set up. The most civil disabilities are the penalty of preaching the gospel, distributing the scriptures, or in any otherwise coming in conflict with the Roman Catholic faith. (Southern Baptist Convention 1853c:54)

The Board acknowledged, however, that the Roman Catholic Church was not the greatest obstacle to commencing missionary activity in that part of the world. “The chief difficulties have consisted in the want of suitable laborers. If qualified men were prepared to enter South or Central America, we might safely commence operations at some accessible points, but all the inquiries and calls of the Board have been, in this respect vain” (Southern Baptist Convention 1853c:54). By the time the Southern Baptist Convention again met, this time in Richmond in 1855, the Committee on New Foreign



Fields had come to realize that not only insufficient laborers but also limited financial resources would hinder the expansion of work into other parts of the world.

On looking over the fields already occupied by the Board, and the missions now under their care, your committee is impressed with the belief that their number is as great, and that the labors of their missionaries are as widely diffused, as is consistent with their greatest efficiency and usefulness. It is true that there are many other fields more or less inviting, and more or less prepared for missionary labor; some in China, and perhaps other parts of Asia, some in Africa, and others among the aborigines of our own country, as well as among both the European and native races of South America; but with the very limited means as yet supplied to the Board, and the consequent small number of missionaries which they are able to employ, your committee does not think it would be advisable or proper for them to increase the number of their missions, or to enter at present upon new fields which would make any considerably increased demand upon the resources of the Treasury. They think the policy a better one of strengthening the missions which we now have, of endeavoring to render them more vigorous and effective, than by dividing their forces to weaken all, and perhaps to render some quite inefficient and useless. (Southern Baptist Convention 1855:70)

The outbreak of the Civil War in the United States six years later, with the Northern blockade of Southern ports, further hindered foreign missionary activity by the Board. Missionaries, however, were sent to Italy in 1870, shortly after the war ended. In the following years the work of the Foreign Mission Board gradually expanded when missionaries were sent to Mexico in 1880, to Brazil in 1881, and finally to Japan in 1889.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Baptists also arrived in Panama, not from the United States, but from Jamaica. They were among the workers who built the Panama Railroad. Later they would be found among those who found work in the banana plantations in Bocas del Toro, in western Panama.

When the [banana] plantations of Panama lured the Jamaicans to the Isthmus in the 1860's, there were many Baptists in the group. They asked for missionaries from the Jamaican Baptist Union and the Jamaicans responded. Though limited financially, they sacrificed to send preachers who organized the first Baptist churches in Panama. (Knight 1965:9)

The Jamaican Baptist Union possessed fewer resources than the Southern Baptists, but while the Jamaicans responded, the Baptists slept. Despite their abundance, Southern Baptists could find no one to go to Panama, but out of their poverty, or at least limited resources, the Jamaican Baptist Union was able to send several missionaries to Panama. The long history of Baptists in the country of Panama would later be remembered when a postage stamp was issued in 1992. The stamp celebrated the hundredth anniversary of Baptist work in Panama and pictured the Beautiful Zion Baptist Church. Established in 1892 in Bocas del Toro, it is now the oldest church in the Panama Baptist Convention.

The Jamaicans were also involved in the unsuccessful French attempt to dig the Panama Canal. Although they had been promised high wages,

they were not told how high the price of things would be, how rough and hard the housing and general conditions of living, or how the swamp of the proposed course, and the unsanitary condition of the towns at each end made the canal zone a hotbed of fever. Nor were they told with what contempt and harshness the ordinary black labourers would be treated by their ‘bosses,’ still less how law-abiding self-respecting Jamaicans, members in good standing in our Churches, some of them class-leaders or deacons accustomed to chastity and sobriety, to read the Bible and to keep holy the Sabbath Day, would be expected to live the godless, intemperate life common on the zone, and the cruelest pressure be brought to bear on them to make them do this. (Tucker 1914:97)

When the French effort failed, “thousands were repatriated by their own government, while thousands more were left stranded on the Isthmus, to eke out a meager living the best way they could” (Loveridge 1918a:22). This sad episode was remembered long after the French failure to dig a canal. When the United States came to Jamaica to recruit workers, immigration was discouraged. Hundreds of Jamaicans, however, came to Panama in search of work and several, like those before them, would remain in the country after the Panama Canal was dug.

Repeated attempts by Panama to secede from Colombia were finally successful when in 1903 the country declared its independence. The United States was accused of fomenting the rebellion, but whether the United States encouraged the insurrection or simply took advantage of Panama's desire to sever its relationship with Colombia is debatable. A treaty with Panama was signed in which the United States was granted a control of the Canal Zone in perpetuity. The presence of the United States in Panama and its claim to the Canal Zone, in later years, caused tension, which finally erupted in violence in 1964 when Panamanians were prevented from flying their country's flag in the Canal Zone. The Panamanian's long cherished dream for national sovereignty was not realized until the United States transferred the canal to Panama in 1999. The assertion that Panama "has served since 1510 as gracious host to a series of foreign powers interested in its strategic position as the narrowest point between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans" (Bensenville Community Public Library 2002:1) is questionable. These foreign powers were more often seen as unwelcome intruders than as welcomed guests. Overshadowed by Spain, Colombia, and finally the United States, the country of Panama has struggled to discover its own identity. The countries that occupied it were less interested in the development of the country and more interested in the benefits they could derive from occupying the land.

As early as 1534 Charles I of Spain had considered the possibility of a canal connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. However, what he only imagined became a reality under the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt when he became president of the United States in 1901. He realized that a canal would significantly reduce the time then needed to sail around Cape Horn in South America. The signing of the Panama Canal

Treaty, in 1903, not only gave the United States authorization to build the Panama Canal, but also created a Canal Zone that bisected the country of Panama. The Canal Zone “was a thoroughly modern American community, with all the conveniences of home” (Roberts 1923:22). It was also described “as a sort of state-socialist experiment” under the supervision of the United States.

The individual cannot own land or house. He cannot open a shop or rent rooms, though he may offer the full hospitality of his home. His house, apartment, or bed in a room, are assigned him. He buys his supplies from the commissary. If his electric light fails, he telephones the electrical division. If his door-key is lost, or his wife decides she wants different furniture or a new house, he calls up the Quarter Master. Should his boy sprain his ankle, he applies to the official doctor at the Dispensary. Should he seek amusement, he finds it at the nearest club house. His meals, unless he keeps house, he secures at a hotel conducted by the administration. If he has an automobile, it must be kept in a government garage. (Conger 1917:905)

After the United States had announced its intention to build the Panama Canal, the Home Mission Board not only acknowledged the commercial and military importance of this venture, but also foresaw how it would enhance America’s reputation among the nations of the world and would offer a unique opening for the propagation of the gospel.

Thousands and thousands of men will be thrown upon the work, and very soon the two oceans will be united and a new year in the world’s maritime commerce and traffic will be inaugurated. Through the narrow channel will pass the men-of-war of the merchantmen of all the nations. The Gulf of Mexico will become the Mediterranean of the new world and the Occident and the Orient will be brought together. The Pacific will dispute with the Atlantic for the theater of the world’s commerce, and our country will instantly become the leading nation of the world. The Canal Zone will wondrously affect the countries adjacent. Let us hasten there with our Christian forces and take the territory for Christ. (Southern Baptist Convention 1905:196)

When gold was discovered in California, Panama became a narrow highway over which thousands traveled to California with dreams of becoming rich. No one

realized at that time that, several years later, Panama would not become not only a passageway but also the destination for thousands who would come to dig the Panama Canal. Southern Baptists realized, however, that those searching for gold in California also needed to hear the gospel.

Within the last few months many thousands of our fellow-men, of our own and other countries have emigrated to that distant territory, and very many of them from the Southern States of the Union. There they are entirely destitute of the ordinary means of grace, and subjected as they are to casualties incident to unorganized society, and the diseases of climate, are likely to find their way into vast eternity, without one of the consolations of the written or preached gospel. (Southern Baptist Convention 1849:42)

The description of the situation in California could equally be applied to the situation in Panama during the construction of the canal and the same arguments that justified beginning missionary activity in California would later be repeated as justification for beginning missionary activity in Panama.

Establish the truth in California – kindle a pure gospel light on the Western shore of the American Continent, and it will grow brighter and brighter until it will have eradicated the spiritual darkness from the isles of the ocean, the empires of the East, and the benighted portions of our own generally favored country. Occupy that field effectually, and its happy results upon our China and other distant missions, must be seen and felt, whilst its influences, if properly directed, cannot fail to hasten the long prayed for time ‘when the knowledge of the Lord shall fill and cover the earth.’ (Southern Baptist Convention 1849:42)

When the construction of the Panama Canal began in 1904, thousands again came from the Southern states and throughout the world to come to Panama to find work. The Home Mission Board did not want those who went to Panama to be deprived of an opportunity to hear the gospel. If Panama, like California several years earlier, was occupied as a mission field, not only those who had already come and but also those who would come to Panama would feel the impact of the gospel. And equally important, it was expected

that the influence of the gospel would be felt far beyond the narrow confines of the Canal Zone in countries throughout the world.

### **Feasibility: Within the Canal Zone**

J. L. Wise, pastor at Welsh, Louisiana, was sent as the Home Mission Board's first missionary to Panama in 1905. Having selected and sent their first missionary to the Canal Zone, it is assumed that the Home Mission Board thought it was feasible to begin a ministry to those North Americans who were digging the Panama Canal. As the effort of the Home Mission Board is examined, two questions will be asked. First, was it feasible to begin work in the Canal Zone? This answer to this question will require an understanding of Wise's assigned task and a consideration of the resources that he applied to the task. There were no specific instructions as to what Wise was to do when he arrived. He began by preaching the gospel and establishing churches along the proposed route of the canal. Second, was it feasible to extend the ministry of the Home Mission Board beyond the Canal Zone into the country of Panama itself? It is recognized that the task remained the same, preach the gospel and organize churches, but as the work expanded, it began to include peoples who spoke a different language and possessed a different culture. What resources, both physical and spiritual, were applied to the task?

The minutes of the Home Mission Board indicate that Wise had applied to serve as a missionary to Cuba (Home Mission Board Minutes 1905:447). However, a month later Wise was appointed as a missionary to Panama "at a salary of \$1000 per year, with the understanding that he should go to that field immediately" (Home Mission Board Minutes 1905:451). Several years later, Masters, editor of *Our Home Field*, would reflect upon this significant moment in the history of the Home Mission Board.

In that year it sent out the Rev. J. L. Wise of Louisiana, who, with his young wife, became our first representative in mission endeavor among all the confused and ever-changing classes of people who foregathered to the ten by fifty-mile strip in the tropics, which boasts a frontage on two oceans and a 600 feet high mountain belt in between, also a railroad and one of the most beautiful and annoying rivers and a number of thousands of Central American negroes, that the census-taker has never yet been able to make definite. (1909a:11)

Wise was described as a man who “has unbounded energy, sincere piety and consecration, and ample literary and theological training, having his A. B. from college and the Th.M. from our seminary in Louisville” (Southern Baptist Convention 1905:195). The front cover of the February 1916 issue of *The Home Field* showed Wise and his wife, surrounded by their five children. Although Wise and his wife would remain in Panama for the next twelve years, her name and the names of their children were never mentioned. It was noted, however, that she was “capable and consecrated, and they have entered into their work in the hope and belief that their lives are to be spent there” (Southern Baptist Convention 1905:195).

Thousands had died during the construction of the Panama Railroad from 1850 to 1855. The French attempt to build the Panama Canal from 1880 to 1889 collapsed under the strain of mismanaged funds and an impossible attempt to dig a sea-level canal. The reputation of Ferdinand DeLesseps, who had led the venture, was forever stained by scandal. Twenty-five thousand workers had died, “primarily from tropical diseases such as yellow fever and malaria” (*Engineering News-Record* 2003:48). Construction on the Panama Canal by the United States was therefore delayed until a healthy environment was created in which the laborers could work.

When our government laid hands to this work they found a pest-hole of flies, mosquitoes, filth and death. To clean up the country and make it habitable was the first effort. The most sanguine scarcely had hope, but it

has been done. The country was drained, all standing water oiled, houses screened, garbage cans placed at every door, and sanitary regulation observed, streets graded and paved, sterilized drinking water provided, grass kept cut, and now flies and mosquitoes are but little more than a memory. They have been literally whipped out of the district. (Coin 1911a:14)

When Wise arrived in the country, however, disease posed a threat to anyone who came to Panama. “Yellow fever,” he wrote, “lurked almost everywhere, and at times wrought consternation in the ranks of the American employees on the canal. In the early days boats would take more men from the Isthmus back to New York than they would bring down” (Southern Baptist Convention 1906:192). Wise never complained about any personal illness, but he was often reminded that disease was a constant threat not only to him, but also to the members of his family. “When I first came here, about one year ago, there was plenty of yellow fever. I have buried several who died with it. I have buried two Baptist preachers, both of them good men. One of them died with yellow fever” (Southern Baptist Convention 1906:192). Despite this constant threat of disease, Wise could write, “My health has never been better” (Southern Baptist Convention 1906:192). His wife and family at times were less fortunate. In 1908 the minutes of the Home Mission Board announced, “The health of his wife and child is rather precarious, which will necessitate her visit to the States” (Home Mission Board Minutes 1908:248). The following year, the minutes noted, “The health of Mrs. J. L. Wise, wife of our superintendent in the Canal Zone, Panama, has not been good for months, having been in that severe climate for five years” (Home Mission Board Minutes 1909:375).

In Panama, Wise met Reverend S. M. Loveridge. He was from England and a graduate of Harley College in London. Loveridge, whom Wise described as “an excellent fellow” (Southern Baptist Convention 1905:195), had been sent by the Jamaica Baptist



Union to the Canal Zone in 1900 to care for the thousands of West Indians who were digging the Panama Canal. He was regarded by canal workers as “the most powerful spiritual influence among the 30,000 negro workmen” (Collins 1912:51). When he later became ill with enteric fever or malaria, he

had to be carried to the train, and on to the boat and again off the boat at Kingston, Jamaica, where through the kindness of friends he was nursed back to life and sufficient strength to go on to England. While in England he studied a short course of medicine prepared for missionaries and soon as was able returned to the Isthmus. Here he added to his previous work a morning clinic, treating scores of cases and extracting hundreds of teeth. With the arrival of the American government all this was changed as qualified physicians took charge of such work. (Lawrence, Una Roberts 1931:15)

By 1908 Loveridge was also serving as a missionary with the Home Mission Board and in that same year the work of the Jamaica Baptist Union was transferred to the Home Mission Board. Not only was the Jamaica Baptist Union facing financial difficulties, but also, according to the minutes of the Home Mission Board, it was “undesirable that two Societies of the same denomination should be carrying on Missionary work on practically the same ground” (Home Mission Board Minutes 1908:235). When the transfer of the work of the Jamaica Baptist Union was completed, the Home Mission Board announced,

Our Board has accepted the work tendered us by the Jamaica Baptist Missionary Society, and has pledged our fidelity to our Jamaica brethren for the faithful and vigorous prosecution of the work thus transferred to us. We feel assured that this exchange will be greatly helpful to our work on the Zone, if our people will enable the Board to carry out fully our pledges to the Jamaica brethren, inasmuch as they, through limited resources, are unable to prosecute the work as vigorously as Southern Baptists can do. (Southern Baptist Convention 1908b:220)

In 1908 Southern Baptist membership had increased to 2,139,080 with an enrollment in Sunday School of over one million, and \$1,997,634 had been given to missions (Barnes 1954:306).

While not mentioned specifically as reasons why the Jamaica Baptist Union transferred its work to the Home Mission Board, a hurricane in Jamaica in 1903 and an earthquake four years later undoubtedly impacted this decision and could explain why the Union was experiencing financial difficulties. A letter written on September 1, 1903, by William Head, Chairman, and P. Williams, Secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union, described the devastation that was caused by the hurricane. “While most of our ministers have suffered, there are some who, through the loss of chapels, residence, furniture, books, clothes, &c., have been reduced to great straits; and, being absolutely dependent upon their people for their support, their condition and prospects are gloomy in the extreme” (1903:519). In addition to this, “thirty-three of our chapels have been destroyed; and, on account of the circumstances of the people, it will be many years before they can be rebuilt, even if it be ever done, unless the liberal help is obtained from Christian friends outside of Jamaica” (Head and Williams 1903:519).

The earthquake that followed in 1907 destroyed the city of Kingston. In the months that followed several articles appeared in *The Missionary Herald of the Baptist Missionary Society* which described the devastation:

Private letters continue to give vivid accounts of the disaster. “Every church and chapel,” reads one which has just been placed at our disposal, “is destroyed, and some completely razed to the ground; schools, too, are down, with many children killed, and buried in the ruins. Hundreds of people were buried in the debris, under their houses.

“In thirty seconds the beautiful city was laid in ruins – a mass of rubbish and crowds of dead. Only two per cent of the dwelling-houses in the city are partly habitable, and these unsafe; the business portion totally wiped out. . . . Oh, broken hearts, the weeping eyes, the hungry, homeless ones in our island! And we are also face to face with approaching famine – for weeks no rain, high winds, and fierce sun. Unless rain comes soon, we do not know how we are going to live unless help comes from over the sea.” (Baptist Missionary Society 1907:109)

The members of the Committee on Home Mission Fields thought that the strategic importance of the work in Panama lay “in touching the throngs that pass like ships in the night” (Winburn 1912:10). The thousands who labored on the canal represented many nations of the world. “There is a varying population in Panama,” Coin, who briefly pastored the church at Empire, would later observe.

It will range from 300,000 to 400,000 and is composed of nearly every nationality under heaven. On the Canal Zone alone, our government reported 130 arrests for one month, and this number represented 47 different nationalities. Here one can hear almost every known language of earth on a single day. (Coin 1911b:17)

The missionaries did not overlook the significance of these numerous and diverse voices. Not only was it anticipated that many would accept the proffered gift of eternal life but also that they would return as witnesses to their own homeland. The only qualification required to become a missionary was a personal encounter with Christ.

People from all lands are there at work; from India, from Argentina, from British Colombia, from Siberia, from the whole earth. On confident authority it is claimed that more than fifty different languages are spoken just now in the Canal Zone. What a mighty opportunity for Christian work. Messages of salvation could be sent to the four quarters of the earth from the converts won to Christ among these multitudes. (Gray and Love 1908c:359)

In His providence God had assembled these men from all over the world to dig the Panama Canal. The Home Mission Board not only saw them as laborers, but also understood that they needed to hear the gospel. Recognizing that it was “impracticable to place missionaries there who use all these languages,” it was suggested that “a few polyglot preachers could reach most of these people, and each one would become an agent for circulating the sacred Scriptures to ‘every man in his own vernacular’ or in

some tongue which he could read” (Southern Baptist Convention 1908a:18). There is no evidence, however, that such a plan was ever enacted.

The Committee on Home Mission Fields also reasoned that, strategically, the most important objective for the work in Panama was “in creating a center from which the gospel light may stream out to all Central America and the Caribbean Islands” (Winburn 1912:10). The choice of Panama as a center from which to proclaim the gospel was not a mistake in judgment. It was recognized that “if a location were to be selected for a new Pentecost as a point from which to send spiritual life and power into the whole Latin-American world, that point should be Panama” (Miller, George A. 1917:3). It was assumed that like Jerusalem before it, the gospel of Christ, having taken root in Panama, would then be heard, in ever widening circles, to the ends of the earth. What had once been a forgotten appendage of the country of Colombia had gained a position of great importance among the nations of the world.

In 1904, the same year in which the United States began constructing the Panama Canal, the Committee on Cuba and New Fields had announced:

We approve the opening of new work in the Isle of Pines and in the Canal Zone. We sincerely hope that our brethern in Atlanta, guided by a spirit-controlled wisdom, may be able to enter at once into these ripening fields, and that men and means may not be wanting to establish new centers of spiritual power and Biblical truth in the Panama Belt at once. We particularly urge the immediate occupation of the strategic and tactical points of Colon and Panama, both lying in the territory belonging to the United States. (Southern Baptist Convention 1904a:27)

The often-repeated assertion that the territory was now the possession of the United States would anger the Panamanian people. The Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, written by a Frenchman, declared, “The Republic of Panama grants to the United States in perpetuity a monopoly for the construction, maintenance and operation of any system of

communication by means of canal or railroad across its territory between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean” (Kitchel 1978:210). The country of Panama gave the United States the exclusive right to build the Panama Canal, but continued to affirm its ownership of the territory. This was also implied in Article III.

The Republic of Panama grants to the United States all the rights, power and authority within the zone mentioned and described in Article II of this agreement and within the limits of all auxiliary lands and waters mentioned and described in said Article II which the United States would possess and exercise if it were the sovereign of the territory within which said lands and waters are located to the entire exclusion of the exercise by the Republic of Panama of any such sovereign rights, power or authority. (Kitchel 1978:209)

The question of whether or not the United States was given sovereignty over the Canal Zone has often generated heated debate. While the enclosed time line indicated that the Panama Canal Zone was “a sovereign part of the United States” (CNN Indepth-Specials (1999:3), *The Foursquare Missionary*, a publication of the Foursquare Gospel, declared that the Canal Zone was “under the jurisdiction (although not the sovereignty) of the United States” (Mitzner 1954:1). The myth that the United States purchased the Canal Zone has been perpetuated throughout the years. According to *Exploring American History* (Schwartz and O’Conner 1986), “In November 1903, Panama revolted from Colombia and declared itself an independent nation. President Roosevelt recognized the new nation and arranged for the purchase of a strip of land through Panama” (Schwartz and O’Conner 1986:411). This seems to confirm that the Canal Zone became a possession of the United States. The discussion about the United States and its relationship with Panama, however, continues by stating, “The United States paid the new government for the use of the land on which the canal was built. The United States also agreed to pay Panama yearly rent for the land” (Schwartz and O’Conner 1986:411).

If the United States had purchased the land, why was it necessary to pay rent for the use of the land? The treaty states that the United States was not given sovereignty over the Panama Canal Zone, but could act, in perpetuity, as though it had sovereignty over the Zone. The treaty however did not explain how Panama could regain the land once the United States occupied the Panama Canal Zone.

Although the cities of Panama and Colon lay within the Canal Zone, they were Panamanian cities and they were inhabited by a people whose culture and language was different from that of the North Americans living and working in the Canal Zone. Immediate entrance into those cities would be impractical. This would divert the Home Mission Board from its immediate task, the ministry to the North Americans who had come to dig the canal.

“With a capable force of missionaries and the proper equipment,” the Home Mission Board later declared, “we shall not only be able to meet the needs of the Canal Zone, but from this great center of the world movements, we can send the gospel to the ends of the earth” (Southern Baptist Convention 1914:279). The Home Mission Board, however, did not explain how large a force would be required and it is not known what equipment was needed to successfully carry out this venture.

Barnes later described Panama and Cuba, the other country in which the Home Mission Board was working, as centers of influence.

**Cuba is the Pearl of the Antilles, the largest and most important of the West Indian groups of islands. Panama, originally an unimportant state of the Republic of Colombia, has become one of the strategic centers of the world's life through the opening and operation of the Canal. In the peaceful pursuit of commerce or in the activities of war the little Republic of Panama will hold the attention of the statesmen of Europe, Asia and America. If these centers of influence are won and held for Christ, what mighty factors for further progress in Latin America. (1925:8)**

Like the South in which the Home Mission Board was giving its greatest effort, the Canal Zone was to become an example of the redeeming power of the gospel.

The strip of land, now the meeting point of the two Americas, will, when the canal is finished, become the passageway for forty-seven miles of ships that sail from the ports of the world. It is of incalculable importance that, instead of license and the low viciousness that naturally finds expression in such chance meeting places of the men who go up and down upon the seas, there should be in the Canal Zone the reign of cleanliness, both moral and physical, the reign of Christ. If this shall be attained, the small strip of land on which in these years are focused the eyes of the world, shall have a significance in spiritual as well as commercial things far beyond its own size. (Masters 1909a:12)

The digging of the Panama Canal was described as “the greatest engineering feat of the ages” (Southern Baptist Convention 1907b:189). This concentrated effort to build the canal was to be paralleled by an equally intense effort to evangelize the area for Christ.

Some of the vigor and dispatch with which this titanic work is being pressed should characterize Southern Baptists in their effort to plant the pure gospel on the canal zone. The strategic importance of this location is being more thoroughly appreciated by our people. The proximity of the Isthmus to the South naturally gives us the primacy in commerce for the future, and will put us in the closest relations with the people of the zone. Speedily and firmly established along the canal, we shall be able to bear witness for Christ to the nations of the earth that pass this great highway of the world’s trade and travel. (Southern Baptist Convention 1907b:189)

The following year, Wise wrote: “Nearly three and one-half million cubic yards were taken out of the canal during March. Doubtless more than this will be the record for April. Why not enable us as ambassadors for Christ to do greater things than digging the Panama Canal?” (Gray and Love 1908b:310). The digging of the Panama Canal was a momentous task and a daring undertaking, but it was to be overshadowed by the more important task of reaching these thousands for Christ. The Canal Zone was later described as

a community of persons under one employment – that of the United States. The Navy, Army, the Panama Canal, the Panama Railroad, all these are but departments of Uncle Sam’s business. Furthermore, it is a community with but one concern, the great watery highway along whose banks it extends, from ocean to ocean. (Conger 1917:905)

Wise was hopeful that this same singleness of purpose would characterize the work of the Southern Baptists in Panama. The thousands of laborers faced the dangers of construction and the threat of disease. For Baptists to give less effort, to fail to commit both laborers and resources to the task, would be an embarrassment to the cause of Christ.

Few missionaries from the Home Mission Board went to Panama and those that did were often overwhelmed by the demanding tasks to which they had sacrificially committed themselves. The report of the Home Mission Board in 1910 summarized the difficulties that the missionaries in Panama had to face.

One of these lies in the lack of adequate forces and facilities for dealing with the situation as it demands. Another lies in the shifting character of the population which makes any permanent work of slow growth. Yet, again, the report of our workers complains that the lives of professing Christians who go to the Zone for money making are a hindrance often instead of a help. (Southern Baptist Convention 1910a:17)

In the book *Facing the Task of World Evangelization*, W. O. Carver insisted, “All our money, all our surveys, all our great plans will mean nothing except as we shall have consecrated personality to use our money, to man our stations, to employ our equipment. After all, the devotion of life is the only thing we can count on as we face this world task” (1920:7). Although their numbers were few, there was no mistaking their consecration to Christ and their commitment to the task at hand. For this reason the story of the work of the Home Mission Board is incomplete unless the stories of the missionaries who served there are told. In addition to Loveridge and Wise, men like Sobey and Witt, along with



their wives, were the now forgotten luminaries during the early phase of the work in Panama.

J. H. Sobey became the first pastor of the Baptist church in Colon, the Atlantic terminus for the Panama Canal. He, however, would die a year later from cancer. He and his wife had served as missionaries to Costa Rica for twenty years. "During that time," he wrote, "we sent two of our children far away, and did not see them again for eight years. Our only daughter fills a solitary missionary's grave in Cienfuegos, Cuba, where she died of yellow fever. Our eldest son died in Costa Rica of blackwater fever" (1910:17). Like Wise's children, the names of these children were not mentioned. Their final-resting places, more than likely, are known only to God.

"I give nine services a month to white congregations," Sobey reported, "and with the help of brethren conduct services in four other places regularly. We go to some places where others do not go – into the camps and among people who have no settled home" (1910:17). By 1911 ten churches, two white and eight colored, had been established. Sobey had now been followed by Witt. While Witt served as pastor of the West Indian church in Colon, Loveridge was not only the pastor of the other seven churches but also served as chaplain for the hospital and the penitentiary in Culebra where he lived. Masters acknowledged, "Superintendent J. L. Wise and his associates have labored with untiring zeal and assiduity, notwithstanding the enervating influence of the heat and moisture in the Zone. Reports from our missionaries show that they are doing more work than would be expected even in a far cooler climate" (Masters 1910d:16). Those same reports also indicated that Wise and the other missionaries serving in the Canal Zone

needed not only a larger workforce but also additional financial resources to plant the gospel in that part of the world.

### The Need for Men

In Wise's reports to the Home Mission Board he persistently implored that additional men would be sent to the Zone. Despite his numerous appeals for assistance, he did not minimize the importance of sending men who were qualified to serve as missionaries in this neglected corner of the world.

We need two more men for the work in the zone. First and last they ought to be men who are full of religion. They ought to be intelligent and able to speak well enough to instruct and entertain the people. They ought to be physically strong, for we have a perpetual summer. I think a man ought to be married before coming here. In my judgment he ought to be a young man, and I do not see any reason why children could not be brought here. (Southern Baptist Convention 1906:192)

The following year he pleaded for someone who would be willing to go to Colon. "There are about thirteen thousand people in Colon with about six hundred Americans. There ought to be a good Baptist preacher put there for all time" (Southern Baptist Convention 1907b:192). While Wise was in the United States for rest, he thought about his return to Panama. "I hope we can find another worker somewhere before I go," he wrote. "We ought to have a good man for Panama. We must have one" (Gray and Love 1907a:24). However, the following month, an editorial in *Our Home Field* reported, "He was greatly disappointed that no fellow worker went with him" (Gray and Love 1907b:3). Although thousands of workers were willing to dig the Panama Canal, Wise's frequent appeals for additional help were often met with silence. Sobey, too, echoed Wise's request for additional workers.

Large numbers of men already on the zone closely connected with churches in the home lands must have the Shepherd's earliest attention

and care. The teeming masses of others there, and still they come, and will come, are without God and without hope. For these, and to these, an army of picked men must be sent, and sent soon to preach the Word of Life. For unless Christian sentiment exists and prevails thousands will speedily rush into sinners' graves. (1907:15)

Sobey's vision of an army never materialized. He would later admit, "Other denominations, proportionately smaller than the Baptists, have more ministers than we have" (Sobey 1910:17). Instead of an army, only a handful of soldiers faced the overwhelming task in Panama. Southern Baptists, like those in the last century, did not respond to Sobey's Macedonian cry, "Come over and help us" (Acts 16:9, King James). By 1910, the Home Mission Board admitted, "We have not had as large a force as was needed. Nor has our financial condition made it possible to furnish such facilities for effective work as were imperatively needed" (Southern Baptist Convention 1910b:265).

Wise was frustrated that additional workers could not be found, but he was also upset with those laborers on the canal who professed to be Christians. "Very few of the Christians who come here expect to stay, even if they have their families," he wrote. "They do not consider this home, and therefore feel little inclined to contribute either money or moral force to make Panama better. They are here to make money and go back home" (Southern Baptist Convention 1906:193).

Wise's first volley of criticism was followed later by a second. "The supreme indifference and carelessness of our Christian men and women who have settled here on the Canal," he wrote four years later, "is a difficulty we face. These people come here to better themselves financially, for wages are high. It seems from the way many of our people act that good-bye was said to mother, home, country, and God when they left the

States” (Southern Baptist Convention 1910b:265). M. F. Roberts, then pastor of the Balboa Heights Baptist Church, repeated Wise’s complaint several years later.

Among the Americans on the Canal Zone there is a spirit of worldliness which is very hard to understand. Good men and women who were active church members before they came down here have left all religious interests and obligations behind, and never darken the door of the church. They forget their own and their children’s interest, and indulge in desecrations which would make them ashamed if their friends at home knew about it. (1922:24)

These were men and women whose light was hidden under a bushel and whose salt had lost its savor. They were therefore “good for nothing” (Matthew 5:13-16, King James Version).

Wise was particularly annoyed with the Baptists and, accusing them of treason, he directed a steady gunfire of reproof against them.

It is almost a matter of impossibility to get half of our Baptist people to join our local churches and keep up our work where they are living on the Canal Zone or in Panama. They seem to think that they have no responsibility to keep up work so far away from home, though they are living here and know that our Board is spending thousands of dollars to keep up our work. The supreme indifference and utter carelessness sadly predominate in the lives of many of our people. What has become of the church covenant and the missionary impulse? Our churches and pastors in the States could help us remedy this if they laid it to heart. What Benedict Arnold did with his country some of our people have done with the kingdom of heaven and their church if they ever had any interest in them. (Southern Baptist Convention 1911b:262)

It is probable that the church covenant to which Wise referred is the same covenant that is seen in many Southern Baptist churches today. This covenant has been in use since 1853 and was a summary of the obligations that were assumed by members of local Baptist churches. According to the last paragraph of the covenant, it would be expected that a member of a Baptist church in the United States, but now living in the Canal Zone, would become a member of a local Baptist church. “We moreover engage that when we remove

from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word" (Pearce 1964:10). As the covenant is read, it becomes clear how disappointed Wise was when Baptists from the United States not only refused to join the Baptist churches but also failed to keep up the work. The same document stated,

We engage, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort;

To promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines;

To contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations. (Pearce 1964:9)

How often had Wise appealed for assistance? Now having found Baptists among those who were digging the canal, he expected that they would understand what he was doing and stand with him to share the gospel and strengthen the churches which had been founded, but he was disappointed. Wise urged the Baptist pastors at home to exert their influence on their children and members who were living in the Canal Zone.

Our supreme need is a vitalized Christianity which places Christ and all he stands for first. Baptist preachers who have children living on the Zone ought to urge their children to line up with our Baptist work here, and pastors who know that they have members here ought to do the same thing. Baptists who move to the Zone ought to be encouraged to take their letters and line up with our work. (Southern Baptist Convention 1917b:345)

Finally, shortly before his retirement in 1917, Wise fired his last barrage.

Some of our Baptists here, while they are from the rock-ribbed, orthodox Southland, or some strong Baptist fold north of the Mason and Dixon's Line, have gone wild with Y.M.C.A. dancing, Y.M.C.A. Sunday moving pictures, Y.M.C.A. Sunday pool and billiards. Some of our so-called church people feel no compunction of conscience when they sleep late on Sunday morning and miss Sunday-school and church, go to Sunday

afternoon base-ball and yell for two hours. (Southern Baptist Convention 1917b:345)

Sobey's vision of an army of committed workers could have been realized. It would be expected that soldiers could have been found among those Baptists who were constructing the Panama Canal. They, however, were deaf to any plea to contribute financially to the ongoing work in the Canal Zone. They were silent despite being among so many whom had never heard the gospel. They had become lovers of this present world (2 Timothy 4:5, King James Version) instead of followers of Christ.

### The Need for Money

During the construction of the Panama Canal, congregations met in assortment of facilities, including "sheds, schools houses, tents, dwellings, mess-rooms, etc." (Funk 1907:630). Until his retirement in 1917, Wise again and again appealed for money with which to build churches.

We need chapels all across the canal zone. We believe that the canal zone will be the entering wedge for all Central and South America. There are mountains and plains a thousand miles south of us with unbounded wealth, waiting to quicken the commerce of the world. As it is now the Wesleyans are reaping the fruit of our labors in Colon and Panama because we have no where to house our people. The Panama Railroad has given us lots in Colon, Empire, and Culebra, and has promised one in Panama City if they have any that will suit us. It is a matter of impossibility for us to make our work permanent without houses. (1907:19)

By the following year, the situation had become even more acute. "The need for houses of worship," he wrote, "has been greatly intensified. We must have at once a building at Colon, costing from \$2,500 to \$3000. Colon is the northern terminus of the Canal, and therefore a place of prime importance. We are suffering greatly for the need of a house of worship" (Southern Baptist Convention 1908b:221).

Wise, beginning in 1910, included a list of the churches, both white and colored, in his reports to the Home Mission Board. The churches, following the example of the Canal Zone, were segregated. The majority of the workers on the Panama Canal were West Indians. They were English-speaking Jamaicans, Barbadians, and Trinidadians who had immigrated to Panama from the Caribbean Islands. They comprised the majority of the workers, but, “as individuals they had no delineation whatsoever. That they too were making a new life in an alien land, that they too were raising families, experiencing homesickness, fear, illness, or exhilaration in the success of the work, was almost never even inferred” (McCullough 1977:579). Whether the worker was unskilled or skilled determined if the worker was placed on the gold roll or silver roll. Since the West Indians were unskilled, they were placed on the silver roll. They

were lower caste in a system of Jim Crow more pervasive than in the heart of Mississippi. In many cases their pay amounted to a third or fourth of what United States workers doing substantially the same work were paid. The ceiling of opportunity was very low. If they did not live in Panama’s crowded tenements, they lived in segregated towns on the Zone, shopped at separate commissaries, drank cokes and saw movies at separate clubhouses, attended separate schools, drank at separate fountains. . . . (Biesanz and Biesanz 1955:78)

While strategy is not specifically discussed in the articles in the official publications of the Home Mission Board, much can be learned about how the gospel was being proclaimed in both the white and the colored churches. “By sermons, religious visits, distributing tracts and writing letters,” Roberts, pastor the Balboa Baptist Church, later wrote, “we are trying to lay the Baptist cause and message on the hearts of the people” (1922:24). Loveridge, while pastor of several colored or West Indian churches, employed a variety of methods in his ministry.

In connection with the three mission churches under my care, we have an average of some fifteen hundred services of all kinds during the year. These comprise preaching services, Sunday schools, open-air meetings, prayer meetings, Senior and Junior Christian Endeavor, Bible classes, inquirers' classes, choir practices, etc. A "Self-Help Society" furnishes funds to those members who are sick and in need of financial assistance; cricket clubs are also maintained in connection with two of our churches, while visiting among the sick in their homes or in hospitals is systematically carried on. (Loveridge 1918:16)

There is no mention of missionary organizations such as the Woman's Missionary Society or Girls in Action or Royal Ambassadors which would become a significant feature of some West Indian churches in the following years. The cricket clubs were reminiscent of the English heritage of which the West Indians were so proud.

While the North Americans worshiped at Gorgona or Empire, the West Indians assembled at Colon, Matachin, or Las Cascadas. Coin briefly served as pastor of the church at Empire for six months, but he also preached in the West Indian churches at Culebra and Cucaracha. "They can no more sing than a pond full of frogs," he remarked. "Some choirs know music and carry the time, but their voices are really painful" (1911b:17). He was more impressed, however, by the inspiring worship of these people.

The devotion of these colored people is a thing to rejoice the heart. In this they have some good lessons for us. You hear no boisterous noise from them before or after the service. They come in quietly, sit quietly and go out the same way. Announce a Scripture lesson, and by the time you turn to it, almost every man, woman and child has turned to it in his own Bible, and follows the reading. When a worshiper comes into the house he first takes his seat, bows his face in his hands, breathes a prayer for God's blessings on the minister and the service. Dismiss them standing, and every one takes his seat so quietly that you scarcely hear a rustle. He bows and prays, and goes quietly away with a prayer on his lips and a song in his heart. They gave last year \$7.16 per member to the work. I predict that in a few years this work will be self-sustaining, and that the people will be sending missionaries into the regions round about them. (Coin 1911b:15)



Wise's reports to the Home Mission Board noted not only the gains in membership but also the setbacks that the churches were facing. His reports ended in 1917, the year in which he retired. In that last report he mentioned the Balboa Heights Baptist Church, the only church which white Americans attended.

The final report also described what was happening in the West Indian churches. Referring to the church at Gatun, Wise reported, "The Canal Zone authorities have taken away our church building for military purposes so that we are without a church home. The church, however is continuing to work in the homes of its members" (Southern Baptist Convention 1917b:348). The members of the West Indian church at Corozal was meeting in a building that was never designed to be a church.

Good work has been done in a small rented room measuring 28'3" x 22'6", originally intended for the purpose of a store; for this store we have to pay \$22.50 U.S. currency a month, and have thrown in free of charge all the noise of the neighborhood. Families living in single rooms overhead, many more behind, others on either side, and still more across the street, making it at times difficult for the speaker to make himself heard. In this room is now carried on a flourishing work with a Sunday-school having an average attendance of over 100, divided into some ten classes. A Sunday congregation averaging the same number, and services held there every night in the week. (Southern Baptist Convention 1917b:347)

These reports are important because they describe not only the buildings in which congregations met, but also the numerous distractions, which, at times, competed for the attention of the worshippers.

The building at Colon, another West Indian church mentioned in the report, had been completed in 1909. Witt, who would later serve as superintendent after Wise's retirement, had followed Sobey as pastor of the Colon church on January 1, 1910. He and his wife were from England. She

was a London school teacher. In the providence of God he came to the United States and finished his ministerial training at the Seminary of Chicago University, where he met the little teacher who had emigrated with a younger brother to British Colombia, and from that far west had come to Chicago Training School to prepare for missionary service. When the Jamaica Missionary Society appealed for workers for the Cayman Islands, these two young people answered. (Lawrence, Una Roberts 1931:16)

Married in 1896, they would serve as missionaries with the Jamaica Baptist Union for the next fifteen years first in the Cayman Islands and then in Costa Rica. Witt's wife would later reflect on their years of missionary service. While on the island Cayman Bras, she recalled, "our two first children were born without a doctor. Here we went hungry because food was scarce, here we sometimes went for weeks (and on at least one occasion, three months) without mail" (Lawrence 1930:1). Four years later, the Jamaica Baptist Union asked for volunteers to go to Costa Rica, and they responded to the challenge.

For eleven years we laboured in Costa Rica among the Colored West Indians, who, most of them, worked on the banana farms. The things that stand out most vividly in my mind now, after the lapse of nearly twenty years, are mosquitoes (myriads of them), land crabs round the mission house, fevers, sicknesses of husband and children, the loss of three beautiful boys, sometimes scarcity of water, always the effort to make a small, inadequate salary, not only support ourselves, but the many who shared our hospitality in the port town of Limon. (Witt, Mrs. 1930:1)

After serving as missionaries in Costa Rica, they came to Panama. Witt would continue as pastor of the church at Colon for the next ten years until he was asked to assume responsibility for the work on the Pacific side of the Canal Zone. Writing in 1918, Witt described Colon as "a Panamanian city of over twenty thousand, three-fourths being West Indian negroes, and the other fourth being made up of people from almost every quarter of the globe" (1918:24). Twice the building at Colon was damaged or threatened

by fire. The first fire occurred on March 23, 1911, three months after the Witts had arrived in the city. "The destruction of the Colon Chapel by the great fire in March, when \$800,000 worth of property was consumed in that town, was a great loss. It was by far our best building" (Southern Baptist Convention 1911b:261). Witt, who was living in the second story of the building with his family, "lost all his house furnishings and books" (Coin 1911a:15). For the next two years the members of the church worshiped in a tent. In 1913, the church was rebuilt.

This was the beginning of the present plant in Colon. The church grew, and soon the congregation was overflowing into the street. On a fine Sunday night the crowd would be seen on their way to the Baptist church, many carrying their own chairs to be sure of a seat. The building was enlarged to nearly twice its original size, and was speedily filled with Sunday night congregations that on special occasions numbered a thousand. (Lawrence, Una Roberts 1931:16)

Three years later, in 1916, another terrible fire caused great damage to the city. "Colon was visited by one of the most destructive fires in its history and our church escaped by a 'hair's breath.' More than two thousand souls were made homeless, some of whom were members" (Southern Baptist Convention 1916:47). The conflagration also "destroyed twenty-two blocks of tenement dwellings adjoining our church premises, which scattered our people as well as destroyed their household effects" (Southern Baptist Convention 1916:51). Despite the devastation of the city, the following year Witt indicated that the church in Colon was flourishing.

The church building, which seats 550, is too small for the crowds that attend. The average attendance in the Sunday-school is 290. Five or six open-air meetings are held in different parts of the city every week. The attendance at the weekly prayer meeting is rarely less than 100 and sometimes over 150. The church building is open for some kind of service in every night of the year. In addition to the regular work we conduct a prosperous Dime Bank, a Burial Society and industrial school. (Southern Baptist Convention 1917b:348)

The Dime Bank and Burial Society were examples of mutual aid societies specifically designed to meet the unique needs of the West Indians.

The main purpose of the Dime Bank is to encourage thrift among the members of the church. The city banks are open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., which is during the West Indian's working hours. The Dime Bank is open from 5 to 6 p.m. after the day's work is done. The city banks require an initial deposit of five dollars or more; the Dime Bank required ten cents only. It operates chiefly among the very poor who find it hard to save anything from their meager incomes, and has the reputation of being even more safe than the city bank, so sums of all sizes and from all sorts and conditions of people are deposited therein. It supplies a real need, and is, incidentally, also another means by which the pastor becomes better acquainted with his people.

The Burial Aid society exists to give members of the church decent burial when they die. As most of the members live on the poverty line all the time, the financial burden involved when sickness comes is more than their slender incomes can bear. When one dies, unless the relatives have means to bury the body, the authorities claim and cremate it. Cremation is looked upon by West Indians as a disgrace.

We found that in the case of death of most of our members, even those better off financially, there was not enough money for burial. In tropical countries, interment usually takes place the same day as death. Before the Burial Aid was organized, when someone died, there was a rush on the part of friends and relatives to try to beg or borrow enough for the burial. Sometimes they failed, then the authorities seized the body and burned it. The blame for the failure fell upon the church, but more especially upon the pastor. Now the members of the Burial Aid Society contribute one dollar to the fund when they join. In the case of death, fifty dollars is at once paid to the person appointed as executor and a levy made upon the members to replace the sum. (Lawrence, Una Roberts 1931:17)

In 1929 Witt and his wife retired after serving as missionaries for thirty-four years. Two years earlier, on March 3, 1927, Mrs. Witt had written a letter to her friends in which she explained why her Christmas letter had been delayed.

In the first place Mr. Witt broke down early in the New Year with an overstrained heart and has been under the Dr. ever since. For almost a year after Rev. Thrift left the field, he was in charge of 8 churches and it proved to be too much for him. Some years ago when Rev. Loveridge left the field, my husband was in charge of the whole field for two years

before help was forthcoming. He broke down then but not so badly as this time. Of course, we were younger then and better able to bear the strain.

On Christmas eve, in the afternoon, we distributed groceries, apples and buns to 74 needy families and individuals. All of the families were truly needy, in some cases the father was out of work, in others the mother was a widow with perhaps several children to support. Some have large families and we have several with families of 8 or 9. Others were old people, supported by charity, beyond helping themselves.

At night we went to Empire where we had a Christmas tree for the S.S. Small presents were given to each member of the S.S. and a bag in which were two apples, a little candy and a bun, also a Christmas card.

At five o'clock on Christmas morning my husband went to Chorillo, another of our churches, to speak at the early morning service. After breakfast we went to Calidonia, another church, and distributed bags in which were apples, candy and buns, to all the S.S. scholars. A hasty cold lunch at noon and another school in the P.M. completed the day as far as our churches were concerned. Of course there had been days and days of preparation and we were tired out. I had had no time for preparing Christmas dinner for ourselves, but fortunately we were invited out to dinner and we thoroughly enjoyed it, altho so tired. (1927:1)

Both Wise and Loveridge had retired several years before this letter was written. When they left, few missionaries remained to shoulder the responsibilities. Witt's demanding schedule undoubtedly contributed to his health problems. When asked, however, if she thought her years of service as a missionary were worthwhile, Mrs. Witt replied,

I know of no other life more worthwhile. Of course, there were disappointments and discouragements, difficulties, problems and dark days. Many of these are caused by the fact that the Christians in the homeland are not supporting the work as they should. Want of sufficient help and equipment have sometimes made us feel like giving up. But at that time it seems God sends a bit of extra encouragement, some little words of appreciation, and up go our spirits and on we go rejoicing in the fact that he is using us and blessing us, and at least in some small measure is making us a blessing to others. Worth while: With all my heart I say it is. (Lawrence, Una Roberts 1931:18)

The sacrifices of such missionaries like Witt, Sobey, and Loveridge laid the foundation for what lay ahead.

### Feasibility: Beyond the Canal Zone

The Panama Canal was completed on August 15, 1914. Four years earlier, Masters had asked,

When once the wonderful engineering feat has been accomplished, and the ships that wander over the deep seas shall pass to and fro across the Isthmus and its mountainous continent-divide, all the other tongues of the nations will be spoken by the wanderers, who journey up and down the earth by way of the canal.

Shall the jargon of many tongues be associated with the discord of human selfishness and sin at this gateway of the seas? Or shall we try by the grace of God and faithful missionary endeavor, make it a place where the various tongues of people of every nation out of heaven shall be melted and merged into a sweet accord at the acclaim of the name of Jesus? (1910d:16)

During the construction of the canal the number of laborers fluctuated. It was reported, however, that “there was an average of some 35,000 workers for the ten years” (Gray 1916a:7). Strategy was determined by the unsettled and transitory nature of the work.

The tropical sun beat down upon a 40-mile long panorama of industry. Swarming in the mighty cuts were legions of sweating laborers, white and black, some in shirt sleeves, some almost naked. Some toiled with pick, shovel, and crowbar; others with drill and dynamite in the stone cuts. Series of cableways and a network of railway tracks ran everywhere. Mighty derricks and cranes swung huge buckets of concrete through the air and lowered them into the forms to build locks and embankments. Powerful drills bored holes into the solid rock at the rate of seven feet an hour. The arms of monster dipper dredges rose and fell from barges almost in swamps and bays. More than 100 steam shovels doing the work of 10,000 men dug up earth in ten-ton scoops and dumped it into waiting railroad cars. One hundred and fifteen locomotives hauled trains of these cars to the dumps, where a great plow traveled from one end of the train to the other unloading 20 cars, each carrying 60 tons, in less than ten minutes. (Compton 1961:90)

Nothing of any permanence could be accomplished until after the canal was built. This lack of permanence also contributed to the spiritual malaise that had stricken several church members now living in the Canal Zone.

If each congregation of Canal workers had a feeling that it was building up a permanent organization for social advancement, had before it some tangible ambition, such as building a church and paying for it, or if it was being persecuted, the handicaps of environment and unattractive services might be neutralized. But there is no persecution, no tangible goal, no feeling of permanency, with the result that the average canal worker towards formal religion is that of indifference. (Collins 1912:50)

In that same year, however, the Home Mission Board proudly announced, “We have done much temporary work, which, like the bread cast upon the waters, will be gathered after many days, and in many parts of the world. Men have come to the Canal Zone seeking gold, and by the labors our missionaries have found the pearl of great price” (Southern Baptist Convention 1912:291). After the construction of the Panama Canal, several West Indians went elsewhere to find work. Loveridge received letters from some who were fighting in Italy with the British Expeditionary Force and others who had found employment on the sugar cane plantations in Cuba.

One [letter] tells of how some of them have got together, and out of their first earnings have purchased a little house for fifty-six dollars, which they have converted into a temporary place of worship as there is no Protestant church of any kind in the neighborhood; how they have spent fifty-four dollars more in fixing up a little pulpit and benches in putting the place in a state of repair, and how at the very first dedicatory service, two backsliders came forward to renew their allegiance to their Savior. (Loveridge 1918b:27)

Churches had been established in towns that would later be submerged by the rising waters of Lake Gatun, an artificial lake that had been built to supply the water necessary for the operation of the locks of the canal. The churches at Gorgona, Culebra, Las Cascadas, Matachin, Frijoles, and Haut Obispo, both white and colored, “were disbanded, the membership carried back elsewhere in the Zone or back to their homes in the States and in the West Indian Islands, especially Jamaica, which furnished the largest number of West Indian workers, many of whom were Baptists” (Gray 1916a:7). Several West

Indians now lived in Colon or in the suburbs of Chowville, Guachapoli, San Miguel and Caledonia near Panama City. They were described them as “an island of English people in a Spanish land” who “clung to their English language, customs, and traditions” (Carpenter 1949:33).

While some towns had to be abandoned, other towns were chosen as strategic places where work could be continued. The Home Mission Board reported,

In the nature of the case our work all along has had its transient features, and we have had regard to this, but we have also been looking as far as possible to its permanent features. At least a half dozen permanent stations must be maintained – at Colon, Gatun, Empire, Pedro Miguel, Ancon, and Balboa. Then we should enter into the city of Panama for Spanish work. (Southern Baptist Convention 1913:323)

The city of Panama and the other port city Colon were later described as “two of the most wicked cities in the world” (Southern Baptist Convention 1943:256). Even those who professed to be Christians were not immune to the ungodly appeal of these port cities. “Many Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others have landed here, and not having the anchor of home and the moral support of respective churches, as in the States, they have plunged into the gambling dens and rum shops to satiate themselves anew with sin and to betray the Master’s cause by a traitor’s act” (Southern Baptist Convention 1907b:190). As long as the work of the Home Mission Board was confined to the zone, it could only exert its influence upon the workers themselves, but in the years that followed the attraction of these wicked cities did not abate. Carpenter, who was pastor of the Balboa Baptist Church from 1928 to 1932, later reported,

On the Zone it is difficult for many Christians to give a consistent testimony for Christ. Away from home with family ties relaxed, loosed from neighborhood restraints and with practically no civic responsibility, there is a temptation to ‘pull anchor.’ Good salaries and leisure time contribute to participation in carnal pastimes. Newcomers are often caught



in the swirl of allurements in the two cosmopolitan, terminal cities and often in one night dissipate character that has taken a lifetime to develop. (1949:24)

Roberts insisted that Panama and Colon were “the most promising fields for Baptist activity” (1922:25).

These people are priest-ridden and sin-cursed. They have been under the influence of the Roman Church four hundred years, and their religious and moral condition is simply appalling. They are now disgusted and are turning away from the Church of Rome, and with this picture of Christianity before them they are turning to the devil for relief. They have the lottery, gambling dens, liquor shops, vice districts, and sinful dives of every kind, but absolutely nothing to point them to a higher life. (1922:25)

Beginning in 1911 several articles appeared in *The Home Field* which were critical of the Roman Catholic Church. Most interesting, these articles were written only from 1911 until 1913. The Church was described as a menace (Masters 1910 and 1911) and un-American (Love 1912). Love’s faultfinding of the Roman Catholic Church seems, from today’s perspective, especially harsh.

Either ignorance, poverty, pauperism, immorality, infidelity, or dissatisfaction and disgust, is the fruit which Roman Catholicism presents to the student of history and geography. Everywhere the experiment has failed. Whenever Rome has dominated European civilization, that civilization both reproaches and is a reproach to Roman Catholicism. Wherever the Pope has reigned, civilization has been retarded and defeated in its reach for the highest things in human life and human advancement. (1912a:3)

He does not offer any evidence to support his accusations. The articles, including Love’s, were written when there was an emphasis on fundamentalism in the United States. This movement, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, defended “the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth and divinity of Jesus Christ, the vicarious and atoning character of his death, his bodily resurrection, and his second coming as the irreducible minimum of authentic Christianity” (Bassett 2004:1). From

1910 to 1915 a series of twelve volumes known as *The Fundamentals* were written.

These twelve volumes

provided a wide listing of the enemies – Romanism, socialism, modern philosophy, atheism, Eddyism, Mormonism, spiritualism, and the like, but above all liberal theology, which rested on a naturalistic interpretation of the doctrines of the faith, and German higher criticism and Darwinism, which appeared to undermine the Bible’s authority. (McIntire 2001:473)

The Roman Church was not only described as “Satan’s counterfeit of the true Church of Christ” (Foster 2005:1) but also it was asserted that the Church, “if examined, will be found to be so different from, and so hostile to, real Christianity, that it is not in fact, Christianity at all” (Medhurst 2005:1). It is not known if there was any connection between the fundamentalist movement and the writing of the articles in the publications of the Home Mission Board, but Southern Baptists were seen as one of the strongholds of fundamentalism.

While not openly attacking the Roman Catholic Church, the sting of criticism was also felt in a report presented in 1907. “Your committee [The Fields of the Home Board] would ask this Convention to lift up its eyes and look on Cuba and the other Spanish-speaking countries now stretching out their hands to us. In these countries there is a rapid transformation going on. It is a time of opportunity to plant the true cross where before was only the symbol of it” (Southern Baptist Convention 1907a:35). In the article “The Baptist Message in Latin America,” T. B. Ray asked whether or not missionary activity was justified in Latin America. He was not alone in asking whether the presence of Protestants in Latin America could be justified, but he was among the first to examine this question from a Baptist perspective.

I will acknowledge that there was a time many years ago when I had serious doubts about the advisability of sending missionaries to Roman

Catholic countries, on the theory that the people, although filled with great errors, might possibly know enough of Christ to be saved; whereas, the outright heathen do no not. Our money and our men should, therefore, be concentrated upon the vast work in heathen lands. But it required only a cursory understanding of the facts about the religious conditions in these Latin-speaking countries to completely disabuse my mind of its false conclusions. Now, after having had extended opportunity for personal observation in some of these fields and some considerable study of others, I am profoundly convinced that there is the same and as imperative a call for missionary effort in Latin-America as there is in any so-called heathen land. (1916:6)

The negative impact of the Catholic Church upon the people of Panama, as described by its critics, was justification for the presence of Protestant missionaries in the country. Ray (1916:7) argued that missionary activity in a Catholic stronghold was fitting for four reasons.

1. Roman Catholic worship and practices in Latin-America are idolatrous.
2. The Bible is withheld.
3. The gospel is not preached to the people.
4. The Baptist Message is peculiarly adapted to the need.

He insisted that the worship of Mary overshadowed the worship of Christ. “Mariolatry is the chief religion of Latin-America. It is sheer idolatry. This universal dethronement of our Saviour is a revolting, idolatrous sin” (1916:7). Worshippers would never find their way out of this spiritual quagmire, he concluded, not only because “Roman Catholic priests in Latin America are opposed to the circulation of the Bible” but also because “the Roman Catholic church in Latin-America is not a preaching church. The priests mumble prayers and masses and chant songs in a language the people do not understand” (1916:7).

Carpenter’s assessment of the Catholic Church was less strident than Ray’s, but did succinctly describe its influence upon the people of Panama.

The Roman Church with all its mediaeval power has held this country within its grip for upwards of four hundred and fifty years. Today, although the uneducated fear and many of the cultured are loyal to the Roman Church, it is apparent, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that it has failed to meet the needs of the people, and thus, in a measure, has lost her influence with youth and leaders of the Republic. (1930:18)

He later added that “socially, the church has little leavening power because of her own corrupt policies; religiously, the masses of the people tolerate the church because it has in its control many necessary (?) ceremonies connected with the birth and death; also, the masses know nothing short of atheism as their alternative” (1930:18).

Missionaries from the Home Mission Board would not turn their attention to the Spanish-speaking population of the country until 1942. The *Church Development Depth Study* later remarked that the “late emphasis on Spanish work” negatively affected the growth of Baptist churches in the country of Panama. As early as 1904, however, it was understood that “mission work is sadly needed in that country. Panama, said to be the oldest city on the continent, with 30,000 people, has no Baptist work, neither Colon, with between 5,000 and 10,000 people” (Southern Baptist Convention 1904b:172). Three years later, Sobey also remarked,

While sins, alas, too common, will be found down on the zone, yet we fear caterers to the lusts of the flesh will multiply in the cities at either side of the zone. The United States authorities, through the government of Panama, must use their influence to prevent our sons from being cursed and sent to an early grave. A more needy field for missionary work it would be difficult to find. (1907:15)

Wise agreed with Sobey. Although occupied by the overwhelming tasks he faced in the Canal Zone, he realized that those who lived in the country of Panama also needed to hear the gospel. He wrote,

One of the problems and the chief one so far as I am concerned is the evangelization of the Isthmus. It would not take a prophet nor the son of the prophet to see upon a casual glance that the prime need of Panama and

all South American Republics is the vision of the King. If this country was evangelized how much greater would be the influence of God, since he is greater than any one government or all combined. (Southern Baptist Convention 1906:191)

Sobey and Wise were not the only ones who were concerned about the thousands of Spanish-speaking Panamanians who were living beyond the Canal Zone. Una Roberts Lawrence would later write,

It is an untouched mission field, 'white unto harvest,' calling for reapers, grain wasting in the field. This is a Spanish country and if we ever have a worthy, established work, it must be with these people. The West Indians and the white employees of our Canal Zone are not of this country. We can reach the last one of our constituency with these two groups and still fail in our real task. The Spanish people, whose country this is, must be reached for Christ if 'the people called Baptists' are ever to make their influence felt on the isthmus. (1932:4)

Carpenter also acknowledged that little was being done to share the gospel with those who lived beyond the larger cities of Colon and Panama City. "Other than these two cities, these provinces are sparsely settled, largely by backward natives. Good roads have not yet penetrated far into this territory. The only mission activity in this territory is fostered by Four Square Gospel and reaches only a short distance in the vast interior area" (1930:18). The Northern Methodists and the Seventh Day Adventists were doing limited work in Chiriqui and Bocas del Toro, the westernmost provinces of the country. Carpenter was convinced, however, that the most promising work could be done in the provinces of Veraguas, Herrera, Los Santos, and Coclé, the country's midsection that stretched from the Atlantic Ocean in the north to the Pacific Ocean in the south. He then asked, "When will work actually begin in taking the message of redemption to these worthy, needy, appreciative people?" (1930:18).

In the article “Panama – A Worthy Mission Opportunity,” he described a visit to the interior of the country during which Gospels were distributed and Bibles were sold. “On our return trip,” he wrote, “we learned that the priests in two towns had issued an order that all books distributed by us be brought to church, and they were burned in the church door during a public demonstration and papal warning” (1930:18). During this visit, he also saw “many signboards for cold drinks, tobacco, gum, liquor, in English, which one in a thousand could read” (1930:19). He then asked, “If these companies can afford to advertise on this basis, why not sow the Gospel in Spanish to the uttermost end of the way?” (1930:19).

While Baptists remained occupied with the work in the Canal Zone, those who represented these diverse commercial interests had already penetrated the countryside. R. G. Mason, who followed Carpenter as pastor of the Balboa Baptist Church, announced, “We plan as soon as possible to extend the field to the interior of the Republic working among the Spanish-speaking people” (Southern Baptist Convention 1933:245). Two years later Dr. F. V. Tinnin was serving as the pastor of the Balboa Baptist Church.

Beyond this English-speaking people, among whom we do have some work, lies the populous Republic of Panama in which as yet there is very little evangelical work being done and that only in the cities at the terminal points of the Canal. Baptists have no mission work in the great republic. It is an almost virgin field for evangelical missions. When shall we enter? (Southern Baptist Convention 1935:280)

While several were asking when the Home Mission Board would begin work in the interior of the country, a man named Latham had already begun the work there. His story was told in the 1936 *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*.

Some twenty years ago there lived in the city of Chitre, Republic of Panama, about 200 miles from the Canal Zone toward Costa Rica, an American man by the name of Latham who in a most sacrificial way

taught the Word of God to the people of that city and the surrounding territory. He planted in their hearts a desire for the Gospel, won many to simple faith in Jesus Christ and promised that when he was gone there would come a preacher to lead them into church life. We are not sure that he was an ordained minister. It seems that he never tried to organize a church, but he did teach the believers whom he won the fundamental tenets of our faith and held regular services in the large front room of his home. They learned to love the Word of God. At his death after 17 years of this voluntary service, it was found that he left his property at Chitre in trust to the Free Tract Society of Los Angeles, who had supplied him with his literature, to be turned over to any responsible evangelical missionary agency who would establish there a permanent work. (Southern Baptist Convention 1936:249)

The 1937 *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* announced that the Balboa Heights Baptist Church

has a standing offer with the Home Mission Board to purchase property and build a mission house at Chitre, 170 miles in the interior, provided the Board will locate a missionary on the field. Should the plan materialize, Chitre would be the first Spanish-speaking mission station to be operated by Southern Baptists throughout all Central America. (Southern Baptist Convention 1937:281)

The Board, however, could not find someone who was willing to go to Chitre and the plan was abandoned. The Foursquare Gospel, on the other hand, now traces its beginning to the same man whose labors could have been continued by the Southern Baptists.

The Foursquare ministry was begun “by a pioneer missionary who was a great admirer of our leader whom Dr. Edwards met at his deathbed. The aged worker’s name was Rev. Latham and from his inspiring program which Dr. Edwards adopted has come the great Panama work. Rev. Latham left no converts that we are able to find, but intercessory prayer has been a bulwark to this day” (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel n.d.:5). Edward’s decision to become a missionary had been influenced by a vision.

In his vision, Arthur saw an aged man with a white beard, holding his hand over his brow as if looking for some one to assume his labors of plowing, planting and reaping. Months later, after Rev. Edwards had established the work in Panama, he made a trip to the town of Chitre. There he was requested to visit a dying man in the Gorgas Army Hospital. As he learned over the aged white-bearded man, he heard the gentleman speaking in tongues. At once, Arthur recognized the man as the aged figure in the vision of his call.

Later, Rev. Edwards learned that the man had been a Presbyterian missionary. He visited the home of the deceased missionary and to his surprise discovered a picture of Aimee Semple McPherson and a number of issues of the Foursquare BRIDAL CALL magazine. In a diary, there was an entry dated at the exact time Arthur had received his call. It read, "God, you know that I am advanced in years and my health is failing, please put your hand on someone else that will come to pick up the plow and continue the task." (Van Cleave 1992:97)

The *Church Development Depth Study* mentioned, "The plan of keeping North American missionaries stationed throughout the republic is increasingly difficult to realize because of the reluctance or inability of the missionaries to reside for long periods in the interior of the country" (Home Mission Board 1972:9). Referring to the Spanish-speaking population in Panama, Butler concluded that Protestantism "has been hesitant and dilatory in seeking to win them" (1964:38) and then explained that "apparently North American missionaries were easily diverted from the more difficult task of evangelizing Spanish-speaking Panamanians. Were there not always the North Americans and the West Indian Panamanians to be churchied? –people who spoke the English language and shared in the Protestant heritage" (1964:38). The story of Latham suggested, however, that it would have been feasible to begin work among the Spanish-speaking people of Panama much earlier than it was done.

Almost fifty years before the Home Mission Board began work among the Cuna Indians who lived on the San Blas Islands along Panama's northern coast, Wise acknowledged that "so far as I can find out there has never been a missionary to preach to



them” (1907:20). Two years later Masters agreed. “It needs to be said that, though the surrounding Panama districts are very destitute of the gospel, including among others 30,000 Indians of the San Blas tribe, who have never yet been touched by missionaries, our mission operations have been confined to the Canal Zone” (1909b:15). Anna Coope, an independent missionary from England came to the San Blas Islands during the construction of the Panama Canal. In her autobiography, she wrote,

I am surprised that God chose me to come to his people so near to the spot where big men were digging a big canal, the wonder of the world. Big minds turned that way, and one would have thought that big Boards that do big things would have seen an opening to get the gospel to these Indians. But the opening was so small that they didn't see it, and God let me in through the opening because I believed. (1917:179)

Coope began a school and Lonnie Iglesias was one of Coope's first students and later became a missionary to the Cuna Indians, his own people.

Miss Coope – how well I remember her! She was a rare sight and a unique character. I really don't see how anyone could be uglier in face or figure. Even with such an unpromising start, taste and interest might have worked wonders; but little did she care how she looked. She took the attitude that she had been born ugly and she wasn't going to make any effort to improve God's handiwork! Her clothes were few and all looked alike – they hung about her angular form like ruffles on a broomstick. Her face always shone like greased onion, for she scorned the use of anything so frivolous as powder. Her hair was pulled straight back from her face and fastened in a knot on the back of her head. The straight strands were forever becoming loosened and hanging limply about her face and neck.

When one looked into her eyes, though, one forgot the homeliness and saw instead the strength and kindly character of the woman. Her firm handclasp gave one a sense of protection and well-being. Her keen sense of humor lightened many a heavy load; while her fairness and integrity won the respect of those who knew her. I shall never forget her, for I owe her much of whatever I am today. Miss Anna Coope was a born pioneer – fearless, tireless, ageless. Nothing ever seemed to make her sick or chill her dauntless spirit. I sometimes think that her lack of care and regard for her bodily comfort contributed to the disease which caused her untimely death. (Morgan 1958:36)

When the Panamanian government demanded that the Cunas abandon their way of life, they revolted in what later came to be known as the Tule Revolution. Iglesias explained that “Panamanians saw no value in the Indian way of life. They began to put pressure upon the Indians to abandon their language, costumes and customs. They wanted Cunas to speak Spanish, to wear Western clothing, and to live just as the Panamanians did” (Iglesias 1967:29). Coope’s role in this insurrection has been debated. Some insisted that she was falsely accused of causing the disturbance. However, she was blamed for the uprising and was banished from the islands.

Both Coope and Latham demonstrated that it was possible to proclaim the gospel beyond the confines of the Canal Zone. Why did the Home Mission Board fail to enter the country until 1942? At least two reasons can be suggested.

#### Increasing Military Forces

In 1912, two years before the construction of the Panama Canal was completed, it was thought that few workers would be needed to maintain and operate the Canal when construction ceased.

The working force is composed principally of West Indian negroes and Spanish laborers, and white Americans who do the skilled labor and administrative work. When the force was at its highest point, March, 1910, there were at work 38,176 men and 500 women, and the total number of names on the pay rolls was 50,774. These included 5,235 Americans, 5,263 European laborers, and 28,178 negro laborers. The force grew from 700 on May 4, 1904, principally negro laborers, to 3,500 in 1905; 17,000 in 1906; 29,000 in 1907; and is now decreasing gradually, and will decrease until the Canal is opened, when there will be employed about 3,000 men to maintain and operate the Canal, and do the work of sanitation and government. (Collins 1912:67)

A larger than expected population remained, however, after the construction of the canal to maintain the waterway. “At one time it was thought that after the completion of the

Canal a few thousand would suffice for its operation, up-keep and defense. But now we know that a vastly population will be required and the religious needs will be correspondingly great” (Southern Baptist Convention 1917a:300). When the Home Mission Board began its work in the Canal Zone, it focused its efforts on those who were digging the Canal. After the construction of the Canal Zone, however, the focus shifted because the soldiers who would protect the canal had replaced those who had dug the canal. Wise noted,

A new feature of our work and one that is destined to be constantly on the increase is the number of our soldiers coming here. We have more than 6,000 here now. Many of these boys are unsaved – in fact nine-tenths have never made any profession of faith. To reach them is a difficult work but one that should call forth our best effort. Every scheme and device known in the realms of evil are held out as enticements for their ruin. (Southern Baptist Convention 1917b:344)

The numbers of soldiers fluctuated during those years, but there was always concern that they would succumb to the temptations in the port cities of Colon and Panama. During the visit of President Harding in 1921, he announced that “it would be necessary to have at least 25,000 soldiers and marines to protect the canal” (Southern Baptist Convention 1921:444). This was seen as “a great opportunity to reach with the gospel our soldiers and marines and hundreds and thousands of soldiers” (Southern Baptist Convention 1921:444). Roberts, who served as pastor of the Balboa Heights Baptist Church, described the church’s ministry to the soldiers.

We have three camps near us and our church is noted for the good work it has done among the officers and enlisted men. The majority of the enlisted men are boys away from home, in a wicked land, and need the wholesome influence of the gospel. Many of them are from our Southern Baptist homes, and it is a pleasure to the church and pastor to be a of service to any and all of them. (1922:25)

George Austin, who followed Roberts, wrote, "We are trying to furnish a Church Home for Baptists among the twelve thousand officers and enlisted men of our army and navy stationed here" (Southern Baptist Convention 1927:307). The ministry to the officers and enlisted men, although necessary, also meant that the expansion of the Home Mission Board's work into the country of Panama would be delayed.

### Decreasing Missionary Funds

In 1920, the Southern Baptist Convention had launched the 75 Million Dollar Campaign. This campaign

as projected in 1919 was to give increased support for all missionary, educational and benevolent work. It also was to set a new pattern for co-operation. The time seemed right for such a move. There was a general prosperity, and Baptist life was marked by unity and friendliness. Out of World War I had come experiences of raising large sums of money in war bond drives and other campaigns. Servicemen came home with pleas for more missions effort abroad. (Grindstaff 1965:24)

The attempt to raise 75 million dollars failed. "Widespread financial depression caused the Seventy-five Million Campaign receipts to be \$17 million less than the original goal and \$34 million less than had been pledged" (Grindstaff 1965:25). The Home Mission Board only received half of the money it had anticipated, but had planned its work based on the amount of money it had expected to receive. "The Home Mission Board, trying to maintain the enlarged mission work on the anticipated income from the 75 Million Campaign, had each year increased its debt until in 1924 the debt was \$875,908.18" (Lawrence 1958:106). By 1927 this debt had increased to \$1,608,903.28.

The following year it was discovered that the treasurer of the Home Mission Board had embezzled \$909,461.00. In 1929 the Southern Baptist Convention met in Memphis, Tennessee. The Home Mission Board reported,

Those who were elected by the Convention a year ago to serve as members of the Home Mission Board had thrust upon them the most difficult and embarrassing responsibilities which have come to any group of denominational representatives in this generation. The new Board had but little more organized and started out with a year's work when it found itself face to face with a colossal disaster, the defalcation of our treasurer in the amount of \$909,461.00, which made it necessary to abandon all usual programs and to give all its energies to the work of rescuing the Board's resources and responsibilities from complete collapse and utter ruins. (Southern Baptist Convention 1929:269)

The report of the Home Mission Board also included several recommendations; the seventh specifically concerned Panama.

We recommend that a careful study be made of the situation in Panama, with a view to the reorganization of the work there as an independent Baptist mission, as least as far as the native West Indians are concerned. These people have so little in common with the National Baptists in America that it would seem only an independent organization will meet with their co-operation; so we recommend the continuation of our relations with the work in Panama for at least one year, with the foregoing provision. (Southern Baptist Convention 1929:278)

The treasurer was later arrested and served a little less than five years in prison, but the Board was facing a staggering debt. In 1930 the Southern Baptist Convention met in New Orleans, Louisiana. The situation had become so serious that the Board announced that

We want to do an increased amount of mission work. But we can neither pay debts or do mission work without money, and we have no way of getting money apart from the program projected by the convention. Unless some provision can be made by which the receipts of the Board can be increased there is nothing left for your Board to do but reduce its work. We will have to abandon some fields which we now occupy, discharge some of the missionaries now at work, close some of our mission stations or leave them inadequately manned. (Southern Baptist Convention 1930a:255)

The Depression of 1929 had further handicapped the efforts of the Home Mission Board. "Economic disaster was sweeping the States, and retrenchment in missions was necessary

in all the work” (Carpenter 1949:36). The Board was unable to send another missionary to replace Witt when he retired as superintendent of the Baptist mission in Panama in 1929. Beginning with Carpenter, the pastors of the Balboa Baptist Church were asked by the Home Mission Board to serve as superintendent without salary until Paul C. Bell was sent to Panama in 1941.

The lengthy delay to establish churches among the Spanish-speaking people of Panama was considered a detrimental factor in the growth of Baptist churches in the country. It is not known how or if the presence of Baptist churches in the country would have influenced the nation’s early history and it is not known why the Home Mission Board did not transfer its work in Panama to the Foreign Mission Board when it was facing difficulties.

Could the Home Mission Board justify the expansion of its work into the interior of the country? In 1910 Victor I. Masters was editor for *Our Home Field*. As he thought about the Board’s work in Cuba and Panama, he insisted, “Our work in these two places is really a foreign mission work in essence which, in the Providence of God, is in the hands of our Home Mission Board” (1910a:16). Reflecting on the efforts of the Home Mission Board in the Canal Zone, Reverend Russell J. Pirkey, pastor of the Balboa Heights Baptist Church, disagreed. “This is not a foreign field, but a home mission field, similar to many that might be seen in the United States” (1918:24). Austin, who also served as pastor of the Balboa church, agreed that the Home Mission Board should continue its work in the Canal Zone, but implied that the work beyond the Canal Zone should be placed in the hands of the Foreign Mission Board. “I have emphasized the close relation that exists on the Isthmus between actual Home Mission work and

opportunity for Foreign Mission endeavor. Baptists have no work among the five hundred thousand population of Panama” (1927c:13).

In the article “The Home Mission Task,” J. B. Lawrence, Executive Secretary of the Home Mission Board, argued that “Home Mission fields are just as definite as Foreign Mission Fields” (1931:3). While Foreign Mission fields “can usually be defined geographically,” Home Mission fields are “confined to a given territory” (Lawrence 1931:3). He defined “home missions” as “missions at home and might be the work of a local church, or a hospital, an orphan’s home, a denominational school, a theological seminary or any other worthy Christian enterprise in the home land that is serving in a Christian way and therefore is missionary” (1931:3). Whether Panama should have been assigned to the Foreign Mission Board or the Home Mission Board had already been answered almost fifty years earlier when it was asked which board should assume responsibility for the Chinese in California.

The Southern Baptist Convention had met in Baltimore in 1853. The “Report on California” asked whether the Home Mission Board or the Board of Foreign Missions should work among the Chinese population in California. The members of the Committee on Missions to California concluded, We

cannot avoid the conviction that it is the appropriate work of the Home Mission Board to provide for the spiritual welfare of all classes of population in our own country. It seems to us that this is a question to be determined, not so much by the character of the population, as by the locality of the field itself. The question is: Where is the field to be found – at home or abroad? If at home, it seems to us that all portions of our country, embraced in the limits of the constituency of the Southern Baptist Convention, are within the province of the Board of Domestic Missions. At Calcutta and other cities in pagan lands, the preaching of the gospel in their own language is demanded by the English and American residents; and this demand is supplied, not by Home, but by Foreign Mission Boards. The locality of the field and not the character of the population,

settles the question to whom the field belongs. (Southern Baptist Convention 1853a:15)

Based on this argument the work in the Canal Zone and the country of Panama was the responsibility of the Foreign Mission Board. Members of Southern Baptist churches at home had come to dig the canal, but this would not justify the Home Mission Board's presence in the Canal Zone. It had been argued that the locality of the field and not the character of the population would determine whether responsibility should be given to the Home Mission Board or the Foreign Mission Board. Lawrence, however, insisted, "There is a definite geographical territory in which the work of the Home Mission Board is being done. This territory is composed of the homeland – the states within the bounds of the Convention – the four western provinces of Cuba and the Canal Zone" (1931:3). While defining the work of the Home Mission Board geographically, he extended its responsibility to include Cuba and the Canal Zone, but not the country of Panama beyond the Canal Zone. As justification for the presence of the Home Mission Board in the Canal Zone, it can be erroneously argued that the United States had been given sovereignty over the Canal Zone when the United States signed the Hay-Bunau-Treaty with Panama in 1903, but this argument cannot be applied to Cuba.

When Paul C. Bell and his wife went to Panama during the Second World War as missionaries with the Home Mission Board, Southern Baptists "had no work among the Spanish-speaking people in Central America" (Carpenter 1948:6). Not only did Bell begin to minister to the Spanish-speaking people of Panama, his work also carried him into the neighboring countries of Central America, including Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica. This expansion of the work into the neighboring countries of Central America earned Carpenter's praise. "This movement, led by Paul C. Bell, is probably the



outstanding piece of pioneer mission work ever accomplished for Southern Baptists among the Spanish-speaking country” (1948:6).

Expansion, however, could renew tension between the Home and Foreign Mission Boards. The decision of the Home Mission Board to assume responsibility in Cuba had caused controversy and the expansion of the work of the board into other Central American countries could also spark disagreement. In a letter to Una Roberts Lawrence, Blanche Sydnor White, Corresponding Secretary of the Women’s Missionary Union, wrote,

I’m sorry to say the Home Board is going to get cruel criticism for going into Central America. I wonder, even now, if it is wise for them to go to Costa Rica. Panama, -or part of it, -flies the American flag. Of course, no one has to tell me that the Costa Rica work is a direct Providential challenge which came out of Paul Bell’s work. But-- (1946:1)

Bell, however, already felt he could justify expanding the work beyond Panama.

A good many years ago, we are told, the Foreign Mission Board and the Home Mission Society entered into a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ that the Foreign Board would occupy South America and the Home Mission Society, Central America. Later the field in Central America was reassigned by various denominations. Nicaragua and El Salvador were assigned to Northern Baptists, Guatemala was assigned to the Presbyterians, and Costa Rica and Panama to the Methodists. The Home Mission Board is in no way responsible for any of these agreements. (Southern Baptist Convention 1945:280)

In the years which followed the Foreign Mission Board assumed responsibility for several of these countries in Central America, Guatemala in 1948, Costa Rica in 1949, Honduras in 1954, and finally Nicaragua in 1976. The work in Panama, however, would remain under the Home Mission Board until 1974.

The Home Mission Board began work in Panama in 1905 primarily serving men related to the digging of the Panama Canal. With the passing of years this work has spread throughout Panama. It now embraces not only English-speaking Americans, but also West Indians (principally from

Jamaica), Cuna Indians on the San Blas Islands, the Cricamola and Choco Indians on the mainland, and Spanish-speaking Panamanians. The work has thereby become more of a foreign mission than a home mission effort. (Southern Baptist Convention 1974:140).

What had begun as a Home Mission Board effort had therefore gradually developed into what would become the responsibility of the Foreign Mission Board. It is debatable, however, when Panama ceased to be a Home Mission Board effort. Did it begin to resemble a Foreign Mission effort when the ministry was expanded to include the West Indians or did it become a Foreign Mission Board effort only when the work included the Spanish-speaking Panamanians and the Cuna Indians?

With an increasing emphasis on expanding the work beyond the Canal Zone and in establishing churches among the Spanish-speaking people of the country, discussions finally began about transferring the work to the Foreign Mission Board as early as 1966. When the work in Panama was transferred to the Foreign Mission Board, Arthur B. Rutledge, Executive of the Home Mission Board, acknowledged, "The HMB's withdrawal from Panama will allow this Board further to concentrate on the United States and its territories. This will emphasize the fact that the Home Mission Board is a national, not international mission board" (1974:21).

### Conclusion

The records from both the Foreign Mission Board and the Home Mission Board placed an emphasis on the physical and financial resources. There is no mention of prayer and there is an obvious lack of emphasis on the Holy Spirit. This is not to suggest that Southern Baptists did not realize the importance of the

Holy Spirit in missionary activity, but that awareness is not apparent when the articles, minutes, and reports are read.

Although Southern Baptists had an opportunity to send missionaries to Panama shortly after the Southern Baptist Convention was organized, the Foreign Mission Board later concluded that it did not have sufficient personnel or financial resources to enter the country. The Episcopalians and the Jamaica Baptist Union, however, were able to enter the country of Panama. It is doubtful that Southern Baptists possessed fewer resources than these two organizations. A membership that began with 351,951 in 1845 had increased to more than three times that number, 1,657,996, by 1900 (Barnes 1954:306). Mission gifts had increased from \$202,170 in 1885 to \$881,219 in 1900 (Barnes 1954:306).

What hindered missionary expansion, more than any other factor, was a failure to find someone who would be willing to go to Panama. This same failure would impede Southern Baptist efforts in Panama on several occasions, not only during the latter half of the nineteenth century, but also during the construction of the Panama Canal. Despite the appeals of both Sobey and Wise, few came to assist them in strengthening the work in the Canal Zone. Southern Baptists could have entered the interior of the country earlier than they did, if they had responded favorably to Latham's invitation. The presence of both Latham and Coope silence any suggestion that it was not feasible to enter the country of Panama.

It is impossible to retrace steps, but often churches or denominations come to a pivotal moment when God opens a door to carry the gospel to another corner

of the world. When that occurs the lack of resources, perceived or imagined, can be sufficient reason to justify inactivity. When God calls, however, the moment has come to prayerfully undertake the assigned task, looking to Him to provide the resources.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Evaluating the Strategy of the Home Mission Board: The Principle of Consistency**

The *Church Development Depth Study* emphatically asserts, “The primary objective of the Home Mission Board is to assist in the establishing and growth of Baptist churches in Panama” (Home Mission Board 1972:6). If “a key function of strategy is to provide coherence to organization action” (Rumelt 2003:81), did the implementation of the strategy discussed in the study result in the establishing and growth of Baptist churches in Panama? If the Board was only to assist in the establishing of Baptist churches, who was primarily responsible for the accomplishment of this task? Who decided how or where churches were to be founded? Who determined when a church had been established, and most importantly, that it was a Baptist church? What was the criterion by which it was known that the church was growing?

Unlike Wood, neither the *Background Report*, the *Church Development Depth Study* specifically declared that the goal of the Home Mission Board was to establish indigenous churches in Panama. Only the term “self-support” is mentioned in the discussion about subsidy.

The number of self-supporting churches has increased in recent years to 10 including the 5 churches of the Canal Zone. However, there is no longer any precise program of subsidy reduction and it would appear that few of the remaining churches will attain self-support in the near future. (Home Mission Board 1972:8)

Wood, however, clearly stated that the goal of the Home Mission Board in Panama was to establish churches which were self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. “Methods are intended to achieve certain results, to do some tasks and not others. Each has a limited scope of ability to achieve change in our world. They can be legitimately

evaluated only against their ability to reach certain goals” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:267). The methods employed by the Home Mission Board, therefore can only be justified if their implementation resulted in the establishment of an indigenous church.

Hodges, like Wood, agreed that “the purpose of missionary endeavor is to establish indigenous churches” (1953:30). For him, however, indigenous churches were “patterned after the New Testament model” (1957:19).

The New Testament church was first, self-propagating; that is, it had within it sufficient vitality so that it could extend itself throughout the region and neighboring regions by its own efforts. It produced its own workers and the work was spearheaded by the effort of the Christians themselves. Second, it was self-governing; that is, it was governed by men who were raised up by the Holy Spirit from among the converts in the locality. Third, it was self-supporting; it did not depend on foreign money in order to meet the expenses of the work. (1957:16)

The selection of the indigenous model as a goal for missionary activity was not arbitrary. The indigenous model was justified only because the New Testament church was an indigenous church. Failure to establish an indigenous or New Testament church can be demonstrated when it is shown that the established church was not self-governing, self-sustaining, or self-propagating. “Should any one of these essential elements be missing, the church is not truly indigenous” (Hodges 1953:13).

In his book, *The Course of Christian Missions*, Carver, professor of Missions at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, asks, “In what order shall the three ideals be sought and required by the creating and directing mission?”

It was long assumed, and upon occasion asserted, that a church was not to be regarded as capable of self-government until it was self-supporting. The first expression of Christianity is witnessing, and the first mark a church would properly be propagation. To that it should be encouraged by the mission. Its right and duty of self-direction would be far more readily recognized if we trusted the Holy Spirit as did the missionaries in the first

days of Christianity. Self-support might well be the last of the three characteristics to be attained. (Carver 1932:311)

At what point would the congregation think of itself as a church? Would it become a church only when all three characteristics had been attained? Or could the congregation consider itself a church if only one of the characteristics had been attained? Allen argues that the three-selves cannot be separated. “If the churches of our foundation are to be self-extending in the sense of self-propagating, they must necessarily possess the power to create their like, and unless they are self-governing and self-supporting they cannot possibly propagate themselves” (1962b:27). The question is asked, therefore, Were the Baptist churches self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating? If not, they were not indigenous.

### Self-Governing

The *Church Development Depth Study* acknowledged that “Baptist work has remained too long under the almost exclusive control of the Home Mission Board” (1972:12). According to Austin, pastor of the Balboa Heights Baptist Church from 1924 to 1927, “the Board owns all the property, appoints the pastors and superintendent, and aids largely in their support” (1927a:3). Beginning with J. L. Wise in 1905 and ending with Joe Carl Johnson in 1974, the presence of a superintendent, according to the *Church Development Depth Study*, “has enabled the Home Mission Board to act more flexibly and rapidly to institute policy changes or to initiate new programs of work” (Home Mission Board 1972:7). However, the study did warn that

leaving the administration in the hands of a superintendent seems to have stifled somewhat the participation and creativity of the other missionaries in regard to general strategy planning. In fact, there is a general

unawareness among the missionaries as to the overall picture of the work, especially concerning finances. (Home Mission Board 1972:7)

It can be argued that strategy formulation is handicapped when input is limited to a single individual. *The Church Development Depth Study* acknowledged, however, "At present the other missionaries are far removed from participation in group thinking and planning" (1972:24). When it is remembered that, for several years, the superintendent also served as pastor of the Balboa Heights Baptist Church, how much time did he have to familiarize himself with the work in the Canal Zone? How often was he able to participate in the worship services in the West Indian churches? When did he have an opportunity to meet with them and discuss their problems? Was he able to envision how the ministry of the Home Mission Board could be expanded to include the people and communities that had not yet heard the gospel?

It is suggested that the other missionaries were not given an opportunity to discuss the particular problems associated with their work and how the work could have been done more effectively. They were ministering to the different peoples of Panama and they were aware of their unique problems and needs. How could goals be chosen and strategies devised without their input? The study later recommended "that efforts be made to include the participation of both nationals and missionaries in the planning of the work" (Home Mission Board 1972:24). This correction would not only give the missionaries but also the nationals an opportunity to contribute to the formulation of missionary strategy. This, however, does not go far enough. It must be remembered that the Home Mission Board was subsidizing the work in Panama. Would this create an atmosphere in which the nationals could speak freely, or would they be afraid that the Home Mission Board would reduce its support if they did not readily agree to its



proposals? Whose opinion will be accepted if what the nationals proposed contradicts what the missionaries advise? The nationals should not only participate in the process, but should direct the planning process.

The study further reveals that “it has been the intent of the Home Mission Board to use field missionaries assigned throughout the country on an area basis to supervise and direct the work” (Home Mission Board 1972:9). How can an emphasis upon supervision by both the superintendent and the missionaries result in a church that was self-governing? If missionaries considered themselves to be supervisors, would they encourage input from the nationals with whom they were serving? Would they be willing to relinquish direction of the work to allow the nationals to assume more and more responsibility?

Allen advised that the missionary, following the example of the apostle Paul, should practice retirement.

He can keep ever before his mind the truth that he is there to prepare the way for the retirement of the foreign missionary. He can live his life amongst his people and deal with them as though he would have no successor. He should remember that he is the least permanent element in the church. He may fall sick and go home, or he may die, or he may be called elsewhere. He disappears, the church remains. The native Christians are the permanent element. (Allen 1962a:153)

At the conclusion of the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas returned to the churches they had established. “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 9:23, King James Version). Paul

believed in the Holy Ghost, not merely vaguely as a spiritual Power, but as a Person indwelling his converts. He believed therefore in his converts. He could trust them. He did not trust them because he believed in their natural virtue or intellectual sufficiency. If he had believed in that, his faith must

have been sorely shaken. But he believed in the Holy Ghost in them. He believed that Christ was able and willing to keep that which he had committed to Him. He believed that He would perfect His Church, that He would stablish, strengthen, settle his converts. He believed, and acted as if he believed. (Allen 1962a:149)

Discussing the strategy of the Home Mission Board, Wood reported, “We are desirous of helping people be indigenous as rapidly as possible. However, we have no plan to abandon them completely until they are fully capable of self-determination, self-support, self-propagation, and mutual cooperation. They will have the opportunity and responsibility according to their capacity and sense of responsibility” (1965:7). Such an attitude encourages paternalism. Wood does not reveal how it would be known that the people had come to the place where they could assume responsibility for the work or who would determine whether they had reached that point. His statement suggests, however, that the Home Mission Board alone would determine when the Panamanians have achieved sufficient maturity to assume responsibility for the work in Panama.

According to the study, the Panama Baptist Convention “was organized in 1959 at the urging of the superintendent and has consistently received encouragement from the Home Mission Board” (Home Mission Board 1972:10). Wood explained,

The convention serves as a state that forms a part of the Southern Baptist Convention. Its Cooperative Program, including a percentage for worldwide causes, is sent through the treasurer of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. A large proportion of the Cooperative Program budget supports the Panama Baptist Theological Institute and mission work in the republic. (1960:1)

This is “a plan adequate for the Zone,” Scanlon reasoned, “but disastrous for the Republic, especially in a day of fervent nationalism” (1972:11). The development of the convention was also listed in the *Church Development Depth Study* as a factor that not only contributed to the growth of churches but also as a factor that hindered the growth of

churches. The convention, instead of being formed at the urging of the superintendent, could have been established through the initiative of the Panamanians themselves and given a structure and purpose that was radically different from that imagined by the superintendent. Rather than acting as an independent body to determine how it would respond to the challenge of world missions, however, the Panama Baptist Convention continued to financially support the Southern Baptist Convention.

The churches being taught missions, respond by giving to world missions through the Cooperative Program. The Panama Baptist Convention, in its annual session, designates a percentage of its income to world missions through the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee. The Panama convention, as part of the Baptist World Alliance, is a separate and autonomous Baptist convention. It is a proud national body, yet its people utilize proven methods, regardless of where they have been developed. Since numbers are small and finances are limited, Panamanian Baptists believe that aside from personal witnessing, the best way to win people is through regular giving through the Cooperative Program. (Wood 1965:7)

How many members and how much money would be required before the Panama Baptist Convention could devise and implement a program through which the cause of missions could be supported? Instead of looking to the Southern Baptist Convention for continued financial assistance, the members could have prayerfully looked to God to understand how the gospel could take root in their own land and anticipate the moment when missionaries from their membership would be sent throughout the land and to other countries beyond Panama.

The *Church Development Depth Study* and the *Background Report* also identified "lack of unity" in the convention as a factor that was detrimental to growth. The *Church Development Depth Study* concluded,

- 1) Panamanian Baptist work is divided by language and culture with insufficient effort being made to overcome the problem.

- 2) In spite of being the largest group, the West Indian element of the Convention stands in danger of being shunted aside from leadership roles before there are other leaders qualified to assume the positions. (Home Mission Board 1972:22)

The history of Panama reveals that Panamanian society has been fractured by intolerance. First with the Cuna Indians and then again with the West Indians, Panamanians insisted that they abandon their way of life.

The term Panamanian (Panameños) refers in its legal sense to all citizens of the republic but as popularly used by those citizens the term denotes the Spanish-speaking, overwhelming Roman Catholic, and predominantly mestizo majority. It includes as well Spanish-speaking whites, blacks, and Indians who adhere to the broad behavioral patterns of the prevalent Hispanic tradition and thus excludes the English-speaking, mainly Protestant blacks – known as Antillean (or West Indian or Jamaican) Negroes – who in the late 1970s constituted nearly 8 percent of the population. Also excluded are the tribal Indians – approximately 6 percent of the population – who have not adopted the Spanish language or the Roman Catholic faith, and other minorities, such as Asians and Europeans, who accounted for about 1 percent. (Nyrop 1980:53)

Panamanians have insisted that West Indians become more like themselves, embracing a policy of deracination or cultural extinction. This would have had a disastrous effect upon the West Indians.

Deracination would destroy the self-respect and pride of several generations. It would deprive the community of skills and attributes that helped them survive, such as proficiency in English; American work ethics; institutions such as benevolent societies, schools, churches, and charities; and family lineages reaching back to the islands. Assimilation even meant repudiating what many believed was a solid record of accomplishment in Panama. Assimilation, in short, was a one way street that forced them to abandon their very identity as a people. (Conniff 1985:138)

The members of the Panama Baptist Convention are Spanish-speaking Panamanians, West Indians, and Cuna Indians, and therefore are a microcosm of Panamanian society. They are also, and most importantly, members of the family of God. Instead of creating a

convention in which cultural differences are minimized or eliminated, each culture can identify its own strengths and add a unique flavor to the organization. They can demonstrate, how, through the power of the Holy Spirit, peoples from divergent backgrounds and different cultures can labor together for a common cause. For the West Indians, hybridization was an alternative to deracination or cultural extinction.

The two peoples – Latin Panamanian and West Indian – could blend together on equal footing and trade cultural elements freely, in a spirit of reciprocity. Then a hybrid society might emerge, one different from and better adapted to the modern world than either parent. Moreover, hybridization could be achieved without violating liberal democratic norms, for each individual and family unit could decide how much of each culture to retain and discard. Ideally, a kind of social Darwinism would select the best mix of Latin and West Indians' traditions by rewarding the individual who excelled. (Conniff 1985:138)

The convention, therefore could have found strength in its diversity and could have discovered that the “real goal of culture should be to seek to improve its own unique ‘flavor’ rather than mimicking another flavor” (Long 2002:2).

If all the elm trees of the world transformed themselves into pine trees, we'd have plenty of wonderful pine scent – but we'd lost the elm trees. Elm trees – and cultures – should focus on becoming the very best, very purest, very finest elm trees around, rather than becoming something they are not. (Long 2002:2)

The churches of the Panama Baptist Convention, Cuna, West Indian, North American, and Spanish-speaking Panamanian, instead of becoming a melting pot in which the churches became more and more similar, could have become a colorful mosaic. The heterogeneous nature of the people of Panama provided unique contexts in which the gospel could be planted, each church, West Indian, American, Panamanian, or North American, celebrating and worshipping God in a manner which was consistent with its culture.

The Panama Baptist Convention could also be viewed as an orchestra under the leadership of the Master Conductor. Each section of an orchestra, strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion, can be easily identified. As the symphony is performed, the various instruments contribute their unique sounds to the music. The violin does not expect the oboe to imitate its sounds, and the trumpet can not compete with the drum, but if the music is to be heard as the Composer intended, each instrument must sound its own notes.

In addition to this problem, the location of the headquarters of the Panama Baptist Mission in the Canal Zone also caused resentment among some Panamanians. The *Latin American Depth Study* not only agreed that “in some respects the administration of the work has strongly resembled that of a state convention in the United States rather than an independent national work” (1972:14), but then added,

The headquarters building as well as the residence of most missionaries is in the Canal Zone rather than the Republic. The financing of the work has been supremely dependent upon the Home Mission Board and the churches of the Canal Zone. Some of the Panamanian Baptists tend to feel overwhelmed by the large number of stateside visitors who have come to share in the work. (1972:14)

Prior to the transfer of the work in Panama to the Foreign Mission Board, the *Church Development Depth Study* also recommended “that the concept of a mission headquarters site was not to be used by foreign missionaries” and “that without exception all missionaries be assigned to live in the Republic rather than the Canal Zone” (Home Mission Board 1972:26). When the Foreign Mission Board assumed responsibility for the work in 1975, the headquarters was to be relocated in Panama City. Scanlon explained that

in every Latin American country the capital city has an importance all out of proportion to other cities. Here in Panama almost one third of the population live in Panama City.

The shift of mission headquarters to the republic will also have the cosmetic value of moving out of the American-controlled Canal Zone, although that control is expected to diminish in years to come. (1974:6)

The majority of the funds to purchase a building, \$113,000, was provided by the Foreign Mission Board. While the Panama Baptist Convention now occupies that building, the headquarters for the Panama Baptist Mission remains in what was the Canal Zone.

Amstutz discusses the strategy of the Foursquare Gospel in an article entitled "Doing More with Less." He criticizes the strategy that is often employed by other Protestant denominations. "Western methodologies frequently tend to be too complicated and too costly to implement overseas, including all that goes with a largely institutionalized approach to church which requires extensive property, substantial buildings, and many programs" (1994:78). The *Church Development Depth Study* mentions three institutions, the Marvel Iglesias Medical Clinic, the Cresta del Mar Baptist Camp, and the Baptist Theological Seminary. These institutions were significant elements in the methodology employed in the development of Baptist work in Panama and were thought to have contributed positively to the growth of the churches (Home Mission Board 1972:11). "Within the framework of the basic aim of establishing churches," the report affirmed, "a generally wise use has been made of the denominational institutions" (Home Mission Board 1972:11).

How did these institutions contribute to the growth of the Baptist churches in Panama? How many churches were established, either directly or indirectly, through these different institutions? McGavran (1970:231) himself asked the question, "Are these [hospitals, schools, agricultural demonstration centers, literacy drives, radio stations,

orphanages, leprosy homes, and theological seminaries] good for reconciling men to God and multiplying cells of the Church?"

In most circumstances the answer is Yes, if . . . If, in the schools, many are 'added to the Lord'; if the church expansion is demonstrably aided; if the splendid institutions do not overbalance the little, pitiful church; if the multiplying churches can build similar institutions on their own; if the seminary or theological training school trains church planters as well as caretakers; if church growth is enhanced and not eclipsed; if the medical institutions stimulate reproduction of churches; if, rather than create a small community of cultured, middle-class, sealed-off Christians, mission institutions lead the churches to multiply – then the answer must be Yes, Yes, Yes! (1970:231)

The patients who came to the Marvel Iglesias Medical Clinic were charged about thirty cents a day for hospitalization (Fowler 1972:10), but the clinic received most of its financial support from subsidies from the Panamanian government and the Home Mission Board. It can be assumed that institutions like the clinic were "calculated to create among non-Evangelicals a favorable attitude toward the Evangelical cause" (Nida 1969:44). Allen insisted that

the Church has not, by these social activities, brought men in any great degree within the sphere of its spiritual influence. It has not succeeded along this road in imparting that spiritual life which it exists to minister. Many deplore the obvious fact that, while the institutions have done much valuable work, the great mass of those who have used them have not drawn nearer to the Church or to Christ. (1962a:81)

Allen's conclusion is supported by Butler who, in his analysis of the Methodist Episcopal Church, discovered that the emphasis upon establishing schools, did not, as was expected, result in the multiplication of churches. Nor was there any indication that the Panamanians were drawn nearer to the Church or to Christ.

The previous importance given to the ministry of North Americans in the years 1906-1912, and the priority given to institutional work in the years 1913-1924, were not the results of an intentional effort to restrict church growth. There simply was no master plan for the winning of the



Panamanian for Jesus Christ, no burning conviction concerning the need to give precedence to the multiplication of churches. For the moment, schools cried out for attention! And would not these schools create a favorable atmosphere for the expansion of the Church? (Butler 1964:48)

Statistics however revealed that increasing enrollment in school did not result in an increasing membership in Methodist churches.

The *Church Development Depth Study* reported that “in addition to the actual healing ministry, the hospital personnel are also engaged in a general program of public health, a nutrition program and a small agricultural ministry. It is said these services meet immediate physical needs but also create a general acceptance of the spiritual message of the Gospel” (Home Mission Board 1972:9). The study added, however, “Some people interviewed have seen little in the way of evangelistic results from the medical ministry” (Home Mission Board 1972:12). One of the pitfalls of employing institutions as pre-evangelism is “based on the hope that they would generate such Christian good will among otherwise resistant people that the Gospel would eventually spread” (Wagner 1973b:155). Were the Cuna Indians resistant to the gospel? Having presented the gospel, the missionary may discover that the people are not interested and can come to the mistaken conclusion that they are resistant. Institutions like a medical clinic or a school, therefore, are established to create a more favorable response to the gospel. When people fail to respond to the gospel, however, the reason may lie not with the people themselves but with the manner in which the gospel was presented.

The Panama Baptist Seminary, located in Arraiján near Panama City, was established in 1955 “to produce and train a national ministry” (Home Mission Board 1972: 8). The seminary met in rented quarters for several years. “In 1962 a beautiful three story building was completed through funds made available through the Annie

Armstrong Offering and the Cooperative Program” (Hurt 1963:8). According to the study (Home Mission Board 1972:8), the seminary

has since graduated 36 men and 12 women in the field of theology and religious education. Of those graduating in the last ten years, 24 are reported to be serving as pastors. The Seminary has a present faculty of 9, including 6 nationals. The student body with present enrollment of twelve and prospects for an enrollment of 3 for the coming school year is in a period of steep decline. The total budget of \$18,000 is provided as follows:

Local Sources	\$ 6,502.16
Home Mission Board	11,496.00
Other Outside Sources	18.75
Registration Fees	218.40
	<hr/>
	\$18, 235.31

The local sources included contributions from the North American churches in the Canal Zone. Like the Marvel Iglesias Medical Clinic, the seminary can be evaluated to determine how effectively it was carrying out its assigned task. While the study commends the seminary for providing pastors for the churches in Panama (Home Mission Board 1972:11), the study then comments that “20 of the 48 graduates of the seminary are no longer engaged in vocational Christian service” (Home Mission Board 1972:15). The study does not examine the curriculum that was offered by seminary and little is said about any alternatives for providing training for those who would be serving as pastors in Baptist churches in Panama. The *Church Development Depth Study* did recommend, however, “that the Seminary give careful attention to the promotion of continuing theological education for pastors and laymen by means of short-term institutes and extension studies” (Home Mission Board 1972:19). The study also discussed how to increase student enrollment.

A present trend of great concern is the reluctance of young people other than the Cuna Indians to attend seminary, and it is felt that there is already an abundance of Indian pastors. The entrance requirements for the Seminary have been raised to include only those with a high school diploma, effectively eliminating most potential Indian students. Thus the Seminary is faced with a situation in which most Indian candidates will not be eligible and most others are not interested in becoming students. (Home Mission Board 1972:15)

The committee does not explain why young people, presumably Spanish-speaking Panamanians or West Indians, were reluctant to attend the seminary. And if God were calling these Cuna Indians to the ministry, why devise a policy that denied them further education?

### Self-Supporting

Heavy financial subsidy was a significant factor as the Home Mission Board did work in Panama. According to the *Church Development Depth Study*, the positive contribution of subsidy to the growth of the churches in Panama “is seen in the quality of the buildings, the budgets of the institutions and the salaries of the pastors where total compensation often runs as high as \$300 US a month or more” (Home Mission Board 1972:8). While Scanlon (1972:12) included the provision of meeting places as a factor which contributed to the growth of the Baptist work in Panama and the Canal Zone, he later added (1972:13) that “over dependence on U.S. programs, personnel, and finances” had retarded that growth. The Home Mission Board invested thousands of dollars in buildings, but did this result in a church which was self-supporting? Instead of creating an indigenous church whose members determine not only the structure in which they would meet, or even if they need a building, and the manner in which they could express their worship of God,

too much giving can create artificial 'needs,' such as pastors' salaries, church buildings, Sunday School quarterlies, stained glass windows, pipe organs, and other things which the church itself could not afford with a subsidy from abroad. It can also produce the negative effect of failing to teach the national Christians to give to the Lord's work, since they really never get to feel the true financial needs of their own church. (Wagner 1971:165)

The lack of stewardship promotion was noted in the study as one of the factors that hindered the growth of the Baptist churches. Referring to the Spanish churches, the study remarked that "only 9 of the 23 reporting churches have a budget and only 4 use pledge cards. Five of the churches do not take offerings in the worship services. Of the 18 that are not yet self-supporting, 9 state that they will need more than 15 years to achieve that goal" (Home Mission Board 1972:18). Why were the Spanish churches expected to prepare a budget and use pledge cards? Why were Spanish churches expected to take offerings in the worship services? Why did the churches need fifteen years to achieve self-support? The study does not answer these questions.

In the *Background Report*, Scanlon included stewardship teaching as a factor that had contributed to the growth of Baptist churches. He wrote that such teaching "has helped triple the number of self-supporting churches in recent years" (1972:12). However someone has written in the margin of the report that I acquired that this occurred mainly among the churches in the Canal Zone whose members were, for the most part, North Americans. Although the study acknowledges that ten churches were self-supporting, it states that only five of those churches were in the Canal Zone. The five churches, Balboa Heights, Cocoli, Chagres River, Margarita, and La Boca "not only contribute financially to the work of the Panama Baptist Convention, but maintain a large number of missions" (Scanlon 1972:7). The *Church Development Depth Study* also mentioned these five

churches, but then added, “There is no longer any precise program of subsidy reduction and it would appear that few of the remaining churches will attain self-support in the near future” (Home Mission Board 1972:8). Scanlon also acknowledged that special teams from the United States came to teach stewardship, but it is not known if those who came were aware of the financial situation in the country, or knew the annual income of the Panamanians to whom they were speaking.

Referring to the churches among the Cuna Indians, the study reported, “The combined offerings of all 8 of San Blas churches would not provide one full-time pastor’s salary. It would appear that the low monetary income of the island people is generally used to excuse a low concept and practice of stewardship, this encouraging an anti-giving mentality” (Home Mission Board 1972:17). The study, however, does not indicate the amount of money that would be considered a full-time pastor’s salary. Nor is it known if the amount is realistically based upon what a typical Cuna Indian earned. If the amount of money needed to provide a pastor’s salary was determined from a North American viewpoint, the sum could have been so much beyond what the Cunans could have paid that stewardship would be discouraged. Hodges argues, however, that providing a pastor’s salary is not an insurmountable problem. “Ten or more families that tithe faithfully are able to support their worker on about the same economic level that they themselves enjoy” (1957:85).

The *Church Development Depth Study* recommended “that programs of assistance to the Indians be of a self-help nature, with emphasis given to showing them how to do things for themselves” and “that efforts be instituted to train church leaders for the San Blas in that region, and that support levels be brought in line with prevailing standards

among the people” (Home Mission Board 1972:23). These recommendations, however, stress more what the Cunas could learn from the missionaries than what the missionaries could learn from the Cunas. The study does not describe these programs of assistance or suggest who would implement them, nor who would determine if these programs were necessary.

Allen argued that “however wealthy a church might be, it would not be self-supporting unless it supplied its own clergy as well as its own buildings. However poor it might be, it would yet be self-supporting if it did produce its own clergy and carry on its own services, though its ministers might receive no salaries, and its services held under a tree” (1962b:27). The members of each church therefore would expect that pastors would emerge from their own membership and would decide whether the pastor would be full-time or bi-vocational. They would also decide what structure was needed, if any. The booklet *Church Planting Movements*, published in 1999 by the Foreign Mission Board, warns that buildings and institutions can become “stumbling blocks” and then explains that

when buildings and institutions emerge indigenously and naturally with the needs and means of the local believers, they undergird the work. When institutions (seminaries, schools, hospitals, etc.) are imposed by or dependent upon external agents, they may leave a burden of maintenance that distracts from the momentum of evangelism and church planting.  
(Garrison 1999:46)

Too often missionaries want to build a church and introduce a worship experience that is similar to what they have known in the United States. They expect worshippers to assemble in structures made of concrete and tin, or they question singing which is not accompanied by an organ or piano, or demand that bulletins be printed. However, what

missionaries perceive to be different in structure or worship experience may be a more authentic response to the gospel than what is similar.

We should expect the presentation of the Gospel to be different in every culture: not that they will have a different God (because they won't), but they may have a different name for Him (because they will). Their church buildings will look different (huts, open fields, tents, etc.); the format of their services will be different, their customs will be different; their denominations and schools will be different; their systems of support for their pastors will be different. (Long 2001:2)

Paul C. Bell came in 1941 to serve as superintendent of the Panama Baptist Mission and to establish churches among the Spanish-speaking population of Panama. He had been appointed as a missionary with the Home Mission Board in 1919. Before coming to Panama he had been the superintendent of the Mexican Baptist Institute at Bastrop, Texas. When he arrived in Panama, forty percent of the 600,000 Panamanians lived in Panama and Colon. "It is very difficult," Bell reported, "to find anyone who will rent to us for religious purposes. The only chapel we have for our Spanish work is one that was built by natives, of bamboo, bejuco and palm fronds deep in the jungle of Panama" (Southern Baptist Convention 1947:147). This was a humble structure that was constructed from materials easily available in Panama. Instead of a structure built with outside funds, the simple chapel, built through the initiative and sacrifice of the natives, could have become the pattern in future years.

In the article "The Call of Panama," R. B. Van Royen, who followed Bell as superintendent, wrote: "During the last five years the Home Mission Board has financed or assisted in financing eleven church buildings and properties at a cost of \$268,000. Yet the missions at Aguadulce, Baseline Spanish, Cattiva, and Arraiján, are ready to organize into churches, but all need buildings" (1958:11). It is not known for how long the Home

Mission Board would be willing and able to invest such large funds for buildings in Panama. Above an article in *Home Missions* (1946:3) announcing “a serious cut in the budget of the Home Mission Board” are the words, “My God Shall Supply All Your Needs According to His Riches in Glory by Christ.” The strategy of the Home Mission Board, however, encouraged greater confidence in the Board than in God. Were the members of the missions convinced that they could not organize into churches until buildings were provided? Would the members of the missions provide buildings for themselves or would they wait to organize themselves as a church only when the Home Mission Board could provide a building?

Church buildings have become second nature to us in the West. We forget that it took Christianity nearly three centuries before it indigenously arrived at the need for dedicated church buildings. During those same three centuries the gospel exploded across much of the known world. When instantly providing buildings for new congregations, we may be saddling them with an external burden they are ill-equipped to carry. (Garrison 1999:46)

The *Church Development Depth Study* further reported that “the present churches are generally well accommodated in buildings costing up to \$50,000 US. During one six-year period the Home Mission Board spent more than \$200,000 US in purchase of property and construction of new buildings. Thus, the churches have come to expect a certain standard of building to be provided for them” (Home Mission Board 1972:4). Such steps discouraged self-reliance. The report then added that when the amount of money for repairs and construction was “frozen at 20,000 US a year, the growth rate of the churches also declined” (Home Mission Board 1972:15).

The *Church Development Depth Study* recommended “that a short term (such as five years) program of subsidy reduction be initiated to achieve the economic



independence of the churches” (Home Mission Board 1972:21). This emphasis was to be “accompanied by a positive conventionwide emphasis on stewardship and church growth” (Home Mission Board 1972:21). It was also suggested “that future buildings be constructed in keeping within the potential and with the participation of the churches” and “that Home Mission Board participation in building projects be limited to the granting of construction loans and that the properties be placed in the name of the churches when the loans are paid” (Home Mission Board 1972:21). However, it is not known who would determine when the congregation needed a building, the type of building that was to be constructed, or where the building was to be located.

### **Self-Propagating**

Self-propagation “refers to churches that will continue to propagate the gospel and to reproduce themselves by starting more churches, even apart from any concern or effort of missionaries who work alongside them” (Crawley 1985:200). The reports of this happening among Baptist churches appeared only infrequently in the official publications of the Home Mission Board. “The pastors at Las Tablas and Biqui are reaching out in the communities around them to carry the message of Christ into the needy communities” (Van Royen 1955:29). Seven months after Home Mission Board missionary Bell came to Panama, he reported:

In the Spanish field of the Panama Republic we find practically nothing has been done in the way of evangelization. The Methodists have been here for a quarter of a century, but their program is not evangelistic. The Adventists have their center for Latin America here with a large publishing house in the Zone, but I have found that comparatively speaking they have made little headway among the Spanish-speaking people. They have a church at Boquete, a small school and church at David, and a small group at Chitre. The Four Square Gospel group has a church in Panama City and a small group at Chitre. (1942:10)

Three years earlier, the *Foursquare Crusader*, the official publication of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (McPherson 1939:1), had announced, "Pentecost Sweeps Panama! Canal Zone at Cross Roads Of the World Becomes Tinder-Box of Potential Foursquare Preachers."

From the Isthmus and the Jungle, the lowlands and the hills, they had traveled on foot and by ox-cart, in autos and by rail.

Delegations from outlying churches were there, men from U.S.A. Army and Navy departments, laborers and business men gathered from all walks of life, intent upon but one cause - that of dipping their torch in the flame and running with the fire throughout Panama, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Honduras, Nicaragua and on and on through the land of these teeming throngs.

Right here at our very doors lies the challenge and the answer to the challenge of Christ's command to preach the Gospel to men everywhere.

With resounding shouts and fiery earnestness all offered their bodies a living sacrifice to bridge each lagoon, climb each mountain, cut his path through every jungle, till no man or woman should be left without the knowledge of the Savior, Baptizer, Healer and Coming King.

Willing to live - willing to die - here they are singing, shouting, praying, preaching, growing, spreading, till the Foursquare Gospel has well nigh covered the Isthmus already. Once devout Catholics telling their beads and kissing the crucifix of their dead Lord, they have now turned themselves about like Mary of old to behold with transcending joy the risen, living, all-conquering Christ.

As if to confirm its claim that "the Foursquare Gospel had well nigh covered the Isthmus," the article ends with a list of the communities in which churches had been established in the country: Panama, Chepo, Corozal, Chinina, La Palma, Arraiján, Gamboa, Gamboa Penitentiary, Frijoles, Colon, Catival, Puerto Pilon, Sabanita, Aqua Bendita, Buenos Aires, Pueblo Nuevo, El Peligro, Mendoza, Rio Cano Quebrado, Penonome, El Cano, Cocte, Pajonal, El Dentradero, Churuquita Grande, Tambo, La Candelaria, Chitre, Monagrillo, Paris, David, Limon, and two places in the Republic of

Colombia. The Foursquare Gospel had experienced greater success in establishing churches than Bell realized.

When the Foreign Mission Board assumed responsibility for the work in Panama in 1975, statistics reported that there were 42 churches and 79 missions with a membership of 6639. According to the *Church Development Depth Study*, some of this growth can be attributed to the “receiving of work started by other groups” (Home Mission Board 1972:7).

Baptist work in Panama has from the beginning resulted from a mixture of sources, rather than simply the pioneer efforts of the Home Mission Board. The original West Indian work was the result of Jamaican Baptist effort and the San Blas work was begun by independent missionary Lonnie Iglesias. (Home Mission Board 1972:7)

Only by examining existing records can it be determined how much growth can be traced to the “receiving of work by other groups” and how much resulted from the “pioneer efforts of the Home Mission Board.” In 1973 the Panama Baptist Convention reported 42 churches with a membership of 6,755. Of that number 3,805 were members of either West Indian or Cuna churches. Of the remaining number 1,943 were members of the North American churches in the Canal Zone and 1,007 were members of Spanish-speaking churches.

Table 4.1. Churches of the Panama Baptist Convention  
*Program Base Design*  
1980 Revised Edition

<b>CHURCH and YEAR ORGANIZED</b>	<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	<b>CULTURE GROUP</b>
1. Beautiful Zion 1892	<b>Bocas del Toro</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
2. Balboa Heights 1908	Canal Zone	American (US)
3. Calvalry 1908	<b>Central</b>	<b>West Indian</b>

4. New Life 1909	<b>Bocas del Toro</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
5. First Isthmian 1910	<b>Central</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
6. Almirante 1915	<b>Bocas del Toro</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
7. Bethel 1916	<b>Bocas del Toro</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
8. First Baptist, Paraiso 1920	<b>Bocas del Toro</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
9. Good Counsellor, Guabito 1933	<b>Bocas del Toro</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
10. Primera Bautista, Panamá 1943	Panama	Spanish
11. Cocolí 1943	Canal Zone	American (US)
12. Iglesia Bautista, Chorrera 1946	Panama	Spanish
13. Bethany, Rainbow City 1947	<b>Central</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
14. First Baptist, Margarita 1950	Canal Zone	American (US)
15. Primera Iglesia, Las Tablas 1953	Interior	Spanish
16. Primera Iglesia, Alligandi 1953	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
17. Emmanuel, Panama City 1956	<b>Central</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
18. Chilibre 1956	Panama	Spanish
19. IglesiaTemplo Bautista, Colón 1958	<b>Central</b>	Spanish
20. First Baptist, Cativa 1958	<b>Central</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
21. Primera Iglesia Bautista, Ustuppu 1958	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
22. Iglesia Bautista, Mulatuppu 1958	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
23. Iglesia Bautista Redención, Panamá 1958	Panama	Spanish
24. Primera Iglesia Bautista, Aguadulce 1959	Interior	Spanish
25. Primera Iglesia Bautista, Playón Chico 1959	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
26. Chagres River, Gamboa	Canal Zone	American (US)

1960		
27. Primera Iglesia Bautista, Arraján 1961	Panama	Spanish
28. Primera Iglesia Bautista, Chitré 1961	Interior	Spanish
29. Iglesia Bautista, Río Tigre 1962	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
30. Nueva Creación, Dos Caños 1962	<b>Bocas del Toro</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
31. Primera Iglesia Bautista, Pedregal 1963	Panama	Spanish
32. El Buen Pastor, Buena Vista 1964	Panama	Spanish
33. Jordan, Panama City 1964	<b>Central</b>	<b>West Indian</b>
34. Primera Iglesia, Niatupo 1964	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
35. La Boca 1964	Canal	American (US)
36. Iglesia Bautista, David 1964	Chiriqui	Spanish
37. Nueva Jerusalem, San José 1966	Rio Chame	Spanish
38. Iglesia Bautista, Narganá 1967	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
39. Fuente de Amor, Cerro Silvestre 1967	Panama	Spanish
40. Iglesia Bautista, Tupile 1969	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
41. La Providencia, Penonomé 1971	Interior	Spanish
42. Primera Iglesia Bautista, Concepción 1972	<b>San Blas</b>	<b>San Blas Cuna</b>
43. Caribbean, Gatun 1975	Canal	American (US)
44. Iglesia Bautista, Escobal 1976	Panama	Spanish
45. Iglesia Bautista, Huile 1976	Panama	Spanish
46. Iglesia Bautista, Santa Clara 1976	Panama	Spanish
47. Primera Iglesia, Boquete 1976	Chiriqui	Spanish
48. Iglesia Bautista Kuna, Panama City 1977	Panama	San Blas Cuna

49. Iglesia Bautista Mt. Horeb 1977	Panama	Spanish
50. Primera Iglesia, Punta Vieja 1977	Bocas del Toro	Guaymi
51. Iglesia Bautista, Chica 1977	Rio Chame	Spanish
52. Iglesia Bautista, Monte Lirio 1977	Chiriqui	Spanish
53. Iglesia Bautista, Coloncito 1977	Rio Chame	Spanish
54. Iglesia Bautista, Piña 1978	Panama	Spanish
55. Iglesia Bautista, Mamitupu 1978	San Blas	San Blas Cuna
56. Iglesia Bautista, Hatillo 1979	Rio Chame	Spanish
57. Iglesia Bautista, Achutuppu 1979	San Blas	San Blas Cuna

Of the 42 churches which were founded during the time of the Home Mission Board, the beginnings of 22 of the churches, marked in bold letters, can be traced to work begun by the Jamaica Baptist Union among the West Indians or Lonnie Iglesias in the San Blas Islands. The members of the five churches in the Canal Zone were North Americans and the members of the other fifteen churches were Spanish-speaking Panamanians. Both the Chiriqui and the Rio Chame Associations were included in the Interior Association until 1979.

Beautiful Zion Baptist Church was established in 1892. Other churches were organized in the Bocas del Toro Association in 1909, 1914, and 1916. The next church Guabito was not organized until 1933, and since that time no other church was established in Bocas del Toro until 1962. Looking at the Canal Zone Association, the Balboa Baptist Church was established in 1908. The next church was not organized until 1943. Seven years later, a church was established at Margarita, followed by Chagres

River in 1960 and La Boca in 1964. Based only on the existing statistics, there is little or no indication that the churches were self-propagating. What is not apparent, however, is the fact that other churches had been disbanded, especially after the construction of the Panama Canal, and that several churches were establishing missions and preaching points in outlying areas. By 1974 there were 79 missions, but when preaching points or missions continue for thirty years or more before becoming churches, the rate of self-propagation is noticeably slowed.

The Foursquare Gospel, in contrast with the Baptists, has experienced notable growth in the country of Panama. This denomination,

in 1960, accounted for approximately one-third of the total Protestant constituency in Panama and the Canal Zone, and more than 70% of all Spanish-speaking Protestant Church members. Not surprisingly, the Foursquare Church in Panama has become synonymous with Protestantism – evangelicals are often referred to as “los Salvacuatos” (meaning Foursquare Church members).

Soon after the introduction into the country in 1928, active lay workers carried the Pentecostal message to outlying areas of Panama. There were few Protestant churches in any of these Spanish-speaking areas, consequently the Foursquare work grew without much competition, especially in the Chiriqui Province. In the 1940s, the Foursquare work experienced rapid growth: from 1,000 members in 1940 to 7,000 in 1950 (21.6% AAGR).

By 1950, scores of Foursquare congregations had been formed throughout Panama; by 1961 there were 128 churches and 65 preaching points with 10,276 members. Institutions included two Bible institutes with 65 students and 17 teachers, and one day school with 60 students and three teachers. There were 163 national workers, only fifteen of whom were fully ordained; three missionary couples also supported Foursquare ministries. Ninety-five percent of membership was Spanish-speaking. Foursquare work prior to 1960 grew with little administrative control, since it was largely a spontaneous expansion led by gifted lay workers without much formal education. Since the early 1960s, the Foursquare Church in Panama has entered into a period of consolidating previous efforts, constructing church buildings and increasing pastoral salaries. (Holland 1981:132)

Statistics published in the latest edition of *Operation World* (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001:437) indicated that the Foursquare Gospel Church and the other members of the Pentecostal movement have continued to dominate the religious scene:

Table 4.2. Protestant Growth in Panama in the year 2000

	MEMBERSHIP	NUMBER OF CHURCHES	YEAR IN WHICH WORK BEGAN
International Church of the Foursquare Gospel	54,102	720	1928
Assemblies of God	60,000	450	1967
Church of God (Cleveland)	12,275	180	1935
Baptist Convention	6,897	96	1905

The Baptist denomination is not and never has been the most significant or the largest piece of the puzzle. *Operation World* reported that the membership of the Baptist Convention in 1985 was 6,550 (Johnstone 1986:335). Fifteen years later the number of members had increased to 6,897 (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001:506). In that same period of time the members of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel had increased from 27,500 to 54,102. The members of the Assemblies of God had increased from 18,000 to 60,000. The members of the Church of God (Cleveland) had increased from 2,700 to 12,275. The analysis of the work, by both the Home and Foreign Mission Boards, is disheartening. The *Church Development Depth Study* noted that “gains that are made in evangelism and the baptism of new members are often nullified by losses from the membership rolls” (1972:25). *The Church Growth Indicators Analysis* which was prepared by Jim Slack for the Foreign Mission Board declared that “Panama is not even



keeping pace with biological growth, much less making gains into the growing population” (1990:3).

The assertion that the growth of the Foursquare Gospel can be attributed to “spontaneous expansion” cannot be overlooked. In his book *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, Roland Allen explained what this phrase meant to him.

I mean the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the Church explaining to others the Gospel which they have found themselves: I mean the expansion which follows the irresistible attraction of the Christian Church for men who see its ordered life, and are drawn to it by desire to discover the secret of a life which they instinctively desire to share; I mean also the expansion of the Church by the addition of new churches. (1962b:7)

While it was said that Pentecostal churches grew spontaneously, this was never said of Baptist churches.

The *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study* would later reveal, “In Panama, churches indicated that their churches were organized by missionary involvement more than any other grouping or for any other reason. Here, church planting/starting seems to be the work of the missionary more so than by the local church, the association, or the Convention” (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:2). It can be concluded therefore that the churches that were established were not self-propagating. Panamanians as a whole, instead of reproducing churches, had surrendered their responsibility to the missionaries.

The study further observed,

National leaders believe that mother churches are needed in starting new works. However, church members see the missionary as the ones who are primarily responsible for the planting and organization of new churches. Pastors also are not heavily involved in starting new works (averaging only one new work per pastor), although they believe that pastors should be instrumental in starting new works. (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:4)

Several years earlier, Van Royen had remarked,

The problem in Panama is not to find places to go, but rather to decide to which community we will go next. Very few communities in Panama have anything other than a Roman Catholic church. There are hundreds of communities in the open country and in the mountains that have no church of any kind. Many of them have constructed little shrines where they try to have some form of worship. (1955:29)

His comments implied that the Panamanian people were receptive to the gospel and also described the importance of the beginning missionary activity in the interior of the country as soon as possible. He later asserted, "If we had missionaries to go into the inland towns of Panama to teach and preach, we could organize 50 to 75 churches in the next five or six years" (1958:10). He said nothing about the pastors or the members of the churches that had already been established. They would not only be able to speak the Spanish language, but they would also be familiar with the needs of those to whom they would share the gospel. They would be people like themselves. Van Royen was predicting that within five or six years the number of Baptist churches could have doubled. If the members and pastors of the churches had accepted this challenge, a larger number of churches may have been established in less time. The Home Mission Board never experienced the growth that Van Royen imagined.

By 1974, in addition to the 42 churches, 79 missions had been established. The apostle Paul, however, established churches, not preaching points or missions. "Some Baptist leaders in the Kuna questioned why it is necessary to have "missions" since it is not a Bible term. They want to know why a new group of baptized believers cannot be considered to be a church from the start" (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:20). It is not known how the Foreign Mission Board responded to this question.

There is a subtle danger if the missionary begins by establishing a preaching point or a mission and fails to establish a church. Having begun by establishing a preaching

point or a mission, it is assumed that the preaching point or mission will later, at some unknown time, become a church. This process however may require several years. By beginning with a preaching point or mission, however, the goal of establishing a church can be forgotten or overlooked. The goal of establishing a church has been replaced by that of beginning a preaching point or mission.

Table 4.3. Missions Established in Panama from 1969-1973

ASSOCIATION	1969-70	1970-71	1972-73
Bocas Association		19	19
Canal Zone Association		25	23
Central Panama Association		6	5
Interior		10	10
Panamá		13	11
San Blas		9	11
TOTAL	80	82	79

The preaching point or mission, by its very nature, implies dependence. Neither are self-supporting, self-governing, or self-propagating. If it is kept in mind that the goal was to establish an indigenous church, how many of those preaching points or missions could instead be churches? It will never be known how many Baptist churches could have been founded if the members and pastors of the local churches had, like the Pentecostals, enthusiastically and spontaneously shared the gospel. A handful of missionaries, no matter how committed to the cause of Christ, will never be able to successfully establish

churches in hundreds of communities. Only if there a multiplication of laborers can this be achieved.

### Conclusion

The churches which were established through the efforts of the Home Mission Board were neither self-governing, self-supporting, or self-propagating. A missionary had been placed in the role of superintendent, but this conflicted with the stated goal to establish a self-governing church. The emphasis upon subsidy provided funds for the construction of churches and salaries for pastors but did not produce a church that was self-supporting. When the members of the local churches expect the missionary to assume the primary responsibility for planting and organizing churches, it is obvious that they are not thinking about self-propagation.

To reverse this trend, the “churches must be given birth and early training and then let loose to rely on the resources the Lord provides to them. Such resources will include money, leadership, worship styles, ethical guidelines and a culturally relevant doctrinal statement of the gospel” (Kammerdiener 1991:2). When reliance upon God is discouraged, the church continues in a prolonged state of infancy and never achieves adulthood. When reliance upon God is encouraged, the members of the church become prayerful and expectant as they look to God to supply the necessary resources to sustain the church and its various ministries. The members of the church become a people of faith. Worship styles are not inherited, but reflect the culture of the people and their personal encounter with God. Ethical guidelines emerge as the members read and study the Bible together and allow its teachings to mold both their individual and corporate lives.

The members of a church which was self-governing would assume responsibility for the manner in which it was organized and the way it manifested the kingdom of God through their love for one another and their involvement in community action. The members of a church that was self-supporting would contribute sacrificially a portion of that given to them by God, and from that portion undergird the church and its various activities. The church that was self-propagating would not only share the gospel where the church had been established but would also endeavor to take that gospel to other communities.

## CHAPTER 5

### Evaluating the Strategy of the Home Mission Board: The Principle of Consonance

According to the principle of consonance, “strategy must represent an adaptive response to the external environment and the critical changes occurring within it” (Rumelt 2003:81). For the missionaries sent by Home Mission Board, the external environment could have been defined geographically as the country of Panama. However, the environment also included the particular peoples among whom the missionaries were sharing the gospel. Both the *Church Development Depth Study* and the *Background Study* briefly discussed the history of Panama and her people. However, these few paragraphs only introduced the discussion about the work of the Home Mission Board in the country and were not intended to give a detailed account about the historical development of the country or a lengthy description about the unique cultures of her people. The articles in the official publications of the Home Mission Board focused on the labors of the missionaries who had been sent to Panama, but little is said about the technological, physical, social, and political events that had a significant impact on the peoples of Panama.

Van Rheenen, former professor of Missions at Abilene University, insists, however, that historical understanding and cultural awareness are significant elements in the formulation of strategy. His missional helix or spiral

begins with **theologies**, such as *Missio Dei*, the kingdom of God, incarnation and crucifixion, which focus and form our perspectives of culture and the practice of ministry. Cultural analysis forms the second element of the helix. **Cultural analysis** enables missionaries and ministers to define types of peoples within a cultural context, to understand the social construction of their reality, to perceive how they are socially

related to one another, and to explain how the Christian message intersects with every aspect of culture (birth rates, coming of age rituals, weddings, funerals, etc.). The spiral proceeds to consider what has occurred historically in the missional context. **Historical perspective** narrates how things got to be as they are based upon the interrelated stories of the particular nation, lineage, the church, and God's mission. Finally the spiral considers the **strategy**, or practice of ministry, within the missions environment. (2002:1)

Van Rheeën (2003:2-3) argues that theological reflection is “the beginning point for ministry formation” or strategy. In addition to the biblical mandate, however, missionaries “must develop ministry based upon historical perspective rather than being oblivious of what has previously occurred” and “must undertake an in-depth worldview analysis of the local culture.” The formulation of strategy is not static, but is flexible, and is continually being informed by the missionaries' personal encounter with God and by what they are learning about the history and the particular culture of the people among whom they are working.

While later official publications of Home Mission Board focused on the expanding ministry of the Home Mission Board, little was said about what was happening in the country of Panama itself. Each historical event, from Balboa's discovery of the Pacific Ocean to Noriega's rise to power, not only influenced the development of the country, but also impacted the lives of those who lived on the Isthmus. What the country has become cannot be understood apart from its past.

Overshadowed by Spain, Colombia, and finally the United States, Panama has struggled to discover its own identity. The article “Panama – Culture Overview” indicates that the country “has served since 1510 as gracious host to a series of foreign powers interested in its strategic position as the narrowest point between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans” (Bensenville Community Public Library 2002:1). To suggest that Panama has

served as a gracious host, however, is to overlook the country's persistent attempts to live independently of foreign influence. After declaring its independence from Spain in 1821, Panama was annexed by Colombia.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Colombia stagnated politically and economically under 96 changes of government over a period of 82 years. This social anarchy, which included a series of civil wars, had a disastrous effect on Panamanian society. Furthermore, Colombia treated the isthmus as a poor and unimportant fiefdom, exploited by individual military officials and tax collectors which were sent by Colombia to govern this backward *departamento*. (Wheaton 1976:10)

Repeated attempts to secede from Colombia were finally successful when in 1903 Panama declared its independence. The role of the United States in this event has been debated. Some argue that the United States, having learned that the Panamanians were intent on becoming an independent nation, took advantage of the situation and came to their assistance. Others insist that Roosevelt, determined to build a canal in Panama, encouraged the Panamanians to revolt against Colombia. The claim of the United States to the Canal Zone, however, would later cause tension. This strained relationship between Panama and the United States at times erupted into violent confrontations, such as in 1964 when Panamanians rioted when they were not permitted to fly their country's flag in the Canal Zone.

The Church Development Depth Study Committee noted, "There is a degree to which Baptist fortunes have risen and fallen according to the relations between the United States and Panama. Periods of tension between the nations have been marked by a slackening in the churches and tensions within the fellowship" (Home Mission Board 1972:14). Having referred to the disturbances in 1964 and 1968, the committee concluded, "It is noteworthy that the baptismal total reported in 1967 was 372. In 1968



this fell to 223, but the following year the total was 416” (Home Mission Board 1972:14). The committee however did not include the statistics from 1964 and therefore did not confirm that this trend was also reflected during and after the riot in 1964.

The Panamanians’ long cherished dream for national sovereignty was not realized until the United States transferred the canal to Panama in 1999.

Although Panama has existed as a country since 1903, the U.S. involvement has been so overwhelming that people have never learned to feel independent. Now, for the first time since Theodore Roosevelt used gunboat diplomacy to wrest the Isthmus of Panama from Colombia and create a special-purpose state where the United States could build and run the canal, the Panamanians are on their own. (Simons 1999:64)

Whether the presence of Protestants early in the history of Panama would have prepared its people for democracy is debatable. “Late independence left Panama relatively ill-prepared for self-government, and the Panamanians had to accommodate to U.S. interests as they set out to build their nation” (Bethell 1990a:604). The country was overshadowed by the presence of the United States, and because of the frequent interference of the United States in its internal affairs, it cannot be known what the country would have become if its people had been given the opportunity to choose their own destiny after severing its relationship with Colombia.

The enclosed time line reveals that construction of the Panama Canal has been the most significant factor in the development of the country. President Theodore Roosevelt came to Panama in November of 1906 to inspect the canal, an event not mentioned in the official publications of the Home Mission Board or the annuals of the Southern Baptist Convention. Roosevelt had decided to come to the country during the rainy season. Unlike the Frenchman Ferdinand DeLesseps, whose visit during the dry season led him to

underestimate what was required to dig the canal, Roosevelt wanted to see the situation at its worst.

It was raining the morning he landed. It was raining as he and President Amador rode through the streets of Panama City in an open carriage, Roosevelt waving a top hat to sodden but exuberant crowds. The deluge the second day was the worst in fifteen years. Three inches fell in less than two hours. He saw the Chagres surge a hundred yards beyond its banks. The railroad was under water in several places. Villages were 'knee-deep in water.' There was even a small landslide on the railroad cut at Paraíso. The contrast between the Panama he saw and the sunny, benign land toured by Ferdinand de Lesseps could not have been much greater. (McCullough 1977:493)

The most memorial photograph shows him at the controls of a Bucyrus-Erie steam shovel, the same company which provided "seventy-seven of the one hundred and two machines purchased by the Isthmian Canal Commission between 1904 and 1914" (Bucyrus-Erie 1970:2). Roosevelt

was at the controls for perhaps twenty minutes, during which a small crowd gathered and the photographers were extremely busy. Presidents of the United States had been photographed at their desks and on the rear platforms of Pullman cars. Chester A. Arthur had consented once to pose in a canoe. But not in 117 years had a President posed on a steam shovel. He was wearing a big Panama Hat and another of his white suits. And the marvelous incongruity of the outfit, the huge, homely machine and the rain pouring down, not to mention his own open delight in the moment, made it at once an *event*, an obvious and inevitable peak for the man who so adored having his picture taken and who so plainly intended to see success at Panama. (McCullough 1977:496)

In his report to the two Houses of Congress on December 17, 1906, after his visit to Panama, he described what he had seen and assured them of the certain success of the venture.

In 1904 the Committee on Cuba and New Fields had announced, "The Star of Bethlehem must never fail to accompany the Stars and Stripes" (Southern Baptist Convention 1904:27). The Star of Bethlehem, however, played a less significant role in

the development of the country than the Stars and Stripes. Roosevelt's foreign policy was succinctly stated in what was known as the Roosevelt Corollary and suggested the future role of the United States in the country of Panama.

It is not true that the United States feels any land hunger or entertains any projects as regards the other nations of the Western Hemisphere save such as are for their welfare. All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political manners, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power. (U. S. National Archives 2004:1)

Roosevelt's foreign policy "contained a great irony: whereas the Monroe Doctrine had been sought to prevent European intervention in the Western Hemisphere, the Roosevelt Corollary justified American intervention throughout the Western Hemisphere" (U. S. National Archives 2004:1). When the history of the country of Panama is examined, it will be seen that United States exerted its influence frequently either to protect the Panama Railroad or the Panama Canal.

TABLE 5.1. A Timeline of Military Intervention in Panama  
Scott Brady Guyette

1501: Spanish exploration begins.
1519: Old Panama City founded. Sacked by Henry Morgan 1671
1751: Becomes dependency of part of New Granada (later Colombia).
1821: Independence from Spain. Soon becomes official part of New Granada.
1823: Monroe Doctrine from U.S. Government stakes out claim to the Americas.

1846: U.S. concludes treaty with New Granada stating U.S. would guarantee "perfect neutrality" of the isthmus.
1855: Railroad finished by U.S. (California gold rush contributed to need.)
1856: U.S. troops Sept. 19-22 to protect U.S. interests.
1865: U.S. troops March 9-10 to protect lives and property of U.S. citizens during revolutionary activity.
1873: U.S. troops at Bay of Panama, Colombia, May 7-22 and September 23-October 9 to protect U.S. interests during hostilities over who should govern Panama.
1885: U.S. troops at Colón January 18-19 to guard valuables on the Panama Railroad and to protect the safes and vaults of the company.
1885: U.S. troops at Panama City and Colón March, April and May to reestablish freedom of transit during revolutionary activity.
1898: Quick victory against Spain in the Spanish-American War yields four ports to U.S.: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Philippines, Guam.
1901: U.S. troops November 20-December 4 to protect U.S. property and to keep transit lines open.
1902: U.S. troops September 17-November 18 to keep the railroad open. Permanent presence of U.S. troops.
1903: A U.S. military show of force facilitates Panama's breakaway from Colombia in November. The Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty is then negotiated for the building of a canal. U.S. troops become a permanent presence.
1904: Extra U.S. troops to prevent insurrection during elections. Meanwhile, U.S. policy undermines and weakens the national army. By this time, no Panamanian could become president without the consent of the U.S. government.
1908: Extra U.S. troops to prevent insurrection during elections.
1912: Extra U.S. troops to prevent insurrection during elections. In May, the U.S. Government appoints a commission of high-ranking U.S. Army officers to count the votes in June elections.
1914: Panama Canal opens. Conditions are in place for creation of those dialectical opposites, Repression and Resistance. Oligarchy: land and money for the few; 90 percent

are excluded. Wages: in the Canal Zone U.S. employees receive more than twice the wage that Panamanians receive. Segregation: a system of apartheid like the Jim Crow laws in U.S. (water fountains were gold for whites and silver for non-whites). U.S. control of a 10-mile-wide Canal Zone in the middle of the country. In 1915, the U.S. Government disarms the national police and takes over basic control of the judiciary, educational, health and public work systems.

1918-20: Extra U.S. troops to provide police duty at Chiriquí (western Panama) during election disturbances and subsequent unrest. In 1918, President Ciro Urriola postpones the elections, a decree that the U.S. Government considers unconstitutional; the U.S. Government orders the decree revoked and U.S. troops occupy Panama City and Colón.

1920: Major labor strike directed by William Preston Stoute, who is banished from the country.

1925: Extra U.S. troops on October 12-23 to keep order and protect U.S. interests during the tenants' movement (rent strikes).

1926: Kellogg-Alfaro treaty places the Panamanian Army under U.S. control and commits Panama to declaring war against any nation in conflict with the U.S.

1930s-40s: U.S. Government is occasionally forced to make concessions. For instance, in exchange for more U.S. military sites outside the Canal Zone on the eve of entering World War II, the U.S. Government cancels some debt, gives monetary compensation for the sites, transfers to Panama certain properties of the Panama Railroad Company and control over the water and sewer systems of Panama City and Colón, grants some jurisdictional control to Panama, etc.

1947: The Filos-Hines agreement is an attempt to extend the presence of the 140 U.S. army military bases used during World War II, but Panamanians eventually force its revocation.

1952-68: As an example of oligarchic government, during this period there are four presidents all of whom are cousins.

1954: Elected government of Arbenz is overthrown in Guatemala by CIA, increasing understanding of U.S. goals in Latin America.

1954: U.S. Supreme Court passes school desegregation decision. Developing U.S. Civil Rights Movement has profound influence in Panama.

1955: U.S. Government agrees to pay more for Canal expenses; to let Panama collect taxes from employees there excepting U.S. citizens and some others; to restore a little property to Panama.

1958: Campaign demanding equal status for Panamanian language and flag in the Canal

Zone. The Eisenhower Administration agrees both flags can fly at a specified place.
1959: On January 1, Cuban Revolution triumphs, profoundly influencing the Panamanian populace. Disturbances occur in each of the first four months of this year.
1959: On Independence Day Panamanians march into the Canal Zone to raise the Panamanian flag; U.S. troops turn them back. U.S. Government begins to convert police force into full-fledged military, the very military that the U.S. Government later fears because of its potential as a nationalist force.
1964: On January 9, U.S. students raise U.S. flag by itself at high school in Canal Zone. Panamanians march into Zone and are turned back by U.S. troops. This leads to two days of demonstrations during which U.S. troops kill more than 20 civilians and wound more than 300. Panama breaks diplomatic relations and demands revision of treaties. Relations resume in April after U.S. Government agrees to discuss treaties.
1968: On October 11, the National Guard, under Col. Omar Torrijos, overthrows the oligarchy and installs a junta from which Torrijos emerges the leader. He heads armed forces 1968-81. Any leader in Panama has two choices: be a puppet of U.S. Government without any real power or assert some independence, forcing reliance on a nationalist base. Torrijos is not part of oligarchy; his base comes from the dispossessed. Under his leadership, the Panamanian Defense Forces becomes part of the movement for national liberation of Third World peoples in Panama.
1968-86: Public schools grow from fewer than 2,000 to more than 3,000. Infant mortality decreases from 40 to 25 per 1,000 live births. Social security is extended by more than 1 million. Roads and electricity are brought to rural areas. Labor unions grow. Blacks are appointed to ministerial positions.
1972: Junta confirmed by election. Torrijos remains at head of armed forces.
1977: Three treaties known as the Carter-Torrijos treaties are signed, arranging for the return of the Panama Canal Zone to Panama by the year 2000 – specifically at midnight 12/31/99.
1979: Treaties take effect October 1; 65 percent of the Zone is returned to Panama. U.S. has responsibility of operating and defending Canal through December 31, 1999, but not after that.
1981: Reagan Administration takes office in January, with Reagan's commitment not to "lose" the Canal.
1981: General Torrijos is killed July 31 in an airplane crash.

In February 1916, two years after the Canal had been completed, Panama was host for The Panama Congress on Christian Work in Latin America, an event which Wise, Loveridge, and Witt attended. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 “limited attendance to the boards and societies working in ‘pagan’ countries. Because its people were at least nominally Roman Catholic, Latin America was not considered as a mission field” (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:43). The later Panama Congress specifically addressed the missiological problems of Latin America. According to Read, the conference established a precedent.

Never before had a conference dealt with so extensive a field in so intensive a manner. Latin American missiologists value highly the resulting reports, which constituted the first comprehensive survey of the material, physical, political, moral, ethical, economic, social, and religious conditions of the Latin American countries at this crucial point in time. (1969:43)

An editorial in the November 1915 edition of *The Home Field* acknowledged the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church in Panama to the proposed Congress.

We do hereby formally prohibit, under penalty of mortal sin, to all the Catholics subject to our jurisdiction, to attend to the sessions of the proposed Congress in question, which, as announced, is to be held in this City of Panama from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of February next, even if their attendance might be prompted by curiosity. (Masters 1915:21)

From the Roman Catholic perspective, the Protestant Congress was an “abortive attempt to impress the country with their religious creed under the mask of the material progress that they wanted to claim as their own, now witnessed on the Canal Zone” (Arrieta 1929:252). Wise, however, said little about the event. Referring to the results of the Congress, he wrote,

They were not as much as many had hoped. Entrance could be had only by ticket. The hall where the sessions were held was well located and at times less than half full, but many did not feel like going without a ticket and

that could not be had. The effect upon those who attended, I think, was to kindle missionary interest. The effect upon the outside world depends as to how far and wide the influence of the delegates reaches and how extensively the reports of the Congress are read. (Southern Baptist Convention 1916:49)

The reports were collected in three volumes under the title *Christian Work in Latin America*. The chapter “The Training and Efficiency of Missionaries” included this advice, “We expect all the foreign missionaries to know our history, to study our social habits, and to know us” (*Christian Work in Latin America* 1916:166). How well did the missionaries sent to Panama know its history and its people?

### **The People: Resistant or Receptive**

Were the people of Panama resistant or receptive to the gospel? “When there is much work and little or no fruit, something is wrong. Careful analysis will usually pinpoint the trouble as either working in unripe fields, or working in ripe fields but using the wrong methods” (Wagner 1981:579). When statistics reveal that Baptists were experiencing less significant growth than the Pentecostals, two questions are asked. First, were Baptists working in unripe fields, and second, if not, were Baptists using the wrong methods?

The importance of determining receptivity cannot be minimized. “In resistant populations, single congregations only, and those small, can be created and kept alive, whereas in responsive ones, many congregations which freely reproduce others can be established” (McGavran 1970:216). Among a resistant population, not only would fewer be willing to accept Christ, but also, when churches were established, they would struggle to survive and there would be less opportunity for them to reproduce themselves. If it can be shown that the Panamanian people were resistant to the gospel, then it would have



been unreasonable to expect significant growth. However, if the Panamanian people were receptive to the claims of Christ, the lack of growth, as compared with the Pentecostals, cannot be justified. If working in unripe fields was not the problem, then the problem was working in ripe fields but using the wrong method.

What was said about Latin America in general may not apply to the country of Panama. "The remarkable growth of some Evangelical Churches in Latin America and the lamentable lack of growth of others presents a complicated puzzle. This is particularly true in view of the considerable receptivity of the urban and rural peoples who inhabit Latin America" (Read, Monterroso and Johnson 1969:18). Articles from both the Home Mission Board and the Foursquare Gospel, however, often indicated that the Panamanian people were receptive to the gospel. In the article "Waiting for Christ in Panama," Paul Bell acknowledged, "Panamanian people are open to receive the Gospel. Everywhere I go they accept with a real craving the tracts, Gospels, New Testaments that we give them" (1942b:10). R. G. Van Royen, who served as superintendent of the Baptist Mission in Panama and the Canal Zone from 1953 to 1960, wrote, "Most of the towns have a Roman Catholic church. Very few of them have any other religious message. Everywhere we go we find the people in the interior eager to read the Bible; to have portions of it so they can read it; and to have it explained to them that they may understand the way of salvation" (1955:7). It is not known how many, if any, committed themselves to Christ after reading a tract or portion of the Bible, and it is not known if any church was directly or indirectly established as a result of this literature distribution.

Bell also acknowledged, "There are hundreds of these little native villages in Panama with their little grass-roofed bamboo huts where live thousands of simple people,

hungering for something that will satisfy the longing in their souls” (1942b:10). His comments were similar to that expressed earlier by the Foursquare Gospel. “In many places whole towns are Foursquare, and the people of Panama whether in the urban localities or out in the jungle are hungry for the Gospel” (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel n.d.:6). L. D. Wood, who followed Van Royen as superintendent from 1960 to 1965, reported, “Roman Catholicism is the state religion, but the people are receptive to the gospel” (1960:1). Jim Slack, a church growth analyst for the Foreign Mission Board, acknowledged that the slow growth of Baptist churches in the country of Panama “is not due to a lack of response or the presence of a highly resistant population” (1990:7). Although it was repeated frequently that the Panamanian people were receptive to the gospel, the available statistics, when compared to the Pentecostals, do not indicate the Baptists were experiencing significant growth. Among the thousands of people and hundreds of communities, only 42 Baptist churches had been established by the end of 1972.

Missionaries were seemingly satisfied to assert that the Panamanian people were receptive to the gospel, but there was no attempt to identify which segment of society, West Indian, Panamanian, or Amerindian, was most receptive to the gospel. It cannot be overlooked that, when receptivity was mentioned, no one spoke specifically about the West Indians, or the Spanish-speaking Panamanians, or the Cuna Indians. The people were referred to only as Panamanians. “People and societies vary in responsiveness” (McGavran 1970:216), and, therefore, it cannot be assumed that each segment of society was equally receptive to the claims of Christ. Even when a particular people are receptive to the gospel, it must be remembered that receptivity is not constant, but fluctuates. There

was never, however, a focus upon a particular people group to determine if they were or were not receptive to the gospel. There was no attempt to discover when or why a particular people had become receptive to the gospel or when or why those once receptive were now resistant.

If the missionaries were unable to determine when receptivity occurred and if they failed to act when a people became responsive to the gospel, hundreds, if not thousands, would have been denied the opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. “An essential task is to discern receptivity and – when it is seen – to adjust methods, institutions, and personnel until the receptive are becoming Christians and reaching out to win their fellows to eternal life” (McGavran 1970:232). Having discerned that a particular people are or are not receptive to the gospel, then missionaries know how to respond. They either need to prepare the soil, anticipating that someday the gospel will take root among those people, or they need to harvest those who hearts have already been prepared to hear the gospel.

According to Dayton and Fraser, “the receptivity or resistance to Christian faith in any given instance is due to a number of variables” (1980:179):

1. The degree to which a people is satisfied with its present fate in life. If their own religion and magic give satisfactory answers to their questions, they will not give much hearing or consideration to any alternative religion.
2. The degree to which the rest of their life is changing. New immigrants or people who have recently moved from their traditional habitation are more open to new ways and ideas. So are minorities who are away from their normal communities and are no longer surrounded by friends who support their old religious identity.
3. The cultural sensitivity of the gospel presentation. A great deal of the resistance among many peoples around the world is due to the cultural insensitivity of evangelists.

4. The agent of the Good News. Because of their ethnic and political origins, some people will be given a more respectful hearing than other agents of evangelization. The young, Western-educated person is not always the best evangelist!

5. The relative fit between the gospel and the cultural patterns that are presently dominant in a social group. There are some customs which the gospel does not condone.

As each of these variables is applied to the particular peoples of Panama, it may be possible to determine why the different peoples of Panama were receptive to the gospel.

### West Indians

During the construction of the Panama Railroad, English-speaking West Indians had emigrated from the Caribbean islands such as Barbados and Jamaica in search of work. About 50,000 more came to Panama during the French attempt to build the Panama Canal and that number tripled during the construction of the Panama Canal by the United States.

Most did not plan to stay. Eventually though, tens of thousands remained because the islands offered few opportunities that could compete with the pay and benefits available in Panama. The West Indians settled, married, had children, and became the largest immigrant group in the sparsely populated country. (Conniff 1985:3)

It has been argued that immigration is a significant factor when determining if a particular people are receptive to the gospel.

Whenever people are undergoing rapid and radical social and economic change, churches are likely to grow. People who are uprooted from familiar social surroundings and located in new ones find themselves searching for a new orientation to their lives. They are disposed to listen to the gospel, and many of them will recognize that Christ can become the integrating factor they need in their personal lives and in their community. (Wagner 1971:112)

Both of those factors converged in the lives of the West Indians. They had to face not only social ostracism but also crippling poverty in Panama. It would be expected, therefore, that several churches would have been established among the West Indian population. Statistics, however, indicated that the number of West Indian churches did not increase dramatically.

Beginning in 1911 a “STATISTICAL TABLE, SHOWING WORK BY STATES” appeared each year, until 1918, in the Home Mission Board report to the Southern Baptist Convention. (The number of churches and stations included in these statistical tables, however, often do not agree with Wise’s list of churches and stations. See Table 5.4.) These tables included the number of “Sermons and Addresses,” “Prayer Meetings,” and “Religious Visits” not only for the states but also for the countries of Cuba and Panama. The tables also indicated not only the number of “Baptisms” and those “Received by Letter,” but also the number of “Churches Constituted” and “Houses of Worship Built and Improved.” After 1918, these tables were not included in the Southern Baptist Convention annuals and statistics that did appear in the later Home Mission Board reports were infrequent and fragmentary.

Table 5.2. Baptist Growth in Panama, 1911-1918

Year	Number of Missionaries	Churches and Stations	Baptisms	Received by Letter
1911	11	40	118	106
1912	5	11	105	83
1913	5	12	101	71
1914	6	12	209	160
1915	4	11	110	122
1916	4	10	76	155
1917	4	7	142	151
1918	3	8	144	177

The Home Mission Board report for 1911 indicated that there were eight churches and five mission stations (Southern Baptist Convention 1911:40), not 40 as seen in the statistical table. The North Americans were members of the churches at Empire and Gorgona and the mission stations at Gatun and Paraiso. The West Indians attended the churches at Culebra, Matachin, Colon, Frijoles, Las Cascadas, Haut Obispo, and the mission stations at Cucuracha, Cunette, and New Gatun. The largest number of baptisms, 209, was reported in 1914. At least 192 persons were baptized in the West Indian churches in that year. By 1918 the list of churches had changed. Several churches had been disbanded and others established in Colon and Panama City or elsewhere in the Canal Zone. North Americans attended the Balboa Baptist Church. Loveridge was pastor of the West Indian churches at Chorillo, Corozal, and Cirio with a total membership of 357. Witt was pastor of the West Indian churches at Colon, Gatun, Cativa, and New Providence with a total membership of 379. By 1918 the number of West Indian churches had increased by one, from 6 to 7. Nothing, however, was said about the mission stations at Cucuracha, Cunette, and New Gatun.

The statistics that appeared in the proceedings of the annuals of the Southern Baptist Convention and the reports of the Home Mission Board were, at times, contradictory. In 1910, both sources stated that there were eleven churches and four mission stations.

**In the Canal Zone, Panama, our Board has now been years at work. We have eleven churches – four white, seven colored – and four mission stations. (Southern Baptist Convention 1910a:17)**

**We have eleven churches and four mission stations... (Southern Baptist Convention 1910b:266)**

Wise's list of churches and missions for that year, however, showed seven churches and six mission stations. The Empire Baptist Church had been organized in 1908 and it "was later relocated and renamed the First Baptist Church of Balboa Heights, Canal Zone" (Johnson 1972:2).

Table 5.3. Wise's List of Churches and Stations, 1910-1917

1910

<b>WHITE</b>	<b>COLORED</b>
Gorgona Baptist Church	Colon Baptist Church
Empire Baptist Church	Culebra Baptist Church
Gatun Mission Station	Las Cascadas Baptist Church
Paraiso Mission Station	Frijoles Baptist Church
	Matachin Baptist Church
	New Gatun Mission Station
	Haut Obispo Mission Station
	Cucuracha Mission Station
	Cunette Mission Station

1911

<b>WHITE</b>	<b>COLORED</b>
Empire Baptist Church	Culebra Baptist Church
Gorgona Baptist Church	Matachin Baptist Church
Gatun Mission Station	Colon Baptist Church
Paraiso Mission Station	Frijoles Baptist Church
	Las Cascadas Baptist Church
	Haut Obispo Baptist Church
	Cucuracha Mission Station
	Cunette Mission Station
	New Gatun Mission Station

1912

<b>WHITE</b>	<b>COLORED</b>
Gorgona Baptist Church	Colon Baptist Church
Empire Baptist Church	Cucuracha Baptist Church
Gatun Mission Station	Cunette Baptist Church
Ancon Mission Station	Culebra Baptist Church
	Las Cascadas Baptist Church
	Haut Obispo Baptist Church
	Matachin Baptist Church

	Frijoles Baptist Church
	New Gatun Mission Station

## 1913

WHITE	COLORED
Empire Baptist Church	Colon Baptist Church
Gorgona Baptist Church	Gatun Baptist Church
Ancon-Balboa Mission Station	Cucuracha Baptist Church
	Culebra Baptist Church
	Las Cascadas Baptist Church
	Haut Obispo Baptist Church
	Matachin Baptist Church
	Frijoles Baptist Church

## 1914

WHITE	COLORED
Gorgona Baptist Church	Colon Baptist Church
Empire Baptist Church	New Gatun Baptist Church
Ancon-Balboa Mission Station	Cucuracha Baptist Church
	Las Cascadas Baptist Church
	Haut Obispo Baptist Church
	Matachin Baptist Church
	Frijoles Baptist Church
	Chorillo Baptist Church

## 1915

WHITE	COLORED
Empire Baptist Church	Chorillo Baptist Church
Balboa Baptist Church	Cucuracha Baptist Church
	Culebra Baptist Church
	Frijoles Baptist Church
	Colon Baptist Church
	Gatun Baptist Church

## 1916

WHITE	COLORED
Balboa Baptist Church	Chorrillo Baptist Church
Empire Baptist Church	Culebra Baptist Church
	Cirio Baptist Church
	Colon Baptist Church
	Gatun Baptist Church



## New Providence Baptist Church

1917

<b>WHITE</b>	<b>COLORED</b>
Balboa Heights Baptist Church	Chorillo Baptist Church
	Corozal Baptist Church
	Cirio Baptist Church
	Colon Baptist Church
	Gatun Baptist Church
	New Providence Baptist Church

As early as 1906 Wise concluded, "It would be easy for Baptist churches to be started in Panama and Colon among them [the West Indians]" (Southern Baptist Convention 1906:191). In 1930, Witt summarized what had been accomplished since Wise's arrival in 1905.

Figures can tell but a small bit of the work done on the Canal Zone these past twenty-five years, and yet they tell a story that is encouraging indeed. To sum up, we have seven churches with 558 members, 850 in Sunday school, not counting Balboa Heights Church with 130 members, 397 in the B.Y.P.U.'s, 70 in the Woman's Missionary Societies, 112 in the girls' clubs, and 28 in the Boy Scouts. (Southern Baptist Convention 1930:273)

The number of West Indian churches had remained the same since 1918, but there were fewer members. While 736 members were reported in 1918 (Southern Baptist Convention 1918:389), only 558 members were reported in 1930. This lack of growth, to some degree, may be attributed to the departure of several West Indians from Panama after the Panama Canal was completed. By 1936 about 40,000 West Indians were living in the country of Panama, but again the number of West Indian churches, as indicated in the Home Mission Board report for that year, had not increased. "The Home Mission Board is the only Baptist mission agency at work among them, our seven churches being the center of social life and their small self-supporting English schools as well as their religious life" (Southern Baptist Convention 1936:248). By the following year, 1937, the

number of West Indians living in the country had increased to 60,000. It would appear that the number of West Indian churches had remained the same as was reported in 1918, but this is misleading. “The Home Mission Board assists in supporting seven churches among them, three in the Canal Zone, two in Panama City and two mission stations in outlying districts” (Southern Baptist Convention 1937:281). It must be not be overlooked that the report included two mission stations among the number of churches. Actually there were only five churches. If this is correct, the number of churches reported in 1918 had now decreased by two, from seven to five. By 1974, thirteen of the forty-two churches in the Panama Baptist Convention were West Indian.

The West Indians were an “unwanted minority” who “built a defensive subculture to cope with American racism and exploitation, as well as Panamanian chauvinism” (Conniff 1985:xiii). Tinnin, who served as pastor of the Balboa Heights Baptist Church, described the West Indians as “a vigorous and persistent people, preserving their English traditions, loyalty, culture and language despite the pressure of Catholic, Latin civilization all about them” (Southern Baptist Convention 1936:248). After the construction of the Panama Canal, several West Indians had gone to Jamaica, Cuba, or the United States to find work. Some left their wives and children behind in Panama. The West Indians who lived in the slums of Colon and Panama City, faced an uncertain future. Thousands of West Indians “crowded into tenement houses two or three stories high, along narrow streets where life at best was but a poor makeshift” (Lawrence 1931:15).

Only a few articles appeared in *Home Missions*, the official publication of the Home Mission Board, during this decade describing the work in Panama. Those few

articles and the reports in the annuals of the Southern Baptist Convention kept interest in Panama alive, while the West Indians struggled to survive. “They were the “victims of the fluctuating demand for labor on the canal,” always living “precariously on the edge of poverty” (Southern Baptist Convention 1937:248). The last article appeared in 1937, and nothing more was said until Bell arrived in the country four years later.

Following Witt’s resignation in 1929, the Home Mission Board would not send another missionary from the United States to Panama for the next ten years. While the pastor of the Balboa Baptist Church would also serve as the superintendent of the Panama Baptist Mission, Vernon Theophilus Yearwood, Norton Bellamy, and James Blake continued the work among the West Indians. Yearwood, a graduate of Yale University in England, was the pastor of the church at Pueblo Nuevo and “the only West Indian ever ordained to the Baptist ministry in the Canal Zone” (Lawrence, Una Lawrence 1935c:55). Blake and Bellamy had both been born in Jamaica and educated at Calabar College in Kingston. The father of Blake’s wife, Felix Cohen, had died during the construction of the Panama Canal. Blake served as pastor of the churches at Cristobal and Colon on the Atlantic side of the Canal Zone; Bellamy was pastor of the churches at Chorillo and Calidonia near Panama City and the church at Red Tank.

In *The Baptist Opportunity in Panama*, Davis wrote, “Every West Indian admits that the besetting sin of his race is immorality. This and superstition are the two hardest things the church has to contend with” (1930:28). The immorality to which Davis referred may have been concubinage, but that is not certain. Bell’s later description of the West Indian people was both succinct and blunt. “Here we have a motley group of mixed blood and dialect as well as every kind of religion and superstition that can be conceived

of. Sin and vice abound everywhere” (Bell 1946:1). It was thought that the housing conditions in Panama contributed to this corruption. “Housing conditions in Republic are not conducive to good morals,” Carpenter reported. “Few families can afford more than one room, 12 feet square. Kitchens are not provided. The cooking is done on balconies or sidewalks. Toilet and bath accommodations are about one to ten families. Rent is exorbitant” (1949:37). It is not known if the Baptist churches became a voice of protest against these oppressive housing conditions, but renters rioted in 1925.

The harsh conditions in which the West Indians lived perhaps indicated that they would be receptive to the gospel. Receptivity, however, does not imply that that they would only listen to the claims of Christ. In their despair, any movement that offered relief from the oppressive conditions in which they lived, would possibly find a receptive audience among the West Indians. “Immigrants and migrants have been so pounded by circumstances that they are receptive to all sorts of innovations, among which is the Gospel. They are in a phase of insecurity, capable of reaching out for what will stabilize them and raise their spirits” (McGavran 1970:219). The Garvey movement was one of those innovations that attracted the attention of some West Indians.

The West Indians were not only a “desperately poor people,” they were also “easily blown about by the winds” and there was “always some fanatical sect springing up to furnish them a breeze” (Southern Baptist Convention 1924:348). Marcus Garvey was born in Jamaica in 1887. He had visited Panama during the construction of the Panama Canal, as well as Ecuador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Colombia, and Venezuela. He later established the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association on August 1, 1914. The objectives of this association were “to promote the spirit of race,

pride and love; to administer to and assist the needy; to reclaim the fallen of the race; to establish universities, colleges and secondary schools for further education and culture of the boys and girls of the race; to conduct a worldwide commercial and industrial intercourse” (Wikipedia 2005:1). It is not known if Garvey was addressing issues that had been ignored or overlooked by the local Baptist churches. Disparaged by both North Americans and the Panamanians, they could have been seeking an affirmation of their human worth. Often scorned and exploited, they could have been attempting to discover a reason to be proud of their race and culture.

The larger significance of Garveyism lies in the fact that it was able to tap successfully into the ambitions and emotions of the downtrodden, the beaten, the hopeless – people whose lives were held down by class, economics, and racism. It told them that they were descendants of great kings and queens and to say with boldness, ‘I am somebody!’ and feel good about it. (Watson 2000:66)

If existence in Panama had become unbearable, an opportunity to leave and begin life anew somewhere else, even Africa, may have been very appealing. By 1924, however, the appeal of the movement had faded. “This enterprise is losing its momentum,” it was reported, “and the people are coming back to their friends” (Southern Baptist Convention 1924:348). Two years earlier Garvey had been arrested and sentenced to serve two years in prison in the United States for mail fraud. After serving his sentence, he was deported to Jamaica.

In addition to the housing conditions, it was thought that the lack of educational opportunities also contributed to the immorality of the West Indians.

The boys and girls normally finish school at about 12 or 13 years of age. From that time until they are old enough to work, perhaps 3 or 4 years, they are running the streets. It is during this period that the seed of immorality is sown, for they are allowed to acquire the habit of laziness and laziness is at the root of much of the immorality. (Davis 1930:28)

Yearwood sent several letters to Una Roberts Lawrence, asking for financial assistance so that he could send his daughters to the United States to continue their education. “There is no high school for the English speaking West Indian,” Davis wrote, “and any who aspire to a higher education than the 6<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade have to go to Jamaica or the US and they are too poor for this. The best paid West Indian on the CZ receives no more than \$80 a month. The average around \$40” (Davis 1930:28). Blake and Bellamy were paid \$25 each month by the Home Mission Board, significantly less than what a West Indian pastor received in 1931. Yearwood and his wife Rhoda had nine children. As part-time pastor of the Pueblo Nuevo church the Home Mission Board gave him \$15 each month.

After the construction of the Panama Canal, several West Indian churches established Day Schools. West Indian children did not attend the Panamanian schools because they could not speak Spanish and their parents did not want them to be influenced by the teachings of Roman Catholicism. “All of the schools are self-supporting,” it was reported. “They are also religious. The Bible is taught. As a result, they become feeders for the church. They are very valuable missionary assets” (Southern Baptist Convention 1930:273).

The various ministries of the West Indian churches also included cottage prayer meetings, visiting the sick, Dorcas sewing groups, and literary clubs. Through the literary clubs the younger West Indians were “instructed in debates, elocution, oratory, and singing.” “So marked has been the progress,” Bellamy wrote, “that young men and maidens can now take prayer meetings and give a clear testimony to Jesus” (n. d.:1). In a letter to Una Roberts Lawrence, Blake wrote,

With regard to our work on this Mission Station the Spiritual fervor of our converts has been maintained in spite of the desperate financial conditions. Our best work at present is shown in the Brotherhood of the Church. A number of men have been brought into this Society and through it some of them have made the open decision for Christ and have been baptized on the profession of their faith. The work among our young people is also very encouraging. A number of young ones stood out for Jesus and we carry on in order to produce competent workers for the future. We are also encouraged by a modest school that is carried on. Through its educational activities we are hoping to reach and influence our Spanish speaking community. (1935:1)

The spiritual fervor of the West Indian church, during the years when the Panama Canal was dug, can be attributed, at least in part, to the perilous times in which the workers were laboring. "The very dangers of construction made them more religious" (Conniff 1985:38). During the years of construction, from 1904 to 1914, several workers succumbed to yellow fever or malaria or died from accidents.

During the dangerous construction days an early morning prayer meeting was held for the men and every morning at 5:00 'clock the church would be crowded. The women seeing the men going to work in the morning never knew whether they would ever see them alive again. The ambulance was constantly bringing home dead or wounded and white and colored women would anxiously watch the ambulance. The color of those in the ambulance brought immediate relief or anxiety to those who waited. Not that each wanted the other to suffer, the immediate anxiety for loved ones was relieved if the dead or wounded belonged to the other race. Every one lived on the tip-toe of excitement in those days of facing death and God seemed to be brought nearer to many. (Davis 1930:23)

Despite the optimism of Bellamy and Blake, those days belonged to the past. "During the years when they faced death." Davis continued, "they instinctively sought God in His church but the years of security have built up a new type. Mostly indifferent to God, they seek amusement in all the past times of the day and to our shame, the white people are not setting a better example" (1930:24). By 1981, the majority of the West Indians were only nominally attached to Protestant churches.

While most Panamanians of West Indian origin call themselves Protestant relatively few take their religion seriously. Although a dozen or more Protestant denominations can be found among them, most of these local congregations have low attendance at their services except on special occasions, just like the nominal Catholics. More than ever before, West Indian young people prefer to worship in Spanish-speaking *mestizo* churches, if they choose to attend at all. Most Antillean Protestant churches have a ghetto mentality, exhibiting a strong desire to preserve cherished traditions based on their British Caribbean heritage and to resist acculturation to Spanish norms. Consequently, the West Indian population is a declining ethnic group, with little hope of being strengthened by large numbers of new arrivals from the Caribbean islands. Instead growing numbers of West Indians are emigrating from Panama and are seeking employment opportunities in the United States or in neighboring Latin American countries. (Holland 1981:125)

Holland does not explain why the majority of the West Indians did not take their religion seriously. He does not identify the particular Protestant denominations that were ministering to the West Indians or the churches in which the young people preferred to worship. If the majority of the members of the Antillean or West Indian Protestant church were the older West Indians, then the churches, in their attempt to maintain their cultural identity, may have lost their appeal to the younger West Indians. If the younger West Indians preferred to worship in Spanish-speaking *mestizo* churches, have they become bilingual, speaking both Spanish and English, or has Spanish become their preferred language?

Given the possibility of choosing between a hereditary way of life and that of the national society, the young man or woman is faced with a hard decision. Although the increasing numbers of young West Indians are becoming bilingual and joining the mainstream of society, major assimilation still appears to be some time off. (Nyrop 1980:62)

Assimilation into Panamanian life required that “they should give up their culture and adopt that of Panama. This meant renouncing British nationality, hispanicizing their names, speaking Spanish, marrying Latin spouses, converting to Catholicism, and ending



ties with the islands (Conniff 1985:4). The degree to which the West Indians have been integrated into Panamanian society is debatable. Biesanz and Biesanz argue that the problems of the West Indians “are being alleviated as the immigrant generation fades from the scene and its descendants become truly Panamanians” (1955:381). Conniff insists, “Perhaps it is too soon to conclude that the West Indians and their descendants in Panama have become fully integrated into and accepted by Panamanian society. Yet the process has advanced enough to make it a future probable” (1985:179). While the older generation cherished their West Indian roots and British influence, the younger generation was gradually being assimilated into Panamanian society.

It could be argued that a certain segment of the Panamanian population was more receptive to the gospel, but the story of the West Indians in Panama also revealed that different generations could also vary in receptivity. Older West Indians “take pride in being church-goers, neat, respectable, sober, honest, industrious, philosophical, obedient to authority, and loyal to their employers” (Biesanz and Biesanz 1955:320). The younger generation, however, “scorns his parents’ Union Jack and Royal Family; he admires Lena Horne and Bing Crosby and American material culture; he likes the free and easy Panamanian life and its comparative racial mobility. Yet he has little sense of patriotism, for he feels he belongs nowhere and is welcome nowhere” (Biesanz and Biesanz 1955:321). They have “opted for inclusion in the Hispanic society at large” and have “generally rejected their parents’ religion and language in so doing” (Meditz and Hanratty 1989:80).

## Panamanians

The Panamanians were “descendants of some of the old Spanish explorers, those whose families are of pure Spanish blood and the Europeans of all races who have settled in Panama and made it their home” (Davis 1930:16). Although there had been sporadic attempts to begin a ministry among the Panamanians, nothing of any lasting significance was accomplished until Bell was sent to Panama. A few months after arriving in Panama, he announced,

This is one of the greatest mission fields I have ever seen, and the most neglected. It is a very difficult and complex field, yet a most strategic and vital one. There are many possibilities here, and opportunities. Thus far we have not been able to do very much for the Panamanian people. I do have one little mission started with a Sunday School of 36, and with about forty attending the preaching service. There are several awaiting baptism. (1942a:1)

His reports, like those of Wise, emphasized the need for additional workers and buildings. “At the present time,” he acknowledged, “our greatest physical needs, from the standpoint of Baptist work in the Republic of Panama are additional man power and buildings (Bell 1942b:11). Two years later, he wrote, “If we had workers for the English speaking fields, one for the Americans and another for the West Indians, I could give my time to the Spanish-speaking work. Please do your best to find us someone. If you cannot find two, at least send one” (Bell 1944:7).

After years of delay, the Home Mission Board had finally begun a long anticipated ministry among the Spanish-speaking people in Panama. Bell’s ministry, however, carried him beyond Panama to other countries in Central America.

When we came to this field five years ago we found not one Baptist among the Spanish speaking people in all of the Republic of Panama nor in Costa Rica. The Lord has enabled us to win hundreds and we now have two organized churches in Panama, four in Costa Rica besides some

twenty missions where we have converts, some of whom have been baptized. Then we have answered the Macedonian call and gone on into Honduras and preached, baptized and organized ten churches and established scores of missions. Thus all of Central America is now open with definitely organized Baptist work. (Lawrence 1946:2)

The first Spanish-speaking Baptist church, the “Church of the Redeemer,” had been established in 1943 in Panama City, followed by La Chorrera in 1946. Although there had been an opportunity to begin work in the interior of the country in Chitré several years earlier, the first church established there was in Las Tablas in 1953. In 1955, Van Royen, who followed Bell as the superintendent of the Panama Baptist Mission, wrote the article “Baptists Are Advancing in Panama” in which he acknowledged that there were only four Spanish-speaking churches in the Spanish Baptist Convention in 1952. Two years later a church was established at Biqui, about fifteen miles from Panama City, “the first country church in the Republic of Panama” (Van Royen 1955:29). A list of the churches in 1980 shows that only two Spanish-speaking Baptist churches had been established prior to 1953 and Biqui is not included in the list. The number of churches was always fluctuating, however, as some churches disbanded and others were founded.

In the article “The Call of Panama,” Van Royen described the progress that had been made from 1953 to 1958 throughout the country. “June 28, 1953, 10 missionaries, 5 missions, and 10 churches. March 1, 1958, 70 missionaries, 33 missions, and 19 churches. Although this may look like a large increase, we still are just at the beginning of the evangelization of this great nation” (1958:11). He, however, did not indicate how the number of churches had increased from 10 to 19 or how the number of missions had increased from 5 to 33 in five years or whether the increase was occurring more among the Spanish-speaking Panamanians, the West Indians, or the North Americans. By

examining the list of churches and when they were established, however, it can be learned four of the churches were Spanish-speaking Panamanian, two were West Indian, and the last three were Cuna Indian.

By 1974, fifteen of the forty-two churches in the Panama Baptist Convention were Spanish-speaking. While immigration possibly indicated that the West Indians would be receptive to the gospel, this can not be said about the Panamanians. Not only immigrants in a new country, however, but also “societies suffering from deprivation and shock, and the oppressed, hear and obey the Gospel more readily than contented beneficiaries of the social order” (McGavran 1970:160). If the missionaries were implying that the Spanish-speaking Panamanians were receptive to the gospel, it can be suggested that were they were receptive for two reasons, one religious and the other political.

When the countries of Central and South America are considered missiologically, it must be remembered that Roman Catholicism has influenced the area for hundreds of years. Although Spain withdrew from Central and South America, a distorted Christ remained. Critics of the Roman Catholic Church have indicated that the portrait of Christ reflected in its teachings is not consistent with Biblical revelation. “The Christ of colonial Latin America was the Christ of the crucifix – made of stone, distant and cold, powerless to transform – who could not satisfy the spiritual longings of the Latins” (Read, Monteroso, and Johnson 1969:36). Other writers also have also portrayed an image of an emasculated Christ. As early as 1911, Speer wrote

The crucifixes, of which South America is full, inadequately represent the Gospel. They show a dead man, not a living Savior. We did not see in all the churches we visited a single symbol or suggestion of the resurrection or the ascension. There were hundreds of paintings of saints and of the

Holy Family and of Mary, but not one of the supreme event in Christianity. And even the dead Christ is the subordinate figure. The central place is Mary's. Often she is shown holding a small lacerated figure in her lap, or often she is the only person represented at all. (Speer 1911:170)

Mackay presented a Christ who was powerless. "As regards His earthly life, he appears almost exclusively in two dramatic roles – the role of the infant in his mother's arms, and the role of the suffering and bleeding victim. It is the picture of a Christ who was born and died, but never lived" (1933:110). Nuñez and Taylor described this Christ as the "child who cannot talk; only Mary, who holds and protects him, can at times understand his infant babblings" (1989:229). If the portrait of Christ has in any way been distorted, the task of Protestant missionaries is to add additional details so that the image of Christ that emerges more accurately resembles the Christ of the New Testament.

Although Speer acknowledged the weaknesses of the Roman Catholic Church, he also cautioned against attacking the Church because it "holds some great fundamental truths. We respect its piety and consecration of many of its men and women. We are appalled at the mass of evil which has overcrusted it in Latin America, but even so, we cannot wage a war against it" (1911:176). A bitter denunciation of the Roman Catholic Church solidifies opposition to and mistrust of Protestants. Before missionaries harshly denounce the Catholic Church, they must realize what the Church has meant to those who speak of themselves as Catholics.

He has believed in a religion which has a ceremonial expression for every attitude and emotion. For penitential moments he has had the shadowy confessional, the living confessor in his robe and stole, the whispered words of advice or reproof or consolation. In his moments of religious exaltation in the Holy Communion – the only kind of real communion with Christ he knows – he has the hushed multitude, the dim religious light, the solemn bell, the golden glow of the illuminated altar, the murmured words of the priest in his vestments, and then the solemn laying

on his tongue of the wafer which he has been taught to believe contains 'the body and blood, soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ.' In the Protestant house of worship he sees none of these things which have been associated in his mind with all the religion he has ever known. It looks 'bare and cheerless.' (Pierson 1915:11)

Those who served the Home Mission Board in Panama were also critical of the Roman Catholic Church. Referring to the peoples living in the cities of Colon and Panama, Roberts reported,

These people are priest-ridden and sin-cursed. They have been under the influence of the Roman church four hundred years, and their religious and moral condition is simply appalling. They are now disgusted, are turning away from the church of Rome, and with this picture of Christianity before them they are turning to the devil for relief. They have the lottery, gambling dens, liquor shops, vice districts and sinful dives of every kind, but absolutely nothing to point them to higher life. (1922:25)

In 1932, Una Roberts Lawrence visited the country of Panama. She also criticized the Roman Catholic Church because, in her opinion, it perpetuated a religion in which Christ Himself was hidden.

Many times the priests themselves know nothing of the Christ, his wondrous coming, his marvelous life, his atoning death and his glorious resurrection. Nor can they know, with minds broken to complete submission to a system that removes all possibility of individual thought, on the part of its ministers. They have never known the Word of God with its simple story of God's love and mercy. Many have never ever seen it. How can they give it to their people? (1932:2)

The Catholic church in Nata was built in 1522 and is the oldest church on the American continent. During a visit to the interior of the country, Lawrence saw this church.

It is very old. It is very interesting. But it has never brought Christ to this far inland town of Panama, where for more than three centuries it has been the dominant influence over a simple, credulous people. Around it the village lies much as it did when it was built. Its people are pitifully poor. They can neither read nor write. Beggar boys crowding around us showed the ravages of man preventable physical handicap. They were in rags. Whatever religion was here presented in this ancient church has not taken effect in the life of its worshippers to improve either the physical or

mental conditions of their lives. There was no evidence that it had any effect on them religiously at all. (1932:2)

Although the church had been there for hundreds of years, nothing had been done to end the suffering and misery of the people who lived in its shadow. A religion that refuses to comfort the suffering cannot call itself Christianity. In his book *Handclasp of the Americas*, Carpenter concluded, “The religion has not met the spiritual need of the individual, and consequently, the people are in search of an experience which satisfies” (1949:99). A few years later Van Royen wrote, “There are some 850,000 people in the Republic of Panama and it would be a safe estimate that 840,000 of them need to know the message of salvation; to know Christ as a personal Saviour. They have a religion, but their religion is not the type that gives them a personal understanding of salvation through the blood of Christ” (1955:7). The words of these missionaries and pastors paint a somber scene in which the spiritual longings of a people were not being satisfied. If the missionaries from the Home Mission Board had come to the Panamanians with the living Christ, like the Foursquare Gospel did years earlier, they may have found a receptive audience.

In addition to the impact of the Roman Catholic Church in the country of Panama, the role of the urban elite in Panama’s historical development also possibly contributed to the receptivity of the gospel. “Since 1904, the oligarchy has dominated Panamanian politics by restricting the electoral process to personalist and non-programmatic political parties. Its economic power depends on the exploitation of Panama’s non-white national and foreign labor force” (Bethell 1990a:93). The oligarchy was more concerned about protecting its own interests than in helping the “average Panamanian, who was poor, black or mestizo, and marginal within the Panamanian political system” (Mabry 2003:4).

When Omar Torrijos became dictator in 1968, neither the United States nor the traditional elite supported him. Earlier in the history of the country, the military insured that the elite remained in power, but now, under Torrijos, the military seized control of the government. He represented “the interests of the commoner” (Nyrop 1980:148).

### Torrijos

worked on building a popular base for his government, forming an alliance among the National Guard and the various sectors of a society that had been the objects of social injustice at the hands of the oligarchy, particularly the long-neglected campesinos. He regularly traveled by helicopter to the villages throughout the interior to hear their problems and explain his new programs. (Meditz and Hanratty 1989:45)

When it is remembered that the Foursquare Gospel experienced significant growth among these people, the appeal of this movement may find its roots, not only in their religious disenchantment, but also their political disenfranchisement.

Pentecostalism has found a fertile soil in Latin America, and with its pragmatism and capacity for innovation, it has proven to be a sturdy and fruitful plant. In each country and each culture it has not only learned to survive but it has also brought hope for millions of people from the lowest strata of society. (Gaxiola-Gaxiola 1991:128)

It is not known how the country would have been affected if the missionaries of the Home Mission Board had not only understood that many Panamanians were dispossessed but also had presented the gospel in such a way which would have addressed their particular needs.

### Cuna Indians

The Cuna Indians, living in the San Blas Islands on Panama’s northern coast, are “animists, finding souls or spirits in all things such as plants, animals, rocks, winds, storms, and stars” (Keeler 1955:22). The Cunas spoke of themselves as the Golden



People from the Sun, but they have also been described as “perhaps, among the most primitive people of the western hemisphere” (Diaz 1958a:28).

The San Blas people have a culture that is primitive, barely touched by modern civilization. They have no communication with the outside world except the small planes and trading vessels that visit the island. They have no means of transportation except the cayuca. There are no doctors and no industry and no animals except the dogs and cats and the wild animals of the jungle. They make their own tools from the hard woods of the forest. They hunt, fish and go daily to the mainland where they raise coconuts, bananas, plantains, and corn to provide a day by day existence. (Dossey 1956:14)

Referring to the culture of the San Blas Indian as “primitive” suggests that cultures can be “ranged along a continuum from primitive to the most highly developed (or ‘civilized’)” (Shenk 1999:53). The word “primitive” can be used to “describe tribal groups living close to nature and showing definite roots in the prehistoric past” (Weyer 1961:12), but the word also has negative connotations and “may unintentionally suggest low intellect, crude habits, or brutish appetites” (Weyer 1961:12). When people are viewed as primitive, missionaries can assume that their task is not only to evangelize but also to civilize these primitive people. The Cuna people had learned how to survive in the jungles of Panama. They lived in isolation, protecting their way of life, limiting those who would come to visit them. Having assumed that the Cuna were “primitive,” they would always be viewed negatively, and the strengths of their culture would never be recognized or appreciated.

Ethnocide or culturecide has been defined as “the destruction of a people’s way of life” (Davis 1999:76). Would the Cuna’s way of life become extinct? Nyrop noted that the Cuna Indians

are considered the group with the best chance of retaining their cultural individuality. They engage in considerable trade with surrounding

Panamanians and, as a result of these contacts, speak Spanish extensively. Local surveys indicate that almost 37 percent are bilingual, and some 20 percent speak Spanish in the home. Nevertheless they maintain a close-knit internal organization that tends to shield them from the eroding effects of overexposure to alien influences. Even during periods of sizable migration to work in the former Canal Zone, as occurred during World War II, they demonstrated little cultural accommodation. Although little of the art of the preconquest era is practiced, Cuna women have preserved many native handcrafts. (1980:64)

As early as 1947, D. B. Stout insisted, however, “Few people realize the great rapidity with which the ancient, primitive culture of the San Blas is disappearing. Gone are the noserings and earrings of men, the body painting, painted loincloth, ceremonial metejar of the hair cutting ceremony, gold working, pottery, weaving, the honor head-band. Even the memory of customs or culture objects have disappeared.” (1947:192). Knight would later assert, “On every hand the San Blas people are moving towards modern civilization; and the old culture is breaking down” (1965:80).

Because the economy of the islands is precarious, with people living close to the subsistence level, some 4,000 men work away from the islands on the banana plantations, for the U.S. government in the Canal Zone, or in Panama in general. As these return, they come back with ideas of Western civilization and no interest in the ancient Cuna culture. Nor do they seek the native professions of medicine, clairvoyancy, devil driving, or others that would keep them in touch with the old historical stories, religious beliefs and taboos. (Knight 1965:81)

It is understood that the breaking down of a culture leaves a vacuum that can result in receptivity to the gospel. What is happening among the Cuna people can be described as a paradigm shift. Joel Arthur Barker, in his book *Future Edge*, describes a paradigm as “a set of rules and regulations (written or unwritten) that does two things: (1) it establishes or defines boundaries; and (2) it tells you how to behave inside the boundaries in order to be successful” (1992:32). For the Cuna people the boundaries are shifting as traditional cultural values are being challenged by Western civilization. The Cunas are in the first

stages of a paradigm shift, what Barker refers to as “ a change to a new game, a new set of rules” (1992:37).

Barker, in the conclusion of his book, outlines the steps taken during a paradigm shift.

Step 1 The established paradigm begins to be less effective.

Step 2 The affected community senses the situation, begins to lose trust in the old rules.

Step 3 Turbulence grows as trust is reduced.

Step 4 Creators or identifiers of the new paradigm step forward to offer their solutions (many of these solutions have been around for decades waiting for this chance).

Step 5 Turbulence increases even more as paradigm conflict becomes apparent.

Step 6 Affected community is extremely upset and demands clear solutions.

Step 7 One of the suggested new paradigms demonstrates ability to solve a small set of significant problems that the old paradigm could not.

Step 8 Some of the affected community accepts the new paradigm as an act of faith.

Step 9 With stronger support and funding, the new paradigm gains momentum.

Step 10 Turbulence begins to wane as the new paradigm starts solving the problems and the affected community has a new way to deal with the world that seems successful. (1992:206)

It is not known how long will be needed to complete each of these steps or if the process to the adaptation of a new paradigm will be frustrated by resistance from those who protect the traditional cultural values. By applying the model of the paradigm shift, the missionary will not only recognize where the Cuna people are in the process, but also can

anticipate the next step. Barker's steps also suggest how missionaries should approach the Cuna people. They must show that Christianity has answers that will satisfy the questions they are asking.

### The Message: Relevant or Irrelevant

It has been argued that "the single most important element for planning strategies for evangelism is an understanding of the people to be evangelized" (Dayton and Fraser 1980:109). Missionaries may earnestly and sincerely attempt to share the gospel with others. However, if they do not know the culture or the historical background of the people to whom they are speaking, they may unintentionally offend them or may be unable to explain the relevancy of the gospel or show its superiority to the ideas or practices which the people accept. In the article, "Pragmatic Strategy for Tomorrow's Mission," Wagner identifies four "common pitfalls in missionary methodology" (1973b:155). The third, "using an individual approach in a group-oriented culture," is applicable to the Cuna Indians. "Western missionaries," he explained, "have a difficult time understanding that other peoples may be less individualistic than they. Individual action on important matters is repugnant to many cultures of the world" (Wagner 1973b:156). The culture of the Cuna Indians would be such a culture.

In his book *Diffusion of Innovations*, Everett M. Rogers defines an innovation as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption" (1995:11). For those who have never heard the gospel, the announcement that "that through this man is preached unto the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38, King James Version) is a radical idea. Shearer argues, "If the gospel advocate can convince his hearers he has something desirable, then he has produced the want that will lead to

receptivity and change” (1973:161). However, the gospel is desirable only if the people to whom the missionaries are speaking believe or can be convinced that what they now have is undesirable. If the Panamanian people, including the Cuna Indians, were receptive to the gospel, it can be assumed that the gospel had been presented in such a way that demonstrated its relevance. However, the slow growth of Baptist churches throughout Panama does not indicate that receptivity to the gospel had been followed by acceptance of the gospel. “The claim to relevance without growth is nonsense because it is difficult to see how a body can be relevant to its situation and still not attract others who wish to join it, or at least hear its message” (González 1969:116).

Compatibility, a characteristic of innovations, “is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters. An idea that is incompatible with the values and norms of a social system will not be adopted as rapidly as an innovation that is compatible” (Rogers 1995:16). For the Cuna people,

the principle foci of interests, the behavioral patterns reflecting major values and attitudes, in modern San Blas culture and personality are: cooperation, prudish modesty concerning all sex matters; modesty concerning one’s own actions and achievements; status achievement through industriousness, learning and experience; acquisition of certain wealth forms, of which some are hoarded and others displayed; and hospitality, generosity and consideration for others. (Stout 1947:47)

These values and attitudes are discussed in the Bible and are descriptive of Christian character. Instead of suggesting a radical shift in moral values, the gospel reinforces the behavior they already admire. The Cunas, on the other hand, are displeased when any one

is guilty of shirking his cooperative responsibilities, or is lazy, stingy, inhospitable, suspicious, sly, or a braggart, he will be publicly censured in a “singing” meeting, others will avoid him and will not reciprocate in mutual labor. If he is immodest in speech or action concerning sexual

matters or steals from another Cuna, he is regarded as having sinned, and will in addition be punished by God. (Stout 1947:48)

The Bible condemns these same transgressions. Having learned the culture of the Cuna people, missionaries can avoid behavior that the Cunans find displeasing or unacceptable. Having learned the culture of the Cuna people, they can begin to speak about sin in a manner that makes sense to them. Like any culture, the Cuna culture “has its demonic as well as admirable qualities” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:165). Peter Miller, a Cuna translator of the Bible, recognized that certain elements of the Cuna culture should be preserved. “I tell the women to keep wearing their traditional molas. It is rather sad that no one listens to the *kantule* tell tribal traditions any more” (Vandervelde 1968:27). However, he insisted that certain elements should be changed, like the chica orgies. Having learned the culture of the Cuna Indians the missionaries will “be able to select those Scriptural truths which will have the greatest relevance to their particular needs and concerns” (Beekman 1974:132). However, it must be remembered that

these are not usually the same as those which have appealed to the missionary in his own culture. While the basic need of man and the basic message is the same everywhere, the most effective presentation of the gospel is that which takes into account the cultural beliefs and fears of the people. (Beekman 1974:132)

As missionaries begin to learn about the needs, cultural beliefs, and fears of the Cuna Indians, they will begin to look at the Bible from a different perspective. Before coming to the San Blas Islands, they may have easily overlooked any mention in the Bible about evil spirits. Since the Cuna Indians are animists, that issue cannot be ignored. The following list (Hile 1977:501) identifies the felt needs of the Chiquimula-Quiché Indians of Guatemala. Their felt needs would possibly be similar to that of the Cuna Indians because they too are animists.

1. Need to be freed from evil spirits.
2. Need to be freed from the capriciousness of the gods.
3. Desire for longer life and freedom from sickness.
4. The need to be freed from the results of sin.
5. The need for a good life; crops, rain, food and domestic animals.
6. Need for better returns on money and time spent for religion.
7. Need to be an accepted part of the community.
8. The need to obey the rituals and traditions and to respect ancestors.
9. The need to be freed from drunkenness.
10. Need to deal with sin.

It is not suggested that this list is descriptive of the felt needs of the Cuna Indians in every detail, but until their felt needs are identified, the relevance of the message of Christ cannot be demonstrated. If people are to see the relevance of the gospel, “it must speak of things that are real things in the lives of the hearers. It must therefore begin by accepting their issues, using their models, and speaking their language” (Newbiggin 1980:155). Because felt needs are not universal, each people group must be viewed separately. It can not be assumed that the West Indians, the Spanish-speaking Panamanians, and the Cunas have the same felt needs.

In addition to the felt needs, however, are the universal and supracultural needs, “the needs of man as viewed by God” (Hile 1977:500). It would be thought that the Bible, having been written thousands of years ago, would now be outdated and irrelevant. Through those pages, however, God was not only speaking to those in the changing times in which they were written, but He was speaking to those living today. Many in the world have never heard of Jesus Christ. Whether they are living in the slums of Panama and Colon or on the San Blas Islands, there is a need that transcends language and cultural barriers, a need to know the Savior. The *Willowbank Report* adds,

We acknowledge that these ‘felt needs’ may sometimes be symptoms of deeper needs which are not immediately felt or recognized by the people. A doctor does not necessarily accept a patient’s self-diagnosis.

Nevertheless, we see the need to begin where people are, but not to stop there. We accept our responsibility gently and patiently to lead them on to see themselves, as we see ourselves, as rebels to whom the gospel directly speaks with a message of pardon and hope. To begin where people are not is to share an irrelevant message; to stay where people are and never lead them on to the fullness of God's good news, is to share a truncated gospel. The humble sensitivity of love will avoid both errors. (Lausanne Committee 1978:16)

There is no indication that any missionary, labouring among the Cuna Indians, has tried to find "words, concepts, art forms, social groupings and psychological characteristics" which "can become communication links from the Gospel to the people" (Rossman 1963:10). God will work in the lives of these people to remove what is displeasing to Him, but in its place will emerge a culture and a people that more clearly reflect His purposes.

### Conclusion

Although there were repeated assertions that the peoples of Panama were receptive to the gospel, there was a failure to ask what had they heard or assumed about the gospel that caused them to be receptive to the gospel. Why were they willing to listen? As each of the different people groups in Panama are examined, different reasons for receptivity emerge. Having discovered why a particular people are receptive to the gospel, missionaries can speak directly to their fears, needs, and aspirations.

The West Indians who first came to Panama had been uprooted from what was familiar to them on the islands of the Caribbean and had come to a land where they faced prejudice and poverty. It is not known if the West Indians will be able to retain aspects of their culture while being assimilated into Panamanian society or if they will one day lose



their distinctive identity. The West Indians, however, can find within the pages of the Bible an affirmation of their worth as individuals and as a people.

As for the Cuna Indians, there has never been a study, from a missiological point of view, to determine how the Cuna Indians should be approached. Their culture is collapsing, and when that culture is gone, an opportunity to discover how God would manifest Himself in that culture also will be lost. Since the Cuna are animists, they will be drawn to the miracles of Christ, especially deliverance from demon possession.

The task of missionaries is not only to address the fears and aspirations of the people to whom they are speaking, but, most importantly, they are to share the gospel. The Spanish-speaking Panamanians who have been influenced by Roman Catholicism need to hear about the Jesus who died for their sins and they need to discover the Christ who experienced hunger and thirst. The New Testament stresses not only the divinity of Christ, but also His humanity. He is not only the Lamb who died for the sins of the world, He is also the Good Shepherd.

## CHAPTER 6

### Evaluating the Strategy of the Home Mission Board: The Principle of Advantage

For hundreds of years, Roman Catholicism was unchallenged by the presence of Protestant missionaries in Latin America. Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and other churches have now been established and this has changed the religious landscape in Central and South America.

In the new market of faith, Latin Americans are at liberty to choose among the hundreds of religious products that best suit their spiritual and material needs. After four centuries of religious monopoly in which the only choice for the popular classes was either to consume the Catholic product or not consume at all, impoverished believers, and indeed all Latin Americans, can now select from among a dizzying array of religious options... (Chesnut 2003:21)

In this competitive environment, “the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be *marketed*. It must be ‘sold’ to a clientele that is no longer constrained to ‘buy’” (Berger 1969:138). While some may be offended by this analogy, Finke and Starke defend the use of “market” terminology in discussions of religion.

We see nothing inappropriate in acknowledging that where religious affiliation is a matter of choice, religious organizations must compete for members and the ‘invisible hand’ of the market place is as unforgiving of ineffective religious firms as it is of their commercial counterparts. (1992:17).

The failure or success of the Baptist, Methodist, Foursquare Gospel, or Roman Catholic denominations in this market environment will depend upon “(1) aspects of their organizational structure, (2) their sales representatives, (3) their product, and (4) their marketing techniques” (Finke and Starke 1992:17). If a denomination fails to survive, or

does not experience significant growth, the failure can be traced to a variety of reasons, not only an inherent weakness in its strategy or marketing technique, but also the person or sales representative given the responsibility to implement the marketing technique. Since the Pentecostal movement has experienced significant growth in Latin America, how do its sales representatives, marketing techniques, and organizational structure differ from the other denominations? Are there any significant differences in the product they offer than that offered by the other denominations?

Pentecostals, more than the other traditional denominations, have been more successful in changing the religious landscape in Central and South America. In the article “The Catholic Church Confronts the Pentecostal Challenge,” Edgar Moros Ruano, argues, Pentecostalism “is not simply a matter of impressive numbers and crowds of enthusiastic people making a fleeting racket. Rather, Pentecostalism represents a profound challenge to the Catholic monopoly over the symbolic goods of salvation” (1996:158). The Pentecostal movement can be viewed as a threat to the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, but it can also be seen as an incentive for change. For that reason, the “Pentecostal challenge is beneficial to the Catholic church, since it forces the church to examine itself critically and to look at new forms, more faithful to the gospel, in all dimensions of the church’s life and thought” (Ruano 1996:158).

The principle of advantage suggests that “the strategy must be proved for the creation and/or maintenance of a competitive advantage in the selected area of activity” (Rumelt 2003:81). This principle is also reflected in Mintzberg’s understanding of strategy. He has broadened the traditional understanding of strategy as plan to include strategy as position. “As position, strategy encourages us to look at organizations in their

competitive environments – how they find their positions and protect them in order to meet competition, avoid it, or subvert it” (2003:9). How does a particular denomination not only create but also sustain a competitive advantage over its rivals? “In order to thrive in the new religious economy, Latin American spiritual firms must develop an attractive product and know how to market it to popular consumers” (Chesnut 2003:21). It can be suggested that the Pentecostals have experienced greater growth in Panama than the Baptists because they have offered a more attractive product to the Panamanian people. The market analogy, however, mars the biblical image of the Church, reducing it the level of a business enterprise. If a market environment fosters competition, cooperation among denominations has to be abandoned in order to preserve the dominance of the more successful denomination. “Since the consumer’s needs and the competition are ever expanding, the church finds itself in a pursuit which requires it to adopt the same materialistic mindset that secular businesses embrace in order to win the market share” (Doran 1996a:79). A customer may purchase a product without knowing the company that made the product and will never establish a relationship with the company or make a commitment to the company. The person who accepts Christ as Savior, however, becomes a member of His church, and will be challenged to live as a responsible and moral member in His body. Membership in a local body is expected and demanded, thereby producing a tangible demonstration of the presence of God in the midst of an ungodly world. Clients can be manipulated or misled into purchasing a product which they do not need, or a product which, when used, is proven to be ineffective or unable to accomplish its intended purpose. The church is not a business enterprise, but a living organism.

Developing an attractive product, however, can also imply offering a product that appeals to the consumer, a product that the consumer desires to have and will purchase. The consumer can become the most significant factor when the business enterprise decides not only which product to manufacture but also how to market it. In the area of evangelism, catering to the whims of the people can result in a gospel that has been misshapened or distorted. It must be remembered that the gospel is not to be altered to make it more palatable to consumers. The emphasis is not placed upon a product, but upon a personal and intimate relationship with a living God, made possible through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The emphasis is not on a product to be purchased, but on a gift that is offered by God and therefore must either be rejected or received.

The Pentecostal movement has not positioned itself in this religious environment by devising a superior marketing strategy. Instead, it has fervently embraced a Biblical pattern. Hodges argues that “the purpose of missionary endeavor is to establish indigenous churches” (1953:3) and “indigenous churches are patterned after the New Testament model” (1957:19). The New Testament model is not one of several models that can be chosen. “The Acts of the Apostles is the only authentic pattern given for the operation of the New Testament church” (Hodges 1957:97) and, for Pentecostals, is “regarded as a normative record of the normative primitive church” (Hollenweger 1972:321).

While “the traditional churches are still stuck between Easter and Pentecost” (Hollenweger 1972:330), the Pentecostal movement attempts to restore the Church to the Biblical model found in the book of Acts.

Since God has not changed, the disobedience of Christians (Acts 5:32) must be the cause of the degeneration of the church. Accordingly,

Pentecostals ask: In what way have we departed from the commandments of God, so that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the healing of the sick, prophecy, and speaking in tongues have disappeared, and the church has become lifeless and powerless? (Hollenweger 1972:321)

Since the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as the healing of the sick, prophecy, and speaking in tongues, appear prominently in its pages, it is assumed that the Church that God envisions for today would also possess those gifts.

If the Pentecostal movement is studied without first examining the writings of Roland Allen, it will not be known to what extent he has influenced this movement.

The thrust of his work calls for a theology of mission rising from empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and that appeal rings clear to Pentecostals. Allen really said little against or for speaking in tongues: with their restorationist impulse, Pentecostals could easily forgive and correct the omission. Some of Allen's favorite points the Pentecostal missionaries could overlook as Anglican nuances not relevant to their program: his insistence on voluntary clergy (although Pentecostal lay workers abound in third-world missions), his attachment to apostolic succession, his concern for the sacraments. Just as Pentecostals imported much of their theology, so did they acquire their missiology largely from Roland Allen. (Spittler 1998:415)

Are his fingerprints only smudges or are they clearly seen and easily identifiable? Where do the Pentecostals agree with Allen and where do they disagree with him? "For a church to be truly indigenous, Allen suggested that missionary practice ought to observe five apostolic principles" (Shenk 1990:30).

- (1) New converts must be taught so clearly that they can readily translate teaching into practice.
- (2) Church organizations must make sense and be supportable within the local culture and economy.
- (3) The economic basis of the church must be geared to the economy of its members and independent of any foreign subsidies.
- (4) Christians must be taught and practice mutual responsibility and church discipline.

(5) The church should immediately exercise spiritual gifts to serve and strengthen itself.

These principles are described in the last chapter of *Paul's Missionary Methods* and will provide a framework by which it can be shown how the Pentecostal movement was influenced by the writings of Roland Allen and how it has positioned itself to experience significant growth among the Latin American people.

### **Roland Allen's First Principle**

All teaching to be permanent must be intelligible and so capable of being grasped and understood that those who have received it can retain, use it, and hand it on. The test of all teaching is practice. Nothing should be taught which cannot be so grasped and used. (Allen 1962a:151)

The *Church Development Depth Study* recognized that members of the Baptist churches were being lost through poor conservation methods. Allen's first principle, however, can not only be applied to diagnose the situation, but also to correct it. This principle can also be applied to the significant number of members who were only nominally attached to both the Roman Catholic churches and the West Indian churches. What was being taught to those who had committed themselves to Christ and had become members of local Baptist churches? Seemingly what had been taught had not been retained. If it was not retained, it was probably because what had been taught was not usable or practical. Had those who accepted Christ been given Biblical knowledge that they could apply to their particular lives and which addressed the daily issues that they were facing?

Although members were being lost through poor conservation methods, no attempt was made to understand why this was occurring. It is not known how many of

those lost through poor conservation methods had been or had not been enrolled in Sunday School. The *Church Growth Indicators Analysis*, however, examined the growth of Baptist churches in Panama from 1976-1989. The analysis indicated that the Sunday School was “the major discipleship organization in the local church” (Slack 1990:5) and then concluded, “During the time 6,386 individuals have been baptized and only 1,240 have been added to the membership records, the Sunday Schools have added 1,808 to their records. Only a figure equal to 28.3% of the individuals who have been baptized have been enrolled in the Sunday School” (Slack 1990:5).

Table 6.1. Church Growth, 1976-1989

YEAR	MEMBERS	BAPTISMS	SUNDAY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT
1976	6,534	440	7,996
1977	6,393	509	7,767
1978	5,966	501	7,979
1979	6,245	372	7,909
1980	6,315	435	8,408
1981	6,171	410	7,814
1982	6,311	437	7,992
1983	7,217	567	8,898
1984	7,851	503	8,489
1985	6,686	393	7,381
1986	6,928	435	7,625
1987	7,063	439	8,809
1988	7,279	515	9,894
1989	7,459	430	9,236

It is not known if the churches understood the importance of the Sunday School for Southern Baptists. *A Church Organized and Functioning* (Howse and Thomason 1963) discussed several functions of the Sunday School. Those functions included

Teach the Biblical Revelation  
 Reach All Prospects for the Church  
 Lead All Church Members to Witness



Lead All Church Members to Worship  
Provide Opportunities for Personal Ministries of the Church

It would be expected that those who had become members of the local church would have been enrolled in the Sunday School. From 1976 to 1987, however, approximately three out of four were not enrolled in Sunday School. The Sunday School was designed not only for the study of the Bible, but also encouraged worshipping and witnessing. If there was a failure to conserve members, there would be fewer attending the worship services and fewer witnessing to the neighbors and friends. The question is then asked, "How can these new members be assimilated into the church, learn the Bible and become vibrant witnesses if they are not brought under regular Bible study? It is to be expected that they will continue to "go out the back door" if better enlistment in regular Bible study is not achieved" (Slack 1990:5).

According to the *Church Development Depth Study*, one of the factors that contributed positively to the growth of the Baptist churches was the use of Baptist literature.

In both the questionnaires and the interviews pastors gave high marks for the quality of Baptist literature which is being used almost exclusively. A denominational consciousness and loyalty is one of the results that has come from using Baptist materials both in the English and Spanish churches. (Home Mission Board 1972:12)

The *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study*, however, later concluded, "Baptist distinctives are relatively unknown by rank and file church members" (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:2). There is no explanation for why this was occurring, and there was also no standard by which it can be determined how the teaching and training organizations were expected to perform and what was anticipated they would be able to achieve. However, the committee also concluded, "There has been a general decline in the

teaching and training organizations of the churches in recent years” (Home Mission Board 1972:25). The committee therefore recommended “that efforts be made to adapt the religious education organization to the needs of Panama, and that the function of teaching and training be given high priority in the denomination’s plans” (Home Mission Board 1972:25). This implies that there needed to a refocusing on the functions of the Sunday School, and an evaluation as to whether or not it was achieving its intended purposes.

Although the loss of membership suggested that the Baptist churches had failed to teach and train its members, the apostle Paul “succeeded in training his converts that men who came to him absolutely ignorant of the Gospel were able to maintain their position with the help of occasional letters and visits at crises of special difficulty” (Allen 1962:87). The stability of the church was not attributed to how long Paul remained in the community or the extent to which he exerted control over the local church. The apostle Paul taught his converts “a doctrine of God the Father, the Creator; a doctrine of Jesus, the Son, the Redeemer, the Savior; a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling source of strength; but these in the simplest and most practical form” (Allen 1962a:87). Such teaching is not beyond the ability of any missionary or church. Even when Baptist materials are not available, anyone who has a copy of the Bible can teach these same fundamental truths. Paul’s teaching was balanced. Having spoken about God the Father and God the Son, he did not fail to mention God the Holy Spirit.

#### A. Retain the teaching

The success of any teaching is directly related not only to what the students have received, but also to what they are able to retain and pass on. The teaching will not be

retained unless it can be used. Using it and handing it on reinforces retention. The Church Development Depth Study Committee concluded, "Gains that are made in evangelism and the baptism of new members are often nullified by losses from the membership roles" (Home Mission Board 1972). It was then recommended "that emphasis be placed on giving better indoctrination and immediate involvement in Christian service to new converts" (Home Mission Board 1972:25). It is significant that the members of the Baptist church would not only be taught, but also be given opportunities to apply what was learned in Christian service. Allen criticizes the condescending attitude that fails to give those won to Christ an opportunity to participate in the life of the Church.

We have done everything for them. We have taught them, baptized them, shepherded them. We have managed their funds, ordered their services, built their churches, provided their teachers. We have nursed them, fed them, doctored them. We have trained them, and have even ordained some of them. We have done everything for them except acknowledge any equality. We have done everything for them, but very little with them. We have done everything for them except give place to them. We have treated them as 'dear children', but not as 'brethren'. (Allen 1962a:143)

When viewed as children they will be thought to be helpless. This attitude only delays the maturation of the local church because it is thought that the church cannot survive without the continued presence of the missionary. Instead the capability of the members to assume responsibility for the church must be recognized. Like the missionaries, they have access to the throne of God through prayer and the Holy Spirit is as much present in their lives as He is in the lives of the missionaries. Teaching is retained when they are able to manage their own funds, order their own service, and build their own churches. These tasks need to be taken from the hands of the missionaries and placed in the hands of those to whom the church must belong. When the members assume responsibilities in

Christian service, the church is less likely to become a replication of the missionary's choice of music or style of worship.

### B. Use the teaching

Statistics did not reveal if the loss of membership among Baptists was occurring more often among the Cuna Indians, the West Indians, or the Spanish-speaking Panamanians. Where was the loss occurring? After having identified where the loss was occurring, then it can be asked, "Why was a significant loss of membership occurring among this segment of society?" It can be argued that the loss in membership could be attributed to Biblical teaching that was not relevant and which could not be applied to the situations they faced in their day to day lives. The articles from the official publications of the Home Mission Board provide little information about the day to day lives of the people to whom the gospel was being shared.

How did the teaching in the Baptist and the Pentecostal churches differ? Was more emphasis placed upon the theoretical or the practical? How were the lives of those who were influenced by Pentecostalism transformed by the gospel? For Baptists, there is no information that explains how Biblical understanding was related to their day to day lives. For Pentecostals,

*The home is crowded, with no privacy; frequently the most essential things of life are lacking. Instead of being a sphere where one can realize a meaningful life for others, the place of work turns into a locus of subjection and exploitation. Worse, work often cannot be found. The worker (or would-be worker) feels superfluous and useless. The street is the place of the perpetual search for work – a road without end. It is the place where all vices run rampant, the place of danger and crime.*  
(Westmeir 1993:76)

The encounter with Christ did not change the crowded living conditions at home. They continued to face danger and crime in their neighborhoods but Christianity gave them “a livable life” (Sepúlveda 1989:83).

To be saved is to change one’s way of life, not the conditions of living. What is changed is the way in which the person establishes a relationship with those conditions of living. Therefore, “to be saved” is, in other words, “to be a different person,” to be a “new creature.”

In this way, the idea of “perdition” takes on more significance: the world is “perdition” in the sense that life before conversion is a life that is lost, it an unsustainable way of living; it is to lack a “livable life.” In short, “world of perdition” refers to a place where life and the individual “are lost,” where identity is impossible and the fall is visible; a world of loneliness, of hate, of sadness, of fear, of shame, of envy, of neglect of moral degradation.” (Sepúlveda 1989:83)

This is not to suggest that Pentecostals were not involved in changing the conditions in which they lived, but even in such oppressive situations, they, through a personal relationship with Christ, had discovered a life that was sustainable.

The conversion experience makes it possible for the Pentecostal believer to break out of “the world” (this world) into a new life. The church becomes the new home with power to transform the old. The church also becomes the place where meaningful existence for others can be realized. It gives the believer the identity and worth that could not be found in his or her *lugar del trabajo* (place of work). Thus the church turns into the locus from which the world (street ) can be effectively evangelized. (Westmeier 1993:76)

The Roman Catholic Church is the background for the Pentecostal movement in Latin America. Pentecostal worship has been described as a possible “reaction against the extreme formalism of their former religion” (Read, Monterroso, Johnson 1969:315). In Catholic churches the worshippers were spectators, but in the Pentecostal worship experience, they became participants.

In sharp contrast to what takes place in traditional Catholic or Protestant worship, almost anyone accepted by the Pentecostal community is allowed to interpret Scripture during worship, to moralize about the conditions of

life, to preach about the changes needed in personal conduct, to pray spontaneously, to offer suggestions for the community's response to an evil world, and to vote on questions of importance such as large expenditures of community assets. (Cleary 1997a:7)

Among the teachings of the Pentecostal movement, it has been pointed out that "the effectiveness of Pentecostalism is found in the possibility it offers of a religious experience with a mediator, with direct access to God" (Sepúlveda 1989:87). This teaching is known by Southern Baptists as the priesthood of the believer. Although it was a significant doctrinal teaching for Baptists, the Pentecostals used it more effectively.

### C. Hand it on

The teaching of Paul was so effective that "his converts became missionaries" (Allen 1962a:93). In the Pentecostal movement, every Christian potentially becomes an instrument whereby others can not only hear the gospel, but also accept Christ as Savior and Lord. The people who have heard and embraced the gospel now begin to tell others what they themselves have experienced. "The only requirements for service are knowing the Lord, a public declaration of faith in Him, and courage to speak up. With every convert the working force grows" (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:318). They speak about a relationship with Christ that has radically changed their lives. Since the Pentecostals have grown through spontaneous expansion, it can be assumed that

He speaks from his heart because he is too eager to be able to refrain from speaking. His subject has gripped him. He speaks of what he knows, and knows by experience. The truth which he imparts is his own truth. He knows its force. He is speaking almost as much to relieve his own mind as to convert his hearer, and yet he is as eager to convert his hearer as to relieve his own mind, for his mind can only be relieved by sharing his new truth, and his truth is shared until another has received it. (Allen 1962b:10)

Pentecostals not only preach in the streets and from house to house, but “rubbing shoulders with family and friends seems to be far more significant in the spread of the faith” (Escobar 1992a:33).

When asked why their Churches continue to grow, they said, “We grow because we preach in the open air. We do not wait until men are interested in going to church. We go to them to interest them. Anyone who would try this same method would also grow. Men are interested in what we say on the street corner because we are not talking about cold theories but about what we ourselves have experienced.” (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:317)

Why were the Baptists not growing? “It is not enough for the Church to be established in a place where many are coming and going unless the people who come and go not only learn the Gospel, but learn it in a way that they can propagate it” (Allen 1962a:13).

Allen’s conclusion implies that there was something amiss in the teaching in the Baptist churches. He also suggested that there was something fundamentally wrong in the lives those who belonged to the Baptist churches and yet who did not feel the same compulsion to share the gospel like the Pentecostals did. “Christians receive the Spirit of Jesus, and the Spirit of Jesus is the missionary Spirit, the Spirit of Him who came into the world to bring back lost souls to the Father. Naturally, when they receive that Spirit they begin to seek to bring back others, even as He did” (Allen 1962a:93).

### Allen’s Second Principle

All organization in like manner must be of such a character that it can be understood and maintained. It must be an organization of which the people see the necessity: it must be an organization which they can and will support. It must not be so elaborate or so costly that small and infant communities cannot supply the funds necessary for its maintenance. The test of all organizations is naturalness and permanence. Nothing should be established as part of the ordinary Church life of the people which they cannot understand and carry on. (Allen 1962a:151)

It is not known what Allen would have said about the Pentecostal movement. He lived and wrote before the movement had attracted the attention of the religious community. Allen was critical of the Christianity that had been transported to foreign lands and would later describe that Christianity as exotic, dependent, and uniform. The Pentecostal movement, however, would prove to be the exception.

### A. Exotic

Everywhere Christianity is still an exotic. We have not yet succeeded in planting it in any heathen land that it has become indigenous. If there is one doubtful exception to that rule, it is a country where from the very beginning Pauline methods were followed more closely than elsewhere. But generally speaking it still remains true that Christianity in the lands of our missions is still a foreign religion. It has not yet really taken root in the country. (Allen 1962a:141)

When the Baptists are compared with the Pentecostals, the Baptists appear to be the foreign religion which “has not yet taken root in the country” (Allen 1962a:141). His critical assessment of missionary activity provides a framework in which the effort of the Home Mission Board can be evaluated. After being educated in the United States, Lonnie Iglesias, with his wife, returned to the San Blas Islands as a missionary. Sending someone like Iglesias, a Cuna Indian, overseas to receive an education, however, could also be a reason for concern.

They return to their people with strange ideas and strange habits. They are lonely, and they have to struggle against the perils of loneliness. They are not even the best teachers of people from whose intellectual and spiritual life they have for so long been absent. They do not know how to answer their difficulties or to supply their necessities. They know so much Christian doctrine and philosophy that they have forgotten the religion of their country. (Allen 1962a:106)

Iglesias’ marriage to Marvel violated a taboo of the Cuna Indians. “By marrying a foreigner, he had broken the traditions of his people, customs to which most of the Cuna people still clung jealousy” (Iglesias 1967:41). When Lonnie returned to the San Blas



Islands with his bride, his family seemed to accept them, but some of the Cunas were resistant, offended not only by their marriage, but also disturbed that any children born to them would be of mixed blood. Such children at other times would usually have been killed.

Iglesias and his wife were invited to begin a school on the island of Ailigandi. The first school building was constructed of boards from Panama City and a thatched roof, but within three years termites had destroyed it. When he and wife rebuilt the school, he also “broke other taboos by using cement for building” (Iglesias 1967:56).

The Indians watched closely the process of block making and saw in it something very unholy. Only a few blocks had been made when Lonnie was hailed before the town council for practicing Black Magic. They had seen Lonnie take sand and powder and water, mix them together with a shovel, and tamp them into an iron box. They had seen him make a few magic passes over the top with a trowel, and the next day it was not sand and powder and water any more, but a stone. “Nobody,” they declared, “can change sand and powder and water into a rock unless Nia tummati [the Big Devil] does it for him.” (Keeler 1956a:173)

He was acquitted by the town council and allowed to continue the construction of his home and school. Was there a way Iglesias could have introduced an innovation such as concrete that would have caused less friction? Was he too abrupt? Could he have avoided this confrontation if he had gradually introduced the concept of concrete to the villagers or had involved them in the process itself? Iglesias did not attempt to change the customs of the Cuna people, but did he preserve those customs and incorporate them into the life of church and the lives of the worshipers there?

A photograph in the article “First Christian Wedding at San Blas Island” shows three Cuna women. The first woman is dressed in a white wedding gown, a gift from the women of the Balboa Heights Baptist Church in the Canal Zone. The other two women,

dressed in the customary dress of the Cuna women, had unexpectedly decided that they too wanted to be married, but there was not sufficient time to provide wedding gowns for them. The article continues, “It was quite a sight to see the three couples going down the aisle, the first in a white dress and veil and the other two barefoot. But everyone did well, including the ring bearer, bridesmaids, and best men” (Van Royen 1956:8). The article concluded, “This is only an example of the way the people of Panama and the Canal Zone are embracing Christianity” (Van Royen 1956:8).

Francisco Diaz described a different wedding in the article “A San Blas Wedding.”

One day as I was passing Raquel’s house, I saw her parents and kinsmen making a bridal hammock, about twice the size of the regular hammocks used for beds. My heart sank very low. Raquel was going to be married, and I hadn’t even been invited to the wedding. I went home and sat on my palmetto mat and pitied myself.

When evening came I could hear the singing and the celebrating, and I was very sad. Then, all of a sudden, I knew that I was surrounded by men. Four of them caught me and held me. I tried to get away, but not very hard.

They led me to Raquel’s house, picked me up, threw me in the big hammock, and stood guard to see that I didn’t get out. Then they went to get Raquel. Everybody was laughing and shouting and having a big time. The women and girls surrounded Raquel and tried to keep the men away, but they broke through and took Raquel to the hammock. Very gently, and with great ceremony, they lifted Raquel into the hammock beside me. That was the marriage ceremony. Then we joined the others in the feast and celebration. (1958b:21)

Raquel’s marriage was very different from the “Christian wedding” described earlier. She did not wear a white wedding gown, but her wedding was a typical Cuna wedding. Raquel and Francisco now have three sons and a daughter and they, with the assistance of friends and neighbors, built their own home. “We got material together and let the neighbors know when we would build. First, we put down three big supporting poles and

then put up the walls. For a roof, we fastened to the rafters palmetto leaves, overlapping so that the rain could not come through” (Diaz 1958b:21).

Francisco is already thinking about the marriage of his children. “When the time comes for our children to marry, I want them to choose their own life companions. They will marry in the Lord’s house and make their vows before the Lord. Then I hope they will have the kind of Christian homes that will bear witness for the Lord and bring honor to his name” (Diaz 1958b:21). If the Christians among the Cuna people are given an opportunity they could create a wedding ceremony that celebrates a mutual commitment to God while retaining some aspects of their own culture.

We must begin with positive teaching, not with negative prohibitions, and be content to wait and to watch whilst the native Christians slowly recreate their own customs, as the Spirit of Christ gradually teaches them to transform what today is heathen, and tomorrow, purged of its vice, will appear as a Christian custom. . . It means that Christian converts must be left at first in their heathen surroundings and must live as their people, and be still of their people, until they grow so strong in numbers and in knowledge that they will be able to correct what is false, and to amend what is evil, with that full understanding which is born of slow and quiet interior advance. It means that we cannot force them at a bound to adopt or reject at our command, even when the adoption or rejection seems to be an immediate step forward. (Allen 1962b:79)

Missionaries could perceive what the Cuna people would become as the gospel influenced their lives and impacted their culture. They could apply pressure on the Cuna Indians, demanding that changes be made that agreed with what they had envisioned or they could allow the Holy Spirit to apply Christian principles to their lives and culture.

Keeler also pointed out that the traditional musical instruments of the Cuna Indians have either been lost or else no one is now able to play them.

On some of the islands jazz, played on harmonica and guitar, has replaced almost completely the entrancing and exotic tones of the armadillo skull, the fourteen reeds, the eagle wing-bone, the jaguar skull, the Kantule’s

great kammu reed, and other reeds of lesser size, such as swalla and kokke, each instrument having a special technique and special music. (1956a:193)

It is not known how many of these instruments could have been incorporated into the worship of God in the Baptist churches on the San Blas Islands. In the passing of time, the Cunas no long remember how to play some of these instruments. Peter Miller, a Cuna Indian and translator of the Bible into the Cuna dialect, was also educated in the United States. He is “the chief native musician of San Blas, who teaches piano, trumpet, trombone, clarinet, and voice at Escuela Coman (Ailigandi) and at Escuela Nipakinya (Mulatuppu)” (Keeler 1956a:195). He does not teach his own people how to play a traditional musical instrument. There is, therefore, no attempt to recover the musical instruments that were a part of the culture of the Cuna people. The music that they could have composed with those instruments, celebrating the Christian life, will never be heard.

In the article, “Medical Missions Take Christianity Deeper into Panama,” L. D.

Wood wrote:

We must let these people [the Cuna Indians] know about the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time it is not our business to Americanize them. We should let them continue with their culture indefinitely because their culture, except in a few pagan rites, in no wise violates Christian principles. Sometimes we missionaries have a tendency to Americanize instead of Christianize, thinking the two terms are synonymous. (1963:20)

A Cuna woman dressed in a white wedding gown or a Cuna student being taught to play a trombone or a clarinet or a West Indian women giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and reading the *Commission* magazine suggests, however, that the Baptist churches which were established among the various peoples in Panama were not indigenous but reflections of the churches from which the missionaries had come.

## Dependent

Everywhere our missions are dependent. They look to us for leaders, for instructors, for rulers. They have as yet shown little sign of being able to supply their own needs. (Allen 1962a:141)

Referring to the Baptist Theological Institute, Knight asserted, “Only Panamanians, trained in Panamá, can build one of the necessities of every mission field, an indigenous Christianity, which someday would support, reproduce, and expand on its own without assistance” (1965:87). Until the Baptist churches could support themselves, reproduce themselves, and expand themselves, they would remain dependent upon the Home Mission Board. At times the discussions about the work of the Home Mission Board in Panama included the idea that, although indigeneity was a goal, its achievement had not been realized and would not be realized for several years. Barnes had earlier stated, “Some day, be the time far or near, the Home and Foreign Boards will completely withdraw from Latin America and the Baptist churches will be self-supporting and self-governing” (1925:9). More than twenty-five years later the goal had not yet been achieved.

Referring to the work among the Cuna Indians, Knight concluded, “Baptist work on the islands will long need financial assistance because of the economic condition of the people. . . .” (1965:81). Dependence upon the Home Mission Board was therefore prolonged. Knight did not explain why they would need financial assistance. Nor did he offer any alternative to subsidy or suggest how subsidy could gradually be reduced.

## B. Uniform

Everywhere we see the same types. Our missions are in different countries amongst people of the most diverse characteristics, but all bear a most astonishing resemblance to one another. If we read the history of a mission in China we have only to change a few names and the same history will serve as the history of a mission in

Zululand. There has been no new revelation. There has been no new discovery of new aspects of the Gospel, no new unfolding of new forms of Christian life. (Allen 1962a:142)

When Roberts wrote, “the Baptist preachers on the Canal Zone are presenting the simple Baptist message, and pressing a constructive Baptist program” (1923:24), he was referring to the Balboa Baptist Church and the West Indian churches that had been established in the Canal Zone. The Balboa Heights Baptist Church existed for a time as the only church for the North Americans who lived and worked in the Canal Zone. In an article written in 1920, Mrs. W. W. Hamilton described the building as a “a beautiful structure of hollow tile and concrete. The interior is especially attractive, with its casement windows, polished floor, and opera chairs with snowy-white linen covers. The woodwork, including the pulpit furniture, is of native mahogany” (1920:25). Roberts, a pastor of the church, declared, “Here the roads cross, the seas meet and the people of the nations are passing by. It is an excellent opportunity for Southern Baptists to maintain a strong church, with a Baptist program and message that will find its way into every nation under heaven” (1923:23). He, however, did not separate the Baptist program from its message. A strong church, in his opinion, would include both. The 1925 *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* reported that “the Balboa Heights Baptist Church continues to minister, not only to the local community, but to the soldiers and sailors among us, and to the passing pilgrims from everywhere. The church has all the auxiliary institutions common to the Baptist churches in the homeland and each one of these is alive and at work” (Southern Baptist Convention 1925:337). These institutions would be similar to those that would be found in many Southern Baptist churches of that day: Sunday School,

Baptist Young Peoples Union, Woman's Missionary Society, Girls in Action, and Royal Ambassadors.

Austin argued that the Balboa Heights Baptist Church must be identical to those Southern Baptist churches in the homeland:

While we have an organization like all other regular Baptist churches, making, training, keeping records of and dismissing members, thus carrying on all denominational activities, we do these things because such is Baptist life and work, and because the churches at home are similarly active, and we can not be those churches reflected through the Home Mission Board unless we are like them and doing what they are doing. (1927a:4).

The Balboa Baptist Church, therefore, was to imitate the Southern Baptist churches found in the United States. For North Americans who attended the Balboa Heights Baptist Church, the activities and style of worship were similar to that which they had experienced in Southern Baptist churches at home.

If a member of Antioch Church in a Southern rural community, or of the First Baptist Church, Augusta, Maine, or of Montreal, Canada, or of Los Angeles, California, should arrive on the Isthmus he will find that his old home church is here ahead of him, not so much by "representation" but actually in the meeting house, organization and fellowship of the Balboa Heights Church. The day he arrives, this church becomes the very genius of our denominationalism the church of which he is a member in the States just as he is individually the same person that he was back home. This church in its life and identity is the unity of all the churches from which Baptists may come. This is because it was created by, and is one of the activities of, the Home Mission Board, which was itself created by these churches. As all the churches support the Home Mission Board (or should do so) so this Board reflects each of them, all in combination, at all points where it has work. (Austin 1927a:3)

If the Home Mission Board did not propagate and defend the Baptist program and message, then it betrayed the churches which had given it birth. And the Balboa Baptist Church could not consider itself a Baptist church if it was not identical to the Baptist churches at home.

Should the Protestant environment be extended beyond the narrow limits of the Canal Zone? Should an American type of Christianity be transferred to Panamanian soil? As for church policy and organization, Winston Crawley, former vice president of the Foreign Mission Board acknowledges,

The Bible really does not prescribe specifically and clearly the forms or structures of church life. The New Testament says nothing about church buildings. Little is said about organization, and even that little seems to show patterns which vary at different times and places. Worship forms are not detailed. Ways of arriving at decisions seem to be those that were common in the cultural setting. (Crawley 1985:207)

He then insists that the objective of missionaries is not to establish “Southern Baptist churches” but instead churches “that embody the spiritual qualities of the New Testament church” (1985:196). While the Baptist message that is consistent to Biblical teachings is mandatory, such organizations like Sunday School, Baptist Young Peoples Union, Woman’s Missionary Society, Girls in Action, and Royal Ambassadors are not. The emphasis placed on Baptist distinctives such as security of the believer, baptism by immersion only, and inspiration of Scriptures separates this denomination from others. A Baptist church is not identified by the building in which the congregation meets, or the programs it embraces, but the doctrines it teaches and defends.

While it could be asserted that there was an American type of Christianity, there was also a West Indian type, a Cuna type, and a Panamanian type of Christianity. These other types of Christianity, at times, were not acknowledged. While L. D. Wood recognized that the North Americans, West Indians, Cunans, and the Spanish-speaking Panamanians were “completely different in roots and culture” (1965:5), he reported,

In Panama and in the Canal Zone the same methods are followed that are used among our Southern Baptist congregations in the United States. Years of experience among Spanish-speaking people in the United States



have proved that methods used to win and develop the English-speaking congregation will also win and develop the Spanish, provided the element of prejudice is eliminated. Seldom do we find it advocated that Christ must be a Latin or an African or an American in order to be accepted. So methods of work, soundly and scientifically developed under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, will produce results among any people regardless of where these methods are developed. (1965:5)

Wood was advocating the use of a standard solution strategy which “works out a particular way of doing things, then uses this same approach in every situation” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:17). This strategy assumes “that one approach can be used in every context of the world” (Van Rheenen 1996:142). According to this strategy, “the differences between various cultural groups are insignificant. So long as one can use the language of the group, a standard methodology will work in virtually all cultures. It is assumed that a method that stimulates significant church growth in one culture will probably be useful in many other churches” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:154).

The unique-solution strategies, on the other hand, “are based on the assumption that cultures and situations are different and each one requires its own special strategy” (Van Rheenen 1996:145). As early as 1931, Lawrence asserted that Home Mission fields “must be defined racially, nationally, culturally, and religiously” (1931:3). “Every people,” he argued, “must be regarded as a separate field presenting its own problems and requiring its own methods of approach by the missionaries” (1931:3). McGavran agreed, “No single method will fit all populations” (1970:230). This suggests that the strategy utilized among the animistic Cuna Indians would have been different from that applied among the Spanish-speaking Panamanians who were influenced by Roman Catholicism.

West Indians. During the years which followed the construction of the Panama Canal, “the Home Mission Board was the only Baptist agency at work among them”

(Southern Baptist Convention 1936:248). Faced with their own financial difficulties, the Board, however, could do little or nothing to ease their financial burden. “During the years of economic depression when the Home Mission Board was hampered by debts, the West Indian churches drifted aimlessly, lacking adequate pastoral leadership” (Carpenter 1949:42). If the goal of the Home Mission Board was to establish an indigenous church, the degree to which that was accomplished could be seen in the West Indian churches when the Home Mission Board was facing financial difficulties and was unable to send missionaries to Panama. Once the influence of the Home Mission Board was removed, these churches struggled to survive. These churches were not only facing financial problems, they also were not expecting pastoral leadership to emerge from their own membership. The Home Mission Board appointed the pastors, but it was “difficult to get Negro Baptists from the West Indies into Panama, and the Negroes in the Isthmus being British were reluctant to accept Negro pastors from the United States” (Leavell 1941b:7).

The article “The Canal Zone and Cuba” provided a glimpse into the lives of these West Indian churches.

On the Pacific side of the Isthmus, Reverend Norton Bellamy cared for the large church at Chorillo, a section of Panama City, at Caledonia also in Panama and Red Tank on the Zone. These churches have large Sunday Schools and young people’s organizations. The W.M.S. at Red Tank observed the seasons of prayer for Home and Foreign Missions, sending in worthy gifts for both the Lottie Moon Offering for Foreign Missions and the Annie W. Armstrong Offering for Home Missions. (Lawrence 1935c:55)

A report on the work being done in Almirante in the province of Bocas del Toro announced, “Pastor W. D. Morgan studied the WMU literature and then organized the RA’s, GA’s, and YWA’s because there was no trained leadership in the WMU. Now the church has a very good WMU” (Van Royen 1958:10). Another article, “Panama Women

Send Mission Offering,” ends by stating that the women of the Women’s Missionary Society of the Calvary Baptist Church “are becoming more and more interested in missions as they become more informed. Some in this group now take *Southern Baptist Home Missions*, *The Commission*, and *Royal Service*. They wanted to know if there were not other magazines they could take so that they could learn more” (Bell, Mrs. Paul C. 1948:18). In many ways these West Indian churches were similar to the Southern Baptist churches in the United States. They differed little in organization and how the cause of missions was both promoted and supported.

How many of these West Indian women knew Lottie Moon or Annie Armstrong? Lottie Moon served as a foreign missionary with the Foreign Mission Board. She went to China for thirty-nine years and died on board a ship as she was returning to the United States. Her body was cremated and her ashes were sent to the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia. Annie Armstrong was the corresponding secretary of the Woman’s Missionary Union, serving without salary until 1906. Southern Baptists in the United States remember them when they give sacrificially to support missions at home and abroad. Instead of finding a woman to represent Home Missions or Foreign Missions from the United States, the West Indian women could have been reminded of their own history. Instead of reading the official publications of the Home and Foreign Mission Boards, they could have read about the sacrifices of the missionaries who brought Christianity to the island of Jamaica.

Missionaries from the English Missionary Baptist Society had come to Jamaica beginning in 1814. The average length of service for these missionaries was only three years. Several died from the “hot climate, overwork, exhausting saddle journeys,

mistaken ideas on clothing, diet, and personal hygiene” (Tucker 1914: 34). The names of Compere, Knibb, Rowe, Kitching, and Godden could have become as familiar to the West Indians as Moon and Armstrong were to the Southern Baptists in the United States.

Knibb’s older brother Thomas had gone to Jamaica as a missionary in 1822, but he died less than two years later of a fever. After his brother’s death, Knibb volunteered to go as a missionary in his brother’s place. The planters on the island of Jamaica owned slaves. Although this offended Knibb, the Baptist Missionary Society had advised all its missionaries not to interfere. Knibb, however, later defied the Society and became an outspoken opponent of slavery. Finally, in 1838, slavery was abolished on the island. When he died, “an estimated 7,000-8,000 people thronged around the Falmouth Church for his funeral just 25 hours after his death, so quickly did word spread” (Profiles 2003:12). On his tomb were inscribed these words:

To the Memory of William Knibb

Who departed this life on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, 1845, in the 43<sup>rd</sup> year of his age.

This monument was erected by the emancipated slaves to whose enfranchisement and elevation his indefatigable exertions so largely contributed; by his fellow-labourers, who admired and loved him, and deeply deplore his early removal; and by friends of various creeds and parties, as an expression of their esteem for one whose praise as a man, a philanthropist, and a Christian minister, is in all the churches, and who, being dead, yet speaketh. (Profiles 2003:13)

Knibb’s story suggests that the West Indians, instead of remembering Moon or Armstrong, could have memorialized someone whose life was more meaningful to them.

The West Indians adopted not only the organizations which were commonly found in the North American churches in the Canal Zone, like Royal Ambassadors and Girls in Action. They also read the same magazines, *The Commission* and *Home Missions*. They, like the members of the North American churches, contributed to the

Lottie Moon offering and the Annie Armstrong offering. The West Indians churches and the North American churches were to that extent uniform.

Cuna Indians. On January 1, 1955, the Home Mission Board expanded its work to include the Cuna Indians who lived on the San Blas Islands on Panama's northern coast. The annual for that year announced,

At the annual meeting of December 9 the Home Mission Board voted to assume responsibility of supporting and directing the mission work that Dr. and Mrs. Lonnie Iglesias and their co-laborers have been doing in the Comarca de San Blas. These are 456 coral islands on the northeast coast of Panama and 54 of these have Indian villages in which live approximately 25,000 San Blas Indians. (Southern Baptist Convention 1955:219)

The article "Baptist Church Organized Among San Blas Indians" stated that Iglesias "felt that he and his people believed as Baptists and wanted to establish Baptist churches on their islands" (Dunn 1955:20). This first church would be established on the island of Aligandi.

The 1500 Indians who inhabited the island of Aligandi, "a tiny coral island some sixteen hundred feet long and six or seven hundred feet wide" (Dossey 1956:14), lived "in thatched roof, reed houses built closely together with only narrow passages for streets" (Dossey 1956:14). The process by which the first Baptist church was organized on the island of Aligandi differs in several respects from that described by Hodges in his chapter on self-government. According to the article, "Rev. Adalberto Santizo, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Panama City, Panama, and Mr. Van Royen went to Aligandi, one of the principal islands, where they met with some of the leaders from various islands and spent three days studying Baptist beliefs, church policy, and organizational methods" (Dunn 1955:20). Afterwards, "the articles of faith were read one by one and adopted. Then the church covenant was read and the church was organized and officers elected"

(Dunn 1955:21). It is not known if the Cunas were given the opportunity or were encouraged to write their own articles of faith and church covenant. Hodges argues, “Having won a group of converts, the missionary turns from being an evangelist to the function of teacher and instructs them in the precepts of the Christian faith and the standards of Christian living” (1953:17). He later emphasizes, “The standard of doctrine and conduct must be an expression of the converts own concept of Christian life as they find it in the Scriptures. It is not enough to be the missionary’s belief” (Hodges 1953:19).

The article continues, “The next day Mr. Van Royen and eight members of the First Baptist Church of Balboa came to the island where at a service 31 presented themselves for baptism and church membership. On the authority of the First Baptist Church of Balboa they were accepted and baptized that afternoon in the sea” (Dunn 1955:21). Hodges suggests that an examining committee be formed. The committee will include not only the missionary but also “three or four of the most mature converts” (Hodges 1953: 19). “This committee will review the list of candidates for membership one by one. The candidates will be examined as to their Christian experience, testimony and faithfulness” (Hodges 1953:19). A significant difference between the establishment of the church at Aligandi and Hodges’ plan is that he places a greater emphasis upon the role of the converts in establishing their own church.

Iglesias and his wife had labored on the islands for more than thirty years. “When these soldiers of the cross had carried the work as far as it seemed possible for them independently, they appealed to the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to take over the support and direction of the work” (Dossey 1956:14). At first glance, this seems to be a reversal of the goal of the Home Mission Board in two

respects. First, assuming the financial responsibility for work among the Cuna Indians would violate the principle of self-support. Second, assuming responsibility for the direction of the work would not result in a church which was self-governing. It was not known to what extent the Home Mission Board would financially undergird the work among the Cunas. And it is not known if the Cunas would be consulted or allowed to give input when the Board assumed direction for the work. However, what seems to be the inevitable result of such a policy was expressed in the *Church Development Depth Study*.

As a people they have become accustomed to expect and receive outside help. The image of primitive childlike creatures who can do little for themselves has been exploited by both the Indians and others in the effort to obtain funds for new projects of assistance. Baptists are not entirely to blame for this situation, but they have contributed greatly to it. (Home Mission Board 1972:23).

Clyde Keeler, then professor of Biology at Georgia State College for Women in Milledgeville, Georgia, contributed several articles to *Home Missions* in which he described the culture of the Cuna people. "Concrete was one of the first outstanding signs of civilization when I visited the San Blas Islands," he wrote.

The Southern Baptist denomination is a heavy investor in this permanent concrete of San Blas. Whenever possible its glistening white Baptist churches, as well as the homes of its missionaries, consist of a reinforced framework on floor of concrete, the walls being filled in later with hand-fabricated cement blocks that are eventually finished over with stucco. (Keeler 1964:20)

The Southern Baptists were not the first to build churches from concrete, however. In her first visit to Nargana, Marvel described the houses "made of mud and saplings, with dirt floors and thatched roofs of palm fronds, and also mentioned the Catholic church and school, "both extremely nice-looking cement buildings" (Morgan 1958:29). Nargana, however, was "the most progressive island in the entire group" (Morgan 1958:37). Even

though these structures would be more durable than the thatched roof and reed homes in which the Cunas lived, Hodges insisted that congregations should provide their own buildings.

Some of our congregations in Central America have struggled for ten years to build their chapel. They have begun in a private home, moved into a thatched-roofed hut of their own, and finally after years of sacrifice and labor, have completed their frame or adobe building. Their little chapel means infinitely more to them than if it had been provided by the Mission. (1953:72)

During an evangelistic crusade on the island of Ustuppu, “the meeting was conducted in the Indian Congress hall for lack of a building in which to worship. The only light for the meetings was a single kerosene lamp in the center of the hall. Yet the people listened eagerly and 45 made professions of faith” (Dossey 1956:15). It is doubtful that the evangelist understood the significance of the Indian Congress hall. The meeting hall was where the important decisions of the Cuna people were discussed. There could not have been a more appropriate place in which to hear the message of Christ.

### Allen’s Third Principle

All financial arrangements made for the ordinary life and existence of the Church should be such that the people themselves can and will control and manage their own business independently of any foreign subsidies. The management of all local funds should be entirely in the hands of the local Church which should raise and use their own funds for their own purposes that they may neither be pauperized nor dependent on the dictation of any foreign society. (Allen 1962a:151)

For members of Pentecostal churches, the giving of tithes and offerings is mandatory (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 321:1969). Allen advised,

It is important that the missionary should educate the whole congregation in principles of Church Finance because this is a question which touches every member directly in a very obvious way, and when the people learn to understand that the control of finance is in their hands they will more easily and quickly lean their responsibility in other matters. (1962a:154)



Subsidy, invested in buildings, institutions, and pastor salaries, was thought to be a factor that contributed to the growth of Baptist churches in Panama. If the Home Mission Board provided funds to erect buildings and provide pastor salaries, where was the incentive for the members of the church to assume those responsibilities for themselves? Lack of adequate stewardship promotion, however, negatively affected the growth of Baptist churches in Panama. "There are serious gaps in the stewardship emphasis which are presently hidden by the large offerings from the North American churches" (Home Mission Board 1972:18). The report noted that the total contributions, between 1966 to 1971, had increased from \$200,000 US to \$345,000 US. The North Americans contributed \$241,533.82 of that amount. The study added that the "average giving for the Convention as a whole was \$55 US per member. Subtracting the North American giving, the average falls to \$23" (Home Mission Board 1972:13).

The members of the churches beyond the Canal Zone should not be embarrassed because they could give no more than \$23. That amount could have been multiplied as the members faithfully proclaimed the gospel and others were added to the church. When contributions are less than needed, members are to be challenged to tithe and to support the church according to the Biblical pattern. The giving of a tithe does not exhaust the responsibility of the members of a church. They as well should seek God's leadership to know how to invest what has been given. The members must decide if the pastor should be full-time or bi-vocational, whether they should meet in a building of concrete, or a structure of bamboo, or under a tree. The tithe that is given, no matter how small or large, is not theirs but God's. God is less hindered by the amount that is given than by the unwillingness to give.

The study concluded, “At present there is no general fixed plan of subsidy reduction” (Home Mission Board 1972:21) and then recommended “that a short term (such as five years) program be initiated to achieve the economic independence of the churches. Such a program should be preceded and accompanied by a positive convention wide emphasis on stewardship and church growth” (Home Mission Board 1972:21). It can be assumed that the Home Mission Board envisioned a time when subsidy could be reduced, if not eliminated, as members of the Baptist churches assumed more and more responsibility for the financial needs of local churches. There is no indication that a moratorium on subsidy was begun and the five-year time frame would carry the Home Mission Board beyond the time when the work was transferred to the Foreign Mission Board. The recommendation was also too naive. There was no attempt to determine whether the model of the church given to the people of Panama was a model that they could realistically sustain. There was no discussion about whether the churches should assume the salary of a pastor or whether a bivocational pastor would be a more realistic pattern.

“Self-support “means that the financing for the churches comes from local sources, not from America (not even to any significant degree from the tithes of American missionaries” (Crawley 1985:201). The *Panama Growth Strategy Study*, prepared by the Foreign Mission Board in 1998, indicated that “32% of the pastors surveyed, 32% of the convention leaders surveyed, and 57% of the church members surveyed said that tithing was a Biblical teaching. At the same time, pastors indicated that tithing is something that needs to be taught in the churches” (1998a:4). Why should tithing be taught if it is not a Biblical teaching? On whom were the pastors and

convention leaders depending for the financial resources that were necessary to maintain and reproduce churches in the country? Does God have another method whereby the churches could be sustained? The study appropriately connects stewardship with discipleship. The failure to tithe, or more importantly, the refusal to accept tithing as a Biblical teaching, indicates a narrow understanding of the Bible and an anemic conception of discipleship.

Cleary, a Catholic priest, has concluded that “Pentecostalism is a sacrificial religion. Ordinary people give extraordinary amounts of money, some 10 percent or more from their often meager incomes.” (Cleary 1997:10). The emphasis on subsidy has meant that the members of Baptist churches have not had to face the challenges involved in supporting a pastor or providing a building in which to meet.

Our modern practice in founding a Church is to begin by securing land and buildings in the place in which we wish to propagate the Gospel, to provide houses in which the missionary can live, and a church, or at least a room, fitted up with all the ornaments of a Western church, in which the missionary may conduct services, sometimes to open a school to which we supply the teachers. (Allen 1962a:52)

The nationals are thereby given a model that they themselves cannot sustain. Does this imply that services cannot be conducted until land has been secured and a building constructed? Who determines the type of building to be constructed and the location of the land to be purchased? How much land is necessary? Are there any alternatives besides constructing buildings, such as meeting in homes or renting facilities until enough funds can be collected to begin to build a structure?

Allen’s assessment emphasizes only the initiative of the missionary and does not envision the national assuming responsibility for the work. The task of the national is to continue what was begun by the missionary.

The habit of taking supplies with us is due chiefly to two causes: first, the amazing wealth of the Church at home and the notion that reverence and devotion depend upon the use of expensive religious furniture to which our luxury has accustomed us, and secondly, the prevalence of the idea that the stability of the Church in some way depends upon the permanence of its buildings. When we have secured a site and buildings we feel that the mission is firmly planted; we cannot then be easily driven away. A well-built church seems to imply a well-founded, stable society. So the externals of religion precede the inculcation of its principles. We must have the material establishment before we can build the spiritual house. (Allen 1962a:52)

The missionaries take with them what cannot be found there. The nationals are therefore crippled, imagining that the structure built with foreign funds must also be furnished according to a foreign standard. Neither the church nor the furnishings can be supplied from their meager resources. Is it necessary for a church to have pews or a pulpit? The missionaries are preparing to remain indefinitely in the country. Instead they should be preparing to leave. What is important is not insuring the permanence of the missionary but insuring the permanence of the church, equipping those who have given their lives to Christ so that they can not only survive but also thrive.

In the matter of material equipment, with few outstanding exceptions, evangelical churches of Latin America do not have proper buildings or environment in which to carry on their work. In most places the work of preaching and teaching must be carried forward in buildings which resemble sheds more than churches. This constitutes a great handicap, especially in reaching certain classes of Latin-American society. Without indulging in extravagance in ecclesiastical architecture, we must find some ways and means to provide our evangelical congregations with more dignified places for worship and preaching of the word. Beauty, stateliness, and harmony of line in church edifices are pleasing to the Latin American, and it is not possible to do permanent and effective religious work among Latin peoples if we insist in providing, as we have done up the present, inadequate and in many cases distressingly unattractive places for corporate worship. (Hall 1927:99)

The worship of God in what has been described as “sheds” may be more acceptable to God than what occurs within a large and impressive church edifice. The place is

dignified, not by the architectural style of the building, but by the worship that occurs within its walls.

Why do people become Pentecostal? Because the doors of the small, storefront churches open to an exuberant but imperfect family in which everyone remembers your name and greets you as a hermano or hermana. Pentecostal churches are places where newcomers are encouraged to express their personal problems before a responsive community. And these small communities need their members' help. Participation is not only expected but also demanded, and there seems to be something for everyone to do. (Cleary 1997:9)

God is willing to meet with His people in any structure, no matter how humble, and is willing to meet with them even if a structure is not available. "We have found," Godwin noted,

that a congregation tends to seek its own level of financial sustenance. If the missionary avoids the pitfalls such as the temptation to build 'the American dream,' as well as the other trappings that merely tend to Americanize the congregation into heavy debt, we have found that buildings and property can be adequate and a pastor can be fully supported by that congregation in accord with its own local, economic and cultural lifestyle. (1984:24)

Bell came to Panama in 1941 to serve as superintendent of the Panama Baptist Mission and to establish churches among the Spanish-speaking population of Panama. "It is very difficult, he reported, "to find anyone who will rent to us for religious purposes. The only chapel we have for our Spanish work is one that was built by natives, of bamboo, bejuco and palm fronds deep in the jungle of Panama" (Southern Baptist Convention 1947:147). Several years later he wrote: "We are greatly hindered in our work for lack of buildings and adequate equipment" (Southern Baptist Convention 1951:213). Had he forgotten that chapel in the jungle of Panama? The natives themselves, using material which was readily available to them had constructed this humble structure. Instead of encouraging others to take similar steps, the Home Mission

Board continued to invest money in the construction of churches. In the article "The Call of Panama," R. B. Van Royen, who followed Bell as superintendent, wrote: "During the last five years the Home Mission Board has financed or assisted in financing eleven church buildings and properties at a cost of \$268,000. Yet the missions at Aguadulce, Baseline Spanish, Cattiva, and Arraijan, are ready to organize into churches, but all need buildings" (1958:11). It is suggested therefore that these missions could not be organized into churches until funds were available to construct buildings. If the Home Mission Board could not supply the necessary funds, or if those funds were delayed, would the members of the mission hesitate to organize themselves into a church? Would they assume responsibility to find a place in which to meet, or had the Home Mission Board established a precedent in which missions, expecting assistance from the Home Mission Board, would never be willing to meet in any structure but that provided by the Board? Allen warned,

By importing and using and supplying to the natives buildings and ornaments which they cannot procure for themselves, we tend to pauperize the converts. They cannot supply what they think to be needful, and so they learn to accept the position of passive recipients. By supplying what they cannot supply we check them in the proper impulse to supply what they can supply. Foreign subsidies produce abroad all the ill effects of endowments at home, with the additional disadvantage that they are foreign. The converts learn to rely upon them instead of making every effort to supply their needs. (1962a:56)

Such a paternalistic attitude views converts as "infants incapable of doing anything for themselves" (Allen 1962a:146). Less than ten years after Knight wrote his book, the Home Mission Board transferred its work to the Foreign Mission Board. *The Latin American Depth Study Committee* recommended "that in agreement between the Home and Foreign Mission Boards a vigorous program of self-support and subsidy reduction be

initiated as quickly as possible” (Home Mission Board 1972:27). Financial support, thought to be needed for some time, would be withdrawn. If the Foreign Mission Board did not give to the Cuna people as much financial support as the Home Mission Board, would the work survive? The missionary

should remember that he is the least permanent element in the Church. He may fall sick and go home, or he may die, or he may be called elsewhere. He disappears, the Church remains. The native Christians are the permanent element. The permanence of the Church depends upon them. Therefore, it is of vital importance that if he is removed they should be able to carry on the work, as if he were present. (Allen 1962a:153)

Unforeseen circumstances like a sudden change in government, or natural disaster, or a sudden and severe loss of revenue like what occurred in during the Great Depression, can result in the removal of missionaries. The transfer of the work from the Home Mission Board to the Foreign Mission Board also illustrated how temporary the presence of missionaries can be.

### **Allen’s Fourth Principle**

A sense of mutual responsibility of all the Christians one for another should be carefully inculcated and practised. The whole community is responsible for the proper administration of baptism, ordination, and discipline. (Allen 1962a:151)

Hodges never places the missionary in the role of supervisor. “It may be necessary for the missionary to continue his guidance for a time. He will help occasionally with the preaching, but he should plan to withdraw more and more from the local affairs until he can leave them entirely in the hands of the nationals” (1953:26). In his discussion about baptism, ordination, and discipline, Allen also emphasized this principle of mutual responsibility. Baptism, ordination, and discipline are functions of the church. Discussing the ministry of Paul, Allen explained how, in each of these areas, Paul

did not act alone. The members of the local churches decided who would serve as their pastor, disciplined or corrected those members whose lives dishonored Christ, and determined who was qualified to be baptized.

The church was a brotherhood, and the brethren suffered if any person was admitted to their society. They knew the candidates intimately. They were in the best possible position to judge who were fit and proper candidates. That they might make mistakes, and that they did make great mistakes, is sufficiently obvious; but if they made mistakes, they made them at their own peril. In this matter of mutual responsibility a little practical experience is worth a great weight of verbal teaching. (Allen 1962a:98)

Allen, examining the methods of Paul, insisted, "For baptism, apparently very little knowledge of Christian truth was required as an indispensable condition" (Allen 1962a:95).

What the New Testament does show is that in St. Paul's teaching the requirements for holy baptism were repentance and faith. The moment a man showed that he had repentance and faith he was baptized into Christ Jesus, in order that Christ in him might perfect that repentance and faith, and bring it to its full end, holiness in the Body of Christ. (Allen 1962a:97)

The *Background Report* revealed that, of those who had made professions of faith between 1960 and 1968, only one out of three were baptized (Scanlon 1972:12). The *Church Growth Indicators Analysis* reported that from 1976 to 1989

The churches have baptized 6,386 people in 14 years. Recorded membership gains during the same period of time lists 1,240. This means that 5,146 baptized members have disappeared from the churches in 14 years. Thus the churches are losing 367.57 members each year while baptizing only 456.1 per year. Based upon averages, the churches lose 80.6% of the baptisms. (Slack 1990:4)

In a twenty year period of time, from 1975 to 1995, the highest number of baptisms, 706, occurred in 1991, but the lowest number of baptisms, 262, was reported four years later in 1995. "It seems that of those that are won to the Lord, very few are actually baptized. In most churches, six months to a year (or more) passes before a new convert is baptized"



(Foreign Mission Board 1998a:1). What was a moment for Paul became a year for the Baptists. The *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study* also observed that “many churches require either a new believers and/or pre-baptismal class before a person is baptized. This may be one reason why, on the average, it takes from 4 to 12 months after a person is won to Lord, before he/she is baptized” (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:4). It was recommended, therefore, that “baptism should not be dependent upon a person’s having completed a long doctrinal course. Instead, the new believer should be baptized as soon as possible after conversion, once the individual received a short course [on] salvation basics and the meaning of baptism” (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:4). It is not known if this short course would be as brief as that received by the Ethiopian eunuch.

As they [Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch] rode along, they came to a small body of water, and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! Why can’t I be baptized?”

“You can,” Philip answered, “if you believe with all you heart.”

And the eunuch replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

He stopped the chariot, and they went down into the water and Philip baptized him. (Acts 8:36-38, Living Bible)

While it was thought that the establishment of the seminary in Arriaján contributed to the growth of Baptist churches in Panama, the Foreign Mission Board also placed an emphasis on Theological Education by Extension.

TEE participation over the whole time it has been recorded (1978-1995) has been inconsistent, but does reflect that there has been a need for decentralized training. Pastors and Baptist leaders have consistently noted their desire for more training that occurs closer to where they live, especially in the outlying areas. More leaders are developed through decentralized TEE than through the centralized seminary approach. (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:6)

Baptists and Pentecostals, however, differ in the way those preparing for Christian service are selected and trained. The Pentecostals have utilized an apprentice system

which “may well turn out to be the most critical of all growth factors contributing to the high degree of success that Pentecostal mission work has enjoyed through the years” (Wagner 1991:277). This approach has solved two problems, “(1) how to support a ministry (the ministers supported themselves until they were capable of attracting a church which had sufficient members to support them) and (2) the more precarious difficulty of selecting capable persons” (Nida 1961:99). The Baptist Theological Seminary was the only institution established by the Home Mission Board to educate those who would be serving in various capacities in the Baptist churches in Panama.

This institution, more than any other in Panama, holds the future of a strong Baptist witness, for from these classrooms will come the pastors and religious education leaders who will give to the churches quality leadership. Only Panamanians, trained in Panama, can build one of the necessities of every mission field, an indigenous Christianity, which someday would support, reproduce, and expand on its own without outside assistance. (Knight 1965:87)

For the Pentecostals, however, “success in the ministry becomes the qualifying factor, not the awarding of a diploma or a degree” (Wagner 1978:96). Unlike the Baptists who developed potential leadership within the seminary, the Pentecostals

develop pastoral leaders from among the laity. They depend on God’s effectual call. Leaders emerge from among the converts through in-service training at the level of the local congregation. Here pastoral and spiritual gifts and personal consecration are tested and developed. Calling to the ministry is verified by success in communicating the faith, and multiplying churches. Finally ministers are accepted or rejected by the approval or disapproval of the members of the church. (Read, Monterroso, and Johnson 1969:321)

In the book *What Are We Missing?*, Wagner described an apprentice system in which those preparing for the ministry “stay with their families, they work at their jobs, they keep their social contacts, they worship with their people, and with all this they learn by doing” (1978:95). Having begun as a street preacher, he then proceeds to climb the next

six rungs of the ladder. As the pastor of a new preaching point, “he must evangelize an assigned area, and his success there is measured by nothing less than converts” (1978:97). As a pastor-deacon, “he is usually assigned a new area of the city or a village where he is expected to plant a new church. In fact, planting a new church is a requirement for confirmation on this rung of the ladder” (Wagner 1978:98). If he is not successful in founding a church, he cannot become a pastor. As a pastor, the final rung,

not only must he plant a church, but also he must nurture it until it becomes large and solvent enough to support him financially as pastor. When the pastor can present sufficient evidence that he can leave his secular employment to dedicate himself entirely to the pastorate, he will be awarded the title. (Wagner 1978:99)

Allen, in his discussion about baptism, ordination, and discipline, did not emphasize the importance of the Church as community. No one, however, who examines the Pentecostal movement can overlook this significant aspect of the Pentecostal movement.

In Pentecostal communities, a fraternal world is created which welcomes, prays, celebrates, shares, and restores, helping the believer to get away from the individualistic, competitive, and almost savage social climate and to find an answer to sickness, death, unemployment, and the disintegration of the family. (Ortega 1996:175)

Pentecostals have discovered that the Church described in the book of Acts is not typical of many traditional churches today.

Since God has not changed, the disobedience of Christians (Acts 5:32) must be the cause of this degeneration of the church. Accordingly Pentecostals ask: In what way have we departed from the commandments of God, so that the gifts of the Spirit, the healing of the sick, prophecy, and speaking of the tongues have disappeared, and the church has become lifeless and powerless? (Hollenweger 1972:11)

The Pentecostals have, therefore, attempted to restore the Church to that which it was in the First Century. Whether the disappearance of the gift of tongues is because of the

disobedience of the church or because the gift is no longer given is debatable. McClung defends speaking in tongues.

If the tongues attract thirsty souls to where there are living waters of the Spirit we can do nothing but rejoice. Balanced teaching and healthy example will soon let them see the novelty of speaking with tongues is only an introduction to far greater and deeper manifestations and experiences of the eternal Spirit of the living God. And many may never make this life-changing discovery if they are not first attracted by the strange sign of a supernatural power at work in the church. (1988:3)

The sign gifts would include speaking in tongues, the interpretation of tongues, miracles, and healing. The other gifts are described in the books of Romans, 1 Corinthians and Ephesians, but are not mentioned here. McClung introduces the idea of a hierarchy of gifts and suggests that the other gifts such as helps and administration are not as important and therefore can be ignored. However, these other gifts are also given by the Holy Spirit, and are as much a manifestation of His presence in the life of the Church as the sign gifts.

While McClung asserts that speaking in tongues attracts “thirsty souls to where there are living waters of the Spirit,” he overlooks the Church itself which is an equally significant demonstration of the supernatural power of God. The Holy Spirit has not only manifested Himself in the gifts but also in the fruit. The Holy Spirit not only acts in individual lives to effectively serve the church through His gifts, He also reproduces the life of Christ in their lives through His fruit. Jesus Himself told his disciples, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34, 35, King James Version). Those who observe the Church are not convinced that those who worship there are followers of Jesus Christ because they

speak in tongues. They are convinced that the members of the Church are followers of Christ because they love as Christ loved. Among the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given,

the most marvelous gift of all is the community itself. The gift of fellowship must be received and passed on. At the beginning and end of all spiritual gifts, the gift par excellence is the gift of love (1 Corinthians 13). The life of the community is the context for the exercise of all the spiritual gifts and ministries that are so necessary for the vitality of the whole church. (De Petrella 1986:34)

What can be easily overlooked here, however, is that love is not a gift. Biblically speaking, love is a fruit.

Wagner argues, “Non-Pentecostals might do well seriously to consider the possibility of behaving more like Pentecostals, even if they do not chose to believe like them” (1973c:39). Neither the Pentecostals, nor any other denomination, should become the model for the more traditional churches. If, as the Pentecostals have asserted, the movement is an attempt to restore the Church to what is described in the book of Acts, that is the model for the Church for today. The task of the historical churches, therefore, is to reexamine the book of Acts, to determine if God’s vision of the Church for today includes speaking in tongues or performing miracles. The Church, however, must be seen in its totality. The focus must not remain upon a particular gift of the Spirit. The arena in which and through which the Spirit works in the book of Acts is the Church. The book of Acts must also be examined to understand the Church in its many dimensions: caring for the poor, discipling its membership, correcting or disciplining those whose lives now dishonor Christ, extending the Church at home and abroad through faithfully proclaiming the gospel. The book of Acts not only shows the members speaking in tongues, but also presents members praying, witnessing, and dying for the cause of Christ.

### Allen's Fifth Principle

Authority to exercise spiritual gifts should be given freely and at once. Nothing should be withheld which may strengthen the life of the church, still less should anything be withheld which is necessary for its spiritual sustenance. The liberty to enjoy such gifts is not a privilege which may be withheld but a right which must be acknowledged. The test of preparedness to receive the authority is the capacity to receive the grace. (Allen 1962a:151)

Although Edwards and his wife, the first missionaries sent by the Foursquare Gospel to Panama, began their ministry in Panama City, they also preached in the surrounding villages.

In July 1928, they were invited to a small village named Frijoles. They held an open air meeting in the center of the village. The music performed by the family attracted many people. From the first day, sick people were healed. On the first night it was reported that a young man with a massive infection on his leg was healed. As news of the healing spread, many people came to the village. The Panamanian railroad had to add extra cars to get all the people to this village who wanted to come. (Eim 51:1986)

The first church in Frijoles was built from the lumber of a condemned building. This building was torn down and a church constructed which could seat almost 200.

The church presented in the book of Acts has become the pattern or model for the Pentecostal church today. "For Pentecostals the Acts of the Apostles are regarded as a normative record of the normative primitive church" (Hollenweger 1972:321). As the gospel took root first in Jerusalem and later throughout the world, miracles accompanied the preaching of the gospel. Allen, having examining the ministry of Paul, was convinced, however, that miracles were not as important in Paul's ministry as some may imagine.

These miraculous powers were never used by the Apostle to induce people to receive teaching. He did not attract people to listen to him with a view to being healed of disease or by the promise of healing. It seems as if St. Luke was careful to avoid producing the impression that miraculous powers might be used to attract people to accept Christianity because of its

benefits which they might receive from it. We are never told of the conversion of anybody upon whom St. Paul worked a miracle of healing. (Allen 1962a:42)

Allen, however, did insist that the miracles that Paul performed did contribute to the success of his ministry. His miracles “attracted hearers” (Allen 1962a:43), and “were universally accepted as proofs of the Divine approval of the message and work of him through whom they were wrought” (Allen 1962a:44). They were also “illustrations of the character of the new religion. They were sermons in act. They set forth in unmistakable terms two of its fundamental doctrines, the doctrine of charity and the doctrine of salvation, of release from the bondage of sin and the power of the devil” (Allen 1962a:45).

“Most people of the world,” asserted Kraft, “seek a Christ that is as powerful today as he was in Biblical times” (1991:303). He, however, does not refer to any biblical evidence that would suggest that Christ has committed himself to manifest his presence today in the same way He did during His earthly ministry. “The Scripture clearly states that those who turn to Christ in repentance and faith will be forgiven their sins. But God has not covenanted to heal in the same way that he has covenanted to forgive” (Glasser 1986:414). For Southern Baptists, speaking in tongues, casting out demons, and healing would be the most controversial teachings of the Pentecostal movement. Is the Christ worshipped by Southern Baptists an anemic representation of the Christ presented in the pages of the New Testament?

Kraft discusses his stereotypical perceptions of the Pentecostal movement that kept him from appreciating the strengths of the Pentecostal movement. However, he has now come to the conclusion that “a very large percentage of the missionaries who have

labored cross-culturally and of their followers who now lead the churches of the world are evangelicals who have not learned to minister in power” (1991:305) and that the Pentecostal movement can show other missionaries how to correct this deficiency.

Kraft differentiates between the gift of healing and the gift of miracles. Healing, according to Kraft,

Is the supernatural intervention of the power of God in cases that apparently could also be cured by doctors in hospitals, if the patients could afford them. Miracles, on the other hand, involve cases that have deteriorated beyond the possibilities of medical science. A virus infection or an abscess or dysentery are cared for by the gift of healing. Cancer or congenital mental retardation need the gift of miracles. Both are present among Latin American Pentecostals, but healing is more common than miracles. (1991:302)

Can the gift of healing be limited only to those who do not have access to adequate medical care? God’s power, according to Kraft, is demonstrated more in those cases that could be healed by medical science, but less in those situations for which medical science has no answer. Several years ago medical science had no answer for a virus infection, or an abscess, or dysentery. Does the progress of the medical science move certain ailments or diseases from miracles to healing?

God only heals when those who are ill do not have access to adequate medical care. If the situation develops into a problem for which medical science has no answer, those who are ill now require a miracle. If medical care could be offered inexpensively to everyone, would that end the need for the gift of healing. God responds more frequently with healing than with miracles. Healing, however, places God on the same level as physicians. Medical science does not have a cure for cancer, but God is more active in cases that are curable and less active in cases that are incurable. He is a God who heals but if healing does not occur, “some of them were not healed because they did not have



enough faith,” and “for others it was simply not the Father’s will to heal them physically at that time. Perhaps some other time would be theirs. . . .” (Kraft 1991:311).

Kraft also cautions that there is an “over emphasis on the need for and importance of the gift of tongues” (1991:309). However, he later writes that tongues is “a precious and scriptural gift” and “ought to be sought and accepted by those who seek greater intimacy with God and greater effectiveness in service for him” (Kraft 1991:309). How can too much emphasis be placed upon speaking in tongues if its fruit is intimacy with God and effectiveness in service? It is suggested that those Christians who cannot speak in tongues cannot know God intimately and cannot serve God effectively. Arguing that the gift of tongues ought to be sought also reverses the Biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit chooses the gifts that He bestows on a believer.

Kraft also insists that Christians can be possessed by demons, “Most of the demonized Christians I have dealt with have been able to weaken considerably the grip of the demon through growth in Christ. If then, we think of the grip of a demon on a scale of 1 to 10, most of the demons I have dealt with in Christians tend to be in the 3-6 range” (1991:310). Christians can only weaken the grip of the demon, but the demon remains, arresting, at least to some degree, the growth of the Christian. McGavran has noted that “Pentecostals believe that the mighty name of Jesus drives out evil spirits and heals all manners of sickness”(1977:98). Kraft, however, teaches that the Christ who drove out evil spirits during his earthly ministry can only weaken the less powerful demons today.

Paul lived in a world in which demon possession was commonplace. “Before conversion every one of St. Paul’s hearers was born and bred in the atmosphere of superstitious terror, and even after conversion the vast majority of them were still used to

the idol and did not cease to believe in demons” (Allen 1962a:28). Faced with such an audience, how did Paul respond? Did he attempt to convince them that demons did not exist? Should he denounce such fears as childish superstitions? Paul chose a different approach.

The preaching of St. Paul and the other Apostles was not a denial of this belief; it provided those who accepted it with invincible weapons wherewith to meet the armies of evil, but it did not deny the existence of those armies. It was only the constant sense of the presence of the Spirit of Christ, before whom all spiritual powers must bow, that enabled Christians to banish those demons from their hearts and from the world in which they lived. Deliverance came not by denial but by conquest. (Allen 1962a:28)

Spiritual gifts cannot be limited to speaking in tongues or the interpretation of tongues or healing or miracles. According to the New Testament, other gifts are given such as administration, teaching, and helps. Each of these gifts are as much a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit as the others. The Holy Spirit has not only manifested His presence in His gifts but also in His fruit, which is described in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. “When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23, Living Bible). The Holy Spirit, therefore, not only reveals his presence in speaking in tongues and in healing but also in the Pentecostal community.

If the sign gifts like speaking in tongues or miracles are no longer given does this make the church less powerful?

Every day we know that it is not the possession of great powers but rather the spirit in which any power is used which attracts, which moves, which converts. If we no longer possess (Paul’s) power we still possess the Spirit which inspired him. We have powers enough whereby to let the Spirit shine forth. We have powers sufficient to gather hearers; we have powers sufficient to demonstrate the Divine Presence of the Spirit of God with us;

we have powers sufficient to assure inquirers of the superiority of Christianity to all heathen religions; we have powers sufficient to illustrate in act the character of our religion, its salvation and its love, if only we will use our powers to reveal the Spirit. (Allen 1962a:48)

While certain gifts may no longer be given, the Holy Spirit remains to direct the missionary effort that will bring the gospel to those who do not know Christ at home and abroad and to convince them of their need of Christ. The question however is not whether the Church possesses the Holy Spirit, but rather how much does the Holy Spirit possess the Church?

### Conclusion

Allen did not place as much an emphasis upon the community as the Pentecostals do, and he also placed less emphasis on the gift of miracles. According to Allen, “Paul does not give the gift of miracles the highest place amongst the gifts of the Spirit. He does not speak as if the best of his workers possessed it. It was not the power of working miracles which was of importance in his eyes: it was the Spirit which inspired the life” (1962a:47). What was more important, was not the manifestation of a particular gift, but the demonstration of love.

The emphasis upon the person and role of the Holy Spirit challenges the Baptists to reexamine their understanding of the Holy Spirit. Expressing his criticism of the Church Growth Movement, Van Rheenan asserted,

The anthropocentric approach of Church Growth is by its very nature pragmatic, asking functional questions like ‘Does it work?’ or ‘Will this help the church to grow?’ such questions, void of theological reflection, create a dichotomy between strategy and theology. Theology is thought to provide the message of mission; strategy supplies the method by which the message is conveyed to the people. (2004:2)

In the Pentecostal movement no such dichotomy exists. Their theological understanding provides not only the message, but also the method. It is therefore impossible to separate the strategy that had been applied from the doctrine which identified them as Pentecostals.

For theological reasons Baptists will not follow in the footsteps of the Pentecostals by embracing the gifts of miracles or healing or speaking in tongues. They, however, can find much to imitate in the worship experience of the Pentecostals. Baptists can see the worship experience as too emotional, but “as a religious experience, it represents a ritualized prolongation of the Pentecostal event (Acts 2, 10, 19) that expresses the essence of Christianity with an intense spirituality that recalls the life of the early Christians” (Campos 1996:42).

First, Baptists must learn that a style of worship is not to be imposed upon a people. The people themselves must be allowed to create their own worship experience.

Unlike Catholic or historical Protestants, for whom experience is a secondary consideration, or evangelicals for whom a decision for Christ is often a discrete, noncontinuous event, the Pentecostals' experience of God is a primary and ongoing aspect of their religion. The structures of their worship are designed to enhance those experiences. (Cleary 1997:14)

Having stressed the importance of learning about God, Baptists can sometimes forget the importance of experiencing God.

Second, while Pentecostals place an emphasis upon what are known as “sign gifts,” Baptist must recognize that the Holy Spirit has given other gifts through which He equips the Christian community to serve God in and through the life of the local church. In addition to the gifts, an emphasis must also be placed on the fruit of the Spirit through which the character of Christ is manifested in the lives of His followers.

Third, Baptist pastors can learn from their counterparts in the Pentecostal movement. Although their sermons are “theologically thin,” “often they are more effectively directed to the needs of the people than many sermons delivered in more traditional churches” (Nida 1961:102).

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion: Implications for Mission and Suggestions for Further Study

According to McGavran, the book written by Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?*, “has been one of most influential documents on mission methods ever written. Its great contribution was that it anchored indigenous principles to the Early Church and thus implied that they were not only pragmatically sound but also scripturally sound” (1970:33). Within its pages Allen examined the methods utilized by Paul in his missionary activity and then concluded,

The apostle's methods were suited to his age, our methods are suited to ours. I have already suggested that unless we are prepared to drag down St Paul from his high position as the great Apostle of the Gentiles, we must allow to his methods a certain character of universality, and now I venture to urge that, since the Apostle, no other has discovered or practised methods for the propagation of the Gospel better than his or more suitable to the circumstances of our day. It would be difficult to find any better model than the Apostle Paul in the work of establishing new churches. At any rate this much is certain, that the Apostle's methods succeeded exactly where ours have failed. (1962a:147).

The influence of Allen's books upon Pentecostal missionary thinking is unmistakable. In the article, “Assemblies of God Mission Theology: A Historical Perspective,” McGee acknowledged that several factors influenced mission theology, but perhaps the “most significant outside influence came from the writings of Roland Allen” (1986:1).

Although the writings of Roland Allen had a significant impact upon Pentecostal missiology, little is known about how or if his writings, to any significant degree, have shaped Baptist strategy to establish indigenous churches in Panama. Cal Guy, former professor of Missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, frequently referred to Allen in *Church Growth and Christian Mission* (McGavran 1965). Guy, however, often did not identify his sources, and only by examining the

writings of Roland Allen can it be known whether Guy was referring to this book or another. In the article “A Strategy for World Missions,” he recognized Allen’s contribution to missionary strategy and succinctly stated Allen’s position, “The method followed in New Testament times is the most effective one for today” (1962:10).

*Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Terry, Smith and Johnson 1998) was edited by three former missionaries who are now professors of missions at Southern Baptist and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminaries. Allen’s contribution to the formulation and implementation of missionary is only occasionally mentioned in the lengthy book.

In his books, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, Allen advocated a methodology of communicating the gospel in its simplest form and forming a church which would then be led by the Spirit in matters of polity, ministry, and worship. (Smith 1998:440)

Missiologist Roland Allen asserts that Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit to concentrate his efforts on strategic centers (e.g., Ephesus, Corinth), using them as a base for spreading the gospel. (Sanchez 1998:470)

Allen boldly declares that the church in his day had forgotten the missionary methods set forth in the New Testament. The church, he said, was neglecting the biblical principles for church growth while following unbiblical tradition and methods. One such tradition followed was establishing institutions for missionary activity. Allen believed that institutions drained financial and personnel resources that could better be devoted to propagating the faith. (Ranier 1998:486)

Although Allen “proved to be prophet when he recognized early in the century that it was indigenous congregations under the leadership of the Holy Spirit which grew (James 1998:257), there is no suggestion that his writings have had a significant impact upon the formulation of Baptist strategy.

Alice E. Luce served as an Assemblies of God missionary to India. In a series of articles entitled “Paul’s Missionary Methods” she explained the significance of the writing of Roland Allen.

When I first went out as a missionary to India 24 years ago, I accepted without hesitation the methods of the Board under which I was working, and went on laboring for many years along those lines. Then a book was written, whose author’s name I cannot now recall, entitled, ‘Missionary Methods: Paul’s or ours?’ We missionaries all read it, and thought the writer somewhat visionary and unpractical; but the book first opened my eyes to the diametrical distinction between our methods of working and those of the New Testament. (1921a:6)

J. Herbert Kane served as a missionary to China with the China Inland Mission and was later professor of missions at Moody Bible Institute and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Kane, like Luce, discussed the significant elements in Paul’s strategy. Although Kane placed less of an emphasis upon the Holy Spirit than Luce, her assertion that Paul’s “aim was to found in every place a self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating church” (1921a:6) was echoed by Kane, “The churches founded by Paul were not only self-governing and self-supporting, they were self-propagating as well” (1976:82).

The emphasis on the Pauline methods, however, is incomplete without an understanding of Paul’s personal commitment to Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel. To suggest, however, that Paul was the only one who used these methods is misleading. Others employed the same methods as he did.

He was not the only missionary who went about establishing Churches in those early days. The method in its broad outlines was followed by his disciples, and they were not men of exceptional genius. It is only because he was a supreme example of the spirit, and power with which it can be used, that it can we can properly call the method St. Paul’s. (Allen 1962a:4)



Would Paul's methods be less effective if placed in the hands of someone who was less committed to Christ and less submissive to the Holy Spirit than he was? Hodges explains,

Methods are no better than the men behind them, and men are no better than their contact with God. We can study methods of church growth principles, all of which is well and good, but we will never have anything like New Testament churches and New Testament growth until we get something like New Testament men with New Testament experience. (1965:32)

After discussing Paul's missionary strategy, Kane (1976:86-93) presents several factors which, in his opinion, contributed to his success as a missionary: his deep conviction regarding his call, his complete dedication to the will of God, his complete dependence on the Holy Spirit, his fearless presentation of the gospel, his emphasis on the autonomy of the local church, his wise policy regarding money, and the example of his life.

Paul was a success-oriented person in the best sense of the term. He played to win (1 Cor 9:26-27), and he played for keeps (2 Cor 5:9-10). He was a high-minded person (Phil 4:8) with the purest of motives (1 Cor 13:1-3) and the noblest of goals (Phil 1:21). He sought nothing for himself (1 Thess 2:5-9) but wanted everything for Christ (Phil 1:20). For him success involved two things – the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31) and the good of his fellow men (Rom 15:1-2). He brings both ideas together in one passage: “He who serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men” (Rom 14:18). He believed in success (2 Cor 2:14), he prayed for success (Rom 1:10), he expected success (Rom 15:29), and he achieved success (2 Tim 4:6-8). (Kane 1976:86).

The life of Paul is a reminder that the strategy can fail, not because of an inherent weakness in the strategy, but because the persons given the responsibility to implement the strategy are less devoted to Christ and are less willing to risk their lives for the cause of Christ. They, therefore, are not able to achieve anything similar to what Paul accomplished.

Whether Paul carefully formulated his strategy as he began his missionary journeys is debatable. A footnote in *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Shenk 1999)

advises, “See J. Herbert Kane (1976, 73-85) who discusses ‘Paul’s Missionary Strategy.’ He cites Roland Allen (1962) and Michael Green (1975) who argue that Paul had no thought-out strategy” (Shenk 1999:104). In response to the question, Did Paul have a missionary strategy?, Kane answers,

Some say yes; others say no. Much depends on one’s definition of strategy. If by strategy is meant a deliberate, well-formulated, duly executed plan of action based on human observation and experience, then Paul had little or no strategy; but if we take the word to mean a flexible modus operandi developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and subject to His direction and control, then Paul did have a strategy. (1976:73)

The reference to Green is taken from his delivery at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. “Many of you commented that my paper was then on the strategy of the early Christians. You are right. You see, I don’t believe they had much of a strategy” (1975:174). In the paper itself he remarked,

There does not seem to have been anything very remarkable in the strategy and tactics of the early Christian mission. Indeed, it is doubtful if they had one. I do not believe they set out with any blueprint. They had an unquenchable conviction that Jesus was the key to life and death, happiness and purpose, and they simply could not keep quiet about him. (1975:165)

Responding to Green’s assertion that the early Christians did not have much of a strategy, Kane insists that “Roland Allen took a similar position” (1976:73) and quotes the following statement from *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* (Allen 1962). “It is quite impossible to maintain that St. Paul deliberately planned his journey, beforehand, selected certain strategic points at which to establish his churches and then actually carried out his designs” (Allen 1962a:10). To suggest from this, however, that Paul had no strategy is misleading. In the last paragraph of this chapter “Strategic Points,” Allen affirmed,

St. Paul's centres were centres indeed. He seized strategic points because he had a strategy. The foundation of churches in them was part of a campaign. In his hands they became the sources of rivers, mints from which the new coin of the Gospel was spread in every direction. They were centres from which he could start new work with new power. But they were this not only because they were naturally fitted for this purpose, but also because his method of work was so designed that centres of intellectual and commercial activity became centres of Christian activity. So Paul was less dependent upon these natural advantages than we generally suppose. We have seen that he did not start out with any definite design to establish his churches in this place or in that. He was led as God opened the door; but wherever he was led he always found a centre, and seizing upon that centre he made it a centre of Christian life. (1962a:17)

According to William Owen Carver, then professor of Missions at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Paul and his associates adopted a simple missionary strategy" (1922:16).

While "all nations" were ever before them as they went to make their Christ the Saviour and Master of the 'inhabited earth' (the "world" of the New Testament vocabulary), it seems fairly certain that Paul set before his own vision the Roman Empire as his own parish. He adopted the province as his unit for evangelization. Selecting the chief city – or more than one – for base of operations, he organized campaigns to evangelize the population centres and thus to cover the province. (1932:42)

The difference between Carver's and Allen's understanding of Paul's strategy is subtle. From Carver's viewpoint, Paul's strategy was more deliberate. He selected the chief city in which he would preach. Allen, on the other hand, insisted that Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to the cities where he was to preach the gospel. Paul's strategy did not emphasize where he was to preach, but more what he was to do when he arrived.

Defining the church as self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting, however is troubling to some. Defining the church as self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting overlooks the colorful images of the church which are found in the pages of the New Testament. A more biblical view of the church would include the

metaphors, “the body of Christ, the building of God, the bride of Christ, the flock of God, the garden of God, and the family of God” (Towns 2004:67). Standing alone, the three-self model paints the church in drab colors while the more vibrant hues such as the bride of Christ, the family of God, the Vine and the branches, and the sheep and the Shepherd are ignored.

Winston Crawley is troubled by the constant reference to the term *self* in the three-self formula. “It seems to view churches primarily from an inward-looking perspective, when churches should be essentially upward and outward-looking” (1985:198). Smalley questions whether

the three ‘selfs’ are really projections of our American value system into the idealization of the church, that they are in their very nature Western concepts based upon Western ideals of individualism and power. By forcing them on other people we may at times have been making it impossible for a truly indigenous church to develop. (1958:55)

Wagner attempts to strengthen the indigenous model by introducing the concept of the “mature church.” “Mature churches can take care of themselves, they are churches for others, and they are relevant in their cultural situation” (1971:64). David J. Bosch briefly discusses the inclusion of a “fourth self,” self-theologizing (1998:451). According to him, the three-selfs

were derived from the Western idea of a living community, which was one which could support, extend and manage itself; these, then, were the criteria according to which the younger churches were judged. The Western churches, which had long ago achieved these aims, represented the “higher” form, the others, struggling to rise up to these expectations, the “lower”. In both Catholicism and Protestantism, then, the prevailing image was a *pedagogical* one – over an extended period of time and along a laborious route the younger churches were to be educated and trained in order to reach a selfhood or “maturity”, measured in terms of the “three-selfs”. (1998:451)

Tippett expanded the three-self formula to include what he referred to as the marks of a truly indigenous church: self-image, self-function, self-determination, self-support, self-propagation, and self-giving (1970:378). John R. Stott was also aware of the weaknesses of the indigenous model. According to Stott, this model

is not radical enough in relation to the church's identity. Their three principles were 'self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending', but the authentic selfhood of a church goes beyond finance, administration and evangelism to the totality of its cultural-expression, including its theology, worship and life-style. Indigenization (local autonomy) should lead to contextualization (cultural identity). (1990:238)

Contextualization is "a process whereby the gospel message encounters a particular culture, calling forth faith and leading to the formation of a faith community, which is culturally authentic and authentically Christian" (Shenk 1999:56). A significant difference between the indigenous and contextualization models "was that responsibility for contextualizing the message of the gospel no longer was seen as resting with individual's outside the culture, rather, that responsibility lay with the church and its leaders from within the culture" (1999:56). Bosch agrees.

In all earlier models it was the Western missionary who either induced or benevolently supervised the way in which the encounter between Christian faith and the local cultures was to unfold. The process was onesided, in that the local faith community was not the primary agent. In acculturation, however, the two primary agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community, particularly the laity. (1998:453)

The shortcomings of the indigenous model are graphically displayed in the work of the Home Mission Board in Panama. When the official publications of the Home Mission Board are examined the voices of the Amerindian, West Indian, and Panamanian are strangely absent. They seem to play an insignificant role in a drama in which they should have been the principal actors. They had no input into the formulation of missionary

strategy. No one knows what the churches could have become if they had been immediately placed in the members' hands. In *Panama, The Land Between*, Walker L. Knight, then secretary of the Editorial Department of the Home Mission Board, reported on a trip he made to the country in July 1964. He concluded,

In the calendar of history, Baptists are newcomers to this land between, and their accomplishments have yet to claim the attention of the nation. Nevertheless, the strongest of foundations has been laid in area after area. Panamanian Baptists know that nations are won to Christ by winning the individual citizen, that the citizen is won by meeting him where he is and telling him of God's plan of redemption. These Baptists of Panama for the first time now have adequate organization in their associations, in their national convention, in their evangelistic conferences, and in other groupings. For the first time, they have an adequately housed and staffed theological institute and a beautiful and useful encampment. For the first time, there are churches in every province. (1965:101)

Records, however, indicated that the missionaries from the Home Mission Board did not meet the West Indian or the Spanish-speaking Panamanian, or the Cuna Indian. Little is said about their fears and aspirations or their cultural beliefs. Baptist may have failed to claim the attention of the nation because the missionaries who proclaimed the gospel did not show its relevance to those to whom they were speaking. Knight seems to imply that now that the Baptists of Panama had an adequately housed and staffed theological institute and a beautiful and useful encampment, now that there were churches in every province, now that the foundations had been laid, they could now begin to make a impact on the country of Panama. It took sixty years to lay those foundations, and in the meantime the Pentecostals, more than twenty years before, had already established churches in every province in Panama.

Both the *Background Report: Panama* (Scanlon 1972) and the *Church Development Depth Study: Panama* (Home Mission Board 1972) examined the ministry

of the Home Mission Board to the various peoples in Panama. Again and again, certain assertions were made, but the next steps were never taken.

1. Having asserted that the primary objective of the Home Mission Board is to “assist in the establishing and growth of Baptist churches in Panama” (Home Mission Board 1972) no one explained whether the Home Mission Board was emphasizing biological growth, transfer growth, or conversion growth. Did the Board anticipate that the churches, having been established, would in turn reproduce themselves?
2. Having declared that the Panamanian people were receptive to the gospel, there was no attempt to discover who was receptive or why.
3. After showing that Baptists were not growing as quickly as the Foursquare Gospel, there was no attempt to discover why this was happening.
4. Having referred to two significant books describing the Latin American situation, no one examined the material to determine where mistakes were made or how to improve strategy.
5. Having discussed the significant aspects of the strategy of the Home Mission Board, no one showed how the application of those factors resulted in a church that was self-propagating, self-governing, or self-supporting.
6. Having declared that growth was a result of the pioneer efforts of the Home Mission Board and the receiving of work started by other groups, no one determined how much growth could be attributed to the pioneer efforts of the Home Mission Board and how much to the receiving of work started by other groups.
7. Having noted there was “little in the way of evangelistic results from the medical ministry” of the Marvel Iglesia Clinic, no one asked why or if the medical clinic was the most effective way to present the gospel to these people.
8. The available statistics included only the number of churches, but did not show gender or age. It cannot be shown therefore if the members of Baptist churches are male or female, or young or old. Since the statistics do not identify the churches as West Indian, North American, Spanish-speaking Panamanian, or Cuna Indian, it cannot be shown if growth is or is not occurring among those people groups.
9. Although several members of Baptist churches were lost through poor conservation methods, there was no attempt to explain why or where this was occurring.
10. Although it was stated that “20 of 48 graduates of the seminary are engaged in vocational Christian service,” no one asked why the other graduates were not involved in vocational Christian service or if the seminary was the most effective way to prepare Panamanians for future Christian ministry.

The list can be continued. The material raises more questions than it answers. Why should these questions, and many others, be answered?

Effective strategies (and methods as well) are discovered rather than conceived; they are based on valid and careful research. Every Christian group should constantly monitor what it is doing, how it is doing it, and what results are happening. Research is a spiritual undertaking. Few procedures waste more than those which continue year after year with no effort or willingness to analyze methods, evaluate results, or seek more productive patterns. To fail or refuse to seek and act on the facts revealed by research is unfaithfulness to God. (Smith 1998:443)

Having carefully examined articles from the official publications the Home Mission, its minutes and other sources, the following questions can be answered.

1. What were the explicit and implicit goals of the Home Mission Board in Panama? Wood alone most clearly stated that the goal was to establish an indigenous church. He spoke specifically about establishing a church which was self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. As was mentioned in chapter four, the *Church Development Depth Study*, however, referred to an unidentified superintendent of the Panama Baptist Mission who insisted, “The primary objective of the Home Mission Board is to assist in the establishing and growth of Baptist churches in Panama” (Home Mission Board 1972:10).

GOAL	STRATEGY
Establish an Indigenous Church Superintendent	Administration by a Mission
Self-Governing	Receiving of Work Started by Other Groups
Self-Supporting	Heavy Financial Subsidy
Self-Propagating	Emphasis on Theological Education
	Use of Area Missionaries
Establish and Grow Churches	The Medical Ministry to the Cuna Indians
	The Development of the Convention



Was the goal of the Home Mission Board to establish an indigenous church or to establish and grow churches? While the first goal clearly defines the envisioned church as self-propagating, self-governing, and self-propagating, the other goal does not. Either goal would serve as a guideline for determining which activities or programs would be pursued and which would be ignored or rejected. Whether the goal was to establish an indigenous church or to establish and grow churches, any activity or program could be justified only if it could be demonstrated that it contributed to the realization of that goal. While it was stated that the goal was to establish an indigenous Baptist church, in practice it seems the goal was to establish and grow churches in Panama. If the goal of the Home Mission Board was to establish an indigenous church, how could the emphasis upon heavy financial subsidy and administration by a mission superintendent be justified?

The *Church Development Depth Study* insisted, “Whatever may be the proper evaluation of any individual program of work, it cannot be denied that the intent has been to promote the growth of churches” (Home Mission Board 1972:10). As can be seen in this statement, this goal, to establish and grow churches, was so nebulous, however, that it provided little direction for the ministry of the Home Mission Board in Panama. By applying this as a goal, almost any activity or program of work, so long as it contributed to the establishing or growing of churches, could be justified.

2. What church growth strategy or strategies did the Home Mission Board employ in Panama? It was argued, rightly or wrongly, that institutions, such as the Marvel Iglesias Medical Clinic, the Cresta Del Mar Baptist Assembly at Santa Clara, the Panama Baptist Theological Seminary in Arriaján, and the Panama Baptist Convention, also contributed to the growth of Baptist churches in Panama. The *Church Development*

*Depth Study* not only explains the importance of these institutions but also, to some degree, why they were established.

The camp program at Cresta Mar has helped to solidify and unify the work on the associational level. (Home Mission Board 1972:11)

In addition to the actual healing ministry, the hospital personnel are also engaged in a general program of public health, a nutrition program and a small agricultural ministry. It is said that these services to the Indian people not only meet physical needs, but also create general acceptance of the spiritual message of the Gospel” (Home Mission Board 1972:9).

For many years Baptist work in Panama was led almost exclusively by foreign pastors. By 1955, however, it was evident that Panamanian Baptists themselves must produce and train a national ministry. In that year the Seminary was opened and it has since graduated 36 men and 12 women in the fields of theology and religious education. (Home Mission Board 1972:8)

It is evident that the development of a strong denominational structure has been a goal of prime importance in recent years. (Home Mission Board 1972:10)

The translation of the New Testament into the Cuna dialect, the use of Baptist literature, and an emphasis upon stewardship were also elements of the strategy employed by the Home Mission Board, but the Latin American Depth Study Committee did not consider them to be as important as the other methods.

(3) Assuming that a significant goal was to establish a Baptist church which was self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing, did the strategy result in the effective planting and multiplication of indigenous churches in Panama? It has already been shown that the churches were neither self-propagating, self-supporting, or self-governing. The churches established by the Home Mission Board, however, “showed signs of unhealthy dependency and lack of rootedness in native soil” (Shenk 1999:53).

(4) How can this analysis be further informed by comparison with Pentecostal strategy in Panama? Having identified problems or expressed concerns is not enough. Dayton and Fraser assert that change only takes place when there is discontent. “We can become discontented in a positive way because we have a new perspective on the world or how we might go about doing things” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:421). The Pentecostal movement could have given the Home Mission Board a different perspective. Their approach to evangelism and the establishment of churches was more successful than that of the Home Mission Board. The Pentecostal movement could have shown the Home Mission Board how it could have done things differently in Panama. Pentecostals have placed an emphasis upon the Holy Spirit that is lacking in the articles from the official publications of the Home Mission Board. While it cannot be denied that Southern Baptists emphasize His role in missionary endeavor and personal life, He is not mentioned as often as in the material describing the Pentecostal movement. Allen himself realized that the application of the apostle Paul’s methods without reliance on the Holy Spirit was foolhardy.

Now if we are to practice any methods approaching to the Pauline methods in power and directness, it is absolutely necessary that we should first have this faith, this Spirit. Without faith – faith in the Holy Ghost, faith in the Holy Ghost in our converts, we can do nothing. We cannot possibly act as the Apostle acted until we discover this faith. (Allen 1962a:196).

Discontent could be avoided if the Pentecostal movement was ignored or disparaged, but where there is no discontent there will be no change in the formulation of strategy.

Negative discontent can be brought about by “a failure to reach one’s goals” (Dayton and Fraser 1980:421). The Pentecostal movement could have shown the Home Mission Board that, while they shared a similar goal, the establishing of an indigenous

church, the Pentecostals had been more successful in realizing that goal. Since the writings of Roland Allen contributed significantly to the missiological understanding of the Pentecostals, it can be suggested that Baptists should examine his books more carefully.

In barest essentials this is his strategy: the missionary communicates the gospel and transmits to the new community of converts the simplest statement of faith, the Bible, the sacraments, the principles of ministry. He then stands by as a counseling older brother while the Holy Spirit leads the new church, self-governing and self-supporting, to develop its own forms of polity, ministry, worship, and life. Such a church is spontaneously missionary. (Beaver 1970:27)

Beaver, through his summary of Allen's strategy, not only identifies inherent weaknesses in the strategy followed by the Home Mission Board, but also reveals a strategy whose application results in a church which is self-propagating. The church envisioned by Allen does not become self-governing and self-supporting after a lengthy process of development and supervision by the missionary. When the church was established, the members immediately assumed the responsibility to govern and support it.

(5) Based on this examination of the strategies of the Baptists and Pentecostals and the application of church growth principles, what were the major strengths and weaknesses of the Home Mission Board's strategy in Panama? The men and women who represented the Home Mission Board in Panama faced personal tragedy and overwhelming difficulties. The sincerity and earnestness with which they approached their assigned task cannot be questioned. The weaknesses of the strategy that was applied to establish indigenous congregations, however, are apparent.

The application of a standard solution strategy to all peoples in Panama indicated that the Home Mission Board failed to recognize the differences between a ministry to a

North American audience, laboring to dig to the Panama Canal and others whose language and culture was different from theirs. The Panamanian people not only spoke Spanish, but also were influenced by Roman Catholicism. The Cuna Indians were animists. Although the most obvious difference between the North Americans and the West Indians was race, the West Indians not only spoke English, but also were proudly British and Protestant in background. The similarities between the North Americans and West Indians, however, may have obscured their differences.

In the article "The New Macedonia: A Revolutionary New Era In Mission Begins," Ralph Winter discusses three types of evangelism, E-1, E-2, and E-3. Those concepts are defined in the glossary (Winter and Hawthorne 1992): E-1 or near-neighbor evangelism "where the evangelist is working within his/her own cultural sphere" (Winter and Hawthorne 1992:E-7), E-2 evangelism in which "there are some cultural and language differences between the evangelist and hearer but these are not a major hindrance to evangelism" (Winter and Hawthorne 1992:E-7), and E-3 evangelism "where there is maximum cultural distance between evangelist and hearer" (Winter and Hawthorne 1992:E-7). While work among the Cunans would be regarded as E-3 evangelism, the work among the Spanish-speaking Panamanians would be seen as E-2 evangelism. Because the West Indians spoke English and were Protestant, it would be assumed that they would be placed under E-1 evangelism. Were they, however, so similar to the North Americans that they should be placed under this category? The difference between them is not linguistic or even religious, but cultural, and for that reason they should be placed in the E-2 category. By placing them in the E-2 category, with the

Spanish-speaking Panamanians, the difference between them and the North Americans is emphasized.

The importance of preserving statistics and any other information that would be helpful to explain what is happening and why it is happening cannot be overlooked. Statistics, if correctly interpreted, can suggest factors that contributed to or hindered growth. What has been preserved through letters and other documents can provide insights into the aspirations and frustrations of those men and women whose story is being told. Factors that influenced or hindered growth may be discovered only through examining a document or letter or statistical report that seemed at the moment to have little value, but nonetheless was kept.

The failure to conserve members was a problem that was faced not only by the Home and Foreign Mission Boards, but also by the Panamanian Baptists themselves. Cleveland Cooper, who would later serve as president of the Panama Baptist Convention, declared, “Miles de almas han llegado a los pies del Señor porque hemos proclamado el evangelio” (1991:24). (Thousands of souls have come to the feet of the Lord because we have proclaimed the gospel.) He also had to admit however, “Hemos estado pescando con redes rotas y, constantemente, las almas que ganamos para el Señor desaparecen de nuestras congregaciones” (1991:24). (We have been fishing with torn nets and constantly the souls we win for the Lord disappear from our congregations.) There has not been sufficient investigation to determine where or why this has been occurring.

It has been noted that numerical or quantitative growth is a priority with God, but qualitative growth is equally important to God. The statistics that are available from the Home Mission Board do place an emphasis upon quantitative growth. This is reflected

not only in the number of churches but also in the number of members who attend those churches. What is absent, however, is an emphasis upon qualitative growth. An emphasis upon qualitative growth can reverse this pattern of a failure to conserve members. It is not enough, however, to emphasize those characteristics of the Christian life which are applicable to any Christian, despite his or her culture. It also must be discovered how a commitment to Jesus Christ would be manifested by the Cuna Indian, the West Indian, or the Panamanian within his or her own culture.

The present strategy in Panama, as proposed by the Foreign Mission Board, focuses on people groups, but most of these groups are found in the metropolitan areas such as Panama City and Colon. The *Panama Church Growth Strategy Study* listed the top five priorities for people groups and populations: Panama city apartment dwellers, students of Panama City, Guaymi, East Indian Hindi Muslims, and the Chinese (Foreign Mission Board 1998a:20). This leaves the countryside untouched.

Up to this time little has been done by the evangelical churches in distributing their workers and in systematically and unitedly planning for a more effective Christian witness and service throughout Latin America. We have left much to chance. A great many of our churches have been established without account being taken of strategic elements in their locations, the factors of need, or the probability of their becoming centers of influence and evangelism for surrounding territories. (Rodriguez 1927:111).

The majority of those living in these outlying provinces are Spanish-speaking Panamanians. A more effective strategy to evangelize them would be geographical, emphasizing the establishment of churches that would become centers from which the gospel could be proclaimed in the more remote areas of the provinces, the same strategy suggested by Leland, the first Foursquare Missionary to Panama, and followed even earlier by the apostle Paul. Those cities and towns would be found along the Pan

American Highway, running the length of the country and ending in the Darien jungle. Santiago, Penoneme, and Chame are cities in which public schools, medical clinics, and public parks are often located and each can be used in creative ways to proclaim the gospel. Because a greater number of people live in these towns and cities, greater financial resources are found here. The cities are centers for transportation. The members of the churches established in these towns and villages, acting in concert with the desires of God, would be able to go into the more isolated villages to proclaim the gospel.

Further research can be conducted in one of three areas. First, the story of Jamaica Baptist Union and its initial efforts in the country of Panama has not been fully told. Second, a history of the Balboa Baptist Church has not been written. The church has been in existence since 1908, spanning the ministry of both the Home and the Foreign Mission Boards. Its minutes would be a valuable resource for insights into the character of those who served as pastor and superintendent when the Home Mission Board was facing financial difficulties. Its minutes would also reveal how the church has demonstrated a missionary spirit. The members expressed an interest in continuing the ministry of Latham in the interior of the country and later were involved in beginning a medical ministry to the Cuna Indians. Third, the voice of the Panamanian needs to be heard. How have they envisioned taking the gospel throughout the country? In an article entitled, “Renovemos nuestros espíritus y nuestras mentes” (We will renew our spirits and minds), Cooper, then president of the Panama Baptist Convention, challenged Panamanian Baptists, “Es necesario que los bautistas oren y actúan para que los 45 distritos de la República de Panamá que no tienen una obra bautista la tengan pronto. Después, nuestra próxima meta será que cada uno de los 510 corregimientos de nuestra Nación tenga una



obra bautista” (1994:6). (It is necessary that the Baptists pray and act in order that the 45 districts in the country of Panama that do not have a Baptist work have it soon.

Afterwards, our next goal will be that each one of the 510 *corregimientos* of our nation will have a Baptist work.)

### Conclusion

Once strategy is formulated and implemented, it must be evaluated. As long as evaluation is delayed, resources, both in terms of personnel and finances, will be squandered. When evaluation is delayed, any weakness in strategy will not be discerned, and mistakes, which need to be rectified, will constantly be repeated. Delay in evaluating goals and strategies is costly, not only for the sending agencies, but most importantly for those for whom Christ died. Resources are limited, and they must be applied in the most effective manner possible to insure that more and more people have the opportunity to hear and respond to the message of salvation.

The result of strategy evaluation “is the rejection, modification, or ratification of existing strategies and plans” (Rumelt 2003:87). Having compared the Pentecostals with the Baptists, when weaknesses in missionary strategy are discerned, suggestions can be made as to how strategy can be altered and improved so that indigenous Baptist churches can be more effectively established, not only in Panama, but throughout the world. What is learned through this investigation of the Home Mission Board’s activity in Panama can be applicable to any attempt to effectively proclaim the gospel to people throughout the world.

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