

Who Will Step Up?

By Pastor Robert M. Reid

Crunching the numbers about our world can certainly be an eye-opener. Consider some of the findings from the International Bulletin of Missionary Research:

- Current world population: 6.7 billion
- World Christian population: 2.2 billion
- World population increase per day: 219,000
- Net Christian converts per day: 79,000
- Fastest-growing Christian population: China, 16,500 per day
- Christian martyrs in 2007: 175,000 (or 480 per day)

I am sure there can be lots of spin put on the numbers, but several observations strike me. The “fields” of people that, in Jesus’ words, are “ripe unto harvest” (John 4:35) are huge. The “harvest” in the fields has not kept up with the expansion of the fields. The greatest harvest region in the world is where the influence of the western church growth movement is the smallest. There is still a high cost to being a genuine follower of Christ.

Moving closer to home we see some other numbers reflecting the “field” we call the United States. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recently released some data that reflects some significant changes. While the US is 78% Christian, its Protestant segment is “at 51% and declining.” The Pew Forum reported, “More than one-quarter of American adults have left the faith of their childhood for another religion or no religion at all.” They added, “One in four adults ages 18-29 claim no affiliation with a religious institution.” Commenting on the shift, sociologist Roger Finke of Penn State University observes, “In the past, certain religions had a real holding power, where people from one generation to the next would stay. Right now, there is a dropping confidence in organized religion, especially in traditional religious forms.” On the other hand it was interesting to note that only 4% of the total US population consider themselves agnostic or atheist.

Perhaps with this in mind, Dr. James Dobson, in an address to the National Religious Broadcasters conference on March 11, 2008, issued a serious concern. “It

causes me to wonder who will be left to carry the banner when this generation of leaders is gone. The question is, will the younger generation heed the call? Who will defend the unborn child in the years to come? Who will plead for the Terri Schiavos of the world? Who’s going to fight for the institution of marriage, which is on the ropes today?” Dobson added, “What will be the impact on the conservative Christian church when the patriarchs have passed?” Perhaps he should have added, “Who is going to declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world that has no eternal hope apart from salvation through Jesus Christ?”

The answer is the children, teens, young adults, and those sitting in our churches and Christian homes. It is time for the Christian community to move beyond “idolizing power” as one person put it. Vern Poythress correctly observes, “The power of the Christian faith is in the power of the cross, power in human weakness, the power of God’s love. Christian faith spread in the Roman Empire not by strategically placing Christians in the Roman Senate and in the aristocracy, but by people hearing God’s good news – the ‘foolishness’ of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). Christianity spread by orphanages, by caring for the sick, and by returning good for evil.”

Our country needs dads and moms who are committed to raising their children to be committed followers of Christ. Of course, to do that requires that those same parents are committed to this task themselves. The importance of the family in our nation will be underscored when Christian couples are committed to each other and their families. The validity of the Christian faith will be displayed by Christian students in their classrooms, by employees in their workplace, and citizens in their neighborhoods. Perhaps it will not be the nationally recognized personalities who will step in and arrest the spiritual decline of our nation. It may be ordinary individuals, abandoned to an extraordinary God, who will be the ones called upon to make a difference in this world where God has placed them. Certainly the harvest fields in which we are called to labor look tough. Remember, however, we have a mighty God who has called, empowered, and equipped us for the task at hand. God has not called us to crunch numbers, but to labor in the fields He has prepared for the harvest (John 4:34-38).