

What it means to be a World Christian

by David Bryant

What, then, shall we call this discovery that can change us so radically and I yet make us so healthy? And, what shall we call those who have experienced it?

By now it should be obvious that all Christians are born again into the Gap between God's world-wide purpose and the fulfillment of it. But there's more than one kind of response to that Gap.

Some are asleep, some are on retreat, and some are determined to stand in the Gap particularly at it's widest end where billions await the opportunity to hear of Christ for the first time. Some are heading into the "sunrise of missions" while others huddle in the shadows. Many move along at a sluggish pace, changing little in the Gap because of their own internal gap-of-unbelief. Others run the race before them setting no limits on how, where, or among whom God will use them.

Some are trapped in boxes or pea-sized Christianity full of myths about missions that rob them of incentive to care about the unreached. Others have broken through into cause-Christianity, ready to reach out with God's love to the ends of the earth. They are determined to make Christ's global cause the unifying focus - the context - for all they are and do in the Gap. Yielded to the mediator, they are willing to be broken and remolded to fit in the Gap wherever they can make the most strategic impact. In turn they're growing to know Christ, obey him, and glorify him as the mediator.

So, what shall we call the discovery that redirects Christians toward the needs of the Gap? And how shall we distinguish those who have made it?

Some Christians in the Gap are stunted by selfishness and petty pre-occupations or by a cautious obedience and love reserved for the closest and easiest to care about. How shall we distinguish the others in the Gap whose growth in discipleship is unmistakable, with a vitality that comes only to those who help bring lost sinners from many nations home?

What shall we call this distinct group of Christians who have taken a stand that says:

We want to accept personal responsibility for reaching some of earth's unreached, especially from among the billions at the widest end of the Gap who can only be reached through major new efforts by God's people. Among every people-group where there is no vital, evangelizing Christian community there should be one, there must be one, there shall be one. Together we want to help make this happen.

For a moment, let's call them WORLD CHRISTIANS. Of course, any new term might be misunderstood. For example some might think I said "worldly" Christians, not World Christians. By now we know, however, if you are one you can't be the other. If you are one you don't want to be the other.

No, the term is not in your Bible concordance. Don't worry. It isn't another cliché like the words of the bumper sticker that reads "Honk-if-the-Rapture starts." Nor is it an attempt to label some new spiritual elite who have a corner on a super-secret blessing. Rather, the term describes what all of us are meant to be and what some of us have started to become.

The term "World Christian" may have been coined first by Daniel Fleming in a 1920 YMCA book entitled Marks of a World Christian. More recently the term has appeared in publications of such groups as the WorldTeam missions, Conservation Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, United Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies, the Mission Renewal Teams, Inc., and the Fellowship of World Christians, as well as Campus Crusade for Christ and Inter-varsity Christian Fellowship.

A World Christian isn't better than other Christians. But by God's grace, he has made a discovery so important that life can never be the same again. He has discovered the truth about the Gap, the fact that he is already in it, and the call of Christ to believe, think, plan, and act accordingly. By faith he has chosen to stand in the Gap as a result.

Some World Christians are missionaries who stand in the Gap by physically crossing major human barriers (cultural, political, etc.) to bring the Gospel to those who can hear no other way. But every Christian is meant to be a World Christian, whether you physically "go", or stay at home to provide the sacrificial love, prayers, training, money, and quality of corporate life that backs the witness of those who "go".

World Christians are day-to-day disciples for whom Christ's global cause has become the integrating, overriding priority for all that life is for them. Like disciples should, they actively investigate all that their Master's Great Commission means. Then they act on what they learn.

World Christians are Christians whose life directions have been solidly transformed by a world vision. This is not a term for frustrated Christians who feel trapped into the world missionary movement and sporadically push a few buttons and say they've done their part. Having caught a vision World Christians want to keep that vision and obey it unhesitatingly.

World Christians are (in Corrie Ten Boom's phrase) "tramps for the Lord" who have left their hiding places to roam the Gap with the Savior. They are heaven's expatriates, camping where the kingdom is best served. They are earth's dispossessed, who've journeyed forth to give a dying world not only the Gospel but their own souls as well. They are members of God's global dispersion down through history and out through the nations, reaching the unreached and blessing the families of earth.

By taking three steps we become World Christians. First, World Christians catch a world vision. They see the cause the way God sees it. They see the full scope of the Gap. Next, World Christians keep that world vision. They put the cause at the heart of their life in Christ. They put their life at the heart of the Gap. Then World Christians obey their world vision. Together they develop a strategy that makes a lasting impact on the cause, particularly at the widest end of the Gap.

Many years ago a World Christian named John R. Mott, leader of the Student Volunteer Movement that sent out 20,000 new missionaries, outlined similar steps.

An enterprise which aims at the evangelization of the whole world in a generation, and contemplates the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of Christ, requires that its leaders be Christian statesmen with far-seeing views, with comprehensive plans, with the power of initiative, and with victorious faith.

Catch! Keep! Obey! - these are the three steps to becoming a World Christian.