

The Analysis of a Movement

Ralph D. Winter

Chapter One: By the Year 2000?

The AD2000 Movement¹ has a profound mission statement: *A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person By the Year 2000.*

Do these three phrases give us a crystal clear mandate? Note the final phrase especially.

“By the year 2000” is the most electrifying phrase in the statement; it also causes the most hesitation. No one objects to the idea of goals for the year 2000, but here we see “every people” and “every person.” Doesn’t the presence (twice) of the word “every” make these goals for AD 2000 seem audacious and perhaps even foolish?

Suppose we could arrive at the place where we were absolutely confident that every *person* on earth has heard the Gospel and understood it, that is, everyone who is over 2 years old, say, and also not so old as to be *unable to hear*, or so sick as to be *unable to think*. In any case, suppose we could come to the place where every “hearing” person has heard. At midnight on a certain night—we have finished the job!

One day later, over a million more tiny tots have arrived at the age of two, and over a million more people have plunged beyond a condition of intelligibility.

(Note that God must know what to do with all such people. There are probably 500 million children in the world at any given time under the age of two. Who knows how many older or sick folks there are?)

But this is the point: is God really playing with statistics and watching curves on a computer graph? Is He mechanically waiting for a certain number of souls to be saved? Is He counting peoples and persons? Is that all He expects us to shoot for by AD 2000?

What *can* be done by the year 2000? What is it that we can all pray for?

Well, what did Jesus tell us to pray for? He said that we must pray “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

What this means is that our concept of God’s desire to reach all peoples and persons must somehow be part of His desire for His Kingdom to come on earth. Other verses say that He looks toward the time when all the nations of the world will declare His glory.

What does it really mean for His Kingdom to come? Jesus once said, “If I with the finger of God cast out devils, then has the Kingdom of God come upon you” (Luke 11:20).

Is this what it means for the Kingdom of God to come? Is it possible that we have become so tied up with our measurements of evangelism, social reform, and economic growth that we have forgotten that God is primarily in the business of conquering Satan?

We look forward toward the time when “The Kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). Surely He seeks to vanquish the “Rulers of the darkness of this earth” (Eph 6:12)?

But this is not simply a case of political or military conquest. Jesus made that plain when He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” So we’re not looking for a Christianized United Nations any more than we are looking forward to every person being converted to Christ, or even all social wrongs righted. Indeed, in Revelation 21 we note that *after* He returns “He shall wipe away every tear...”

Reprinted with permission from: Ralph D. Winter, *Frontiers in Mission: Discovering and Surmounting Barriers to the Missio Dei*. Third Edition. Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2005, pp. 135-144.

Is it possible that the essence of the Return of Christ will inevitably be a moment when “measurable” evangelistic goals will be overwhelmed by a total newness of God’s own design?

Certainly we should take our evangelistic measurements seriously, but not as ultimate parameters of God’s plan. We must look forward to the year 2000, knowing that He may evaluate things by measures we cannot fully comprehend. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Meanwhile, with regard to His known will, we can and must go all out.

Can we be overly concerned about bookkeeping tallies in heaven and less concerned about declaring His glory on earth? Can souls get saved without His Name being glorified? I actually believe that brilliant evangelical thinkers who are wrestling with front-line science are part and parcel of the global struggle to glorify His Name.

This is why breaking through into every people has got to be a precursor to reaching every person. Satan *holds whole peoples in bondage*. We can’t wrestle a single soul out of his hand without challenging his authority in that particular people group.

In those groups where Satan’s hold has already been broken, it is well understood how to win souls. But, in groups where no real breakthrough has occurred, the contest is still a “power encounter” between the Spirit of God and the powers of darkness. This is why the front line is prayer. This is why Asian evangelists say they must first “bind the strong man” before entering a village that sits in darkness waiting for the great light.

We must remember that taking the light into dark places will meet fierce resistance. In the Bible the concept of darkness is not merely the absence of light but the presence of a malignant, destroying Person. That is why the kingdoms of this world will not easily yield.

Every People—Kingdoms of Darkness

The phrase *Every People* refers to these kingdoms of darkness. This is why this phrase comes first in the slogan. Only when the gates of those kingdoms are broken down can the Gospel be available “for every person.”

What does a darkened kingdom look like? How can we tell when a kingdom has been brought under God’s sway? Isn’t this the definition of spiritual mapping?

Satan wields his control over individuals by dominating their *groups*. Most people follow the lead of their own group. Very few individuals are perfectly unrestricted thinkers for themselves. Sometimes it is baffling to

missionaries to know how to penetrate a group. Often the breakthrough comes through a miraculous healing or the unaccountable conversion of a key person, not through normal evangelism. Normal evangelism only becomes possible after that breakthrough occurs.

Back to our point: it may be, therefore, somewhat artificial to try to figure out how many individuals are, or aren’t, won to Christ. *Maybe what we face is a much more direct question: are there still kingdoms of this world where His Name is not glorified?* Every people and every person are stepping stones in that direction and are the result of the invasion of God’s glory. But the conquering of the kingdoms of this world is both more and less than every *people* and every *person*.

That this is primarily a spiritual battle certainly does not mean we can set aside careful planning for evangelism and pioneer penetration and just pray that God will go out and do His thing. What it does mean is that “We fight not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12).

And we know that it is our fight, not just His, and that He is fighting with us. We do not need to worry about losing. We know that in every place on earth the key effort is not going to be *our* wisdom or even our hard work. It will be all of that *plus* His sovereign power breaking down the very gates of hell. And we know that He is still doing miracles.

All of this cannot be brought together into a single human plan; yet it calls upon every planning effort, all creative approaches, and all the sacrifice we can muster. We do know that our measurements—our peoples and persons—are merely concrete goals. We know also that He is with us and we are acting in obedience to the Heavenly call.

We can be embarrassed by the outcome in the year 2000. But we will be embarrassed only if when that day comes we cannot say we have done everything in our power to find and approach and reach every people and every person on earth.

But what does “A Church for Every People” mean?

Chapter Two: A Church for Every People?

In the five-word phrase, “A Church for Every People,” the word “church” means much more than an empty building or even a small congregation.

The first five words of the AD 2000 Movement slogan were launched in 1980 by a global-level meeting of mission executives coming from both the Western world and the Two-Thirds world. At that meeting the fulfillment of the phrase “A Church for Every People by the Year 2000” was certainly not for one symbolic congregation to be planted within every group by the year 2000. Behind this simple phrase “A Church for Every People” was essentially “a church movement.”

The phrase “A Church for Every People” was actually based on Donald McGavran’s concept made famous almost thirty years earlier when he spoke of “a people movement to Christ.” A small group of people met in a private home a few months before the 1980 meeting and hammered out this new “watchword.” Dr. McGavran’s conviction which had influenced so many others was that *we cannot say that we have evangelized a person unless that person has been given a chance to unite with an indigenous movement within his or her own society.* Note that if we take this seriously we cannot even speak of the Gospel for Every Person without planning to achieve an indigenous “people movement to Christ” in every people.

McGavran’s concern for converts was that they ought to be encouraged to reach their own people rather than *separate* from them, and to do that he felt that they should stay within the social sphere of their own people. McGavran’s marvelous “letter” on this subject is printed in full in the Appendix of this article.

What is the Upshot?

The churches of the New Testament avidly sprouted up in part because of the impasse experienced by the Gentile “devout persons” attending Jewish synagogues out in Gentile territory. Many of the synagogues of the Jewish dispersion had generously invited Gentile seekers to sit in the back rows. But such invitees were not given an inch by the devout Jewish core of those synagogues when it came to the laying aside the Jewish cultural tradition. Like many Christians today, the faithful had to some extent confused their cultural tradition (diet, calendar, dress, etc.) with the faith itself. Their tradition had become traditionalism, to use Jaroslav Pelican’s language—“Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”

Paul came along and dared to call out all such (Greek) “devout persons” into what would become essentially Gentile-run synagogues. Now the fast growing traits

of early Christianity began to appear. Once the faith was indigenized (or “contextualized”) it grew rapidly. Within two centuries more than one third of the entire population in the the Eastern portion of the Roman Empire had decided to follow Christ!

But a factor more important than mere culture was involved. Paul, referring to Aquila and Priscilla, spoke of “the church that is in their house” (Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19), a situation (unnoticeable to many American readers) where family ties and church worship went together, where church authority and family authority were often indistinguishable, where church discipline and family respect were one and the same thing, where the principle of “honor thy father and thy mother” was not different from spiritual accountability in the church. In such a “church” it is unlikely that the ostracism McGavran fears would occur. It is likely that the synagogues of the New Testament period as well as the Gentile-run churches of the New Testament period mainly consisted of a cluster of extended families guided by the elders of those families.

Beware of the Americans!

What is a *church* in the phrase “A Church for Every People?” In America—especially in urban America—churches have become more and more collections of unrelated individuals huddling together—individuals who, for the most part, have already been loosened up from their natural families with the church becoming a kind of substitute family. Married couples may have children and bring them to church (where they are normally segregated off into age-graded fellowships), but they are not often asked about their own parents.

Neither are older people asked about their children. Individual decisions in the church are as important as individualism has become in secular society. Thus, although the churches of urban America to some significant extent perform the functions of a family, they often do so in the absence of—or possibly even at the expense of—the natural families. For example, although I have attended evangelical churches in many parts of the United States, I have never heard a sermon on why or how to have family devotions. Personal devotions, yes; but not *family* devotions.

But as the church of Jesus Christ grows up in soil of the traditional societies around the world (most of which are not yet so individualistic), it often becomes a movement which normally reinforces, not dismantles, natural fami-

lies, which are part of Creation. This result is not what the average American missionary always expects, however. Sometimes missionaries feel they must stress that people who come to Christ do so *in opposition* to their parents lest their decisions not be real. On the other hand, I heard the story of a North Korean young person that came to Christ. His father asked him what Christianity taught him. He said that it taught him to honor and respect his father and mother. The father's response was, "Good."

If we seriously seek "A Church for Every People" we must recover this Biblical harmony between natural families and "church" families. It will probably be much easier for missionaries from the Third World to do this than for Americans, whose instincts may often lead them (in their haste to "plant a church") to establish congregations composed mainly of "loosened up individuals," social refugees, or even social "deviants." But, in actuality, to work within the culture rather than against it may often be easier, not harder!

Nevertheless, there will still be times and situations when the American practice of putting together scattered family fragments in brotherly love will be a helpful technique, especially as urban conditions around the world may involve the tragic degree of family fragmentation which we now have in the U.S.A.

However, the global threat of American and Western hyper-individualism, so closely allied with Christianity as it now is, may more often pose one of the most serious obstacles to the realization of "A Church for Every People."

Missiologically Defined Peoples?

In any case, only after we recognize clearly that "a people movement to Christ" should be the basic goal of missionary activity within a people is it possible to think clearly about what kind of a people we are talking about. If we see clearly that a "people movement" is highly indigenous, and that the members of the people feel a sense of belonging to each other, then it is possible to recognize the inherent barriers that result from rivalries or enmities within groups which may appear unified and barrierless to outside observers. Those of us who often count ethnolinguistic groups usually take very seriously the tangible differences in dialect or vocabulary of different groups but may not often take seriously the many different kinds of intangible "prejudice barriers" that define additional subgroups.

In other words, if there are divisions which prevent all the people in a group joining in with a "people movement" that has grown up, it is likely that (from the standpoint of missionary strategy) there are really two or more groups, not just one, and that more than one people movement must be started to fulfill the goal of "The Gospel for Every People." Is this what it will take for *every person* to have access to the Gospel?

Chapter Three: The Gospel for Every Person?

What does it mean for us to try to take seriously the statement that *we cannot say that we have evangelized a person unless that person has been given a chance to unite with an indigenous movement within his or her own society?*

If it is imperative for there to be an indigenous church movement within every *people* in order for every *person* to have a reasonable opportunity to know Christ, then it comes with equal force that if every person in a group cannot join an existing people movement, it is apparently true that this group consists of more than one group needing the incarnation of an indigenous church movement. In a word, from the standpoint of churchplanting strategy there may be important subdivisions within the group which we have assumed is just one group.

Groups within Groups?

This fact has caused a lot of confusion. It means we can't start out by counting how many groups there are except in a guess-work sense. Some or many of our groups may turn out to be clusters of groups. Only when a people movement gets going will it define the practical boundaries and allow us to define how many groups there actually are. It means that we can only count groups accurately *after* the Gospel has come, not *before*. We don't want to count more groups than really can be reached with a single people movement; yet we don't want to ignore silent, alienated minorities which feel left out of a majority movement. The technical wording goes like this: a group with mission significance is "the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."

These words were framed by a large and representative group of mission experts at a Lausanne-sponsored meeting in March of 1982. Neither before nor after

has there ever been a similar meeting to define such concepts and terms. The most common objection to this definition is that this particular wording results in a people of a type defined by missiological criteria, which is meaningful primarily to mission strategists. Pragmatically, however, you can't find data of this kind in encyclopedias or world almanacs or reference materials coming from the United Nations. Secular researchers don't think in such terms. Rather, what you do find is data based on country units, which often (very often) split a single people group into two or more groups because of country borders.

Defining Groups by Ministry Tools

Christian workers may be confused partly because they naturally tend to define the world's population in terms of the groups which are reasonable targets for the particular tools of evangelism *in which they specialize*.

For example, those missionaries who hold in their hands immensely powerful radio stations have understandably concluded that they must limit their outreach to 280 groups of people in the world—those that are over 1 million in size. Missionary radio, the enormous and expensive tool in their hands, does not allow them to cope with the smaller groups within these 280 spheres, smaller groups which have differing dialects. The thought is that the smaller groups can understand through a trade language within the 280.

Or, take Campus Crusade's amazing *Jesus* film strategy. Although *Jesus* film strategists started out targeting the same 280 groups of 1 million or more, their indefatigable efforts have taken them deep into the grass-roots reality. As a result, they have now developed less expensive ways of producing sound tracks for the film and as a result of this modification of their "tool" they are now able to focus on groups which are only 75,000 in number or larger. The new less-expensive approach allows them a goal of just over 1,000 such groups. Within these groups there are still smaller groups, which, if you were to count them all, would produce a much larger number. Again, these still-smaller groups may be able to hear via the trade language of their areas.

Understandably, one of the oldest and largest missionary forces, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, has chosen its tool to be the printed page. That choice is the least expensive medium, and thus enables them to reach every group in the world. *Note that written materials are usable by more than one dialect!* If each dialect able

to read the same text were to be pronounced out loud it very well might be unintelligible or objectionable to other groups which can nevertheless read from the same page! In any event, use of the printed page both allows and requires a total of more than 6,000 groups to be approached, only about half of which still need (printed) translation help.

By contrast, note the differing circumstances of the mission groups which employ the *ear-gate*. Take Gospel Recordings, for example. These marvelous people understand perfectly that several groups which can *read* the same printed page may *pronounce* what they see in discordant ways, and as a result the people speaking the different dialects simply will not all listen to a radio or cassette that speaks one of the other dialects—even though its message may appear the same on the printed page. Accordingly, as long as Gospel Recordings uses the ear-gate it has to take these subgroups seriously. As a result, Gospel Recordings estimates more than 10,000 groups to be reached—if you employ the ear-gate and the mother tongue. However, it is possible to put the minimal Gospel message into cassette more easily than it is to produce a substantial portion of the Bible in printed form. Thus, Gospel Recordings, with only a staff of 60, has already dealt with more than 4,500 groups!

If you ponder carefully the effect of using differing tools of evangelism, it will become clear that the goal of the Gospel for Every Person will more likely require penetration by people movements into the smaller groups—eventually, that is, into groups the size Gospel Recordings works with. Why? Because otherwise some small groups of people in many places will not feel part of Christian people movements that talk in objectionably different ways.

Barriers of Prejudice!

Tragically, near-neighbors often hate and fear each other. Thus, in the early stages of evangelism such groups often refuse to become part of the same "people-movement church." In the early stages of evangelism such enmities will require these groups to be dealt with separately.

Fortunately, however, it is true that virtually all such smaller groups are part of larger clusters of groups. This makes it possible to include all remaining unreached groups without listing more than 2,500 or so groups, some of which are clusters. These are a tangible list of

targets for distinctively missionary strategy. Once these clusters are successfully penetrated it gives insight into how other groups within the same cluster may yield to the Gospel, even though the Gospel may not automatically flow from one group in a cluster to its near-neighbor enemies.

And history shows that eventually a large host of smaller, often warring groups, once they become Christian, start to coalesce into larger groups. For example, at the time Christianity first began to be adopted in the Scandinavian area, hundreds of mutually hostile tribes inhabited the region. The Norwegian, Swedish and Danish spheres today are the result of widespread reconciliation and consequent unification resulting from the adoption of Christian faith on the part of many smaller, formerly warring groups. Christian faith did not quite prevent the Rwanda massacres, but it is clearly the only thing that unites the two groups. Satan simply took advantage of the overall good will between the two groups whose people were living side by side and unleashed a malignant minority to do his dirty work, exploiting a settled situation of integration. Note that for the most part one group was not won to Christ by the other group but by people from far away.

It is valuable for the AD 2000 Movement to have added “and the Gospel for Every Person” to the 1980 slogan, “A Church for Every People,” because it may not be obvious that reaching every *people* is the essential means of reaching every *person*. It also may not be obvious that once that essential people movement to Christ has been created by the divine-human effort of cross-cultural evangelism (which is what missions is), that central achievement then essentially makes accessible and available “the Gospel for Every Person,” and is perhaps the best way to define it.

Measure or Verify?

But how measurable is the presence of this “essential people movement to Christ?” It might perhaps be better to say “verifiable” than “measurable.” We don’t normally say a woman is partially pregnant, or that a person is partially infected by AIDS. Rather, in such cases we “verify” the presence or absence of a condition.

For example, measuring the percentage of the individuals in a group that seem to be active Christians may not be the best indicator of the presence or absence of a people movement to Christ. Two percent of a small group of 700 is only 14 people; 2% of the Minnan Chinese in Taiwan happens to be 400,000 believers in 2,000 congregations.

What makes it easier to verify the existence of an unreached people is the fact that we are looking for the groups with the least opportunity, the least access. While it may be difficult to say at exactly what point a people movement securely exists or not, it is certainly easy to identify those groups *where there is no doubt* one way or the other. You end up with three categories: 1) groups definitely unreached, 2) groups where there is doubt, and 3) groups definitely reached. This could be boiled down to 1) unreached, 2) doubtful, and 3) reached. Logically we expect to focus our highest priority energies on those that are definitely unreached.

But, unfortunately, it is still almost entirely theoretical to ask the simple question of whether or not a group has a people movement to Christ within it. Why? Because this is not the way the world’s statistical machinery is working. The U.N. does not ask such questions. Neither do the secular encyclopedias, nor the military or political researchers. Who does? The three major Christian research offices, those of Patrick Johnstone, David Barrett, and Barbara Grimes, have been at work for years and control masses of data on the World Christian movement, drawing on sources all over the world, but mainly upon annual publications of some kind or another, both secular and church publications, etc. These, understandably, are primarily sources for *what is being done*, not so much for *what is not being done*. Few of these sources render information on peoples with whom they do not yet work, and if they do, still fewer ask this particular, specific “unreached peoples” question. The very concept is still fairly new. Thus, there is inadequate information at the present time.

In the Meantime...

As a result, we must be content with the best we can do with the data available. This is where the kind of “less than 2% Christian” type of “available data” comes back in as better than nothing. The AD 2000 Movement has drawn together a fine group of willing researchers and has put together a list which combines differing criteria that may all be significant. These sources have drawn upon data from mission agencies, from individual missionaries, from church publications and lists gathered for other purposes and with other criteria. Some research agencies tabulate the percentages of different religious adherents. Some tabulate degrees of ethnicity, and so on. Thus, the practical thing to do is what AD 2000 has done in this still early state of affairs—namely,

to take lists from various sources and various criteria and make up “a list of lists,” giving all of the available information about a now fairly comprehensive list of peoples.

The goal has not changed. It is still “A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000.” But there is a practical and temporary shift of attention away from the simple, missiological question, “Is this group reached?” That is, is there a “people movement to Christ” present? Or, is there a “pioneer church planting movement” present? Rather, the question has temporarily become, “Is there published information about this group which could give us some light of some sort on the missiological question?”

Do We Have Enough to Work with?

The really crazy thing is that we have all the information we need for the new outreaches for which we are prepared right now. The more we penetrate the pioneer peoples, the more we will know. We don't really need to know more than we can digest right now. We don't need to wring our hands because we don't know the middle name of every baby in every ghetto in order to reach out with mercy to those whose existence we already know. We don't need to know in advance the name of everyone in every house on every block to be able to leave brochures about the *Jesus* film. We will find out a lot more about a lot of the details when we get out there and get to work. The world is now incredibly small. There is no place on earth you cannot go in a few hours. We must keep our goals clearly in mind and not worry too much about the details. We need not suppose that everything depends on us, but we must understand that God is asking everything of us. That, in turn, is the same as saying that He wants to touch our tongues with a live coal from the altar. It means He wants our love for all the world to reflect the genuineness and compassion of His love for all the world, which has already profoundly benefitted us. Paul explained his motivation when he said, “Christ died for all that those who live might no longer live unto themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (II Cor 5:15).

Appendix

Note: The following is one of the most significant documents McGavran ever wrote. It was written at the very end of his life and distilled his misgivings at superficial attempts to barge into untouched groups with the Gospel. Much of his whole life of insights is remarkably distilled here.

A Church in Every People: Plain Talk about a Difficult Task

Donald A. McGavran

In the last eighteen years of the twentieth century, the goal of Christian mission should be to preach the Gospel and, by God's grace, to plant in every unchurched segment of mankind—what shall we say—“a church” or “a cluster of growing churches”? By the phrase “segment of mankind” I mean an urbanization, development, caste, tribe, valley, plain, or minority population. I shall explain that the steadily maintained long-range goal should never be the first; but should always be second. The goal is not one small sealed-off conglomerate congregation in every people. Rather, the long-range goal (to be held constantly in view in the years or decades when it is not yet achieved) should be a cluster of growing congregations in every segment.

The One-by-One Method

As we consider the phrase italicized above, we should remember that it is usually easy to start one single congregation in a new unchurched people group. The missionary arrives. He and his family worship on Sunday. They are the first members of the congregation. He learns the language and preaches the Gospel. He lives like a Christian. He tells people about Christ and helps them in their troubles. He sells tracts or Gospels, or gives them away. Across the years, a few individual converts are won from that. Sometimes they come for very sound and spiritual reasons; sometimes from mixed motives. But here and there a woman, a man, a boy, a girl do decide to follow Jesus. A few employees of the mission become Christian. These may be masons hired to erect the buildings, helpers in the home, rescued persons or orphans. The history of mission in Africa is replete with churches started by buying slaves, freeing them and employing such of them as could not return to their kindred. Such as chose to could accept the Lord. A hundred and fifty years ago this was a common way of starting a church. With the outlawing of slavery, of course, it ceased to be used.

One single congregation arising in the way just described is almost always a conglomerate church—made up of members of several different segments of society. Some old, some young, orphans, rescued persons, helpers and ardent seekers. All seekers are carefully screened to make sure they really intend to receive Christ. In due time a church building is erected and, lo,

“a church in that people.” It is a conglomerate church. It is sealed off from all the people groups of that region. No segment of the population says, “That group of worshipers is us.” They are quite right. It is not. It is ethnically quite a different social unit.

This very common way of beginning the process of evangelization is a slow way to disciple the peoples of the earth—note the plural, “the peoples of the earth.” Let us observe closely what really happens as this congregation is gathered. Each convert, as he becomes a Christian, is seen by kin as one who leaves “us” and joins “them.” He leaves “our gods” to worship “their gods.” Consequently, his own relations force him out. Sometimes he is severely ostracized; thrown out of house and home; his wife is threatened. Hundreds of converts have been poisoned or killed. Sometimes, the ostracism is mild and consists merely in severe disapproval. His people consider him a traitor. A church which results from this process looks to the peoples of the region like an assemblage of traitors. It is a conglomerate congregation. It is made up of individuals who, one by one, have come out of several different societies, castes or tribes.

Now if anyone, in becoming a Christian, is forced out of, or comes out of a tightly-structured segment of society, the Christian cause wins the individual but loses the family. The family, his people, his neighbors of that tribe are fiercely angry at him or her. They are the very men and women to whom he cannot talk. “You are not of us,” they say to him. “You have abandoned us, you like them more than you like us. You now worship their gods not our gods.” As a result, conglomerate congregations, made up of converts won in this fashion, grow very slowly. Indeed, one might truly affirm that, where congregations grow in this fashion, the conversion of the ethnic units (people groups) from which they come is made doubly difficult. “The Christians misled one of our people,” the rest of the group will say. “We’re going to make quite sure that they do not mislead any more of us.”

One-by-one is relatively easy to accomplish. Perhaps 90 out of 100 missionaries who intend church planting get only conglomerate congregations. I want to emphasize that. Perhaps 90 out of every 100 missionaries who intend church planting get only conglomerate congregations. Such missionaries preach the Gospel, tell of Jesus, sell tracts and Gospels and evangelize in many other ways. They welcome inquirers, but whom

do they get? They get a man here, a woman there, a boy here, a girl there, who for various reasons are willing to become Christians and patiently to endure the mild or severe disapproval of their people.

If we understand how churches grow and do not grow on new ground, in untouched and unreached peoples, we must note that the process I have just described seems unreal to most missionaries. “What,” they will exclaim, “could be a better way of entry into all the unreached peoples of that region than to win a few individuals from among them? Instead of resulting in the sealed-off church you describe, the process really gives us points of entry into every society from which a convert has come. That seems to us to be the real situation.”

Those who reason in this fashion have known church growth in a largely Christian land, where men and women who follow Christ are not ostracized, are not regarded as traitors, but rather as those who have done the right thing. In that kind of a society every convert usually can become a channel through which the Christian Faith flows to his relatives and friends. On that point there can be no debate. It was the point I emphasized when I titled my book *The Bridges of God*.

But in tightly-structured societies, where Christianity is looked on as an invading religion, and individuals are excluded for serious fault, there to win converts from several different segments of society, far from building bridges to each of these, erects barriers difficult to cross.

The People Movement Approach

Now let us contrast the other way in which God is discipling the peoples of Planet Earth. My account is not theory but a sober recital of easily observable facts. As you look around the world you see that, while most missionaries succeed in planting only conglomerate churches by the “one-by-one out of the social group” method, here and there clusters of growing churches arise by the people-movement method. They arise by tribe-wise or caste-wise movements to Christ. This is in many ways a better system. In order to use it effectively, missionaries should operate on seven principles.

First, they should be clear about the goal. The goal is not one single conglomerate church in a city or a region. They may get only that, but that must never be their goal. That must be a cluster of growing, indigenous congregations every member of which remains in close contact with his kindred. This cluster grows best

if it is in one people, one caste, one tribe, one segment of society. For example, if you were evangelizing the taxi drivers of Taipei, then your goal would be to win not some taxi drivers, some university professors, some farmers and some fishermen, but to establish churches made up largely of taxi drivers, their wives and children and mechanics. As you win converts of that particular community, the congregation has a natural, built-in social cohesion. Everybody feels at home. Yes, the goal must be clear.

The second principle is that the national leader, or the missionary and his helpers, should concentrate on one people. If you are going to establish a cluster of growing congregations amongst, let us say, the Nair people of Kerala, which is the south west tip of India, then you would need to place most of your missionaries and their helpers so that they can work among the Nairs. They should proclaim the Gospel to Nairs and say quite openly to them, "We are hoping that, within your caste, there soon will be thousands of followers of Jesus Christ, who will remain solidly in the Nair community." They will, of course, not worship the old gods; but then plenty of Nairs don't worship their old gods—plenty of Nairs are Communist, and ridicule their old gods.

Nairs whom God calls, who choose to believe in Christ, are going to love their neighbors more than they did before, and walk in the light. They will be saved and beautiful people. They will remain Nairs while, at the same time, they have become Christians. To repeat, concentrate on one people group. If you have three missionaries, don't have one evangelizing this group, another that, and a third 200 miles away evangelizing still another. That is a sure way to guarantee that any church started will be small, non-growing, one-by-one churches. The social dynamics of those sections of society will work solidly against the eruption of any great growing people movement to Christ.

The third principle is to encourage converts to remain thoroughly one with their own people in most matters. They should continue to eat what their people eat. They should not say, "My people are vegetarians but, now that I have become a Christian, I'm going to eat meat." After they become Christians they should be more rigidly vegetarian than they were before. In the matter of clothing, they should continue to look precisely like their kinfolk. In the matter of marriage, most people are endogamous, they insist that

"our people marry only our people." They look with great disfavor on our marrying other people. And yet when Christians come in one-by-one, they cannot marry their own people. None of them have become Christian. Where only a few of a given people become Christians, when it comes time for them or their children to marry, they have to take husbands or wives from other segments of the population. So their own kin look at them and say, "Yes, become a Christian and mongrelize your children. You have left us and have joined them."

All converts should be encouraged to bear cheerfully the exclusion, the oppression, and the persecution that they are likely to encounter from their people. When anyone becomes a follower of a new way of life, he is likely to meet with some disfavor from his loved ones. Maybe it's mild; maybe it's severe. He should bear such disfavor patiently. He should say on all occasions,

I am a better son than I was before; I am a better father than I was before; I am a better husband than I was before; and I love you more than I used to do. You can hate me, but I will not hate you. You can exclude me, but I will include you. You can force me out of our ancestral house; but I will live on its veranda. Or I will get a house just across the street. I am still one of you, I am more one of you than I ever was before.

Encourage converts to remain thoroughly one with their people in most matters.

Please note that word "most." They cannot remain one with their people in idolatry, or drunkenness or obvious sin. If they belong to a segment of society that earns its living stealing they must "steal no more." But, in most matters (how they talk, how they dress, how they eat, where they go, what kind of houses they live in), they can look very much like their people, and ought to make every effort to do so.

The fourth principle is to try to get group decisions for Christ. If only one person decides to follow Jesus, do not baptize him immediately. Say to him, "You and I will work together to lead another five or ten or, God willing, fifty of your people to accept Jesus Christ as Savior so that when you are baptized, you are baptized with them." Ostracism is very effective against one lone person. But ostracism is weak indeed when exercised against a group of a dozen. And when exercised against two hundred it has practically no force at all.

The fifth principle is this: Aim for scores of groups of people to become Christians in an even flowing stream across the years. One of the common mistakes made by missionaries, eastern as well as western, all around the world is that when a few become Christians—perhaps 100, 200 or even 1,000—the missionaries spend all their time teaching them. They want to make them good Christians and they say to themselves, “If these people become good Christians, then the Gospel will spread.” So for years they concentrate on a few congregations. By the time, ten or twenty years later, that they begin evangelizing outside that group, the rest of the people no longer want to become Christians. That has happened again and again. This principle requires that, from the very beginning, the missionary keeps on reaching out to new groups. “But,” you say, “is not this a sure way to get poor Christians who don’t know the Bible? If we follow that principle we shall soon have a lot of ‘raw’ Christians. Soon we shall have a community of perhaps five thousand people who are very sketchily Christian.”

Yes, that is certainly a danger. At this point, we must lean heavily upon the New Testament, remembering the brief weeks or months of instruction Paul gave to his new churches. We must trust the Holy Spirit, and believe that God has called those people out of darkness into His wonderful light. As between two evils, giving them too little Christian teaching and allowing them to become a sealed-off community that cannot reach its own people, the latter is much the greater danger. We must not allow new converts to become sealed-off. We must continue to make sure that a constant stream of new converts comes into the ever-growing cluster of congregations.

Now the sixth point is this: The converts, five or five thousand, ought to say or at least feel:

We Christians are advance guard of our people, of our segment of society. We are showing our relatives and neighbors a better way of life. The way we are pioneering is good for us who have become Christians and will be very good for you thousands who have yet to believe. Please look on us not as traitors in any sense. We are better sons, brothers and wives, better tribesmen and caste fellows, better members of our labor union, than we ever were before. We are showing ways in which, while remaining thoroughly of our own segment of society, we all can have a better life. Please look on us as the pioneers of our own people entering a wonderful Promised Land.

The last principle I stress is this: Constantly emphasize brotherhood. In Christ there is no Jew, no Greek, no bond, no free, no Barbarian, no Scythian. We are all one in Christ Jesus. But, at the same time, let us remember that Paul did not attack all imperfect social institutions. For example, he did not do away with slavery. Paul said to the slave, “Be a better slave.” He said to the slave owner, “Be a kindlier master.”

Paul also said in that famous passage emphasizing unity, “There is no male or female.” Nevertheless Christians, in their boarding schools and orphanages, continue to sleep boys and girls in separate dormitories!! In Christ, there is no sex distinction. Boys and girls are equally precious in God’s sight. Men from this tribe, and men from that are equally precious in God’s sight. We are all equally sinners saved by grace. These things are true but, at the same time, there are certain social niceties which Christians at this time may observe.

As we continue to stress brotherhood, let us be sure that the most effective way to achieve brotherhood is to lead ever increasing numbers of men and women from every *ethnos*, every tribe, every segment of society into an obedient relationship to Christ. As we multiply Christians in every segment of society, the possibility of genuine brotherhood, justice, goodness and righteousness will be enormously increased. Indeed, the best way to get justice, possibly the only way to get justice, is to have very large numbers in every segment of society become committed Christians.

Conclusion

As we work for Christward movements in every people, let us not make the mistake of believing that “one-by-one out of the society into the church” is a bad way. One precious soul willing to endure severe ostracism in order to become a follower of Jesus—one precious soul coming all by himself—is a way that God has blessed and is blessing to the salvation of mankind. But it is a slow way. And it is a way which frequently seals off the convert’s own people from any further hearing of the Gospel.

Sometimes one-by-one is the only possible method. When it is, let us praise God for it, and live with its limitations. Let us urge all those wonderful Christians who come bearing persecution and oppression, to pray for their own dear ones and to work constantly that more of their own people may believe and be saved.

One-by-one is one way that God is blessing to the increase of His Church. The people movement is another way. The great advances of the Church on new ground out of non-Christian religions have always come by people movements, never one-by-one. It is equally true that one-by-one-out-of-the-people is a very common beginning way. In the book, *Bridges of God*, which God used to launch the Church Growth Movement, I have used a simile. I say there that missions start proclaiming Christ on a desert-like plain. There life is hard, the number of Christians remains small. A large missionary presence is required. But, here and there, the missionaries or the converts find ways to break out of that arid plain and proceed up into the verdant mountains. There large numbers of people live; there great churches can be founded; there the Church grows strong; that is people-movement land.

I commend that simile to you. Let us accept what God gives. If it is one-by-one, let us accept that and lead those who believe in Jesus to trust in Him completely. But let us always pray that, after that beginning, we may proceed to higher ground, to more verdant pasture, to more fertile lands where great groups of men and women, all of the same segment of society, become Christians and thus open the way for Christward movements in each people on earth. Our goal should be Christward movements within each segment. There the dynamics of social cohesion will advance the Gospel and lead multitudes out of darkness into His wonderful life. Let us be sure that we do it by the most effective methods.

Endnote

¹ Now, AD2000 & Beyond Movement.