

# From the Unfinished Task to the Finishable

Articles by Ralph D. Winter  
in Chronological Order

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## PART 2

### Jesus' 2000th Birthday

*Mission Frontiers*, July-August 1994

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/jesus-2000th-birthday>

We applaud efforts being made to stage a massive celebration of the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. A Christian dentist in the California bay area was the first I knew to come up with that idea. Now several others are taking it up, including a brilliant younger missiologist named Jay Gary.

One of the most intriguing contributions is the idea of Robin Wainwright, a New Testament scholar, who would like to repeat the journey of the Magi, and would like to see action start in 1996, building both a visitor's center as well as a planetarium in Bethlehem! These thoughts are contained in a new book, *Star of 2000*, by Jay Gary, and an article in the current issue of *World Christian*.

All of these events stirring about will no doubt make millions pause and consider eternity, consider Jesus Christ, and perhaps even consider His driving purpose to encompass the earth with His redeeming Word.

An unfortunate element in these materials is the bizarre emphasis that mission goals for AD2000 are making "zero" progress! Is this justification for forgetting all about world evangelization and celebrating His 2000th birthday instead? I'm sure that does not follow.

However, there is, as usual, a slippery aspect when dealing with statistics.

#### **"Zero Progress?"**

This is a completely new thought for me. But it is true, actually, that if you focus on a small number of still "totally unreached" people groups you can technically claim that up to now there has been "zero" progress with these particular groups.

But note that this is not to say there has been zero progress in world evangelization in the last few years! It merely says that there is no progress as yet in the case of those groups for which there has been no progress. Is it such astounding news that some groups are as yet unreached?

We may be bitterly disappointed that there are still some groups in the world for which there has not yet been any progress. That is an impelling reason to redouble the already massive efforts reaching out across the world to the unreached peoples. It certainly is not a legitimate answer to the question (in the article), "What progress has been made in the last five years (in world evangelization)."

Let's do celebrate His birthday in the year 2000. Let's also do all we can to present Him with the birthday present He most desires—that His glory might be declared among the nations—all the nations by then, if at all possible.

## **Editorial Comment on What Is the Task; Completing the Task**

*Mission Frontiers* September-October 1994

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorialcomment763>

Money and missions is the theme of most of our material this time, but a few minutes ago, when I took out the trash, I noticed that my right front tire was almost flat. I had to go to the garage and get out my seldom used, battery-operated tire pump. As I sat there on the grass watching this neat little engine make imperceptible progress pumping tiny puffs of air into an almost flat tire, I knew I was in for a few-minutes wait.

My thoughts drifted to the fax message that had just come in earlier today. It was a page from a well-known mission magazine.

There it was. One more of my friends had tossed in the towel about finishing the task by AD 2000. The reason was suspicious. We, too, may give up the goal one day, but not yet!

But why now are two of my friends the first to burst into print talking like this? Well, both of them are leaning on the same misleading statement I talked about last issue.

### **The stumbling block**

You judge. Let me cite the provocative, misleading quote on which both of my friends are relying, because they are misreading still another friend of mine—David Barrett.

Barrett is as zealous as anyone to see big things done by AD 2000. But at times his eagerness to encourage greater effort leads in the direction of alarming people. (I used to do that, too.) His confusing quote is: "I just updated my 1990 list of least evangelized peoples. This list was totally unreached in 1974, totally unreached in 1989, and totally unreached today."

Wow! This list is the "least" reached out of a larger number of unreached groups. My friends have misinterpreted this statement.

My comment last time was, roughly: "To suppose that nothing has been done among any of the groups simply because nothing has been done within one sub-section is a serious flaw in logic."

Let's take an example. Suppose (I'm just guessing) there were 120 million smokers in America in 1974, and that this number dropped dramatically to 100 million today. An alarmist could still say (truthfully, but misleadingly) that "There were a certain 20 million really heavy smokers who had not stopped smoking in 1974, who still had not stopped smoking in 1989, and who are still smoking today in 1994." While such a statement could be true, it glosses over the fact that a total of 120 million smokers in 1974 declined to 100 million in twenty years. Sure, a certain 20 million have not stopped smoking, but 20 million have stopped! A LOT has been done!

To be specific

Those of you who want to look more closely at what can be done by the year 2000 need to know that the list ("2,000 least evangelized peoples") referred to by Barrett is unpublished. No one but the owner can verify it. Furthermore, the dozen or so criteria



for what constitutes least evangelized are also unrevealed. The hundreds of knowledgeable mission leaders in the world today have no way to make sure new breakthroughs are recorded so as to affect this list.

Finally, the phrase, least evangelized, whatever its criteria, is a quite different concept from the phrase unreached. Unreached has a published definition, carefully arrived at in a two-day study conference of two dozen widely representative mission leaders (in March of 1982, a meeting sponsored by the Lausanne Committee and the then-called Evangelical Foreign Mission Association).

The phrase, a least evangelized people group, has multiple (unpublished) criteria, apparently having to do with degrees of exposure. The last time I saw the list of such groups, one of the groups already had thousands of churches and hundreds of thousands of fervent believers within it.

Thus, a group can be least evangelized and yet already reached, or a group can be unreached and yet already evangelized. How?

The phrase, an unreached people group, has only one criterion: Is there (or isn't there) within that group a viable, evangelizing, indigenous community of believers able to reach the rest of the group?

Also, a group that is unreached is like not yet pregnant. You can't, grammatically, say either slightly, or partially pregnant nor can you say totally pregnant. You CAN say, "clearly pregnant" or "possibly pregnant." Thus, the troublesome quote is not using technical terms when it says "totally unreached" or when it uses least evangelized and unreached synonymously.

The point is that years of effective progress can go on without a group finally attaining the "reached" status. But not quite arrived does NOT mean there is no progress at all.

What is "the task"?

Furthermore, to say "the task can't be completed" is meaningless unless you say what the task is. One of my good friends, Jim Montgomery, is out to plant 7 million churches. He was on our founding board. His marvelous ministry, DAWN (Discipling a Whole Nation), has a brilliant grasp of the local, practical goal of planting a church for every village or cluster of 500 or more people. DAWN now has a global network with committees on the country level which is setting out to do just that. That's why their goal is 7,000,000 churches. (We have been suggesting that even that huge a number means only one more church for each existing church. But Jim Montgomery has corrected us, and we need to speak of only 5 million existing Bible-studying churches.)

However, when I speak of "The Task," I prefer to speak of "people groups" and the remaining necessity for the cross-cultural missionary type of work to penetrate them. Thus, I am concerned about the number of peoples that have not yet been disciplined--and I go along with the 1982 definition (see col. 3 on p. 4) of "reached/unreached peoples." This is the cross-cultural missionary task of penetrating every people group, not a task of ordinary evangelism. This point has been voiced since the 1980 World Consultation on Frontier Missions in Edinburgh as A Church for Every People by the Year 2000. Only when that goal is attained for a given people group, can we pursue the further goal added by the AD 2000 Movement: "and the Gospel for Every Person."

Therefore, we have always stressed that the first priority is the penetration of the sealed-off (unreached) peoples of the world. We would like to see all of them penetrated (reached). Now, that is a goal that is finishable by the year 2000.

We are getting closer. We may have to give this more specific missionary goal up, but it is much too soon to do so now!

#### Korea Countdown

We are approaching the global level AD 2000 Movement meeting in Korea next May 17-26. It will unquestionably be the most important strategic huddle before the end of the century. If you want to sense the momentum of faith and action behind it, check Luis Bush's two articles, pages 32 and 36.

#### Money and Missions

Probably the most important book ever written on this subject is Jonathon Bonk's book, *Missions and Money*. See the excerpt on page 22.

#### An Iranian Shocker

Judith Shadzi is an evangelical American happily married to an Iranian. Her new book, *A Time for Peace between Muslims and the West*, gives gripping, knowledgeable, and invaluable insight into Islam. And it gives informed yet shocking insight into the Iranian view of the United States--which armed Saddam Hussein as he killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians. Send \$10 directly to Judith Shadzi, 10187 Byrne Ave, Cupertino CA 95014.

#### Transform Your Bible

Dr. David Filbeck's new Billy Graham Center Monograph is the most thorough-going presentation of the Bible as a missionary book ever written. Spectacular! Your Bible will never be the same. See the announcement on page 51.

## **Editorial Comment on What the AD2000 and Beyond Movement Has to Do with the Return of Christ**

*Mission Frontiers* March-April 1995

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-comment73>

What does the AD2000 and Beyond Movement have to do with the Return of Christ?

How about you? Do you (honestly) think very often about the end of history?

What if history might come to an end while you are still alive? Or before we elect another president? Or before you can use up your pension funds? Or before your children graduate from college, have children, before their children have children, etc.? Surprise, yes!

Confusion abounds on this subject. Some leaders have missed out on the incredible excitement of the AD2000 Movement (and thus the importance of the upcoming GCOWE meeting in Korea—see pp. 7-14). Why? The reason they have held back is the simple fact that the Return of Christ and the End of History are to them unacceptable subjects of discussion. They want to have nothing to do with people who think that Christ just might return sometime soon. A liberal pastor in Los Angeles used to have a sign in front of his church that said, “One world at a time.”

Even within the AD2000 Movement some leaders refuse to consider the possibility of the year 2000 being something spiritually special. They are glad to go along with the year-2000 evangelistic goals, but that’s all.

However, recently in my morning devotions while translating my way through Paul’s words to the Thessalonians I encountered a radically new idea (new for me). I don’t know why I had not seen it before.

Ever since I was a teenager I have puzzled over Paul’s paradoxical statement that the Day of the Lord will “come as a thief in the night” but “to you who walk in the light it will not overtake you as a thief.” My translation of 1 Thess 5:2-10 makes this new insight clear:

“You already know perfectly well that the Day of the Lord will be totally unexpected, and that it will be bad news for most people—like a robber breaking in at night. People may say, ‘Everything’s okay, no problem, don’t even think about things like that.’ But just as a mother expecting a baby never knows from one minute to the next when the birth pangs will really begin in earnest, so also there is just no way you can know precisely when this Event will occur.

“However, brethren, as believers this Event—however unpredictable—is not going to be for you an unpleasant surprise. For you the sudden Appearance will not be that of a thief but of a rescuing friend.

“You are living in the light, not in darkness. You don’t have deeds of darkness to hide or be revealed against you. People who doze and drift and get drunk, do so in spiritual darkness. But you are of the day, and you are living soberly and righteously with faith and love leading to salvation. That’s right. God’s plans for us who believe are for good and not for evil—for salvation in Jesus Christ. He gave His life for us. The result is

that whether we die before He comes or are still alive at the moment He returns, we will live with Him!”

For me, these verses settle once and for all that that Day does not—or should not—hold any terrors for those who are walking in the light. For me, at least, it is settled once and for all that no one should try to predict that Day—IT WILL BE A SURPRISE FOR EVERYONE. “As in the days of Noah,” or “as with a mother expecting a child,” etc., it will be a surprise.

On the other hand, an expectant mother is not completely in the dark about the time of birth since there are many signs leading up to it.

Similarly, it seems eminently reasonable that God would have some fairly practical goals in mind prior to the Return of Christ. Matthew 24:14 is pretty clear: “This Gospel must be preached... as a testimony to all peoples, and then shall the end come.” There seems something here needing completion just as do the words in a Psalm of David, “Declare His glory among all nations (peoples)” (Ps 96:3, see also 1 Chron. 16).

It is important to note that these verses do NOT speak of our somehow winning (or even evangelizing) every soul on earth—or even all individuals on earth who have arrived at the age of accountability.

Why not expect to win everyone, or at least “evangelize” everyone? Perhaps such a goal is a bit artificial since every day 411,000 more children grow up into an age of accountability. This requires every village on earth to be re-evangelized every minute. Would it be meaningful to achieve that goal for a split second before falling back from it?

We have to believe that God has plans we don’t know of in detail. What about all those who die in abortions or who are not yet born at the time of His Return—for example, 113,000,000 babies still in utero at any given moment!

But, admittedly, Scripture is fairly explicit. Let’s check again three sample passages:

1. “Sing to the Lord all the earth. Declare His glory among all nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (Ps 96, and also 1 Chron 16:24). This speaks of a result not a mission strategy--that is, it speaks of a great choir made up of all peoples singing to all peoples. It goes on to say, “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength... the glory due to His name” (v. 7).

This is the spirit-filled Psalmist crying out (with God’s goals in mind) what ought to happen. If God’s wish is our command then we ought to go out and do everything within our power to make happen His specific wishes known to us.

But even so, precisely what has to happen for this result to be properly fulfilled? What if all heads of state produce a truly spiritual choir in the U.N.? Would that do it? What if only a handful of believers within every people were to raise their voices in praise to the living God? Would that do it?

2. Take the other key verse: “This Gospel must be preached ... as a testimony to all peoples, and then shall the end come.” The wording here could conceivably allow you merely to preach, to expose, with or without results—if the Psalmist had not indicated that all nations in some sense are to “sing unto the Lord.”

3. Or, take the “Great Commission” phrase: “Disciple all peoples” (Matt 28:19).

Problem: we may feel more confident about discipling a person than discipling a people (to disciple a people is a phrase that has no parallel elsewhere in Scripture). But

the “Great Commission” goes on to speak of “baptizing them... teaching them...”) and this is pretty specific. But, does this mean baptize every single person?

Let's jump to the end of the story! Revelation 5 portrays every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth singing. Rev 7 speaks of a great, uncountable multitude “from every nation, tribe, people, and language” before the throne.

In an often mistranslated passage, Rev 21:3, we see God addressing “His peoples” (this is often translated improperly as “His people”). The great missionary linguist, Kenneth Pike, once said something like: “A divine Gardener may be more interested in the survival of a rare flower than in a huge quantity of any one flower.” Note also that “wipe away every tear” comes AFTER His Return.

But enough. Would you like me to explain how I reconcile the tension between every person and every people?

In my mind the most strategic of all goals posed for the year 2000 is simple: it is that of giving every person in the world access to the Gospel. But, note carefully:

I don't mean by access merely the existence of a strange church next door. Far better: an intelligible church across town. People must have someone (like Jesus) who can speak to them from within their society—THAT is the “incarnation” of the Gospel.

So, is it fair if some people still lack access to a completely indigenous church movement? Is it fair if some people cannot hear in their mother tongue?

No, what is essential is a missionary breakthrough of communication whereby the Gospel becomes intelligible on the linguistic and cultural wave length of every person. That means we cannot blithely by-pass “pockets” of people—peoples sealed off by significant differences, where only cross-cultural techniques of evangelism will suffice.

Amazingly, all of this is summed up by the phrase, “A Church for Every People by the Year 2000.”

All of this, furthermore, explains why it is equivalent to say “A Church for Every People and (thus) the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000.”

## **Editorial Comment on A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000**

*Mission Frontiers* May-June 1995

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-comment72>

A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000!—How can anyone guarantee that this WILL happen?—How can anyone guarantee that this WON'T happen?

Well, AD2000 leaders are truly sorry if some find it difficult to believe that “it CAN happen.” The end of the second millennium, December 31, 2000 is five years beyond January 1, 1996. A lot can be done in that amount of time, especially with God in charge. However, just what are we talking about? Is it the completion of the Great Commission? No, no, no.

Is it the Return of Christ? No, no, no. Let's look at the IT more carefully.

AD2000 and the Return of Christ? A great deal of consternation took place as the year AD1000 was approaching. But at that time in history most of the people on this planet were totally unaware of year, and few of the world's peoples even employed a calendar which suggested such a date. Today, the Christian calendar that looks forward in a few years to the year 2000 is widely known and understood.

Both a thousand years ago—as well as today—we cannot require anyone to take notice of the change of a millennium, nor can we prevent people from getting excited or apprehensive about it. Indeed, millions may be stirred in a bad way if they are not thinking clearly.

The AD2000 Movement and Beyond is one organization girdling the globe which is speaking boldly about the purposes of God and the year 2000. But, this Movement does not pretend to suggest when Christ will return.

On that issue, the Bible clearly teaches that His Return will be unexpected for everyone. The good news is that to believers that Day won't be a damaging event--like a robber at midnight. But even for believers that Day will be unexpected (1 Thess 5:2). Jesus compared His return to “the days of Noah,” and those days in Matt 24:37, Luke 17:26, and 1 Pet 3:20, will be days of unanticipated terror for many, while the precise timing will be unexpected for everyone. Thus, the AD2000 movement does not attempt to predict the unpredictable.

The Great Commission? What about “The Completion of the Great Commission?” Is that the goal of the AD2000 Movement? This, too, is off limits in official AD2000 Movement documents. Of course, to complete the Great Commission is what we are all working for. But no one in AD2000 is bold enough to say for sure just what is implied by the completion of the Great Commission.

Since the Great Commission is not an idea that is specific enough to make into a measurable goal, the AD2000 Movement has wisely chosen a purpose statement which is eminently measurable—A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person. This statement ought not to be torn in two—as if you can get the Gospel to every person without planting a church movement which is meaningful to every person. See pages 12-

18. Over the years considerable effort has been made for that goal to be as precise and measurable as possible. Thus the AD2000 Movement's goal for the year 2000 is something which will be clearly evident—or not—by December 31st of AD2000.

Let us not argue the wrong cause! Meanwhile we must guard against emotional or illogical thinking. What about those who scoff at the AD2000 movement because they think we are talking about the Return of Christ? Tell them we are very excited about the Return of Christ, but that we are not confusing His

Return with our measurable goal. What about those who scoff at the idea of completing the Great Commission by the year 2000? They too misunderstand the specific goal definition of the AD2000 Movement.

So, let us not argue the wrong cause. Satan would be happy to embroil us in such things, just to distract us from the task before us—the preaching of the Gospel within every people. The classical statement of that goal has been in print ever since 1981, and is contained in the appendix of my new book “Thy Kingdom Come” under the title, “A Church in Every People—Plain Talk About a Difficult Task.” Those few pages tell how meaningful a living, accountable fellowship within every people is and how delicate a divine-human achievement it is. The AD2000 purpose statement is eminently reasonable, measurable and substantial, building as it does on so carefully defined a goal.

But some may still be confused. We simply must guard against saying, “We are sure it will be done.” We must also recognize the folly of anyone unwise enough to say, “I am sure it won’t be done.” But we can still say, in faith, “I am sure it can be done.”

By saying that we mean that our goal has never been a sure thing and will naturally get less likely as time passes. After all, what we have in mind that God wants to accomplish by the year 2000 may be close or far from His actual purposes. Yet, what He may decide to do by that time—or at that time—will reasonably depend upon what we and others do now and between now and then.

What can happen in five years? In our day more can be done in five years’ time than in 20 years back in the time of the Student Volunteer Movement at the beginning of this century—if only because travel time is less than one thirtieth of what it was then. Other things are in our favor, too. A hundred years ago it was impossible to pick up the phone and call across the world. It was unthinkable for one person to talk to one billion people simultaneously--as Billy Graham has done.

Not only that, but the peoples of the world have been massively shuffled. They now have links to other peoples through an unprecedented amount of dispersion and mixing. Almost no one in the world today is completely cut off from Coca Cola or flashlight batteries or Singer sewing machines—or even VCRs—or the Gospel. Someone has figured that there may only be 200 peoples in the world where there are no believers at all. There may be almost no groups within which there are not key “bridge”-bilinguals.

At the closing meeting in Korea, it is expected that after years of previous preparation 100,000 Korea young people alone will volunteer to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Even if there were 10,000 still-unreached people groups, that would mean ten missionaries for every one—sent from Korea alone.

Furthermore, our plans cannot even begin to predict or control revival fire. Is it not likely that the God Who has often blessed this world with revival in the past will employ that kind of fire again? It has been said that in a true revival God can do in 20 minutes what might otherwise take 20 years. Are we praying for revival? As I write this

we are hearing reports of revival fires on dozens of college and seminary campuses as well as in many cities and in other places around the world.

Let no one scoff at what God can do!



## Which Missionary Is Doing the Most Strategic Work?

*Mission Frontiers* May-June 1995

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/which-missionary-is-doing-the-most-strategic-work-you-choose>

Are all mission activities equally strategic? Here are some tests for your mission judgment!

MISSIONARY A: This missionary is working “overseas” (is that important?) with a strong, indigenous church—the result of 80 years of fine missionary effort—helping an existing church movement to get its seminary going, and to get its church-planting efforts better organized. This church movement already undertakes evangelistic efforts which reach individuals from other tribal groups nearby, bringing them as new members into the existing church movement. There is no deliberate attempt thus far to found an “indigenous church movement” within any of the other tribal groups.

COMMENT: Most people would call this “missionary” effort because it is “overseas” and because the missionary has to learn a foreign language to do the job. But, essentially, it is, at best, the kind of work which we would call “home missions” if it were being conducted in the United States. Notice that the fact that the person has to go “overseas” and “learn a language” does not in and of itself assure us of a strategic contribution.

However, what is not explained one way or another is whether or not this missionary is vitally working toward a missionary vision for this overseas church movement. If he (or she) is, then that kind of activity would seem to be VERY HIGHLY STRATEGIC. In this latter case, what the missionary would be doing would not itself be a “pioneer work in a frontier group,” but would be precisely frontier mission mobilization, which is probably the highest priority mission task in many situations right at this point in history.

MISSIONARY B: Another missionary has been assigned to a group on an island in Indonesia which is predominantly Muslim, with no known Christians within the group, and no such beachhead within any other portion of this same group in any other location. The goal of this missionary is to establish “a viable, indigenous evangelizing church movement” within this people group.

COMMENT: This kind of work is, by definition, a “pioneer, or frontier missionary task” since the work is within what is called an Unreached People group (a group within which there is not yet a viable, indigenous, evangelizing church movement”).

But, how high a priority is this kind of work? Very high, of course, since the one most obvious, ultimate barrier to world evangelization is the planting of a missionary beachhead in every remaining, sealed off pocket of humanity. We cannot be serious about reaching everyone if we do not make sure that every group has been penetrated. There CANNOT be any other type of evangelism that will be effective until these people can be evangelized from within.

HOWEVER, at this point in history there are not enough missionaries doing precisely this kind of work, either from the Western nations or the mission fields of the world. Right now, then, is not the highest priority mission task still that of "frontier mission mobilization" not frontier mission work itself?

MISSIONARY C: This missionary has worked for many years in an Indian tribe of about 22,000 people in Guatemala. There in Guatemala these tribal people really know their way around, are quite confident of their existence, and don't tend to feel the need of any missionary's wisdom. Now, however, 1,000 of this group are in Santa Monica, California, in the Los Angeles basin where they are refugees from guerrilla warfare in Guatemala. The missionary with his family has moved back to Los Angeles to work with this one portion of the group. Great interest and openness has greeted them here. Now the Indians are at the mercy of a situation they no longer have completely under control. Evangelism for the first time is progressing effectively. But, half of the churches supporting this missionary family have cut off their support because the missionary is "no longer on a mission field overseas." With dwindling support it is not certain that they can continue.

COMMENT: This partially fictional example could be multiplied at least two hundred times in the U.S.A. alone. Is this not a tragic misunderstanding of the definition of mission? The Bible says nothing at all about a missionary being one who flies over salt water to get to his field. There are thousands of Kurds in San Diego, California. Does not that mean, then, that San Diego is a mission field, a frontier mission field? Unreached peoples are wherever you find them, not merely "overseas." Classical, Pauline "go where Christ is not named" mission has no geographical significance.

## **Thy Kingdom Come: A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000**

*Mission Frontiers* September-October 1995

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/thy-kingdom-come-a-church-for-every-people-and-the-gospel-for-every-person>

### **An Analysis of a Vision**

#### ***Chapter One: By the Year 2000?***

The AD 2000 Movement has a profound mission statement. It is more profound than meets the eye: 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? The Bible says “if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound...” 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...watching curves on a computer graph? Is He mechanically waiting for a certain number of souls to be saved? Is counting peoples and persons the name of the game? 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” (Ephesians 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 human being, 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...”

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.

And, 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.

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. Yes, 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" (Ephesians 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 (at which Thomas Wang was a plenary speaker) 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. I was at that meeting and know that what was meant by this simple phrase "A Church for Every People" was essentially "a church movement."

The phrase, "A Church for Every People," was actually based on a concept of Donald McGavran's that was made famous almost thirty years earlier when he spoke of "a people movement to Christ." He was there with us when 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.

His 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 little "letter" on this subject

is printed in full in the Appendix on page 40. But at this point we need to quote some of it.

Here are two of the seven principles in McGavran's short essay or letter: (One)...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."

(We must) 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. (A closely related) 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.

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 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 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" (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 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 "honor thy father and thy mother" were 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. And people who are older are not 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; 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 families, 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 evolve into the tragic degree of family fragmentation which we now have in the U.S.A. (The mission theologian, Howard Snyder, in his new book *Earthcurrents*, says, “In the United States, the most dramatic change has been the drop in households headed by a married couple--from about one half to one tenth in just 40 years” (p. 34).

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 that group consists of more than one group needing the incarnation of an indigenous church movement. In a word, from the standpoint of church-planting 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 be sure 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, although people are free to ignore or oppose this definition. The most common objection 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 290.

Or, take Campus Crusade's amazing Jesus film strategy. Although Jesus film strategists started out targeting the same 280 groups of one 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 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 need 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! Peoples need the minimal gospel on a few cassettes. They also need a substantial portion of the Bible (not necessarily just the New Testament).

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 such groups to be dealt with separately—in the early stages, that is.

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 subtle situation of integration. Note that for the most part one group was not won to Christ by the other group but by people from a long way away.

It is valuable for the AD 2000 and Beyond 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 just 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. The only thing is that 2%, or any percentage as such, may be an indirect and misleading measurement.

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 (e.g., is it reached or not by the 1982 definition?). 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.

This 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?”

The goal has not changed. It is still “A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000.” One of the most exciting things to see happen following GCOWE '95 in Korea is the vast increase of information which is bound to be uncovered in the months and years between now and the year 2000.

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” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

## **Christian Leaders Express Support for Joshua Project 2000 and the Cooperative Effort**

*Mission Frontiers* November-December 1995

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/christian-leaders-express-support-for-joshua-project-2000-and-the-cooperati>

### **...in Listing the Least-Evangelized Peoples**

The ISFM acknowledges the complex task of enumerating and categorizing humanity into peoples and their status in relation to the gospel. In light of this the ISFM recognizes this list as a significant but not comprehensive effort toward identifying peoples requiring frontier mission endeavors. The ISFM is grateful for the progress this list represents and recommends its use as a priority for prayer and strategy resource. International Society for Frontier Missiology, Annual Meeting, September, 1995

What a joy to affirm the great cooperative effort that has produced the Target List of 2000 Least-Evangelized Peoples. This list goes a long way toward fulfilling the hopes of the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse when it released its first rough list back in 1993. Focusing on the “least reached” rather than on the “unreached” makes possible broad subscription to a list that is definable, functional, and reasonably verifiable in its boundaries. At the same time, it reflects a compilation of the best information now available. Here is a tool that all believers, churches and mission agencies can use confidently to focus attention, prayer and resources on the squeakiest wheels in the Great Commission task.

—Gary Corwin of SIM and Evangelical Missions Quarterly Associate Editor

The AD 2000 list is the next step toward completing the “last commandment” that Jesus gave us on the Mount of Ascension. This is our next frontier in missions. Others will follow or run in parallel. By God's grace—let's do it together!

—Loren Cunningham, founder and chairman, Youth With A Mission (YWAM) International

When I first joined the staff of the U.S. Center for World Mission in 1981, I fully expected to see a “war room” like we had in Vietnam when I served in U.S. Army Headquarters. I thought we would have the 16,750 unreached peoples listed on a wall, and cross them off as they were adopted and reached. I soon learned that we were a long way from that kind of detailed list. In the intervening fourteen years, there has been discussion, confusion and controversy about who still needs to be reached. However, with the development of this present list, there is at last a consensus about the essential next steps so that we can focus our available resources on the highest priority task we face.

—David Dougherty, Overseas Missionary Fellowship

As a German, I do not always get easily excited. Scratching the surface of a lot of seemingly wonderful stories frequently yields another more complex, less black-and-white, picture. For years I have monitored the often frustrating and convoluted attempts to enumerate and categorize humanity into peoples--reached and unreached. Humanity is complex, making the task extremely difficult, and only God, in the final analysis, knows when a person is "reached." For the first time, I now see a wide consensus emerging. While no list of peoples can be totally accurate, the AD 2000 momentum has now yielded a useful and significant listing of the gospel-neediest peoples on earth. I am excited, and happily endorse emerging efforts to train and send research / prayer teams to these 2,000 peoples. I hope that their reports will be truthful and yet faith filled, and result in greater mobilization of many new missionary initiatives to these peoples.

—Paul Filidis, Director, Youth With A Mission, International Communications Network

Since 1974, when the concept of unreached people groups was first introduced, missiologists have been struggling to compile lists of these groups. During the past couple years several lists have been produced, but none of them have gained popular acceptance. Finally, a manageable list with popular acceptance has been produced. I expect that this list will help generate consensus agreement regarding where our mission resources can be strategically invested. This will help increase partnership and therefore speed the completion of world evangelization. I'm thankful for those who have worked to produce this list of the least-evangelized peoples.

—Greg Fritz, president, Caleb Resources

I want to take this opportunity to voice my support for Patrick Johnstone, John Gilbert, Ron Rowland and others in their commitment to clean up the GCOWE '95 list of peoples. I support this effort and have been a part of the dialogue for some time. The cleaned-up list is a solid contribution to the effort to define where Christians should be placing their missions resources. Our work on peoples in the forthcoming World Christian Encyclopedia (with Patrick Johnstone as contributing editor) will merely place this "sublist" in its larger context among all the peoples of the world. For now, in my opinion, the GCOWE '95 list should be utilized by mission agencies and churches for targeting and engaging peoples.

—Todd Johnson, World Evangelization Research Center

Praise the Lord, I feel now we have a list that we can work on happily and make it a more flexible tool for the big push over the next five years.

—Patrick Johnstone, author of Operation World, Chairman of Unreached Peoples Network, AD 2000 and Beyond Movement

The most significant impact of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement for world evangelization is launching a crusade for mobilizing the whole Church to conquer the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. If the Church would unite for one common goal—a church for every people and the gospel for every person—I am sure that the Church will see the fulfillment of the Great Commission by

reaching the unreached by the year 2000. The 2000 unreached people group listing created by AD2000 will be a most important guide for pioneering ministry for the unreached, which will change mission history within just a few years and reach the world for Christ.

—Joon Gon Kim, chairman of Korean AD2000 and Beyond Movement

Women in many countries are offering themselves to visit unreached villages and tribes to do on-site research. I believe their insights will be extremely helpful in finding cultural keys to open doors into previously closed communities. We as a network are encouraging women to focus on at least three unreached people groups in each country.

—Lorry Lutz, international coordinator, AD2000 Women's Network

I think it is great that for the next five years we can all work from the same page to see these peoples engaged and the church planted. If anyone wants to take on some other groups... Praise the Lord, but for us let's join hearts and arms with brothers and sisters around the globe to see a church-planting movement among these nearly 2,000 by 2000.

—Paul McKaughan, executive director, Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Associations

The listing represents the frontier of missions today, and we will do everything we can to support you in this endeavor.

—Jerry Rankin, Avery Willis and John Gilbert, Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention

I believe that the current cleaned-up list of approximately 2000 peoples with populations of more than 10,000 and evangelicals less than 5% of population can be confidently used for adoption of the least evangelized peoples, for focused prayer profiles and for other aspects of Joshua Project 2000.

—Ron Rowland, SIL and Wycliffe Bible Translators, coordinator of PIN (People Information Network) and Chairman of GMI (Global Mapping International)

I pray this vision and information will get into the hands of millions of believers and that they will respond to the challenge.

—George Verwer, international director, Operation Mobilization

A mass of information has been collected on the unreached peoples of the world that is unprecedented in the history of the Christian Church. Many fine minds have devoted themselves to this task for years, and we should be deeply grateful for the results. Now, after all the research, collating, analysis, and planning, the effort finally comes down to where we knew it would: local churches committing their resources of people, prayer, technology and money to enter the remaining nearly 2000 major peoples and plant the New Testament church. I rejoice to see this day, because every church that chooses to be involved will experience the refining fire of the Holy Spirit. Each of these churches will have to rethink what the local church is supposed to be—a visible exhibit of redeemed people living out kingdom values together and individually in the midst of darkness, communicating the saving message of Jesus Christ. In so doing, the

sending church will find itself being purified as it seeks to plant a healthy church elsewhere in the world. This is the stuff of revival!

—Bill Waldrop, president, APMC

The intercessory prayer efforts by churches and individuals focused by means of the prayer profiles for each of the nearly 2000 target peoples and the special October 1997 prayer effort to each for these peoples will be vital for the "small cloud" on the horizon to become a "great rain" of God's blessing. Praise the Lord that our missions leaders are now unanimous on the list of nearly 2,000 least evangelized peoples of the world. This is a major achievement. What a breakthrough! God's heart must be pleased. Let's rally around this cause and fast and pray for Joshua Project 2000.

—Thomas Wang, international board chairman, AD 2000 and Beyond Movement

When Jesus told His disciples to pray "Thy Kingdom come, on earth" He referred to the effect of an exciting, powerful but humble, expanding movement that has grown across the centuries through thick and thin to encompass one-third of the world's population today including more than half of all "nations, tribes, and tongues." Furthermore, the active, seriously believing people within this colossal world family called Christian themselves number in the hundreds of millions, to be found in millions of Bible-believing churches, speaking all of the major languages of the planet. With these unprecedented resources we thus look forward to the year 2000 with a specific list of less than 2,000 doorways through which almost every unreached person in the world is to be found. This list will be the object of history's largest network of Christian bodies as its detailed contents are verified and further defined. It is the logical way to go when congregations and mission agencies around the world are now "signing up" to take their fair share of the load.



## **Editorial Comment on Explosion of Global Interest in Completing the Task**

*Mission Frontiers* November-December 1995

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-november-december-1995>

Monday, October 23, 1995 I am scared to death of two tragic possibilities, no three.

First, as I write these words in this editorial (in the first-ever issue of *Mission Frontiers* edited entirely by people not on our staff) I am seriously concerned that the stark, astounding significance of the movement described here will be vastly underestimated by preoccupied believers-like the maidens who ran out of oil, or worse still, like the people who didn't take Noah seriously ("As is the days of Noah..."). This issue is only the tip of the iceberg of AN INCREDIBLE NEW FACTOR that explodes all previous estimates of what can be done by the year 2000.

Secondly, I am scared stiff that this atomic explosion of global interest in completing the task of Global Mission will go wrong in several ways.

Thirdly, I am afraid that despite all of the careful explanations, the important linking of the smaller list published in this issue (part of a larger list) is not going to be easily understood. Yet it is very important how this list leads to other smaller groups of people, and how mission strategy may often begin with the smaller fragments of the peoples listed here. Read on.

### **1. Fear One: Underestimating the Hand of God**

O.K, people may say, so what if 60,000 university students in Korea get all excited about missions?

Well, you know students everywhere...they are our true world citizens. They are eager to keep up with the students in other countries. In 1996 we may see not just students in Korea rising to the challenge, but students around the globe also putting their shoulders to the task.

Next year is an Urbana year, and even before the GCOWE meeting in Korea, Urbana leaders were planning to link up by satellite with other large student meetings around the world. And, read what this issue says further on: already the Brazilian students are determined to follow the Korean example. Already the South African students have stood up to be counted.

The events presented in this issue of *Mission Frontiers* if rightly understood, constitute not just a Korean oddity but a global reality! They are a series of amazing and unpredicted events which, linked to the Joshua Project, force a transformation of all previous estimates of the remaining task!

It is not as though we are predicting the time it takes for an underpowered car to make it up a long steep grade. The "car" of global Christianity today is twenty times as powerful as it needs to be to climb the grade in good time. It simply has not been running on all cylinders. Where I meet pessimism is often when people whose work contributes little to the countdown condone their lack of involvement by saying "the task is now impossible."

But, do you know? Those students in Korea were the sparkplug to generate all those millions that carried that amazing global gathering in May into the black. In fact, they still have a surplus of \$2 million with which to be serious about the 60,000 commitments that were made.

Furthermore, those Korean students are the basis for a new wave of unprecedented collaboration in Korea. Thomas Wang and I addressed their huge “Mission Korea” meeting four years ago—and we were amazed to see all of the different student traditions, IVCF, CCCC, Navigators, Operation Mobilization, etc., cooperating together! Dear reader, pray that God will not allow you to underestimate Him in this hour of opportunity!

## **2. Fear Two: Will Fools Rush in Where Angels Fear to Tread?**

But there are real dangers. I have taught the story of Christianity for many years. I recall many times down through history when explosions of renewal have taken place. Alas, it does not always turn out well.

We don't usually talk in public about all of the gross mistakes tourist type visitors to the mission field have made. Brief, superficial trips spurred on by the sense of adventure and travel more than deep concern for the Spiritual realities don't always help. In some cases all we really see accomplished is the realization that good intentions are not good enough.

With the proper preparations and cautions from veteran workers a lot of great good can be done by both pure-hearted Prayer Walkers and “On-site-investigators.” But real damage is also possible without great care. Casual, minimal knowledge may be “the little knowledge which is a dangerous thing.”

Take one simple problem: people may easily assume that mission work can be done by using ordinary evangelistic methods.

If masses rush into mission fields to finish the mission task, the real danger is that they will tend to use tried and true evangelism concepts, drawing understandably on their experience witnessing in their own culture. But Hindus who already expect reincarnation may be confused by talk about being “born again.” We can't assume our way of explaining things back home will make sense in an exotic, little-understood unreached people. Cross-cultural mission requires something that is not immediately apparent.

## **3. Fear Three: Misuse of the List of Peoples in This Issue**

POINT ONE: Be sure to read Dan Scribner's three-page explanation of the list (on pages 12-14). Note how many other people Dan mentions for the results published on pages 17-23. Note the many precautions and provisos he gives, which I do not need to repeat here. Also note his statement that “groups with populations below 10,000 will be considered in future revisions of this list.” I'll bring this up in a moment.

POINT TWO: Sources. The most reliable sources are field missionaries, but they are not everywhere. Barbara Grimes of Wycliffe, editor of the *Ethnologue*, has undoubtedly spent more time across the years than any other person drawing information from the formidable human distribution of Wycliffe's 6,000 personnel scattered around the globe, but even that kind of coverage leaves gaps where government statistics must ultimately be consulted. However, some governments don't pay much attention to minorities. Others, like Australia, lists groups even less than 10 in population! In some

cases, as with Jews and Turks, exhaustive studies were available, and so, of course, they show up in many countries!

POINT THREE: What about a larger list including groups smaller than 10,000? This is coming, Dan says, but what will it mean? First of all, the smaller groups are very numerous! The graph to the right portrays the fact that the smaller the groups the larger the number of such groups, logically enough. In this particular Southern Baptist list of 10,493 peoples, the groups less than 10,000 in population number only 5,647, but if all governments listed smaller groups there might be 20,000 since three out of four governments do not bother to report smaller groups.

But the most important reason for those adopting peoples on the present list is the amazing rule of thumb that missionary breakthroughs are more likely to succeed in smaller rather than larger groups!

Suppose a church, working with a mission agency, wants to help reach the Pathans, the legendary people of the Khyber Pass between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The heartland of this cluster of peoples (speaking various dialects of Pashto) is Afghanistan (page 17), where you'll see 12 million listed, and across the border in Pakistan (on page 21) you'll see 11 million Eastern Pathans plus 7.4 million Southern Pathans. But neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan are very easy places to work on Pathans. You will find thousands more in Iran, United Arab Emirates (two different groups), and the United Kingdom, on pages 20 and 23, respectively. The 87,000 in Great Britain are less than 1/3 of one percent, yet there are some Christians among them--who do not need to live in fear of the British government harassing them. And there might be some highly educated people who are already open to the Gospel who could participate in a powerful colloquial translation of key portions of the New Testament. You could not pursue that course readily in either Afghanistan or Pakistan where many of the main body of Christians look down on the Pashto-speaking "border people." No wonder 30 million Pashto speakers are still awaiting an effective translation—and a virile church movement!

POINT FOUR: This list is a list of serious, sensitive peoples, often where missionaries are already at work locally.

A close friend who has been among the Pathans for over ten years tells me about an outside group that was trying to raise \$70,000 to pay for a study of the Pathan situation, ignoring the enormous efforts of past (and present) missionaries.

In other words, the list of "target" peoples must not mean we "shoot at" these peoples with naive, outside efforts. I heard the other day about a certain church that "adopted" a specific people and poured an enormous amount of study into the situation, even sending church members to scout out the group. But they did not know that an outstanding missionary-professor had written an entire book on that group after working among them for many years.

POINT FIVE: As we approach the historic completion of all the necessary mission breakthroughs the casual terminology we have often used in the past will need to give way to more precise language. We used to say we wanted "to win the world to Christ" without bothering to think concretely about what that would entail.

Preparing the Gospel FOR every person in a group is a mission task of accomplishing the very complicated goal of making sense in every strange group, establishing a church movement into which people can belong without leaving their people and their culture. Then the Gospel can be taken TO every person—in evangelism.

Once a group on this list is chosen the next thing is to know where all similar groups are to be found. To do that you may wish to order 1) a copy of this list sorted out by language rather than by country, and 2) the larger list of 10,493 peoples which includes groups smaller than 10,000 but which may speak the same language as groups in this list. If so, send \$2.50 to me at the address below for these two additional lists. However, you can get all of this and much more on six IBM disks for \$15 from John Gilbert—see his address on page 14.

**When Jesus said, “This Gospel must be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all peoples,”.....what did He mean by “all peoples?”**

*Mission Frontiers* November/December 1995

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/when-jesus-said-this-gospel-must-be-preached-in-the-whole-world-as-a-testim>

Note that there is only one major “people” within the borders of the country to the left (see Col. A). But this people of 12 million has three major geographic spheres (Col. B) within which (Col. C) there are seven major (mutually unintelligible) dialects. Within each dialect area there are perhaps 20-30 “confederations of tribes,” Col D. And, in the final column E you see what may be 70 to 90 tribal groups (which may or may not be friendly to each other but which) certainly consider themselves separate.

So how many “peoples” are there in this country? You’ll note we are having to guess at how many groups at the lower levels. In any case the total number depends on which level you count.

For example, Wycliffe Bible Translators will probably find that they can get by with printed (eye gate) Bible translation on the level of the three major spheres, or at the worst, at the level of the seven dialects. For Wycliffe there may be no more than three or seven “peoples” to deal with.

But Gospel Recordings (people who deal with the much more discriminating ear gate) inevitably needs to deal with the next level of 20 to 30 groups, and just perhaps even in some cases with the tribal level in case the language differences when spoken out loud at that lowest level are sufficiently different or even if they are merely offensive!

Remember, both printed and audio media are valuable, but the relevant number of groups is different in each case. To make things more complicated, note that sizable groups of this overall people are in nine other countries, as well! And, these other groups come from any one of these different levels you see here.

But, now, at what level was Jesus speaking? He wants, of course, to reach through to all groups, behind whatever barrier of understanding or acceptance there may be. The answer is simply that we’ll find out the answer the closer we get to the situation. In the meantime we need to live with guesses.

This is why it is literally possible to say—depending on whether we are referring to levels A, B, C, D or E—that there are only 250 or so major peoples in the whole world, or 900 or so major language families, or 4,000 significant peoples (of which 1,700 are in great spiritual need) or 10,000 or 20,000 still smaller peoples. It all depends on which level you are concerned.

Right now, the list of 1,700 needy peoples listed in this issue (pp. 17-23) is a concrete and valuable target. We can only learn more as we go!

AND, at this hour greater human resources are looming into view than have ever been available to the unfinished task! Are you part of it?

## **The Unfinished Task of World Evangelization**

(Chapter 2 in *Unfolding Drama of the Christian Movement*, 1996).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b3157f3b40b9d21a8096625/t/5f03607d994f3f0763142211/1594056832744/Unfolding%2BDrama%2Bch1-10.pdf>

Before we get into our subject—the overall story of God’s redemptive work on earth—I’d like to make two comments on the wording: first, the concept of an “unfinished task.”

The very phrase, “unfinished task,” is probably an inadequate phrase. It isn’t as though redemption in the biblical narrative or in subsequent history is just a job to be done, like naming the animals or naming the plants, and that the job is not finished. It is not merely an unfinished task. The only reason to use that phrase is because it is so traditional, it seems to communicate better than others.

Yes, the task we are talking about is much more urgently to be performed than the word, “unfinished,” would imply. Compare, for example, the two words “creation” and “redemption.” Creation is an activity on God’s part which is taking place over a long period of time and does not inherently involve any special hurry. Nothing is necessarily going wrong in a creativity process. It is like an artist in a studio working on a painting. If he has no deadline and nothing goes wrong, it does not matter very much if it takes him an extra hour or an extra day to create his painting. That is why I don’t really like the term, “unfinished.” The task is not a job that is simply unfinished; it is a task that is inherently a crisis. It is an emergency kind of a task. It corresponds, not to creation, but to redemption. The word, “redemption,” by its very nature implies a crisis. When an ox falls in a ditch you don’t say, “Well, one of these days in the next few months, we’re going to have to pull the ox out of the ditch; it’s one of our unfinished tasks.” When a car goes off a cliff, or when someone is at the point of drowning in a swimming pool, you don’t say, “Well, now, one of these days we’ll have to see to this situation.” No! You can’t do that, because it’s an emergency! The emergency itself contradicts the usual priorities. It cuts across the routines and conventionalities of ordinary societies. Thus, I think it would be a grave mistake to accept the phrase, “the unfinished task,” without noting the absence of an emergency element built into it.

Secondly, as we look at it, the phrase involves a non-optional dimension. It isn’t possible for us to say, “This isn’t for me;” or “This is for someone else;” or as I—and no doubt you—have heard it said, “The need is not the call.” But I would ask, “If the need is not the call, then what under the sun is the basis of the call?” What we mean by “a call” is not a mere invitation. The fact is, we are not the arbiters of whether or not there is an emergency. God is the one who has judged man a fallen creature, and His analysis of the problem is not up to us, but to Him. Therefore, our human evaluation of our response is not the source of our decision making; God is! He is the One who, in contrast to His creative endeavors, is pointing out to us a redemptive task which devolves upon us no matter what we might wish. Obviously, this way of thinking calls for an adjustment in the way we usually look at things.

The necessary adjustment that a young couple have to make when they get married is similar. Beforehand, they are free to follow their own desires and instincts, but now their individual freedom is to be radically and permanently abridged by another person. Decision making is no longer the option of either one alone; they are now bound by an unavoidable

new dimension of responsibility. This is especially clear when the first child is born. It is not possible in the middle of the night when the baby starts crying to say in desperation, “Well, now, one of these days we’re going to have to do something about that.” Rather, it is a question of who’s going to get up, you or I? And, of course, that gets into culture-distinctions of role, which are too profound to be discussed here. But that’s the nature of the task. A young married couple with a tiny baby goes through a bruising process of readjustment to the external demands of real life. It’s a real trauma to some people, and some really can’t take it. In fact, this is the reason that 300, 000 babies are severely beaten every year in this country—six times the death rate that we see on the high-ways—and often by the mother. That happens because the new situation with an infant is a process requiring a major adjustment.

Thus, parallel to the nature of the task being not creative but redemptive; it is also an obligation, not an option. There is no possibility of a church saying, “Well, that’s for the other churches to be concerned with.” And there is no possibility of any individual Christian saying, “That’s for someone else to worry about.” No matter what you call it, “foreign mission work, overseas mission work” (if you live on an island), the only possibility of a person turning down this kind of a call is if he has some other call which is equally decisive and equally urgent and equally of God. In other words, you have to be called to stay home. In my mind there is no possibility of any other way of looking at the so-called problem of guidance.

We recognize in the Bible a similar kind of situation. The elder brother didn’t understand why the return of his younger brother—the “prodigal son”—introduced an emergency element into the situation. The elder brother didn’t sense the gravity and his own responsibility for that which was lost. Prior to the story in Luke 15 Jesus was essentially asked “Why do we have to be bothered by this redemptive task? Why can’t we just go on living creatively?” Is this attitude familiar?

In the average Christian bookstore today you actually find great support for that attitude. In fact, it seems as if the only verse in the Bible that some Christians today think about is, “I have come to give you life affluently and even more affluently.” Many, many books in the bookstores appeal to people’s hunger to develop a more sparkling personality, or more this or more that—“Be all that you’re meant to be!” or whatever. That theme is very creative when cast theologically. To be what God created you to be is perfectly legitimate. I’m not casting any aspersions on the legitimacy of our getting a good meal, of being physically healthy, being disciplined, being beautiful people. Ann Ortland in her book, *The Disciplines of a Beautiful Woman*, says that God wants women to be beautiful. I believe that is legitimate. But, notice, you can’t walk into a Christian bookstore today and find a book with a title like, “How to Bleed, Suffer and Die for Jesus Christ.” The book wouldn’t sell. Nobody is prepared for an emergency, once peace has been around for a period of time.

And though I hate to say this, one value of war in the history of our nation is that it disabuses the populace of the assumption that the mood of “peace where there is no peace” is not to be questioned. When there are no major problems, it is easy to assume that God wants us to enjoy richly and abundantly all the good food and cable television and all the luxuries that American life today affords us. We have this zany process at work whereby if we can save ourselves enough physical labor, we can actually allow our veins to plug up faster!

In fact, the most extensive menace to human life in the United States is physical inactivity; and we have gained this achievement, this menace, by hard work and by keen “Christian insight.” As the result of our “dedicated and disciplined” endeavors to put ourselves out of work physically, we are actually caught up in a whole set of diseases that have never been known before.

In very few countries in the world is alcoholism a problem, although it almost always is in relatively wealthy societies. In very few countries in the world are the luxuries of divorce a problem; in only a few is it possible, for economic reasons, to get divorced.

You have to be a wealthy country to develop all of the degenerative diseases that plague the American people. It is another, different list of diseases that plagues the people in the so-called non-Western world. A recent article by a medical doctor simply gave two lists of diseases; and not being a medical expert, I can't remember these in detail even though I copied them down at the time. He said something like this: that you've got tuberculosis, dysentery, malaria, and many other diseases that are epidemic in the less affluent world, but in the wealthy countries you have a different list of diseases that are just as damaging to the civil body politic as those in the first list. It seems that the great achievement of our affluence is simply that we have exchanged one list of diseases for another.

But, of course, the Bible isn't talking about a peaceful, unruffled situation. When there is a sheep that is lost, the pastor goes after the one lost sheep, leaving the ninety nine behind. That's his normal, conventional routine; his obvious, stated responsibility. The pastor doesn't send a hireling or somebody else to search for the lost sheep; he is the one who leaves. In Antioch in the book of Acts, the two most respected and mature pastoral leaders were the ones sent off or released by the church for a missionary role. There is no biblical example for what we do in America today when we recruit our young people as missionaries.

I was in a conference recently in the Philippines composed of Chinese Christian leaders, including a number of wonderful evangelical pastors. I remember trying to make this same point, namely, that God could ask pastors to leave their flocks behind and go and try to win the lost cultures into his kingdom; they really didn't need to worry about the flock they were leaving behind (you can't imagine how fast potential pastors mature in the absence of the pastor who was there). Churches have enormous leadership resources, which will never be used if the pastors are not constantly being sent off to the mission field; but that is not the way we do it, even though it is, I think, a biblical pattern.

In the New Testament, curiously, it is people that are not normally considered important who are the object of God's primary favor and attention. During the last few months I've been reading through the entire Bible in the Living Translation. I got up to the New Testament and into the gospels and half way through the book of Mark before something began to dawn on me—something I'd known before but hadn't really felt. You know, there's a difference between knowing and feeling. Well, I began to realize that in the book of Mark, the sensitivities of Jesus were almost always startling, surprising to everyone, even to the disciples. They seemingly couldn't anticipate what Jesus would be interested in. (Are we like that?) He was not interested in seeking out the affluent, the up-and-outs, the righteous, the beautiful people. If He came to Pasadena, apparently He wouldn't be seeking out the chief evangelical leaders and pastors, and sitting down with them and having a wonderful time sharing in the Word together. He would be looking for the sick and the despised people.

Do you remember when He returned to Capernaum and got off the ship He was met by a leader of the synagogue? The function of the leader of the synagogue in that context is very nearly that of a mayor. Anyhow, Jesus steps on shore; and here comes this synagogue leader in terrible torment of soul because his little daughter is on the verge of death. "Can you help?" he pleads. So Jesus heads in the direction of his home. Instantly, His disciples exchange knowing looks because if Jesus can heal this little girl, the daughter of such an eminent man, He will really "have it made." And a tremendous crowd follows along to see what will happen.



Then, suddenly, something slows down the procession, and He stops and looks around and asks, “Who touched me?” Even the disciples are shocked by His question. “What do you mean,” they ask uneasily, “in a crowd like this, who hasn’t touched you?” And they are a bit irritated when they spot, right close to Him, a woman that everyone in town knows is ritually unclean because she has been hemorrhaging for years. And they all shudder, wondering if perhaps by accident they might have bumped into her and become ritually unclean themselves.

It is very distressing for the synagogue leader to wait while all this is going on. His daughter is dying! The disciples also are restless. They are thinking, “Doesn’t He realize that He may be blowing the best chance He will ever have to be accepted by those who really count?” You can almost imagine them leaning close and hissing through their teeth, “The daughter, Jesus, the daughter...” They may have thought, “There he goes again—off on a tangent again! How are we ever going make him a success?”

Jesus ignores all this, even when messengers from the ruler’s house come running with the news that the daughter has died. He glances at the agonized face of her father, then reaches out and touches the defiled woman, who has fallen at his feet in tears. “My daughter,” He says, “go in peace; your faith has made you whole.”

Well, that behind Him, He finally turns to the father, goes with him amidst the jeers of the bystanders, and—now that it is too late—enters the house with only the parents and Peter, James, and John. And He doesn’t just heal the man’s daughter; He raises her from the dead—a much more impressive feat.

What is moving to me about this episode is the fact that Jesus would call this unclean woman His daughter. The big point here is—often true with Him—there is a clear and surprising difference between His sensitivities and those of His disciples, and between His and those of all the people in the town, and between His and ours.

Further on in Mark, a blind man beside the road starts shouting, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” All the people following along behind Him say, “Shut up!” (That’s what the Living Bible says, “Shut up!”) The implication is, “Jesus doesn’t have time for you.” But He does!

Or when little children come, and the disciples blurt out “Get away, get away; this is Jesus!” But conversely, Jesus says, “I want to talk to those little children.” All too often there is a great discrepancy between our understanding of what God is concerned about and the very reality of Christ in our midst. The startling, surprising nature of His concern really has to be taken into account. We must not be complacent in our understanding of what, the emergency—what, the redemptive task God has given us—really is.

The most horrifying thing of all is the fact that, after being with Jesus day after day for so very long, the disciples still do not catch on. When Jesus explains to them again and again what’s up, their own agenda is written with such large letters that they cannot understand how His agenda could be different from theirs.

For example, on three occasions He explains to them that He is going to be assassinated. And for one reason or another, in each of those three situations, they miss that point because they obviously have something else on their minds. They’re convinced that with His wonder-working power, He’s going to run this how pretty soon. In the third instance, He spells it out in much more gory detail than on either of the two earlier occasions, detailing to them that He is going to be tortured, betrayed, and killed, then rise again on the third day. (Unlike us, they knew what torture means.) But instead of reacting in horror and really hearing what He is saying, they, James and John in particular, are so eager to pop the question about the kind of authority they seek to wield in His new kingdom, that they aren’t even listening. “Are you through with your paragraph, Jesus?” they say, in effect. “Listen,

it's not a big thing; but would you sign this little sheet we have prepared? All this is, is merely to put one of us on the left hand and the other on the right. You can do that, certainly?"

What a divergence between their concerns and His! A few days later they poooh-pooohed even the idea that he would be killed. In fact, the first time that Jesus brings up that He is going to be killed, Peter censures Him, "Hey, you shouldn't talk like that. You're going to run down the morale of the team." They're critical; it doesn't even dawn on them that what He's saying is true. And then in the upper room when He tells them that one of them is going to betray Him and that the rest will desert Him, they scoff. They all vow that this just isn't going to happen. Yet it does happen in just a few hours. In the Garden of Gethsemane He asked them three different times to pray with Him. And they failed each time. In addition, Peter, who vowed to protect Him no matter what it took, just a little later in the high priest's courtyard, turned around and denied him with curses, saying that he never even knew Him.

The disciples simply did not understand, neither the scope, the grimness and the reality of the redemptive task, nor their unprepared-ness for it. This ignorance continues to be true even after the cross and the resurrection.

Once again they are together, and sure enough (Acts 1:6) they say, "Now, Jesus, these have been great events that have happened. We're checking our schedules. Just how soon is the big day going to come. You know, we're just curious—nothing special—but how soon are you going to set up Your kingdom?" (They said nothing at all about power or positions. They had apparently learned that such concerns upset Him.) His answer, as always, is unexpected. He says, "Listen, that is none of your business. You're in sales. I'm in management." (That quote's not original with me, but it's even worse than that. He's not even in management.) He says, "We have nothing to do with these things. For you and me there is another agenda." It's as if he'd said, "Okay, okay, if it's power you want (and instantly they said to themselves, "Didn't we try to steer clear of that word?") you will finally get the power you want—once you get going to the ends of the earth." And once again He reminds them of a vast, unfinished, urgent redemptive task involving the ends of the earth. Apparently it takes something far more than all their daily experience with Christ for them to apprehend the truth, the reality and the urgency of that redemptive task.

Now, this is why I feel it is necessary, in our churches and in our preaching and speaking around as we deal with Christians, to assume that the challenge of the Great Commission involves a second decision beyond that of accepting Christ. We can say to people, "You have accepted Christ. Have you accepted His commission?" And in most cases they would say, "What do you mean?" They might answer, "No," or "Yes," but more likely they wouldn't even know what you are talking about. When James and John asked for the positions on His right and left in His kingdom, He answered, "You're asking for something which is not mine to give. But one thing I will assure you of, is that you're going to have to drink of the same cup that I am going to have to drink. Are you ready for that?" And their childish answer was, "Sure." They didn't even hesitate. They just wanted to get back to that signature they thought they needed. So here it is again: James and John couldn't quite accept that the torture and pain could ever apply to them—or to Him, for that matter.

I think this problem of perspective is true of most Christians today. Logically and theologically, when a person accepts Christ as his Savior, he is accepting a person who is much more than Savior, but who is Lord of the Great Commission as well. That's logical and it's theological, but it is not psychological. The average Christian today is no more consciously com-mitted to the Great Commission than were the disciples—up through Acts chapter one.

So, for the most part, the challenge of the unfinished task of world evangelization is not in the heart of the average believer today, any more than it was for the disciples before Pentecost. I don't care whether you're speaking of Christians in the United States or in Nigeria or Singapore or Hong Kong. This looming fact is why the task is still both urgent and unfinished.

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## **Editorial Comment on Several Things, Including A New Global Map; Gateway People Clusters; De-westernization**

*Mission Frontiers* November 1996)

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-comment64>

What I'm covering in this editorial:

1. De-Westernization, or where do we go with the scary subject of our last issue? That's the mammoth challenge of expecting new non-Western forms of Biblical faith within Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism which will likely not call themselves Christian.
2. What about the "Supplement" to the last issue?
3. A marvelous but confusing global map of the world's peoples—an explanation!
4. Many have asked about my wife's medical condition.
5. What happened at our 20th Anniversary Celebration?
6. Two books. One about Darwinism and design in nature. One about Jesus—which ties in amazingly with Item #1.
7. The upcoming conference on the 146 "Gateway People Clusters" —a true, global first. Too bad we couldn't have seen the need for this 100 years ago.

Dear Reader,

After the blockbuster issue raised in our last bulletin, should we now go on to something else? But, what in the world could follow that subject?

Wouldn't that be like trying to ignore an elephant in the living room? We can't escape it! That issue is still with us. It is the one subject we cannot brush off or sidestep.

What issue do I speak of? Well, in part, the idea of odd or even heretical movements becoming significant as the global Westernized Christian movement is rapidly stalling before the three major remaining blocs: Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Can heresies have silver linings, becoming orthodoxies tomorrow? Is this going to happen whether we recognize it or not?

Remember the Catholic leaders in Luther's day who devoutly hoped for so many years that Protestantism would fade out of the picture? Well, Protestantism is still a heresy to many Roman Catholics! (And vice versa.)

Here is a thought: Christian spin-offs with real, Biblical vitality don't go away merely by being labeled heresies. But they can change.

Can we live with heresies—or at least unorthodox theologies and emphases—even large, vigorous movements which may even spurn relations with us and our precious Western way of adapting the Bible?

But, just a minute. I don't want to ignore the list of items which I will cover in this editorial—as you see in the box in the next column. I have already started item number one:

### **Item #1. De-Westernization**

What response are we getting from the last issue? One letter only is negative. It misreads the article, "Is an Explosion of Faith Coming to India?" to imply that when a Hindu worshiper reduces the number of household idols he or she then can be considered

Christian. The letter asks me to recant that position. Since I cannot imagine even taking such a position, I don't think "recant" is the right word. Furthermore, I did not even write the article.

At the opposite extreme are two letters from world famous missiologists.

C. Peter Wagner's warm letter says,

*I'm typing this in Japan, stopping over on my way to Thailand. On the plane I read the Sept/Oct issue of Mission Frontiers which you modestly say is the most important issue of Mission Frontiers ever published. I agree! The information in that one issue rivals the information contained in any one missiological textbook I know of (possibly excluding McGavran's Understanding Church Growth) in potential implications for completing the Great Commission....*

*This matter is worth giving it time. If there is anything I can do to help move this innovation through the early adopter stage (where most of the flack will come) let me know.*

Roger Greenway wrote:

*I found the article, "Is an Explosion of Faith Coming to India?" in the Sept/Oct Issue to be fascinating. Let me explain why.*

*In 1960 I was flying on a DC-3 from Sri Lanka, where my wife and I were missionaries, to Madras, India. I was seated next to an American who was doing research on the subject of the "secret Christians" of India. He said that the amount of data he had uncovered far exceeded his expectations...*

*He claimed that the number of secret believers exceeded the number of church members...*

*They were people like "Rajan" in the article. They accepted the supremacy of Christ and the authority of the Bible, and met in small, secret groups for prayer and fellowship...*

*If back there in 1960 the researcher was even partially correct in his estimates...how many (secret believers) exist today? In the providence of God, the title of the article may be closer to the truth than we realize.*

Other letters have enriched our understanding, and are mentioned in the Supplement (next item).

### **Item #2. The De-Westernization Supplement**

This material adds a lot of excitement to the text of the last issue. Have you noticed how often we need to refer our readers to some additional sources, depending on their special interest. It is truly impossible to give depth to every subject we take up. But we want to give strings readers can pull to get additional insights. More and more this bulletin will be a strategic "index" readers can employ to explore further things of special interest to them. This is why we now have the full-page response form as an extra cover page.

### **Item #3. The Brilliant New Global Map Explained**

Seventy thousand copies of a marvelous, brilliantly colored global map of the world's peoples (not countries) is now out and around. It is the collaboration of the

Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and Global Mapping International. However, it is being made available through the cooperation of dozens of organizations, including ours.

Thus, for the first time in high quality color you can see plotted out the “peoples” of the world, not just the “countries” —10,657 peoples classified by John Gilbert of the Southern Baptist board into five different types of groups or peoples. (12,869 peoples, adding 2,206 additional peoples—as yet unclassified as to A, B, C, D, E status—are available on disk for \$2—see cover response page where you can order both the map and the disk.)

Even without the map, the breakdown you see in the box is a helpful way to look at the different peoples of the world.

[Note, incidentally, that all of our literature, *Mission Frontiers*, Perspectives Study Guide, mobilization materials, etc. use a different meaning for A, B, C, D, as referring to world population, not peoples:

A = believers—10% of world

B = nominal Christians—20%

C = exposed non-Christians—30%

D = (living within unreached peoples)—40%.

No problem since our scale refers to individuals not peoples.]

For those who already possess this map, a much more detailed explanation is available at no charge (see cover response page). Those ordering the map from us will receive the explanation automatically.

#### **Item #4. My Wife's Health**

Hundreds have written letters and we want to express our deep gratitude for them and for the avalanche of prayer. She has had two major operations in the last month and is in the hospital (22 Nov) still very weak. Unrelated, but far more serious is the diagnosis of “multiple myeloma” which is a very rare form of cancer (less than 1 of 10,000 cases of cancer) for which there is no known cure.

Please continue to pray.

#### **Item #5. Our 20th Anniversary Celebration**

This occurred right in the middle of all the turmoil about my wife’s health (she sent faint greetings from her hospital bed in an informal video clip). We had a marvelous time and turnout, looking back over the past and into the future. For those many who sent greetings and regrets and anyone else interested, we have available a four-hour condensation on a single extended-play cassette. See cover response form. A picture story will be in the next issue of *Mission Frontiers*.

#### **Item #6. Two Books**

##### **A. *The Jesus I Never Knew***

This is a superb display of what it takes to be a missionary—first you must de-contextualize your own form of the faith. Philip Yancey, in some ways a child of the ’60s, invested thousands of hours in study and open and frank discussion with people in a wide span of social strata. He is both humble and audacious with many an arresting

phrase coupled with disarming personal honesty. He laments the superficiality of much of Christendom and yet holds on tight to the unshakeable meaning behind it all.

However, the main reason I bring this book to your attention is not merely because I have been stirred and blessed by it—as I have just started reading it—but because it is an outstanding example of what Christianity looks like to someone who is trying earnestly to struggle free from the wrapping paper of his own culture in order to see things in a truly fresh light.

This is what missionaries have to do—or their words will fall on deaf ears. Yancey is writing to a generation that, for a tortured moment at least, tried to reinvent civilization and throw off the assumptions of their given tradition, and in trying to do so proved the near impossibility of anything like complete de-contextualization.

In fact it was so difficult merely to throw out one's own culture that many of the flower children settled for American Indian patterns of dress and spirituality. The '60s were an astounding period of culture rejection accompanied by a wholesale, country-wide trek into the wilderness of world religions which has not left us—what with Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist temples arising all across America from day to day. We can't hide from this.

No, missionary contextualization (or de-Westernization) is crucial even if we are going to reach our own new generations. This book is a striking example of what it is going to take.

### ***B. Darwin's Black Box***

This is the second book I have not finished reading—but which I am already so excited about that I have to recommend it to you.

Both of these books are powerful. They are treasures. Either of them in the hands of a cross-cultural missionary is dynamite, since both of them significantly rise above human culture in what they focus upon. Together they probe the most asked questions in the world today: Who is Jesus? and What is the very reality science is studying? Each of these is a burning question in the educated spheres of the three major blocs with the least response to Christianity, that is, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Here is what this second book, by Professor Behe, does for you. Star Trek portrays spaceships so large that some of them are like small towns. In the real world we do not know of any such things, but we are beginning to recognize that the tiniest form of life—the cell—is an enormously complex “spaceship” employing navigational propellers as well as incredibly diverse internal structure including the redoubtable DNA molecule with its millions of component atoms. Too bad that humans are the wrong size to deal with this amazing and tiny world of life.

No one would ever suppose that the intricate design of a Star Trek spaceship was produced by non-intelligent natural processes. You can't get very far into this book (indeed a page or two in the appendix will suffice) without realizing with a flush of emotion that EACH of the “1,000s of millions of cells” in a tiny baby is fully as complicated as a Star Trek space ship—and equally as unlikely to have dumbly “evolved” apart from a planning process, that is, design.

This truly remarkable book is, yep, the work of a beer drinking highly secularized author. Yet, Dennis Prager dragged Behe into his talk show, I understand, which indicates that the Spiritual significance of this fascinating mass of detail is prominent.

Really, you can so easily get absorbed in this tiny “out of sight” world that looking up from the book is a withdrawal experience. Where have I been? I had a scientific education which I have been building on ever since. No book has ever laid it out so clearly as this one—that the real world includes a very small world of designed complexity which is in no way simpler than the larger world of objects people our size can touch and feel.

Just like Alexis de Tocqueville, who introduced his fellow Frenchman to the novel civilization of America, Behe, in his modestly named Appendix, takes you by the hand and walks you through a living cell which suddenly takes on the complexity of the more visible features of Manhattan Island—buildings, streets, vehicles, but also windows inside of which are desks, people, fax machines, telephone wires connecting every single office on the island, etc.

Indeed, I think Behe may have found the Appendix the most interesting part of the book to write. Could he condense into 22 pages the overwhelmingly triumphant insights of a half century of biochemical research? What brave probes of reality are these lab men! Frankly, if all you read is the Appendix you could conclude on your own—as Behe did—that the very basis of the Darwinian assumption is quite unthinkable. This book pops into being with an impact similar to what the child blurted out in the famous story of the King who had no clothes.

In these two books the majesty of God’s creation unfolds as powerfully as I have ever seen it. If they don’t give you a holy awe of “what we are dealing with in life,” I am afraid nothing will. Here you have two very brainy, very hard working, very honest people, each in his own sphere patiently introducing you to ultimate reality. They themselves write with the same breathless awareness you will have as you try to follow them. While these authors have, humanly speaking, truly mastered their subjects, the fact is they have humbly allowed that reality to master them!

#### **Item #7. Small but Significant—global conference on "Gateway People Clusters"**

This conference may include as many as 400 from all over the world. The purpose this time will be to concentrate on the world’s people, cluster by cluster. See page 44 for more of the details. It will be held at the U.S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena, California. It will not be open to the public, but Mission Frontiers will be glad to report results and make an informal video which will give you a sense of being there.

Six categories of Peoples (groups), 12,863 total, Five types on So. Bap. Map

I. Three kinds of Unevangelized peoples (8,669 total) [Roughly, those who have not truly heard the Gospel] —Two kinds of Unreached peoples (6,322 total) [Roughly, those lacking a viable indigenous church movement]

Type A 1,681 million people within 2,161 peoples (groups) (on map) called “World A Peoples” (on map) dark red

Type B 1,372 million people within 4,161 peoples (groups) (on map) called “Unreached Peoples,” (on map) light red

Type C 1,455 million people within 2,347 peoples (groups) (on map) called “Unevangelized Peoples,” (on map) yellow



II. Two kinds of Evangelized peoples (1,988 total) [Roughly, having heard but not necessarily accepted the Gospel]

Type D, 1,136 million people within 1,945 peoples (groups),(on map) called “Evangelized Peoples” (on map) green

Type E, 3 million people within 43 peoples (groups) (on map) called “Christian Peoples” (on map) purple III. Peoples unclassified as yet = 2,206 in number, some unreached? (+10,657 classified = 12,863 on disk).

## **Finishing the Task: Unreached Peoples Challenge**

with Bruce Koch

*IJFM* 16:2, Summer 1999

[http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/16\\_2\\_PDFs/02%20Winter\\_Koch10.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/16_2_PDFs/02%20Winter_Koch10.pdf)

*“Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told” (Habakkuk 1:5).*

God’s promise to bless all the “families of the earth,” first given to Abraham 4,000 years ago, is becoming a reality at a pace “you would not believe.” Although some may dispute some of the details, the overall trend is indisputable. Biblical faith is growing and spreading to the ends of the earth as never before in history.

### **The Amazing Progress**

One of every ten people on the planet is of the Bible-reading, Bible-believing stream of Christianity. The number of believers in what used to be “mission fields” now surpasses the number of believers in the countries from which missionaries were originally sent. In fact, more missionaries are now sent from non-Western churches than from the traditional mission-sending bases in the West. The Protestant growth rate in Latin America is well over three times the biological growth rate.

It took 18 centuries for dedicated believers to grow from 0% of the world’s population to 2.5% in 1900, only 70 years to grow from 2.5% to 5%” in 1970, and just the last 30 years to grow from 5% to 11.2% of the world population. Now for the first time in history, there is one believer for every nine people worldwide who aren’t believers.

Protestants in China grew from about one million to over 80 million believers in less than 50 years, with most of that growth occurring in just the last few decades. In the 1980s, Nepal was still a staunch Hindu kingdom with only a small persecuted church. Today there are hundreds of thousands of believers, and churches have been started within each of the more than 100 distinct people groups.

### **A Tragic Reality**

While this amazing progress of the gospel gives much cause for rejoicing, it obscures a tragic reality. How could that be? The fact is that the gospel often expands within a community, but does not normally jump across boundaries between peoples, especially boundaries that are created by hate or prejudice. People can influence their “near neighbors” whose language and culture they understand, but where there is a prejudice boundary, religious faith, which is almost always bound up with many cultural features of the first group, simply does not easily jump to the next group, unless that group desires to adopt the other’s culture in preference to its own.

So what does this mean? If all the members of every church in the world were to bring every one of their friends and relatives within the same cultural group to obedient faith in Christ, and they in turn were able to bring all their friends and relatives to Christ and so on, no matter how much time you allow, there would still be billions who would never come to faith. They would be held at a distance from the gospel by boundaries of

prejudice and culture. The church does not readily grow within peoples where relevant churches do not exist. One third of the individuals in the world live within peoples with no church. They are no more spiritually "lost" than your cousin who has never gone to church, but unlike your cousin, there is no church made up of people like themselves with whom they can fellowship.

Thus, while there are still tens of millions who have never heard the name "Jesus" at all, there are hundreds of millions more who may have heard of Jesus, and may even have high regard for Him, but who cannot see a way to become His disciples. Standing before them are barriers ranging from the relatively trivial to the seemingly insurmountable, many of them beyond the demands of the gospel. Cornelius in Acts 10 would have had to cross the barrier of circumcision as an adult—a painful and actually dangerous price to pay for entrance into fellowship with Jewish believers. A Muslim Turk similarly faces huge obstacles if he were to become a "Christian." All his life he has been told, "To be a Turk is to be a Muslim." To him, Christianity is the religion of the barbarian "Infidel" Crusaders who brutally ravaged the land and peoples of Turkey, Muslim and Christian alike. To become a Christian is to become a traitor turning his back on his family, community, and country.

### **To All Nations**

We shouldn't really be surprised to see the thrilling advances of the gospel all over the world. That is exactly what Jesus said would take place, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come" (Matthew 24:14). A close look at the end of this verse says a lot about what we should watch and work for at the end of the age. Jesus says that as the missionary task is completed, there will be "a witness to all the nations."

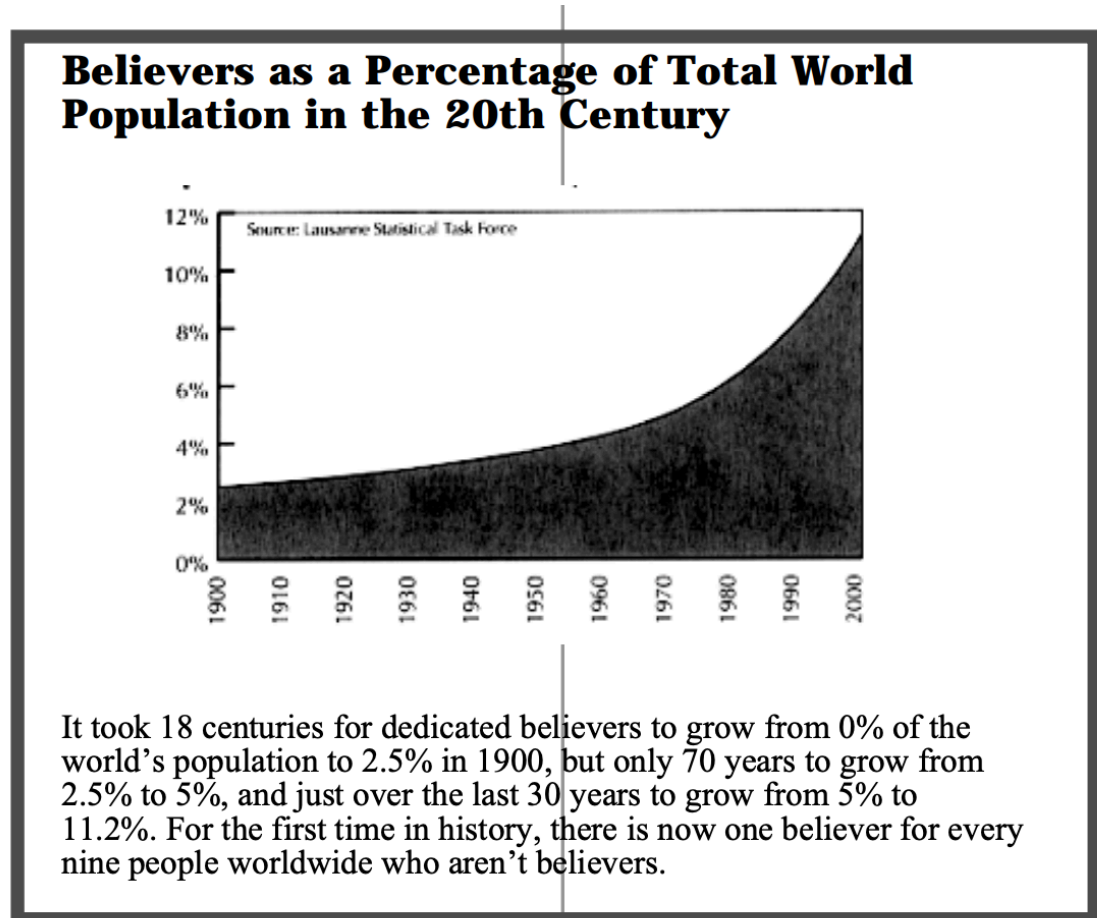
By "witness" Jesus was saying that the "gospel of the kingdom" will be established in open view throughout entire human communities. The gospel of the kingdom is Christ prevailing over evil, liberating people so that they can live obediently free under His mastery and blessing. God wants a persuasive display of that kingdom victory exhibited in every people. What better exhibit of God's kingdom than a community of people who are living under Christ's kingship? That's why we should aim at church planting movements within every people. While not the only way to glorify God, nothing puts Christ's lordship on display like a community of people dedicated to follow Him.

By the phrase "all the nations," Jesus was not referring at all to countries or nation-states. The wording he chose (the Greek word *ethne*) instead points to the ethnicities, the languages and the extended families which constitute the peoples of the earth.

Who are these peoples? Jesus did not provide a list of the peoples. He did not define the idea of peoples with precise detail. What matters most is not that the peoples can be counted but that the missionary task will be completed within all the peoples of the earth. We'll know we are finished only when a visible testimony to the gospel of the kingdom—a church planting movement—has been established within every people.

### Four Different Approaches

In order to work together strategically, mission leaders have been refining the concept of “people groups” as a rough measure of our progress toward completing the entire task. There are four useful ways of looking at the idea of people groups:



*Blocs* of peoples, *ethnolinguistic* peoples, *sociopeoples*, and *unimax* peoples. The first two are especially useful for summarizing the total task and developing strategies and partnerships to approach known peoples. The former two are more useful for those who are on the field working to establish churches. Each is of significant value and corresponds to a distinct aspect of strategic thinking. Only one allows us to speak of closure of the essential mission task, in the sense that every person has a reasonable opportunity to respond to the gospel.

#### 1) *Blocs of peoples for global perspective and strategy.*

*Blocs of peoples are a limited number of summary categories into which we can place peoples in order to analyze them.*

**Major Cultural Blocs:** We have grouped peoples, particularly “unreached” peoples, along major cultural lines according to the predominant religion within the group. The major cultural blocs of unreached peoples were: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Tribal, Chinese, and Others.<sup>1</sup> This model allows us to summarize the remaining task in relation to the potential mission force.

***Affinity Blocs:*** Patrick Johnstone has suggested another model which combines sets of closely related ethnolinguistic peoples into "people clusters" and further combines people clusters into "affinity blocs" based on language, history, culture, etc. The 12 blocs that comprise the majority of the least evangelized peoples<sup>2</sup> are: African Sahel, Cushitic, Arab World, Iranian, Turkic, South Asian, Tibetan, East Asian, South East Asian, Malay, and Eurasian. Combining groups along these lines enables mission organizations to begin exploring ways of establishing strategic partnerships to reach related peoples.<sup>3</sup>

## ***2) Ethnolinguistic peoples for mission mobilization and preparation.***

*An ethnolinguistic people is an ethnic or racial group distinguished by its self-identity with traditions of common descent, history, customs, and language.*

The Lax people from the Black Sea region of Turkey, for example, are easily identified by other Turks not only by their distinctive facial features, but also by their unique "romantic" pronunciation of Turkish.

Sometimes what appears initially to be a single ethnolinguistic group turns out, in fact, to be many more. Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe, began his Bible translation work with the Cakchiquel of Guatemala. The translators who followed him discovered that the Cakchiquel could not be reached with one translation, but needed translations for six distinct dialects. It is likely that had they produced gospel cassettes rather than written translations, they would have to target even more dialects. Cultural prejudices and differences in speech often make people unwilling to listen to a message spoken by a member of a different group even though it appears the same on the printed page.

Recent cooperative efforts among mission researchers have produced fairly comprehensive lists of ethnolinguistic peoples. These lists have given a great boost to the cause of frontier mission. Much of the information is being used to make profiles and other relevant information widely available through printed media and the worldwide web.<sup>4</sup>

People blocs and ethnolinguistic lists give us a simple way to identify peoples and make the larger body of Christ aware of their existence and the need to reach them. The ethnolinguistic approach stimulates prayer and initial planning for specific peoples leading to serious strategic efforts to evangelize them.

## ***3) Sociopeoples and preliminary evangelism***

*A sociopeople is a relatively small association of peers who have an affinity for one another based upon a shared interest, activity, or occupation.*

Once we actually send long-term missionaries to a pioneer mission field, they have to learn a great deal just to be able to live, communicate, and better understand the target people. After the initial phase of cultural learning and adaption, the question remains as to how to begin to establish a church within that people.

Quite often we can effectively evangelize individuals by starting a Bible study or a small prayer group within these specialized groups. The group may be women who wash at the river, taxicab drivers, college students living indoors, or new arrivals in the big city from a particular rural group. There are almost unlimited potential opportunities for this type of group evangelism in our world today. For mission purposes, we can work

with sociopeoples for preliminary evangelism as an intermediate bridge to long-range church planting.

Thus, approaching a sociopeople can be strategic in giving a focus for ministry among a specific subset of the larger society as a first step to full-blown church planting. Some types of groups may prove to be especially helpful when establishing churches, while others may hinder the process. Natural leaders and Bible teachers for churches might be discovered by first reaching businessmen or teachers. Some have even managed to be effective among religious leaders such as Buddhist monks and Muslim mullahs, who are already recognized as spiritual leaders. On the other hand, you could choose the wrong group, such as focusing on children's ministry for initial evangelism within a people, which in nearly every case would be interpreted as a threat to their natural families,

#### ***4) Unimax peoples for people movements to Christ***

*A unimax people is the maximum sized group sufficiently unified to be the target of a single people movement to Christ, where "unified" refers to the fact that there are no significant barriers of either understanding or acceptance to stop the spread of the gospel.*

In 1982, mission leaders hammered out a useful definition for a "people group." For evangelistic purposes [a people group] is "the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance." (see above)

The term "unreached peoples"<sup>5</sup> is used widely today to refer to ethnolinguistic peoples, which are based on other criteria and would normally be larger in size than groups as defined in the 1982 definition. To avoid confusion and help clarify the missiological task before us, we can use the term unimax peoples to distinguish the kind of group intended by the 1982 definitions.

Jungle tribes and other small, remote peoples are almost always single unimax peoples. Discovering unimax realities within larger ethnolinguistic peoples in complete societies is a bit more challenging.

While language is often a primary means by which a person understands his or her cultural identity, in order to reach all peoples we must consider other factors that keep peoples separate. Religion, class distinctions, education, political and ideological convictions, historical enmity between clans or tubes, customs and behaviors, etc., all have potential to develop strong cultural boundaries within ethnolinguistic clusters of unimax peoples. This fact alone helps to explain the differing numbers for the totals of "unreached peoples."

For example, India cannot be approached on an ethnolinguistic basis alone. In addition to over 1600 major languages and dialects, India is further divided by religion, caste and other socio-cultural barriers. A sociological survey in 1991 identified 4,635 peoples in India alone.

Sadly, neighboring groups 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. Rivalries between major clans among the Muslim Somali people are so severe that they have almost dragged the entire country into ruin. In the early stages of evangelism and church planting, such simmering hostilities will likely mean that such

groups can most effectively be approached with the gospel message separately. The bright hope of the gospel is, of course, that new Christ-following movements in such settings of strife will work for the healing of enmities between peoples.

Indeed, history shows that eventually a host of smaller hostile 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.

The first three approaches to people group thinking as blocs, as ethnolinguistic peoples, and as sociopeoples are each helpful in understanding and responding to the task to which Christ has commissioned us. Yet they all, in one way or another, point the way toward beginnings. This fourth (unimax) way of looking at peoples has more to do with finishing, not in the sense that there is nothing left to do, but in the sense that the essential first step for the gospel to flourish within a people has been accomplished. The unimax approach to peoples can help us press on toward closure—our corporate finishing of what is completable about Christ’s mission mandate.

The value of the unimax approach lies in the way it identifies boundaries hindering the flow of the gospel, while at the same time firing the ambitions of dedicated Christians to pursue the evangelization of the peoples beyond those boundaries, leaving no small group sealed off within a larger group.

### **Counting the Peoples**

These often subtle but powerful socio-cultural barriers exist within groups which often appear unified to outside observers. Some have dismissed the usefulness of the unimax concept because socio-cultural prejudice barriers cannot easily be identified or precisely quantified. But even though intangible “prejudice barriers” cannot be quantified, these factors are not irrelevant. What could be more important than identifying and penetrating every barrier which holds people from following Christ?

The unimax peoples definition was never intended to quantify precisely the total task. Instead, it helps us recognize when the unreached peoples task is finished, and identify where that task is not yet begun.

### **Approaching Peoples Cautiously**

Each of these four approaches to various kinds of peoples has a proper and valuable use. Blocs help us sum up the task. The ethnolinguistic approach helps us mobilize, Sociopeoples help us begin evangelizing. But beware of focusing church planting efforts on sociopeoples or ethnolinguistic peoples which simply appear on a list. There is often discouragement or, even worse, a deliberate, typically American “people blindness” as workers find that there are many more people groups than they expected to find. The opposite can happen, too. Sometimes the very same people group is listed twice because it is found on both sides of a political boundary. In actuality, it is the same people group. It may only need a single church planting effort bridging the political line. For example, Uzbek groups are reported in 20 countries in addition to those in Uzbekistan.

In contrast, the country of Uzbekistan reports 56 groups within it that do not speak Uzbek, and only one (very large group—15 million strong) that does! It is almost certainly true that this “one” large group represents a number of different groups that need to be reached separately.

Using political boundaries to distinguish people groups is like dropping cookie cutters down on the geographical distribution of a people group, then calling the pieces within each cutter a different type of dough. Granted, in many cases of extended separation groups do become distinct especially if new migration ceases, but not often antagonistic. In much of the developing world the concept of political separation is quite artificial since borders are often quite permeable.

Consider the challenge of the Kurds. These fiercely independent people are found in a homeland that spans at least five countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Azerbaijan. For the sake of mission strategy, they are certainly not just one people group. They are not even just seven groups. In addition to having four major language subgroups, traditional rivalries keep them fighting one another even when you would think they would unite to fight non-Kurds for the sake of a Kurdish homeland.

Missionaries need to be aware of the possibility as in the case of the Kurds, that people are not necessarily unified even if millions are in one country. Yet, smaller populations of Kurds found in significant numbers in 13 countries outside of the “Kurdistan” home-land are potentially strategic “bridge” populations back to groups in their homeland area. And those who are dislocated from their natural homeland are often more open to the gospel. Once a remote segment of a larger group comes to accept Christ, it may become an effective bridge back to its people in their homeland. Political boundaries do not often limit the spread of the gospel. Of course, all of this “country specific” information can be very useful for planning strategy and forming partnerships for reaching widely scattered members of specific people groups.

### **The Essential Missionary Task**

What is needed in every people group is for the gospel to begin moving throughout the group with such compelling, life-giving power that the resulting churches can themselves finish spreading the gospel to every person. Good but lesser goals may delay or distract us. Evangelism among street vendors or students might lead to discipleship groups for personal growth and even evangelism. But why stop short of anything less than a burgeoning movement of Christ-followers characterized by whole families? Why not expect that God is well able and willing to attract to His Son a substantial movement that will spread rapidly, spontaneously and thoroughly within whole peoples?

The essential missionary task is to establish a *viable indigenous church planting movement that carries the potential to renew whole extended families and transform whole societies*. It is *viable* in that it can grow on its own, *indigenous* meaning that it is not seen as foreign, and a *church planting movement* that continues to reproduce intergenerational fellowships that are able to evangelize the rest of the people group. Many refer to this achievement of an indigenous church planting movement as a *missiological breakthrough*.

We have done our basic mission job when individuals within the society (even those outside of the church) acknowledge that the movement belongs to their society.



Only when this level of cultural adaptation is achieved will the dynamic, lifechanging love of Jesus become available to move freely throughout the people group. Donald McGavran referred to these missiological breakthroughs as “people movements to Christ.” We can hold this goal as the minimal achievement within every people in order to give a realistic opportunity for everyone in that people group to say “yes” to Jesus Christ without adding cultural barriers to the already steep spiritual demands of the gospel. Only in this way will we be able to give everyone in the world a chance to say “yes” to Christ and His Kingdom. Jesus commissioned us to accomplish nothing less. We should settle for nothing less.

### **The Missiological Breakthrough**

The word “closure” refers simply to the idea of finishing. In the 1970s, the Lord began to open the eyes of many to the fact that the irreducibly essential mission task of a breakthrough in every people group was a completable task. At the time, over half of the world’s population lived within unreached people groups. Even so, a small group of mission activists had the faith to believe that if a movement could be mobilized to focus attention on the unreached peoples, which for a time were called “hidden peoples,” then the essential mission task could be completed within a few decades. In faith, they coined the watchword “A Church for Every People by the Year 2000” to capture the essence of the completable nature of the mission mandate. While no one ever predicted that it would be completed by the end of the year 2000, they were confident that it was possible. The watchword succeeded in igniting the hearts of countless thousands with a passion for seeing Christ honored, worshiped and obeyed within every people. God was at work in similar ways among others in order to birth the now global movement focused on the unreached peoples challenge. Today we are seeing the fulfillment of vision that only a few dared to dream just two decades ago.

is unreasonable to even talk of evangelizing every person, since day by day hundreds of thousands of children grow into the age of accountability. By contrast, the idea of “A Church for Every People” is one possible and reasonable approximation of what the Great Commission may mean, and it is a completable task. We know of no better interpretation of what it means to fulfill Jesus’ mandate to have a “witness” among every people or in other words to “disciple all the nations” (Matt 24:14; 28:19,20).

We can confidently speak of closure to this unreached peoples mission. There were an estimated 17,000 unreached peoples in 1976. Today there are an estimated 10,000 unreached peoples (unimax peoples), and a dynamic global movement now exists that is committed to establishing “a church for every people.”

But how measurable is the presence of a “viable indigenous church planting movement”? 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.

In the case of reaching unimax peoples, there can be only three possibilities: (1) definitely reached, (2) definitely unreached, and (3) doubtfully reached. Logically we expect to focus our highest priority energies on those that are in doubt or definitely unreached. Just as in the case of asking, how many unreached peoples are there, we cannot very well evaluate whether a group has truly had a missiological breakthrough from a distance or from sources that are not concerned with such things.

We can make some well-informed guesses about presence or absence of a church movement from quantifiable data. But what if an ethno-linguistic people is actually a cluster of unimax peoples and one of them is experiencing a church planting explosion, other groups in the cluster have little or nothing happening? The presence of those unreached unimax groups in the same cluster, may dilute or even vigorously oppose the movement in the group that is ablaze for God. Secondly, the growth of the church in the one may divert missionary attention from the needs of the other.

### **More Than Closure**

What God will do is always more than what He has given us to do. He has given us a clear and simple thing to finish: to see that Christ is worshiped and followed in every people. That is the essential missionary task. This we must do with utmost focus and passion until it is finished. But there is still more to be done. The missiological breakthrough is just the beginning of all that God intends to do within every people. God will continue to fulfill His promise to undo the works of Satan and bring forth the blessing of Abraham to all peoples.

How did Jesus teach His disciples to pray? “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done one earth as it is in heaven.” Our concept of God’s desire to reach all peoples and persons is obviously 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 (Isa 66:19).

Thus, we look confidently forward to 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 God seeks to vanquish the “rulers of the darkness of this earth” (Eph 6:12).

Fairly soon there may not be a single “kingdom of this world” where His name is not glorified. A spiritual breakthrough into every people is a precursor to making the gospel available to every person on earth. 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 each group where no real breakthrough has yet occurred, there will be a “power encounter” between the armies of God and the powers of darkness. Conquering the “kingdoms of this world” requires an invasion of God’s glory within each people.

The apostle Paul was sent to the non-Jewish peoples specifically “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:17-18). 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 expanding the reign of His Kingdom and conquering Satan?

That this is primarily a spiritual battle, certainly does not mean we can set aside careful planning and training for evangelism and pioneer penetration, and just sit back and pray that God will go out and do His thing. Paul said,

“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).

We know that it is also our fight, not just His, and that we are joining Him in His battle against the Evil One. 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 strongholds of His enemies to bring His glory to the ends of the earth.

Jesus gave us a clear mandate by His unique authority to “disciple all the peoples.” of the world. We can and must go all out to obey Him. Certainly we should take our evangelistic measurements seriously, but not as ultimate parameters of God’s plan. We must press forward, knowing that He may evaluate things by measures we cannot fully comprehend. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

All of this cannot entirely 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 know that all our measurements—of peoples and persons—are merely objective goals. It is more important that we are with Him and He be with us, that we be acting in obedience as He leads us in our heavenly calling to bless all the peoples of the earth.

### **Looking at the Task Graphically**

Although the world is large and complex, there exist helpful methods of quantifying progress toward closure of the essential mission task. Modern researchers are now able to collect, manage and summarize vast amounts of data with the use of computers. We owe a great deal to those who have attempted to trace the hand of God as He continues His pursuit of all peoples.<sup>6</sup> All of our global charts and graphs to date have been dependent on the research of others as well as our own estimates where additional estimates have been needed. However, no database can ever do more than approximate the dynamic reality of the world.

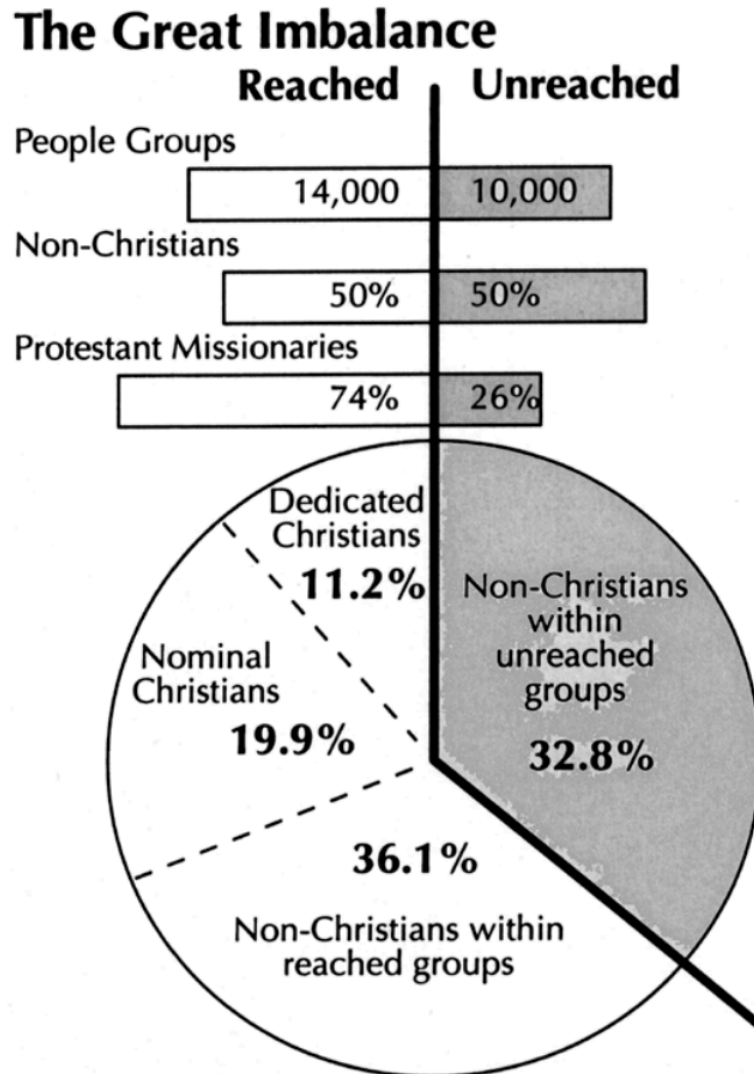
When looking at the charts in this article, you need to understand how we are using the predominant religion within a group as a cultural feature to tag the group as a whole. This does not mean that every person in the group is a member of that religion. Thus, you can have a Muslim group that is “reached” if there is a church movement within it even though the group is still predominantly Muslim.

All of the charts in this chapter, except those on the “protestant Mission Force,” are derived from the numbers on the “All Humanity in Mission Perspective” chart (page 521).

### **The Great Imbalance**

Looking at “The Globe at a Glance” (p. 520), you can readily see that the bulk of the individuals who live within unreached groups (white) are within the Muslim, Tribal, Hindu, and Buddhist blocs. We need to continue to send well trained and insightful missionaries to these challenging peoples. There have been some very encouraging people movements within a limited number of Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim groups. These three blocs are often seen as the most resistant, but we are learning that when a people seems “resistant” it may only mean our approach has been defective. Half of those living within unreached peoples are in the Muslim bloc which is a bloc that has very favorable attitudes toward Jesus Christ.

Only an estimated 10,000 of the global foreign mission force<sup>7</sup> are working within the 10,000 unreached groups, while 41 times that number of foreign missionaries



Sources: David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson,<sup>6</sup> Patrick Johnstone<sup>8</sup>

continue to work within people groups already reached. What an imbalance! Even if you include the foreign missionaries working with Christians within the entire major cultural blocs, reached and unreached (see chart below and page 522), it is still a glaring fact that most foreign missionaries work within peoples which are predominantly Christian.

Patrick Johnstone analyzed the data in *Operation World '93* to approximate distribution of the Protestant Mission Force<sup>8</sup> (see page 522). While this is a more positive picture than we have ever seen before, it still shows a great imbalance in that only 26 percent of the "Protestant" mission effort is going to the two-thirds of the world that is

predominantly non-Christian. It will take the best efforts of the best the Church has to offer if we are to complete the task of frontier mission any time soon.

After nearly 2000 years, 10,000 unimax peoples encompassing 2 billion people still live beyond the reach of any local church.

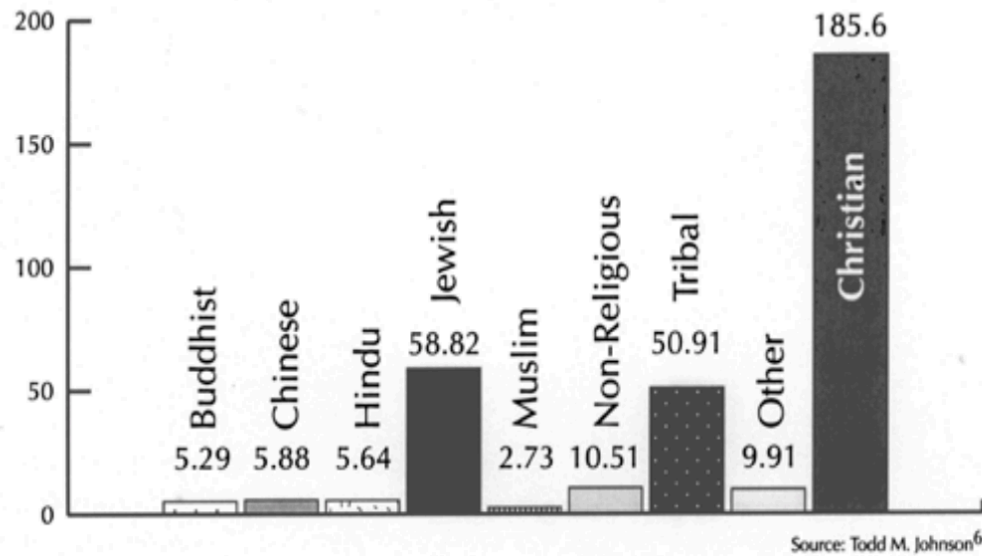
### **The Great Momentum**

While talking about billions of people might seem overwhelming, astounding progress continues to be made. In 1974, we were stunned by the revelation that three out of four of the non-Christians in the world were beyond the reach of same culture evangelism. Today, only one out of every two non-Christians is beyond reach! An easy-to-remember new insight which you can easily see in the chart on page 519 is that you can divide the world up into meaningful thirds. One third of the world would at least claim to be Christian; another third are non-Christians that live within reached peoples; the final third are non-Christians within unreached peoples. Again this is significant progress; in 1974 approximately half of the world's population was beyond the reach of the church. In fact, for the first time in history there are fewer non-Christians within unreached groups than there are within reached groups! As missionaries succeed in establishing church movements in more unreached peoples, that is exactly what you would expect to happen.

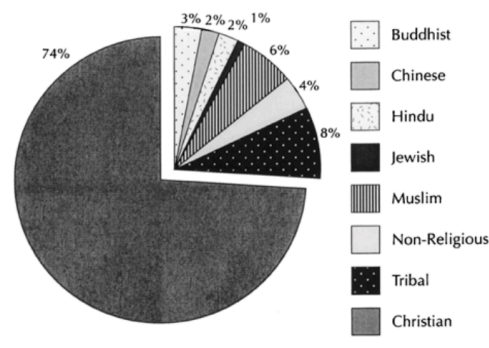
We are in the final era of missions. For the first time in history it is possible to see the end of the tunnel when there will be a church movement within the language and social structure of every people group on earth; powerful face to face evangelism taking over in all peoples. God is moving throughout His global body to fulfill His promise to the nations in ways that we could not possibly have imagined 20 years ago. Thousands of new missionary recruits are no longer coming just from the West, but also from Asia, Africa and Latin America— fruits of missionary movements— wholeheartedly embracing the Great Commission. More so than ever before it is a global, cooperative movement. We have to be prepared for new partnerships new insights, and new approaches by non-Western mission structures. At the same time we need to recognize that the Western missionary story is a reservoir of mission experience that can serve the emerging missions.

The job is large, but relatively small for the enormous body of believers around the world. There are approximately 670 churches in the world for every remaining

### Number of Foreign Missionaries per Million in Major Cultural Blocs



### Distribution of Protestant Mission Force Within the Major Cultural Blocs

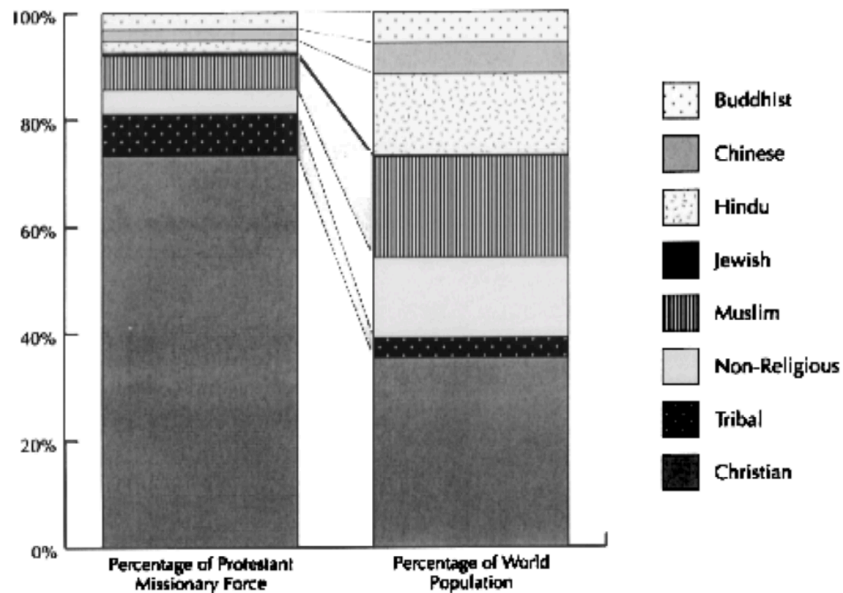


***Only one out of every four missionaries is working in a pioneer frontier ministry among non-Christian peoples of the major religious blocs.***

These two charts represent an inclusive view of the Protestant Mission Force. They include foreign missionaries, missionaries working within their own countries (both cross-culturally and in near cultures) bi-vocational missionaries, and home and staff who are classified as missionaries who support field missionaries. The breakdown was a preliminary assessment based on several days of analysis done specifically for this article.

Source: Patrick Johnstone<sup>8</sup>

### Distribution of Protestant Mission Force Relative to the Size of the Major Cultural Blocs



unreached unimax people group! We need only a small percentage of dedicated believers to be mobilized and equipped. Judging the remaining task by the potential work force makes it quite small and within reach by comparison to the forbidding prospect faced by our forefathers.

Notice how much more doable the mission task seems when we focus on the size of the potential mission force and on penetrating people groups. Instead of talking of evangelizing 2 billion individuals, we can talk of beginning in approximately 3000 ethnolinguistic peoples and then finishing in maybe as few as 10,000 unimax peoples. Within a very short time all of the 3000 “least evangelized” ethnolinguistic groups will be targeted and engaged by some mission-sending structure in the world. It is already true for more than half of them!

Identifying and penetrating the remaining unreached unimax peoples—the great challenge of “discipling all the nations”—still lies before us. God will reveal the glory of His kingdom among all peoples. We are within range of finishing the task with more momentum than ever before in history. Be a part of it—“Declare His glory among the nations!”

#### End Notes

1. For the charts in this chapter, the Non-Religious and Jewish categories have been added for the sake of using data as categorized in the World Christian Encyclopedia although the Jewish category is not always graphed if too small to be seen.

2. “Evangelized” is based on David B. Barrett’s “Index of Evangelization” and does not yet have a published definition,

3. To learn more about the usefulness of these groupings see his marvelous book, *The Church is Bigger Than You Think*. Christian Focus Publications, WEC, WCL, 1981.

4. Just search for “unreached people profiles” and you’re off and surfing.

5. The AD 2000 Movement refers to groups that are less than 2% Evangelical or 5% Christian adherents.

6. In the past, we have relied on a variety of expert sources for our figures and estimates for our “All Humanity in Mission Perspective” chart. We are now using information supplied by Todd M. Johnson of the World Evangelization Research Center. Todd is familiar with the unimax principle and is a caretaker of the data underlying the World Christian Encyclopedia (David B. Barrett, Ed.) His table reflects Todd’s interpretation of missiologically significant groups within larger ethnolinguistic peoples and gives estimates of the numbers based upon analyzing statistical clues and making adjustments where necessary. No attempt has been made to adjust the estimates to make them more in line with previous estimates. If you were to compare with previous charts, you would notice that some of the numbers for unimax groups within a bloc have gone up instead of down. In fact, the overall number of estimated unimax groups has increased back to our earlier published estimate of 10,000 from several years ago. This can be attributed to a change in source and methodology. Other changes from previous versions of this chart: 11 the Jews and non-Religious/Atheist categories have been added, 21 because of the inclusion of the non-Religious/Atheist category, the Chinese bloc was split between that category and the Chinese folk bloc.

7. The global foreign mission force includes all kinds of Christians (Protestants, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, etc.).

8. The graphs for the Protestant Mission Force were generated from data derived from Appendix 3, Protestant Missionary Force found in the 1993 edition of Operation World. The country figures were analyzed based on Patrick Johnstone’s extensive knowledge of mission work around the world. The separation of the cross-cultural work force into the different religious blocks was a preliminary analysis done specifically for this volume. Missionaries in church development ministries within non-Christian peoples are not included in the pioneer categories. Our thanks to Patrick Johnstone and his assistant Jason Mandryk for their willing hearts and expedient labor.

[Editor’s Note: This article is a reprint from the newly revised and world famous *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader*, 1999. William Carey Library. Permission granted.]



## Advancing Strategies of Closure: Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge

(with Bruce Koch)

*IJFM* 19:4, Winter 2002, 15-25

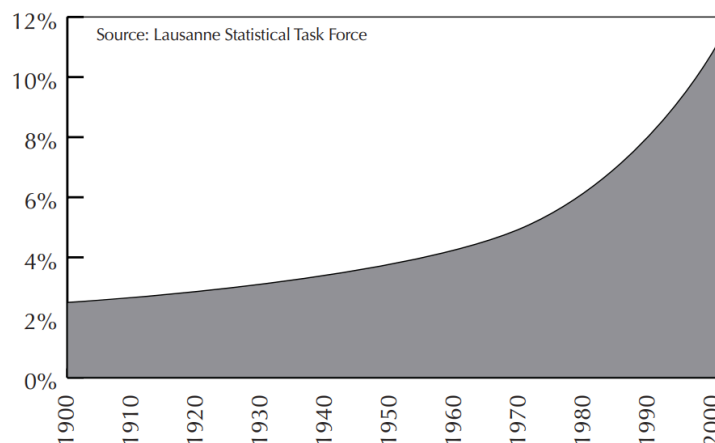
[http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/19\\_4\\_PDFs/winter\\_koch\\_task.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/19_4_PDFs/winter_koch_task.pdf)

Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. (Habakkuk 1:5) God’s promise to bless all the “families of the earth,” first given to Abraham 4,000 years ago, is becoming a reality at a pace “you would not believe.” Although some may dispute some of the details, the overall trend is indisputable. Biblical faith is growing and spreading to the ends of the earth as never before in history.

### The Amazing Progress of the Gospel

One of every ten people on the planet is of the Bible-reading, Bible-believing stream of Christianity. The number of believers in what used to be “mission fields” now surpasses the number of believers in the countries from which missionaries were originally sent. In fact, more missionaries are now sent from non-Western churches than from the traditional mission-sending bases in the West. The Protestant growth rate in Latin America is well over three times the biological growth rate. Protestants in China grew from about one million to over 80 million believers in less than 50 years, with most of that growth occurring in just the last few decades. In the 1980s, Nepal was still a

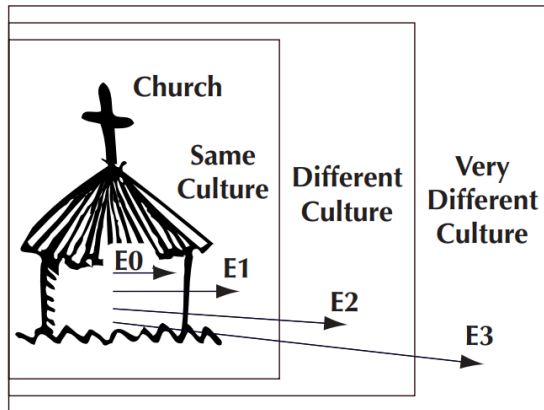
### Believers as a Percentage of Total World Population in the 20th Century



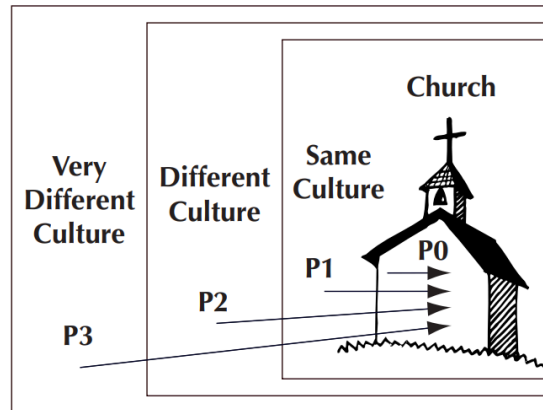
It took 18 centuries for dedicated believers to grow from 0% of the world’s population to 2.5% in 1900, only 70 years to grow from 2.5% to 5% in 1970, and just the last 30 years to grow from 5% to 11.2% of the world population. Now for the first time in history, there is one believer for every nine people worldwide who aren’t believers.

staunch Hindu kingdom with only a small persecuted church. Today there are hundreds of thousands of believers and churches have been started within each of the more than 100 distinct people groups.

### E-Scale



### P-Scale



The E-Scale helps compare the cultural distances that Christians need to move in order to communicate the gospel with others. E0 refers to evangelism of church-going Christians. E1 extends to the very same culture through one barrier, that of "church culture." E2 evangelism presses into a close, but still different, culture. E3 evangelism pushes to very different cultures.

The P-Scale is more than a mirror of the E-Scale. The P-Scale helps compare the different cultural distances that potential converts need to move in order to join the nearest church.

### Tragic Reality: Two Billion Still Cut Off

While this amazing progress of the gospel gives much cause for rejoicing, it obscures a tragic reality. How could that be? The fact is that the gospel often expands within a community but does not normally "jump" across boundaries between peoples, especially boundaries that are created by hate or prejudice. People can influence their "near neighbors" whose language and culture they understand, but where there is a prejudice boundary, religious faith, which is almost always bound up with many cultural features of the first group, simply does not easily "jump" to the next group, unless that group desires to adopt the other's culture in preference to its own.

So what does this mean? If all the members of every church in the world were to bring every one of their friends and relatives within the same cultural group to obedient faith in Christ, and they in turn were able to bring all their friends and relatives to Christ and so on, no matter how much time you allow, there would still be billions who would never come to faith. They would be held at a distance from the gospel by boundaries of prejudice and culture. The church does not readily grow within peoples where relevant churches do not exist. One-third of the individuals in the world live within peoples with no church. They are no more spiritually "lost" than your cousin who has never gone to church, but unlike your cousin, there is no church made up of people like themselves with whom they can fellowship.

Thus, while there are still tens of millions who have never heard the name "Jesus" at all, there are hundreds of millions more who may have heard of Jesus, and may even have high regard for Him, but who cannot see a way to become His disciples. Standing before them are barriers ranging from the relatively trivial to the seemingly insurmountable, many of them beyond the demands of the gospel. Cornelius in Acts 10

would have had to cross the barrier of circumcision as an adult—a painful and actually dangerous price to pay for entrance into fellowship with Jewish believers. A Muslim Turk similarly faces huge obstacles if he were to become a “Christian.” All his life he has been told, “To be a Turk is to be a Muslim.” To him, Christianity is the religion of the barbarian “Infidel” Crusaders who brutally ravaged the land and peoples of Turkey, Muslim and Christian alike. To become a Christian is to become a traitor, turning his back on his family, community, and country.

### **“A Witness to All the Nations”**

We shouldn’t really be surprised to see the thrilling advances of the gospel all over the world. That is exactly what Jesus said would take place, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matthew 24:14). A close look at the end of this verse says a lot about what we should watch and work for at the end of the age. Jesus says that as the missionary task is completed, there will be “a witness to all the nations.”

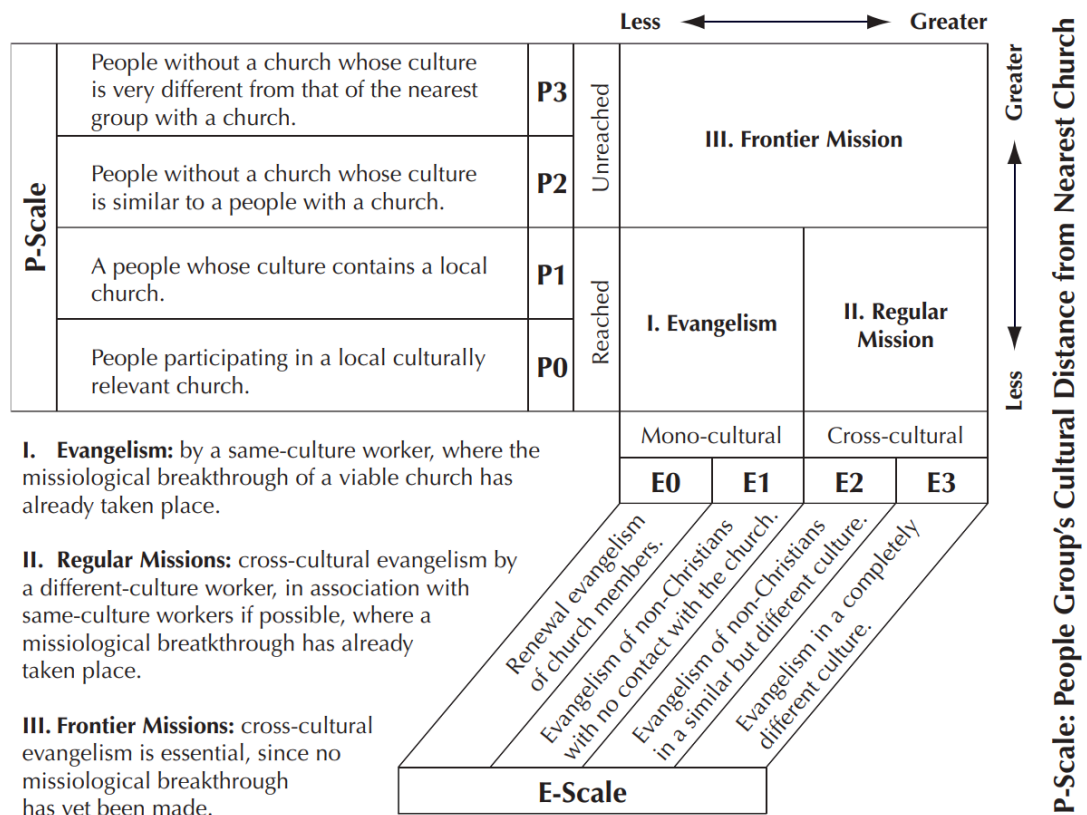
By “witness” Jesus was saying that the “gospel of the kingdom” will be established in open view throughout entire human communities. The gospel of the kingdom is Christ prevailing over evil, liberating people so that they can live obediently free under His mastery and blessing. God wants a persuasive display of that kingdom victory exhibited in every people. What better exhibit of God’s kingdom than a community of people who are living under Christ’s kingship? That’s why we should aim at church planting movements within every people. While not the only way to glorify God, nothing puts Christ’s lordship on display like a community of people dedicated to follow Him.

By the phrase “all the nations,” Jesus was not referring at all to countries or nation-states. The wording he chose (the Greek word *ethne*) instead points to the ethnicities, the languages, and the extended families which constitute the peoples of the earth.

Who are these peoples? Jesus did not provide a list of the peoples. He did not define the idea of peoples with precise detail. What matters most is not that the peoples can be counted, but that the missionary task will be completed within all the peoples of the earth. We’ll know we are finished only when a visible testimony to the gospel of the kingdom—a church planting movement—has been established within every people.

## Regular Missions and Frontier Missions

### E-Scale: Evangelist's Cultural Distance from Potential Convert



## Four Different Approaches to People Group Thinking

In order to work together strategically, mission leaders have been refining the concept of “people groups” as a rough measure of our progress toward completing the entire task. There are four useful ways of looking at the idea of people groups: blocs of peoples, ethnolinguistic peoples, sociopeoples, and unimax peoples. The first two are especially useful for summarizing the total task and developing strategies and partnerships to approach known peoples. The latter two are more useful for those who are on the field working to establish churches. Each is of significant value and corresponds to a distinct aspect of strategic thinking. Only one allows us to speak of closure of the essential mission task, in the sense that every person has a reasonable opportunity to respond to the gospel.

### 1) Blocs of peoples for global level perspective and strategies

*Blocs of peoples are a limited number of summary categories into which we can place peoples in order to analyze them.*

**Major Cultural Blocs:** We have grouped peoples, particularly “unreached” peoples, along major cultural lines according to the predominant religion within the group. The major cultural blocs of unreached peoples are: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist,

Tribal, Chinese, and Others.<sup>1</sup> This model allows us to summarize the remaining task in relation to the potential mission force.

*Affinity Blocs:* Patrick Johnstone has suggested another model which combines sets of closely related ethnolinguistic peoples into “people clusters” and further combines people clusters into “affinity blocs” based on language, history, culture, etc. The 12 blocs that comprise the majority of the least evangelized peoples<sup>2</sup> are: African Sahel, Cushitic, Arab World, Iranian, Turkic, South Asian, Tibetan, East Asian, South East Asian, Malay, and Eurasian. Combining groups along these lines enables mission organizations to begin exploring ways of establishing strategic partnerships to reach related peoples.<sup>3</sup>

## **2) Ethnolinguistic peoples for mobilization and preparation**

*An ethnolinguistic people is an ethnic group distinguished by its self-identity with traditions of common descent, history, customs, and language.*

The Laz people from the Black Sea region of Turkey, for example, are easily identified by other Turks not only by their distinctive facial features but also by their unique “romantic” pronunciation of Turkish.

Sometimes what appears initially to be a unified ethnolinguistic group turns out to be several smaller groups. Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, began his Bible translation work with the Cakchiquel of Guatemala. The translators who followed him discovered that the Cakchiquel could not be reached with one translation but would, in fact, require translations for six distinct written dialects. If they were producing gospel cassettes rather than written translations, they would have to deal with even more dialectical differences. Differences in pronunciation often make people unwilling to listen to a message spoken by a member of a related group even though the words are the same on the printed page.

Recent cooperative efforts among mission researchers have produced fairly comprehensive lists of ethnolinguistic peoples. These lists have given a great boost to the cause of frontier mission. Much of the information is being used to make profiles and other relevant information widely available through printed media and the worldwide web.<sup>4</sup>

People blocs and ethnolinguistic lists give us a way to identify peoples and make the larger body of Christ aware of their existence and the need to reach them. Both approaches stimulate prayer and initial planning for specific people groups leading to serious strategic efforts to evangelize them.

## **3) Sociopeoples and preliminary evangelism**

*A sociopeople is a relatively small association of peers who have an affinity for one another based upon a shared interest, activity, or occupation.*

Once we actually send long-term missionaries to a pioneer mission field, they have to learn a great deal just to be able to live, communicate, and better understand the target people. After the initial phase of cultural learning and adaptation, the question remains as to how to begin to establish a church with in that people. Quite often we can effectively evangelize individuals by starting a Bible study or a small prayer group within these specialized groups. The group may be women who wash at the river, taxicab drivers, college students living in dorms, or new arrivals in the big city from a particular rural group. There are almost unlimited potential opportunities for this type of group

evangelism in our world today. For mission purposes, we can work with sociopeoples for preliminary evangelism as an intermediate bridge to long-range church planting goals. Thus, approaching a sociopeople can be strategic in giving a focus for ministry among a specific sub-set of the larger society as a first step to full-blown church planting. Some types of groups may prove to be especially helpful when establishing churches, while others may hinder the process. Natural leaders and Bible teachers for churches might be discovered by first reaching businessmen or teachers. Efforts to reach religious leaders such as Buddhist monks and Muslim mullahs can be particularly effective because they are already recognized as spiritual leaders. On the other hand, you could choose the wrong group, such as focusing on children’s ministry for initial evangelism within a people, which may be interpreted as a threat to their natural families.

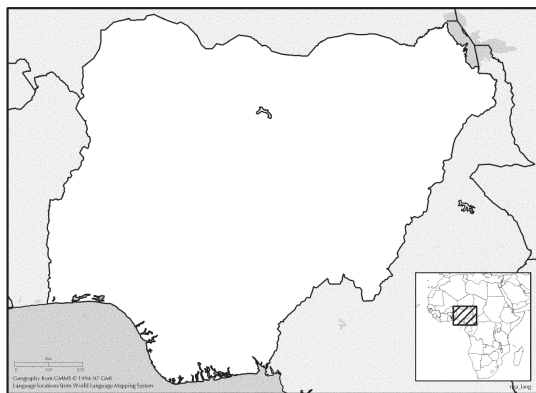
#### 4) Unimax peoples for people movements to Christ

*A unimax people is the **maximum** sized group sufficiently **unified** to be the target of a single people movement to Christ, where “unified” refers to the fact that there are no significant barriers of either understanding or acceptance to stop the spread of the gospel.*

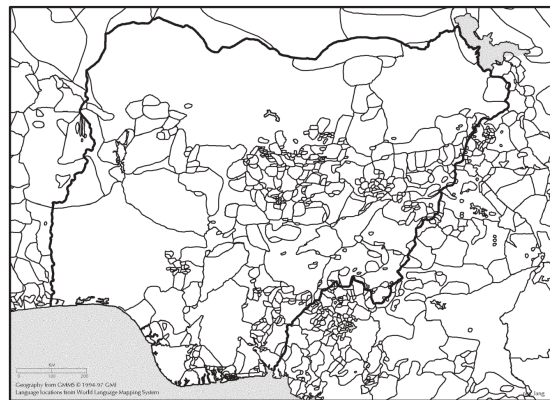
In 1982, mission leaders hammered out a useful definition for a “people group.”

For evangelistic purposes [a people group] is “the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance”

The term “unreached peoples”<sup>5</sup> is used widely today to refer to ethnolinguistic peoples, which are based on other criteria and would normally be larger in size than groups as defined in the 1982 definition. To avoid confusion and help clarify the missiological task before us, we can use the term unimax peoples to distinguish the kind of people group intended by the 1982 definition. Jungle tribes and other small, geographically remote peoples are almost always single unimax peoples. Discovering unimax realities within larger ethnolinguistic peoples in complex societies is a bit more challenging.



Political Boundaries: Nigeria and Surrounding Countries



Ethnolinguistic Peoples by Language of the Same Area

### Mission Leaders Agree on Strategic Definitions

In March 1982 a group of mission leaders came together in Chicago for a meeting sponsored by the Lausanne Strategy Working Group. It was designed to help bring clarity and definition to the remaining missionary task. At no time before or since this meeting has as large or as representative a group gathered for two days to focus specifically upon the necessary definitions for a strategy to reach the unreached peoples. Two basic definitions came from this meeting:

1. A People Group is “a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or combinations of these.” For evangelistic purposes it is “the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”
2. An Unreached People Group is “a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group.”

While language is often a primary means by which a person understands his or her cultural identity, in order to reach all peoples we must consider other factors that keep peoples separate. Religion, class distinctions, education, political and ideological convictions, historical enmity between clans or tribes, customs and behaviors, etc., all have potential to develop strong socio-cultural boundaries within ethnolinguistic clusters of unimax peoples. This fact alone helps to explain the differing estimates for the number of “unreached peoples.”

For example, India cannot be approached on an ethnolinguistic basis alone. In addition to having over 1600 major languages and dialects, India is further divided by religion, caste and other socio-cultural barriers. A sociological survey in 1991 identified 4,635 peoples in India alone.

Sadly, neighboring groups 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. Rivalries between major clans among the Muslim Somali people are so severe that they have almost dragged the entire country into ruin. In the early stages of evangelism and church planting, such simmering hostilities will likely mean that such groups can most effectively be approached with the gospel message separately. The bright hope of the gospel is, of course, that new Christ-following movements in such settings of strife will work for the healing of enmities between peoples.

Indeed, history shows that eventually a host of smaller hostile 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 wide-spread reconciliation and consequent unification resulting from the adoption of Christian faith on the part of many smaller, formerly warring groups.

The first three approaches to people group thinking—as blocs, as ethnolinguistic peoples, and as sociopeoples—are each helpful in understanding and responding to the task to which Christ has commissioned us. Yet they all, in one way or another, point the way to ward beginnings. This fourth (unimax) way of looking at peoples has more to do with finishing, not in the sense that there is nothing left to do, but in the sense that the essential first step for the gospel to flourish with in a people has been accomplished. The unimax approach to peoples can help us press on to ward closure—our corporate finishing of what is completable about Christ’s mission mandate.

The value of the unimax approach lies in the way it identifies the boundaries hindering the flow of the gospel, while at the same time firing the ambitions of dedicated

Christians to pursue the evangelization of the peoples beyond those boundaries, leaving no smaller group sealed off within a larger group.

### **Can They Be Counted?**

These often subtle but powerful socio-cultural barriers exist within groups which often appear unified to outside observers. Some have dismissed the usefulness of the unimax concept because socio-cultural prejudice barriers cannot easily be identified or precisely quantified. But even though intangible prejudice barriers cannot be quantified these factors are not irrelevant. What could be more important than identifying and penetrating every barrier which holds people from following Christ?

The unimax peoples definition was never intended to quantify precisely the total task. Instead, it helps us recognize when the unreached peoples task is finished and identify where that task is not yet begun.

### **Approaching Peoples Cautiously**

Each of these four approaches to various kinds of peoples has a proper and valuable use. Blocs help us sum up the task. The ethnolinguistic approach helps us mobilize. Sociopeoples help us begin evangelizing. But beware of focusing church planting efforts on sociopeoples or ethnolinguistic peoples which simply appear on a list. There is often discouragement or, even worse, a deliberate, typically American “people blindness” as workers find that there are many more people groups than they expected to find. The opposite can happen, too. Sometimes the very same people group is listed twice because it is found on both sides of a political boundary. In actuality, it is the same people group. It may only need a single church planting effort bridging the political line. For example, Uzbek groups are reported in 20 countries in addition to those in Uzbekistan.

On the other hand, the country of Uzbekistan reports 56 groups within it that do not speak Uzbek, and only one (very large group—15 million strong) that does! It is almost certainly true that this “one” large group represents a number of different unimax groups that need to be reached separately.

Using political boundaries to distinguish people groups is like dropping cookie cutters down on the geographical distribution of a people group, then calling the pieces within each cutter a different type of dough. Granted in many cases of extended separation groups do become distinct—especially if new migration ceases—but not often antagonistic. In much of the developing world, the concept of political separation is quite artificial since borders are often quite permeable.

Consider the challenge of the Kurds. These fiercely independent people are found in a homeland that spans at least five countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Azerbaijan. For the sake of mission strategy, they are certainly not just one people group. They are not even just seven groups. In addition to having four major language subgroups, traditional rivalries keep them fighting one another even when you would think they would unite to fight non-Kurds for the sake of a Kurdish homeland.

Missionaries need to be aware of the possibility, as in the case of the Kurds, that peoples are not necessarily unified even if millions are in one country. Yet, smaller populations of Kurds found in significant numbers in 13 countries outside of the “Kurdistan” homeland are potentially strategic “bridge” populations back to groups in



their homeland area. And those who are dislocated from their natural homeland are often more open to the gospel. Once a remote segment of a larger group comes to accept Christ, it may become an effective bridge back to its people in their home land. Political boundaries do not often limit the spread of the gospel. Of course, all of this “country specific” information can be very useful for planning strategy and forming partnerships for reaching widely scattered members of specific people groups.

### **The Essential Missionary Task**

What is needed in every people group is for the gospel to begin moving throughout the group with such compelling, life-giving power that the resulting churches can themselves finish spreading the gospel to every person. Good but lesser goals may delay or distract us. Evangelism among street vendors or students might lead to discipleship groups for personal growth and even evangelism. But why stop short of anything less than a burgeoning movement of Christ-followers characterized by whole families? Why not expect that God is well able and willing to attract to His Son a substantial movement that will spread rapidly, spontaneously and thoroughly within whole peoples?

The essential missionary task is to establish a viable indigenous church planting movement that carries the potential to renew whole extended families and transform whole societies. It is viable in that it can grow on its own, indigenous meaning that it is not seen as foreign, and a church planting movement that continues to reproduce intergenerational fellowships that are able to evangelize the rest of the people group. Many refer to this achievement of an indigenous church planting movement as a missiological breakthrough.

We have done our basic mission job when individuals within the society (even those outside of the church) acknowledge that the movement belongs to their society. Only when this level of cultural adaptation is achieved will the dynamic, life-changing love of Jesus become available to move freely throughout the people group. Donald McGavran referred to these missiological breakthroughs as “people movements to Christ.” We can hold this goal as the minimal achievement within every people in order to give a realistic opportunity for everyone in that people group to say “yes” to Jesus Christ, without adding cultural barriers to the already steep spiritual demands of the gospel. Only in this way will we be able to give everyone in the world a chance to say “yes” to Christ and His Kingdom. Jesus commissioned us to accomplish nothing less. We should settle for nothing less.

## Four Approaches to People Group Thinking

Types of Peoples	Major Cultural Blocs	Ethnolinguistic Peoples	Unimax Peoples	Sociopeoples
Composition	broad categories of people groups	often a cluster of unimax groups	networks of families w/ a shared identity	an association of peers
What Defines Group	religious-cultural spheres	linguistic, ethnic & political boundaries	social and cultural prejudices	activities or interests
How Identified	available published data	available published data	discovered on site	discovered on site
Strategic Significance	global overview	mobilization and strategy	church planting	small group evangelism
Quantity	8 major cultural blocs	approx. 3,000 "unevangelized"	est. 10,000 "unreached"	number unknown

### Missiological closure— a breakthrough in every unimax people

The word "closure" refers simply to the idea of finishing. In the 1970s, the Lord began to open the eyes of many to the fact that the irreducibly essential mission task of a breakthrough in every people group was a completable task. At the time, over half of the world's population lived within unreached people groups. Even so, a small group of mission activists had the faith to believe that if a movement could be mobilized to focus attention on the unreached peoples, which for a time were called "hidden peoples," then the essential mission task could be completed within a few decades. In faith, they coined the watchword "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000" to capture the essence of the completable nature of the mission mandate. While no one ever predicted that it would be completed by the end of the year 2000, they were confident that it was possible. The watchword succeeded in igniting the hearts of countless thousands with a passion for seeing Christ honored, worshiped, and obeyed within every people. God was at work in similar ways among others in order to birth the now global movement focused on the unreached peoples challenge. Today we are seeing the fulfillment of vision that only a few dared to dream just two decades ago.

It is unreasonable to even talk of evangelizing every person, since day by day hundreds of thousands of children grow into the age of accountability. By contrast, the idea of "A Church for Every People" is one possible and reasonable approximation of what the Great Commission may mean, and it is a completable task. We know of no better interpretation of what it means to fulfill Jesus' man date to have a "witness" among every people, or in other words to "disciple all the nations" (Matt 24:14; 28:19,20).

We can confidently speak of closure to this unreached peoples mission. There were an estimated 17,000 unreached peoples in 1976. Today there are an estimated 10,000 un reached peoples (unimax peoples), and a dynamic global movement now exists that is committed to establishing "a church for every people."

### Reaching unimax peoples: not measur able, but verifiable

But how measurable is the presence of a "viable indigenous church planting movement"? 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.

In the case of reaching unimax peoples, there can be only three possibilities: 1) definitely reached, 2) definitely unreached, and 3) doubtfully reached. Logically we expect to focus our highest priority energies on those that are in doubt or definitely unreached. Just as in the case of asking, how many unreached peoples are there, we cannot very well evaluate whether a group has truly had a missiological breakthrough from a distance or from sources that are not concerned with such things.

We can make some well-informed guesses about the presence or absence of a church movement from quantifiable data. But what if an ethnolinguistic people is actually a cluster of unimax peoples and one of them is experiencing a church planting explosion, while other groups in the cluster have little or nothing happening within them? The unreached unimax peoples in the same cluster, may vigorously oppose the movement to Christ in the group that is ablaze for God. In addition, the growth of the church in the one unimax people may divert missionary attention from the needs of the other groups in the cluster.

### **The mandate is more than closure**

What God will do is always more than what He has given us to do. He has given us a clear and simple thing to finish: to see that Christ is worshiped and followed in every people. This is the essential missionary task. This task we must do with utmost focus and passion until it is finished. But there is still more to be done. The missiological breakthrough is just the beginning of all that God intends to do within every people. God will continue to fulfill His promise to undo the works of Satan and bring forth the blessing of Abraham to all peoples.

### **The Declaring of His Glory by All the Nations**

How did Jesus teach His disciples to pray? “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Our concept of God’s desire to reach all peoples and persons is obviously 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 (Isa 66:19). Thus, we look confidently forward to 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 God seeks to vanquish the “rulers of the darkness of this earth” (Eph 6:12). Fairly soon there may not be a single “kingdom of this world” where His name is not glorified. A spiritual breakthrough into every people is a precursor to making the gospel available to every person on earth. 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 each group where no real breakthrough has yet occurred, there will be a “power encounter” between the armies of God and the powers of darkness. Conquering the “kingdoms of this world” requires an invasion of God’s glory within each people. The apostle Paul was sent to the non-Jewish peoples specifically “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:17-18). 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 expanding the reign of His Kingdom and conquering Satan? That this is primarily a spiritual battle certainly does not mean we

can set aside careful planning and training for evangelism and pioneer penetration and just sit back and pray that God will go out and do His thing. “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 also our fight, not just His, and that we are joining Him in His battle against the Evil One. 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 strongholds of His enemies to bring His glory to the ends of the earth. Jesus gave us a clear mandate by His unique authority to “disciple all the peoples.” We can and must go all out to obey Him. Certainly we should take our evangelistic measurements seriously, but not as ultimate parameters of God’s plan. We must press forward, knowing that He may evaluate things by measures we cannot fully comprehend. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. All of this cannot entirely 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 know that all our measurements—of peoples and persons—are merely objective goals. It is more important that we are with Him and He is with us and we are acting in obedience as He leads us in our heavenly calling.

### **Looking at the Task Graphically**

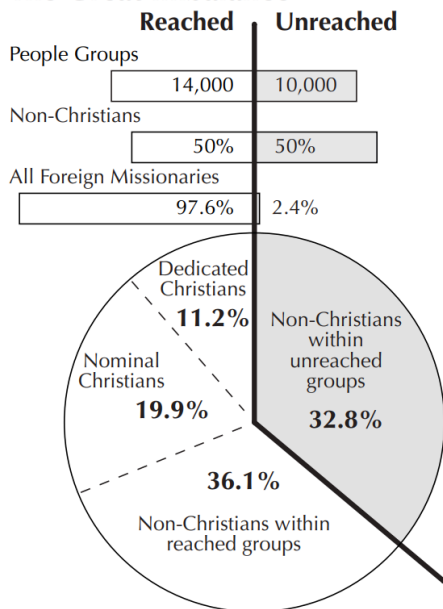
Although the world is large and complex, there exist helpful methods of quantifying progress toward closure of the essential mission task. Modern researchers are now able to collect, manage, and summarize vast amounts of data with the use of computers. We owe a great deal to those who have attempted to trace the hand of God as He continues His pursuit of all peoples.<sup>6</sup> All of our global charts and graphs to date have been dependent on the research of others as well as our own estimates where additional estimates have been needed. However, no database can ever do more than approximate the dynamic reality of the world. When looking at the charts in this chapter, you need to understand how we are using the predominant religion within a group as a cultural feature to tag the group as a whole. This does not mean that every person in the group is a member of that religion. Thus you can have a Muslim group that is “reached” if there is a church movement within it even though the group is still predominantly Muslim. All of the charts in this chapter, except those on the “Protestant Mission Force,” are derived from the numbers on the “All Humanity in Mission Perspective” chart (page 24).

### **The Great Imbalance**

Looking at “The Globe at a Glance” (p. 23), you can readily see that the bulk of the individuals who live within unreached groups (white) are within the Muslim, Tribal, Hindu, and Buddhist blocs. We need to continue to send well-trained and insightful missionaries to these challenging peoples. There have been some very encouraging people movements within a limited number of Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim groups. These three blocs are often seen as the most resistant, but we are learning that when a people seems “resistant” it may only mean our approach has been defective. Half of those living within unreached peoples are in the Muslim bloc, which is a bloc that has very favorable attitudes toward Jesus Christ. Only an estimated 10,000 of the global foreign mission force<sup>7</sup> are working within the remaining 10,000 unreached groups, while 41 times that number of foreign missionaries continue to work within people groups already

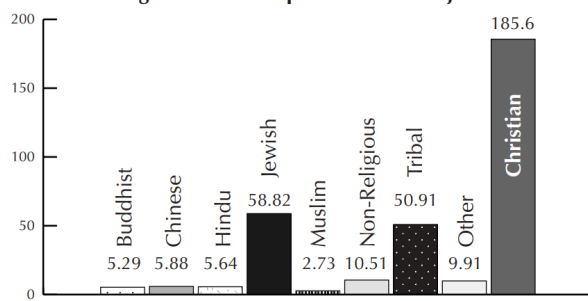
reached. What an imbalance! (see below) Patrick Johnstone analyzed the data in *Operation World '93* to approximate distribution of the Protestant Mission Force<sup>8</sup> within the major cultural blocs. (See charts at the bottom of page 24.) While this is a more positive picture than we have seen before, it still shows that 74% of the “Protestant” mission effort is within peoples where Christianity is already the predominate religion and a major cultural factor. If you look at the Protestant missionaries working within the other major cultural blocs, you need to understand that those blocs include both reached and unreached peoples. It is a common observation of field practitioners that even among the 26% that are working in peoples dominated by non-Christian religions, most are working to build the church where it already exists (they are working within the gray areas of the non-Christian blocs on the Globe at a Glance chart to the left) and are not doing pioneer work to establish a breakthrough within peoples that are yet to be reached. It will take the focused efforts of the best the Church has to offer if we are to complete the task of frontier mission any time soon. After nearly 2000 years, an estimated 10,000 unimax peoples encompassing 2 billion people still live beyond the reach of any relevant local church.

### The Great Imbalance



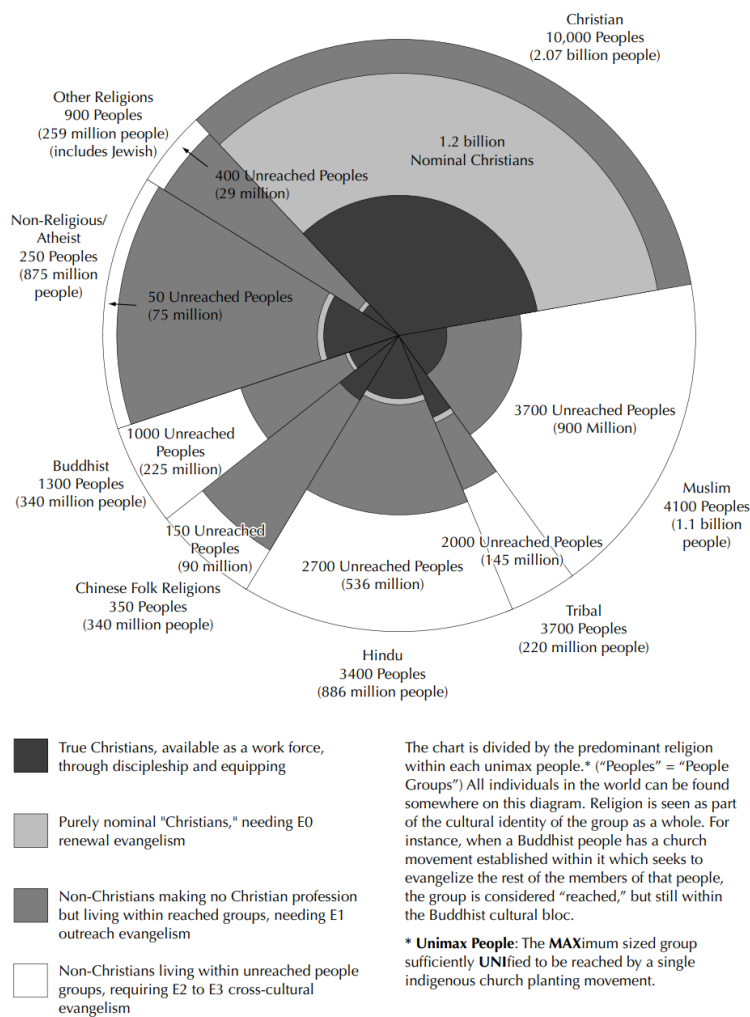
Source: David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson,<sup>6</sup>

Number of Foreign Missionaries per Million in Major Cultural Blocs



Source: Todd M. Johnson<sup>6</sup>

## The Globe at a Glance



### Great Momentum

While talking about billions of people might seem overwhelming, astounding progress continues to be made. In 1974, we were stunned by the revelation that three out of four of the non-Christians in the world were beyond the reach of same-culture evangelism. Today, only one out of every two non-Christians is beyond reach! An easy-to-remember new insight, which you can easily see in the chart on page 22, is that you can divide the world up into meaningful thirds. One-third of the world would at least claim to be Christian; another third are non-Christians that live within reached peoples; the final third are non-Christians within unreached peoples. Again this is significant progress; in 1974 approximately half of the world's population was beyond the reach of the church. In fact, for the first time in history there are fewer non-Christians within unreached groups than there are within reached groups! As missionaries succeed in establishing church movements in more unreached peoples, that is exactly what you would expect to happen.

All Humanity in Mission Perspective in 2000 AD		Predominant Religion within Culturally Defined Peoples									
		Totals	Christianity	Buddhism	Chinese Folk	Hinduism	Judaism	Islam	Non-Religious	Tribal Religions	Other Religions
Least Evangelized and Unreached Peoples	Least Evangelized Ethnolinguistic Peoples	4,400	-	300	50	350	180	2,000	20	1,400	100
	Unreached Unimax Peoples	10,000	-	1,000	150	2,700	200	3,700	50	2,000	200
	Individuals (in millions)										
	Great Commission Christians (GCC)	3	-	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.01	0.3	0.7	0.5	0.29
	Non-Christians (P2): E2 to E3	1,099	-	100	80	465	8	310	74	45	17
	Non-Christians (P2.5): E2.5 to E3	824	-	110	10	60	1	580	0.3	60	2.7
	Non-Christians (P3): E3	75	-	14.7	0	10.6	0	9.7	0	40	0
Total	2,000	-	225	90	536	9	900	75	145	20	
Global Foreign Missionaries	10,000	-	800	800	1,500	100	1,500	1,200	3,700	400	
Most Evangelized and Reached Peoples	Most Evangelized Ethnolinguistic Peoples	8,720	6,750	150	100	120	50	300	100	1,000	150
	Reached Unimax Peoples	14,000	10,000	300	200	700	100	400	200	1,700	400
	Individuals (in millions)										
	Great Commission Christians (GCC)	677	489	11	22	45	0.2	30	54	22	4
	Nominal-Christians (P0, P5): E0 to E3	1,218	1,191	1	0.5	10	0.02	1	11	3	1
	Non-Christians (P1): E1 to E3	2,196	392	103	227	295	8	169	735	50	217
	Total	4,091	2,071	115	250	350	8	200	800	75	222
Global Foreign Missionaries	410,000	384,400	1,000	1,200	3,500	900	1,500	8,000	7,500	2,000	
World Totals	Ethnolinguistic	13,120	6,750	450	150	470	230	2,300	120	2,400	250
	Unimax Peoples	24,000	10,000	1,300	350	3,400	300	4,100	250	3,700	600
	Total (in millions)	6,091	2,071	340	340	886	17	1,100	875	220	242
	All Missionaries	420,000	384,400	1,800	2,000	5,000	1,000	3,000	9,200	11,200	2,400

The table above was generated by Todd M. Johnson using data from the peoples database for the forthcoming *World Christian Encyclopedia* (WCE), 2nd edition, Oxford University Press (Barrett, Kurian, Johnson).

Other Religions includes peoples that are predominantly Confucianist, Mandeian, Zoroastrian, Sikh and Spiritist.

Least Evangelized Ethnolinguistic Peoples: Peoples less than 50% evangelized\* with relatively few Christians.

Unreached Peoples: Estimate of Unimax peoples (1982 definition) without a viable church planting movement or a viable, indigenous, evangelizing church.

The number of unimax peoples (1982 definition) are estimates. Clues are taken from linguistic and social factors (e.g., language clusters, caste).

Most Evangelized Ethnolinguistic Peoples: Peoples more than 50% evangelized\* with a substantial Christian presence, including all peoples predominantly Christian (6,750).

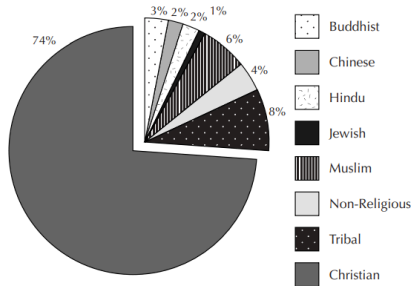
Reached Peoples: Estimate of Unimax peoples (1982 definition) with a viable church. This includes all peoples predominantly Christian.

Great Commission Christians (GCC): Christians of evangelical conviction attempting to obey the Great Commission.

Global Foreign Missionaries includes all kinds of Christians (Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Anglicans, Independents and Marginals).

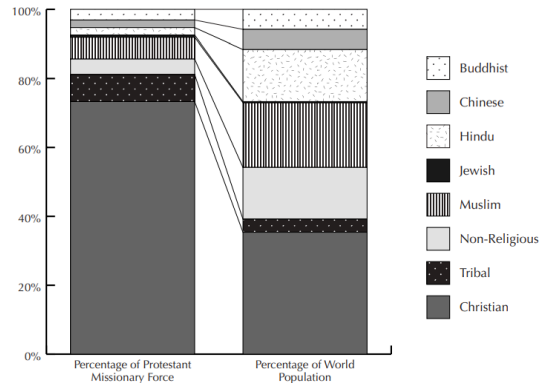
\*"Evangelized" is based on David B.Barrett's Index of Evangelization which does not yet have a published definition.

Distribution of Protestant Mission Force within the Major Cultural Blocs



Only one out of every four missionaries is working in a pioneer ministry among non-Christian peoples of the major religious blocs.

Distribution of Protestant Missionary Force Relative to the Size of the Major Cultural Blocs



These two charts represent an inclusive view of the Protestant Mission Force. They include: foreign missionaries, missionaries working within their own country (both cross-culturally and in near cultures) bi-vocational missionaries, and home staff who are classified as missionaries who support field missionaries. The breakdown was preliminary assessment based on several days of analysis done specifically for this volume.

Source: Patrick Johnstone<sup>8</sup>

We are in the final era of missions. For the first time in history it is possible to see the end of the tunnel, when there will be a church movement within the language and social structure of every people group on earth, powerful face to face evangelism taking over in all peoples. God is moving throughout His global body to fulfill His promise to the nations in ways that we could not possibly have imagined 20 years ago. Thousands of new missionary recruits are no longer coming just from the West, but also from Asia, Africa, and Latin America—fruits of missionary movements—whole heartedly embracing the Great Commission. More so than ever before it is a global, cooperative

movement. We have to be prepared for new partnerships, new insights, and new approaches by non-Western mission structures. At the same time, we need to recognize that the Western missionary story is a reservoir of mission experience that can serve the emerging missions. The job is large, but relatively small for the enormous body of believers around the world. There are approximately 670 churches in the world for every remaining unreached unimax people group! We need only a small percentage of dedicated believers to be mobilized and equipped. Judging the remaining task by the potential work force makes it quite small and within reach by comparison to the forbidding prospect faced by our forefathers. Notice how much more do-able the mission task seems when we focus on the size of the potential mission force and on penetrating people groups. Instead of talking of evangelizing 2 billion individuals, we can talk of beginning in approximately 3000 ethnolinguistic peoples and then finishing in maybe as few as 10,000 unimax peoples. Within a very short time all of the 3000 “least evangelized” ethnolinguistic groups will be targeted and engaged by some mission-sending structure in the world. It is already true for more than half of them! Identifying and penetrating the remaining unreached unimax peoples—the great challenge of “discipling all the nations”—still lies before us. God will reveal the glory of His kingdom among all peoples. We are within range of finishing the task with more momentum than ever before in history. Be a part of it—“Declare His glory among the nations!”

### *Endnotes*

1. For the charts in this chapter the Non-Religious and Jewish categories have been added for the sake of using data as categorized in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* although the Jewish category is not always graphed if too small to be seen.
2. “Evangelized” is based David B. Barrett’s Index of Evangelization. See *World Christian Trends* (William Carey Library, 2001), Part 24 (“Microevangelistics”), pp. 749-755.
3. To learn more about the usefulness of these groupings see his marvelous book, *The Church is Bigger Than You Think* (Christian Focus Publications/WEC/WCL, 1998 ).
4. Just search for “unreached people profiles” and you’re off and surfing.
5. The AD2000 Movement refers to groups that are less than 2% Evangelical or 5% Christian adherents.
6. In the past, we have relied on a variety of expert sources for our figures and estimates for our “All Humanity in Mission Perspective” chart. We are now using information supplied by Todd M. Johnson of the World Evangelization Research Center. Todd is familiar with the unimax principle and is a caretaker of the data underlying the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (David B. Barrett, ed.). This table reflects Todd’s interpretation of missiologically significant groups within larger ethnolinguistic peoples and gives estimates of the numbers based upon analyzing statistical clues and making adjustments where necessary. No attempt has been made to adjust the estimates to make them more in line with previous estimates. If you were to compare with previous charts, you would notice that some of the numbers for unimax groups within a bloc have gone up instead of down. In fact, the overall number of estimated unimax groups has increased back to our earlier published estimate of 10,000 from several years ago. This can be attributed to a change in sources and methodology.  
  
Other changes from previous versions of this chart: 1) the Jews and Non-Religious/Atheist categories have been added; 2) because of the inclusion of the non-Religious/ Atheist category, the Chinese bloc was split between the between that category and the Chinese Folk bloc.
7. The global foreign mission force includes all kinds of Christians (Protestants, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, etc).
8. The graphs for the Protestant Mission Force were generated from data derived from Appendix 3, Protestant Missionary Force, found in the 1993 edition of *Operation World*. The country figures were analyzed based on Patrick Johnstone’s extensive knowledge of mission work around the world. The separation of the cross-cultural work force into the different religious blocs was a preliminary analysis done specifically for this volume. Missionaries in church development ministries within non-Christian peoples are not included in the pioneer categories. Our thanks to Patrick Johnstone and his assistant Jason Mandryk for their willing hearts and expedient labor.



## **Advancing Strategies of Closure: From Mission to Evangelism to Mission**

*IJFM* 19:4, Winter 2002

[http://ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/19\\_4\\_PDFs/winter\\_address.pdf](http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/19_4_PDFs/winter_address.pdf)

The most likely interpretation of my topic as I have phrased it could readily be that of a sequence in which mission work produces a national church which then engages in evangelism and finally begins to send missionaries. That is certainly one of the most common and healthy sequences of events in the world today.

However, I would like in these few minutes to pursue a radically different interpretation. I would like to speak of a sequence (not often recognized) in which mission work produces a national church that unfortunately is not much more than a projection of the Western style church in the missionary's homeland, and then after a while the mission realizes it must go back and start over with a more indigenizing kind of mission effort which can produce a much more indigenous church than the one—call it a first try—which has inherited much of the missionary's culture.

Note that this line of thinking suggests that a people group may not really be reached at all if merely a Western style church is planted within it. That means we will probably need some radical reevaluation of how many groups are reached.

For example, is there yet a truly Japanese form of our faith? Many serious observers doubt it. This would mean there is still a need for cross-cultural mission in Japan, and that a truly missiological breakthrough is still in the future. A further example might be the church in India. It consists largely of a Westernization of a population sector which has little to lose and much to gain by grasping for any kind of alternate cultural tradition. This perspective could imply that there is essentially little true mission work that has thus far been accomplished in India, and that the unreached populations there are far larger than we have commonly conceived them.

Before going further, however, I need to define some terms. I would like to suggest that there can be great value in making a distinction between a mission agency and an evangelistic agency. Obviously the phrases can be used interchangeably. But for the sake of discussion here I hope you will find it helpful to define evangelism and mission quite differently. This is a distinction so important, in fact, that I am convinced we would not even need to speak of frontier missions if we observed this distinction. In fact this whole conference might not have been so necessary if this kind of a distinction were well understood.

Many church people, for example, talk freely about evangelizing the world. So freely does this happen somewhat carelessly that I felt it necessary to develop years ago the distinction between E-0, E-1, E-2, and E-3 evangelism.

E-0 stands for evangelism within the church movement itself.

E-1 stands for outreach to those within the same culture as the church.

E-2 stands for a quite different type of missionary cross-cultural evangelism within a people quite different from that of the evangelist, different yet still somewhat similar. Enough different to need a separate congregation but still similar, like English culture and Spanish culture.

E-3 stands for an even more strikingly missionary cross-culture evangelistic outreach to people in a totally different culture from that of those workers who are reaching out, like the difference between English culture and Japanese culture.

In the first two cases you can use existing congregations or simply multiply the same kind of congregations. This is ordinary evangelism. By contrast, the second two cases, E-2 and E-3 types of activity, merit the designation mission or missionary evangelism for the simple reason that E-2 and E-3 efforts reach into strange situations that are so different as to virtually require separate and different kinds of congregations.

Using these terms, all true mission differs from ordinary evangelism because it is an activity involving the special problems of cross-cultural communication and contextualization. You can thus say that all mission involves evangelism but that there are types of evangelism that do not involve cross-cultural communication and therefore are not true mission.

However, mission is not merely a communication problem. It is a creation problem. What is needed must be created by the Spirit of God as a new church tradition, not just the extension of a Western denomination but perhaps a worshipping movement with a decidedly different church life.

Suppose a mission agency goes to Nigeria and establishes fifty indigenous churches among the Yoruba, and those churches then plant even more Yoruba churches. In that case, the initial “missiological breakthrough” would be called mission while the further church planting expansion by the Yoruba churches would be considered evangelism. But if now the Yoruba send missionaries to break through to a cultural group where there is not yet an indigenous church movement, then you can say that the Yoruba believers are not only involved in ordinary evangelism but also in cross-cultural work, in the creation of a new worshipping tradition of Jesus followers. Such efforts classify as a mission activities.

We can further say that if the initial mission agency is not involved in that further outreach but is content to continue to work with the Yoruba church, then it ceases to be a mission agency but becomes merely what could be called a “foreign evangelism” agency.

Now, since most agencies of mission eventually go through the transition of becoming merely evangelistically involved (and that is certainly one measure of success) it may appear that this kind of distinction devalues much of mission work. On the contrary, the mission that continues in evangelism and allows and encourages an overseas church movement to become missionary is doing a very strategic thing.

However, let me freely admit that I have no power to define words for other people. Most people will go on using evangelism and mission in whatever way they wish. I am not even terribly concerned to have it my way with these two often-used words. I would be willing to talk about, say, Type A work and Type B work. The main thing is to understand that reaching out in the same culture is relatively simple and is often automatic while breaking through to a new and different culture is both rare and complex.

I actually believe that the achievement of a true missiological breakthrough into a new culture is often grossly underestimated as to its complexity.

For one thing not many Christians realize how major a transition it was when our faith spread from its Jewish roots into the Greek and Roman world. The pagan holiday called the Saturnalia was converted into Christmas. So were a hundred other things adopted, such as the wearing of wedding rings and the throwing of rice at a wedding. In a

further transition our faith spread into the Anglo-Saxon sphere, where early missionaries even made use of a pagan sunrise festival promoting a spring-goddess of fertility as our present-day Easter sunrise service. These were mission attempts to indigenize the faith, representing complex cross-cultural evangelistic decisions that went far beyond ordinary evangelism.

Perhaps we don't often think of the complexities of the past and we may wish they did not extend into the present. But if we take a hard look at the current expansion of the faith around the world from the standpoint of our distinction between evangelism and mission I am afraid that we must recognize the need for a great deal more in-depth mission than we have thus far accomplished.

For the most part the much heralded march of the Christian faith across the world has been successful mainly in subordinate cultures, where, say, the Koreans—oppressed for so long by the fellow Buddhist country of Japan— would grasp a foreign faith almost automatically.

For example, as already mentioned, are churches in Japan today sufficiently indigenous to conclude that all that is left to be done is for these churches to multiply with their relatively Western form of the faith? Some keen observers, as I've said, suggest that there is not yet a truly Japanese church movement but only a relatively small Westernized following. Movements like Soka Gakkai are quite Japanese, although they embody some Christian elements, but by being rather more indigenous have grown astronomically, proving the existence of a spiritual hunger in Japan despite failing to provide even the minimal elements of Biblical faith.

We have often thought of Unreached Peoples as being small, but when you look more closely at the definitions it is clear that wherever an authentic "missiological breakthrough" has not yet occurred the size of the group does not matter.

From this point of view you can impellingly argue that the true missiological breakthroughs in Africa, India and China are to be seen surprisingly and precisely in movements that are "outside" of what we ordinarily identify as Christianity in those places. Such movements are not readily recognized as Christian despite their characteristically strong focus on the Bible. It is a little known fact that in three key places, Africa, India and China, the truly devout believers in Christ in radically contextualized groups may actually outnumber the truly devout believers in Christ within the more identifiable movements of missionary implanted Western-oriented Christianity.

It has never been true that a people group has been considered reached just because essentially foreign churches are present within that group. The definition distinctly requires an "indigenous" church movement.

Of course, there is room for discussion as to just what is truly indigenous or not. Indigenous churches tend to grow, sometimes very rapidly. They are often not initiated by foreign personnel but many times are actually heretical spinoffs which highlight certain cultural features lacking in missionary-established churches. They are not always Biblically balanced, although they are often highly respectful of the Bible. Donald McGavran's perspective was for our relationship to them to be friendly and supportive if in fact they focus on the Bible seriously. That focus will level them out in the long run, he felt.

Thus, shocking though it may seem, the world may look substantially different from our usual take if viewed from the perspective of the essential importance of

authentic indigeneity. Ordinary evangelism must thereby be seen as inadequate if it is going on in a situation still requiring true mission with true indigeneity at heart. The ordinary evangelism of an essentially Western Christianity may in such cases be little more than the promotion of a complex cluster of foreign legalisms which people in characteristically minority and oppressed cultures learn to wear like outer clothing with the hope that they will be benefitted thereby.

Ironically, we have been talking for years about the necessity of mission agencies moving intentionally beyond care-taking existing mission field churches to reach out to Unreached Peoples still untouched. That is we have been calling for mission in addition to evangelism when we might more accurately have been calling for a much more radical and penetrating mission instead of evangelism. We may have too easily accepted the birth of a new national church as truly indigenous when in fact it was still substantially foreign. And, instead of expecting the birth of a new substantially strange and unpredictable movement to appear which could then by itself grow automatically by evangelism, the movements we have planted may themselves need to be subjected to an on-going attempt at true indigenization, which is the object of true mission.

Thus, my title, "From Mission to Evangelism to Mission" can be utilized to describe the ideal sequence of events in truly successful work. However, that sequence may not have truly happened beyond the spread of a church pattern which is still significantly Western.

This is not bad. It is not illicit. It may be superficial, however, and it may be a cultural phenomenon in which people under oppression gladly accept anything with promise.

But at the same time the truly successful missiological breakthroughs, such as the Pauline breakthrough to the Greeks, and the Lutheran breakthrough to Germanic culture, have characteristically involved the actual creation of new movements which the older source culture could not recognize as true to the faith. It is thus an hypothetical thought that a true missiological breakthrough will almost always create a church movement which will believe for a good long time that the source culture form of the faith is seriously flawed, and vice versa, the sending culture will characteristically reject the validity of the new form of the faith in the receptor culture.

The blunt meaning of this kind of thinking is fairly easy to illustrate from major movements and events that have already taken place in the mission lands. We hear reports that there are 52 million followers of Jesus Christ in Africa who do not belong to any standard Christian tradition. The same is true in India where smaller estimates (14 to 24 million) caste Hindus are reported to be devout followers of Jesus Christ even though they do not call themselves Christians. Finally, much of the most vibrant work in China is not to be found in the state recognized churches but in the millions of followers of Jesus Christ who are to be found in the so called "house churches."

Thinking along these lines involves receiving and digesting information which we do not expect and are not well prepared to believe. It is a major new frontier that must be recognized as soon as possible, and dealt with strategically in ways that are practical and possible even if not conventional. Are we ready to do that?

## Editorial Comment on what it takes to “engage” a people group

*Mission Frontiers* November-December 2006

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-comment14>

We used to concern ourselves with listing all the “Unreached Peoples” in the world. The cover story this time is “What does it take to ‘engage’ a people group?” Why ask that? Good news!

So many agencies have turned their attention to Unreached Peoples that now the Southern Baptists (as evidenced in our January–February 2006 issue) are trying to list Unreached Peoples which are still “unengaged” by any agency or entity.

Jeff Liverman proposes a four-fold test. Jim Haney tweaks all four, suggesting that it is not necessary to have a resident missionary, and that a foreign missionary may not even be necessary if someone within the culture goes outside and later, as a bi-cultural believer, goes back into his own people.

Bravo! The bi-cultural possibility has often been overlooked by mission agencies. They may not realize that the two most prominent “missionaries” in the New Testament (Paul and Barnabas) were both bi-cultural.

When the Jerusalem Council needed a missionary to go to the new Greek believers in Antioch, they chose a bi-cultural (Barnabas). When Barnabas needed help, he sought out another bi-cultural (Paul).

Today around the world there are thousands more bi-culturalists than at any previous time in history. This is due to massive migration of peoples. Only a handful of the smallest groups locked away in some hidden valleys do not yet have a number of their people in the outside world.

Migrating people are a global phenomenon today. When people migrate, they often are much more open to new ideas than back in their homeland. Thus, we need not merely list Unreached Peoples and Unengaged Peoples and send foreign missionaries. We must assiduously seek out bi-culturalists who are already introduced to Jesus Christ and who can reach their own people better than any outsider.

I must add one caution to what both Liverman and Haney have said. My suggestion: let’s stop talking about “church planting.” Why? Because of what we often assume a “church” to be.

We Americans live in a country where families are almost expected to drift apart, creating artificially “individualized” people. Thus, as a result we produce artificial “church” fellowships which collect loose individuals or family fragments (such as “nuclear families”) into a helpful surrogate family — which we then call a “church.”

However, in much of the world our missionaries find that multi-generational families are still intact! Often the only thing they know to do is to pull people out of those families so they can gather in an artificial “church” family. What an astounding contrast to the New Testament! There worshipping households were the “churches.”

I am sure that both Liverman and Haney know this. But, in that case, wouldn’t it be better not to continue to use such a misunderstood term as “church” for what they are advocating?

In our last issue Bob Goodmann presented a crucial series of charts talking not about “church planting” but instead about “movements to Christ”, namely, fellowships built on families, not groups made up of loose individuals. Way to go!

### **But, are we finishing the task? (Part 1)**

Yes, in a way. However, this issue of Mission Frontiers could easily be taken to reinforce the common assumption that if we can see a movement to Christ in every nation, tribe, and tongue, we will have fulfilled the Great Commission and have even fulfilled the final conditions for the return of Christ! Wrong.

Admittedly, Matthew 24:14 does say, “This Gospel must be preached in the whole world as a testimony to every people and then the end will come.” But did you note that I left a word out of that quote?: “Kingdom” – “this Gospel of the Kingdom. “ This reminds us of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth ....”

The most shocking, tragic and incredible delusion built right into contemporary Evangelicalism in many areas is the idea that we are here on earth simply to get more people fixed up for eternity.

That aspiration is basic, of course. But it’s preliminary to a life lived 24/7 in an all-out battle against those things that dishonor God: evil things, disease germs, corruption, dishonesty in industry and government. 1 John 3:8 says, “The Son of God came for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the Devil.” And, as the Father sent Him, so He sends us!

In fact, glorifying God by fighting evil is the best way to win people to Christ. Jesus Himself fought evil, dishonesty and greed — and disease. He did this to reveal to us the character of our heavenly Father. It is not merely a case of overcoming evil with good, as when we run up against “flesh and blood.” We must also deliberately seek out and destroy evil in order to defend and confirm the character of our Father in Heaven.

I just read that annually over 200,000 hours of work are lost in the USA to dental disease among seniors. By contrast, in Africa, 45 million work years are annually lost to malaria. That’s 2 million times as many man-hours! Is that why Africa’s people are malnourished and poor? You bet. Should we fight malaria as Christians? Yes. Are we doing so? NO. (Bill Gates is). We have no theology to fight disease. We think caring for the sick is all we need to do. Yes, we must reach every Unreached People. But we must also faithfully reveal the Father, or we won’t win very many.

### **Are we finishing the task? (Part 2)**

Yes, in a way. If we confine our attention to the remaining Unreached Peoples and not for the moment concern ourselves with all the Lord’s Prayer means, we can deal with some very concrete figures.

An Unreached People has been technically defined as lacking an indigenous community of believers. A department of the USCWM ([www.JoshuaProject.net](http://www.JoshuaProject.net)) uses a more researchable definition of less than 2% believers and 5% adherents. Their total of 6,637 such groups I have divided into three categories. Some of the first category may actually be “Reached” as defined technically.

Probably the most surprising number in the chart is the small total population for the 3,473 groups in the third category – 6.7 million. That is less than one-tenth of one percent of the global population (about one-thousandth).

Note well that there are now thousands of churches worldwide which could become part of the harvest force for each of these “least-reached” groups. And mission outreach is now exploding in Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, Brazil, etc. Not bad!

## **The Role of Western Missions in the 21st Century**

*Frontiers in Mission*, 114-17

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b3157f3b40b9d21a8096625/t/5be3338f21c67c84dfe1b9f1/1541616554604/Frontiers\\_in\\_Mission+4th+ed+copy.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b3157f3b40b9d21a8096625/t/5be3338f21c67c84dfe1b9f1/1541616554604/Frontiers_in_Mission+4th+ed+copy.pdf)

### **1. The long-standing and indeed illustrious campaign to take Western Christianity to the world's minority groups is slowing down because fewer and fewer such groups remain untouched.**

One of the miracles of the 20th century— which forever changes the focus of missions for the 21st—is the fact that the Western missions have been so successful in transforming dark mission fields into bright mission sending forces.

We must give credit to the AD2000 Movement and others in the last ten years for highlighting the fact that there are still dark pockets needing the light of the Gospel. But, nevertheless precisely because of the efforts of Western missions and, now more recently the active missionary outreach from many Third World countries, the fact is we are running out of “traditional pioneer mission fields.” There aren't many left. Are we going to be without a job? Yes, in the traditional sense, more and more.

Because pioneer missions have planted well-established churches in so many parts of the world, the 21st century looks radically different from that the 19th or 20th when Western Protestant missions began their work in earnest. Pioneer missions of the kind we have undertaken in the past are useful and essential in far fewer places around the world compared to the situation in the days of William Carey.

Thus, on the world level we now have the miracle of what is very nearly a single Christian family. English, for example, has more and more become the lingua franca of international Evangelicalism. This is a good thing and it is a joyous thing, this relatively unified global cultural tradition of Christianity. But it is probably not the final thing.

It is actually wrong to think that reaching the final unreached people with Western cultural Christianity will be the fulfillment of the Great Commission. It is a marvelous beginning. It is not a mistake. It is nevertheless not the whole picture.

### **2. Both Western and Non-Western missions are now more and more assisting Christians in other parts of the world to build their churches and schools and to reach out to their own people, rather than tangling with the remaining non-Christian peoples.**

This continuing post-pioneer part of the picture is bright and shining and a blessed reality. But it is a very different process from the continuing activity of pioneer mission to the small remaining unreached groups in the world. Ironically, the very success of missions in producing vital overseas churches has meant, for one thing, that donors are becoming less and less interested in supporting mission work. Missionaries have sought to “work themselves out of a job” and they have succeeded in many places beyond their dreams. But their dreams have turned into nightmares as their faithful supporters have lost interest in their work. Donors have by now long been complaining that the Great Commission must not be redefined to read, “Go ye into all the world and meddle in the national churches.” Many mission supporters have turned to assist the continuing growth



and impact of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, since they are known to be working where there is not yet a church that can stand on its own two feet.

**3. Meanwhile, as missions have often had great success among oppressed and minority groups, the Gospel of Christ and the Bible has also gone beyond the physical extension of the Western institutional church structure and has entered into the large "Resistant blocs" of non-Christians producing seemingly syncretistic forms of "semi-Christian" faith. Millions of Africans and Asians are in this second category.**

The so-called "Resistant blocs" of Chinese, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists resist the Western cultural style of our faith while being very acceptive of Christ. So while the Gospel has created a substantial movement of "Christianity" within most of the small groups it has only extracted a token few individuals out from within these large groups. At the same time, some people within these large blocs are accepting the Gospel and the Bible in strange and unexpected ways. We may wish to ignore them, but we cannot deny that they are there.

**4. It becomes suddenly clear that history may be repeating itself and that the experiences of the New Testament and early church throw remarkable light on the present.**

It is necessary to speak of a "global stalling" of the Westernized form of the Gospel. We rejoice that millions have turned from their own culture and embraced the culture of Westernized Christianity, at least in part. They have the freedom in Christ to do so. This is just like the 100,000 Gentiles in Paul's day who turned from their own people and embraced the Jewish vehicle of faith, becoming circumcised "proselytes." These people were mostly genuine believers, but had shifted culturally in a way Paul considered a legitimate option but an illegitimate requirement, non-essential to faith. This is the kind of "proselytism" that has evolved around the world among minority peoples but which is mostly feared and fought by those in the majority cultures.

But in Paul's day, there were many more people— maybe ten times more—who were not proselytes, but "God-fearers." These were people like Cornelius, who were attracted to the Word of God in the synagogues, but who had not made the shift over to the Jewish cultural tradition.

Paul's mission strategy made both Jews and Proselytes—who had settled on the Jewish cultural tradition—furious. What did he do? He acknowledged the reality (despite the remaining weaknesses) of a new, unplanned, "Greek" version of the Biblical faith. This new version was based on Jesus Christ and the basic principles of the Jewish Bible, rather than literally upon all the Jewish customs described in the Bible.

From the standpoint of even believing Jews Paul's efforts helped to generate a vast and—to them—tragic movement which soon encompassed most of the million "God fearers" and eventually became at home in the Greek, Latin and Syrian Christian traditions. Naturally, as soon as these major Mediterranean traditions cast an influence beyond their home cultures hundreds of different varieties of semi-Biblical faith resulted.

For example, the Greek tradition of faith influenced the Slavs and the Celts, while the Latin influenced both Celtic and Teutonic, and the Syrian the Arabic. Germanic Lutheranism, Slavic Orthodoxy and Semitic Islam resulted, employing different

languages, literatures and cultures, the most significant common denominator being the Bible. These all, to some significant extent were “people of the book,” the Bible of the early church. All of them in addition were influenced by the New Testament and generated their own additional semi-scriptures as well.

Greek Orthodoxy naturally considered the Greek scriptures most authoritative. Latin Catholicism enshrined its Latin translation, and the Lutherans, to be different, chose the Hebrew. However, because the Arabic translation of the Bible did not come soon enough, the Islamic tradition emerged with far less direct access to “the Book.” There were many arguments about what form of the faith was the one, right form.

When Islam engulfed Egypt, two different Christian traditions were at that time at each other’s throats. All of these various cultural traditions tended to consider their own cultural derivation of the faith correct, and any lingering presence of the followers of a “foreign” faith were resented, rejected or marginalized. Actually none of these cultural traditions of faith were perfect even though most of them were barely salvific.

**5. Thus, it seems possible that the 21st century will see further unification around a generalized form of Western Christianity but at the same time see the looming up of radically different forms of our faith which may be barely recognizable and may be alienated or even antagonistic.**

We need only to reexamine our own past to see how drastically unity was shattered by the various deviations in Western history. The Quakers were considered a radical departure—and they were. Evangelicalism itself was, but so were Christian Science, Seventh-Day Adventism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Pentecostals— all with varying degrees of similarity to the Reformation traditions and with varying degrees of relationship to the Bible. All these became, and perhaps still are for many, shocking departures nevertheless from “the faith once delivered.”

However, figures like Billy Graham have succeeded in gaining a hearing to some extent from within almost all of these divergent traditions, just as Brahmins in India have been attracted to Graham’s message and his Bible without affiliating themselves with the formal movement of Christianity.

The phrase “churchless Christianity” has thus been employed to describe some phenomena in South India. It is possible that a more accurate phrase might be to speak of “Christianity-less churches,” since we see people still regarded as “Hindus” involved in home meetings much like the “*ecclesias*” of the New Testament but we do not see any close affiliation of these believers with the cultural tradition of Christianity. It is as though we must ask whether we are to preach Christ and not Christianity.

A recent secular editorial in India recounted the gruesome tortures early missionaries of Portuguese Christian tradition inflicted on the people of Goa wherever departures from faith were suspected. We can protest that that was “Catholic” Christianity. But our own Protestant “Christian” cultural tradition includes similar events such as when John Calvin consented to the death by fire of Michael Servetus as well as thirty some women accused of witchcraft, whose departures from the faith seemed threatening to the unity of the Gospel. How can we not therefore try to understand the disinclination today of high caste Hindus to see their cultural unity threatened by invading missionary forces which may find it difficult to conceive of a Hindu cultural tradition that validly understands the Gospel?

**6. The willingness and the ability to “give away our faith” is the great challenge of the 21st century. Can we accept the fact that Christianity by that name will never conquer the world even though our Bible and our Savior may become a spiritual reality within even the major so-called “resistant” blocs? This is of course a complex and delicate area of thought as well as a human phenomenon, which now includes perhaps more sincere people in the non-Western world than are included in the formal extension of Western Christianity into Africa and Asia.**

We have always thought that one of the blessings of the achievement of a worldwide Church movement is the possibility that this miraculous global fellowship would enable those of us in the West to reexamine our faith, our theology, our very study of the Bible. What neither the Western church nor its converts in the Third World are fully prepared for is the radical deWesternization of the Gospel. But the 21st century may be the time when this will happen without our power to stop it.

Paul’s ministry begs for a parallel today. Our impact on the non-Western world has been primarily on the relatively few who for various reasons want something of our Western cultural tradition. We suddenly realize that both Western and non-Western missions are promoting our Westernized forms of religion. Some of the non-Western missions are just as much involved in this as are the Western missions. This is understandable and it is not evil, unless we believe and preach that the Gospel can only exist in its Western vessel.

Paul said circumcision did not need to carry over. For many in his day this was as outrageous as for anyone today to say that baptism by this or that method is not essential. If the parallel is at all valid that our missionary movement is similar to the Jewish diaspora and its "Gospel," then we are not likely to see the missions, whether Western or not, capable in general of doing so radical a thing as Paul did.

**7. It is possible that some of the non-Western peoples are more interested in the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—as they see His glory in the face of Jesus Christ—than they are interested in our procedures for gaining Salvation. It may be that we ought to more deliberately “Declare His glory among the nations” than we are to sell our formulas for getting people into heaven, even though we ourselves may find it difficult to distinguish between these two related things.**

Jesus demonstrated the character of God in His preaching and healing ministry, and on that basis, asked people to repent and believe. And he talked to people who had a great head start in understanding His father in heaven. Today we are trying to build on a far thinner foundation. Once people know God through our science and medicine and through scriptures like Proverbs, and even better by knowing the Christ of the Gospels, then our missionary efforts to the major blocs will be more effective. There will still be those who want simply to become Westernized, learn English and so forth.

Can Western and non-Western missions in the 21st century change enough to encourage and nourish some of these highly indigenous movements? Our overseas church constituencies may be as opposed to such an approach as the Jewish believers were opposed to Paul’s approach.

Thus, our task in the 21st century is not so much to promote a Westernized Christianity as to defend the name of God, to represent Him more faithfully, to point out

the role of Satan and be on God's side in striving to destroy the works of Satan. We are, as Paul put it, "to open peoples' eyes, turning them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." However, the outward results of this process may both surprise us and also not be immediately recognizable to our supporters.

In summary, the difference between the activity of Western and non-Western missions is not very great. They are both highly Western compared to the new indigenous movements which derive their faith more directly from the Bible more than from Christianity. We have long gloated over the fact that Christianity is now geographically global. However, our faith and our Bible, just as in the past, has quickly gone beyond any particular codification of it.

Third World Missions may be able to leave their own inherited Christianities and choose to follow the growth of Biblical faith and worship where this flows beyond the bounds of traditional Christianity. It is possible that these non-Western missions will be more able to do this than the traditional missions in the West. The culture of the West is itself changing so rapidly that traditional denominations are all on the decline while newer and unusual movements are those which are growing. The West today needs the help of the Third World Churches and missions, especially if they are willing to follow faith and not form.