

A Giant Step in Mission
By Donald McGavran

Editor's note: Referring to the article which follows, Ralph D. Winter, General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission, observes, "This is a stirring proposal which I believe we must consider immediately and take seriously. It is written by an elderly man who by many is considered the foremost mission strategist in the world today. It is in effect a timely 'Renewal Manifesto' for this moment of history. All other renewal efforts must be built on the act of faith involved in putting other nations before our own salvation. Indeed, failing such a test of faith is probably the principal reason for God's judgment upon a Christian tradition."

Christian mission, world evangelization, must take a new and significant step if God's will is to be done. We rejoice in past achievements--hundreds of missionary societies, thousands of young denominations (Churches), the Church firmly established in almost every nation-state, the Bible or parts of it available in more than 2,000 languages, new missionary societies arising in the non-Western lands, more than a billion souls who consider themselves Christian, and on and on. We praise God for all the great victories of the cross.

But, we also note that world evangelization is very far from completing the task the eternal God *commanded* (Romans 16:25f). Three billion (soon to be four billion) have yet to believe on Jesus Christ or to hear of Him. More specifically, half the world's population is almost totally isolated from the Gospel in "Unreached Peoples". Young Churches (now in every land!) are often small and weak, engaged primarily in nurturing and managing themselves. In many segments of society and in some whole lands less than one in a hundred is Christian. Often it is one in a thousand. If the church is there, it has very little power. Often 95% of all church members are tribesmen or come from oppressed and depressed classes of society. Thousands of whole peoples (*ethne*, segments of society) believe intensely that "if any of us" becomes a Christian, he leaves "us" and joins "them".

Some missiologists place the number of Unreached Peoples at 17,000. This is a surprisingly small number in view of the great potential of evangelical resources. But it is still huge, and is quite out of proportion to our present level of mobilization. (What shall we say to the fact that American evangelicals may spend more on pet food than on missions?)

The Center for World Mission in Pasadena, Fuller's School of World Mission, World Vision's MARC, and other organizations have done valiant work in calling on Christians to reach the Unreached Peoples (plural). A new conscience on the huge undone task of world mission is already in the process of being aroused. This is good. But now in 1985 unless a giant new step forward is taken, all this may turn out to be mere words! Thousands of ambassadors and millions of dollars must very soon be devoted to the *tens of thousands of unreached segments of mankind*. It is not enough to call attention to the three billion who have yet to believe. Existing missionary societies--or *new missionary societies*--must very soon place well trained, well equipped, lifetime task forces in *the thousands of remaining Unreached Peoples*. Today this can be both parallel to, and in partnership with, other churches and other societies, new and old, all around the globe. It is a huge but feasible task.

The Frontier Fellowship, now with 36 organizations collaborating, has launched a campaign to raise up a million American Christians who will use the *Global Prayer Digest*, pray and give loose change daily for the evangelization of one or more of the Unreached People groups (*ethne* or segments of society). This is a good first step. I AM NOW PROPOSING A GIANT ADDITIONAL STEP--*that in every congregation in North America practicing Christians organize themselves into frontier missionary societies, men's missionary societies, women's missionary societies, youth missionary societies.*

Let the Holy Spirit lead groups of earnest Christians to meet regularly to study one or more of the very numerous unreached pieces of the mosaic of mankind, and to give and pray to the end that within each group to be reached a beachhead of saving faith might be established. Let all monies raised by these local groups be given solely to frontier mission enterprises --through existing missionary organizations which promise to spend the money exclusively on new evangelistic efforts among unreached *ethne*, or through new organizations specifically founded to evangelize the Unreached People groups--those that are clearly out *beyond* the actual reach of any congregation or denomination or mission agency in any of the six continents.

All such new local missionary societies will focus on the unfinished task of world evangelization! These new, local societies will pray for the effective evangelization of specific unreached segments of society. They will give their sons and daughters to be lifetime missionaries to the millions dying in the greatest famine of the Word of God ever to be seen. These new fellowships will send millions of dollars to establish effective, well-organized evangelizing forces to feed the lost and spiritually starving multitudes.

The word "unreached" must not lead us astray. An "unreached" *ethnos* or segment of society is not one in which individuals who are Christ's followers are perceived by their fellows to have "*left their own people and traitorously gone off to join another people.*" Putting it positively, a people is to be considered reached when its members who become Christians are perceived by their fellows as "still our people who are pointing the way to what they believe would be a good path for us all to follow." In Guatemala in 1985, when one asks a person, "Are you an evangelical?" he frequently hears the answer, "not yet." This is proof that many segments of society in that nation are now effectively "reached"--i.e., they believe that while linguistically or ethnically they still remain themselves (Indians or Mestizos), they probably ought to become obedient followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Guatemala is a nation in which God is bringing great church growth. The evangelical churches there are working and praying that by 1990 half the entire population will be Bible-believing, Bible-obeying Christians.

Unless here in America literally *thousands* of new frontier missionary societies are founded, in thousands of local churches in most Churches (denominations), the "unreached peoples" will not be reached. Let us boldly face that unpleasant fact. Existing promotional schemes are naturally tied to existing mission structures. These are sometimes philanthropic, sometimes educational, sometimes evangelistic. They are most frequently controlled by already established Churches/denominations in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or Europe. They do not intend to "reach the unreached." They intend to help younger Churches.

Certainly some mission resources ought to be sent to help young Churches. This is obvious. But all mission resources ought not to be dedicated to that end. Most mission resources--ambassadors and money--should now be spent working directly or indirectly to multiply sound churches among

the two and a half billion lost men and women *who are presently locked out of and locked away from any personal witness within their group.*

Thus, here in America, in order to do our fair share of this global task, we must soon found thousands of new groups of Christians dedicated to multiplying congregations of biblical Christians in every unreached ethnos in the world. Unless this GIANT STEP is taken, all those earnest Christians scattered out across this country who would want to work for, pray for and give to the evangelization of the unreached will remain essentially unhelpful, if not hopeless, and will simply continue to give modestly to existing mission efforts.

We must act on our belief that there are at least one million individuals who would pray for and give to frontier missions, and we must encourage them to organize themselves into local missionary societies single-mindedly devoted to finding, fostering and founding new outreach to unchurched segments of mankind. The task is urgent and enormous. Today in early 1985 more than three billion are still closed off in unreached groups. They have yet to believe on Christ. They are lost sheep. The Great Shepherd wants them found.

As thousands of such local missionary societies are formed, each one will want to make sure that its God-given purpose is carried out. Each must not stop giving to existing efforts, yet must be allowed to add strength to those efforts designed exclusively to reach the unreached, to disciple a heretofore undisciplined people group. The Frontier Fellowship has followed the lead of Asian Christians who set aside a handful of rice at each meal specifically for missions. Their daily "loose change" giving, with this specific purpose, does not threaten any existing budget. Yet, one group with a goal of 10,000 participating estimates the loose change offerings brought in monthly will amount to \$1 million per year of new money. Amounts in the hundreds of thousands of dollars are already coming in. One million people daily dedicating loose change will generate \$100 million per year specifically for new frontiers!

In a given local congregation, the members of such a band of ardent frontier minded men and women will gather daily in their families around this challenge, weekly at church with this vision highlighted wherever possible, and monthly in their own special meeting for study, prayer, praise, and giving, all focused on some part of the unevangelized thousands of millions. The members of the band must be acutely conscious that they are doing a task for each unreached group which to date no one has ever done. It is a new task. The Holy Spirit is sending them, as He sent Philip to Samaria and Paul to Rome, as true pioneers.

These groups must number in the thousands even in 1985, but as the vision spreads there will be tens of thousands of them. Some denominations (Churches) will themselves recognize, welcome, and organize such groups. They will see that this is the best way to regain true missionary purpose. Other denominations will grudgingly recognize frontier groups, saying in effect, "Yours is not a good idea, but if you insist, we will see that your gifts go exclusively to evangelize the unreached." Still other denominational headquarters, we fear, may say bluntly, "Give through our unified budget. We will use the money as we see fit. We know the situation so much better than you do. God bless you."

Some local groups will hear of some new missionary venture to some unreached segment of society, evaluate how effective it is, and give to it through some denominational, interdenominational, or faith mission which is clearly maintaining frontier missions among

unreached peoples. Please recall the careful definition of the word “unreached” given a few paragraphs earlier.

In the spreading of this new realistic vision of devoting ourselves heart and soul to evangelizing the multitudinous peoples of earth, we shall see an enormous surge of Christian activity. The time is ripe. God is now pointing His finger at the most responsive world believing Christians have ever contemplated.

The DAWN movement is fast spreading. It believes that many regions and, in at least twenty cases, whole nations can now be discipled. That is the meaning of the acronym DAWN-- Discipling A Whole Nation.

Africa south of the Sahara will soon be as Christian as North America. The Holy Spirit leads us to ripe harvest fields. He also calls us to many which have yet to be sown. The great day of Christian mission (in which Christians of all six continents will spend themselves) is dawning. We can at least set a good example for other concentrations of believers to follow.

Even in the lands where the Gospel has long been present, the true power of the Gospel is not wanting. After 67 years of suffering, the church in the Soviet Union is probably spiritually and perhaps even numerically stronger than ever. Certainly in China, despite 34 years of suffering, the Christian movement is unimaginably larger and stronger.

Now is the time to move forward. Let us “furiously” organize frontier missionary societies in every congregation of every denomination in North America. And other nations will follow.

An aroused Christian conscience on the world level is all it will take for the peoples and nations that are already “blessed” to fulfill the Biblical mandate, to be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:2,3)