

Editorial: The Fatal Attraction of Pseudo-Frontier Mission

If the "whole world is to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord", a major change in direction is needed in the present method of locating missionaries both at home and overseas. It can be summed up in a phrase: deploy them among the least evangelized. The present deployment of missionaries of all kinds leads us to one conclusion—the world's 1.25 billion unevangelized receive little or no attention. At the same time, the world's 4000 or so foreign mission agencies persist in saying they believe in frontier mission. What they are in fact doing is best termed "pseudo-frontier mission" or, to use Donald McGavran's term, "international domestic mission." That is, they work where the church has already been firmly established. Not surprisingly then, little of the massive amount of talk about frontier mission in the past 20 years has directly affected the unevangelized. There are several problems in the various traditions of Christianity that cause this.

Global estimates

For the past several years there has been widespread acceptance of *global* totals of unevangelized individuals, unreached individuals, and individuals in unreached people groups. David Barrett has been publishing his estimates of the percent evangelized for the past seven years in the January issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. That percentage now stands at 76.4% leaving 23.6% or 1.25 billion unevangelized individuals in the world. Patrick Johnstone has made several estimates in the past few years of how many people are currently beyond the reach of the gospel and of a Bible-believing church. His current estimate of the number of unreached individuals in the world is 1.8 billion. Finally the U.S. Center for World Mission has published totals of unreached peoples and the number of individuals in them (naturally including Christians and some evangelized non-Christians). The current estimate is 12,000 unreached people groups made up of 2.2 billion individuals. (A clever reader will be able to see how these differing figures can be easily reconciled though based on differing methodologies).

Evangelicals

All of this is well known in evangelical circles. The figures are ubiquitous in today's Christian literature. To be sure, often times they are misquoted or out-of-date but the basic ideas and estimates have remained intact. However, there has been a rather large gap between the thinking of many evangelicals and the action they take. While agreeing that the unreached peoples of the world are made up primarily of Muslim, Hindu, tribal, Buddhist, and non-Han Chinese groups, they speak and write as if the unfinished task of evangelization lay primarily in Guatemala, Belgium, Canada, Brazil, and scores of other heavily evangelized countries. Actually these countries have very few individuals in unreached people groups.

Part of the problem seems to be the tendency to narrow the scope of who a Christian is. How easy it is for Catholics, Orthodox, and even Protestant state churches to be written off by evangelicals as "not really Christians", shifting them into a "yet to be evangelized" category. Yet no one in the last twenty years has put forth *global* totals that incorporate such stringently narrow guidelines. The result, of course, would be a world with 4.8 billion unevangelized, which directly contradicts the careful research already done (to say nothing of the fact that it makes finishing the task near impossible!). The only solution is to see to it that country and people totals add up to global ones and to abide by these results. Proper focus will keep missionaries in real frontier mission fields.

Charismatics and Pentecostals

The world of Pentecostals/Charismatics falls into a similar trap. This is most clearly illustrated by their tendency to view evangelization as renewal of existing Christians. This is further illustrated in their response to the opening of Eastern Europe which is viewed as an opportunity to spread the gospel beyond its present boundaries when in truth these countries (except for Albania) are nearly 100% evangelized and have remarkable charismatic populations, church leaders, and Christian statesmen.

Ecumenicals

It has become popular in the World Council of Churches to speak of the responsibility for world evangelization as resting primarily in the hands of the local churches. They are expected to reach out in evangelism to the people around them thus somehow finishing the task of world evangelization. The participation of mission agencies and other parachurch groups is viewed as supportive of this endeavor. Unfortunately, most of the unevangelized 1.25 billion people are geographically nowhere near the world's 2.6 million local Christian churches. They will be blatantly ignored unless special attention is given to their circumstance.

JPIC among the unevangelized?

It is instructive as well to check exactly where, geographically, the ecumenical emphasis on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation is being carried out. The most heavily evangelized of the poorest countries receive the most attention. (It is, of course, right and necessary for Christians to give urgent attention to the needs of other Christians, but here we are referring to frontier missions situations). We find a parallel in that many people are now talking about how most of the unevangelized are poor and most of the poor are unevangelized. As it turns out, the first statement is true but the second one is not. Over 90% of the unevangelized are below the global poverty level of \$1000 per annum income. But looking at all those below that poverty level only about 50% of them are unevangelized. Thus if you minister to the poor you only have a 1 in 2 chance of working with the unevangelized. Actually your chances are far less than that because the unevangelized poor are often difficult to get near. Thus the heavily-christianized continent of Latin America has become a main focus of JPIC while Afghanistan, Mauritania, Iraq and other countries hostile to Christianity are receiving little or no attention.

The Roman Catholic Church

Catholics are viewing the next decade as one of evangelization but their plans reveal that they are really

talking only about parish renewal. While this will certainly lead to increased evangelistic activity among the unreached it in itself is not frontier missions. Leading one-half of the world's population to Christ from the present 33% also does not necessarily involve the unevangelized or the unreached peoples. A world half Christian could still be 23.6% unevangelized.

Third-World missions

Another of today's voices holds that the answer is Third-World missionaries going directly to unreached peoples. Regrettably, it does not turn out this way: 97% of all such personnel go where churches already have been planted and in many cases to their own kind of people in other countries. Thus a huge resource may or may not lead to a more evangelized world—even when these missionaries may have greater access to the unreached.

What can be done?

Common sense dictates that the only way to evangelize the unevangelized is to get in close proximity to them. The problem is that you are not likely to be invited nor will it be easy or, in some cases, possible to work there. But as long as all the major agencies and traditions have no provision for contact with unreached peoples (except those that happen to be close to existing work) the task will never be finished. Surely this is not what God intended when he showered his love and blessing on each of these expressions of himself.

Focusing in on the real goal

Why is it so hard to focus on frontier missions? What attracts these noble agencies and missionaries to Christians rather than non-Christians? The past success of other missionaries is surely what is being built on in most cases. The heavily evangelized peoples of the world were at one time unevangelized themselves. Unfortunately it is difficult and sometimes costly to redirect efforts.

Who will focus?

There is a new movement today that should bring some focus to the unreached peoples of the world—nonresidential missions. An excerpt from David Garrison's forthcoming book on this subject shows just how

committed these men and women are to the least evangelized and how remarkably successful the first ones sent out have been.

But it is not only the way in which groups are targeted that makes the NRM program exciting—it's the breadth of ministry and the networking with Great Commission Christians of all other stripes. This approach then takes *all* of the Christian resources to bear on the *least* evangelized segments. That's an unbeatable combination.

Who will adopt?

For several years the Adopt-A-People concept has been promoted different places around the world. Yet little has come of it. Darrell Dorr makes a convincing case as to why we can now expect that to change. It will require both sacrifice and focus. It will also require overcoming the fatal attraction of pseudo-frontier missions. It is orphans that need adopting, not children with two good parents.

Who will make it from start to finish?

Everything seems to be connected here. Caleb Project is involved in mobilizing people for strategic involvement in frontier missions. They have found that all those who start getting interested don't make it to strategic involvement. They drop out of the process somewhere along the line. They identify some potential areas where efforts can be focused.

Who is least evangelized?

As a sneak preview we are publishing a list of the least evangelized peoples who will be over 1 million in population by the year 2000. These represent some of the primary targets for Christian mission. Surprisingly, very few of the traditional mission agencies are working among these peoples. They are often difficult to get to and sometimes not friendly to the gospel. But these peoples represent the cutting edge of frontier missions—these are the peoples that suffer when Christians feel that their primary task is to make other types of Christians their kind of Christian. That job, as we have seen, is never-ending and takes away from the focus on these least evangelized peoples.

What countries need more work?

Stepping back from the details of peoples, a list of 251 countries and how evangelized they are is included here. The point to take home is that the job of frontier missions is not equally distributed around the globe. Some countries have been neglected for decades and, in some cases, centuries. That needs to change and here is your guide to the least evangelized countries.

Recognizing the Great Commission World

David Garrison, Darrell Dorr, and the Caleb staff all realize the huge potential of those already committed to sharing their faith. That group cuts across all traditions and all denominational lines. The Lausanne Statistics Task Force illustrates the enormity of that force in two global diagrams from the book *Our Globe and How to Reach It*. Today's Great Commission Harvest Force and Tomorrow's (A.D. 2000) illustrates just how much there is to draw upon.

Overcoming the fatal attraction

In a sentence, what can we do to overcome our fascination with reaching only fellow Christians with the gospel? We can catch the vision of the Great Commission Harvest Force as what it really is and then focus our efforts on the least evangelized peoples.

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