

Editorial: Another society? Another journal?

We are at a critical juncture in the history of frontier missions. A few weeks ago we entered the final decade of this century. More attention is focused on the year 2000 and its significance for goal-setting in world evangelization. "A church for every people by the year 2000" is still a viable goal. We have far better information on exactly which peoples need to be targeted than we did ten years ago. Nearly all traditions of Christianity have plans for unreached peoples in the 1990s.

On the other hand, a great deal of what can be termed "the unreached peoples movement" still exists only in the form of rhetoric. The vast majority of missionaries still work among heavily Christian peoples. Their discipleship of this prime force for mission makes little reference to frontier missions. Much needs to happen soon on the most basic levels of deployment of missionaries and nationals if unreached peoples are to be reached anytime in the near future.

Ironically, with much left to be done, some of our colleagues are asking "Do we really need the ISFM or the IJFM—surely these agendas are being covered in other forums?" This seems to be a question on the minds of many busy executives these days.

Mission in the light of most journals and societies

Let's think clearly together about this. I am an avid reader of *Missiology*, *IBMR*, *EMQ*, *Mission studies*, and other missions journals. These focus on the history of missions, the mechanics of missions, the personalities of missions, the cultural challenges of missions, etc. They are essential and enjoyable reading for anyone interested in the subject of missions. But in this avalanche of material on the "how" of missions, I see very little written on the priority of frontier missions. Any clarion call for the least evangelized is somehow absorbed into the discussions of the present extent of the gospel. Of course, these voices of the mission industry are under no obligation to write on frontier missions and therefore cover it only sporadically.

Mission conferences seem to follow

the paths of these journals (or vice versa, since many conference addresses are subsequently published by the journals). In fact, what is published in journals and said at conferences often has an anti-frontier missions tendency built in. Let me explain.

1. The Evangelical agenda seems heavily focused on "evangelicalizing" other Christian traditions. Why else would many recent evangelical publications highlight saturation church-planting in heavily churched regions like Latin America, Western and Eastern Europe, and North America? Why would a recently published and widely disseminated map highlight Poland, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal as "less evangelized than Chad, Sudan and Ethiopia"?
2. The unreached peoples movement has been interpreted by many as a mopping-up operation among many countries of the world. The immense size of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese blocs are brushed aside. Yet this is precisely where the fewest missionaries are deployed or are likely to be deployed.
3. Missionaries of all kinds are piled on top of each other in heavily Christian peoples. Recent publications highlight peoples that we can demonstrate are already 90% Christian as "unreached". This could be a major opportunity if these missionaries would now point the way to the unreached peoples.

These tendencies take the emphasis away from the need to prioritize on peoples with few or no Christians.

Yes, another society! Yes, another journal!

In light of this, should we be questioning the existence of a society and journal focused on the priority of frontier missions? Or should we be working harder than ever to clarify and monitor the task?

Many executives who fear drastic cuts in their personnel assigned to World C (The Christian World) are

responding by now advocating "balance" in our approach. But what is balance when 95% of the mission force is assisting Christians in other parts of the world, or even trying to change their affiliation? We need balance in the truest sense. Let's stop defending mission work among reached peoples and get on to the subject that is not being addressed—mission among the least evangelized peoples that currently receive less than 2% of the world mission force.

That is balance. Balance, particularly in mission work, has to be in the direction of the least evangelized, the unreached peoples, the non-Christians. Many of us have become too polite with agencies whose goals state commitment to the unreached but whose actions show otherwise. These agencies are not above accountability and must either stop making global claims or start working among clearly unreached peoples.

Whatever happened to Iraq?

Why should a country like Iraq simply not be listed or even appear in any *Mission Handbook* (the standard directory of North American Protestant foreign mission agencies) since 1976? Were we confused back then about the status of Christianity in Iraq? Did we decide that no further work was necessary among its peoples? What about today? Do we not still see no difference between the Iraqi Arabs and supposedly unreached people groups in the U.S.A. like the "radical feminist movement" (as recent publications assert)?

I don't believe that we are as confused as our deployment shows. Until we achieve some sort of balance in the attention unreached peoples receive we will need both the ISFM and the IJFM as a clarion call in the midst of a missionary enterprise enamored with working among other Christians. Unless this call is made clear in the near future, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Chinese, and tribal peoples will be bypassed and ignored once again in favor of more "rewarding" tasks.

This issue should not be glossed over or ignored. We must admit how bad we have allowed the situation to get and

work to remedy it as soon as possible.

*Further reflections on frontier missions
Who are the unreached peoples?*

Some of the confusion over the difference between a reached people and an unreached one may be the result of our inability to distinguish between evangelized and unevangelized non-Christians. It is difficult for some to see that an individual can be evangelized even though he/she remains non-Christian. Yet, this is absolutely essential to understanding that evangelization is not the same as conversion. Surely no one believes that evangelizing the world is synonymous with converting every individual in the world. That task will never be completed.

If, on the other hand, the task is to offer every individual the opportunity to know Christ within the context of a viable church in his/her people then it is easy to imagine that reached peoples would have many evangelized non-Christians. We might not then be so tempted to prioritize mission among reached peoples over unreached peoples (as current deployment of missionaries implies).

An agenda for planting your own kind of churches will most certainly overlook the unreached

Church planting in peoples where "our kind of church" does not currently exist will almost always direct you to the easiest targets. If you are attempting to make other Christians evangelical or charismatic or Catholic you will naturally place more emphasis on other Christian communities than on unreached peoples simply because it is so much easier and results are easier to achieve. We, as advocates of frontier missions, must keep these agendas separate and only encourage them where they involve unreached peoples.

The ISFM meeting

In September of 1990, the International Society for Frontier Missiology had its 5th annual meeting around the theme of "The crucial links in the frontier

missions chain." The participants were trying to identify both strong and weak links in the chain in order to determine how the church might be better focused on the unreached peoples.

These talks, including the ones published in the January 1991 issue of this *Journal*, focus on how we might better understand and then strengthen the links and the linkages.

Recommendations of the ISFM

In the closing meeting of the ISFM, participants came up with 17 recommendations and action steps. *Note: many of these relate to the specific context of IFMA/EFMA mission agencies and other agencies working with them.*

1. Circulate for suggestions George Patterson's matrix (see Ralph Winter's article in this issue of the journal) on mobilization links to help us discover missing links in frontier missions.
2. We acknowledge and applaud changes already made in North American mission agencies and encourage them to continue the changes needed to become increasingly more relevant to help North American emerging generations be effective in mission. We encourage agencies who can to provide suggestions on how to make such changes.
3. We encourage the emerging generation not to proliferate new agencies unnecessarily but to work within the established agencies bringing necessary changes to help them continue to be effective.
4. We encourage agencies to reach back further in the mobilization pipeline, assisting earlier and later links in the chain.
5. We encourage integration of a frontier missions vision in the campus discipleship agencies and churches.
6. Use the lists of least evangelized peoples as targets for frontier mission, starting with the list of 170 megapeoples and continuing with more detailed lists as they become available.
7. We recommend a small committee from the ISFM to quantify the 1982 unreached peoples definition and present their suggestions to the Lausanne Statistics Task Force for

wider acceptance.

8. We commend the ISFM to make a more deliberate effort to effectively communicate research findings to mission executives, mobilizers, and others.

9. We encourage agencies to increase substantially their mission force among unreached peoples.

10. We encourage mission agencies to impart frontier mission vision to all their current workers.

11. We advocate that the mission industry promote the adoption of all identifiable minipeople clusters within the next two years.

12. We encourage existing agencies to present a united front in the Adopt-a-People movement.

13. We encourage the integration of frontier missions vision in the prayer networks. We affirm and rededicate ourselves to prayer as a major frontier missions strategy.

14. We encourage existing agencies to appoint an Adopt-a-People coordinator.

15. We recommend that the AAPC sponsor a meeting in conjunction with the ISFM and require its members to send representatives.

16. We recommend that the Adopt-a-People clearinghouse coordinate people profiles.

17. We salute the Association of Evangelical Professors of Mission, welcome their new president, and encourage members to join the ISFM and subscribe to the IJFM.

On behalf of those who can't know

The International Society for Frontier Missiology exists in order to advocate the reaching of the unreached peoples as an immediate priority of world mission. Without this advocacy we may be tempted to turn ever inward, proselytizing and re-evangelizing each other while many peoples remain beyond the reach of the good news we all have to share.

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