

# A NEW MODEL FOR MISSIONS

■ With many global plans and vast resources, the church is still overlooking the peoples furthest from the gospel. With a bold new strategy to focus evangelization resources on these peoples the author outlines a rationale for implementing it on a broad scale.

By V. David Garrison

## INTRODUCTION

### *Mighty Mission Force*

By the beginning of the 1990's, more Christian missionaries from more foreign mission agencies and Christian denominations were being deployed around the globe than at any time since the beginning of the Christian world movement. According to the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, in 1992 there were nearly 300,000 foreign missionaries worldwide issuing forth from more than 4,000 foreign mission agencies and over 23,000 Christian denominations.<sup>1</sup> By any calculation, God has raised up a mighty Christian mission force to reach His world with the Gospel message.

### *The Lost Quarter*

Despite this formidable workforce, researchers continue to identify nearly a quarter of the earth's population as unevangelized—totally devoid of Christian witness. Most of these 1.2 billion men, women, and children live in countries which do not allow a traditional missionary witness. The names of the countries are well-known to most of us: Afghanistan, Algeria, Albania, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Chad, China, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Kuwait, Laos, Libya, Mauritania, Mongolia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam. Within these and other similar countries are hidden "nations within nations," vast populations of ethnic and linguistic minorities invisible to the outside world. Linguists have identified 2,000 unevangelized ethnolinguistic peoples (i.e. peoples sharing a common ethnicity and language) living as minorities

within countries which do not allow traditional missionary witness. Whereas all people enter the world in a state of estrangement from God, these 1.2 billion are the twice lost: lost from the opportunity as well as the saving knowledge of Christ.

Reaching this lost quarter of the world is the responsibility of this generation of Christians. With nearly 300,000 foreign missionaries serving around the globe how can it be that a quarter of the world's population remains unreached?

### *WHY THE QUARTER REMAIN LOST*

The nations which are home to the 1.2 billion least evangelized peoples are predominantly Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, or Marxist. Few missionaries or Christian evangelism resources are expended there for a variety of reasons:

#### *Hidden Peoples*

In some cases, the lost quarter are lost because they are unknown. Despite their great numbers, the 2 million Hazara of Afghanistan, 55 million Bhojpuri of India, or 6 million Buginese of Indonesia remain unknown to the Christian world typifying the invisibility of many of the world's least evangelized peoples. In Romans 10, Paul writes, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" A modern corollary, might read, "How can a missionary be called to a people of whom they have never heard?" Anonymity has led to neglect from the Christian world. No missionary has ever been called to a people about whom they have never heard.

#### *Anti-Missionary Governments or Cultures*

Most of the world's least evangelized peoples remain so because their governments and/or cultures resist Christian missionary activity. Whether they be Marxist one-party states (China), nationalist democracies (India) or Islamic republics (Iran), few nations without a sizable indigenous Christian population are open to traditional missionary presence these days. In the more extreme cases, conversion to Christianity is a capital offense and missionary activity is strictly forbidden.

#### *Hard-to-Reach Peoples*

The world's least evangelized peoples typically occupy the least hospitable places on earth. The Tuareg of southern Algeria reside in Saharan wastelands where temperatures exceed 130° Fahrenheit. The Beja of Sudan roam the barren dunes and empty canyons of the Red Sea Hills where few Westerners could survive even if they were granted a visa. Chronic warfare has kept others beyond the bounds of missionary witness. In numerous cases, warfare and geography conspire together against evangelization. The Kurds of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and the Soviet Union, the Kashmiri and Dogri of northern India, the Hazara, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Tajiks of Afghanistan all are insulated from the gospel by a combination of inhospitable geography and chronic warfare. Other isolating barriers include nomadic lifestyles, obscure or government-suppressed languages hidden behind official national languages, and absolute poverty as only the Third World can exhibit. Even the best-intentioned

missionary pauses at the thought of taking his or her family to live in the disease infested slums of Bombay and Calcutta, or along the nomadic caravan routes of northwest Africa, or amidst the mortar fire and anti-personnel mines of Afghanistan.

### *Inequitable Distribution of Christian Missionaries*

Each of these reasons conspire against the world's least evangelized persons ever hearing the gospel through traditional missionary models. These barriers have restricted the flow of missionaries into the lost quarter. Ask a Bedouin in the Sahara if the world has adequate water resources and his answer will certainly be "No." Put the same question to a Bengali after monsoon and his response will be "Too much!" Ask a Somali villager if the world has adequate food and his answer will be a predictable, "No." Direct the same question to an Iowa corn farmer and he, too, may reply, "There's too much!" The common link between each of these perceptions is the inequitable distribution of resources.

The same can be said of the Gospel. In 1992 alone, more than 55 million Bibles and 83 million New Testaments were distributed, nearly 300,000 foreign missionaries were deployed, and Christians spent more than \$9 billion on foreign mission efforts.<sup>2</sup> In each instance, however, the vast majority of these resources—more than 90%—never made it into the least evangelized quarter of the earth's population.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for this inequitable distribution are those described above. If the world's lost quarter are to hear the good news of Jesus Christ, it will take new models and methods for reaching them.

### *A New Paradigm*

In his book, *Future edge*, Joel Barker defines a paradigm as "A set of rules and regulations that does two things: 1) it establishes or defines boundaries; 2) it tells you how to behave inside the boundaries so as to be successful."<sup>4</sup> What is needed to reach the lost quarter of the world's population is a change in our missionary paradigm, a new missionary model.

A paradigm shift is not a revolution. A revolution seeks to demolish the old and replace it with something totally new. A paradigm shift pursues the

same goal, but with expanded definitions and boundaries. A paradigm shift revises existing rules (real or perceived) in light of new realities, thus enabling a new range of possibilities.

### *Information Explosion*

Under earlier conditions, most Christians had never heard of the vast majority of the world's least evangelized peoples. No one sought to reach the 55 million Bhojpuri of India or the 8 million Uighurs of China, simply because they had never heard of them. The mushrooming of information in today's world has forced us to recognize these peoples and their needs. The 20th century has witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the cataloging and study of the world's peoples, cultures, and languages so that virtually any people on earth can be studied through a well-stocked library. With more than 80 million volumes, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. virtually eliminates the excuse of ignorance for not reaching the world's previously hidden peoples. Published anthropological and demographic surveys make it possible for us to understand the physical and spiritual needs of these people and from this knowledge to tailor ministries to meet those needs.

### *Nonresidential Ministry*

In the former missionary paradigm, residence among a people was presupposed before a missionary was even deployed. If a missionary candidate discovered that he or she could not gain a residence visa, he was left to choose another assignment or relinquish his desire to be a missionary. Today's paradigm recognizes that even if a missionary cannot obtain a residence permit, he or she can still 1) research the needs of a people, 2) devise a strategy for reaching that people, 3) implement a strategy of ministry, evangelism, and church planting among that people without ever personally residing among the targeted population. The "Nonresidential Missionary," as some have called this new type of missionary, lives and works within the realm of possibilities created by the new paradigm. One of the benefits afforded by this new paradigm is an expanded resource base.

### *Global Resource Base*

Missionaries of an earlier generation typically went to the field alone to pour out their life's energies in a remote setting far removed from the majority of the world's Christian resources. Today's missionary has the option of reaching beyond his own limitations to include a great family of Christian coworkers. As a nonresidential missionary devises a strategy for reaching the world's least evangelized peoples, he knows that he has a resource pool of 23,000 Christian denominations, more than 4,000 foreign mission agencies, nearly 300,000 foreign missionaries, plus tens of thousands of Christian professionals able to serve as tentmakers and volunteers. While a nonresidential missionary may have difficulty placing a traditional missionary among the people he is trying to reach, he may find it relatively easy to place a Christian professional in an educational, business, or medical ministry. One of the most encouraging trends along these lines is a realization that God is choosing laborers from non-Western countries who may be ethnically, culturally and linguistically better suited to reaching one of the remaining unreached peoples than a witness from the West.

### *Technology*

Working under yesterday's paradigm, missionaries had little access to this vast pool of evangelism resources. Today's paradigm includes technological innovations which make it possible to communicate by phone, fax and electronic telecommunications from points around the globe. Just as the world's Christians are discovering one another in organizations of common cause such as the Lausanne Movement, the World Evangelical Fellowship, COMIBAM, and other regional gatherings, instantaneous communications and intercontinental travel are making it possible for nonresidential missionaries to tap into these resources around the world. Working in today's new paradigm, a nonresidential missionary from Australia can identify ministry needs in the Horn of Africa and fill them with evangelical Christians from Central America.

Technological innovations are also having a direct influence on

evangelization tools. Radio broadcasts are becoming more language-specific and are now being complemented by gospel television and video programming. The "Jesus Film", with its simple message of the Gospel of Luke in the language of the people, is in the process of entering every nation on earth through 16 mm, video tapes, and even slide and cassette mediums. Other technological breakthroughs are following on the heels of the computer microchip enabling audible Christian messages in an indigenous language to be imprinted on a tiny chip and then implanted on an audio card which can be transported into remote regions of the world which remain hostile to a residential missionary presence.

### *The Shrinking Globe*

The global village is an expression that has become a reality for missions in the 1990's. Never in history have mankind's destinies been so intertwined. Mass migrations of peoples, economic interdependence, and international communications are adding a condition of global interconnectedness to the new mission paradigm. Nonresidential missionaries are quick to take advantage of the ways in which Christians and the unreached masses are being unexpectedly juxtaposed. The flow goes both ways. Three million Afghan refugees appear in proximity of Christian communities in Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of Christian refugees from Ethiopia find themselves in Muslim Sudan. Thousands of Filipino Christians work in the homes and businesses of Arab families in the Persian Gulf. Thousands of Kurdish and Turkish laborers work

as *gustarbeiter* in Germany, as do thousands of North African Arabs and Berbers in France. And *everyone* is coming to America! Today's missionary must be prepared to use this global fruit-basket-turnover to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

### *A New Missionary Model*

Some mission agencies are already recognizing the need to empower missionaries to function within the scope of this new mission paradigm. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board is one of a number of mission agencies which has established a new mission program to take advantage of the new mission models. They call their program "the Nonresidential Missionary Program." Nonresidential Missionaries seek to capitalize on each of the new realities offered by the new mission paradigm. They are linked globally by telecommunications, they draw on the entire spectrum of Great Commission Christian agencies and individuals as co-laborers in reaching the lost quarter of our world.

One mission agency defined its nonresidential missionary as "A full-time, professional missionary assigned to one of the world's least evangelized peoples with the primary goal of evangelism that results in churches. This assignment entails (1) developing an understanding of the people through research, survey work, ethnographic interviews, language study, and may include short-term residence to reach this goal; (2) developing a working knowledge of and relationship with worldwide Christian ministry and evangelism

resources; (3) identifying ways that Christian resources can be focused on the evangelization of the assigned people; (4) advocating and implementing strategic ministries which will achieve the goal of evangelism and church planting among the assigned people."

Using the tools and resources inherent to the new mission paradigm, nonresidential missionaries have penetrated the most restricted settings on earth. Devising and implementing a comprehensive array of evangelism and ministry efforts, nonresidential missionaries have seen people previously lost to the Gospel message hear the Good News of Christ for the first time. Churches have begun to emerge in lands far removed from traditional missionary witness, and, in many places for the first time in centuries, new hope has been given to the lost quarter of our world. ■

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### **END NOTES**

1. David B. Barrett, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1992," *International bulletin of missionary research* 16:1, 27.
2. Ibid.
3. David B. Barrett and Todd M.