

World Evangelization Assessment: A Paradigm Shift for the '90s

by Pete Holzmann

As we approach another global conference on world evangelization in May 1995, many people are vitally interested in knowing whether or not it is really possible, or even plausible, that there will indeed be a church for every people and the Gospel for every person by AD. 2000? I'd like to discuss some principles that lie behind the process of answering that question, looking especially at how the process of assessment has changed in recent years.

I am a businessman, having developed a successful two-track career combining business pursuits with a growing and activist heart for missions. It should come as no surprise that I see tremendous parallels between the corporate world and the world of evangelical missions. As the saying goes, "Business is War." And we shouldn't be afraid to declare that we are fighting a war—a spiritual war, battling for the souls of men and women in God's world.

In order to form a ministry strategy, the first step in that process is assessment. Let's see how assessment can help clarify the issues. We need to look at changes taking place in various major enterprises around the world. Why do major corporations seek to divest themselves of responsibility for so many aspects of running a business? An example that I am intimately familiar with, is in the software industry. Software companies write software, write the documentation, duplicate it, package it up, sell it, ship it to customers, and provide (hopefully) good service if (or when!) things go wrong. Do you realize that today, it is possible for a software company to get away without doing any of that work itself? By "out-sourcing"

every single one of those tasks to an outside vendor, the software company would end up in a purely coordinating role, and yet could still be considered a market-leading software company!

Looking at successful "out-sourcing" partnerships, we find that what is strategically important in a business enterprise is not so much the work to be done and the resources required to do it, but the information, knowledge and relationships behind the process. Certainly, massive resources are needed to achieve the goals. But strategies and tactics based on wisdom and understanding gleaned from current information can improve the effectiveness of those resources by several orders of magnitude.

This new focus on information as a valuable resource, and the new cooperative relationships created, is causing major changes in how the corporate world does business. It is also causing great turmoil within the US Department of Defense (which is perhaps the largest corporate enterprise in the world), as they realize that war can no longer be fought in traditional ways. For example, according to reliable sources, the recent US-led Desert Storm operation was much less of a resounding success than has been promoted in public. Military leaders struggled mightily with getting the right resources to the right place at the right time. As it was, a large proportion of the material sent over was not found in time for battle, and in fact has never been returned to the US.

Do these examples strike a familiar chord? Why is it that the Church, with its incredible resources, vision and spiritual strength, struggles so mightily to accomplish her global task? Why is it

that, even with the valuable lessons of the past behind us, we are still struggling to make disciples of all the nations? Looking a bit deeper into the principles behind today's business and warfare strategies will give us valuable insights. Perhaps we can apply the following six principles to the mission "battle" in which we are engaged and win the war!

1. Seeing the Whole Picture

Today you can't make it in the grocery business by simply renting a building on Main Street and opening a corner grocery store. You need to see the big picture. Who are your competitors? Where are they located? What is their business strategy? Who are your potential customers? What are their buying habits and shopping hours? What do they want in a grocery store... is it just "groceries," or perhaps are they really looking for... a friendly place to obtain the everyday necessities of life?

You also need to see the details. What product brands do people prefer? How much inventory must be maintained to take care of demand without spoilage? How can you coordinate promotions with what is being advertised on national TV and radio?

These are questions that relate to both overall strategy and specific tactical issues. Today, you cannot run an effective, efficient, competitive business without good answers to these vital questions.

Through massive cooperation of vendors, retailers and research organizations, information to answer these kinds of strategic and tactical questions is available in the business world. Market research firms and consultants are happy to supply necessary back-

ground information at the strategic planning level. Vendors will work with you to take care of tactical details; in many cases, they're happy to fully handle inventory turnover and promotions for you! Together with partners such as these, you can create a successful strategy for your store.

We're in the same situation in the "missions industry," and have been for many years, even though it is only recently that cooperative strategies have come into vogue. Efficient overall strategies for resource mobilization, and effective tactics at the local level, require that we obtain and continue to maintain a clear understanding of the situation both globally and locally.

In fact, much progress has been made toward building and maintaining a complete picture of the status and opportunities for the Gospel. But just as it is only in the last decade that businesses have found it practical to acquire and track current and accurate market research for their industry, it is only in recent years and months that we've begun to get a clear, field based, reasonably complete global picture of our "missions marketplace" at every level from nations to villages, from mega-peoples to MPTA's (Million People Target Areas, a clustering concept favored by Campus Crusade for Christ). We have only begun the process, but our goal is to build and maintain a picture that is clear and understandable, that is based on a continuing stream of field-based information, and that is reasonably complete and up to date.

By the end of this year, we'll have baseline maps and standard codes for all of the countries and provinces of the world. We're close to having workable tracking systems for the peoples and languages of the world. Projects are under way to compile listings of every habitat on earth, from mega-city to tiny village. Our habitat database is not much more than a list of every city on earth with over 50,000 population, but even that is a milestone. To the extent

possible, we're trying to foster a strategic understanding of the situation at each of these levels, from global to local. Clearly, the availability of an ever-more-complete picture such as this will have, and already has had, some important consequences.

Strategic Thinking

When people can distinctly see the entire remaining task, they begin to think more strategically. For over a hundred years, missiologists have talked about dividing up the remaining task. Now, with concepts such as the 10/40 Window and Worlds A, B and C entering the consciousness of lay Christians worldwide, we see many more people saying things like: "If that is what's left to be done, what is the best way to divide up the remaining task?" "We should work together to finish this up!" "How many churches would each denomination need to plant in order to reach that country for Christ?" "What strengths of my organization need to be further developed so that we can be ready the next time there is a major opening such as happened in the former Soviet Union?" "Please assign us to our part of the task!" Clearly, old ways of thinking are beginning to quickly disappear. The task is not too big, it is not unknowable, it is something that can be grasped, yet it certainly is bigger than one group of believers can handle on its own!

Motivation to Fill the Gaps

A second consequence of having a reasonably complete picture: Gaps in the picture are highly motivational. When only a few pieces of a jigsaw puzzle have been assembled, it is easy to tire of the project. But when only a few pieces remain loose, bystanders develop an incredible urge to fill the gaps in the picture. Because of this effect, there is no shame in having blank areas in a database. The gaps are incredibly valuable for telling us what we do not know, and motivating people to fill them in!

Thus, while comprehensive mod-

els, with all gaps filled in by interpolation, are important for creating usable strategies, it is also important to publish information in a form that shows how much of our knowledge is based on current field information, and how much is increasingly out-of-date conjecture.

As an example of a great presentation on what we don't know, consider that Wycliffe/SIL creates language maps specifically showing the many languages for which more research is required before we even know whether a translation is needed! A country, people or city profile containing lots of blank space is a very powerful motivational tool.

Getting Close to the Finish

A final consequence for those who can see the scope of the remaining task: there is a realization that the task can and will be completed someday soon. Today, our efforts involve a significant sense of urgency, a sense that we are in a *kairos* moment.

The early church started the race with a bang, "pressing on toward the goal" as Paul put it. Since then, we have slogged along in the race for twenty centuries, sometimes slowing to a walk, perhaps even getting confused and heading in the wrong direction. Yet in all that time, God has not given up on us. We who are involved in discipling the nations now have a great sense of urgency because *we can see the finish line!* We don't know how long it will take to get there, but we can see that we're getting close. Oh how that energizes us to sprint during the final leg of the race! Do we want to see a church for every People by AD 2000? Definitely! But our eyes are on the finish line, not on a stopwatch, or on an arbitrary date, no matter how significant. We don't know how fast God wants us to run the race. We just know that He wants us to run it with all of the strength and skill He has given us!

2. Focus on the Process

As the information age pro-

gresses, improved information management tools have allowed us to move from focusing on products (whether products relating to strategy, such as a strategic plan, a book, an almanac or an informative seminar, or products relating to the results of our efforts, such as a completed production run, a signed contract, or a successful campaign), to more of a focus on the process. To some extent, this is a matter of degree rather than a wholesale change. Research focused on producing an updated strategic plan every five to ten years involves a process that improves each time it is repeated. What is different in the 1990's is that the path from research to results is often highly compressed. Rather than basing business market strategies on decadal census data, we depend on massive quarterly updates incorporating the latest local trends.

The same thing is happening in missions. As always, there is a cycle from field understanding to creation of strategies and tactics, to communication of vision. And from there to prayer and mobilization, to the reaching of the unreached in the field. Field results (based on effective strategy) lead to a desire to cooperate in providing updated field information that can improve our tactics and strategies. In simpler terms, the missions enterprise needs frequent reality checks!

But rather than taking years (if not decades) for field reality checks to be incorporated into tactics and global strategies, today it can take months, weeks or even less. For instance, within hours of the first opposition to the CoMission project in one area of the former Soviet Union, electronic mail messages were flying around the world, sharing the situation and requesting concentrated prayer. Concepts such as Adopt-A-People and the 10/40 Window have spread

like wildfire to the global Christian community. You can be sure that every time a list of people group information is printed, there is lots of feedback, providing corrections and new data! Even the Christian missionary enterprise, with all of its perceived lack of resources, has joined the modern world of amazingly fast communications and informa-

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tion technology.

This change has several significant implications. Some are quite valuable; others entail new pitfalls and dangers to be avoided.

First and most obvious, it becomes clear that information gathering and analysis cannot be a single event undertaken to produce a particular report or to support a particular strategy, but is rather an ongoing process, continually cycling through periods of data gathering, analysis and reporting, and action motivating another round of the cycle. If this process is handled properly, our understanding of appropriate strategies and tactics will remain current, and will continue to improve due to the availability of an ever more complete and accurate, updated picture. Each turn through the cycle provides a new reality check that holds us all accountable to the situation in the field.

Secondly, as I've already mentioned, many who come in contact with an

updated set of information are motivated to search for errors based on their own knowledge, and to correct or fill in gaps in the data. Some might be frustrated seeing all this critical feedback, but it is an essential part of the process. In many ways, such feedback improves the process itself. Within limits, the more often you can cycle data updates back to

the field, the more people will understand that their input has a very real effect on our understanding of what God is doing. They see that their input affects how people pray; it affects how resources are allocated; it affects how we all think about each part of the world. Eventually, effective strategy, properly applied, produces fruit, which enables us all to see that we are doing a better job of approaching the task God has given us.

That idea leads us directly to one of the pitfalls to

be avoided. In this era of fast turnaround time, there's a strong temptation to publish hasty updates, based on the idea that "we can always catch our errors next time." Sure, there is some truth in that statement, but at the same time, much damage can be done through the careless publication of too-quick updates. Many who look at such needlessly and erroneous data waste precious resources based on an assumption that what they see is the best we know. Once they find out (and as soon as more informed people see the obvious errors and inconsistencies), they become rightfully angry, knowing that better stewardship of the information is needed. This can seriously damage the overall process, because people don't want to participate in a process where their best efforts to provide good information are ignored.

How do we deal with this danger? Answer: Through improved cooperation, accountability throughout the

process (not just after each report is published), and through setting of realistic goals at each stage. For example, I want to be able to present a fantastic assessment summary report at GCOWE '95 meeting in Korea, showing the progress of the Gospel at all levels from countries to peoples to MPTA's and cities. However, I'd much rather see a more limited report done well, than a huge report done poorly. There needs to be balance here. All assessment is subject to error. For instance, we know that we can never create a perfect list of the all the unreached peoples, just as we can never get a truly exact instantaneous count of the population of the world. But that doesn't excuse us from being good stewards over the information that we have; we need to hold each other accountable in this.

3. Focus on Cooperative Effort

How does a modern corporation achieve its goals, when much of the real work is handled by outside organizations? It does so by cooperating with able partners who are in business to see the common goal accomplished, partners who do not worry about obtaining credit for themselves. A corporation may work with outside product development consultants, an outside telephone sales organization, a "fulfillment house" that does all of the packaging and shipping, a billing and collections firm that collects the money, and so forth. None of these organizations, vital as they are to the success of the enterprise, insists on special recognition for their efforts. By working together, they form an enterprise that is actually more than just the sum of the parts.

In missions, we too are learning this lesson. But it does not come naturally! Although we want to give the Lord all the credit as Author and Enabler of our entire task, our fallen nature causes us to get very nervous if we aren't recognized for our vital role in any particular project. But over time, we are learning; we're finding the joy in being part of

a community where nobody but Jesus gets the credit for what is accomplished!

This principle creates an interesting implication for the assessment process. Some typical questions of the past, such as, "Which organization are you with?" or, "Which organizations are working among this people?" are becoming quite difficult to answer properly. Perhaps these questions are even becoming obsolete! Does it really matter that my mission board is Paraclete Mission Group? Is it not more useful to have an understanding of the cooperative partnerships I'm involved with, the resource networks I'm affiliated with the leaders that I work with? Rather than knowing which particular radio ministry or ministries are targeting the Muslim peoples of Pakistan, is it not more useful to know that World By 2000, the radio ministry cooperative partnership, is working on that area?

Many of these new enterprises are serious about accomplishing their goals and objectives, but at the same time find it completely unnecessary to set up the visible trappings of yet another non-profit missions organization. Cooperative partnerships is obsoleting many traditional measures of ministry activity. If we only count the officially constituted organizations, but leave out the cooperative partnerships, we will increasingly miss the most active and most important part of the overall picture.

4. Responsible Sharing of Information

Traditionally, there was a distant if not somewhat paternalistic, or even antagonistic, relationship between a wholesale supplier (such as Coca Cola or Kellogg's) and a grocery store. The wholesaler had rather full control over the situation: they knew what would be advertised nationally, and when, and what kinds of discounts would be offered. They knew better than anyone how much product was needed in any store at any time. They controlled the pricing, delivery and other terms of how prod-

uct would be made available to the grocer.

Today, the grocer has his own set of valuable information. He knows who buys each type of product, how often they buy, what kind of promotions his customers respond to, and so forth. Using this information, the grocer can turn around and dictate to the wholesaler exactly which products are needed, and when, and even what kinds of promotional events will best sell more product.

Rather than turning all of this information into ammunition for a pitched battle, the grocer and wholesaler have found a better solution. They share their vital information. Increasingly, grocers (and other vendors) are giving their suppliers direct access to internal databases that track inventory, sales, pricing, and so forth. In fact, tactics that once would have been unthinkable are now commonplace. Vendors look at the store's inventory, and create their own replenishing orders. Stores can look directly at vendor production management databases, and decide whether to temporarily switch to alternate sources of supply.

How does this apply to assessment of global evangelization? In two significant ways: First, we must look creatively at the information being maintained by various parties, and see what benefits might accrue from greater sharing of that information. One of the best ways to find errors in a data set is to compare the data with a similar set of information created through an entirely separate means. Every area of disagreement is worth noting, as it highlights what may be an error in one or the other database. However, I'm afraid that the Christian community has to take more fully to heart a second lesson from the grocer and the wholesaler before we'll see commonplace data sharing on a large scale.

The second application of this principle is simply this: We have much to learn about trust, both earning trust, and acting in trust. Through the SHARE Fellowship, we now have a defined

mechanism for information sharing. But trust is built on much more than definitions and contracts. It is built on relationships. We need to continue to work on trust relationships within the mission community. As we do that, I pray that we'll learn to trust our information with each other at least as well as the grocer and wholesaler are able to trust each other!

5. Information: A New Resource

Unlike material goods, information can both be quite valuable and at the same time is relatively easy to acquire and also difficult to hoard. Under most circumstances, if I learn something, you can learn the same thing (the same way I did).

Once you know what I know, you can do whatever you like with the information, even to the point of sharing it with the whole world. Unlike other resources that we might like to widely share or duplicate, information is something that can be easily shared at little or no cost. This is far more true today than at any time in the past, even than just a few years ago. Today, I can instantly send a message to millions of people around the world at a personal cost of only a few pennies. I can duplicate two million pages of text onto a digital audio computer tape for only ten dollars. That is certainly a far cry from a few hundred years ago, when duplicating a copy of the Bible was an effort worthy of a lifetime.

Of course, this reality has tremendous implications for the missionary enterprise, in a wide variety of areas. I'd like to focus on just one implication that applies particularly well to the assessment process.

Not too long ago, the prohibitive cost of getting a book published created an automatic barrier for those who

would see their ideas disseminated to the world. Authors simply could not get a wide audience for their ideas if they could not first convince the owners of the presses that their thoughts were worth the trouble. Even after the publisher agreed, they spent a lot of effort refining their thoughts, polishing their presentation, checking and rechecking all of the facts and figures. Readers of printed material knew this, and thus developed a long habit of trust for what they found

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in print.

Today, even though almost anyone can inexpensively self-publish whatever they like without any oversight or review, the public still retains this habit of thinking, "If it is in print, it must be correct." But that habit is changing. People are beginning to realize a need for the ability to come to their own conclusions regarding what they read. Increasingly, the audience holds the author accountable for the information presented.

As we produce assessment reports, analyses and other presentations, we have a responsibility to ensure that readers are able to verify what we're saying. We need to make ourselves accountable to our audience. Thus, our presentations of assessment analysis must allow the audience to understand how our analysis was done, and the facts it was based on, so they can perform their own analysis. Without this accountability, we're setting ourselves up as experts whose word must simply be taken at face value.

One good example of an assess-

ment analysis that incorporates this accountability is the new Southern Baptist work on Gospel exposure factors. Just like product ratings in consumer and computer magazines, the SBC/FMB analysis will incorporate a number of weighted factors. In the report the data behind the factors, as well as the assigned relative weights, will all be shown. Thus, the reader can easily see the derivation of an overall ranking, and can create their own ranking if they

wish to use a different weighting system. Providing this extra information involves a significant amount of additional effort, but the results, seen in a strong sense of ownership by interested readers, are well worth the trouble.

6. Localized Strategy

Both in the business world and in the military another massive shift is taking place. Organizations are moving from centralized planning and control to localized control. Overall strategy is still maintained and promoted by the central leadership, but most other decisions, especially those regarding specific tactics, are made locally.

The global missions enterprise has a long way to go before we can say that there is coordinated global strategy and localized tactics. However, I submit that we are making progress in that direction. The name of the game today is *cooperative partnership*, in every ministry area from radio to church planting, from Bible translation and distribution to prayer, which is transforming the world of missions. We are seeing clear, coordinated, effective global strategies-not just on paper, but in action!

We're also beginning to see more effective local tactical decisions based on those strategies. Being realistic, we all

know that these initial efforts towards cooperation are imperfect. Some of the goals are too vague, too ambitious, or simply based on improbable assumptions. But the partnerships I've had the privilege of observing are serious about their task. They want to improve, to regularly take a "reality check" of both current and long-term goals, and of factors hindering progress. In every resource network I've seen, there's a recognition that the overall strategy must be localized.

One current example of this truth is found in our efforts to track the peoples of the world. Until recently, several researchers felt that the only practical method for identifying people groups was by language and by habitat (country, province, etc.). This emphasis ignored some sociological aspects that could perhaps help us to identify other distinct peoples. Since such distinctives were considered theoretically boundless, they were not believed to be useful as the basis for a practical coding and identification system.

Now we find that local researchers, such as those in India, have done some extensive work and have derived a method for identifying what they consider to be a complete listing of what they call "communities"—essentially, a contextualized description of the groups of people that each require a separate missiological breakthrough. More analysis of this situation is necessary, but it is already clear that some changes may be needed in the global coding system in order to incorporate the Indian situation as seen by the experts in that country. That is my simple point: Rather than telling researchers in India that they must conform to a central idea of the "correct" people group identification system, it is our duty as outsiders to incorporate the insights of Indian researchers into our models.

Combining this principle of localization with our new focus on process brings me to another new pitfall in the assessment process. One of the conse-

quences of our ability to create increasingly timely and accurate pictures of the missionary enterprise is that it's quite easy to succumb to a tendency to drive analysis from the numbers, rather than to let local understanding take precedence. It is easy to think that "our information and analysis is the best available, incorporating current local knowledge." Yet even at best, any compilation of information is only a summary, a current estimate. In many cases our information has become completely outdated in the years since the last survey of a local situation. That's why it is always dangerous to assume that we who are on the outside know better than local people who live with the situation. We must always be vigilant to welcome and solicit input from those with a closer understanding of the situation.

I'd like to provide yet another example. There are a number of global surveys flying around the world today. At least one of these surveys is being prepared in a way somewhat different from my past encounters with surveys and profile forms. The AD 2000 Country-level assessment workbook, and some other new survey tools, are based on a set of questions designed not by researchers in the West, but rather through cooperative effort by leaders from all over the world. The questions are formulated in a way that *they* feel will be most helpful in communicating the reality of their situations. Does this small effort, ensuring that the voice of in-country leaders is heard, make a significant difference? We believe that it does. We're seeing excitement among international leaders as preliminary versions of these survey tools are put into use.

Conclusion

So, we have discussed six principles: 1) the necessity of seeing the whole picture, 2) a focus on process, 3) the need for cooperation, 4) the need for sharing of vital information, 5) information as a different kind of resource, and 6) the shift from a centralized focus to an

emphasis of localized understanding. These principles lie not only behind the AD 2000 assessment process, but behind the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement itself.

With that background, perhaps we will better understand the answer to the question: "Is it really possible, or even plausible, that there will be a church for every people and the Gospel for every person by AD 2000?" The answer is two-fold: First, I believe that the energy now being invested in a *process* that leads toward this goal will eventually bear much fruit. Second, through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, I know that if the Church were to wake up to the fact that it can be done, and that it will only happen, even in our lifetime, through the massive participation of the Body of Christ around the world, then the goal just might be reached.

As it is, even if we do accomplish the goal, we've got a lot of work to do before we can know for sure that we have made it. We need to take this process one step at a time and ask: Where are the churches? Where are the unreached people groups? Where are the cities, towns and villages that house every person on earth? Where has the Gospel been effectively shared so that now it is spreading like wildfire? Only with good answers to these questions can we even have any idea whether the overall task has been or will be completed.

With our Lord's help, I believe that these vital questions can and will be answered. The answers will help the Body of Christ create effective strategies for fulfilling the world mission mandate which will only be accomplished by God's grace and the obedience of His people to that vision. My prayer is that it may be accomplished by the year 2000.

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