

Editorial: Reaching Tribal and Nomadic Peoples

When discussing tribal peoples in my church planting course I often ask the students: How many of you grew up in a country where tribal people live? While many foreign students raise their hands, the majority of U.S. students do not. This issue of IJFM is dedicated to tribal and nomadic peoples, not only to help us see the prominent place they have in society as a whole, but also to provide us greater understanding in how to deliver the Gospel to them in a contextualized and challenging manner. We need to remember that some 3,000 tribal peoples remain unreached—some of whom live right in our backyards.

But who are tribal people? How do they differ from foragers? Pastoralists? Peasants? To help dispel the fog, Douglas Hayward attempts to define some of the key terms for us. He then suggests an introductory reading list that addresses the “problems and prospects of ministry among such people groups.” Both veteran and novice Christian workers among these peoples should find this overview helpful.

[Editor’s note: For our readers who need help on definition of terms please turn to Douglas Hayward’s article, the last in this issue, where he defines basic terms and concepts, and also lists important bibliographical resources for ministry to tribal peoples.]

Dr. Hayward also challenges our understanding and ministry to animism. He argues that successful evangelization of animists requires not only a correct understanding of animism, but also a combination of strategies that utilizes the strengths of three types of encounters: truth encounters, power encounters and love encounters.

Several articles focus on the use of storytelling in ministry, the predominant genre of Scripture. Don Pederson’s article provides an overview of the Chronological Teaching model designed by Trevor McIlwain in the Philippines some 20 years ago (used presently

by numerous mission agencies around the world). Pederson outlines the model, noting the inadequacy of traditional evangelism models to transform traditional cultures and worldviews. He argues that time spent laying a solid Old Testament foundation for the Gospel will help avoid laying as syncretistic foundation on an animistic worldview.

Cynthia Klatt applies part of the Chronological Teaching model to Mayan people in Guatemala, validating Peterson’s argument. She provides an excellent case study in leadership development that demonstrates the need to begin in the beginning when teaching the Bible. She documents how the study of Genesis among Mayan church leadership challenged and corrected traditional understanding of the spirit world and the character of God.

As is frequently the case in any new adventure, terms and concepts evolve to clarify and distinguish. Southern Baptist missionaries in the Philippines were the first to adopt the Chronological Teaching Model from New Tribes Mission. J. O. Terry, reflects on some of the differences between New Tribes Mission’s approach from those of the Southern Baptists. Terry provides numerous case studies in training leaders to tell the story, depicting some of the joys, challenges and lessons learned in this exciting venture.

The remaining articles focus on key ministry related topics. Malcom Hunter takes us into the challenging world of nomadic pastoralists. After defining who they are, locating where they live, calculating their numbers and identifying common misconceptions held about these people, Hunter suggests time-tested solutions he has observed over his many years of service among these difficult to reach people.

One of the most under studied areas in cross-cultural ministries, yet applicable to all because of the use of teaching in all (oral or written), is how people learn. John Wilson writes a very helpful

article on how people learn in oral societies and how they pass on learning to others. I investigate the socialization process of a tribal people—the Antipolo Amduntug Ifugao of the Philippines—and indicate basic guidelines for curriculum development.

Many issues remain to be investigated among tribal and nomad peoples, demanding further studies. My friend Tom Headland, a nomadic people specialist, contents that most tribal people are becoming peasants, who are the poorest people in the world. How should this backward step into poverty instruct present ministries? Did you know: About 65% of the native people in the four Western provinces of Canada live in the 15 largest cities.

The urban-rural connection is another issue that requires immediate attention. Other aspects of the challenge could include: TEE (Theological Education by Extension), development and dependency, spiritual warfare, training expatriate and nationals for tribal and nomadic ministries, secularization among tribal and nomadic peoples and partnerships between expatriate and national churches and agencies.

As a word of encouragement to all who minister among tribal peoples, may we see what John saw: “a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe.” (Rev. 7:9). Holy Spirit driven efforts will result in new churches all over the tribal nomadic world and God’s reign over spiritual territory, formerly lost because of individual, collective and structural sins, will be regained. May we all understand that God “...will not forget how hard you have worked for Him.”

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*November 1997
El Paso, Texas*