

Editorial Reflections

A New Strategy: Why Didn't We Think of it Before?

How do missionaries figure out what to do? In the history of missions there have been huge changes.

The famous World Missionary Conference of 1910 in Edinburgh, Scotland was not only built upon profound and serious pre-conference studies, it issued into extensive post-conference research as well. Nothing similar had ever been done before, or has happened since. One of its major contributions was its hefty 10 x 14 inch, approximately 200 page atlas of missionary work, *A Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions*. The proposed atlas for 2010 is currently titled *Atlas of Global Christianity*. This sequel is being produced for the 2010 Centennial meeting sponsored by the University of Edinburgh, but 1910's many other documents will possibly never again be matched.

In all of that flurry of serious study, however, the basic idea was to make (individual) disciples in all countries. It was not clear in 1910 that the Bible speaks mainly of peoples, not countries. Nor was it clear that the Great Commission does not speak of making disciples of *individuals*, but of whole peoples. I have not checked this, but I don't think they emphasized the fact that the Great Commission does not merely say "teaching ... all that I have taught you," but is, in a sense, a restatement of the "Thy will be done *on earth*" part of the Lord's Prayer: "teaching them *to obey* all that I have commanded you."

For our purposes here, however, it is enough to note that in 1910 they talked mostly about winning *individuals in countries*, rather than focusing on *peoples* where there had not yet been a missiological breakthrough. Thus, for example, all of Latin America was not considered a mission field because in each country there were already Catholics. Not even the 20 million indigenous peoples in Latin America surfaced in their country-by-country perspective.

Meanwhile, we have seen in the last 50 years an enormous shift of mission strategy from going beyond winning individuals to making sure those individuals are safely members of an accountable Christian fellowship. We talk more often of "church planting" than mere evangelism. In the past 25 years, we have seen a huge shift from countries to peoples, and specifically "unreached" peoples.

It is time to go further? *I would like to introduce a new term: Global Peoples*. This is not totally new, of course, but there has been a huge and totally unprecedented volcanic blast of global migration that has scattered the members of literally thousands of peoples all over the earth.

I contend that it is no longer entirely reasonable to think of the Samoans being in Samoa or the Swazis being in Swaziland, since in both cases there are more of them outside their homeland than there are left where they started. But even where the majority of the members of a people are still at home, a large proportion may have migrated elsewhere. Take the case of the Turkmen. While they are still mainly in Turkmenistan, it is nevertheless true that almost half of them are scattered in thirteen other countries.

This fairly obvious insight has more than one value. It may be easier to get to some places than the homeland of a people. Also, members of a people may be more easily reached where they are no longer settled and self-confident about their way of life. Of course, in many cases the migrated group, especially if cut off from its source for many years, will have little relation to its roots. Even so, the globalized members of a group may still have an inherent advantage in going back with the Gospel to the place where they originated.

How does this insight change things? It means that when a missionary, church or mission agency picks a people within which to work, it would be wise to take seriously that group's various locations and, if necessary, regard it as a "Global People."

This "Global People" perspective is also one of the things that underlies the rationale for the formation of the Global Network of Mission Structures, and now for the plans of the GNMS, the Third World Mission Association and the Asia Mission Association to jointly sponsor in 2010 another meeting structured like the 1910 meeting, namely one made up of delegates sent by mission agencies from all over the world. More on that meeting later. It is not the same as the small conference of scholars which will meet in Edinburgh, nor is it the Lausanne Committee meeting which will, as usual, focus on envisioning church leaders. **IJFM**