

THE UNFINISHED TASK: A new perspective

Suppose the dam breaks twenty miles up the valley from your small hometown of ten thousand people. A wall of water fifty feet high is surging down the canyon.

You have just thirty minutes to warn as many people as possible to scramble up the valley slope out of danger. But evacuating ten thousand people in thirty minutes is not going to be easy. What would you do?

When the dam breaks, it's 2 p.m. and most of the kids are in school. There are three schools in town. All the kids can walk home in ten minutes, run home in three.

Would it make sense to start down the block punching doorbells, warning people of the coming disaster? You'd use up your thirty minutes before you covered three blocks.

No, since almost half the town is in school, you phone each school. The kids run home, fan out down the blocks. You phone the four major factories. You phone the local radio station, etc. It's not very far to the valley slope and safety.

REACHING EVERY PEOPLE

Trying to contact ten thousand people one at a time would be an overwhelming task compared to the penetration of the key groups, within which communication is nearly automatic. That's the way Dawson Trotman used to reason—and by the end of World War II The Navigators had a man on every ship of the Navy. It was always a cause for rejoicing when some trained disciples were transferred

to a ship where there were no witnessing believers. What a strategist!

Even before the war ended Daws envisioned workers in every country. And he responded to Cameron Townsend of the Wycliffe Bible Translators who called for laborers to work in every tribal group. Why? Because you have to penetrate every *group* if you want to reach every *individual*. Thus "a church for every people" is the most efficient way to attain "a church for every person."

In recent years this, "new," biblical view of reaching the world has swept the world of missions. And what a difference it has made! I once was awed by the enormity of the unfinished task. My outlook has been transformed into an optimistic view of the *smallness* of the task that remains.

The simple fact is that we don't have to reach out to every *person* in the world if we concentrate on penetrating every *people group* in the world. Penetrating every group with the gospel is admittedly not quite as easy as in our broken dam illustration—phoning three local schools where the person answering speaks your language. However, establishing a church for every people by the year 2000 is definitely possible!

SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH NEW GLASSES

To see the world in startlingly new and optimistic terms, we first have to put on a new set of glasses. The old glasses showed us only huge countries and countless millions of individuals. Through the new glasses, we look at how

A new way of looking at the unevangelized world gives us hope that we can fulfill the Great Commission by the year 2000!

The World in Mission Perspective

by Ralph Winter

many *groups* still need to be penetrated—a much easier target. We are only thirteen years away from the year 2000, and an astonishing and hopeful picture is emerging. Let's take a quick but cautious look.

The first thing we see through our new glasses is that the Bible has always talked about nations. But while we equate nations with countries, virtually all occurrences of the word *nation* in the Bible refer to ethnic groups that are either smaller than a country or overflow into other countries. These smaller groups may be split by country boundaries or, due to migration, may stretch across oceans. For example, the Basques are divided between France and Spain, and the Masai live in both Kenya and Tanzania. The largest concentration of Mexicans outside of Mexico City is in Los Angeles. Tens of thousands of Gujaratis have emigrated from India to Vancouver.

The second thing our new glasses let us see is the difference between a "reached people" and an "unreached people." A near consensus today among missions leaders regards the distinguishing factor in whether or not a people is reached to be the presence or the absence within the group of a vital, ongoing witness.¹ The essential concern of this definition is that *in a reached group, every person has the opportunity to be reached, to say yes, not only to the Lord but to an accountable relationship within the Body of Christ.*

This definition is not always easy to apply. For example, the *Operation World* guide to daily prayer reports that there are 700,000 Italian university students who do not acknowledge the lordship of Christ. Yet they all have the Bible in their language. Any of them truly seeking God could find Him very quickly compared to a person in whose social sphere there is no Bible, no church, no

gospel. The latter kind of group is more clearly an unreached people than the former, since the Great Commission does not command us to *convert* everyone, but to *confront* everyone—to make it possible for everyone in the world to respond.

Using these new glasses, then, allows us (1) to assign every person in the world to the group in which he is most likely to be reached, and (2) to divide the approximately 24,000 people groups of the world into reached groups and unreached groups. The roughly 7,000 reached groups tend to be larger than the remaining unreached groups, and about half the world's population is part of these reached groups. The other half of the world's population is walled off into approximately 17,000 relatively smaller groups that are unreached.

REACHED GROUPS: THREE KINDS OF PEOPLE

What kinds of people are in the average "reached" group? According to the definition, there are evangelizing fellowships of believers within these groups, and so we know there are committed Christians. We can also expect to find nominal Christians, who are not actively sharing their faith, and nonChristians, who are objects of evangelism. The Christians do not have to learn a foreign language to reach these nonChristians, who can be won by "E-1" evangelism: outreach to people in the same cultural sphere as the Church (e.g., Mexicans to Mexicans, Yuppies to Yuppies).

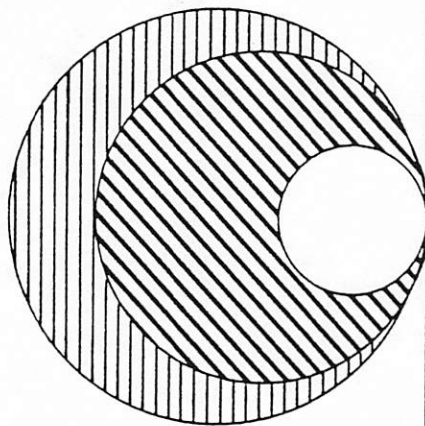
UNREACHED GROUPS: THREE KINDS OF PEOPLE

Unreached peoples are defined as groups that do not have a vital, internal witness. These groups are sufficiently different from believers in reached groups to make normal evangelistic methods ineffective.

Some are similar enough to be won by "E-2" evangelism: cross-cultural ministry that can be built on some cultural overlap (for example, evangelism done by an Anglo-American missionary to Spain, since English and Spanish are similar). Other groups are substantially different from any reached group and require "E-2.5" missionary evangelism, which is more difficult (an Anglo-American witnessing to a Russian would have greater difficulty, even though both speak Indo-European languages, because other cultural differences are far greater than those between America and Spain). Still other groups require an "E-3" approach: evangelism from one culture to a totally

Reached Peoples

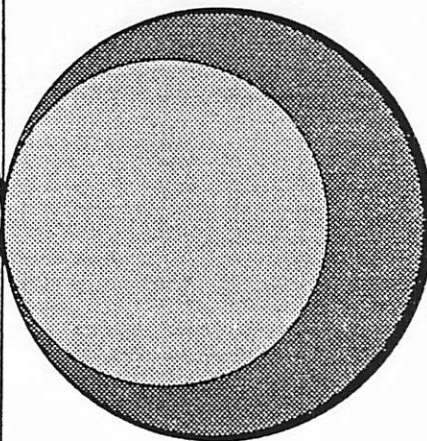
- Committed Christians
- ◐ Nominal Christians
- ◑ NonChristians culturally near a church within their group



7,000 Reached Peoples

Unreached Peoples

- P2: NonChristians who are in a people group without a church, but who are culturally similar to another people group having a church.
- P2.5: Non-Christians for whom the culturally nearest church is in a quite different people group.
- P3: NonChristians for whom the culturally nearest church is in a totally different people group.



17,000 Unreached Peoples

different one, such as an exchange between an Anglo-American and a Zulu tribesman.

What does the world look like with these new glasses?

A NEW VIEW OF THE WORLD

First, let's look at the whole world. On page 13 you see two large circles with a vertical line between them. Roughly half the world is on each side of the dividing line. The most crucial aspect of this and all the other diagrams is the meaning of that line.

On the right side, you see the half of the world made up of unreached people groups. These are isolated by ethnic and social distinctives from any group where there is a vital witness. *The individuals in these approximately 17,000 unreached groups are effectively walled off from the gospel by the absence within their society of an indigenous, evangelizing church movement.*

On the left you see the other half of the world, where the gospel is well-established. Not all of the individuals are believers, but all of the groups have been penetrated. Again, my very rough estimate of the number of these "reached" groups is 7,000.

In the left circle, the pure white area represents evangelizing Christians. The next larger circle, with slanted lines, represents the rest of those who call themselves Christians, whether they truly know the Lord or not. The additional space in the outer circle represents those who are not Christians, but whose social sphere has been penetrated by a vital Christian church. (The diagram on page 15 gives more detailed information about the relatively reached blocs of people.)

Looking back to the huge mass of individuals who live within the unreached groups on the right, we also find three kinds of groups. It is encouraging to realize how large a proportion is very similar in culture to groups on the left, where there is already a church! Such groups, as we have already observed, can be penetrated by relatively easy E-2 missionary work. The next largest area consists of the groups that have greater differences, and are in the more difficult E-2.5 category. And finally, the darkest and most perplexing challenge are those who can only be reached by E-3 mission work.

Note how small the black, E-3 area now is! We are truly getting close to the time when "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations," setting

the stage for Christ's return (Mt. 24:14). *Not only is less than half the world today walled off from the gospel, but only a very small proportion is isolated by the most difficult barriers. This is anything but a hopeless picture!*

THE UNREACHED BLOCS

Let's see how these proportions appear in the major blocs that contain most of the unreached peoples. (See the diagram, "Relatively Unreached Blocs" at the right.)

The Tribal World. Perhaps the toughest of all missionary tasks left in the world today is the tribal world. It is not the most challenging task in terms of sheer numbers of people—notice how relatively small the circles are—but the tribal groups contain the largest number of people groups to reach. The tribal world is also toughest in terms of the number of groups requiring the most difficult, E-3 type of missionary activity (note the relatively large size of the solid black area).

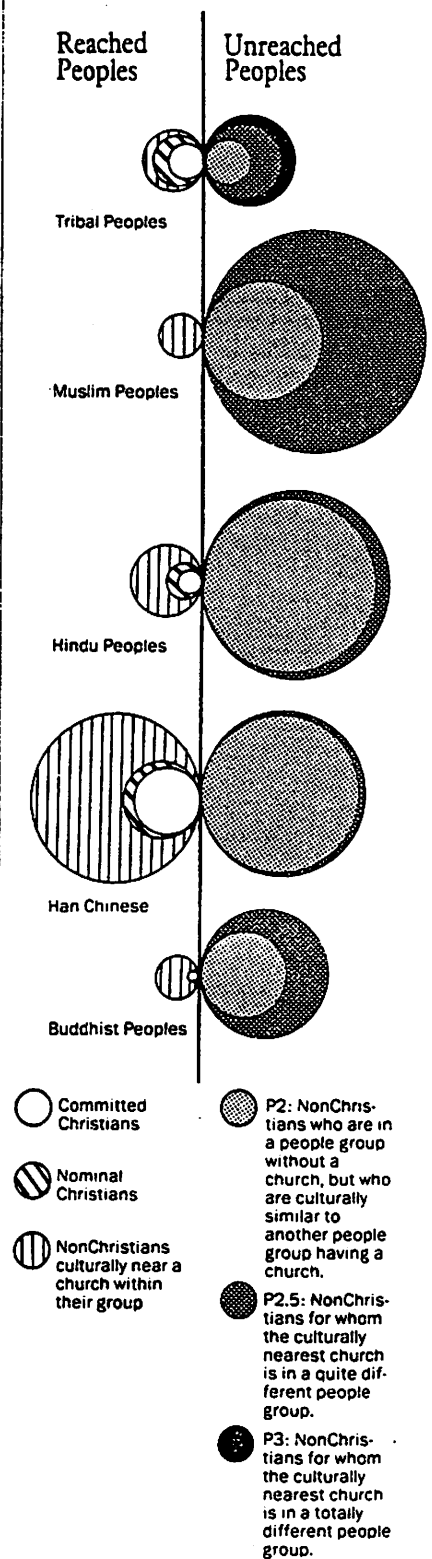
Because the tribal world presents such a challenge, not many missions work with these groups. Fortunately, the Wycliffe Bible Translators stand sturdily "in the gap" with the largest and most technologically skilled group of workers: more than 5,000 missionaries recruited from 27 sending countries. But Wycliffe reports that there are still 723 tribes who need Bible translation.

The Muslim World. More than four times as many human beings are walled off within the 4,000 unpenetrated Muslim groups. These are much larger groups than the tribal groups, and there are far fewer missionaries working in these groups than in any other major sphere. Some estimate that there are more missionaries in the state of Alaska than in the entire Muslim world of 900 million people, which is more than 3,000 times as populous.

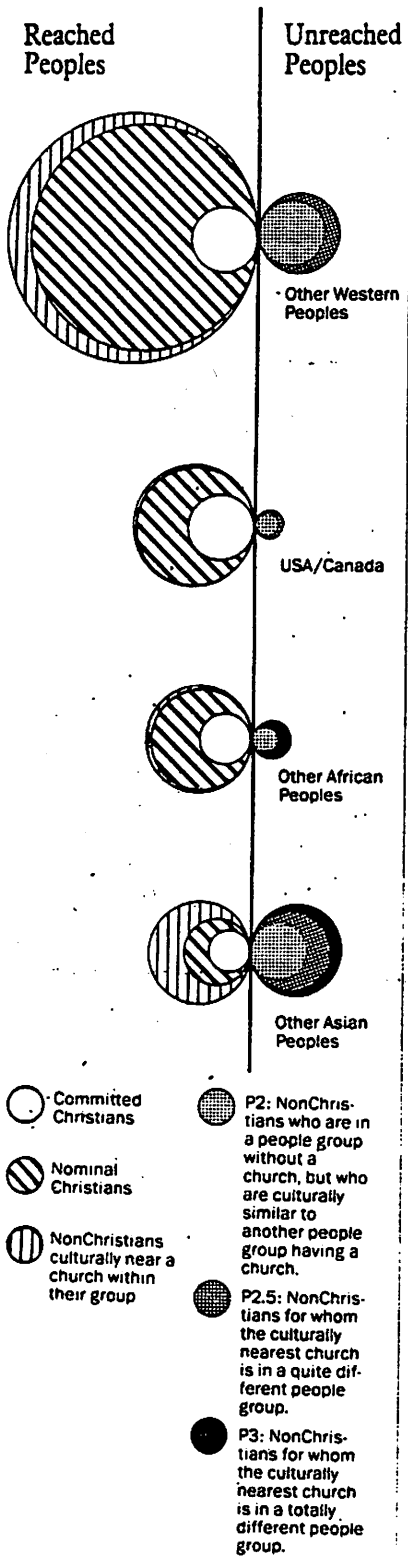
One reason for this appalling disproportion is that many think the Muslim world is impossibly difficult to reach. Some missionaries, by condemning the centuries-old and in many respects magnificent Muslim cultural tradition, have handicapped themselves unnecessarily. Paul was willing to be a "Greek to the Greeks." Can we learn how to be a "Muslim to the Muslims"? To their credit, many missionary agencies are beginning to take a new look at the Muslim world.

Why shouldn't it be easier to reach Muslims, who have a profound respect for Jesus, than Hindus, who don't even conceive of One God? And it is a most

Relatively Unreached Blocs



Relatively Reached Blocs



unenlightened generalization that all Muslims "resist" the gospel. We understand that there are one hundred areas of the Muslim world in which Christians can witness without opposition. Why should God open more doors if we don't tackle the opportunities we have?

The Hindu World. There are many more Muslims than Hindus, but the Hindus are geographically concentrated in what is becoming a fortress against outsiders: India. Worse still, unlike Muslims, they have no concept of One God, and they do not revere the Bible. Yet the impact of the gospel in India has already been enormous, significantly and profoundly challenging and changing the face of Hinduism itself. Due to the impact of the gospel, the Hindu caste system has been outlawed, at least in principle. Even secular Hindu writers admit to the enormous influence of the Christian hospitals and schools that have been the hallmark of missions.

Furthermore, there is a powerful, living church in India today. The largest mission agency in India, The Friends Missionary Prayer Band, was founded by Indians in South India. Northeast India is almost entirely tribal, and has the highest percentage of evangelical Christians of any political territory on the globe. Neither South Indians nor Northeast Indians need passports to go to the vast, virtually untouched northern region, a huge diamond-shaped area constituting the most densely nonChristian major bloc in the world today.

Much of India has seen the transforming power of the gospel precisely because 90 percent of Indian Christians come from the oppressed classes of society: The impact of a new hope within their midst is all the more obvious. Some observers say that if the middle classes of Indian society were able to join a church made up of people of their own group, about one quarter of the country would convert to Christianity almost overnight. Some missions are trying to trigger new work on these middle levels.

The Han Chinese. Only a few years ago mainland China was closed. Even Christian scholars were writing books about the great failure of the missionaries in China. The ten-year "Cultural Revolution" was intended to be the final rooting out of the Christian movement. Ironically, it led to the largest surge of Christianity in Chinese history. Thousands of pastors' wives spread west across the country, taking the gospel with them, when their husbands were imprisoned. As Communist China gradually

opened its doors to the West, we learned that Christianity had not died out after the missionaries were expelled. Despite persecution, the Church in China has continued to multiply until careful estimates approach 50 million believers there today. Some parts of China that were 3 percent Christian when the Communists took over are now more than 80 percent Christian.

An ethnic group known as the Han Chinese encompasses nearly 90 percent of the population of Communist China. Approximately 1,000 Han Chinese people groups are believed to be penetrated. Roughly 2,000 smaller groups are not yet reached, but they contain fewer than half of the 930 million Han Chinese. (The approximately 100 million Chinese citizens who are not Han Chinese are grouped with tribal and other blocs diagrammed here.)

Notice how very different the proportions in the Han Chinese circle diagrams are from those of the other major blocs of unreached peoples. More than half the Chinese are now within the range of the gospel.

The Han Chinese constitute the largest bloc of human beings in the world. No group anywhere near its size has been so extensively reached. Experts estimate at least 50,000 house churches are active in China. The groundswell of faith inside China is already a momentous, irreversible movement. Furthermore, 4,000 additional evangelical Chinese churches are scattered all over the globe. Their faith can spread not only to the Chinese throughout the world but to many other unreached peoples in the years to come.

The Buddhists. In Buddhist countries the progress of the gospel has been slow. Often, as in Burma and Thailand, missionaries have had greater success with the tribal peoples than with Buddhists. In Japan, less than one half of one percent of the population are church members.

Buddhism, a reform movement of Hinduism that discarded most of its barbaric practices, is the predominant religion in Japan. Just as Americans have adopted many Christian values, giving them false confidence and stronger defenses against the gospel, the Buddhists are content with their religion. Thus, we cannot discard all values within that tradition and expect to be accepted or heard.

Perhaps the Christian movement has not yet taken on a form that is sufficiently indigenous to attract adherents

to Buddhism. In any case, the way to reach large numbers of Buddhists for Christ remains an unresolved problem.

THE YEAR 2000

We cannot predict when our Lord will return. However, everything we know about the unfinished task would lead us to believe in the feasibility of *preparing* for His coming—completing the task of evangelizing every nation—by the year 2,000!

At this time, the vast majority of all mission efforts are focused on the 7,000 reached groups, the nominal Christians and the nonChristians who live within the range of the church. Yet these existing efforts are in a strategic position to promote new mission outreach by national Christians. We can count 150 evangelical congregations around the world for every group yet to be reached. *If we accept the missionary challenge, Christ's Great Commission can be ful-*

filled within the next thirteen years!

How can we help it happen? We must acknowledge that we cannot let up in the ongoing "war against the darkness of this earth." Of all the saints in history and in the world today, Americans are in many ways the most blessed. Thus we need to be most wary of blithely assuming that we are simply to enjoy the blessings of God rather than joyously and determinedly passing them on to the remaining peoples of the earth.

We are still in a war. We must acknowledge that no matter how our neighbors live, for Christ's blood-bought followers, anything other than a wartime lifestyle is unconscionable. Not just servicemen, but every civilian must be involved. Many wholesome pursuits, reasonable in peacetime, become criminal in time of war.

We must choose this day whether we will hide our eyes from the need and close our ears to the call or whether we

will tackle with new decisiveness, mixed with humility and devotion, the unchanging command of a faithful God. To hold back now will lead to misery, guilt, and failure. The other choice leads through new open doors into the most spectacular mission challenge any generation in human history has ever faced.

Rub your eyes, awakened to the magnificent reality of God's mighty acts in our time. You'll develop a whole new agenda, a new set of heroes, a new affection for the things of God as you begin to move into the arena of the final countdown of history.

Note

1. Harvey Conn, ed., "The Development of the Concept," *Reaching the Unreached* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984), p.36.

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Hope and the Great Commission *by Chuck Steen*

When God appeared to Abraham before he departed for the promised land, He revealed that through Abraham's seed every group of people on earth would ultimately be blessed. The Apostle Paul interpreted this statement as a promise pointing to God's eternal purpose to draw to Himself members of every people through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:8,16).

This was the thrust of Jesus' last words to His disciples, and through them to us, before He ascended to heaven. The great responsibility—and privilege—of being God's agents in this world rests on us (Mt. 28:19).

Though the world's population has surpassed five billion, and roughly half of those people have never even heard the name of Jesus Christ, the situation is not hopeless! In God's great revelation, John saw "a great multitude which no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). This is the Great Commission fulfilled!

The final score is posted, the armistice is signed—even though the game is in progress and the war is still being fought. We've won! The question now is, What part will you and I have in this great victory? Is what we're doing making any eternal difference?

In the parable of the talents (Lk. 19:11-27), Jesus described a prince who committed some of his resources to his

servants to be used during his absence. Upon returning as king, he required an account of their stewardship. Two who multiplied their resources were commended and granted further responsibility in the kingdom. The one who simply hid his was condemned and lost what he had.

The Lord was not concerned with the amount of gain, only that the resources were wisely invested for His benefit. We may view our contributions as meager. But *any* investment will be rewarded by the King when He returns. Paul exhorts us to "stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

God created each of us with a particular personality, gifts, and abilities. He also placed each of us where He wants us in His body. Yet many of us become insecure when we look at the more "successful" ministries of others. How can we avoid comparison and rejoice in the work and position God has given to us?

1. *Reflect on the good things God has done in your life.* Throughout the Bible, we're reminded of the serious dangers of forgetting God's work in our lives. Foremost is our redemption in Christ. If God were never to do anything again on our behalf, we would still have every reason to be eternally grateful. Think about other experiences of how God has worked

in and through you in the past, and praise Him.

2. *Accept your part in God's purpose for the world.* Involvement in Christ's command to make disciples is not optional. To not participate is to disobey. At the same time, the Body of Christ is comprised of individuals uniquely created and fitted together. We're a team. When one part is hurting or missing, the entire body feels the injury or loss. You have a role to play in God's plan to redeem the world for His glory!

3. *Become equipped in the basic skills of disciplinemaking.* In addition to knowing how to walk with the Lord ourselves, we need to have a grasp on how to express the gospel clearly and how to help others grow in Christ so they too will be effective in their outreach.

Even when our efforts for the Kingdom seem to fail, our contributions will not be lost. We may be able to identify with the prophet Isaiah when he wrote, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing" (Is. 49:4). But the rest of his statement contains a glorious truth: "Yet what is due me is in the LORD'S hand, and my reward is with my God." Hope says that the promise of God alone is satisfactory. I am free to be obedient knowing that God's gracious hand holds with a sure grip all that is due me.

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