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LET'S GET SERIOUS ABOUT THE THREE BILLION

by Dr. Donald McGavran

In the January, 1977, issue of the *International Review of Missions*, Rev. Noberto Saracco has a luminous paragraph:

The reason there is so much talk about the Pentecostal Movement is not due to its emphasis on charismatic manifestations, nor to divine healing, but to its amazing growth in the seventy-five years of its existence. . . . Evangelism occupies a central place in the ministry of the Pentecostal churches. The other manifestations revolve around it.

The Pentecostals have grown from nothing in 1905 to more than twenty-five million in 1977, not primarily by speaking in tongues, practicing divine healing, serving the poor or conducting colorful worship services. They have grown because they have made telling good news to those who have not heard absolutely central to their life. They have done this intending and praying that hearers accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and become responsible members of His Church. They have gotten serious about the evangelization of the three billion.

Church Growth Bulletin invites missionary societies, missions, congregations and denominations to get serious about the three billion¹ who have yet to believe on Jesus Christ.

Getting serious involves at least the following six steps. First, we must have a *clear statement that discipling every tribe and tongue and class and segment of society is our basic purpose*. We must turn from wide, fuzzy definitions of mission which include everything that God wants done. Mission must be defined—as classical mission always has been—as calling the lost, all three billion of them, from death to life through belief on Jesus Christ.

Second, *we must set challenging long range goals which are closely geared to that essential purpose*. Tactical targets will change; but the strategic goals must remain locked into the essential purpose.

Third, *we must list the priorities* the goals require. Some missions drown in an ocean of good deeds, and we must avoid drowning. Hard headed thinking as to what

we have to do first and second and third in order to reach our true goals will give us our priorities. "What few things will really help us reach our long range goals?" is the question we must ask.

Fourth, *we must allocate resources according to opportunities for growth.* An executive, The Rev. Bruce Johnson, recently wrote, "Unless the treasury is locked into the strategy of mission, there is no strategy. Without significant financial commitment, a strategy, no matter how brilliantly conceived and theologically defended, is only fiction." That sentence should be burned into the consciousness of every Church and Mission around the world. We cannot get serious about the evangelization of the world by piling up words and proposing beautifully stated strategies. By themselves, they are only fictions. If we are to get serious about world evangelization, we must commit substantial resources to it.

Fifth, *we must concentrate effort on the few things that really advance the discipling of the multitudes.* Let us describe honestly what our church or mission is now spending its money for—and then evaluate these many good things in the light of our central purpose.

Sixth, since Christian mission is carried on in a rapidly changing world, *we must continually review and revise in the light of current feedback.* The degree to which world evangelization has actually been accomplished in *each* of the multitudinous homogeneous units which make up mankind must be noted *every year*, and used to guide mission *in each unit.*

In this issue, Ralph Winter and George Peters write effectively of the missiology now seizing the minds of God's obedient servants as they contemplate the three billion. We commend these hard hitting articles to our readers. We also include an attractive story by Robert Skivington who asked, "What would it mean for the Conservative Baptists to get really serious about the three million largely unreached Filipinos living in Eastern Mindanao?" In answer, his board ordered a scientific survey of Eastern Mindanao from the point of view of churching its unreached multitudes, and sent Skivington there as the first of a large team. Skivington tells the story well. There are thousands of "Eastern Mindanaos" in the world. New teams operating on the basis of scientific surveys from the point of view of churching unchurched multitudes are often the first step. Good reading lies ahead!

LET'S GET SERIOUS ABOUT THE THREE BILLION!

'At the time of the International Congress on World Evangelization, the number of non-Christians stood at about 2.7 billion. The figure has now risen to about 2.8 billion and is on the way to 3 billion. We use the term "three billion" to speak of these masses still outside of Jesus Christ.

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WHO ARE THE THREE BILLION?

by Dr. Ralph D. Winter

As we prepare to confront the future, no matter what else we do we must 1) sum up our *progress to the present*, and 2) evaluate our *program in the present*. The first leads us to an awesome awareness of the task as yet unfinished, that is, the NEED. The second leads us to an impressive list of OBSTACLES to the meeting of that need. These two together—the massive NEED and the momentous OBSTACLES—constitute, in my opinion, the grounds for a *major and imperative new thrust in missions*, something we must immediately plan and pray for.

Meanwhile, let us be asking ourselves whether what we are now doing is remotely close to what God can legitimately expect of evangelical forces in America today. Having just gone through all this material myself, I am deeply moved by the conviction that we must begin to talk in terms of actually *doubling all that we are doing now*. Nothing less will suffice. Let me try to show the basis on which I speak.

For me, the Great Commission is most significantly stated in three key texts: in Genesis 12:2,3; Isaiah 49:6, and Matthew 28:19,20. In all three cases the entire world, all the families of mankind—whether you call them nations, tribes, tongues, peoples, or whatever—are clearly in the picture.

Two years ago at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, I gave an address, the central thesis of which can be summed up in a single sentence: *While there are 2.7 billion people who do not even call themselves Christians, over ¾ of them are beyond the range of any kind of normal (or "cultural-near-neighbor") evangelization by existing churches.* By "normal evangelism" I do not mean what is normally now being done; I refer as well to all of those various kinds of evangelism which believers in presently existing congregations *would be capable of launching* without surmounting unusual barriers of language and social structure.

This "normal evangelism has also been called "cultural-near-neighbor," as above, or monocultural evangelization, or E-O and E-1 evangelism, and surely must continue and must even be vastly expanded. Let us distinguish, however, between E-O evangelism (winning *nominal Christians* to Christ) and E-1 evangelism (winning people *who do not call themselves Christians* but who are in the same secular sphere as the church). Don't look now, but most evangelism is not even E-1, it is only E-O evangelism among nominal Christians. The regional committees of the Lausanne Congress are hoping valiently to expand at least to E-O and E-1 evangelism.

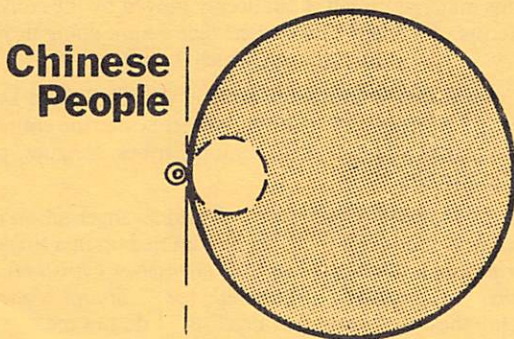
But according to the analysis I presented two years ago, even assuming a great spiritual evangelizing revival were to sweep every existing congregation in the world, those congregations reaching out in normal evangelism could win all nominal Christians plus all people in their cultural sphere, but still be stopped short by cultural barriers before reaching ¾ of the non-Christians in the world today; *from that point on*, cross cultural, E-2 and E-3 mission agencies would still be necessary. This awesome fact was the main point I was attempting to communicate two years ago.

In the providence of God *The mission society* (whether denominational or interdenominational) is the only kind of organization which 2000 years of Christian experience assures us is able effectively to go *beyond* normal E-O or E-1, mono-cultural

evangelism and reach cross-culturally, by E-2 and E-3 methods, to the vast proportion of those who do not yet know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

The first diagram is a fairly exact scale drawing representing the largest racial and cultural block of humanity—the Chinese. The large circle represents those Chinese who do not consider themselves Christians. The small circle outside the large circle represents the number of Chinese who consider themselves Christians. The sphere within the small circle represents an estimate of the number of truly committed Chinese Christians—by this I do not mean, for example, all who call themselves evangelicals, but rather truly committed believers, specifically *those Christians on whom we may count to help finish the task*.

The first impression this diagram of the Chinese gives us is the vastness of the unfinished task. But a startling second message comes through to us when we note that the dotted circle within the large circle represents the limited number of Chinese whom even cross-cultural evangelists are able to get at during this present epoch. That is, the dotted



circle represents the 40 million "overseas" Chinese, outside mainland China. But even if China were open, there is in Chinese society an amazing mosaic of sub-cultural barriers which would put most Chinese beyond the reach of normal evangelism as we have defined it.

Another large bloc of non-Christians is the Hindu. In this next diagram the large circle again represents non-Christians, this time the number of Hindus who do not consider themselves Christians. Note that here as in the case of the Chinese I am referring to a culturally, not racially or religiously, defined group. Thus we may say that the small circle outside the large circle represents the number of people in Hindu cultural background who consider themselves Christians. Note carefully that this Christian circle is proportionately larger than in the case of the Chinese. The sphere within the small circle (the committed Christians) is larger too, yet it is smaller relative to the total number of Christians, that is, there more nominal Christians of Hindu background both absolutely and relatively.

Once more, if we are sensitive at all to the heart of God, we must be stunned and crushed by the vastness of the unreached populations within this major bloc of mankind. But the second message is still more shocking: it is the stubborn fact not often recognized that a relatively small number of people in India are reachable by normal evangelistic efforts on the part of even the Christians in India. These reachable people,

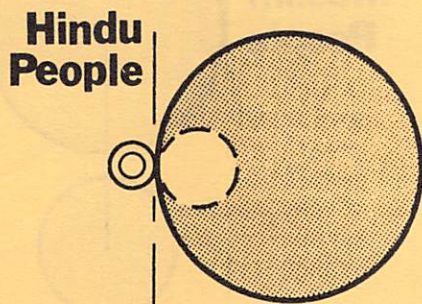
represented by the dotted circle, are the Harijans—the remaining non-Christian peoples in the formerly “untouchable” category.

Here especially let me emphasize that by *normal* I do not mean what is now normally being done. A reliable—but staggering—report indicates that 98% of all current evangelistic efforts in India, whether missionary or national, are not even focused on non-Christians, but (as is true in the USA) are attempts of *believing* Christians to reach *nominal* Christians and bring them back into the vital fellowship of the church—that is, Christians of the solid sphere reaching nominal Christians in the doughnut-shaped space around them.

These are specifically *not* efforts to reach even the people in the dotted circle. But what a shame, because the dotted circle represents the number of non-Christians of Hindu culture *who are culturally approachable* by Christians, people with the same cultural traditions—shall we say caste?

On the one hand, then, Christians in India are not (with only rare exceptions) even *attempting* to win totally non-Christian people. But on the other hand, if the Christians of India did suddenly and strenuously reach out to every last person within their various cultural traditions, they would not even in that hypothetical case be able to win anyone outside of the circle with the dotted line unless, note, *unless* they made new beachheads by the utilization of what would substantially be traditional missionary techniques (involving the establishment of the kind of professional agencies capable of crossing seriously high cultural barriers).

At the risk of elaborating this point unnecessarily, let me be very sure what I am saying is clear. All countries have their caste systems. Sometimes the barriers are linguistic differences, economic differences or other types of cultural differences. The barriers of this type are almost always socially describable. They are not spiritual barriers. While the spiritual barriers are the same whether a nominal Christian becomes



committed to Christ or a total non-Christian becomes committed to Christ, the cultural barriers, where they exist, are always a stubborn technical problem *in addition*.

In India, as in many other countries, the vast bulk of Christians are found in a relatively small number of social groupings, and it is always a problem for them to cross the cultural barriers into other groups. For example, the most integrated of all Indian churches may well be the Church of South India, which embraces 100 different castes. Yet to this day 95% of its members derive from only five castes, all of which represent the Harijan or formerly “untouchable” category.

This, then is why we must urgently face the fact that special types of E-2 and E-3 cross-cultural evangelistic efforts will be necessary if any significant proportion of the

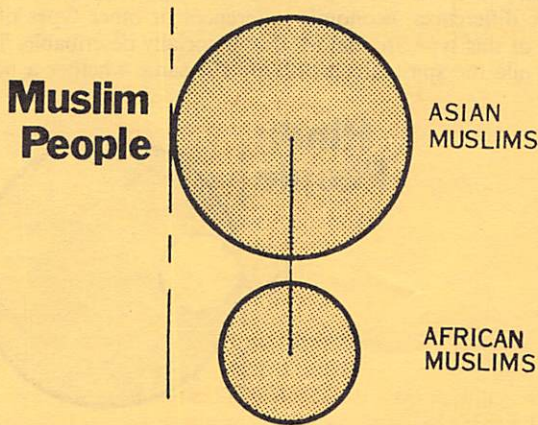
middle and higher castes are ever to be reached. This is why the dotted circle is disarmingly small in the case of India. Thus something different, decisively different, urgently more, must be done to reach the vast bulk of the Indians for Christ.

The third large non-Christian cultural tradition of mankind is pictured in this next diagram. Since there are huge numbers of Muslims both in Africa and Asia; we have used two circles to depict the non-Christians of Muslim cultural background. In this case a curious and tragic fact appears: there are not enough Christians of Muslim extraction that we can even depict them in a small circle as we did for the Chinese and the Hindus.

For one thing, a highly disturbing fact is that up to now in mission history we have either not *known* or have not been *able* to achieve the development of a "Muslims for Jesus" movement, anywhere, with one or two possible exceptions. On the one hand, we have all become accustomed to hearing about Jews for Jesus, and there are from 10 to 30 thousand such people in the United States—this despite the fact that they were brought up from infancy to react against the name of Jesus Christ.

The amazing difference on the other hand is that Muslims are brought up to revere Jesus highly. Their holy book, the Koran, technical scholars today point out actually elevates Jesus above Mohammed. But to date there are very few Muslims for Jesus.

We have now seen three major blocs of non-Christians, and in each case only a tiny proportion of the people in these blocs represent people whose social groupings would allow them easily to become part of (and also attract their friends to) any existing congregation of believers in Christ on the face of the earth. To sum up, normal



evangelism, even if effectively and fully launched from all present congregations, is totally inadequate to grapple with this major part of the unfinished task.

Now, once we have recognized the existence of these three major groups, the remaining, or "other" non-Christians in Asia represent (by contrast) only a mopping-up operation.

(Continued next issue.)

This article is adapted from the opening address at the October, 1976, IFMA/EFMA Executive Retreat, and is part of Chapter One of the new book Evangelical Missions Tomorrow (William Carey Library, Pasadena, 1977) which carries all the addresses given at the retreat. Dr. Winter's presentation of "Who Are the Three Billion" (the need) will be continued in the next issue of CGB. The remainder of the chapter on "obstacles" will not be printed in the Bulletin.)



At Last! Dramatic Middle Class Growth!	Donald L. Bubna
Who Are the Three Billion? Part II	Dr. Ralph Winter
Denomination Doubles in Four Months!	Al Brant

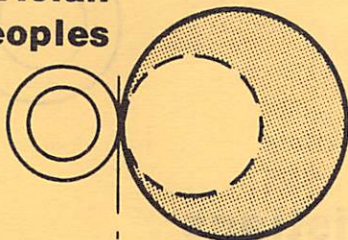
WHO ARE THE THREE BILLION? PART II

by Dr. Ralph Winter

Once we have recognized the existence of these three major groups (the Chinese, Hindus and Muslims), the remaining, or "other" non-Christians in Asia represent (by contrast) only a mopping-up operation.

The astonishing novelty in this diagram is the large number of Christians culturally related to the remaining non-Christians. The number of Christians is of a totally different magnitude and proportion than in the previous diagrams. As before, the sphere within the circle of Christians represents an estimate of the number of committed believers. This group also is vastly larger.

Other Asian Peoples

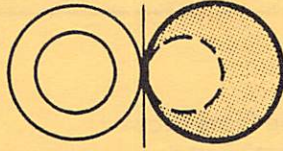


Who are the peoples in this catch-all group of "other" non-Christian Asians? There are, for example, 100 million Japanese. Are they all reachable by "normal" evangelism? Lest we exaggerate the number requiring cross-cultural evangelism, let us recall that while there are some fairly momentous cultural barriers to be crossed in the winning of all Japanese into the present variety of existing Japanese churches, such cultural barriers are in no way comparable to the barriers that prevent normal evangelism from even touching the vast bulk of the Hindus and Muslims.

Thus the dotted circle—people who *can* (even conceivably) be reached by normal evangelism—is very much larger and includes not only many Japanese but also many Buddhists for whom there are in fact viable Christian traditions nearby that do not present a major social obstacle to their affiliation. In this estimate we are certainly not *over* but *under* estimating the proportions of those who cannot be reached by normal (E-0 or E-1) evangelism.

Let us now move on to the last bloc of non-Christians outside of the Western world. We have already mentioned the non-Christian Muslims of Africa. This diagram shows

Other African Peoples

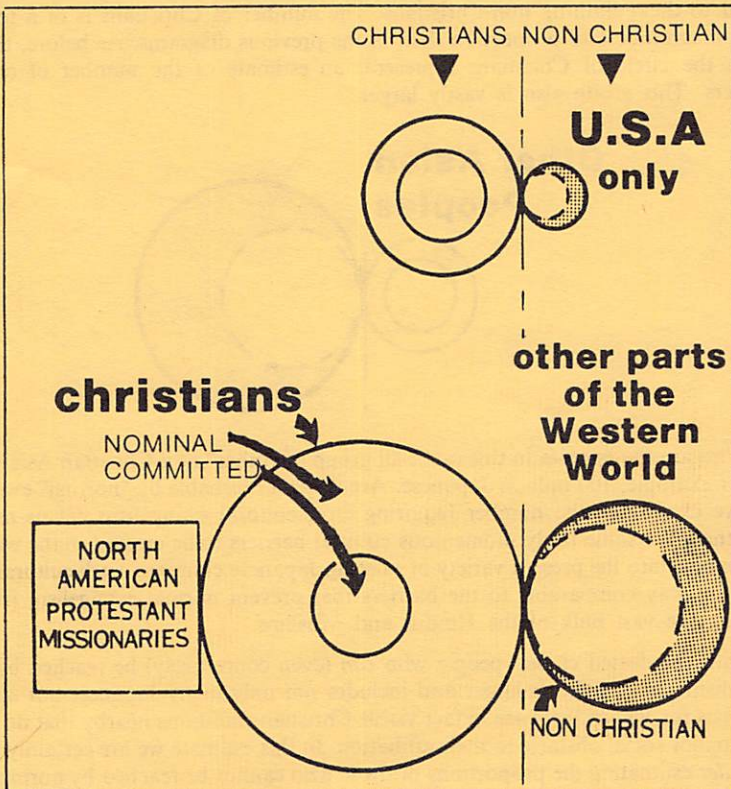


the non-Christians of Africa who are not Muslims. Recalling that Africa was only 3% Christian in 1900, we stand amazed and pleased that the number of Christians is getting close to being equal to the number of non-Christians who are not Muslims! The number of committed Christians is large too.

In view of these general contours for Asia and Africa, let us put them in a single chart and note the amazingly different proportions in the Western World. This diagram

WESTERN WORLD

(EUROPE, RUSSIA, AMERICAS, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND)
CHRISTIANS NON-CHRISTIAN



breaks the Western world down by isolating the population of the USA into a separate diagram. Since these circles are drawn on the same scale as before, we see immediately that the Western world contains most of the nominal Christians. We can verify by eye the fact that 85% of the nominal Christians are in the West while only a little over half of the committed Christians are in the West. It is even more obvious that the ratio of Christians to non-Christians is radically different in the Western world when compared to every area of Asia and Africa except non-Muslim Africa.

Here then are the hard facts that maintain the credence of that long useful adage that where there are 10 men at one end of a log and only one at the other, the priorities are obvious, especially if the ten men are at the smaller end of the log.

Fully to digest these diagrams can rightly absorb hours and hours of deep thought and earnest prayer. Here in scale drawing is the primary need, in terms of missionary strategy, in the world today.

However, before moving on, let us stop and recognize the following: 1) the great bulk of people on this planet are concentrated in Africa and Asia; 2) an even greater proportion of Africa and Asia (than the Western world) consists of peoples who do not consider themselves Christian; 3) the three largest cultural blocs of mankind—the Chinese, Hindus and Muslims—have only tiny Christian communities, if any at all, related to them; 4) in the case of China and India, only a very small proportion of the non-Christians are within normal evangelistic striking range of the existing Christians; and 5) despite the small number of Christians from within these large cultural traditions, their evangelistic efforts are mainly soaked up by the spiritual needs of the nominal belt that surrounds them. Once we size up the need in these terms, it must be clear that *the only effective answer to the major part of this need can come from specialized cross-cultural organizations of the type represented by a standard mission society, either local or foreign.*

The vast millions of people in the doughnut-shaped areas of the Western world, for example, absorb almost the entire energies of evangelism on the part of the committed Christians in those areas. It is safe to say that a high percentage of all the people being converted to Christ in the Western world have all along considered themselves Christian. Since dealing with nominal Christians is the kind of evangelism most Americans are acquainted with, it is not surprising that Americans who become involved in traditional foreign missions generally have a tough time figuring out how to do cross-cultural evangelism, and even if they do figure it out, have an even tougher time explaining to people back home how different pioneer missionary work is from the normal evangelism of cultural near-neighbors.

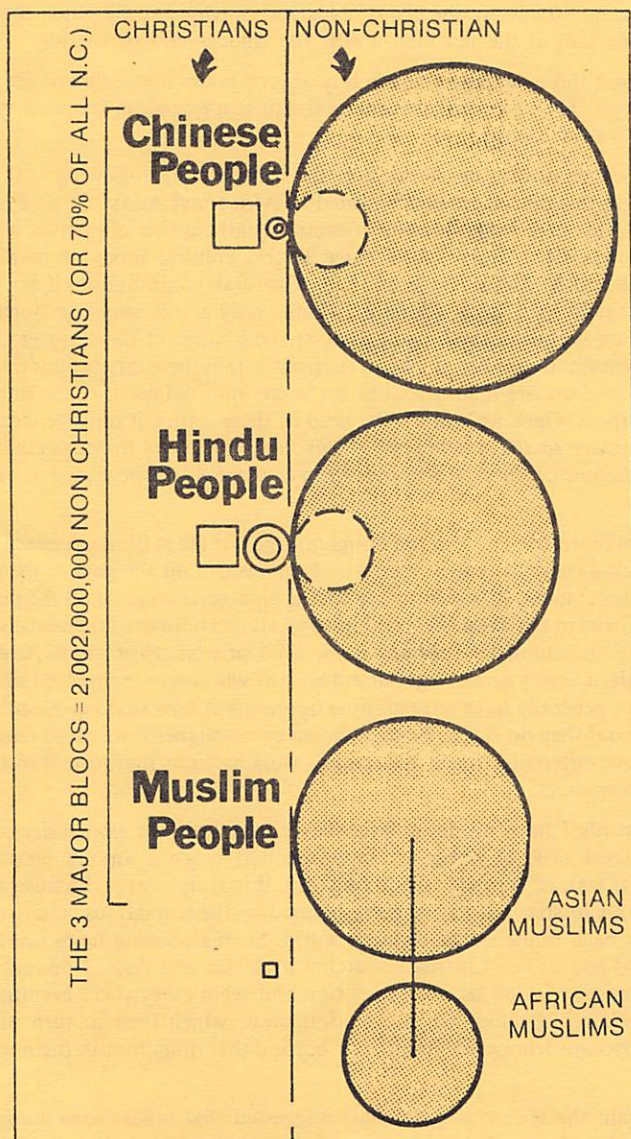
In these words I have no desire whatsoever to belittle the immensity of the commonly understood task of bringing about spiritual renewal among lifeless nominal Christians. This task of renewal is not only big, it is truly urgent, because world-wide outreach to non-Christians is considerably blunted by the scandalous behaviour of nominal Christians back home in the Western world. Such reasoning helps understand the similar nominal gap in the Christian churches in Africa and Asia. Nominal Christians emerge automatically in the second generation and seem everywhere eventually to ring the Christian church around like a soft doughnut, which then in turn prevents the committed Christians from even getting out beyond that doughnut to the non-Christian world.

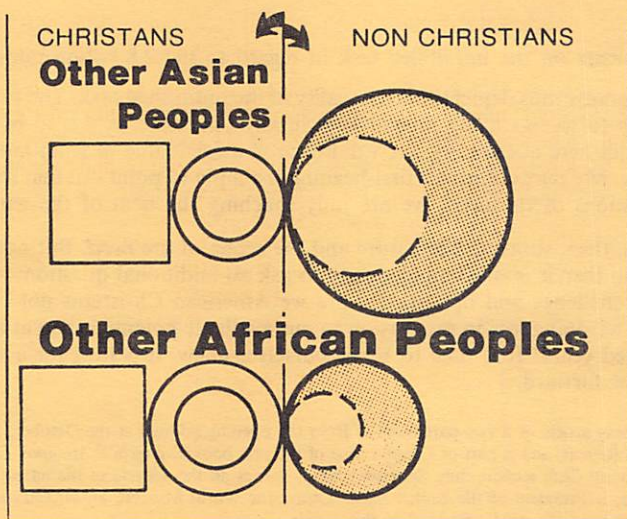
This is again the reason why we have suggested that unless something specific is done on the order of special organizations of the type represented by the mission soci-

eties, no truly effective outreach to totally non-Christian people is likely to be significantly strong. Christian groups, even those which are relatively highly committed, often tend to be so cozy that it takes special organizations for renewal even to shake them up and get them to witness to the nearby nominal Christians.

NON-WESTERN WORLD

(= ASIA, AFRICA)





Thus the blunt truth is that if you had to guess at the proportion of all the evangelizing energies of evangelicals around the world expended on the renewing of nominal Christians you would probably come up with something like 97%. Yet, nominal Christians, though numerous, are only about one-fourth as numerous as the total of nominal Christians and non-Christians. Why should the nominal one-fourth receive 97% of all evangelizing energies? Furthermore, it is incomparably more difficult to work cross-culturally: the larger job is not only larger but harder—unimaginably more difficult in regard to the prerequisites of special training and preparation required for any real success.

As a final element in this presentation of the *need*, let us consider the number of full-time missionaries who are working in the various areas of the world. I have useable data only for North American missionaries. (See the rectangles on Western World and Non-Western World.) If we were to use the same scale I have already used, the number of missionaries could not even be seen. Thus, while the family of circles on all these charts represents masses of people, the squares, on a completely different scale, represent proportionate numbers of North American missionaries.

This adds a whole new dimension requiring earnest and urgent prayer and reflection. Notice the relatively small number of missionaries at work with the Chinese and Hindus, the almost microscopic number who are working with Muslims, and the relatively huge numbers of missionaries working with “other Asians” and in non-Muslim Africa—exactly where most of the national Christians already are. As a result, it is not difficult to understand how it may be claimed that *the average missionary today is no more likely to be fulfilling a ministry directly among non-Christians than are his supporters back home.*

As a result, the front line evangelical missionary today may not be as extinct as the dodo, but is far less visible than the general practitioner in medicine. It is eminently fair to say that most present-day missionaries are specialists working in tasks other than cross-cultural evangelism among totally non-Christian people. We do well not to assume that this ought to be the case. This may be the welcome “new day” in relation to national churches, but it represents a massive, mainly tragic swerving away from the straightfor-

ward requirements on the unfulfilled task in regard to the 2.8 billion non-Christians.

These diagrams thus depict the stark reality of the unfinished task. The root problem is not as likely to be too many missionaries in any one place as it is to be too few in others. I am not here questioning the validity or strategic value of what most missionaries are doing. My purpose in this first heading is simply to point out that in relation to the major bastions of the need, we are only touching the hem of the garment.

All of this, then, sums up the nature and the scope of the *need*. But notice, if the need is the call, then it is our bounden duty to ask an additional question: why in this hour of great challenge and opportunity are we American Christians not heeding the call? Why are we doing less in proportion to our available potential than at any time in the last hundred years? It is time to bestir ourselves anew. It is time for a whole new, doubling thrust forward.

This concluding article of a two-part series is from the opening address at the October, 1976, IFMA/EFMA Executive Retreat, and is part of Chapter One of the new book *Evangelical Missions Tomorrow* (see Church Growth Book Club section, July Selection) which carries all the address of the retreat. The author, Dr. Ralph Winter, is President of the United States Center for World Mission, an organization developed specifically to help meet the need presented in this article.

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