

Strategic Deployment: Field vs. Mobilization

“When are you going to be a *real* missionary?”

Greg H. Parsons

None at the church asked it quite so bluntly, but that was the meaning. The assumption was that working anywhere but *on* or at least *nearer* the “front lines” in missions was not as high on their list.

The thinking behind this makes some sense. Over the years, as Americans have been faithful to send missionaries, many have returned after years of faithful service to take roles in headquarters or in regional/global macro-view ministry. Soon, a church has a number of missionaries they have sent, prayed for and supported who have moved back and seem a long way from the “front.” So, churches want to make sure that many of the younger missionaries are going to where the action is—sometimes to balance out where their missions dollars are going.

I understand and support that idea in general, but—is it possible a missionary could do more effective work in strategy or training than in field service? When we learn, for example, that almost *no one* is working within the core of the Hindu world (see below) what should we do differently? Beyond prayer, what might that mean for strategic placement of missionaries? Our first thought might be that we need to

send some people out there—perhaps we should, but what else could be done?

The first thing is to find out what God is doing and connect with that.

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But that may not look so exciting to a church missions committee.

Let’s look at the Hindu world as an example. The book *Unreached Mega Peoples of India* (produced by the India Missions Association) describes one massive people group after another that is getting little attention—except for some of the tribal peoples, nominal Christians and Dalit groups. (The Dalit populations became better known last fall when many made a public—mainly political/social—conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism. While the Dalits number up to 200 million, they are distinct from the Hindus who number more than 500 million.) While we need to continue outreach to Dalits, we must also recognize that very little is being done among the core bloc of Hindus (the so-called “Forward” and “Backward” castes).

Last week, the director of the India Missions Association (IMA) spoke to our staff during his visit to Pasadena. He noted that very, very few of the IMA’s 147 member

agencies (including some 25,000 missionaries) are doing anything to even try to reach Hindus—or the growing 250 million members of India’s middle class. He added that the vast majority of today’s Indian missionaries work in the same cities and villages—very few pioneer new areas or ministry approaches.

How does this relate to the missionaries our churches support? What is most strategic? How important might it be to seek to weave strategic networks between the pioneers who are already attempting

various kinds of sensitive outreach among Hindus? Certainly, some new missionaries should join these pioneers in field service—though most Christians in general and most missionaries in particular are not prepared mentally or practically for this type of work. It seems that we need to re-evaluate our roles and be more willing to provide supporting services to those in effective positions among “must-win” cultures rather than thinking that we need to pioneer it all ourselves.

We must begin to think strategically, outside the box—or just toss the box out! Such thinking is needed, not just in terms of how fellowships of believers will be established among Hindus or Muslims, or others awaiting pioneers, but even in the criteria used in the deployment and support of missionaries. ☛



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