



## In these two issues of *MF* the main thrust is to enable informed choices of where to work.

Ralph D. Winter



### Dear Reader,

Don't let the masses of numbers deter you from enjoying this valuable issue of *Mission Frontiers*. This presentation will give you a peek into some of the factors mission leaders mull over in deciding where to work.

But, first of all, rejoice that both the Nov-Dec issue and now this Jan-Feb issue display an awesome abundance of data. This is far more than we had when we gathered on the world level in 1980 at Edinburgh for the World Consultation on Frontier Missions. We have come a long way!

Second, note the fascinating tension between two different and valid approaches. In these two issues of *Mission Frontiers* the main thrust is the first of two kinds of approaches. The thrust presented in these two issues is intended to *enable informed choices of where to work*.

If your agency or your church is seeking out the most needy people groups, you need to rely on some objective factors, such as the reported language (how different is it from your own?) or caste or clan, as well as what initial Christian efforts have already been expended for a given group.

Thus, one thrust is *deciding which group to approach*.

The second approach, which is equally necessary, is to *decide (after work has begun) just where the meaningful boundaries are for the group with which you are working*.

As Todd Johnson points out, it would be nice to know in advance



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which groups are integral (are really one) and which are composed of mutually alienated sub-groups. Remember, people are usually more harshly divided from near-neighbors whom they don't like than by major differences of language or culture.

Thus, to go beyond major differences of language and culture, you must also take into account more subtle factors if you want to talk about truly *Unreached Peoples*, also called *Unimax Peoples*, which are defined as:

The largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance. (See page 14.)

Note the all-important final word: acceptance. Of this you can't be sure before you get there.

Only *after* missionaries begin work in a group (if all else fails to tip them off concerning an invisible barrier they have encountered), simply *acceptance* (not linguistic similarity or whatever) will tell them they have more than one group to deal with, and that they have to make more than one beachhead. Many missions work for years in a group that at first seems like one group but that eventually reveals sectors which after years of outreach simply don't respond.

Even in the United States churches very often are puzzled because their congregations simply don't absorb many (or any) members of certain social or ethnic groups. What to do? First, realize that it may not happen at all in this life. They may need to call in another mission or denomination because of high feelings of estrangement between two local groups. This is what denomina-

tions are for!

Denominationalism? Yes, if America did not have hundreds of denominations, we would not see our faith so deeply embedded in this country. Despite all that has been said negatively about the Body of Christ being split up, the Bible nevertheless portrays the different parts of the Body, each of which is performing a different function.

That is why, once a missionary gets things going in a people group, he or she must watch carefully for invisible barriers which may possibly require a new beginning. For example, just as the large majority of Black Muslims in America have grown up within the culture of the black churches, and their choice of Islam is mainly based on their disinclination to follow the white man's religion, so in every mission field we can expect new groups to spin off in order to keep their distance from Western culture.

Thus, the Unreached People and Unimax approach is mainly a help to those *already* working in an area, country, or language and who may think that once a church-planting movement has started, it can easily spread (as the same movement) more widely than it actually can.

It would be nice to know in advance just what the Unimax list would be like.

Unimax thinking is certainly the most important way of defining mission tactics on the ground (not strategy at a higher level). But, prior to entering a people, guesswork on this approach is very necessary. See the estimates on page 15 on what may turn out to be truly Unreached or Unimax peoples.

So, relax if you thought that we need to await a definitive list of Unreached Peoples *before* we can choose which to reach. We find out, *after* we land and begin the work, just what may be the subdivisions of expansion.

By the way, this is where the concept of Unreached Peoples came from in the first place. Overlooking a group that is sufficiently different creates a bypassed or unreached people. Donald

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McGavran's insights came from India, where subtle and invisible caste distinctions effectively wall off millions of people even if there is a church within walking distance. The same thing is happening in America, where we don't even talk about caste.

But, back to the higher-level approach of where to choose a new mission field: the data of the kind in these two issues is of great value.

I would add one word of caution about the use of labels. Most of the high-priority lists here consist of Muslim peoples. Since today we know of many Muslims who have found Christ without rejecting their families and cultural tradition (and we also know of millions of people who are still culturally Hindu as well as devout followers of Christ), let's remind ourselves that we are preaching *Christ*, not Christianity. Followers of Christ in the New Testament did not call themselves Christians; some in the Semitic sphere,

I am guessing, may have called themselves "muslims" (surrendered to God).

Reflections on the shape and mission of the Church have recently surfaced in several places. *Christianity Today* (November 2004) has a cover story about the "emerging church" phenomenon. One of the leaders in this movement, Brian McLaren, is quoted as saying,

One of the greatest enemies of evangelism is the church as fortress or social club; it sucks Christians out of their neighborhoods, clubs, workplaces, schools, and other social networks and isolates them in a religious ghetto ...warehoused as merchandise for heaven, kept safe in a protected place to prevent spillage, leakage, damage, or loss until their delivery (p. 43).

He wants Christians to go out into the world and work for God:

What does it mean to be "saved"?  
When I read the Bible I don't see it saying [merely] 'I'm going to

heaven after I die' (p. 40).

In other words, we have work to do, now, before we die!

Nancy Pearcey, in her new book *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, in the first sentence of her Introduction quotes a friend as saying,

Your earlier book says Christians are called to redeem entire cultures, not just individuals ...I've always thought of salvation strictly in terms of individual souls (p. 17).

This is certainly a must-have book, by the way, for every serious believer, just loaded with profound insights. Our mission is clearly bigger than getting people to heaven. I intend to make use of it when I teach a course on "Frontiers in Mission" at Columbia International University in South Carolina in January. ☉

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