



In a “missiological breakthrough” patterns emerge that both conform faithfully to the Bible and swim effectively within the new believers’ own culture.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

I need to connect for you the tie that binds the two major themes of this issue – the mystery of “insider movements” and the nitty-gritty of prioritizing some people groups above others. Let me approach it this way:

The “Reached Peoples”

Suppose we track a person who comes to Christ within a so-called “reached group.”

In that case several things are true:

1. In that group there are already other believers who have both a spiritual union with Christ and yet are still at home in their native culture.
2. The new believer will be different in some ways. He will still speak the language, eat the food, and dress the same way. That is, in this “reached group” the Gospel itself has become at home in the culture of that group.

(Oops, doesn’t the Gospel change that culture? Yes, as more and more of that group become believers, the culture will no doubt gradually change.)

The “Unreached Peoples”

How very different it is when a person comes to Christ within an “Unreached People!”:

1. In that case there is not yet any established pattern for the one who wants to follow Christ. That’s why the first believers in the unreached people group may be desperately confused. They may feel it is desirable or safest to adopt the missionary’s culture even though it may clash with their own culture – in food, dress, family life,

etc. However, that option may appeal only to a few brave (or perhaps odd) souls or to individuals enamored of the Western world.

2. Eventually, hopefully (but not always), a “missiological breakthrough” will occur. In that case both intellectual and behavioral patterns will emerge which will both conform faithfully to the Bible and at the same time swim effectively within the new believers’ own culture. Once that happens the Christian faith can gain ground very rapidly.

No matter how small an authentic missiological breakthrough (meaning a people movement to Christ), no missionary will need to start from scratch again. The group is now defined as a “reached” people. From now on it is an “insider movement.” It’s like the Greek believers in the New Testament who did not need to embrace Jewish culture. Once Paul made it clear to them, thousands embraced the faith almost overnight. Paul explained that they could accept the Jewish faith without accepting the Jewish culture.

Note, once a group is “reached”, to start from scratch would be unnecessary and inefficient. Even a tiny earlier breakthrough can become a “Bridge of God,” the phrase coined by the most influential missiologist of the 20th century, Donald McGavran. He is the one who first defined what today we call insider movements. In his terms he spoke of “people movements to Christ.”

McGavran is also the one who came up with this classical criterion (necessary but not sufficient) of a true “people movement to Christ” or a “Christward movement”: ask someone within the same culture who is not part of the Christward movement if those in the movement are still part of his group. Only if he says “yes” can the new movement truly represent a missiological

breakthrough, people movement to Christ, or insider movement. If the answer is “no,” the new church movement will not likely grow rapidly.

What About “Insider Movements”?

Gary Corwin, an outstanding missiologist of our time, has very helpfully (within the conversation on pages 16-23) raised some reasonable questions about this whole mysterious matter. Take a look at what Gary and others have to say.

Can a new believer within an “Unreached People” follow Christ without leaving his culture? That is the pattern in the New Testament with Greeks. Wow, were Greeks different from Jews! The Jews allowed plural marriage and abominated homosexuality, while the Greeks hated plural marriage but accepted homosexuality and revered celibacy. As masses of Greeks and Latin-speaking Romans became followers of Christ, “Christianity” resulted. Almost predictably, for certain leaders celibacy began to appear and plural marriage correspondingly disappeared.

Changes of Clothing

Pretty soon the faith got completely out of the control of biculturals like Paul and Barnabas. Eventually the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox traditions were hammered out and the Jewish beginnings were forgotten, ignored or despised. As the Roman tradition became belligerently “Christian”, the entire Semitic sphere predictably developed its own form of the biblical impetus, despite scant access to the Bible. This was Islam, which had no difficulty sweeping up many other societies that were enemies of the Roman empire.

A few centuries later Protestants took the ball (the faith) and ran within their culture, and for them the Catholic tradition was now forgotten, ignored or despised. Today multiplied millions of Africans, Indians, and Chinese are taking on our faith – but not necessarily the culture of our Western Christianity – within their own cultural traditions. Today, however, unlike much of the past, the Bible itself is so much more available that new forms of the faith are arising all over the place. The Bible is “out of control”!



Ralph D. Winter is the Editor of Mission Frontiers and the General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship.

Getting Practical Today

In recent years the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention has given more and more emphasis to unreached peoples. That kind of outreach requires the achievement of the missiological breakthroughs I've just been recounting. Scott Holste's and Jim Haney's description of the IMB's tangible moves forward, and of the ripple effects on others (see pages 8-15), is both fascinating and encouraging, although their definitions on page 9 fall short of the precision of the definitions hammered out in 1982 in a two-day meeting of 35 mission leaders, sponsored by the EFMA and the Lausanne Committee. Those semi-official 1982 definitions (to which we adhere) make no use of percentages, and in addition they take prejudice barriers into account.

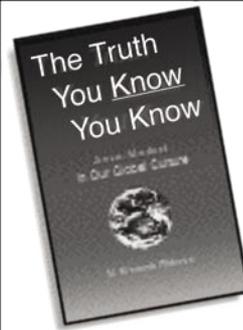
Note that for practical reasons it simply isn't convenient to adhere strictly to the theory behind the IMB's analysis. Several departures must be taken into account:

1. Country boundaries often divide

groups. Eight hundred peoples in Africa live on both sides of some political border. Sometimes they become two (or more) groups and sometimes not, but are usually counted at least twice.

2. It may be that not all those on the IMB's list of "Unengaged Unreached Peoples" of 100,000 or larger are truly "Unreached" since the handy, "less than 2% Evangelical" criterion, while relatively easy to verify, could mean these groups contain anywhere from 2,000 to 800,000 Evangelicals (since the groups range in size from 100,000 to over 40 million). What may be "handy" may have very severe weaknesses.
3. On a very positive note, while the article estimates there to be 2,700 groups smaller than 100,000 in the "less than 2% Evangelical" category, it also indicates that only 141 groups have no Evangelicals and that the combined population of these groups is only one-fifth the population of California! This would seem to be spectacular news. 🌐

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