



DISCIPLING ALL PEOPLES:

Today's Imperative and the Vision of Tokyo 2010

DAVID TAYLOR

Every year, hundreds of thousands of American evangelical young people lose their faith while attending college: an estimated 65%. Here they are confronted with a secular humanist worldview, often anti-Christian, which they have not been prepared to engage. Next year a new batch will be sent, and this spiritual holocaust will go right on with few people seeking to do anything about it.

Now why is that? And what is the real problem here? Could it be that we are merely entertaining our young people in youth groups across the country instead of discipling them? On the other side, why can almost all of our great Christian leaders point to someone in their life who mentored them in the faith? Is there a connection here? Many missiologists believe so. But what does all this have to do with frontier missions and the upcoming 2010 Global Mission Consultation in Tokyo?

One historian, Paul Pierson, recently commented on Tokyo's discipleship theme:

I believe the emphasis on disciple making is very important. I believe evangelism is still the irreplaceable core of mission, but unless believers

become strong disciples, little impact will be made on our world and the church will easily lapse again into nominalism.

There is much to be said for this observation. Today, over 30% of humanity consider themselves to be Christians. A majority of the world's countries are a majority Christian. But is the world a better place as a result?



Getting Back to the Bible

What does the Great Commission command us to do among the nations? If you had to reconstruct the Church's mission statement based on what we actually do, you might never figure it out. How much of our mission activity really reflects our mandate? After all, nowhere does the Great Commission say, "Go into all the world and get as many people as possible to say the sinner's prayer." Nor does it say, "Go into all the world and get everyone to meet together once a week at 10am to listen to a sermon and sing a few songs." While there's nothing wrong with any of this, it is not the Great Commission. So what are we supposed to be *doing* among the nations?

To answer this question we will have to go back to the very language in which the Great Commission was given. One of the first missiologists in modern history to recognize this was Dr. Donald McGavran, a pioneer missionary in India. His "discovery" was foundational to one of the most effective



David Taylor is a member of the planning committee of the Tokyo 2010 Global Mission Consultation. He is the senior editor of the Global Mission Database.

movements in missions history since William Carey. McGavran had two great insights from our Lord's Great Commission which were truly revolutionary. First, he recognized and highlighted the concept of *panta ta ethne*—the Greek phrase in Matthew 28:20 for all the world's ethnicities and cultures.

He realized the Great Commission was not so much about reaching geopolitical entities but more to do with reaching all the world's peoples. To put it succinctly, Donald McGavran helped us identify the target. His protégé, Ralph Winter, spent over three decades getting the church focused on those "unreached" people groups in which the gospel had yet to be established.

The second insight of Donald McGavran was just as revolutionary, but more difficult to grasp, and in many ways we are still struggling to get it. Going back to the Greek, he discovered that the Great Commission is very specific in what it commands us to do among the nations. In his first work, *The Bridges of God*, he wrote of these two revolutionary discoveries and how they relate:

The Greek word is really "disciple" . . . The Greek word translated nation in the English Bible means exactly "people" in the sense in which we are using that term. It does not mean a modern nation like France or China or Mexico. Thus the Greek means "Disciple the Peoples."

What Donald McGavran discovered was not only the original meaning of the Great Commission, but he also unearthed a strategy for world evangelization which he called "people-movements" to Christ, or Christward movements among peoples. His research demonstrated that the vast majority of believers, both historically, and through mission efforts in the last two centuries, were often won to Christ through "group decisions." In some cases these group decisions resulted in hundreds of thousands coming to faith in Christ in a very brief time period.

With this frame of reference, the Great Commission takes on a whole new perspective. Consider it afresh with Donald McGavran's translation inserted:

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore

go disciple all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The first thing you probably noticed, as Dr. McGavran did some fifty years ago, is that the "them" in the Great Commission refers not to individuals but to the peoples themselves. Thus we are to teach entire peoples to obey everything Jesus commanded, and we are to baptize entire peoples as well.

Of course, to our Western individualistic-oriented minds this makes absolutely no sense. We simply can't fit it in our worldview. How do you teach and baptize entire peoples! Well, obviously nations can only be baptized one person at a time, just as every individual must personalize what is being taught. But Jesus was anticipating what would happen as the gospel spread throughout the world, in which thousands of people movements would

bring millions into the faith. Today, over 2,600 peoples have become a majority Christian. Almost every one of them experienced a people-movement to Christ.

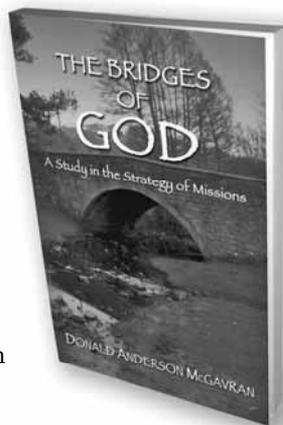
In such movements, leaders make a decision for their group, whether it be on an extended family level, village level, or national level. In these cases, an entire community will undergo baptism at once. The Book of Acts records

such an event in microcosm, when the entire household of the Ephesian jailor was "baptized"

following his conversion (Acts 16:33).

Again, these baptisms happened on an individual level, but the point is they did them together as a group.

Were all the conversions in the Ephesian jailor's household "real" conversions? Perhaps not, and that is the whole point. A people-movement is not the end of the Great Commission, it is just the beginning. It is the opportunity to teach a large group of people what it means to follow Jesus. Not all will get it. But if biblically-based schools and curriculum are set up for young people, and Sunday schools in churches, and discipleship programs for junior-high and high-school students, the proportion of people



2,600

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in society who are being shaped by a Christian worldview will gradually increase over time. This will then have an effect on every aspect of society—from government to economics to education to social justice—all of which the Bible covers.

Enter Tokyo 2010

With this in mind, the theme of the upcoming Global Mission Consultation scheduled for May of 2010 is a welcome advance in the right direction. The vision statement of the consultation is “Making disciples of every people in our generation.” Thus while this statement maintains the “closure” focus of Edinburgh 1910 and 1980—represented by the phrase “every people”—it also captures an equally important dimension of the Great Commission—the purpose of our going, which is *to teach all peoples to obey everything Jesus commanded*.

Discipling peoples is a process, not a one time event or accomplishment. It is something that has to be

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revisited in and by every new generation. The often repeated truism that the Christian faith is just one generation away from extinction is a reality not only for the Church where it is, but

for those seeking to build it where it is not.

Thus it is imperative that we continually ask ourselves: What kind of Christianity are we seeking to establish around the world? Is it a copy of our own—one in which we can't even keep our own young people who have been raised in Christian homes? Or is it built on more solid foundations? The kind laid down by the Master himself, who took twelve young men, and said, “Come, follow me.” Or the kind laid down by the Apostle Paul, who said to the church in Philippi, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice” (Php. 4:9) And again to the Church in Corinth, “I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:16). How many of our leaders would be willing to say that today! But that is the goal, and until we get there we are not fulfilling the Great Commission.

One of the great contrasts today in Asia is between what happened in Japan and that which occurred in Korea. Japan is a nation which has been receiving missionaries for centuries, and yet evangelicals are still well under 1% of the population. But just next door in South Korea, the evangelical church is thriving, encompassing over 20% of the population and sending out over 23,000 missionaries! This is proportionately five times the amount of missionar-

BUT MY BIBLE SAYS...

Unless you're reading the King James Version, you may have never considered the national or corporate dimension of the Great Commission. That's because all modern translations of Matthew 28:19, beginning with the World Council of Churches' Revised Standard Version, have translated this verse, “Make disciples of all nations,” rather than disciple or teach all nations. These modern translations reflect our individualistic worldview, and although the Great Commission is certainly applicable on the individual level, which makes these translations partially correct, they also can lead to a simplistic or reductionist view of our Lord's global assignment.

All early translations of this verse remained faithful to the Greek's national emphasis until recently. The Latin Vulgate, for example, reads *euntes ergo docete omnes gentes* (going therefore, teach all nations). Roman Catholic missionaries used this phrase as the motto for the schools which they would establish all over the world. The early Protestant reformers also saw the significance of this, and emphasized the importance of Christian education in fulfilling the mandate of Christ.

John Calvin wrote of Matthew 28:19:

The meaning amounts to this, that by proclaiming the gospel everywhere, they should bring all nations to the obedience of the faith.

Now some have wondered, “Is this a form of Christian imperialism?” Certainly there is a tone of imperialism inherent within the Great Commission. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” But it is not Christian imperialism; it is our Lord Jesus Christ's imperialism! So while we are to preach with all authority and boldness, commanding all nations to repent and believe and ready themselves for Christ's coming, we do so knowing that many will not listen and that's okay. Our responsibility is to declare the gospel. Then as sufficient response enables, we can begin to bring biblical principles into every sphere of life. And whenever that is possible we have a mandate from the Master to do so, in every generation, among every people on earth. f

ies American evangelicals send out! When financial considerations are mixed in (Korean evangelicals earn three times less than Americans), the contrast is even more remarkable. In fact if Americans sent out as many missionaries as the Koreans, when both numbers and finances are factored in, we would have well over half a million missionaries on the field, as opposed to the current 41,000.

So what was it that produced this amazing church movement, and why is it different from what happened in Japan? And even here in the United States, while we're at it? Although, there are many factors involved, one issue is undoubtedly that of discipleship. The largest church in the world is in Seoul, Korea with 800,000 members and 50,000 cell groups. According to Dr. Yong Cho, a Korean missions leader, the discipleship emphasis of Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators has been widespread throughout Korea. This has resulted in vibrant churches with perhaps the most disciplined laity in the world, and the most educated and well-equipped lay-leadership you can find. Daily, Korean churches across the country gather early in the morning to pray as an entire church. Now that's commitment to the cause of Christ! Is it any wonder that God is using the Korean church so powerfully in His Great Commission?

Learning and Acting

The past one hundred years were truly dramatic in the history of the Great Commission. More peoples heard and responded to the gospel in the 20th century than all-previous centuries combined. As a result, the ratio of committed Christians to world population has been steadily narrowing. In the year 1900 there were 20 non-believers for every one committed believer. Today, that ratio is down to almost 7 to 1. One hundred years ago the ratio of local churches to unreached peoples was 100 to 1. Today there are over 1,000 local churches available to reach every one remaining unreached people! (See pages 30-33 for more statistics such as these).

Thus there is much we need to learn from what has

been accomplished since Edinburgh 1910. At that first-ever world consultation of mission leaders, the question before them was the same as it is today: what remains to be done in the task of world evangelization? Following the 1910 consultation they continued to work together on a regional and national basis to make sure that everyone had access to the gospel. Much was accomplished. Indeed, had it not been for World War I, a great depression, followed by another world war and the complete collapse of colonialism over the next 25 years, the plans made at Edinburgh might have succeeded.

Today, one hundred years later, we are closer than ever to finishing the task of bringing the gospel to all the peoples of the world, and initiating disciple-making movements among them. For this reason, Tokyo 2010 will be organized into four major areas:

Celebration, Casting Vision, New Models, and Coordination.

20:1
7:1

NON-BELIEVERS/COMMITTED
BELIEVER RATIO IN 1900

NON-BELIEVERS/COMMITTED
BELIEVER RATIO TODAY

The first track, *Celebration*, will be a time of reflection on what has happened in the last one hundred years of fulfilling the Great Commission. It will be a time of thanks-

giving and praise to God for the great work that He has done. This track will also look at what God is presently doing through mission movements around the world and what we can learn from one another in this regard. Today, the vast majority of the world's evangelicals and missionaries are from the non-Western world; a truly remarkable shift from one hundred years ago, in which the opposite was true!

The second track, *Casting Vision*, will look forward to what remains to be done to fully engage all the peoples of the world with the gospel. Special emphasis will be given to those 3,000 least-reached peoples currently with little or no missionary presence (see pages 10-11). During this time, mission agencies will be challenged to consider what their contribution will be in seeing the entire world fully engaged with disciple-making teams over the next ten years as part of the Finishing the Task movement.

The third track, *New Models*, will look at how disciple-making movements are impacting major spheres and religious blocs, such as Muslims and Hindus, the urbanized and the nomadic, restricted access

contexts, the illiterate, etc. What is God using today to bring the gospel to some of the least-reached areas of the world—many of which are unreached due to the difficulty of deploying long-term missionary efforts? Are there new models for missionary sending which are bearing fruit? New models for training and equipping tomorrow's missionary force? These are just a few of the practical dimensions which will be addressed by the workshops in this track.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the fourth track of *Coordination* will look at how we can work together to finish the task. How do we keep the conversation going and develop cooperative plans to move forward? How can we make sure that every people is properly engaged by disciple-making teams over the next decade? How can we help strengthen missions movements around the world which are just developing?

(continued on page 12)

FINISHING THE TASK

“We’ll take all the rest!” Nine years ago, these words launched a movement and network now known as Finishing the Task, which has brought together a coalition of major missions organizations to focus on the world’s remaining 3,000 unengaged unreached people groups (unengaged meaning those groups with no known missionaries working among them).

It all began in Amsterdam, at the Billy Graham conference on evangelization in the year 2000. At that time, the Joshua Project initiative, which had been launched by the AD2000 and Beyond Movement, had just 247 groups remaining that were known to be unreached, over 10,000 in population, and unengaged. To facilitate networking and dialogue, over 600 mission strategists and leaders were gathered around tables in a large room. There was a spirit of unity and cooperation among the group. So one mission leader, Bruce Wilkinson of Walk Thru the Bible, suggested that those agencies present ought to take specific responsibility for one or more of these unengaged peoples until they were all accounted for.

One by one it began to happen. Mission leaders made specific commitments on behalf of their agencies, according to their ability and present area of work. Over 147 commitments were registered. But with just 140 left to go, suddenly everything stopped. No more takers. Paul Eshleman, who was leader of the Jesus Film at that time, and now international director of the Finishing the Task network, remembers, “It was an awkward silence!”

But in the providence of God this awkward silence gave birth to an incredible vision and movement. As Bruce Wilkinson was standing up at the front wondering what to do next, someone came up with a note. It read, “Table 71 will take all the rest.” Seated at table 71 were leaders from Campus Crusade for Christ, Wycliffe Bible Translators, the International Mission Board (of the Southern Baptist Convention), Trans World Radio, DAWN ministries (Discipling a Whole Nation), and Walk Thru the Bible.

Since that time, these groups have continued to meet three times a year, and out of this dialogue has come the Finishing the Task network and movement, which now includes dozens of major mission organizations around the world. The goal of Finishing the Task is to see all peoples fully engaged by missionaries in the next ten years. For larger groups, the goal is to see at least one missionary placed for every population segment of 50,000. For example, among the Marathi speaking Shaikh, a group of 8,000,000, that would be a total of 160 missionaries.

Field partnerships are forming to ensure the strategic deployment of newly commissioned missionaries among unengaged population segments. The latest research has revealed that there are still 3,000 people groups that remain unengaged. In addition to this, there are at least an additional 1,000 population segments of 50,000 that remain unengaged. This means a great deal of international cooperation is urgently needed to meet this need.

FINISHING THE TASK continued

At Tokyo 2010, mission leaders from around the world will be challenged to consider what they can do in response to this reality. If we all work together, mission strategists believe it is possible to fully engage all the peoples of the world in the next ten years.

Four thousand years ago, God promised Abraham that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him. Two thousand years ago, Jesus said the gospel would be proclaimed among all nations in the days before His coming. The result would be a great multitude of Jesus worshippers that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language.

Could it be that we are just ten years away from the fulfillment of this vision? Time will tell, but one thing is certain, as believers we are living in the most exciting time to be alive in the history of the Great Commission. You don't want to miss out!

To get involved with the Finishing the Task movement, go to www.finishingthetask.com. f

40 Least-engaged Peoples¹

People Group	Country	Population	Religion	M-Need ²	Adopted? ³
Mahisyadas	India	11,964,538	Hinduism	239	Y
Crimean Turkish	Turkey	5,097,667	Islam	101	Y
Bhenrihar	India	4,264,429	Hinduism	85	Y
Shaikh (Marathi)	India	2,335,683	Islam	46	Y
Azerbaijani	Iraq	2,250,072	Islam	45	N
North Syrian Arab	Syria	2,151,167	Islam	43	N
Idiga (Wagdi)	India	1,957,832	Hinduism	39	Y
Khati	India	1,828,065	Hinduism	36	Y
Cyrenaican Arab	Libya	1,673,130	Islam	33	Y
Shaikh (Marwadi)	India	1,526,271	Islam	30	Y
Dimli Kurd	Turkey	1,515,000	Islam	30	Y
Bedouin Arab	Iraq	1,402,171	Islam	28	N
Guhayna	Sudan	1,377,198	Islam	27	N
Berber	Egypt	1,367,326	Islam	27	Y
Daroga	India	1,245,981	Hinduism	24	Y
Mawalud	India	1,112,507	Islam	22	N
Kangean	Indonesia	1,100,000	Islam	22	Y
Middle Atlas Berber	Algeria	1,014,143	Islam	20	Y
Bedouin Arab	Saudi Arabia	987,709	Islam	19	N
Nubians	Sudan	956,074	Islam	19	Y
Bederia	Sudan	903,401	Islam	18	N
Agri	India	887,776	Hinduism	17	Y
Kawahia	Sudan	826,744	Islam	16	Y
Sainthwar	India	826,239	Hinduism	16	Y
Kaibarta (Assamese)	India	706,333	Hinduism	14	Y
Jalia Kaibarta (Bengali)	India	705,928	Hinduism	14	Y
Tatar	Uzbekistan	686,222	Islam	13	N
Gulf Arab	Oman	667,052	Islam	13	N
Aguri	India	662,559	Hinduism	13	Y
Baluch	Afghanistan	650,000	Islam	13	Y
Navithar	India	649,897	Hinduism	12	Y
Mairal	India	635,341	Hinduism	12	Y
Chunari	India	612,348	Hinduism	12	Y
Awan	India	591,623	Islam	11	Y
Yemeni Arab	Saudi Arabia	585,830	Islam	11	N
Egyptian Arab	Libya	585,830	Islam	11	Y
Levantine Arab	Morocco	554,649	Islam	11	Y
Hausa	Sudan	551,542	Islam	11	Y
Nai (Tamil)	India	544,517	Hinduism	10	Y
Makhmi	India	500,000	Islam	9	N

- 1 These peoples have no known missionaries working among them.
2. Estimated minimum number of missionaries needed.
3. Indicates if the group has been "adopted" by a mission agency for future outreach.

Thus the idea behind these task-forces is to look in depth at four inter-related dimensions of the Great Commission:

- 1) From where have we come?
- 2) What remains to be done?
- 3) What is presently working (and what is not)? and
- 4) How can we join together to take the gospel from where it is to where it needs to go?

Looking at the task in these four areas is something that can and should be done at every level of fulfilling the Great Commission, from the village and town level, to cities, countries and regions—and every once and awhile, such as at Tokyo—to the entire world.

Taking a Part

Obviously not everyone can attend Tokyo 2010. In fact, requirements for attendance are that a delegate must be sent by their mission agency as a representative. The purpose of this is to ensure that the consultation will be made up of people prepared to discuss matters of field concern. Most will be mission leaders, many of whom have a wealth of missions experience. The combination of all this knowledge gathered together to “consult” with one another on strategic issues will be invaluable to moving the Great Commission forward. But more importantly, mission leaders represent the ability to “act” on the information they receive. As Dr. Winter often put it, “They are like generals . . .” (See his article “*Seeking Closure*,” pp. 19-23, in this issue for his perspective on this).

With such potential, you can expect the enemy will seek to thwart these efforts. We are therefore urging our *Mission Frontiers* readers to commit to praying daily for this event between now and May 14th. If you are willing to do so and would like to receive prayer updates, send an email to Tokyo2010@uscwm.org and we will put you on the list. If you would like to help contribute financially to this global effort (many non-Western mission leaders will need scholarships to attend), visit www.tokyo2010.org for more details.

Finally, consider the challenge yourself of what you might do over the next ten years to seeing missionary teams deployed to every unengaged people and region of the world. What sacrifices might have to be made personally, as a family, and as a church? With an estimated 1.5 billion unengaged by disciple-making teams, the need is great. But if we all work together, it can surely be accomplished. The question before us then is this, what are we willing to do? Certainly we have the ability, not to mention

the authority, to make disciples of all nations. But will we?

During the Frontier Mission Fellowship’s recent staff retreat, the newly appointed General Director, Dave Datema, made the following observation:

The last thirty years have meant almost nothing to the vast majority of those living among the world’s unreached peoples.

It’s a sobering reality. Despite the great successes of the frontier missions movement over the last three decades, we still have much to do, and much time to make up for. As Dr. Winter often said, “This is a case of a lot of good effort, but not good enough.”

May the Lord grant the global Church the strength, the will, and the unity to move forward and cross the finish line of reaching all peoples in the timeliest and most efficient way as Providence allows. And may He bless the efforts of Tokyo 2010 as they seek to hear from God and respond to His leading in fulfilling this great assignment. f

