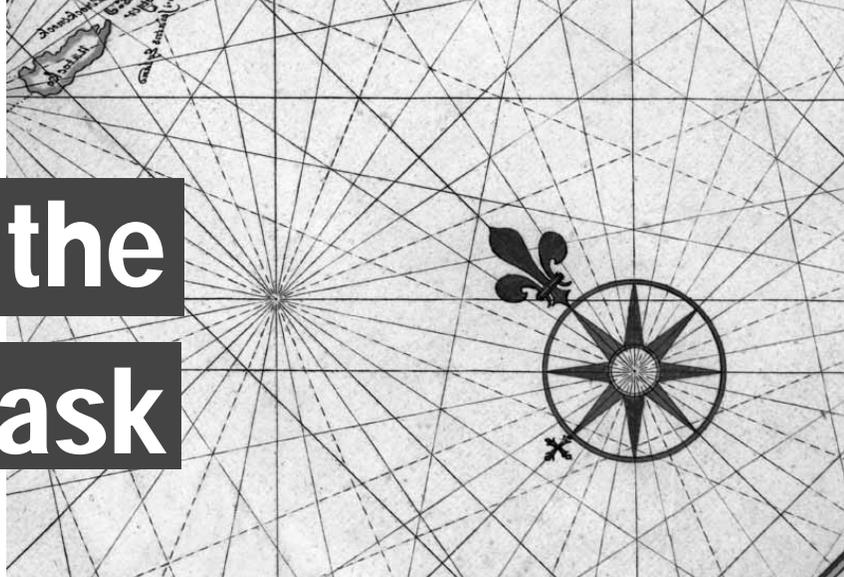


Mapping the Unfinished Task



DAVID TAYLOR

“**T**he Holy Spirit cannot lead you on the basis of information you do not have.” This provocative statement is one which Ralph Winter was often known to recite. Though obviously a generalization, history has demonstrated the reality that the more people know of God’s plan the further the Great Commission has advanced.

It was an early dream of the founders of the U.S. Center for World Mission to empower the global body of Christ to understand the state of the unfinished task. Almost 25 years ago, a global mapping project was envisioned that would enable the mission community to zoom into any community in the world through a mapping database and know the status of the gospel there. That day is almost here. Dozens of countries around the world are initiating their own national surveys to identify church planting priorities. As this data is being collected and mapped, a graphic visualization of the progress of the gospel is emerging, revealing both growth and gaps.

Thanks to the work of national governments around the world, we are getting increasingly better data on virtually every inhabited place on earth. Global databases of habitats (cities, towns and villages) now exist for over three million communities. Surveys to determine the status of evangelism and church planting have been completed for almost fifty countries and 350,000 communities. Wherever these surveys have been done, the information has had a powerful mobilization effect on the national church. (A great example of this has recently happened in Thailand, where a national survey has brought the entire evangelical church together in response to the need. Indeed, the research process itself has served to ignite the church to action.)

David Taylor is the research director of the Global Network of Mission Structures (www.gnms.net). He is the senior editor of the Global Mission Database (www.gmd.info) and author of Operation 10/40 Window (www.op1040.info). You may contact him at david.taylor@uscwm.org.

Missions in the Information Age

As national surveys are being conducted, a critical issue is emerging: How do you keep church-planting data current and the maps updated? National surveys can be costly, involving considerable manpower and time. Fortunately, the technology to solve this problem is now readily available. Combined with the proliferation of smart phones with GPS capabilities, and widespread access to the Internet, it is now possible to set up what are called “cloud-based mapping servers” which can be programmed as a global network with potentially millions of users. This will enable believers from around the world to dynamically map their own ministry data while contributing to the bigger picture as their data is combined with other user’s data.

For example, let’s say we wanted to track the evangelization of every home in Los Angeles. Since LA is ethnically diverse, Armenian churches might be interested in a particular subset of that overall task—visiting the 80,000 Armenian homes in LA and presenting the gospel. As they track their progress, and Filipino churches do the same, along with Chinese, Korean, etc., the composite picture will enable us to see the progress of the goal as well as identify gaps that may represent overlooked or “hidden” peoples which no church is touching.

Of course, that is just the beginning of what can be done with dynamic mapping technology (dynamic in the sense that as the data changes the maps are updated in real time). From tracking the global migration of unreached peoples, to the movement of nomadic bands, to the engagement of strategic population segments by frontier mission teams, web-based map networking will enable cooperation and coordination at a level which generations before could only dream about. This represents a significant advance in the use of mapping as a mission tool. A decade before, mapping was primarily used by the mission community for mobilization purposes. In the next decade it will become an indispensable tool for strategic planning and networking as well.

As the world becomes more complex through urbanization and globalization, we will need more sophisticated tools to engage this ever-shifting mosaic. Could it be that God has given us computer networks, smart phones and mapping technology for such a time as this? With every increase of technology has come an advance in the Great Commission. Changes in transportation technology enabled the gospel to travel further and faster than ever before. Next we saw a communications revolution, which enabled the gospel to be broadcast at the speed of light, and into some of the most restricted places on earth. Today's revolution is in the area of information technology. We have the ability to instantaneously collect and process information in a way that is almost overwhelming for our generation. But as the Church begins to catch up to this revolution, it may very well accelerate us in filling the Great Commission.

For example, if you go to www.greatcommission2020.com, you will see a world map that pinpoints in real time the responses of people around the world who are visiting one of the evangelistic websites set up by Global Media Outreach. You may watch as a visitor in Libya comes to one of the sites and begins to read a gospel message. If this visitor prays to receive Christ, the color of the pinpoint changes from blue to yellow. If the person asks for follow up, the color immediately changes to red. (What a tool for intercessors to use for prayer!) Of the average of 150,000 visitors that come to a GMO related website every day, 25,000 pray to receive Christ, and 5,000 ask for follow up. Now imagine that over the course of a year, the millions of bytes of data gathered by GMO can be mapped to show where there are greatest responses to the gospel in every city in the world. This data can then be made available to mission strategists and disciplers on the ground who can follow up on the leads this information provides.

Staying Secure

Obviously, the most important consideration in the information age is data security. For about forty countries in the world, which are classified as "restricted access countries," this is a major concern and a different approach is required. For the other 180 nation-states, data can be more freely shared. Fortunately, the more restricted the country, the fewer people there are that need access to information (because there are less indigenous believers and missionaries on site in such places). For these countries,



a different approach can be taken which keeps data offline and encrypted, something which many mission agencies working in the 10/40 Window have had to figure out.

Taking the lead to assist mission agencies and churches in this

effort is a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ called Map Factory (www.mapfactory.org). Led by mission strategist Christopher Deckert, the vision of Map Factory is to equip every ministry in the world with the ability to dynamically map the vision God has given them and the progress in seeing it fulfilled. High-end, commercial map servers can cost as much as \$50,000 to deploy, plus the ongoing costs of programming and maintenance, and so they have been a forbidding challenge even for many large ministries such as Wycliffe, the International Mission Board and Youth With a Mission, who need them. Map Factory is raising the funds to provide this service to the missions community at a relatively low cost and recruiting computer volunteers to meet this need. (We would encourage our *Mission Frontiers* readers, who are interested in helping, to contact Campus Crusade's Map Factory division and inquire how you may be able to contribute to this important new initiative. Chris can be contacted at cdeckert@ccci.org)

Secular startup companies are currently attempting to provide location-based services to local and city governments to track crime, graphitti, road hazards, and weather related issues. Non-Government Organizations are utilizing simple, real-time mapping software to track disaster response, such as in the recent earthquakes in Haiti and Japan. At a moment's notice, on the ground responders are sharing, through their cell phones, the locations of needs and the type of assistance required. Software then presents a composite of those needs on a map to enable better coordination. Now picture the Church rallying together after the recent tornadoes in Joplin, Missouri using collaborative tools such as this. Or imagine a city that works together to plant churches and initiate outreaches in areas where crime databases tell us there is the greatest need.

Today we have the opportunity to capture the big picture, as well as zoom in on the details of the unfinished task before us. The Church can do better, needs to do better, and must do better at seeing the state of their "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and uttermost parts of the earth." With the tools and technology we have today, we are left without an excuse. f