

A Field Worker Speaks Out

About the Rush to Reach All Peoples

by Lawrence Radcliffe

While this is an exciting and passionate critique of a movement, by one who was closely involved in the very formation of the Adopt-A-People movement. It is a keen defense of the original principles, but adds many insights that can enhance the AAP movement. Ed.

I find myself in an awkward situation. I have been involved in the Unreached Peoples Movement first as a pastor in 1978, then as a mission mobilizer, and now over the past 12 years as a field worker in the 10/40 Window. However, along with many other field workers performing “open heart surgery” on a culture, our situation is ominously similar to that faced by the doctors and nurses in the story below.

On the one hand, I’m ecstatic! The revival of Evangelical interest in frontier missions has come a long way since Ralph Winter and the fledgling USCWM first began to *wave the flag* for the unreached peoples. The long-awaited thrust to the *final frontiers* is now a major movement. The Adopt-A-People (AAP) movement including the Joshua Project 2000 (JP2000) has generated enormous interest and enthusiasm among local churches and missions around the world. With a passion for traveling and an intense desire to experience other cultures, thousands of pastors, lay groups, and members of Generation X (recently dubbed *Generation Global*)¹ are prayer walking, exploring, researching, reaching out and touching once distant cultures in the name of Christ. Viewing the results of this *movement*, some observers and participants are certain that, “God is in it!”

However, reflect for a moment on this illustration:

The patient lies upon the operating table, chest cavity open. Doctors and medical personnel work carefully, intently, each at his or her specialty. Deliberate decisions, cautious incisions. It’s delicate open-heart surgery, saving a life in an under-staffed Third World hospital. Suddenly, into the “primitive” operating theatre bursts a cackle of visiting medics, paparazzi, and other deeply concerned friends of the patient—cameras,

notebooks, and videocassette recorders in hand. All want to see first-hand the progress of the operation on the one they love and pray for. Some think they, too, might one day want to become doctors. A few stick their unscrubbed thumbs into the chest cavity. They sincerely want to experience what it’s like, even for a few moments, just to help, or to see if they faint. Others, not content with the hospital chapel, insist on laying hands on the patient. The scene is exciting, and moving. The clicking of cameras and sounds of joy, questions and suggestions, mix with the muffled cries of the distracted staff trying desperately to accommodate the crowd, and at the same time to perform surgery on the waiting, now-dying man.

In the face of all this marvelous, long sought enthusiasm, dare we raise questions at a time like this? Do we risk quenching the Spirit, or being accused of being critical, unbelieving, or divisive? On the other hand, are we risking more by not raising questions? The fact is, that the health and well-being of the “patient” (the peoples of the world and what is to them their *heart* cultures) as well as the effectiveness of existing ministries and the global Christian mission may be at stake in how we do frontier missions at this millennial juncture.

If “God is in it” (or perhaps because He is) I believe we have a responsibility to raise even uncomfortable questions and check the quality of our work so that we may be wise “master builders.” **In today’s world, just travelling to the frontiers is no longer a big deal. It’s what we do next that counts.**

In this article I would like to offer a brief assessment of the JP2000 and AAP movements from a field perspective. I admit that this *view from the field* may seem a bit odd, unnecessarily alarmist, or even bizarrely out of tune with the pulsating rhythms, Web sites and victorious spirit of the multi-faceted AD2000 movement. Nevertheless I feel compelled to give voice to certain concerns derived from over a decade of overseas experience and ethnographic research, as well as from in-

teractions with veteran colleagues around me.

I do not mean to interrupt the rejoicing of the AD2000 countdown. Nor do I want to dampen the enthusiasm of newcomers in the frontier movement. But some of us who live and work full time among the *peoples* are concerned about post-AD2000 consequences of present programs, unquestioned assumptions and trends. If wonderful exuberance leads us to ignore vital signs, the *patients* we all love could relapse, reject the transplant, or die, and we will still have to clean up the mess later in the *operating rooms* of hundreds of cultures.

Background²

JP2000 may be viewed as an extension and elaboration of the Adopt-A-People (AAP) concept first proposed through a discussion document circulated at the World Consultation on Frontier Missions (Edinburgh, 1980).³ Essentially, the AAP concept encourages a church or fellowship group to make and maintain a serious commitment to do all it can to help reach a specific unreached people group. This was originally designed to take the form of partnership between the adopting church and a mission agency of its choice. Later, some urged further relationships between several churches that might adopt the same people. All adopting churches agree to provide concerted prayer for their people group. Depending on the situation, the churches may also be asked to supply personnel and to help fund efforts to reach their target group. According to that early design, the agencies, too, do their part by providing monthly project updates to each adopting congregation.

The Adopt-A-People program is built on two interrelated concepts: 1) that the world is best viewed in terms of “peoples” or “people groups,” and 2) that in missiological terms, these peoples are either “reached” or “unreached.” It is important to understand that the concept of “reachedness” applies not to individuals

but to a collective unit, a people group usually viewed ethno-linguistically. It does not measure their relative spiritual need or the extent of evangelistic activity among them. Instead, “reachedness” refers simply to the presence or absence of “a viable, indigenous, evangelizing church movement” within a people group. “Frontier missions” is concerned with establishing this crucial beachhead for the gospel. Thus, the issue is whether a “missiological breakthrough” (a contextualized church movement) has taken place which will, from that point on, sustain “near-neighbor” evangelistic activity.

At a significant Lausanne Committee-sponsored meeting of executives in March of 1982, standard terminology emerged to define a *people* as a group that was sufficiently unified for one Christward people movement to reach the whole group. The same two-day meeting described the “stages” in reaching an unreached people group: reported, verified, evaluated, selected, adopted, engaged, reached.⁴ In the original schemas, “selection” by a mission agency committed to reaching the group was assumed to precede a local church’s “adoption.” This is still the emphasis of certain AAP advocates, such as those related to the USCWM.

In practice, however, in some circles (perhaps particularly ones led by the *baby boomer* generation), the original emphasis on prior agency initiative has given way to a more *popular* scenario, which encourages the *ownership* and *hands-on* involvement of local churches in selecting, researching, and ultimately planting churches among *their* unreached people group. Some leaders actually encourage this as the “best way” to lead churches in missions.⁵ My initial impression is that the AD2000 & Beyond Movement has apparently endorsed this notion since it is closely linked to the “Joshua Project 2000” initiative. The immediate goal of JP2000, as I understand it, is to send short-term (2-3 week) church or student teams to do on-site “research” among each of the estimated 1739 major unreached peoples in about 140 “people clusters” or related groups. This strategy is viewed as a step toward the formation of new church-planting teams “engaged” with every unreached people so as to reach them with the gospel.

I. Strengths of the Movement

People Group Thinking

It is now widely accepted that in the

Bible the word *nations* refers not to socio-political countries but to ethno-linguistic groups or *peoples* (Gen 12: 1-3; Mt 28:19; Rev 5:9). The people group focus of AAP adds clarity to our understanding of the mission task and precision to our prayers and strategies. The goal is to reach every segment of humanity, “every tribe and language and people and nation” with the gospel.

Priority on Unreached People Groups

The Apostle Paul’s aim was to preach the gospel “where Christ was not known” (Rom 15: 20). Thus, the movement as a whole, viewed within the context of the larger global Christian mission, places a priority focus, though not an exclusive one, on frontier missions. Agencies and churches, both in the West and in mission lands, are urged to move into the “regions beyond” to establish new fields and new national churches (2 Cor 10:16), and commit new resources to penetrating the world’s most neglected peoples.

Identifying the Peoples

Many people have come to believe that one factor hindering progress in frontier missions has been the lack of sufficient information about the number and character of these peoples. A very small number of expert researchers are engaged in the task of identifying the status of mission work among each of the world’s ethno-linguistic groups. In addition, some in the JP2000 project encourage the adopting congregations and individual “mobilizers” and “advocates” to be involved in this stage of the process by doing both secondary and short-term field research (qualitative) among unreached peoples. “People Profiles” and other information are then to be shared freely with the Church worldwide.

Emphasis on Church-Planting

The AD2000 watchword, “A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000” focuses attention not only on evangelism, but on the crucial element in the completion of the Great Commission, namely, establishing communities of disciples among all nations. In a sense, it is this step which best ensures fulfillment of the *every person* goal, since contextualized church movements are the most efficient vehicle for gospel communication within a culture. Jesus’ words, “I will build my church” (Mt 16:18), are taken to refer not to an invisible communion of saints but to viable, visible, contemporaneous expressions of the Church in history—an indigenous,

evangelizing church movement—in every existing ethnic or cultural group (*panta ta ethne*, Mt 28:18-20).

Closure Theology

The JP2000 and AAP campaign is distinguished by an optimistic belief that the Great Commission is do-able in the authority of the Risen Christ. Added to this is an eschatological urgency, a passion and commitment to finish the task of taking the gospel to all nations before the end comes (Mt 24:14). The year 2000 AD is generally viewed not so much as an end-time signpost, but as a useful time-dated goal with symbolic and motivational power.

International Cooperation

Believing that no one agency can evangelize the world alone, and based on an application of Body-life principles to global mission work, the movement encourages the formation of field and home-base *partnerships*. The conviction is that lack of *unity* and *cooperation* is a major impediment, and that field and home-field partnerships can advance the work. These are more than *networks*. In these “intentional” partnerships, agencies and churches share resources and work together in some coordinated fashion toward a perceived common goal. This may include partnering with emerging missionary movements from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Mobilization of Local Churches

The JP2000 and AAP programs emphasize the importance of mission education and mobilization at the local level. A dazzling array of creative educational resources, prayer and media tools are now available. Churches are urged to be proactive, to have a significant role, even primary responsibility, in reaching unreached peoples. The traditional triad “pray-give-or-go” is expanded to include “boomer”-inspired, hands-on activities like Internet research, prayer journeys, research trips, and sending short and long-term teams. Local churches are beginning to think globally, believing that *the local church can change the world!* In this scenario, as Bruce Camp puts it, “Efforts are church-initiated. Agencies will be utilized, but only as they can partner with the vision and strategies of the local church.”⁶

Personal Commitment to a Specific People

JP2000 and AAP enable a local church and members of a congregation to feel personally involved in the Final Task. A congregation can “adopt” one

unreached people group as its own for long-term prayer, interest, and personal concern until a church is established within it. The Great Commission is broken down into “bite-size” tasks, facilitating a feeling of being “connected” and having a personal link with a distant exotic culture.

Promotion of Prayer

The AAP movement promotes people-specific prayer. Committed intercession is energized by up-to-date spiritual and cultural information about each named, unreached people group. Modeled after Chapter 9 of Daniel, strategic-level spiritual warfare in the “closet”, in the church, or on-site, is then mobilized to dislodge principalities and powers which are thought to dominate each cultural group. Great new waves of intercession are now flowing through the 10/40 Window.

This is all to the good. But there are other aspects to take into account.

II. Weaknesses of the Movement

The weaknesses of the Adopt A People concept and kindred programs like Joshua Project 2000 are related to their strengths. In the process of popularizing them, some notions have been taken to extremes. Thus, as is often true with an individual’s personality traits, “weaknesses” can also be viewed as “excesses” of what would otherwise be laudable characteristics.

People Group Fixation

By viewing the world in terms of separate, identifiable, denumerable ethno-linguistic units, AD2000 programs can inadvertently ignore complex ethnographic realities on the ground, such as the relatedness of ethnic groups, and the fact that current anthropological research demonstrates that peoples often have multiple identities. The meanings associated with these identities are flexible, changeable, contested and negotiable, depending on the context and the person or group with whom they are interacting. Historically, ethnic identities and designations also vary over time. Many in the AAP movement tend to assume neat *solid line* boundaries around people groups—what could be called a primordial⁷ view—rather than fluid and overlapping *dotted line* identities.⁸ In subtle ways, this simplistic perspective can foster ethnic nationalism, and in the hands of Christians result in a kind of ecclesiastical apartheid.

Similarly, profiling cultural identities in terms of supposedly unique *traits* and *customs* and *immaterial relics* may produce evangelistic approaches which are

retrogressive and insensitive to processes of social change. A fixation with people group thinking can also over-emphasize these cultural distinctives rather than maximizing the bridge-building similarities⁹ between peoples; the resulting people-specific *partnerships* or advocacy networks may end up drawing lines where many nationals do not draw them. A romantic notion of mono-ethnic homogeneous unit churches may actually impede church growth, for example, in urban areas or a *diaspora* context, where ethnic realities and multiple identities may more fruitfully contribute to the formation of multi-ethnic (heterogeneous) or “urban conglomerate” church movements.

Narrow Focus

A narrow priority focus on frontier missions may overlook the continuing importance of Kingdom-building ministries in established fields, and thus inadvertently undermine existing mission work. Some older agencies may not have the luxury of *exclusive* frontier work, and their apostolic ministry of *strengthening the brethren* should not be despised.¹⁰ Participants in AAP/JP2000 may also fail to explore possible linkages with national churches and on-site mission efforts before launching autonomous initiatives to *their* chosen people group. A truncated view of frontier work may likewise underestimate diverse and strategic support ministries like boarding schools for missionary kids, Bible schools for nationals from contiguous *reached* peoples, the teaching of English or theology to Third World missionaries, and other ministries which encourage national churches (Acts 15:36, 41). While these complex interrelations in the global mission infrastructure are recognized by experienced mission leaders, they may be missed by enthusiastic entry-level participants (church and mission alike) who are new to the multi-task mission environment.

An A-historical Approach

It is ironic that a movement with a millennial mentality and a time-date *stamp* in its title should evince such an a-historical approach to doing missions. Apart from the introduction provided by the popular *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* course and references to the Student Volunteer Movement and 19th Century efforts to complete world evangelization, most participants in the AAP/JP2000 movements approach the task without an understanding of and appreciation for the lessons of twenty centuries of mission history. Yet according to Ralph Winter’s early call to *Pene-*

trate the Last Frontiers, one of the requisite strategic tasks is to *re-examine all previous approaches*. Unfortunately, few of the new generation of missionaries, advocates and their supporting churches seem to be taking the time to do so. Winter, coining the phrase “the re-amateurization of mission,” recently compared the current global wave of frontier enthusiasm to the first-blush amateurism of the early Student Volunteer Movement.¹¹

Thus, for example, at the mobilization level, there are a number of parallels between the AD2000 and Beyond Movement and earlier campaigns to re-vitalize, organize, and unify the *home base* of American foreign missions in the 1880-1920 period. Some current ideas actually have roots in these earlier models. But those earlier efforts foundered despite the best of intentions, transdenominational cooperation, global research, grass-roots promotion, and enormous potential. The question is, *why?*¹²

At the field level, we must also do our homework. What has been done before to reach a given people? What stories lie behind the early missionaries, converts, and martyrs?¹³ What evangelistic approaches have been tried? What has or has not worked, and why? How were medical, educational, or development works integrated with spiritual ministry? What can we learn from the evangelism and discipleship literature that was produced—and can some of it be revised, updated, and reprinted? How were neighboring peoples in this particular region penetrated with the gospel? Why did the blessing not then overflow to this particular *unreached* people? What linguistic, social, cultural, political, ecclesiastical, and theological factors affected the success or failure of evangelistic efforts? Can we develop innovations based on earlier semi-successful models?

As we explore these questions, the historical record sometimes reveals a remarkable awareness of those in the past for what we now call *unreached peoples*, and the use of creative strategies to reach them that in some ways rival Phil Parshall’s call for *new paths*.

In spite of this, these peoples remain (according to our earlier definition) unreached. As I tried to explain this sobering complexity to a group of mobilizing businessmen in an American church, one bluntly remarked, *If mission agencies were doing their jobs, these people would have been reached already! Otherwise why are they unreached?* That, of course,

is the very question I am raising. In our own rush to the final frontiers, we must beware of generational arrogance and historical myopia.

Triumphalism

The "Church for Every People by the Year 2000" goal, aggressive prayer strategies, and "Closure Theology" of the AAP/JP2000 movement can tend to foster a militaristic, opportunistic and triumphalistic spirit. This attitude can be quite inimical to the incarnational mentality needed to live and work long-term as a guest in a foreign land (Phil 2: 5-18). Metaphors like "spies" and "warriors" are as far from the New Testament imagery of "servants" and "guests" as a "sword" is from a "towel."

It is also hermeneutically questionable to turn an Old Testament description of the conquest of Jericho and the Promised Land into a programmatic allegorical guide to the penetration of the world's peoples with the Gospel. Jesus never commissioned spies, explorers or prayer-walkers—only witnesses and disciple-makers (Acts 1:8).

Further, a desire for quick victories can skew decision-making, abort pre-field preparation, compel ill-informed action, and threaten other ministries carefully constructed over many years. In the end, the deadline mentality may jeopardize the formation of truly indigenous churches and the larger, long-term harvest among the very people these agencies and churches profess to love.

Sometimes the choice is between rushing into a field and grabbing a few shocks of grain versus patiently preparing a "combine" which can harvest the whole field. For some super-charged newcomers, "love waits" may be a wiser modus operandi leading ultimately to a superior harvest.

Diversity and Unity

There is value in strategic evangelistic alliances which foster communication and help us avoid needless duplication. But some advocates seem to assume this should take the form of a Western approach to organization and relationships. The notion of "cooperation" itself can be used to stifle healthy competition, discourage minority initiatives, marginalize those who disagree, blur theological distinctives, or impose the agenda of organizations or churches with size, money or influence, usually from the West. Certain denominational distinctives or organizational priorities may actually contribute to success on a given field.

Sometimes those pushing hardest for

cooperation, and perhaps with the most to gain, seem to be specialized interdenominational agencies (e.g. radio, Bible societies), or other "niche" ministries focused on research, mobilization, specialized consultations, short-term teams, etc.

In one instance, a partnership originally designed to serve strategic field concerns and workers is being turned more and more into a mobilization exercise to initiate, educate and encourage funding from newly-adopting churches and advocates.

In other cases, a simplistic and idealistic notion of interdenominational unity is being advocated which is not operative among churches in any Western or Asian context or city. Usually this is suggested by those not actually living on the field. It may not be realistic to expect there to be one "least common denominator" or "plain vanilla" church among a people. Variegated church movements and missionary initiatives are not necessarily sinful or divisive, but may be indicative of the diversity of the Body and the plentiful overflow of the Holy Spirit Who blows "wherever He pleases."

Over-Emphasis on Data and Information-Gathering

The idea that a lack of data and information is a primary inhibiting factor in reaching the unreached is probably an assumption that reflects both a Western worldview and a preoccupation with Internet-inspired information resources. There is also an implicit notion of causality, that is, that data and cultural knowledge are necessary for or lead to more effective prayer or action or recruiting. Information does fuel prayer, thus we see the sending of JP2000 "research teams" and *prayer teams*. But in the majority of cases, is this intermediate exploratory step really necessary to begin discipling the nations? Is it merely postponing or substituting for the tough, longer-term work that must be done?

Also unanswered are certain questions: How much and what kind of data is really needed? Who should gather it? Who needs what data? How is the information to be interpreted, by whom, and to what end? Who controls the information and information flow? Who determines when and how it is used? Who is qualified to evaluate the reliability of the information and the credibility of the research(ers)? What information is needed in order to pray effectively? Given the mass of data available, what information is relevant for gospel communication and church-planting? Who is best qualified to

answer these questions? **How much information is needed to initiate work among an unreached people? In actual fact, don't we already "know" enough to obey?**

Amateur Anthropology

An AD2000 poster at Urbana 96 advertised, "Anyone can do research on an unreached people." Such an approach reflects the overall re-amateurization of missions Winter has spoken of, and an appalling trivialization of the academic disciplines of anthropology and missiology. Long-term field research, the pursuit of anthropological understanding, and the reputation of legitimate missionary anthropology are being sacrificed for the sake of pragmatism and promotion. We must recognize that information and information-gathering are not value-neutral, but reflect the values, perceptions and agendas of the "observer." "People profiles" and "research" produced by cultural neophytes and ethno-tourists can become inadvertent instruments for the promulgation of cultural stereotypes—a new missionary colonialism.

For example, the *research* gathered on one Central Asian people was collected from English-speakers interviewed by the short-term team without recognizing that these interviewees were considered *fringe* members of their own culture. According to a veteran worker on site, some churches and agencies then made *bad decisions based on bad data* gathered thus. In another case, the people profile of one *fierce* Muslim people group arbitrarily focuses on their practice of *revenge* (which is a common characteristic of many Middle Eastern tribal peoples). But the storyline could just as easily have highlighted other needs or cultural themes like friendship and hospitality, and the peoples' love of poetry and song.

A similar reductionism with reference to African Americans could have readily been labeled "racist"! The important thing is to recognize that in such profiles "we" are selecting, as it were, the verbal "frames". Granted, much prayer is being generated. But however sincerely motivated, they are mere "representations" of life which reflect primarily our own biased, narrow, often blurred field of vision. Having produced outstanding graduate Schools of Missiology, missiological societies, mission scholars, and thousands of cross-cultural studies, students, and dissertations, I wonder if the Joshua Project 2000 is really the best plan for missiological research that the evangelical movement can come up with.

Misuse of Power

Ethnic “identity” and designations are also influenced by relations of power. That is, governments, colonialists, scholars, media, ethnic nationalists and missionaries may define ethnicity based on self-interest or political and organizational agendas.¹⁴ Even the process of gathering, selecting, interpreting and disseminating these quickie “Polaroid” cultural descriptions is a function of power: “we” have it, “they” (field missionaries or the ‘target’ race or ethnic group) do not.

Imagine an *alien* photographer taking 1000 snapshots of a “native” (you) during a visit to your home, then with full sincerity but minimal knowledge, selecting three shots as “representative” of this person’s “culture:” one with your mouth open full of food, another of your 3-year old son surreptitiously picking his nose or teeth, a third during a finger-pointing argument with your spouse.

The attitude that (as one mobilizer put it) “inaccurate data is better than no data at all” can be a sloppy, even sinful, misuse of power and twisting of reality. It gives “us” the power to construct an unreached world in our own distorted image, then proceed to “reach” it.¹⁵ The danger is that this arrogant “orientalism”, by non-Christians and Christians alike, may cause further resentment and alienation in the non-Western peoples we say we love.¹⁶

Local Church-Mission Tensions

Much of the JP2000 and AAP literature assumes that the local church has primary Biblical responsibility for world evangelization. As one leader has put it, “It is clear that Joshua Project 2000 will be accomplished by local churches all over the world partnering together to complete the task.”¹⁷

This version of doing frontier missions builds upon and does not challenge cultural trends of individual entrepreneurialism, and the loss of confidence in public institutions (mission agencies and denominations). In the process, the knowledge, experience, and historical perspective of mission agencies may be by-passed by zealous but untrained churches or mega-churches eager for greater control or “hands-on” involvement.

Ralph Winter underscores “the crucial role of mission agencies:”

The idea that a local church, without the help of a mission agency, can send, or ought to send, its own missionaries directly overseas...has been tried again and again. It is probably the one method that has most universally fallen short. It

almost always means the missionaries are not properly guided, or, in the last analysis, even properly supported, since a single congregation is not as stable as a group of congregations working through a tried and true mission agency.

Built right into the Adopt-A-People program is the very basic idea that the first move a local congregation should make is to consult with their favorite mission board to find and adopt a specific people group. They ought not to look first in the encyclopedia [Ed.: or in a “list” of unreached peoples] but to support with their prayers, financial and manpower resources that frontier mission work which is already going on, or is soon slated to begin, under the auspices of a well-established mission agency. [By contrast] do-it-yourself mission...is marvelously attractive to big congregations but [is] seriously beyond their expertise in almost all instances.¹⁸

A British professor of missions has even suggested that the concept of the *primacy of the local church* is heretical: we ought better to speak of the *primacy of the Church* in world evangelization. Both congregational and mission structures and personnel are part of the Body, and neither can say, “I do not need you.” By by-passing mission agencies and developing autonomous mission strategies, some churches risk making needless mistakes. Few Western pastors or youth leaders have lived more than two years in a foreign country. Even fewer (in the Americas at least) can speak a second language fluently, grasp the painful depths of culture stress, or understand the complexities of cross-cultural communication. Few stay long enough to develop long-term personal relationships or grapple with contextualized theologies. Few may be around to deal with the aftereffects of early experiments gone awry.

Nevertheless, sweeping plans are created, usually in the West, which depend upon the support of field workers (e.g. as interpreters, guides, mentors, facilitators, etc.) or which impact national and expatriate field workers who have had no hand in their creation. Those who may suffer from the steep *learning curve* of inexperienced advocates and aggressive churches and *niche* ministries are national Christians and existing field ministries and missionaries. In many parts of the 10/40 Window, mistakes can be costly not just troublesome. Humility alone suggests we trace the footprints of the Holy Spirit and the footprints of those who have gone before us.

Promotion-driven Mobilization

Some aspects of JP2000 and AAP

programs seem based on and justified in terms of what “works” to energize, involve, and mobilize local churches on the home-base, without sufficient regard for the concerns of field workers or new converts. Many of the most visible and vocal leaders of the frontier movement are involved in the *mobilization industry*, a newly created genre of middle-men mobilizers, advocates, and agencies. Their dedication has helped awaken the *sleeping giant*, and has spurred creative new initiatives. But often they lack even rudimentary experience in evangelism or church planting in 10/40 cultures.

As a close friend in one mission agency told me, *There are more and more people networking, and fewer and fewer people working the nets*. Promotional (a.k.a. mobilization) concerns dominate. Success seems measured in terms of the extent of our activity, that is, consultations, partnerships, videos, trips, information sharing, etc., rather than in the extent to which people are coming to Christ. For example, vital security issues have not been resolved, even as AAP agencies and local churches demand more detailed information about converts and church growth in Islamic and other sensitive areas.

So-called *research* trips and “prayer journeys” are being used primarily to motivate and generate involvement. One top AD2000 official frankly admitted this as the real motive. Sometimes (but not always) these are undertaken with insufficient regard for the necessity, expense, and consequences of such trips, or the credibility of the resulting so-called “research.”

Do we really need to use the ruse of ethno-tourism to beguile potential candidates to the field? Is our promotion and recruitment based on Biblical motivations for missions? According to AD2000 literature itself,¹⁷ field missionaries are already working among at least 1157 of the 1739 “gateway peoples”: If so, why send out so many JP2000 *spies*?—and that, three years before the deadline? Given the fact that millions are dying without Christ, why not put the same time and effort into helping churches, Christian colleges and seminaries recruit and train *long-term* harvesters? How many times do we need to *explore* the land before we begin reaching it?

It would appear that no clear mechanisms are in place to safeguard incipient field work from what I’ll call intrusions—the sincere but sometimes unwelcome, unnecessary, time- and energy-consuming and even dangerous intrusions

of explorers, self-styled researchers, and projects aimed at satisfying the insatiable Western appetite for stimulation that is sealed off from usefulness by an accompanying revulsion toward *long-term* commitments by faith. And, if our promotion fails to mention the possibility of death on a cross in the 10/40 Window, we are offering the adopting and sending churches of this generation a *bait-and-switch* gospel not worthy of the name.

III. Suggested Correctives

The Lordship of the Holy Spirit

The Unreached Peoples will not be reached through more research, more promotion, more enthusiastic local churches, more mobilizing, more networking, or more finances *alone*. Anyone who has lived more than one year in the Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist worlds would readily testify to this. Our confidence must not be in the energy of the flesh, human wisdom or Internet resources, but in the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who calls, anoints, equips and sends the apostolic Church into the world (Acts 1:8; 2; 13:1-4) to fully proclaim the Gospel of Christ “by the power of signs and miracles, by the power of the Spirit” (Rom 15:19). Those who hear are *born again* only through the Spirit. We must be careful lest success, or the lack thereof, drive the way we *sell* missions. The AAP and other programs are merely tools. As we mobilize, let us be careful not to *inhale* and become intoxicated with our own rhetoric. Let us rely upon the Holy Spirit, who is the Lord of the Mission.

The Power of Home-Based Intercessory Prayer

Some have derided the old support model of churches who *just pray and give*. But the *widow's mite* is a holy sacrifice to God, and prayer is never “just prayer.” Grounded in the finished work of Christ on the Cross, the prayers of the saints are an active participation in establishing the rule and reign of the Lamb—in spite of disobedience and demonic opposition—among “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:8-10; Mt 16:18; 28:18-20). The Lord has promised, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:8). He has commanded, “Ask the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into his harvest field” (Mt 9:38). The end of authoritative prayer is that every ruler in heaven and earth would “serve the Lord” and “kiss the Son” (Ps 2:8-12), and that “eve-

ry creature in heaven and earth” worship Him (Rev 5:13).

As the AAP and JP2000 programs have highlighted the power of intercessory prayer, it is well to remember that, according to Christ, the most significant intercessors are those who enter their “prayer closet” on behalf of the unreached. If everyone has to go and see before they are motivated to pray, give or go, we’ll never get this job done. Prayer is the most important “hands on” work a Christian can do. I say if you want a *touchy-feely* cross-cultural experience, consider giving your trip money to a Bible translator, and *touch* the heart of Almighty God in fervent, personal and united prayer.

The Gift of Apostolic Ministry

Though every Christian is both a worshipper and a witness (Acts 1:8), not every Christian is a pastor, evangelist, or missionary apostle. The latter are unique ministry gifts bestowed by the Lord upon His Church (Eph 4:11). Though the sovereign Lord scatters and uses unnamed lay disciples as witnesses among the nations, our intentional outreach among a given Unreached People should be coordinated by one who has the anointing, gifts, and sufficient training and wisdom to lead the field work, a “servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle” (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1).

One priority focus of prayer and mobilization is for God to raise up these long-term apostles and prophets and teachers willing to pay the price to serve in pioneer areas. Jesus’ promotional pitch included an unpalatable invitation to walk the world His way: *Take up your cross, deny yourself and follow me*. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, “When Jesus Christ bids a man follow Him, He bids him ‘Come and die.’” In this closing hour of the millenium, more incarnational apostolic witnesses are needed, men and women who bear and live and preach the Cross. *Who will go for us?*

The Value of Apostolic Teams

New Testament missionary “apostles” did not function alone, but in “apostolic teams” (Acts 13:1-4). Apostolic teams are made up of one or more “apostles” with complementary leadership gifts (Barnabas and Paul) who mentor younger international leaders-in-training (Timothy and Titus—one bi-cultural, the other Greek), backed up by support personnel (Luke the physician and scribe), facilitators (Priscilla and Aquila), helpers (John Mark), and other short-term assistants

(Epaphroditus, Phil 4:18).

The vision of the entire gift-mix is to “preach the Gospel where Christ is not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (Rom 15:20; 1 Cor 3:1 Of.). The JP2000 and AAP programs might be stronger and more effective if they placed the highest priority on partnering with agencies and colleges to recruit, train and send strategic, long-term apostolic church-planting teams to work within every unreached people group selected for penetration. All our promotional and recruitment schemes and entry strategies need to be re-examined in the light of this objective.

Emphasize Long-term Goals

While God may certainly use prayer journeys, tentmakers and short-term missionaries, the goal of the JP2000 program is neither a certain quota of short-term trips nor short-term gains. Nor is the goal to establish a mere missionary presence, or to do projects, promotion, or proclamation. The vision is to establish nothing less than a viable, indigenous, evangelizing church movement within every unreached nation. Apostolic ministries under the Lordship of Christ lay a *foundation* for His Church in a given city, region or cultural group (Mt 16:18; 28:18-20; 1 Cor 3:10f.; cf. Acts 16: 6-10, 11-15).

And then every other ministry must “be careful” to “build on,” or relate sensitively to, this “one foundation” “as the Lord has assigned to each his task,” for “fire will test the quality of each man’s work” (1 Cor 3: 5-15). The establishment of a truly indigenous church and the perfecting of the saints usually requires *laborers* committed to language acquisition, culture learning, knowledge of the Scriptures, and love relationships with locals, for starters.

All other activities (all field visits, church-initiated strategies and hands-on projects, short-term assistance, etc.) are to be evaluated according to their contribution to, or detraction from, this objective of “blessing” the peoples of the earth, and those who work among them. Despite protestations otherwise from home-based churches and assertive mobilizers and self-appointed advocates, those in the best position to decide these matters are often those actually living on the field. Note: the evaluative criterion is not whatever might inspire, enthuse, motivate, uplift, involve or otherwise bless *us and our church or service agency*. Our guiding principle must be, “It’s not about us—it’s about them.”

Encourage Field Research and Strategies-in-Context

AAP should continue to encourage sufficient research to facilitate mission education and the adopting of peoples. But the information most needed by “adopting” churches is that which will stimulate informed and Spirit-inspired prayer, without comprising field security, distorting the view of the culture, or diverting resources and energies from actual penetration efforts. At a field level, the information most needed is that which is relevant to Gospel communication and church planting, as the Spirit gives wisdom and insight. The latter takes time, knowledge of the local language, patience, and experience. We need to remember that the goal is not gathering data for its own sake, or titillating churches, or feeding and perfecting Christian databases.

The best harvesting strategies are developed in-context, based on data interpreted by those closest to the harvest itself. As an alternative, the frontier movement should encourage the training and sending of long-term “scholar-activist” missionaries able to gather and utilize their own basic field research.¹⁹ Teams should include workers who are trained in missiology, who are culturally sensitive, able to make use of the secondary research of others, and interpret the potential relevance of new field data. Like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Babylon, pioneer workers should aspire to know the “language and literature” of the people, as well as be skilled in spiritual warfare and open to power encounters in the supernatural. One does not substitute for the other.

Voluntary Cooperation between Local Church and Mission Agency

The local church (Antioch), the elder-council (Jerusalem, Acts 15), and missionary team (Acts 13:1-4) each have a role to play in the Church’s outreach to the nations. That is, both congregational structures (local churches, pastors, teachers) and mission structures (comparable to mission agency “elders” and field workers) are needed. These roles are complementary, but unique. Field strategies should be determined not by home-base churches, or their funding priorities, or their desires to initiate or participate in on-site projects, but by the vision of apostolic teams which function with relative freedom under the Lordship of the Spirit (Acts 16:6-10).

When I was a pastor I would not ex-

pect a visiting missionary to assume he would be telling me how to reach my city or deal with my elder board. Pastors and churches should show the same respect for the expertise and sphere of ministry of men and women of God who labor in distant lands. **I mean no disrespect when I say that churchmen who want a seat at the table in mission decision-making must do their homework. Missions is hard-ball.** Our attitude as home-base pastors and support agencies should be, *What can we do to help you and best partner with you (mission agency, field team) to reach this people?*

Most field workers and agency representatives I know will sincerely try to make room for humble co-laborers who want to learn, grow, and serve Christ as part of the penetration effort. Deference to field initiatives may not fit our desire for some specific kind of participatory democracy in mission decision-making, but again, in view of our earlier illustration about a hospital operating room, it may be best for the *patient* on the operating table. In turn, field workers must be accountable to elder leadership (Acts 21:17-19), accommodate the legitimate needs of partnering churches, and “report” back those who “committed (them) to the grace of God” (Acts 14:26-28). Rather than going with the flow of cultural attitudes and trends, the JP2000 and AAP program should help foster relationships between local churches, mission agencies, and field missionaries which reflect humility and build trust and mutual respect.

Partnership between Western and National Church Missionaries

It is now widely recognized that the emerging mission force from Third World national churches is the great new reality in missions today. The AAP program has the potential to provide avenues for multi-national partnerships in frontier missions.

Western agencies and supporting churches can strategically assist and encourage the mobilization, training, and sending of national missionaries to unreached people groups. Sometimes this will mean loving restraint, not aggressive action, on the part of Westerners and mega-congregations, in order to allow emerging missions time and space for ministry.

Adopting churches will do well to strengthen the hands of Two-Thirds World partners, even at the price of limiting their own *hands-on* involvement in the 10/40 Window. **The goal is not how many missionaries we send but how**

many peoples we reach. For example, recruiting short-term workers to teach English to prospective Argentine pioneer missionaries may be more strategic (and cost-effective) in reaching North Africa than sending Mid-Western church youth groups on 2-week trips to Morocco to pass out tracts.

Re-evaluate Our Closure Strategies

It appears that few mission professionals (e.g. professors and historians of missions, missionaries, mission executives) have had very significant leadership roles in the shaping of these *strategic* mobilization and advocacy programs. Some of our greatest and most accessible wisdom is lodged in the vast field experience and subsequent academic professorships of retired people like Dr. Ralph Covell of Denver Seminary. His books ought to be considered sensations by younger workers. AD2000 leaders must find new ways to empower and give voice to such people and draw on their wisdom, as well as listen more closely to those who actually do the work on the field. Many of the latter cannot attend conferences, yet in some cases have 20, 30, even 40 years of hard-won experience to offer, whether they live within or near by an unreached people group.

Some newer missions have produced their own in-house experts in church-planting in Muslim contexts; the voices of these unknown *younger leaders* need to be heard as well.²⁰

Neither should the voices of relatively unheralded national Christians from neighboring peoples be neglected, although is some cases they may be the least able to overcome centuries of animosity, both toward them by their own people and toward the people being sought.

Finally, planing, promotion, and mobilization strategies need to be evaluated in the light of Scripture by all concerned and tempered by ethnographic and missiologic reality.

Conclusion

What do we do next? As in our opening story, those expatriates and local believers who live *among the nations* have the fearful responsibility and awesome privilege of doing open-heart surgery on a wounded people living in a fallen culture. In frontier missions, by definition, within a people correctly classified as unreached no one has yet successfully performed this delicate surgery whereby a *new heart* replaces a diseased one!

Though the operation may seem slow by Western standards, if it were your life

on the table, your family member, or the cherished culture of your people, wouldn't you much prefer that the surgeon take the time to do it well? Those who do not, we call *quacks*; we prosecute them for practicing without a license. We demand professional expertise of doctors, lawyers, teachers, stock traders, and pastors. But when it comes to missions, some enthusiasts presume that *anybody can do it*.

Am I advocating a return to clerical or missionary elitism? A romantic 19th century notion of missions? Or, a regression to the despised *church as cash cow* approach where an agency says 'give us the money and let us do the work?' A slow-down in the spiritual surge to reach the unreached? God forbid! My concern is for the souls of the people around me. Unreached peoples are not a new *Discovery Channel* for culture surfers. They are not mere *contacts* or database *objects* for us to visit, video, peruse and use in our own theoretical passion for the planet. They are real people. I prefer to call them my friends.

I respect the aims of the AD2000 And Beyond Movement and its programs. I, too, am driven by urgency and a passion for the unreached. But I respect my Muslim and other local friends enough not to barge into their souls with my boots on. Where are the servants who will come and stay, and wash their feet?

I offer these thoughts as a stimulus to discussion. I fear that I may prompt a counter-reaction of flaming missives defending some real *results* of AAP, JP2000, or the *benefits* to this or that congregation. Others will sing the praises of the church ownership model, proffering irrefutable evidence of success. I do not doubt that new and exciting things are happening that do not fit the old molds. I praise God with you! But that is not the point.

Sir Winston Churchill said, "There are two kinds of success: initial and ultimate." Sometimes the former can jeopardize the latter. Despite some initial success, there is a need for a thoughtful and thorough re-evaluation of high-energy, high-visibility, multi-gigabyte programs like Joshua Project 2000 and Adopt A People in the light of the ultimate success we seek.

The year 2000 will soon be upon us. Many are being urged to reach and breach Jericho's strongholds in spiritual battle. But we must go beyond the initial breaching of Jericho's walls. To do so, perhaps we need to change from metaphors of *spying* and *conquering* to that of the

Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Incarnation was the greatest act of spiritual warfare. Christ left His Father's glory and was clothed in flesh as a servant. It was not an exploratory trip. He came on a one-way journey to Calvary And Beyond. Those who aspire to reach those for whom Christ died must book the same itinerary.

Lawrence B. Radcliffe is a pseudonym for a former USCWM staff member who has for a number of years been living and working in the Middle East. He is also engaged in doctoral studies. Parts of this paper were presented at the Mission America/Joshua Project 2000 Consultation in Colorado Springs, Colorado, April 29-30, 1997

Endnotes

¹ *Newsweek* (International Edition), October 6, 1997, pp. 34-42.

² Elements of the following evaluation of the Adopt A People and Joshua Project 2000 programs may apply to other aspects of the larger AD2000 And Beyond Movement with which they are often associated.

³ This AAP proposal by Len Bartlotti was later published in *Mission Frontiers: Bulletin of the USCWM*, Nov. 1980 p 1. Another revised form of the proposal appeared in the *MARC Newsletter*.

⁴ A *people group* has been defined as a significantly large ethnic or sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another. For evangelistic purposes, it is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance. An *unreached people* is a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize their people group without requiring outside cross-cultural assistance.

⁵ Bruce Camp, ed., *Adoption: A Practical Guide to Successfully Adopting an Unreached People Group* (Pasadena: Adopt-A-People Campaign, USCWM, 1993), p.24.

⁶ Camp, p.24.
⁷ In its simplest form, the so-called primordial view assumes that ethnicity is in some way *in the blood* as a permanent and fundamental aspect of identity. Associated with the classic *mosaic* model of the world's diverse cultures, it assumes that ethnic groups are biological units of fixed membership. This simplistic understanding has been largely rejected by secular anthropological researchers since 1969, though it is still largely unquestioned by most evangelical missions scholars.

⁸ Patrick Johnstone's effort to group related peoples into "affinity blocks" is a step in the right direction, though it still assumes that *peoples* are bounded, fixed units. We need yet to explore more seriously the broader web relationships (economic, social, political, historical, linguistic, etc.) and boundary dynamics between peoples, as well as their own self-understandings and multiple identities, before positing the kind of *church* to be established among this *people*. This type of ethnographic information may best be gathered by open-minded *immigrant researchers* who live and work among the people, rather than external *advocates* with *a priori* agendas.

⁹ This issue is brilliantly explored in one of Donald McGavran's most important, but least-

known, books, *Ethnic Realities: Lessons from India*, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976).

¹⁰ It is important to emphasize that AAP, viewed as a program, was intended to focus narrowly and exclusively on verified unreached people groups. The defensible reasoning is that many other efforts and dollars are already dedicated to the peoples considered reached. AAP is aimed at the *least reached* (this despite the fact that some agencies, such as The Missionary Church, have creatively grouped reached and unreached people projects into a wider *adoption* program). The original exclusivity of the AAP emphasis should not, however, be interpreted as a diminution of the importance of regular mission work in other non-frontier fields—if only because those other fields are where the workers must come for outreach to the unreached peoples.

¹¹ *Mission Frontiers*, Jan-Feb 1996, p.6

¹² See Len Bartlotti, A Call for A Mission Renewal Movement (*International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Vol 1:1, 1981), and Vincent Rabe, The Home Base of American Foreign Missions, 1880-1920 (Harvard University Press). [**Please check this article look in the bibliography of my article, "A Call" for the exact bibliographic citation for Rabe's book.]

¹³ One may fruitfully examine, for example, missionary biographies, early issues of *The Muslim World* journal, chronicles of individual agencies, the writings of men like Samuel Zwemer, etc.

¹⁴ In the world at large, *post-modernist* writings have contributed to a new sensitivity to the relationship between language and power.

¹⁵ This is true, for example, of the Uighurs of China, the Kurds, and other groups who have "re-discovered" their sense of historical-cultural identity. The Pashai of Afghanistan, whose identity as a distinct "ethnic group" did not emerge until the 1970s, were somewhat arbitrarily distinguished from other Nuristani (Kafir) hill tribes by Western linguists and anthropologists. This eventually led to official Afghan government recognition, also with political intent. The group itself later appropriated the convenient identity marker as useful for their own social and political purposes. But as in many other such cases which could be cited, *ethnic identity* is not so much *in the blood* as it is *in the head* (or *in the heart*) of the subject/actor, or the observer.

¹⁶ Middle Easterners, for example, decry the impact of media in spreading distorted images of their societies. Those who lack access to these power sources feel disenfranchised and unable to influence the politically-correct ideology or cultural stereotypes. See, for example, Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1981).

¹⁷ A promotional letter from AD2000/Mission America inviting denominational and mission executives to the JP2000 Consultation in Colorado Springs, Colorado, April 29-30, 1997.

¹⁸ Ralph D. Winter, "Basic Concepts in Frontier Missiology," p. E-12 (*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, a Study Guide*, William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, 1997)

¹⁹ The term has been used most often by Ralph D. Winter, based on the model of Paul the *task-theologian* and that of the Jesuit missionary scholars of the 17th Century.

²⁰ For example, a fine tool originally developed to help short-term teams do ethnographic research might more appropriately be placed in the hands of long-term missionary candidates and field personnel. See *Exploring the Land: Discovering Ways for Unreached People to Follow Christ*, by Shane Bennett and Kim Felder (Littleton, CO: Caleb Project, 1995).