



Celebrating 25 Years: Snapshots from IJFM:1989–1992

What Were They Thinking?

Editorial: Two Opportunities, Two Obstacles (IJFM 9:4, October 1992)

by Todd Johnson

Editor's note: In his final editorial, Todd describes two encouraging "opportunities." Note the connection between "The Global Ethnoscape" and discussions surrounding the Global Network of Mission Structures, founded in 2005 (see gnms.net and Ralph Winter's IJFM 24:1 Editorial Reflection on "global peoples" for more background).

"The Massive Resource" includes what was then called "Third-World" (more recently "Global South" or "Majority World") missions. Note that *Mission Next: Relating to the Majority World Harvest Force* is the main theme when CrossGlobal Link, The Mission Exchange, the Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS) and the International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM) meet together in Denver, CO this fall. For more details see p. 60. See ijfm.org/isfm for special considerations related to the overlapping ISFM gathering.

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Two for and Two against

It is still not too late to consider reaching all peoples by the year 2000. There are two very encouraging and somewhat serendipitous factors that bring the task into closer reach. On the other hand, two seemingly harmless factors mitigate against the first two.

The Global Ethnoscape

One of the most encouraging yet unexpected developments in the world of missions is the way in which the peoples of the world are rearranging themselves. "More people are in some sense where they do not belong than ever before," says Arjun Appadurai, professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, "but even those who have not moved are in some sense in greater contact with those who have." Appadurai says scholars need to study "the landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live: Tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree." He chooses to call these "global ethnoscapes" while others speak of "transnational identity." (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 3, 1992:A7-A9).

This implies that unreached peoples are inexorably coming into closer and closer contact with Christian peoples.

The Massive Resource—From Any Perspective

Second, Christians all over the world cannot help but notice what a mighty force for evangelization they represent. Each tradition seems to have a slightly different idea of what the harvest force is but in the end the unfinished task is dwarfed by them. This is true whether one speaks of one Protestant Evangelical for every 7 non-Christians or one Catholic for every 3 non-Christians. The growth of Third-World missions in all traditions, the burgeoning Charismatic movement, and the new missions awareness sweeping the Body of Christ all point to an optimistic view of the resources available for evangelizing the world.

Is It All Sewn Up Then?

In this positive context it is hard to believe that a closer examination of world evangelization would reveal two startling negative developments. As peoples move into closer contact and the resources of the church reach an all time high, Christians have apparently decided (1) to focus resources on evangelizing each other while (2) setting aside a minimal mission force for the unreached peoples. How can this be?

Targeting Each Other

Understandably, as Christians gain a deeper knowledge and commitment to Jesus Christ, they desire to share this with others. When the majority of this is focused in mission on non-Christians, particularly those currently beyond the reach of the gospel, then world evangelization goes forward. But, so often, renewed Christians look first at other Christians around them and spend all their time ministering to them. Here their efforts in renewing others may well result in other renewed Christians but this does not directly impact frontier missions.

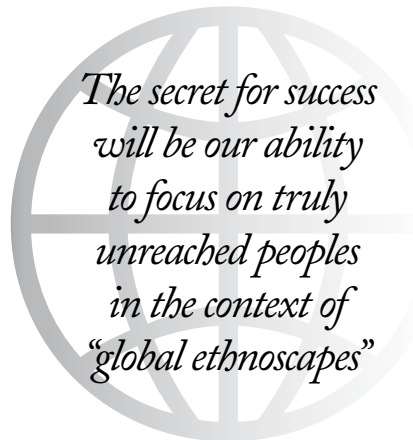
In the final analysis a large percentage of mission efforts today take place entirely in the context of already Christian peoples. This comes at a strategic time when one almost has to try hard to avoid contact with unreached peoples. Why would agencies and churches shy away from this grand opportunity?

The Fewest Possible

At the same time, frontier missions advocates are taking a minimalist position in regards to the deployment of missionaries among unreached peoples. A recent frontier missions publication (and many before it) talk of the need for 44,000 missionaries to reach the 11,000 unreached people groups. This may seem adequate but given all the perils these face it is far too few to take the job seriously. Coupled with this, the estimate of 17,000 missionaries already working among unreached peoples is probably too high since it

calculated with many heavily-Christian peoples classified as unreached (e.g., an enormous number of Bibleless Christian peoples with Wycliffe missionaries among them). Thus we are under the impression that we are already almost finished and only need a handful of new volunteers to finish off the task.

This has to be put into the larger context of mission where many reached peoples have 50–100 agencies working among them—many of them involved in pioneer church planting! The problem seems to be when a new



denomination enters a people already heavily-churched but with no members of its own kind, it is there precisely to start new churches. Thus the further irony that agencies and churches make a maximum resource allocation for reached peoples and a minimal one for unreached peoples.

Redefining the Task

A third mitigating factor arises out of the other two: mission agencies and churches tend to redefine frontier missions in terms of their existing works. A mission pastor recently wrote “There could be a temptation to classify a people group as unreached, because the group is worthy of a church planting ministry, and such a classification would be perceived as an aid to garnering support for a ministry. This temptation must be resisted.” Thus, agencies and churches find it easy to redefine frontier missions as every mission effort requiring church planting

outside of their own tradition. The result is that peoples non-Evangelical, non-Protestant, non-Catholic, non-Charismatic, non-etc. are classified as unreached. This has the net effect of inflating the task significantly beyond true frontier missions. In the end, there are fewer “acceptable” resources and more “unreached” peoples.

The Result?

The end result is that we are crawling along in frontier missions eight years before the year 2000 when we should be making rapid progress. The secret for success will be our ability to focus on truly unreached peoples in the context of “global ethnoscapes” with the massive resources of the whole body of Christ instead of targeting each other and setting aside only a minimal amount of resources for the frontier mission enterprise. **IJFM**

*Todd M. Johnson, August 1992,
Rockville, Virginia, USA*