

Finishing the Task

The Unreached Peoples Challenge

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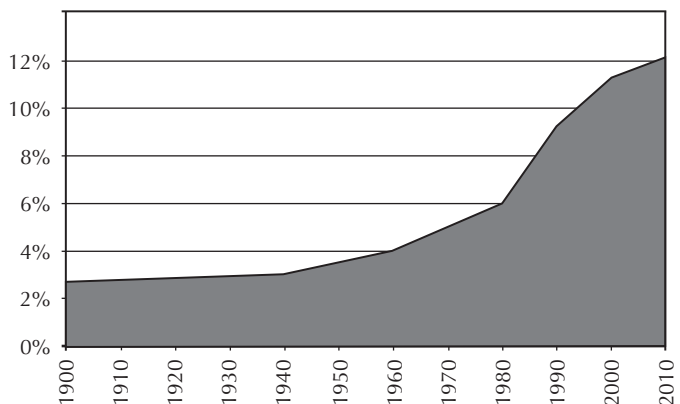
Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. — Habakkuk 1:5

God's promise to bless all the "families of the earth," first given to Abraham 4,000 years ago, is becoming a reality at a pace "you would not believe." Although some may dispute some of the details, the overall trend is indisputable. Biblical faith is growing and spreading to the ends of the earth as never before in history.

The Amazing Progress of the Gospel

One of every eight people on the planet is a practicing Christian who is active in his/her faith. The number of believers in what used to be "mission fields" now surpasses the number of believers in the countries from which missionaries were originally sent. In fact, more missionaries are now sent from non-Western churches than from the traditional mission-sending bases in the West. The Protestant growth rate in Latin America is well over three times the biological growth rate. Protestants

Practicing Christians as a Percentage of Total World Population Since 1900



It took 18 centuries for practicing Christians to grow from 0% of the world's population to 2.5% in 1900, only 70 years to grow from 2.5% to 5% in 1970, and just 40 years to grow from 5% to 12% by the year 2010. Today, there is one practicing Christian for every seven people worldwide who are either nominal or non-Christian.

in China grew from about one million to over 80 million believers in less than 50 years, with most of that growth occurring in just the last few decades. In the 1980s, Nepal was still a staunch Hindu kingdom with only a small persecuted church. Today there are hundreds of thousands of believers, and churches have been started within each of its more than 100 distinct people groups.

Tragic Reality: Two Billion Still Cut Off

While this amazing progress of the gospel gives much cause for rejoicing, it obscures a tragic reality. How could that be? The fact is that the gospel often expands within a community but does not normally “jump” across cultural boundaries between peoples, especially those created by hate or prejudice. Believers can readily influence their “near neighbors” whose language and culture they understand, but religion is often bound up with cultural identity. Therefore, religious beliefs do not easily transfer from one group to another.

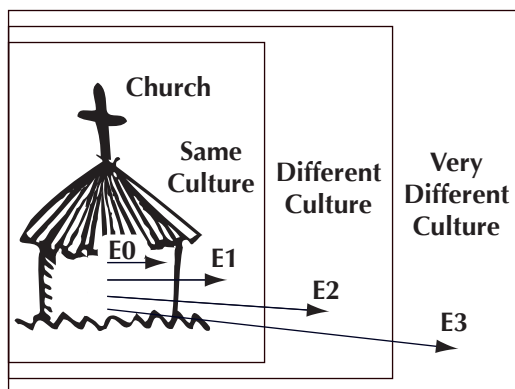
When believers reach out to their friends, relatives or others within their own culture it is referred to as E1 evangelism. (See E-Scale diagram.)

This is the most effective type of evangelism. But, even if all the members of every church in the world were to bring every one of their friends and relatives within their own culture to obedient faith in Christ, and they in turn were able to bring all their friends and relatives to Christ and so on, no matter how much time you allow, there would still be billions cut off from the gospel. They would be sealed off by boundaries of prejudice and culture.

The church cannot grow within peoples where relevant churches do not exist. Forty percent of the individuals in the world live within peoples with no church. They are no more spiritually “lost” than your cousin who has never gone to church, but unlike your cousin, there is no church made up of people like themselves with whom they can fellowship. (See P2 and P3 in diagram.) Such people live in groups that we refer to as being “unreached.” Their entire people has not yet been effectively reached with the gospel.

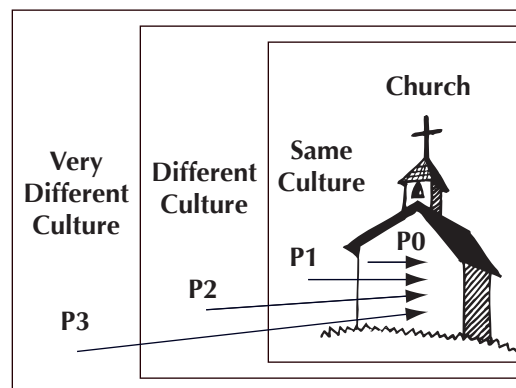
Thus, while there are still tens of millions who have never heard the name “Jesus” at all, there are hundreds of millions more who may have heard of Jesus and may even have high regard for Him, but who cannot see a way to

E-Scale



The **E-Scale** compares the cultural distances that Christians need to move in order to communicate the gospel. E0 refers to evangelism of church-going Christians. E1 is reaching one's own culture across the barrier of “church culture.” E2 is cross-cultural evangelism into a similar, but different culture. E3 evangelism is taking the gospel to cultures very different from that of the messenger.

P-Scale



The **P-Scale** helps compare the cultural distances that potential believers need to move in order to join the nearest church. A P1 people has a culturally relevant church. A P2 people is in contact with similar cultures in which a culturally relevant church exists. The only churches a P3 people is in contact with, if any, are very foreign and composed of people very different from themselves.

become His disciples and still remain within their natural community. Standing before them are barriers ranging from the relatively trivial to the seemingly insurmountable, many of them beyond the demands of the gospel.

Cornelius in Acts 10 would have had to cross the barrier of circumcision as an adult—a painful price to pay to be fully accepted into fellowship with the Jewish believers of his day. A Muslim Turk today faces similar obstacles if he were to desire to become a “Christian.” All his life he has been told, “To be a Turk is to be a Muslim.” To him, Christianity is the religion of the barbarian “infidel” Crusaders who brutally ravaged the land and peoples of Turkey, both Muslim and Christian alike. To become a Christian is to become a traitor, turning his back on his family, community and country.

“A Witness to All the Nations”

Jesus said, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to *all the nations*, and then the end shall come” (Matthew 24:14).

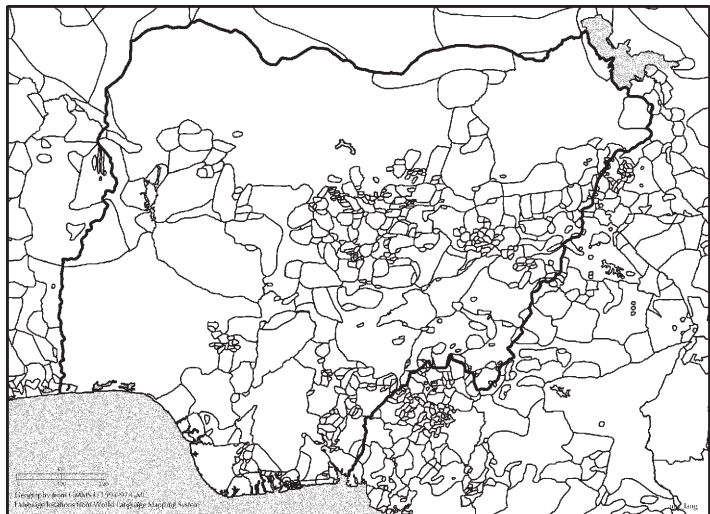
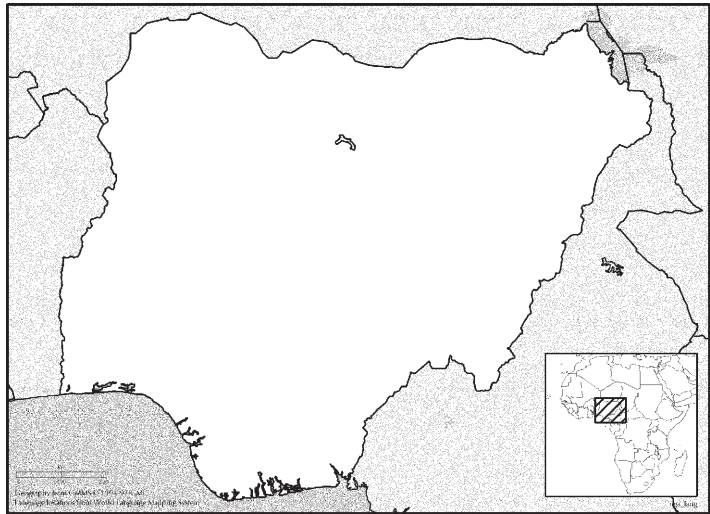
A close look at the end of this verse says a lot about what we should watch for and work toward in this age. Jesus says that before the end comes, there will be “a witness to all the nations.”

The “nations” Jesus was referring to are not countries or nation-states. The wording He chose (the Greek word *ethne*) points to the ethnicities, the languages and the extended families which constitute the peoples of the earth.

Who are these peoples? Jesus did not provide a list of the peoples. He did not define the idea of peoples with precise detail. What matters most is not that the peoples can be definitively identified and *counted*, but that God has given us a task that can be *completed*.

By “witness” Jesus meant that the “gospel of

the kingdom” will be proclaimed in open view throughout entire communities. The gospel of the kingdom is Christ prevailing over evil, liberating people so that they can live obediently and freely under His lordship and blessing. God wants a persuasive display of that kingdom victory exhibited in every people. What better exhibit of God’s kingdom than a community of people who are living under Christ’s authority? That’s why we should aim at obedient discipling fellowships of believers within every people. While not the only way to glorify God, nothing puts Christ’s lordship on display like a community of people dedicated to following Him and effectively pushing back against the dominion of darkness.



Ethnolinguistic Peoples by Language of the Same Area

Matthew 24:14 makes it clear that we must make it our first priority to see that every people has a living testimony of the gospel of the kingdom.

FOUR APPROACHES TO PEOPLE GROUP THINKING

In order to work together strategically, mission leaders have been refining the concept of “people groups” as a rough measure of our progress toward completing the entire task. There are four useful ways of looking at the idea of people groups: *blocs of peoples*, *ethnolinguistic peoples*, *sociopeoples*, and *unimax peoples*. The first two are especially useful for summarizing the total task and developing strategies and partnerships to approach known peoples. The latter two are more useful for those who are on the field working to establish churches. Each is of significant value and corresponds to a distinct aspect of strategic thinking. Only one allows us to speak of closure of the essential mission task in the sense that every person has a reasonable opportunity to respond to the gospel.

1. Blocs of Peoples for Global Level Perspective and Strategies

Blocs of peoples are a limited number of summary categories into which we can place peoples in order to analyze them.

Major Cultural Blocs: We have grouped peoples, particularly “unreached” peoples, along major cultural lines according to the predominant religion within the group. The major cultural blocs of unreached peoples are

Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Ethno-Religious, Non-Religious and Others. This model allows us to summarize the remaining task in relation to the potential mission force.

Affinity Blocs: Patrick Johnstone has suggested another model which combines sets of closely related ethnolinguistic peoples into “people clusters” and further combines people clusters into “affinity blocs” based on language, history, culture, etc. The 12 blocs that comprise the majority of the least evangelized peoples are: African Sahel, Cushitic, Arab World, Iranian, Turkic, South Asian, Tibetan, East Asian, South East Asian, Malay and Eurasian. Combining groups along these lines enables mission organizations to begin exploring ways of establishing strategic partnerships to reach related peoples.

2. Ethnolinguistic Peoples for Mobilization and Preparation

An ethnolinguistic people is an ethnic group distinguished by its self-identity with traditions of common descent, history, customs and language.

The Laz people from the Black Sea region of Turkey, for example, are easily identified by other Turks not only by their distinctive facial features but also by their unique “romantic” pronunciation of Turkish.

Sometimes what appears initially to be a unified ethnolinguistic group turns out to be several smaller groups. Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, began his Bible translation work with the Cakchiquel of Guatemala. The translators who followed him discovered that the Cakchiquel could not

Four Approaches to People Group Thinking

Types of Peoples	Major Cultural Blocs	Ethnolinguistic Peoples	Sociopeoples	Unimax Peoples
Composition	broad categories of people groups	often a cluster of unimax groups	an association of peers	networks of families w/ a shared identity
What Defines Group	religious-cultural spheres	linguistic, ethnic & political boundaries	activities or interests	social and cultural prejudices
How Identified	available published data	available published data	discovered on site	discovered on site
Strategic Significance	global overview	mobilization and strategy	small group evangelism	church planting
Quantity	7 major cultural blocs	approx. 4,500 “least reached”	number unknown	est. 8,000 “unreached”

be reached with one translation but would, in fact, require translations for six distinct written dialects. If they were producing gospel cassettes rather than written translations, they would have to deal with even more dialectical differences. Differences in pronunciation often make people unwilling to listen to a message spoken by a member of a related group even though the words are the same on the printed page.

Recent cooperative efforts among mission researchers have produced fairly comprehensive lists of ethnolinguistic peoples. These lists have given a great boost to the cause of frontier mission. Much of the information is being used to make profiles and other relevant information widely available through printed media and the worldwide web.²

People blocs and ethnolinguistic lists give us a way to identify peoples and make the larger body of Christ aware of their existence and the need to reach them. Both approaches stimulate prayer and initial planning for specific people groups, leading to serious strategic efforts to evangelize them.

3. Sociopeoples and Preliminary Evangelism

A sociopeople is a relatively small association of peers who have an affinity for one another based upon a shared interest, activity or occupation.

Once we actually send long-term missionaries to a pioneer mission field, they have to learn a great deal just to be able to live, communicate and better understand the target people. After the initial phase of cultural learning and adaptation, the question remains as to how to begin to establish a church within that people.

Quite often we can effectively evangelize individuals by starting a Bible study or a small prayer group within these specialized groups. The group may be women who wash at the river, taxicab drivers, college students living in dorms or new arrivals in the big city from a particular rural group. There are almost unlimited potential opportunities for this type of group evangelism in our world today. For mission purposes, we can work with sociopeoples for preliminary evangelism as an intermediate bridge to long-range church planting goals.

Thus, approaching a sociopeople can be strategic in giving a focus for ministry among a specific subset of the larger society as a first

step to full blown church planting. Some types of groups may prove to be especially helpful when establishing churches, while others may hinder the process. Natural leaders and Bible teachers for churches might be discovered by first reaching businessmen or teachers. Efforts to reach religious leaders such as Buddhist monks and Muslim mullahs can be particularly effective because they are already recognized as spiritual leaders. On the other hand, choosing the wrong group could cause problems. For instance, focusing on children's ministry for initial evangelism within a unreached people may be interpreted as a threat by their natural families.

4. Unimax Peoples for People Movements to Christ

A unimax people is the maximum sized group sufficiently unified to be the target of a single people movement to Christ, where "unified" refers to the fact that there are no significant barriers of either understanding or acceptance to stop the spread of the gospel.

In 1982, mission leaders hammered out a useful definition for a "people group." For evangelistic purposes [a people group] is "the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance." (see next page)

The term "unreached peoples" is used widely today to refer to ethnolinguistic peoples, which are based on other criteria and would normally be larger in size than groups as defined in the 1982 definition. To avoid confusion and help clarify the missiological task before us, we can use the term *unimax peoples* to distinguish the kind of people group intended by the 1982 definition.

Jungle tribes and other small, geographically remote peoples are almost always single unimax peoples. Discovering unimax realities within larger ethnolinguistic peoples in complex societies is a bit more challenging.

While language is often a primary means by which a person understands his or her cultural identity, we must consider other factors that keep peoples separate. Religion, class distinctions, education, political and ideological convictions, historical enmity between clans or tribes, customs and behaviors, etc., all have potential to develop strong sociocultural boundaries within

ethnolinguistic clusters of unimax peoples. This fact alone helps to explain the differing estimates for the number of “unreached peoples.”

For example, India cannot be approached on an ethnolinguistic basis alone. In addition to having over 1600 major languages and dialects, India is further divided by religion, caste and other sociocultural barriers. A sociological survey in 1991 identified 4,635 peoples in India alone.³

Sadly, neighboring groups often hate and fear each other. Thus, in the early stages of evangelism such groups may refuse to fellowship with one another. Rivalries between major clans among the Muslim Somali people are so severe that they have almost dragged the entire country into ruin. In the early stages of evangelism and church planting, such simmering hostilities will likely mean that such groups can most effectively be approached with the gospel message separately. The bright hope of the gospel is, of course, that new Christ-following movements in such settings of strife will work for the healing of enmities between peoples.

Indeed, history shows that once smaller hostile groups begin following Christ, they often coalesce into larger groups. For example, when the Christian faith first began to make inroads into Scandinavia, hundreds of mutually hostile tribes inhabited the region. The Norwegian, Swedish and Danish spheres today are the result of widespread reconciliation and consequent unification resulting from the adoption of Christian faith on the part of many smaller, formerly warring tribal groups.

The first three approaches to people group thinking—as blocs, as ethnolinguistic peoples, and as sociopeoples—are each helpful in understanding and responding to the task to which Christ has commissioned us. Yet they all, in one way or another, point the way toward beginnings. This fourth (unimax) way of looking at peoples has more to do with finishing, not in the sense that there is nothing left to do, but in the sense that the essential first step for the gospel to flourish within a people has been accomplished. The unimax approach to peoples can help us press on toward closure—our corporate *finishing* of what is completable about Christ’s mission mandate.

The value of the unimax approach lies in the way it identifies the boundaries hindering the flow of the gospel, while at the same time firing the ambitions of dedicated Christians to pursue the evangelization of every peoples cut off by prejudicial boundaries, leaving no smaller group sealed off within a larger group.

Can They Be Counted?

These often subtle but powerful *sociocultural* barriers exist within groups which often appear unified to outside observers. Some have dismissed the usefulness of the unimax concept because sociocultural prejudice barriers cannot easily be identified or precisely quantified.

The unimax peoples definition was never intended to be used to precisely quantify the remaining task of frontier mission. Instead, it makes us sensitive to the cultural realities we must take into account if we are serious about

Mission Leaders Agree on Strategic Definitions

In March 1982 a group of mission leaders came together in Chicago for a meeting sponsored by the Lausanne Strategy Working Group and the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies. It was designed to help bring clarity and definition to the remaining missionary task. At no time before or since this meeting has as large or as representative a group gathered for two days to focus specifically upon the necessary definitions for a strategy to reach the unreached peoples. Two basic definitions came from this meeting:

1. **A People Group** is “a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or combinations of these.” *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.”*
 2. **An Unreached People Group** is “a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group.”
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finishing that task. A people group awareness helps workers on site identify bypassed peoples where the work of making disciples has not yet begun.

Approaching Peoples Cautiously

Each of these four approaches to various kinds of peoples has a proper and valuable use. *Blocs* help us sum up the task. The *ethno-linguistic* approach helps us mobilize. *Socio-peoples* help us begin evangelizing. Beware of taking ethnolinguistic lists too seriously, however. They are a good place to begin strategizing church planting efforts, but cross-cultural workers should be prepared for surprising discoveries when confronted by the cultural realities on the field.

Sometimes the very same people group is listed twice because it is found on both sides of a political boundary. In actuality, it is the same people group. It may only need a single church planting effort bridging the political line. For example, Uzbek groups are reported in 20 countries in addition to those in Uzbekistan.

On the other hand, the country of Uzbekistan reports 56 groups within it that do not speak Uzbek, and only one (very large group—15 million strong) that does! It is almost certainly true that this “one” large group represents a number of different unimagined groups that need to be reached separately.

Using political boundaries to distinguish people groups is like dropping cookie cutters down on the geographical distribution of a people group, then calling the pieces within each cutter a different type of dough. Granted, in many cases of extended separation, groups do become distinct—especially if new migration ceases—but they are not often antagonistic. In much of the developing world, the concept of political separation is quite artificial since borders are often quite permeable.

Consider the challenge of the Kurds. These fiercely independent people are found in a homeland that spans at least five countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Azerbaijan. For the sake of mission strategy, they are certainly not just one people group. They are not even just five groups. In addition to having four major language sub-groups, traditional

rivalries keep them fighting with one another even when you would think they would unite to fight non-Kurds for the sake of a Kurdish homeland.

Missionaries need to be aware of the possibility, as in the case of the Kurds, that peoples are not necessarily unified even if millions are in one country. Yet, smaller populations of Kurds found in significant numbers in 13 countries outside of the “Kurdistan” homeland are potentially strategic “bridge” populations back to groups in their homeland area. Furthermore, those who are dislocated from their natural homeland are often more open to the gospel. Once a remote segment of a larger group comes to accept Christ, it may become an effective bridge back to its people in their homeland. Political boundaries do not often limit the spread of the gospel. Of course, all of this “country specific” information can be very useful for planning strategy and forming partnerships for reaching widely scattered members of specific people groups.

As history unfolds and global migration increases, more and more people groups are being dispersed throughout the entire globe. Dealing with this phenomenon is now called “diaspora missiology.” Not many agencies take note of the strategic value of reaching the more accessible fragments of these “global peoples.” The new Global Network of Mission Structures (www.gnms.net) is intended to help agencies do just that.

Another reason to be cautious when applying people group thinking is the reality that powerful forces such as urbanization, migration, assimilation, and globalization are changing the composition and identity of people groups all the time. The complexities of the world’s peoples cannot be neatly reduced to distinct, non-overlapping, bounded sets of individuals with permanent impermeable boundaries. Members of any community have complex relationships and may have multiple identities and allegiances. Those identities and allegiances are subject to change over time.

People group thinking is a strategic awareness that is of particular value when individuals have a strong group identity and their everyday life is strongly determined by a specific shared culture.

THE ESSENTIAL MISSIONARY TASK

What is needed in every people group is for the gospel to begin moving throughout the group with such compelling, life-giving power that the resulting churches can themselves finish spreading the gospel to every person.

Good but lesser goals may delay or distract us. Evangelism among street vendors or students might lead to discipleship groups for personal growth and even evangelism. But why stop short of anything less than a burgeoning movement of Christ-followers characterized by whole families? Why not expect that God is well able and willing to attract to His Son a substantial movement that will spread rapidly, spontaneously and thoroughly within whole peoples?

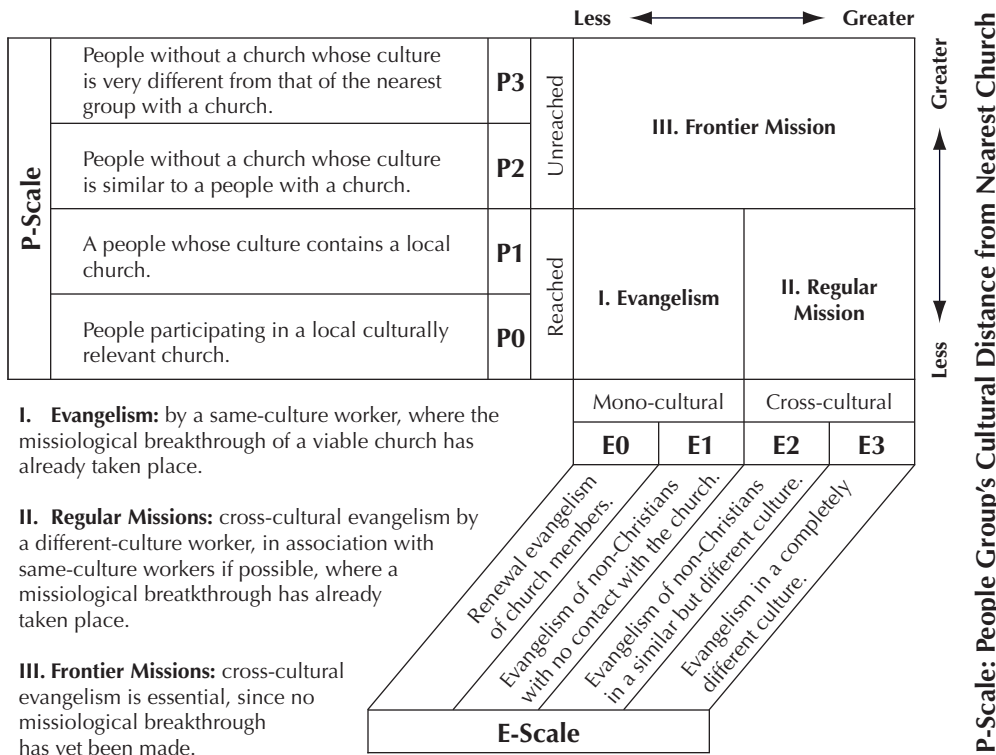
The *essential missionary task* is to establish a *viable indigenous church planting movement* that carries the potential to renew whole extended families and transform whole societies. It is *viable* in that it can grow on its own, *indigenous* meaning that it is not seen as foreign, and a *church planting movement* that continues

to reproduce intergenerational fellowships that are able to evangelize the rest of the people group. Many refer to this achievement of an indigenous church planting movement as a *missiological breakthrough*.

We have done our basic mission job when individuals within the society (even those outside of the church) acknowledge that the movement belongs to their society. Only when this level of cultural adaptation is achieved will the dynamic, life-changing love of Jesus become available to move freely throughout the people group. Donald McGavran referred to one form of missiological breakthrough as “people movements to Christ.” We can hold this goal as the minimal achievement within every people in order to give a realistic opportunity for everyone in that people group to say “yes” to Jesus Christ and His kingdom, without adding cultural barriers to the already steep spiritual demands of the gospel. Jesus commissioned us to accomplish nothing less. We should settle for nothing less.

Regular Missions and Frontier Missions

E-Scale: Evangelist’s Cultural Distance from Potential Convert



Missiological Closure— A Breakthrough in Every People

The word “closure” refers simply to the idea of finishing. In the 1970s, the Lord began to open the eyes of many to the fact that the irreducible, essential mission task of a breakthrough in every people group was also a completable task. It is in fact the only task given to his people that actually has a completable dimension to it.

At the time, more than half of the world’s population lived within unreached people groups. Even so, a small group of mission activists had the faith to believe that if a movement could be mobilized to focus attention on the unreached peoples, which for a time were called “hidden peoples,” then the essential mission task could be completed within a few decades. In faith, they coined the phrase “A Church for Every People by the Year 2000” to capture the essence of the completable nature of the mission mandate. While no one ever predicted that it *would* be completed by the end of the year 2000, they were confident that it was possible. The phrase succeeded in igniting the hearts of countless thousands with a passion for seeing Christ honored, worshiped and obeyed within every people. God was at work in similar ways among others, and a global movement focused on the unreached peoples was born. Today we are seeing the fulfillment of a vision that only a few dared to dream just two decades ago.

It is unreasonable to even talk of evangelizing every person, since day by day hundreds of thousands of children are born. By contrast, the idea of “A Church for Every People” is one possible and reasonable approximation of what the Great Commission may mean.

We can confidently speak of closure to this unreached peoples mission. There were an estimated 17,000 unreached peoples in 1976. Today there are only an estimated 8,000 unreached (unimax) peoples, and a dynamic global movement is now in full swing that is committed to seeing Christ worshipped and obeyed within every one of them.

Reached or Unreached: verifying the presence of a viable church movement

Establishing a viable, indigenous church planting movement is a process. A group

is not “unreached” one day and suddenly “reached” the next. Patrick Johnstone has utilized a Church Planting Indicator ranking the progress within a particular people group:

- 0—No known believers
- 1—No churches, some believers
- 2—One known church
- 3—Group of churches
- 4—Reproducing church movement
- 5—Widespread, disciplined churches

Reliable sources of direct observation are not always available to confirm the status of church planting within a particular people, though. Nevertheless, we can make some well informed guesses about the presence or absence of a church movement from quantifiable data. The Joshua Project has developed a scale that integrates data from many sources to classify every people into one of four categories:

- Unreached / Least Reached
- Formative or Nominal Church
- Emerging Church
- Growing Church

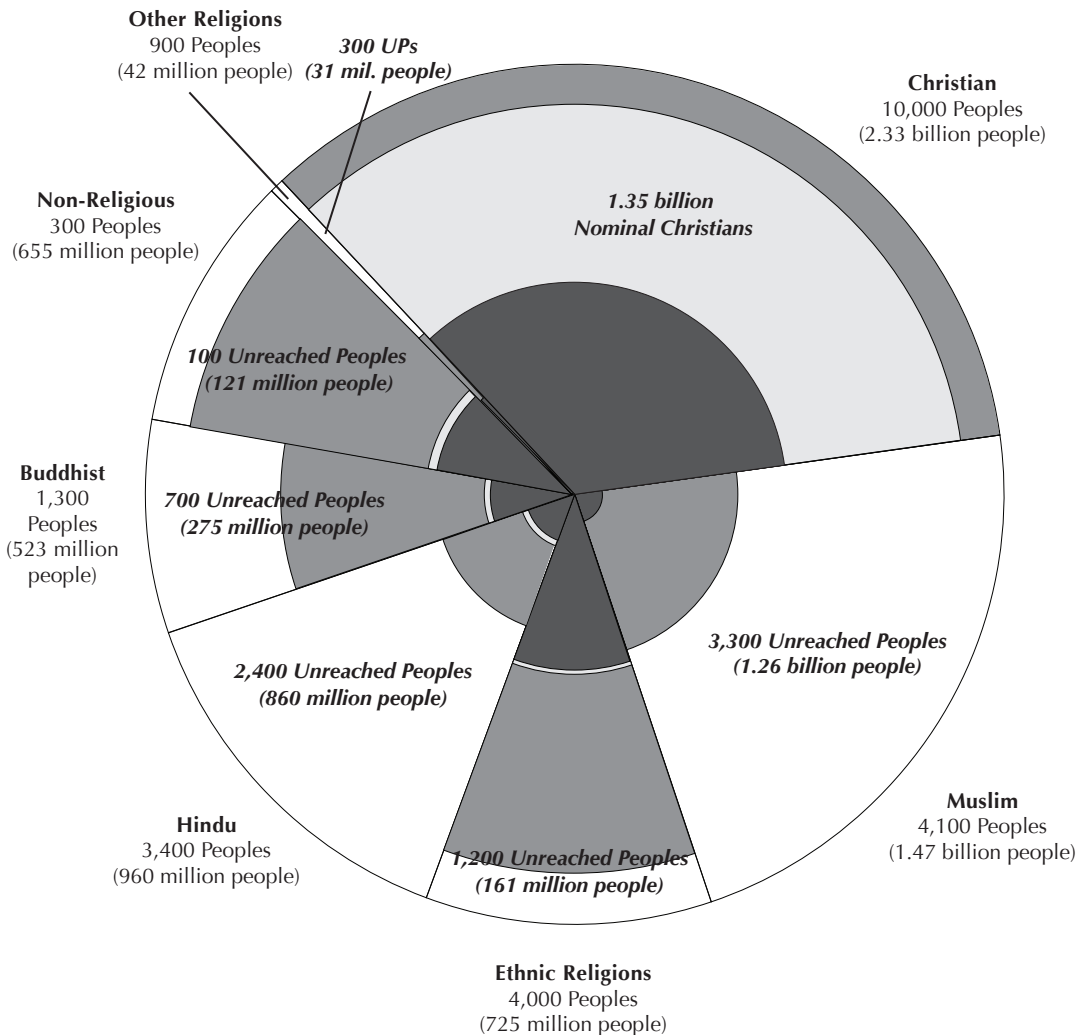
While this level of information sharing and access to data is very helpful, it is primarily gathered at the ethnolinguistic level and does not always reflect unimax realities.

What if an ethnolinguistic people is actually a cluster of unimax peoples, and while one of them is experiencing a church planting explosion, other groups in the cluster have little or nothing happening within them? The unreached unimax peoples may even vigorously resist the movement to Christ in the related group because of some historical animosity. The growth of the church in the one unimax people may divert missionary attention from the needs of the other groups in the cluster.

THE MANDATE IS MORE THAN CLOSURE

What God will do is always more than what He has given us to do. He has given us a clear and simple thing to finish: to see that Christ is worshiped and followed among every people. This is the essential missionary task. This task we must do with utmost focus and passion until it is finished. But there is still more to be done. The missiological breakthrough is

The Globe at a Glance



- True Christians, available as a work force, through discipleship and equipping
- Purely Nominal "Christians," needing E0 renewal evangelism
- Non-Christians making no Christian profession but living within reached groups, needing E1 outreach evangelism
- Non-Christians living within unreached people groups, requiring E2 to E3 cross-cultural evangelism

The chart is divided by the predominant religion within each unimax people.* ("Peoples" = "People Groups") All individuals in the world can be found somewhere on this diagram. Religion is seen as part of the cultural identity of the group as a whole. For instance, when a Buddhist people has a church movement established within it which seeks to evangelize the rest of the members of that people, the group is considered "reached," but still within the Buddhist cultural bloc.

* Unimax People: The MAXimum sized group sufficiently UNified to be reached by a single indigenous church planting movement.

All Humanity in Mission Perspective in A.D. 2008		Predominant Religion within Culturally Defined Peoples									
		Totals	Christianity	Buddhism	Ethnic Religion	Hinduism	Islam	Non-Religious	Other Religions		
Least Evangelized and Unreached Peoples	JPD Peoples	4,253	-	227	704	1,843	1,344	15	120	Frontier Missions	
	Estimated Unreached Unimax Peoples	8,000	-	700	1,200	2,400	3,300	100	300	Evangelism and "Domestic" Missions	
	Practicing Christians	5.3	-	0.4	1.2	0.4	1	2	0.3		
	Non-Christians (P2): E2 to E3	1,551	-	122	68	783	432	119	27		
	Non-Christians (P2.5): E2.5 to E3	1077	-	135	70	60	808	0	4		
	Non-Christians (P3): E3	71	-	18	22	17	14	0	0		
	Total	2,704	-	275	161	860	1255	121	31		
Most Evangelized and Reached Peoples	Global Evangelical Missionaries	24,300	-	3,700	9,600	1,600	7,500	1,400	500		
	JPD Peoples	5,725	3,543	35	1,652	146	317	18	14		
	Estimated Reached Unimax Peoples	16,000	10,000	600	2,800	1,000	800	200	600		
	Practicing Christians	796	570	20	120	12	5	65	4		
	Nominal-Christians (P0, P.5): E0 to E3	1,372	1,350	3	6	3	1	9	0		
	Non-Christians (P1): E1 to E3	1,830	410	225	438	85	205	460	7		
	Total	3,998	2,330	248	564	100	211	534	11		
World Totals	Global Evangelical Missionaries	228,700	185,000	3,700	18,000	3,400	7,500	8,600	2,500		
	JPD Peoples	9,978	3,543	262	2,356	1,989	1,661	33	134		
	Estimated Unimax Peoples	24,000	10,000	1,300	4,000	3,400	4,100	300	900		
	Total (in millions)	6,702	2,330	523	725	960	1,466	655	42		
	All Missionaries	253,000	185,000	7,400	27,600	5,000	15,000	10,000	3,000		

The table above was generated by the Research Department of the U.S. Center for World Mission using data from the Global Mission Database (www.uscwm.info/gmd), the Joshua Project Database (www.joshuaproject.org), and the World Christian Database (www.worldchristianitydatabase.org). JPD Peoples: All ethno-linguistic and ethno-cultural peoples documented in the Joshua Project Database, and summarized without geo-political divisions. Unreached Peoples: Estimate of Unimax peoples (1982 definition) without a viable church planting movement or a viable, indigenous, evangelizing church. The number of unimax peoples (1982 definition) are estimates. Clues are taken from linguistic and social factors (e.g., language clusters, caste). Reached Peoples: Estimate of Unimax peoples (1982 definition) with a viable church. This includes all peoples predominantly Christian. Practicing Christians: Christians of evangelical conviction who are being or can be disciplined to obey the Great Commission. Global Evangelical Missionaries include foreign missionaries, missionaries working within their own country (both cross-culturally and in near cultures), bi-vocational missionaries, and home staff who are classified as missionaries who support field missionaries.

just the beginning of all that God intends to do within every people. God will continue to fulfill His promise to undo the works of Satan and bring forth the blessing of Abraham to all peoples.

The Declaring of His Glory by All the Nations

How did Jesus teach His disciples to pray? “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God’s desire to reach all peoples and persons is obviously part of His purpose for His Kingdom to come on earth. Other verses say that He looks toward the time when all the nations of the world will declare His glory (Isa 66:19).

Thus, we look confidently forward to the time when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). Surely God seeks to vanquish the “rulers of the darkness of this world” (Eph 6:12).

In the not too distant future, there will not be a single “kingdom of this world” where His name is not glorified. A spiritual breakthrough into every people is a precursor to making the gospel available to every person on earth. Satan holds whole peoples in bondage. We can’t wrestle a single soul out of his hand without challenging his authority in that particular people group. In each group where no real breakthrough has yet occurred, there will be “power encounters” between the armies of God and the powers of darkness. Conquering the “kingdoms of this world” requires an invasion of God’s glory within each people.

The apostle Paul was sent to the non-Jewish peoples specifically “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Christ]” (Acts 26:17-18). Is it possible that we have become so tied up with our measurements of evangelism, social reform and economic growth that we have forgotten that God is primarily in the business of expanding the reign of His kingdom and conquering Satan?

That this is primarily a spiritual battle certainly does not mean we can set aside careful planning and training for pioneer evangelism

and church planting. We cannot just sit back and pray that God will go out and do His thing.

“We fight not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12).

We know that it is also our fight, not just His, and that we are joining Him in His battle against the Evil One. We know that in every place on earth the key is not going to be merely our wisdom or even our hard work. It will be all of that—plus His sovereign power breaking down the strongholds of His enemies to bring His glory to the ends of the earth.

Jesus gave us a clear mandate by His unique authority to “disciple all the peoples.” We can and must go all out to obey Him. Certainly we should take our evangelization measurements seriously, but not as ultimate parameters of God’s plan. We must press forward, knowing that He may evaluate things by measures we cannot fully comprehend. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

All that can and should be done cannot be brought together into a single human plan; yet it calls upon our best planning efforts, creative approaches and all the sacrifice we can muster. We know that all our measurements and estimates—of peoples and persons—are merely means to an end. It is more important that we are with Him and He is with us. Missions is still an act of faith and obedience as He leads us to fullfill that which He has given us to accomplish.

LOOKING AT THE TASK GRAPHICALLY

Although the world is large and complex, there exist helpful methods of quantifying progress toward closure of the essential mission task. Modern researchers are now able to collect, manage and summarize vast amounts of data with the use of computers. We owe a great deal to those who are attempting to trace the hand of God as He fulfills his promise to all peoples.⁴ All of our global charts and graphs to date have been dependent on the research of others as well as our own estimates where conclusive data is unavailable. However, no database can ever do more than approximate the dynamic reality of the world.

When looking at the charts in this chapter, you need to understand that we are using the predominant religion within a group as a cultural feature to tag the group as a whole. This does not mean that every person in the group is a member of that religion. Thus you can have a Muslim group that is “reached” if there is a church movement within it, even though the group is still predominantly Muslim.

All of the charts in this chapter are derived from the numbers on the *All Humanity in Mission Perspective* chart (p. 541).

The Great Imbalance

Looking at *The Globe at a Glance* (p. 540), you can readily see that the bulk of the individuals who live within unreached groups (white areas) are within the Muslim, Ethno-Religious, Hindu, and Buddhist blocs. These blocs must be a priority if we are to take the Great Commission seriously.

There have been some very encouraging breakthroughs within Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim peoples in recent years. While these three blocs are often seen as the most resistant, we are learning that when a people seems “resistant” it may only mean that our approach has been ineffective.

Are we making the unreached peoples a priority? Only 24,000 missionaries out of the *Global Evangelical Missionary force*⁵ of 253,000 are working within the estimated 8,000 unreached groups. That means 9 times as many foreign missionaries work within reached people groups than those doing the more difficult work of establishing breakthroughs within unreached peoples. What an imbalance! (see *The Great Imbalance* chart) It is this 10% of the evangelical mission force that is doing pioneer mission work among the unreached peoples.

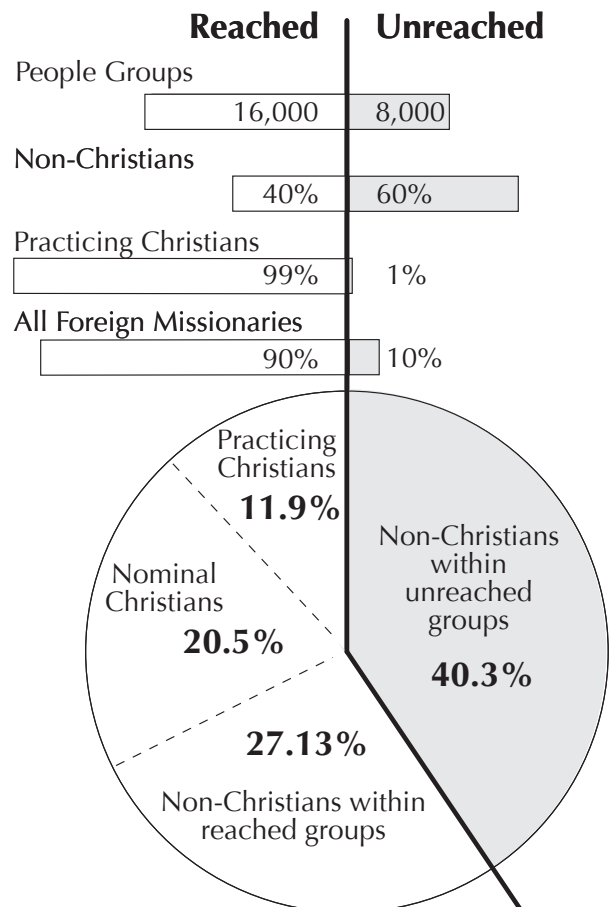
After the nearly 2000 years since Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples of all peoples, an estimated 8,000 unimax peoples, encompassing over 2.7 billion individuals,

are still beyond the reach of any relevant local church. Is there any reason for hope that God’s promise to bless all peoples will be fulfilled any time soon?

Great Momentum

While talking about billions of people might seem overwhelming, astounding progress continues to be made. In 1974, we were stunned by the revelation that 4 out of 5 of the non-Christians in the world were beyond the reach of same-culture evangelism. In the last three decades, that number has been reduced to 3 out of every 5 non-Christians. An easily remembered new insight, which you can see in *The Great Imbalance* chart below, is that you can roughly divide the world up into meaningful thirds. One-third of the world

The Great Imbalance



Source: Bruce Koch, based on *All Humanity in Mission Perspective AD 2008* (Active Christians = GCC)

would at least claim to be Christian; one third are non-Christians that live within reached peoples; the final third are non-Christians within unreached peoples. In 1974, more than 60% of the world's population lived within unreached people groups. Today, that has been cut to 40%. This has happened in just a few decades because missionaries have focused on establishing church movements in thousands of previously unreached peoples. While this is significant progress, there is still much to be done.

We are in the final era of pioneer missions. If we do not waver in our convictions or take our focus off the essential missionary task, we can reasonably hope to see the body of Christ established and growing within the language and social structure of every people group on earth in our lifetime.

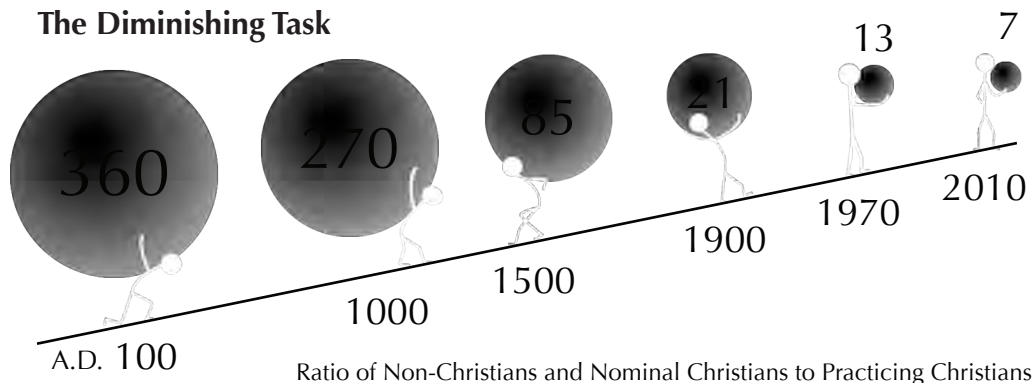
God is moving throughout His global Body to fulfill His promise to the nations in ways that we could not possibly have imagined 25 years ago. Thousands of new missionary recruits are no longer coming just from the West, but also from Asia, Africa and Latin America. There, fruits of missionary movements are wholeheartedly embracing the peoples challenge of the Great Commission. More so than ever before, missions is a global, cooperative movement. We have to be prepared for new partnerships, new insights and new approaches by non-Western mission structures. At the same time, we need to recognize that the history of Western missionary activity is a reservoir of mission experience that can serve the fast growing Majority World missions movements.

The task before us is still large, but relatively small for the enormous body of believers around the world. There are already approximately 1000 churches in the world for every remaining unreached unimax people group! As we have seen over the last three decades, a small percentage of believers mobilized and equipped can make a significant difference. Judging the remaining task by the potential work force makes it relatively small and within reach by comparison to the forbidding prospect faced by our forefathers.

Notice also how much more do-able the mission task is when we focus on penetrating people groups. Instead of talking of evangelizing 4 billion unsaved individuals, we can talk of *beginning* in approximately 3000 *least evangelized* ethnolinguistic peoples and as we discover significant cultural prejudices along the way, *finishing* in maybe as few as 8000 *unreached* unimax peoples. Virtually all of the 3000 least evangelized ethnolinguistic groups have been engaged by some mission-sending structure in the world.

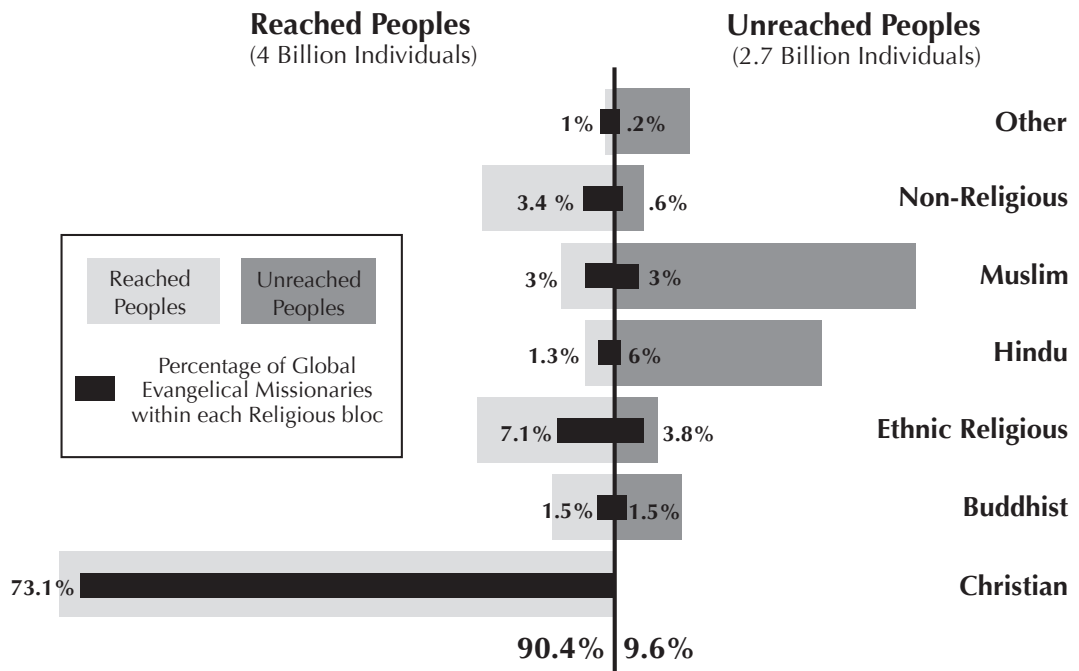
The task of identifying and penetrating the remaining unreached unimax peoples—the great challenge of “discipling all the nations”—still lies before us. But we are assured in scripture that God *will be* worshipped by “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.” We are within range of penetrating every people group on the planet with the light of the gospel with more momentum than ever before in history. Be a part of it—find a place of historic significance in declaring “His glory among the nations!” 🌍

The Diminishing Task

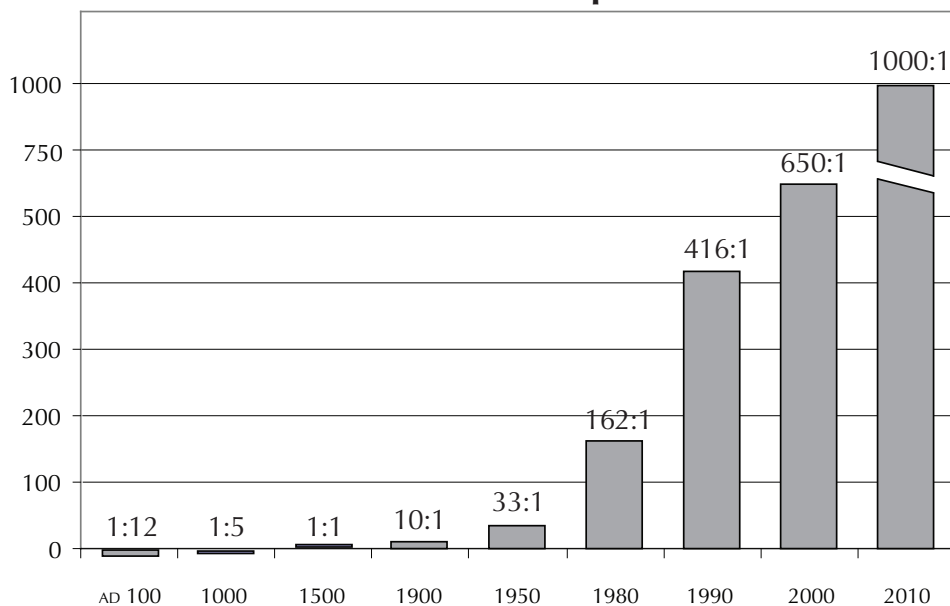


The first chart below graphically displays the distribution of global evangelical missionaries⁵ between the reached and unreached populations of the world. Out of the 253,000 missionaries shown on the *All Humanity in Mission Perspective*, only 24,300 (9.6%) are pioneering among the unreached peoples. The second chart shows that with over 1000 churches per unreached people, the Church globally has more than enough resources to accomplish the task of bringing about a following for Christ within every people, it just needs to be made aware and mobilized!

Distribution of Missionaries in Proportion to World Population



The Growth of Churches to Peoples



Endnotes

1. Practicing Christian refers to Christians of all types and associations, including Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Anglicans, Independents and Marginals, who are not merely nominal.
2. Start at www.joshuaproject.net or search the web for “unreached people profiles.”
3. India Summary, *Operation World*. 21st Century Edition
4. We now possess one of the clearest pictures of the remaining task than ever before in history. The first lists of unreached peoples began to be compiled around 30 years ago, following the initial estimates proposed at Lasauune in 1974 (this was the first time in history that an effort was made to summarize the global unfinished task from a people group perspective). Those early lists were at best fragmentary. Since that time, much research has been done. In addition to linguistic parameters, mission researchers have begun to document other ethno-cultural and sociological realities that restrict people’s access to the gospel. The gaps in mission data are steadily narrowing.

As in the past, we have relied on a variety of expert sources for our figures and estimates for our *All Humanity in Mission Perspective* chart. This chart reflects a comparison and interpretation of data from a variety of sources integrated into the Global Mission Database. We are utilizing the Joshua Project Database as our source for ethno-cultural peoples as they are committed to having their list reflect field level observation as much as possible. A vast and easily accessible amount of information on people groups can be found on the JoshuaProject.net website.

Changes from the previous (A.D. 2000) version of the *All Humanity in Mission Perspective* chart: 1) Predominately ethnic based religions such as Judaism, Chinese folk religions, Zoroastrianism, tribal animism, etc., have been grouped under a new category called “Ethnic Religion.” 2) The ethno-linguistic statistics from the World Christian Database have been replaced with statistics from the Joshua Project Database, which is both ethno-linguistic and ethno-cultural. The JPD totals do not include geopolitical divisions of a people group (i.e., if an ethnic group is in more than one country, they are only counted once). 3) Missionary totals now include estimates of only evangelicals and now also include domestic missionaries; whereas in the previous version, the counts were restricted to only foreign missionaries and were inclusive of all Christian traditions. The distribution of missionaries among the unreached and reached peoples have been extrapolated from other estimates in the World Christian Database.

5. Global Evangelical Missionaries include foreign missionaries, missionaries working within their own country (both cross-culturally and in near cultures), bi-vocational missionaries, and home staff who support evangelical field missionaries. The term “evangelical” is being used in reference to Christian groups who emphasize the following:
 - a. The Lord Jesus Christ as the sole source of salvation
 - b. Personal faith and conversion with regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Recognition of the inspired Word of God as the only basis for faith and Christian living.
 - d. Commitment to biblical witness, evangelism and mission that seeks to bring others to faith in Christ.

Study Questions

1. What is the definition of a unimax people? What is the value of this definition?
2. According to the authors, what is the essential mission task?