

Book Review

Reaching the Unreached: The Old-New Challenge

Reviewed by Phil Foxwell

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Reaching the Unreached: The Old-New Challenge, edited by Harvie M. Conn. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984. 178 pp., \$8.95.

Should you read another book on missions? More missions books are arriving on the market than the average world Christian has time to read. But, yes, this work will reward any reader concerned with reaching the unreached. Since it comes mostly from a Reformed perspective, members of that theological stream will be especially pleased.

I expect good things from Harvie Conn, and so I ordered *Reaching the Unreached* months before I saw it. Now that I've read it, I am not disappointed. This work of nine authors is the result of a 1983 Reformed Missions Consultation at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Ralph Winter and Paul Schrottenboer did double duty, each doing two of the eleven essays. The foreword gives special thanks to Winter, "whose papers, lengthier by far than any others in the book, reflect the wisdom and leadership he has taken in this area." Winter first shows how the concept of unreached peoples has developed and then goes on to deal with definitions and the location of those yet to be reached. Schrottenboer's chief service is to help us see the Reformed distinctives in these issues; his first paper offers background for a new thrust, and his second shows some guidelines for interdependence.

Robert Recker renders the valuable contribution of reiterating that the "new" concept of people groups is actually old because it is central to the Bible. (If I had not spent the last five years at the U.S. Center for World Mission, I am sure I would be surprised by this compendium's presentation of the large amount of Scripture which is relevant to the missionary task. What Ralph Winter calls the "hibernating mandate" will be provocative to many on first encounter with the notion.)

James Reapsome offers a symposium within a symposium, making use of an Evangelical Missions Quarterly survey which elicited comments from more than a dozen mission leaders. Roger Greenway gives us some good data on strategy, Paul Long provides a practical paper on avoiding past mistakes, and J. Dudley Woodberry makes a helpful contribution on new means of reaching the unreached. Paul McKaughan shares his thoughts on restructuring mission boards, demonstrating a flexibility that I take as a good sign for the future of the board he directs—Mission to the World (MTW)—as well as for the mission enterprise as a whole. My co-laborer in a seminary in Japan, Addison P. Soltau, wraps up this new work with a final chapter on mobilizing the seminaries.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

How can *Reaching the Unreached* help us to do a better job?

1. This book reminds Western Christians that they must learn from the Third World. The astonishing growth of the house church in China is wonderfully instructive. The Korean church, with an ambitious program of outreach to other cultural groups, offers the West other lessons on church growth. Greenway reports that "the recruitment of non-Western missionaries is five times as fast as reported North American recruitment" (p.77). Woodberry believes Third World missionaries "can guide us in dealing with the spirit world and the occult and with power encounters involving such things as healings" (p. 123). Paul Long likewise suggests that Western Christians are "naive in regard to the occult world of spirits. We have been conditioned by both culture and training not to believe in the spirit world and its interaction in the worlds of humanity" (p. 115).

2. This book also reaffirms the need for cooperation. Conn himself puts it in these words: "The affirmation was clear throughout the consultation: let us join with our brothers and sisters everywhere and get the job done" (viii).

Winter cites one encouraging illustration of increased cooperation. He explains that late in 1981, Ed Dayton, representing the Lausanne Committee, took the initiative to invite Wade Coggins and Warren Webster to convene a meeting near Chicago's O'Hare Airport to promote agreement on the key terms to be used in the promotion of frontier missions. This meeting in March 1982 drew a wide representation of leaders from the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association, the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Association of Church Missions Committees, the Billy Graham Center, Dataserve, Gospel Recordings, SIM International, North Africa Mission, the Missions Advanced Research and Communications Center, the U.S. Center for World Mission, and Wycliffe Bible Translators. This is a significant indication of the cooperation that is possible.

In fact, cooperation possibilities are so wide that some evangelicals may want to pull back. Schrottenboer refers to "remarkable theological convergence among the ecumenicals, the evangelicals and the Roman Catholics.... These convergences would seem to indicate that the possibilities for joint action in mission are greater than they have been in the past" (p.95).

Soltau suggests one type of cooperation which has been lacking: "Missiologists and mission agency directors have gathered by themselves too often without involving seminary personnel directly with the missiological agendas of the church" (p.161). He goes on to observe about the seminary, "Not only was the subject of world missions introduced very recently, but it had to be forced upon the institution through pressures from outside the seminary proper" (p. 153). Other comments reveal the extent of the problem: "'Surprisingly few candidates are prepared to engage in that mission [of world outreach] with any consistency or accuracy...'" (p. 149). Only in the last fifty years or less has the church once again begun to see its true nature as missionary, its very calling to mission constituting one of its essential elements" (p.151).

How do we get more seminarians into missions? Soltau suggests, "The greatest hope for change lies in the utilization of the dimension/intention motif. Rather than trying to decide where and how missiology fits best in the course of studies, we might wish to start first with the concept... of seeing missiology as a dimension of all theology" (p.160). Those involved with seminary administration will want to read this chapter first.

3. This book highlights the opportunities available to us. Woodberry cites the Global Mapping Project, based at the U.S. Center for World Mission, as one of many examples of technological advances contributing to the frontier missions movement. Project director Bob Waymire explains: "With the help of some amazing technology, there is a way to visualize all the vital information needed for developing strategies to reach the unreached peoples. A new organization, Dataserve, Inc., has formed to help mission agencies meet the technological challenge. One purpose is the mapping of all the people groups and frontiers of the world, depicting their location and identity and status. Another purpose is to reflect the location / distribution, identity, status and dynamic analysis of the forces for evangelism and church planting" (p.72). Woodberry does contend that "virtually all means except those involving high technology have appeared or been used before.... There are some methods of evangelism whose time has come, which are being dusted off and refurbished. In the providence of God 'the fullness of time' for them has come" (p.120).

REDISCOVERIES AND RECONSECRATION

I enthusiastically endorse this compendium of numerous suggestions on how to better and sooner accomplish the task of reaching the unreached. Nevertheless, each reader may take exception to some items. For example, I disagree with the affirmation of one author that "the new strategy is derived not from the Scriptures but by perceiving what God is doing in the world." On the contrary, I believe that the rediscovery in recent years of what the Bible actually teaches about "nations" and "peoples" has helped produce the new emphasis on people groups. I myself have gained new awareness of how much the Bible teaches about cross-cultural witness.

Another author argues, "It seems to me that we have to wrestle with these issues more [i.e., probe more fully into the issues raised by contextualization] before implementing further the unreached peoples concept." As a missionary with thirty years of experience, I have always been keenly interested in any research or tool which would better serve my field, and I believe we should try to send better-trained men to the field. But a great deal was done right for God before recent studies in contextualization. The right men have succeeded with poor methods. Let us go forward with full speed to reach the unreached and work simultaneously to see that our candidates are helped to deal with cultural issues.

Through all the articles of this book there emerges the question, "Why have we as a church been so slow to fulfill the dynamic mandate of the kingdom of Jesus Christ?" Read the book, get some answers, and get more involved in reaching the final frontiers.

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