

~~Karl Franklin
Unicorns and "Hidden Peoples"~~

~~Winter, Ralph D. 1981. "What Remains: All Humanity in
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Momentum is Building! Many Voices Discuss Completing the Task by 2000 A.D.

Ralph Winter

This overview of current discussions about "completing the task" is, in part, a response to Karl Franklin's "Unicorns and 'Hidden Peoples'" (the preceding article) and an introduction to Thomas Wang's "By the Year 2000: Is God Trying to Tell Us Something?" (the following article). In addition, Winter supplements Timothy Monsma's comments on "homogeneous networks" (found elsewhere in this issue of the IJFM) with his own observations on the strategic distinctions between "bridges" and "peoples."



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What is God trying to accomplish, by when? Many people today, like Simeon of Luke 2, are trying to understand.

Trying to understand more about angels, the medieval philosophers asked, "How many angels could dance on the head of a pin?" Even less pertinent than that, other church leaders debated the proper colors of priestly vestments at the moment of the Bolshevik Revolution. Jesus must have wept then as he did earlier when, looking out over Jerusalem, he cried, "You did not know the time of your visitation!"

If we really expect to stand in His presence some day, and to "see Him face to face," if we really believe He is in control, then we will seek to think God's thoughts after Him. When the early disciples betrayed a preoccupation with getting their lunch, Jesus replied, "My food is to do the will of my Father and to finish His work." Today we are closer to that fulfillment than any previous generation.

Can't we, then, take note of the amazing momentum of discussion about what can be done by the end of the century?

No one I know is trying to *predict* when Jesus will return, but many are convinced that it is *possible* for every tribe and tongue and nation to have a resident church community by the year 2000, a goal which might be one of the bases for the return of Christ.

These are not new people speaking. These new documents represent responsible new statements about basic issues which are not yet completely clear. But we are getting closer!

THE DOCUMENTS

Seven documents illustrate this building momentum:

1. *Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas*, 13th Edition, (Monrovia: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center), 1986. Within this significant reference volume, edited by Samuel Wilson and John Siewert, is a 46-page interpretive essay, "Taking Aim on 2000 A.D.," by Robert Coote of the Overseas Ministries Study Center.
2. *Unreached Peoples: Clarifying the Task*, (Monrovia: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center), 1987. This latest addition to the *Unreached Peoples* series is edited by Harley Schreck of World Vision and David Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*.
3. *Peoplesfile Index*, (Pasadena: Global Mapping Project), 1986, edited by Alan Starling, a key researcher for Gospel Recordings.
4. *God's New Envoys*, (Portland: Multnomah Press), 1987, written by Tetsunao Yamamori, executive director of Food for the Hungry International.
5. "What's the Score?," the January-February 1987 cover story in *World Christian* magazine. This article was written by Jay Gary, now a planner of the Lausanne Committee-related Leadership '88 conference in the United States.
6. "Unicorns and Hidden Peoples," an article written by Karl Franklin, a linguist with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, for the June-September 1986 issue of *Notes on Anthropology*.
7. Perhaps most significant is "By the Year 2000: Is God Trying to Tell Us Something?," an article by Thomas Wang, International Director of the Lausanne Committee for World

Evangelization, which appears in the June 1987 issue of the Lausanne Committee's bulletin, *World Evangelization*.

BRIEF COMMENTS ON THE DOCUMENTS

1. Robert Coote's essay in the *Mission Handbook* expresses the least optimistic of the voices heard in these materials. In fact, anything that seems optimistic is subjected to serious questions. He rightly inveighs against "setting dates" when Christ is to return, even though that is not the same thing as the setting of goals, which he also seems to decry. He cautions against thinking that anything very great will happen by the year 2000.

For example, he wonders if the Southern Baptists can win the world by themselves by the year 2000, deducing this perspective from some of their materials. However, Southern Baptist mission leaders do not think this way—they readily concede that they cannot do it alone.

2. Harley Schreck and David Barrett labor together in a 39-page initial chapter in the 1987 *Unreached Peoples* annual, this time attempting specifically to "Clarify the Task." Their struggle is to harmonize the so-called "ethnolinguistic" approach (of Barrett and some others) with an approach which takes into account other possible factors (such as religion) when deciding the best avenue of the Gospel. We should not be surprised that these two approaches produce different totals for unreached peoples!

3. Alan Starling, editor of the *Peoplesfile Index*, is a key man within Gospel Recordings, a small group whose founder, Joy Ridderhof, was the one who first persuaded the founder of Wycliffe to expand into Asia. This monumental, long-awaited book indexes over 30,000 names of places, peoples, languages, and dialects, and traces them to specific groups and countries, giving the location of further information on them, as well as a country-by-country summary. The *Index* principally draws upon cross-referenced listings from the *Ethnologue* (Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators), the *Unreached Peoples File* (MARC), and the *Recorded Language Directory* (Gospel Recordings).

4. *God's New Envoys* bristles with good ideas and starts out soberly assessing the world situation. It may over-

emphasize the inaccessibility of peoples, but does show the new approach which most mission boards are now taking more seriously than ever.

God expects the Great Commission to be completed, somehow affecting all peoples. But how? And by when?

5. Jay Gary, writing in *World Christian* magazine, manfully tries to pull all of this into a single picture. More than the others, he finds great problems due to key terms like "unreached peoples" being defined differently by various individuals.

6. Karl Franklin makes an important point: some entities like languages and peoples must ultimately be defined by those who are on the inside. Outsiders can't "count" them accurately.

7. Thomas Wang provides an excellent overview of some of the major evangelistic plans and projects within Christendom that hold up the year 2000 as a target date.

As we step back to gain perspective before exploring these documents in more detail, we must remind ourselves that God expects the Great Commission to be completed, somehow affecting all peoples. But we must also ask: How? And by when?

LOOKING MORE CLOSELY

Two totally different issues are involved when the question arises as to what can be done by when: (1) How can we measure how big the *job* is? (2) How can we measure how big are the *resources* to complete the job in the foreseeable future?

However, as we approach these questions and look through these materials, one source of possible confusion is the simple fact that terminology differs. On the one hand, Barrett very legitimately seeks to measure to what extent groups have been evangelized, or "exposed" to the gospel (to use Jay Gary's term). Other researchers, especially since 1982, have been thinking more about what Jay Gary calls "response" measurements. The casual observer, however, may confuse Barrett's estimates of the extent to which peoples have been "exposed" with how many peoples are "reached", where the definition hinges on response. Thus, the definition of an

"unreached people" is a key question.

Obviously, if you have different definitions, you will count things up differently. But there is only one formally accepted definition of the phrase *unreached peoples*, thanks to the diplomacy of Ed Dayton and the Strategy Working Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. They sponsored a special meeting near the Chicago O'Hare airport in March 1982 precisely to try to gain agreement on terminology for reaching unreached groups. Those who attended made up a widely diverse and representative group ranging from Wycliffe Bible Translators to the Southern Baptist Convention.

To my knowledge, since that time none of the participants have signaled dissatisfaction with the resulting definitions, which focused on the presence or the absence of a church—basically a matter of "response." (I am personally happy with the "response" emphasis because in the book of Revelation it seems clear that God intends some response from every group. We can thus best measure the effectiveness of our "exposure" activity by our "response.")

In a crucial clause, participants in this meeting defined a *people* as

the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of acceptance and understanding.

This same gathering agreed to define an *unreached people* as

a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside (cross-cultural) assistance.

Incidentally, in Jay Gary's article Sam Wilson and I diverge wildly on the matter of how many people are found within unreached people groups. Actually, Sam and I agree completely, both on the 1982 definition and on the estimate that about 50% of the world's population lives within unreached people groups.

Equally tame is the problem posed by Karl Franklin. He reports that the Wycliffe Bible Translators find it impossible

“from the outside” to be completely sure how many different groups can read one printed translation. (If they don’t know how, who does?) All estimates of the number of unreached groups, then, suffer the same non-finality until we are able to see the Gospel spread within these groups. But that does not mean Wycliffe should stop trying to estimate the number of languages needing to be taken seriously, and the same goes for the desire to estimate the number of groups we need to take seriously whenever church-planting factors are in the picture.

Thus, it would have been quite reasonable for Franklin’s article to have been entitled, “Unicorns, *Languages*, and Hidden Peoples.” All these terms—*Hidden Peoples*, *Unreached Peoples*, *Unpenetrated Peoples*, *Frontier Peoples*—now refer to the same 1982 definition. All such groups must ultimately be identified as the faith grows within them, just as in the case of language communities.

In this vein, it has somehow gained credence that if you cannot list all the groups by name, then you should not try to estimate numbers. That’s somewhat like saying that if you can’t give the names for all fifty million believers in China, then you ought not to guess at the number, but the problem is a bit more complex.

For example, Wycliffe, dealing as it does with printed translations, can often reach more than one group with the same text. But Gospel Recordings, which must employ the ear gate (and can thus bypass the literacy problem), needs to make audio cassettes in a larger number of dialects due to frequent local prejudices about pronunciation. Gospel Recordings surveyed southern Sudan some years ago and concluded that 120 languages needed to be dealt with. Wycliffe, with equal professional skill, came up with a figure of only 50 translations needed. Obviously neither organization was “wrong.” They were counting for different purposes.

The audio approach actually lands us nearer to the number of tasks to perform if we ask the key question: how many peoples need, at least initially, a separate church movement within their group in order for everyone to have the opportunity to become a responsible member of a church?

The key question is: how many peoples need a separate church movement within their group?

COUNTING THE “BEST-CHOICE” GROUPS

Impatience for easy answers clouds many a question. Just for fun, note that no classification commonly used for human beings produces completely discrete, non-overlapping categories. For example, some people are ethnically half this and half that. They might easily be counted twice in a tally of all different *ethnic* groups. You also get overlapping groups if you classify people by *languages*, since some people are fluently bilingual within their own homes. In all such cases you must resolve to put people in only one best-choice group, or you will end up with more people than there are in the world when you count up all the constituent groups.

It is this problem of overlap that has prompted the authors of some of these documents to despair of the value of counting the number of groups to be reached. Thus, some say that if you use ethnic or linguistic or “ethnolinguistic” criteria you can safely count groups and not be counting anyone twice, but that if you use cultural criteria you must give up being concerned about how many groups there are since they overlap.

Frankly, for mission purposes you want to try to approach every person on the wavelength of ethnicity, language, religion, occupation, or whatever means will most likely succeed. If we assume that in all classifications there is the possibility of overlap if you allow people to be counted in more than one group, then we can conclude that there will be no overlap if we simply agree that until we know better, each person can be assumed to be in one group only. But even though this produces non-overlapping groups, you still face the fact that some of these groups are merely “bridges” for the Gospel in reaching groups that fit the 1982 definition of “peoples.” We’ll take this up in a moment.

The Frontier Peoples Committee of the Inter-denominational Foreign Mission Association of North America is making a survey right now of how many groups have been reached by each of its member agencies in this century prior to 1980 and since 1980. Definite, wonderful progress is reported. As far back as 1976, a meeting of mission executives within the (U.S.) Evangelical Foreign Missions Association tallied almost 6,000 groups in the unreached category which those agencies alone were in touch with or were planning to reach prior to 1990. Other mission

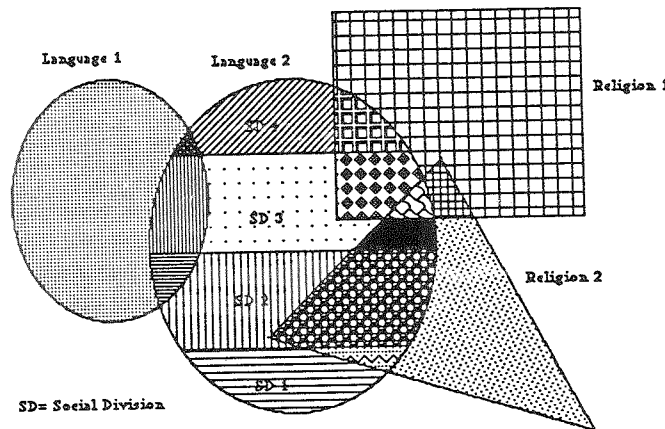
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agencies in other associations are beginning to take similar initiatives. Clearly now is the time to be very sure of our terminology.

BRIDGES AND PEOPLES

The diagram below illustrates how inherently confusing the reality of human diversity actually is! Obviously, if you count all the subgroups in the world, the tally runs up into the hundreds of thousands. And all subgroups are potentially key "bridges of opportunity" to get through to individuals. But these small groups are by no means unreached peoples because they are not candidates for their own church, as is implied by the 1982 definition of "peoples."

WHEN IS A GROUP A PEOPLE—A PEOPLE NEEDING ITS OWN CHURCH?



This is what might actually happen in a suburb of New Delhi, India:

1. Three different languages.
2. Two different religions.
3. Four different, entirely exclusive (non-overlapping) social groupings (castes, in this case).
4. That makes a total of nine groupings not counting overlap, but with overlap there are another ten smaller groupings.

Do missionaries need to target all 19 groupings for church-planting strategy?

Here is the key point: When we speak of unreached *peoples* we are not talking about all the groupings into which people can fall. Every human being has at least ethnic, sex, and age categories, and we don't think we need a special church for each of these groupings.

The strategic question, therefore, is not, "How many groupings are there?", but "How many groups need an indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize the group?" This latter category is a *people*. Yet the smaller groupings may provide "bridges" to the "peoples."

Highly important to mission strategy, then, is the definition of a *people* hammered out by the Lausanne-sponsored gathering in March of 1982. That statement defines a *people* as "the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of acceptance or understanding."

What this means is that those individuals who fall into the smaller groups may very well be won to Christ in those groups, but still they may feel comfortable in a grouping larger than that. Note the definition: "the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church-planting movement. . . ." In this diagram, the four castes may exert the most force in the early stages!

Thus, the number of groups that are candidates for their own church, and as such are the focus of strategic mission attention for *church-planting* purposes, is a much smaller number. My own thought is that it would be better to call the smaller groups "bridge groups" rather than "peoples" when such groups are merely opportunities for evangelism, not peoples of the kind defined in the 1982 Chicago meeting—groups where you expect to have to plant a separate, indigenous church.

Donald A. McGavran, the world's leading mission strategist, years ago entitled his classic book, *The Bridges of God*. He refers in part to the fact that once the Gospel penetrates what he calls a responsive "segment" of society, then, as if crossing a bridge, the Gospel can spread rapidly throughout that subcommunity. His now-classical name for this phenomenon is a "people movement."

Thus, I think we can speak of the still-smaller groups as "bridge groups" rather than *peoples* in their own right because

they lead into the community and family types of true peoples, where a church, not mere individual conversion, is the goal.

Note, in the diagram, that the castes of India are ethnic—they do not intermarry, yet they are not linguistically distinguishable. Their primary identification is that of social status, standing, or role. While the necessary Christian strategy must always be to eventually incorporate people into the larger body of Christ, in our initial strategy we need to be very sensitive to what will allow people truly to find Christ without getting involved in what the New Testament describes as “proselytizing,” which makes cultural and linguistic differences tests of faith. To this day, huge numbers of people in India and elsewhere are being shut out of the Christian faith due to unbiblical requirements laid upon them, forcing them to go up or down the social scale in order to be Christian. This is not unique to India! D. L. Moody, for example, was denied membership in a slightly too-cultured Congregational church in Chicago. The problem exists not merely where would-be Christians are kept from joining “up”; the opposite is the case sometimes in India, where prospective believers face the pressure to marry into lower-class groups in which the only form of Christianity in their area is found.

ENTER THE LAUSANNE COMMITTEE AND THOMAS WANG

We have already noted the vital role played by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in forging consensus on the important definitions of “peoples” and “unreached peoples.” But in the last few months this movement has also chosen to highlight the potential significance of the year 2000.

Actually, such an emphasis was evident even in the movement’s beginnings in 1966, when Carl F. H. Henry and Billy Graham, representing, respectively, the periodical *Christianity Today* and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, jointly convened the Conference on World Evangelism held at Berlin. Not since the previous century had any meeting so prominently talked about *closure*, that is, the idea of completing the task of world evangelization. In 1966 they talked about completing the task “in the next 25 years.”

But by 1974, the date of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, “the next 25 years” meant the year 2000, and so it was A.D. 2000—“before the end of this century”—that was in view. The evangelical German missiologist, Dr. Peter Beyerhaus, summarizes the story in a brief history of the Lausanne movement which appears in the March 1987 issue of the Lausanne Committee’s newsletter, *World Evangelization*. He comments,

The cry, “It must be done!” was matched by the confident assurance, “It can be done!”—the completion of world evangelization before the end of this century.

Evangelical mission strategies are often framed with the goal in mind to complete the evangelization of the world by the year 2000. This does not mean that we expect all nations to become Christian, but we should certainly work toward the goal that all unreached peoples have the opportunity to accept or reject Jesus Christ after a meaningful presentation of the Gospel.

Now this emphasis is receiving even greater exposure because of the efforts of Thomas Wang, newly appointed International Director of the Lausanne Committee. Billy Graham is more widely known around the world, but the post Wang holds bears a significant relation to a larger number of vital elements in the global Church than any other position in the world today. Wang’s essay in the June 1987 issue of *World Evangelization* reviews the “year 2000” goals of other ministries and then squarely challenges readers to reflect on the meaning of these things for the future direction of the Lausanne movement.

The appearance of this essay could be a watershed event not just for the Lausanne Committee, but also for other elements of the frontier mission movement around the world. Perhaps there is no better way to conclude this overview of new discussions about the year 2000 than to borrow from Wang’s own conclusion:

What is God trying to say to you and me? . . .

We are all busy preaching, speaking, teaching, researching, writing, publishing, broadcasting and telecasting. But are we listening? Has our frantic way of life made

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our relation to God a one-way street? Again, what is He trying to say to you and me through all these happenings around us today?

Perhaps we should all come before the Lord like young prophet Samuel did and say to God, "Speak Lord, for thy servant is listening."

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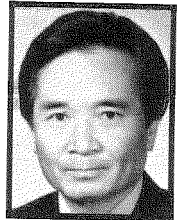
By the Year 2000: Is God Trying to Tell Us Something?

Thomas Wang

The author notes, "The sole purpose of this article is to inform and to challenge churchmen of today into deeper and more intelligent commitment in world evangelization. There is no intention here to applaud, comment upon, or identify with any of the movements mentioned."

"Knowledge of current plans and projects of world evangelization which are being conducted by different churches and groups within Christendom will enable us to examine and to re-evaluate our own programs of evangelism, and thereby hopefully stimulate us into more realistic and coordinated efforts for the fulfillment of the Great Commission."

This article, addressed principally to participants in the Lausanne movement, is reprinted by permission from the June 1987 issue of the Lausanne Committee's bulletin, World Evangelization.



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What is God trying to say to us today? Are we listening—with discernment?

Recently, as we are drawing near to the close of this century, significant things are happening around us. Gigantic plans of evangelism on a global scale are being creatively conceived, planned, and to a degree executed by different groups and orders within Christendom. So much so that I think if only one or two of them succeed in all their objectives they would truly turn the world upside down.

What is equally noteworthy is that most of these movements take A.D. 2000 as their target year for an unprecedented world ingathering of harvest for the Kingdom. These are overwhelmingly significant happenings. What is God trying to say to us through them all?