

John Robb and Patrick Johnstone  
Unreached Peoples Track Report

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- larger peoples.
6. Provide a listing for the 300 or more megacities of the world with priority given to those with major non-Christian populations.
  7. Facilitate the establishment of research and information functions in every region and country where possible to serve the body of Christ in conducting national surveys of all peoples, peoples, and cities. This information can then be used to mobilize the Church nationally and worldwide.

We therefore call upon all Christians everywhere to play their part in reaching these unreached peoples as their most urgent priority from now to AD 2000 and beyond, so that there will be a church for every people and the gospel for every person before He comes!

## World Evangelization by A.D. 2000: Surmounting Certain Barriers

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**M**y presuppositions are: (1) The world will be evangelized in accordance with God's definition and plan—both of which might be quite different from ours (Mt. 24:14); (2) World evangelization could be accomplished by the year 2000 or even before; (3) On the basis of the availability of human, financial and technological resources we can say that the present opportunity to evangelize the world is unprecedented; and, (4) Given the significance of a year in which we move into a new millennium, the appeal that goal-setting has for Americans especially, and the publicity that has already been given to the concept, the linkage of world evangelization and the year 2000 will continue for the next few years at least (D.V.).

My perspective should also be made clear. My stance as a premillennarian conservative evangelical will be apparent. My experiences as rural and inner-city pastor in the States, as postwar missionary in Japan, and as a missiologist obviously will have a bearing on what I say. But even as a missiologist, I must admit to a feeling of being overwhelmed by the avalanche of neologisms and statistics, seminars and consultations, charts and diagrams, books and articles, megaplans and gigaplans, and appeals and exhortations that have converged on the world evangelization theme in recent days. I freely admit that I cannot compete with the imagination, erudition and

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heuristic brilliance that are often displayed in these productions. So I will confine myself to the basics. In that approach, I take encouragement from the eminent Peter Lynch (who has the best record of any contemporary investment-manager on Wall Street) when he says, "Let others rely on the wisdom of Wall Street. I'll take the power of common knowledge" [*Reader's Digest*, Aug. 1989:89]. And the wisdom of missionary F. Peter Cotterell when he writes,

I believe that Christ delivers his people from futility, and especially the futility of their minds. In Christ we can, at last, think straight. It is this 'straight thinking' of the Christian I have labeled 'common sense.' But pragmatic experience and 'common sense' must always be subordinated to Scripture, and not Scripture to them [*JRM*, Jan. 1988:132].

So I trust that you will not be too disappointed, but no esoteric or cryptic *gnosis* will be forthcoming in this presentation.

I fear that in some cases it may be missiological brilliance of a certain sort that occasions some of our problems. If so, it may well be that some missiological problems can be resolved, not by an application of still more brilliance, but by a concerted application of Scripture, common knowledge and common sense. If so, what follows may be of some limited value. At any rate, I propose to ask lay-type questions as I proceed: Does it conform to Scripture? Is it true? Does it make sense?

### I. Identifying the Obstacles

Common sense tells us that any plan as encompassing as a plan for world evangelization must be can fail for a wide variety of reasons. So when our colleagues David Barrett and Jim Reapsome identify some 340 "woes" (I doubt that even Amos under divine inspiration could top that!) we should not be surprised [*Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World*, 1988:10-14]. Some of those woes are obvious--the absence of follow up, administrative fiascoes and apathy to name a few. Others, such as giving free Bibles, ill-advised date-setting and Murphy's Law, require more elaboration and explanation. In any case, we can assume that even that list of 340 obstacles

could be expanded were we to devote still more time to research and analysis.

### II. Categorizing the Obstacles

Obstacles need to be categorized if we are to deal with them logically and practically. Barrett and Reapsome have done that too. They categorize them in terms of a three-fold scheme based on an interpretation of the Temptation of Jesus--woes that fundamentally have to do with economics, the miraculous and politics. I have some questions at that point so I will take another tack.

It seems most helpful to me to recognize that some obstacles or hindrances to world evangelization such as persecution, inflation and natural disasters are *external* to the Church and its missions. Our Lord said that we will always have these (Mt. 24 and Lk. 21) but that the world will be evangelized anyway. In fact, it is common knowledge that persecution and natural disasters, for example, may actually fall out to the furtherance of the gospel. In part, it depends on how Christians respond to them. But external impediments are outside our purview here.

More important for our present consideration are those obstacles that are *internal* to the Church and its missions. And in this category I propose five sub-categories for consideration here:

1. Spiritual hindrances—those having to do with our relationship to God, people and the forces of the Evil One.
2. Theological hindrances—those having to do with our knowledge of God and His revelation.
3. Ecclesiastical hindrances—obstacles occasioned by Church and mission structures, relationships between them and people's status and roles within them.
4. Psychological hindrances—negative reactions among Christians which are caused by the ways in which we go about the evangelization task.
5. Eschatological hindrances—problems that arise out of the interface between our plans and prophecies and

end-time events in Scripture.

Categories and sub-categories are most viable when they are logically or empirically mutually exclusive. The above categories do not entirely qualify. They are characterized by some overlap and ambiguity. Nevertheless, they seem to be most amenable for my present purpose.

### III. Ranking Hindrances

Common sense tells us that few occasions will allow for the analysis of 340 plus obstacles to evangelizing the world by A.D. 2000. If there are such occasions, this is not one of them. On that point, at least, we probably are in total agreement. (It may be one of few such points, so I thought it worth mentioning!) We are forced to *rank* hindrances in order of their importance and proceed accordingly. But how do we go about the task of determining which obstacles are most significant? (Note that we face the same problem when we talk about trends and issues in missions. That is why it is imperative that anyone who discusses trends and issues explain how he/she arrived at them.)

The ranking of hindrances to any world evangelization plans including those that include A.D. 2000 as a target date can be done unscientifically by offering a personal opinion (the usual approach in determining trends and issues). Or it can be done scientifically by surveying the opinions of the experts, canvassing experience at the grassroots, checking out the number of times the various hindrances have been faced in history, analyzing them in the light of a given principle or value system, or any combination of these. In Kierkegaardian terms, I would denominate what follows as an "unscientific postscript" to the problem of ranking hindrances to world evangelization. Though the conclusions which follow are informed by history, expert opinion, grassroots experience, and especially by the principle of biblical authority, they remain as personal opinion because I cannot claim to have invested nearly as much time and energy in researching this problem as have some of my colleagues. This is not simply a platitude. It

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is a fact since recent months have been invested in research in writing in related but nevertheless different missiological areas.

I will therefore proceed by simply highlighting one or two primary obstacles to our "Evangelization A.D. 2000" plans that can be located in the five sub-categories listed above. Our purpose will be served best if I am forth-right in my analysis even though I realize that we are venturing into sensitive territory.

### IV. Overcoming Hindrances

#### A. Overcoming Spiritual Hindrances

I believe that the history of revivals reveals that spiritual revival does not always result in a vision and program to win the world. And it is evident from a brief study of such groups as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses that vision for, and participation in, plans to win the world do not automatically result in true revival or spiritual awakening. Nevertheless, true revival and world evangelization do emanate from the work of the same Spirit of God and *should* go together. As Harry Boer has so irrefutably pointed out in *Pentecost and Mission*, the Spirit of God is both a *Holy Spirit* and a *Missionary Spirit*. And, though I defer to the historians at this point, when I look back in the tradition of my own church to the impact of Franson and others, it seems evident to me that both spiritual revival *and* missionary vision followed in their train.

Now we can only praise God for the prayer emphasis in the *Global Prayer Digest*, David Bryant's "Concerts of Prayer," and the writings of Wesley Duewel or Patrick Johnstone. All of us are greatly in their debt. And I understand that if goals are met, 10 percent of the world total of Christians (said to total 1,700,000,000) will soon be praying daily for world evangelization by AD 2000 (*AD 2000 Monitor*, Premier Issue, p.2). That would be fantastic!

But it is still true that in calling for world evangelization within the decade of the nineties, we are challenging thousands of Western churches and millions of Western Christians

that have never experienced an extensive revival. Prayer meetings, even in many evangelical churches languish. In one large evangelical congregation with which I am familiar, the average attendance in the weekly prayer meeting is ten to eighteen, though an average of 150 attend the weekly fellowship/study on marriage and divorce that meets at the same time. (One wonders if the number of divorced and contemplating divorce would not be 10-15 if an average of 150 had been attending the prayer meeting!) Perhaps Chuck Colson was right when he said on a recent television program that we better reconsider the role of prayer if want to win the battles against abortion, pornography, child abuse and the like. Activism alone won't do it.

According to Todd Johnson [*Mission Frontiers*, Aug. 1988] that foremost proponent of "World Evangelization of 1900," Arthur T. Pierson, wrote in 1882 that three things had to take place before the world could be evangelized: the involvement of the whole church, evangelistic zeal on the part of all believers, and a baptism of the power of the Holy Spirit. By the middle of the 1890s when it became evident that the goal of world evangelization by the year 1900 was far beyond reach, his focus on holy living and revival became more and more pronounced. He said that "the church would fail in its commission if it was not completely renewed" [ibid. 28].

A contemporary theologian, Donald Bloesch, says essentially the same thing when he writes that if the church is to carry out its mission in the world, the choice is likely either revival or persecution [*Crumbling Foundations*, 1984:122].

Perhaps we have been depending overly much on exposure to the mission field, statistics of various kinds, reiterations of the Great Commission, slick slogans, pithy statements and stirring missionary appeals in order to shake God's people out of spiritual lethargy and indifference. *Exposure to missions does that for some who are ready for it.* But even then there is a problem when it comes to depth and staying power. And if we are thinking about the massive support that world evangelization by AD 2000 would require, missionary appeals per se

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may not be enough. We may have to go back to a more biblical order indicated when our Lord told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for Holy Spirit power. Boor seems to be right when he says that in dealing with the Great Commission, we are dealing with an organic law, not just a fiat command. When believers know and yield to the Spirit as the *Holy Spirit*, they become holy. When they know and yield to the Spirit as the *Missionary Spirit*, they become missionary.

To the extent that this analysis is true, it means that our call for intercession on behalf of world evangelization should be accompanied—perhaps even preceded—by a call for revival in our churches. It means that our concerts of prayer should include concerted prayer for the believing community, not just the unbelieving world. It means that in the churches many of us visit week after week we leave little of real missionary vision and dedication in our wake unless we also leave a spirit of repentance and revival. What would happen if more of us prayed, preached and pleaded for world evangelization, yes, but also the kind of repentance and revival that results in believers getting right with God, the Holy Spirit and one another, the kind of renewal that changes worldviews and value systems? What would happen if we missions people left more revived congregations—not just inspired individuals—in our train? Nebulous? Perhaps. But I suspect that unless our generation of Christians surmounts these spiritual barriers it cannot evangelize the world.

#### **B. Theological Hindrances.**

We have numerous theological hurdles that stand between us and the goal of world evangelization—e.g., universalism, truncated authority of Scripture, syncretism aberrant contextualizations. But from my point of view, one of the most formidable hurdles is to be found among those who really believe in Great Commission mission.

Please permit me to omit names and places for obvious reasons. Very recently and toward the close of one of the most important theological consultations in the brief history of

evangelicalism, one of my most esteemed missiologist friends summed up his assessment this way: "These people are orthodox but they are not evangelical." By this he meant that they were greatly concerned about correct theology but showed little concern for evangelizing the world.

About the same time I was with a group of eminent evangelical theologians who were reflecting on one of the most significant of recent consultations on world evangelization when, in essence, one theologian made this evaluation: "They are certainly evangelistic but if they are orthodox they are masters at concealing it."

The irony here is that the vast majority of theologians in that recent theological consultation would vehemently deny disinterest in evangelism and missiology. And the majority of missiologists participating in the consultation on evangelization would flatly deny that they disparage orthodox theology. *At a practical level, contemporary evangelical theology has tended to give lip service to world evangelization. Contemporary evangelical missiology has tended to give lip service to orthodox theology.*

Not being reticent to speak to the theologians (who, by the way, are giving attention to issues related to world evangelization as you will notice from recent meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society), I have not been reticent to speak to missiologists either. Though I am not a theologian and though I often feel like a voice crying in the wilderness, I believe that one of the greatest theological impediments to fulfilling the Great Commission by the year 2000 or any other year is the apparent disregard for theology reflected in some of our most fervent appeals to fulfill the Commission. When I hear a mature missiological colleague announce that he has no interest in any theological "label" (a well-used term of opprobrium) other than "Christian," a part of me withers. When I hear a young and trusted colleague begin a talk on world evangelization by saying, "I am not going to muck around in theology when the world needs to hear the Gospel" I cringe inside.

The biblical mandate is to make disciples by going, baptizing and *teaching men and women to observe all that our Lord*

*commanded.* The first and most important missionary conference of history was not called to drum up enthusiasm but to resolve a theological impasse that would have nipped Gentile mission in the bud. The greatest missionary of the early church was also its greatest theologian, and the most cursory glance at his missionary letters is enough to convince any thinking person that as far as Paul was concerned, to disparage theology is to abort mission. Even common sense tells us that if theology has to do with knowledge of God's Person, ways and will, biblical theology undergirds biblical mission.

It is common knowledge that the leaders of the early missionary conferences in London (1888) and New York (1900) could assume a broadly evangelical Protestant theology. By Edinburgh 1910 this was not so much the case, but leaders elected to disregard theological differences and adopt what James Scherer calls an "intrinsic" approach to the interpretation to the Great Commission—i.e., each participating church or mission was free to interpret it as they saw fit [in Norman Horner, ed., 1968:21-28]. And it is common knowledge that after Edinburgh, *three* organizations emerged—the International Missionary Council, one on Faith and Order, and one on Life and Work—the latter two to deal with issues dismissed at Edinburgh.

In less than two decades, the very theological underpinnings of world evangelization such as the uniqueness of the Gospel and the necessity of conversion were in trouble, not only or even primarily in the other two organizations but in the IMC itself. Within about one generation, Faith and Order and Live and Work had come together to form the World Council of Churches. In less than two generations the IMC had become the missionary arm of the WCC (in New Dehli, 1961). But organizers of Edinburgh would have been appalled when in 1961 the chairman of the Faith and Order Commission announced (in my hearing) the inauguration of a "new day" in Christian mission" in which our missionaries will desist from telling the world's peoples that they must believe in the Gospel or be lost but rather will embrace Hindus, Buddhists, Shin-

toists, Muslims and others with an invitation to join them in a search for God.

A major obstacle to world evangelization would be overcome if the gap between theology and missiology, and between Bible scholars and missions people, were to be bridged more effectively. There are indications that evangelical theologians are becoming more committed to world evangelization concerns as I have said. It remains for mission leaders and missiologists to desist from talk about theology and theological distinctions being of little account. It remains for us to include in our conference agendas significant papers and discussions on those basics articulated in the doctrinal statements that brought us as evangelicals together in the first place. It remains for us to schedule Bible studies (not just homilies) in our gatherings. It remains for us to find ways of encouraging the writing and publication of pertinent essays that serve to undergird world evangelization theologically.

Rest assured that the marriage of theological orthodoxy and missionary advance is divinely ordained. A divorce or even a temporary separation in order to "get on with the task of world evangelization" does the Kingdom a disservice. Unless we are to delegate world evangelization to another time, place and people, we should give ourselves to the task of overcoming any *de facto* cleavage between evangelical theology and evangelical missiology.

### C. Ecclesiastical Hindrances

Many of the significant obstacles to world evangelization stem from the fact that over 20,000 denominations, 4,000 missions and over 500 national councils exist in Christendom today. And of all the obstacles this ecclesiastical diversity engenders, one of the most sensitive and thorny issues that can be addressed in a paper such as this is that of inter-church and inter-mission cooperation. Allow me to address that issue at some length and then to deal briefly with one or two more logistical issues.

#### 1. The basis of cooperation.

How often I have wished that I could read some stimulat-

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ing treatise on world evangelization, pray an appropriate prayer for the church and the world, retire for the night and open my eyes in the morning on a church and world where all ambiguities had miraculously disappeared—Christians were Christians, nonChristians were nonChristians, Christians stood shoulder-to-shoulder, and when the two sides met they recognized each other for what they were. But that is the world I dream about, not the world to which I awaken each morning. The real world is one of profound ecclesiastical complexity and ambiguity. In *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission* (1988: 110-115), I deal with five kinds of ecumenism starting with the kind our Lord enjoins in John 17 and ending with an ecumenism that embraces sincere adherents of the various religions. I note that there is a slippery slide between them because it has proved to be very difficult to know where to "get a grip" on things. Recently it has seemed to me that more and more confusion and ambiguity in this area of cooperation and ecumenicity have appeared in, of all places, world evangelization enclaves and publications—in plans having to do with discipling the world's peoples by going, baptizing and teaching all Christ commanded! Allow me to sketch a historical backdrop against which to assess this problem from an evangelical viewpoint.

Let us grant that the lack of Christian cooperation has been an obstacle to fulfilling the Great Commission. True Christians have recognized that they need to work together in order to overcome the negative results of division and disunity, Long Ranger entrepreneurship, and "standalone plans" if we want to employ that terminology. But the nagging question that has never gone away has to do with the *basis* for unity and cooperation. It is common knowledge that earlier in this century and in the face of tremendous challenges, our spiritual forebears and those who are older among us responded with cooperative organizations and endeavors based on objective formulations of "fundamentals" or essentials and non-negotiables of biblical Christianity. On that basis, the IFMA and later the EFMA and a host of other groupings and efforts

moved forward in world evangelization. If we define evangelization in terms of an understandable hearing of the biblical Gospel, it can be argued that the increase in the proportion of the world which has been evangelized from approximately 50 percent in 1900 to about 75 percent today is largely due to the efforts of believers and organizations of this stripe (often opposed by the ecclesiastical structures and religious groupings with which we are now encouraged to cooperate).

Over the past generation especially another kind of base for cooperation has been proposed, one that is primarily experiential and subjective rather than an objective statement of faith. Among many evangelicals the most important experiential touchstone for justifying cooperative efforts has come to be the "new birth." If a person is deemed to be "born again" or if an effort results in people being "born again," that justifies both person and program. Among charismatics (notice that I do not say pentecostals at this point), the most important experiential touchstone has been the "pentecostal experience."

If a person is "baptized in the Spirit" or if an effort results in people being "baptized in the Spirit," that justifies both the person and the program. Now one or another or both of these subjective measures are being taken by some as sufficient for cooperation in world evangelization.

A classical illustration of this comes from the Global Consultation held in Singapore earlier this year. In a chapter of *The Countdown Has Begun: The Story of the Global Consultation on AD 2000* (AD 2000 Global Service Office, 1989) entitled "The Rooster Crows a New Day" (1989:58-61) the Garys highlight the tension surrounding the participation of the charismatic Catholic, Father Gino Henriques, and his presentation of Evangelization 2000, an evangelistic emphasis of the Roman Catholic Church. South American evangelicals in particular had objected that participation with Catholics went beyond their "historical and biblical commitments." However, according to the Garys, the spiritual highpoint of the consultation occurred when the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board put his arm around Father Henriques and

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prayed, "Our Father . . . we sense the moving of your Spirit in fresh ways among us. Thank you for this brother in Christ; I sense in his heart the same spirit of Christ. . . ." Gary writes,

As Parks prayed, I could sense the Spirit of God moving through the Amara Ballroom. Next to where I sat, two men in the front row were crying and embracing each other. Tears of joy and repentance began to spread across the room among these seasoned agency leaders, theologians and clergy (p. 55).

Still other reports indicate that the objections of South American evangelicals were overcome when they sensed that Father Henriques was a humble, considerate, born-again believer. And, of course, the response of charismatic leaders to a fellow charismatic was predictable.

Now I was not at Singapore. I certainly will not call into question the Catholic Father's new birth and other spiritual experiences, nor do I doubt his commitment to world evangelization. However, all of this may be beside the point. The relevant questions in this case have to do with something far greater than the spiritual status of one person or the missiological temperature of a single movement. They have to do with the validity of Reformation teachings; the nature of any official and grassroot changes in Catholicism; and the kind of churches that are to be planted among new people groups. Common sense tells us that these are not issues to be resolved in the euphoria of an existential moment, but in a time of prayerful deliberation when to raise a question does not seem to be an act of spiritual insensitivity. (It is noteworthy in this regard that among ecumenists the experiential touchstone of the rapidly expanding inter-religious dialogue is a "new inter-faith spirituality" that is the harbinger of a "new day" that will come about as representatives of the various religions gather together in order to share a religious experience that will unite people of all faiths rather than focus on dogmas and doctrines that separate them.)

But currently still another touchstone, another measure, another basis of cooperation has been proposed. I am not sure whether to categorize it as objective or subjective or a combi-

nation of the two, for to be very honest, it leaves me confused and even bewildered. Let me explain.

I believe that I understand most of the material in the recent and prodigious publication entitled *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World*. When I do get confused, I simply refer to the glossary in Appendix J and can usually dispel the confusion. So I think that when I read about hierarchies and networks, the importance of computer "giganetworking" and the limitations of "standalone" plans, I understand what the authors are saying. But when it comes to the basis and kind of cooperation being proposed, I become so confused that no glossary, including the one in Appendix J, is of much help.

Oh, I understood when the authors underline the need for cooperation by writing,

The absence of any network is catastrophic. It is probably the major single cause of the fiasco of today's unevangelized world of 1.3 billion persons largely untouched from one year to the next by either the 788 global plans or the top 254 plans still being actively implemented today (p 50).

The network being discussed stretches across the ecclesiastical spectrum and includes Catholic, mainline Protestant and even heretical groups, in addition to evangelical ones. I paused at that point but was still tempted in the direction of some agreement. After all, partly in response to Professor George Peter's encouragement and assistance, years ago I edited a book on the strategies and dynamics of rapidly growing religious movements around the world (*Dynamic Religious Movements*: 1978) in the conviction that something could be learned from even non-Christian movements when it comes to strategies and tactics. But as I read on, I became really confused and even somewhat agitated. I reasoned that something far more than an exchange of information must be involved in statements like the following:

... many Christians regard the 500 standalone plans as intrinsically bad, evil, even diabolical ... avoiding Christ's categorical desire and prayer; 'That they may all be one.' (John 17:11, 21, 22 RSV) [p. 50].

The following points should be noted: 1) The 16 marginal networks listed [e.g. Universalists, Christian Science, Spiritists, Unity--ed.] insist that they are Christians . . . 2) They profess to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (but, usually, not as God). 3) The Bible as the Word of God plays a major role . . . 4) These networks profess allegiance to Christ's Great Commission and frequently refer to it . . . [p. 55].

The LDS global commitment to Christ's Great Commission has resulted by 1988 in an annual foreign missions expenditure estimated at \$550 million . . . [p. 55].

[Jehovah's Christian Witnesses] regards the rest of global Christianity as apostate, and all other Christian churches and agencies in turn deny it is a Christian body. The paradox we face in this analysis is that this last sentence is true, but that it is also true that Witnesses claim passionately to be followers of Jesus Christ as Lord, appealing frequently to the Great Commission . . . [pp. 55, 56].

In this analysis, we are not investigating theological criteria-- dogmas or doctrines, christologies, ecclesiologies, church politics, church union, missions methods, etc. We are talking only about missiological criteria--how to further Christ's Great Commission . . . [p. 56].

An entire book (or several of them) and/or conference should be devoted to an evaluation of this approach. It raises a host of questions. For example: Granted that "worldwide propagation" of this or that teaching can be discussed apart from "theological criteria," is it logically possible to divorce "theological criteria" and the furtherance of the Great Commission? Can any legitimate exegesis of our Lord's prayer in John 17 require cooperation with Universalists, Christian Science, and the like? Is it right to reinforce this particular approach to cooperation with a statement by Tokunboh Adeyemo when the cooperation he calls for is specifically identified as *evangelical* cooperation and with a quotation by Robert Bowman when he calls for cooperation within the body of Christ [p. 50]? Is it logically defensible to exclude New Age and Baha'i while including Spiritists and Unity when the relationship of the latter to Christ and the Great Commission is so contrived and facile? Is it reasonable to assume that a testimony that might be borne to a few Mormon and Jehovah Witness leaders in the kind of cooperation being proposed will out-



weigh the confusion that will likely be engendered among ordinary Christians? How does such an approach square with that of the historic ecumenical councils in which the early fathers labored long and hard to preserve a faith worthy of acceptance and dissemination? And so forth.

It is commendable that our colleagues who wrote *Seven Hundred Plans* suggest some "theses" for discussion [p. 56]. We can fervently hope that that suggestion is accepted before evangelical leaders adopt their own approach. I humbly suggest that confusion concerning inter-ecclesiastical and inter-mission cooperation will be a millstone around the neck of the world evangelization plans. If we grant that cooperation is important to effect world evangelization, let us rethink its bases and goals. Let us distinguish between two kinds of cooperation—one kind that requires a meeting of heart and mind, and another kind that requires no more than an exchange of information. One has to do with participation *in* world evangelization while the other has to do with networking *for* world evangelization. It seems to me that the basis for one must include some kind of objective statement of the type that has characterized historic Christianity and many evangelical movements such as the one that brings us together today. There can be no evangelization in any biblical and true sense unless there is a biblical evangel. The second kind of cooperation requires no more than a willingness to share information on a professional basis—information that might indeed assist us in world evangelization (but that may also assist others in the dissemination of false gospels).

For example, many of us as professional missiologists are members of the American Society of Missiology. That organization brings Catholic, and liberal and conservative Protestant missiologists together. It has many benefits for the academic. But there is no way we could work together *in* world evangelization because a consensus on the meaning of salvation, the necessity of conversion and the nature of mission simply does not exist. Therefore, many of us are also members of the

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Association of Evangelical Professors of Mission. Its basis for membership is assent to either the IFMA or EFMA statement of faith so we are of one mind and one heart on the essentials of Great Commission mission. Believing that this latter kind of cooperation is absolutely essential to the future of biblical missiology and the fulfillment of the Great Commission, Dr. Donald McGavran has repeatedly urged us to enlarge the latter organization so as to include a much wider range of evangelical mission thinkers—a proposal that had the blessing of the late Drs. Kane and Peters.

I do not presume to have all the answers at this point. But if cooperation *in* world evangelization is important, now is the time to agree on some clearly defined and clearly understood objective basis that supports Great Commission mission and move forward on that basis. If networking with religious and secular organizations that collect, process and analyze global data is beneficial, now is the time to join in such a network and to make the nature and limits of the network crystal clear to our evangelical constituency. Far from effecting world evangelization, the present confusing course may actually fragment further those who really believe the biblical gospel.

## 2. Comity arrangements.

In line with the proposals I have just puzzled over and critiqued, it is said that we need a combination of network of standalone plans and "hierarchical clout" that includes (a) standalone acceptance of total responsibility, (b) a recognition of the essential value of the rest of the network, and (c) recognition of, acceptance of, and cooperation with all other global plans espoused by Great Commission Christians [*Seven Hundred Plans*, p. 50]. Now if that is the kind of cooperation required to effect world evangelization, the obstacles may be insurmountable. In the first place, there is the ambiguity of the phrase "Great Commission Christians" referred to above. In the second place, even if that confusion were dispelled, the grassroots acceptance of total responsibility presupposes a level of spirituality not immediately apparent. It is noticeably lacking even among tens of thousands of pastors of local

churches whose role is far more important than most of the literature on world evangelization seems to recognize. In the third place, and ironically, "hierarchical clout" is of greatest importance in precisely those "Great Commission" organizations that have lost the evangel!

A "comity approach" that divides up the task among churches and agencies, each of which assume an appropriate part of the task is dismissed as "a let-out, a cop-out, a loop-hole, a black hole of gigantic proportions" [*ibid.*]. Why? Because it is too modest, manageable and easy-to-work. Because that are too many gaps and unclaimed tasks. Because if one agency fails, the overarching goal fails. Well, perhaps I am out of touch with reality, but it seems to me that the "adopt a people group" approach is (was?) a comity arrangement by this definition and that it is one of the most hopeful plans yet put forth. Recently I have been with NAE Home Missions leaders in New York, CM&A furloughing missionaries in Seattle, EFCA pastors in Kenosha, and lay Christians and leaders in a score of churches. The overwhelming feeling that I come away from these contacts with is that the best hope for world evangelization is to encourage evangelization plans already or soon to be in place within evangelical churches and missions and the kind of networking that will undergird, enlighten and expedite those plans.

#### D. Psychological Hindrances

There are numerous psychological roadblocks to world evangelization by the year 2000 and they are among the most difficult to rank. Let me mention several and briefly analyze them.

##### 1. Disappointment and disillusionment.

A few months ago, I polled a class of 25 dedicated theological/ missiological graduate students. The questions were open-ended. One question asked for their reaction if, after commitment to an Evangelization 2000 plan, they stood on the threshold of the 21st century and it was evident that the plan

had not succeeded. Predictably, the majority (16) mentioned the words disappointment and disillusionment in their response. Nevertheless, when they were asked to formulate the best arguments they could think of for and against such a plan, they came up with as many arguments for and against (7 in each case).

I think that the jury is out, not on world evangelization plans per se, but on plans that include a target date including the year 2000. Moreover, I doubt that the jury will re-emerge until well into the next decade if Christ tarries. So what is the best course to follow *now*? I do not know because, as my little poll made clear, the more emphasis you place on the target date the greater the participation and chance of success on the one hand, *and* the greater the disillusionment if the plan fails on the other. Halfway houses like "world evangelization by AD 2000 and beyond" have limited utility, but remain as an option.

Perhaps the best way to proceed is to avoid the kind of linkage of our definitions and plans with Divine definitions and plans as was implied in the "see the world as God sees the world" reinforcement of people group thinking. People group thinking actually has more validity when it is reinforced strategically and one does not attempt the kind of questionable exegesis that makes *ethne* in the Great Commission synonymous with our latest anthropologically and sociologically informed definition of "people group." Similarly, a target date—whether AD 2000 or whatever—has the most validity and entails the least risk when it is *reinforced strategically* and related to a basic biblical eschatology that eschews date-setting (see below).

##### 2. "World Evangelization Burn-out"

World evangelization burn-out can result from a variety of causes. One evangelical theologian with a worldwide reputation recently wrote to a well known evangelist that the plethora of consultations, conferences and congresses on world evangelization with their budgets running into the millions ran the risk of backlash and the reaction "Why not spend those mil-

lions in evangelizing the world rather than in more talk about it?" Many of our most dedicated lay people have given up on sorting out the bewildering array of conflicting statistics. How many unreached people groups are there, after all? Three thousand, ten thousand or fifteen thousand? And how many languages are we talking about? Five thousand or three times that number? And so forth. Missiologists can sort these out but the average layman has neither the time nor patience to do so.

And then there is that potential for burn-out after the terminal date has been reached. George Peters highlighted this in his evaluation of Evangelism-in-Depth. Noting that church growth actually tailed off temporarily after EID campaigns, he explained that people had expended so much time and energy that when the campaign was over they breathed a sigh of relief and went back to the mundane tasks that had been put off during the period of the campaign. (Was it Luther who said that if he knew the Lord was coming tomorrow he would plant a tree today?) His recommendation was that EID leaders should "... eliminate from our thoughts and vocabulary the idea that we are moving into a country to 'complete the job' of evangelism in one year" and concentrate on building evangelism into the life of the churches [*Saturation Evangelism*, 1970:84-85].

The solutions to burn-out are quite obvious, but they are not easy to apply.

#### E. Eschatological Hindrances

From the Apostle Paul to J. Hudson Taylor to Arthur T. Pierson, the fulfillment of the Great Commission has been linked with the coming of Christ and the consummation of the present age. At the same time, this linkage has raised numerous questions. In the nineteenth century Gustav Warneck questioned the idea of engaging in mission in order to hasten Christ's return. In a recent personal letter [July 10, 1889] Michael Pocock of Dallas Theological Seminary notes that the people of every tribe, tongue, and nation that surround

the throne in Revelation 7:9 are saved out of "the Great Tribulation," not just "generally troublesome times." He insists that this does not diminish our responsibility, but it means that the "final evangelization may be out of our hands." This is just the beginning. Only *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World* contains more hindrances than can be found in prophetic Scripture in general and more woes than the Apocalypse of John in particular!

What is the greatest eschatological problem to be overcome in planning for world evangelization by the year 1900, or 2000 or "in this generation" for that matter? It depends upon one's eschatology. But I would like to mention one that merits careful thought among premillennial evangelicals at least. It has seemed to me that there is a principle in New Testament eschatology that is absolutely fundamental. It is the distinction between what we might term a "countdown" and a "prophetic alert." Put in a word, the "countdown" perspective is what you have when in dealing with the so-called "signs of the times" in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, you start counting up the number of earthquakes, martyrs, famines, wars, etc. and conclude that Christ must come by such and such a year or within this or that generation. It is Hal Lindsey's perspective when he writes.

Some of you may be thinking that every generation has seen this apostasy in the church. This is true, but the Bible says that as the countdown before Christ's return comes closer, the teachings of the false leaders of the church will depart farther and farther from God's Word [*The Late Great Planet Earth*, 1970:128].

It is the perspective that very naturally is assumed by Jay and Olgy Gary when they write the story of GCOWE, *The Countdown Has Begun: The Story of the Global Consultation on AD 2000* [1989].

Now the appeal of this perspective is apparent when you consider the sale of Lindsey's book; the attendance at Singapore last January; and the number of global plans that involve an explicit or implicit deadline. But, of course, common knowledge tells us that date-setting has proved to be an embar-

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rassment in case after case; common sense tells us that this could have been anticipated in most cases; and, most important, the biblical perspective seems to be very different.

The biblical perspective seems to be that of the "prophetic alert." Stephen Travis points out that our Lord Jesus saw the crisis *within* history as a foreshadowing of the final crisis at the *end* of history [*The Jesus Hope*, 1970:41]. In other words, the prophecy of earthquakes, persecution, the appearance of false Christs and so forth were not given as a kind of prophetic timeclock to enable us to move hour and second hands as the events unfold, but as reminders that the age will yield this kind of history; that God is not taken by surprise (and neither should we be surprised); and that a day is coming in the which Christ will come and change all of this. Therefore, in the Olivet Discourse Jesus repeatedly says that, though we don't know *when* He will come, we do know *that* He will come and should therefore be on the *alert* (see NASB Mt. 24:42; 25:13) *all* the time.

The problem is that we are dealing with human nature that is curious about the future and with American culture that is specific goal/date oriented on the one hand, and with an eschatological framework in which a thousand years is as a day and a day as a thousand years when it comes to effecting God's salvific purpose. What to do? Wait until the mid-1990s and risk having to change the "AD 2000" to "in this generation" (or something similar) as they did in the 1890s? Change the slogan immediately to "World Evangelization AD 2000 and Beyond" (or something similar)? Adjust our definitions and statistics when the target date rolls around so as to pronounce the world "evangelized"? Forget target dates completely and settle for something more in keeping with the biblical teaching that we have no assurance of tomorrow or the 1990s or the 21st century; that Christ may come at *any* time; and that in the final analysis, *our time is now*.

As I have intimated above, I must admit to a preference for an emphasis like, "Global Evangelization: Our Present Oppor-

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tunity" or "World Evangelization: The Time is Now" with an emphasis on the facts that *some* generation of Christians will evangelize the world; that it *could* be ours; that the need is apparent; that we have the means; and that the task is "doable." Various possible scenarios and time frames can be used in the context of such an emphasis while being true to the biblical perspective on the future. Obviously, there is no one solution to the problem posed here, but it is incumbent upon every strategist who incorporates AD 2000 (and any kind of *terminus ad quem*) to anticipate that the unquestioned gain of date-setting and deadlines may exact a certain price. At the very least, let us not sacrifice the very biblical incentive to mission and godly living that accrues to the fact that Christ may come at any time and will come at a time when few expect Him. He is not beholden to our timeframes!