

"ADOPTING" UNREACHED PEOPLES IN THE 1990s: HOW AMBITIOUS ARE WE PREPARED TO BE?

■ Can churches and mission agencies partner in the task of reaching every people by the year 2000? What new innovations present us with hope that this vital link can be made as we enter the 1990s? These and many other crucial questions are examined in this enlightening article.

By Darrell R. Dorr

Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away
ambition:

By that sin fell the angels; how can man then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by't?

—William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*

Ambition, in a private man a vice,
Is, in a prince, the virtue.

—Philip Massinger, *The Bashful Lover*

Love's but a frailty of the mind

When 'tis not with ambition joined.

—William Congreve, *The Way of the World*

"Ambition" is a word about which many of us feel, well, ambivalent. The conflicting perspectives described above are only the tip of the iceberg. For Biblical Christians, other images come to mind: the prophet Jeremiah's thunderous rebuke of his scribe Baruch to "seek not great things for yourself," the apostle James' warning against the evils of envy and selfish ambition. Yet we also recall the apostle Paul's exhortation to "run in such a way that you may win" and Elisha's lament that Jehoshaphat's half-hearted use of bow and arrows led to only three victories over Aram.

I am a relative newcomer to the Adopt-a-People idea but an enthusiastic convert. Now, as an insider, I'm thrilled at the prospects this concept holds. I believe that, in order for the Adopt-a-People idea to succeed, the leaders of the frontier mission movement—including the readers of this journal—must pull together as never before in a collective ambition for Christ-honoring excellence that is accompanied by a setting aside of personal agendas and selfish ambition. Are we ready for such a step? Let's take a look at some of the opportunities and obstacles.

BACKGROUND OF THE ADOPT-A-PEOPLE MOVEMENT

As far as I can tell, the concept of "adopting" unreached peoples was born within North American evangelical circles in the early 1980s, gaining increasing popularity throughout the worldwide evangelical community as the decade progressed. The basic idea: get a church or other fellowship group, working in partnership with a mission agency, to "adopt" one or more unreached peoples for long-term prayer, financial support, and/or personnel recruitment.

It has been envisioned that in this way mission agencies and churches can whittle away at the estimated 12,000 unreached peoples until eventually all are the beneficiaries of pioneer church-planting efforts. In many circles, the hope is that, as a result, a viable, indigenous, evangelizing church community—a "beachhead"—will emerge among each unreached people by AD 2000. The evidence of the 1980s does indeed indicate that the Adopt-a-People emphasis can put flesh on the macro-statistics and give a stronger focus to the frontier mission movement.

In March 1989 a group of North American mission executives met at the U.S. Center for World Mission to compare notes at an Adopt-a-People symposium. They affirmed the value of the Adopt-a-People approach and established the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse to foster greater cooperation between agencies and churches, especially in the area of information management. A few months later, I was asked to direct the Clearinghouse, and in January 1990 I and a small team of volunteers began operations. Recently

the Clearinghouse became international in scope, going beyond its North American base to solicit the cooperation of non-Western agencies and churches as well.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "ADOPT" AN UNREACHED PEOPLE?

So what have we learned in the 1980s and during the first part of 1990? Allow me to start at the "micro" level—within the local church—and then work my way to the "macro" level—the relationships between churches, mission agencies, and coordinating bodies such as the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse.

The first and most fundamental issue is to define what we mean by *adopting* an unreached people. We can answer this question at least four ways: technically, by making comparisons with child adoption, theologically, and with a "hands-on" definition.

Technical Definition

According to the consensus definitions of frontier mission terms borrowed from a March 1982 meeting convened by the Lausanne Committee's Strategy Working Group, "adoption" is the primary role of churches and other fellowship groups, and "selection" is what mission agencies do. Within the seven stages to reaching an unreached people, stage five, called "Adopted/Supported," is defined thus: "A congregation, class, or other group of believers has accepted responsibility for prayer and/or financial support of efforts to reach this people group. The church or agency has personnel and adequate resources to move ahead."¹

Comparisons with Child Adoption

As useful as it is, the technical definition is dry and a little ambiguous. I've often found it helpful to also point out the parallels between adopting *children* and adopting *peoples*. In both cases there is a *special need* because of the absence of nurture that would normally be expected: adoptable children lack adequate care from their natural parents, and unreached peoples lack resident church communities that can adequately demonstrate and proclaim Good News.

In both cases there is the call for a *long-term commitment*. Just as parents cannot adopt a child one year and whimsically discard him the next, neither should a church lightly decide to adopt an unreached people as a way to dress up a mission conference or keep up with First Baptist down the street.

In both cases there is the *recognition that parental responsibility significantly changes at a certain point*. When children become adults, their parents retain responsibilities for nurture and counsel, yet the parents release their children into a new degree of freedom and authority. When an unreached people finally gains a resident church community and thereby becomes "reached," the adopting church can likewise yield primary responsibility for the evangelization of this people to the indigenous church without severing ties either to the indigenous church or the larger people.

Theological Definition

It's also important to note two theological dimensions of adopting unreached peoples. To choose to adopt an unreached people is, first of all, an *embrace of the Father heart of God* for that people. I, like many other fathers, have often watched my children while they slept and mused on my deep love for them, my yearnings for their success, and my fierce jealousy for their safety. In such a time I catch an inkling of what my Heavenly Father feels for the peoples of the earth. When we adopt a people, we say, in effect, "We want to participate in the Father's redemptive yearnings for one people. We want to extend His reconciling love to a people we hope to increasingly understand."

The flip side of people group adoption is the choice to *contend with*

Satan's forces on behalf of that people. It is encouraging that today's Church is growing in its recognition of and power to deal with territorial spirits that rule over particular peoples or regions. This is not merely the topic of exciting novels, but also the substance of frontier mission advance. To adopt an unreached people is to become part of a fighting force, and adopting churches should be prepared for the Enemy's inevitable counterattacks on those who seriously challenge his dominion.

The "Hands-On" Definition

After all this, the bottom line is that people group adoption means whatever a church, in partnership with one or more mission agencies, makes it to mean. The technical definition of "adopted/supported" stated above is broad enough to have permitted churches and mission agencies to hold a variety of expectations of adoption during the 1980s. Some churches and agencies focus primarily on prayer, others expect financial commitment of some kind, and yet others anticipate personnel recruitment. Many combinations are possible.

To some extent, such a spectrum of expectations is desirable because it allows different members of the Body of Christ to assume different functions in the Adopt-a-People movement as they are able and willing. On the other hand, the spectrum can permit confusion as to which functions *are or are not* being fulfilled on behalf of each of the world's estimated 12,000 unreached peoples. Therefore, the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse has proposed multiple "levels" of people group adoption so that mission agencies, churches, and other fellowship groups can communicate more precisely and helpfully.²

To say that adoption means whatever a church and its partner mission define it to mean is to underscore another important point: churches do well, as an early step in their investigations, to link up with at least one mission agency and to heed the suggestions of that agency. In their zeal some churches ignore or minimize such counsel. But it is the mission agency that usually has the ability and the vested interest in keeping the church well-informed and equipped for its unique role. Where mission field

realities require or suggest church-to-field teams or other alternative routes, fine, but, in my opinion, these should be pursued only when it is clear that mission agencies are not up to the task.

WHAT PEOPLE GROUP ADOPTION DOES NOT MEAN

By contrast, it's important to briefly clarify what adopting an unreached people does *not* mean. First, it does not mean, as a primary emphasis, adopting the *missionaries* working among that people. Sure, these missionaries will be the subject of special attention, but the emphasis—unlike many contemporary church mission programs—is on the people group itself and what God longs to accomplish on their behalf. That's refreshing!

Second, adoption does not mean condescending to the unreached people. The very language of "adoption," to some people, carries not only *parental* but also *paternalistic* overtones. But that is certainly not the intent. To adopt an unreached people is to honor the image of God in that people and to seek to build on what is noble in their culture for the sake of their redemption. In order to avoid the appearance of paternalism, some mission agencies have chosen other terms for their Adopt-a-People programs, e.g., Focus-on-a-People. It is, of course, the function that matters, not the form or label.

Finally, *people group adoption does not preclude other concerns*, including other mission concerns within a church, or relegate these concerns to inferior rank. Some agencies, churches, and fellowships have held back from adopting unreached peoples because of fears in this area. While it is true that frontier mission to unreached peoples is at the heart of the Biblical emphasis on "making disciples of all nations," it should be recognized that the adoption of an unreached people no more precludes other mission concerns than the adoption of a child precludes other important dimensions of a family's life. It should be noted, however, that in both cases adoption can lead to a profound rearrangement of schedule and perspective!

BENEFITS OF ADOPTION FOR THE CHURCH OR FELLOWSHIP

The reasoning above may answer

some fundamental questions, but it does not necessarily make the "sale" to inquiring churches. They need to know that adopting an unreached people is not merely a noble, practical response to the Great Commission, but also the carrier vehicle for other benefits that more directly address their felt needs. That's not selfish or illegitimate!

Without pretending that this list is comprehensive, I've pointed out at least three such benefits. First, the adopting church grows in its *ability to wage spiritual warfare*, including warfare closer to home, and begins to better anticipate what it means to reign with Christ.

Second, the adopting church acquires another "lens" on the meaning of *Christian discipleship*, a wider context within which to address personal issues. For example, I've asked one group which has adopted the Sundanese of Indonesia, "What can a middle-class church like this learn from Sundanese culture in general and the fledgling Sundanese church in particular? How do the aspirations and fears of a Sundanese mother, or businessman, or new Christian compare to your own?"

Finally, the adopting church is introduced to a *delightful new fellowship of like-minded churches and mission agencies* giving attention to the same unreached people. Creative ideas crackle back and forth as new friends affirm one another's gifts and assess one another's visions.

This is one of the most joyful and precious dimensions of the whole Adopt-a-People process, and while it has its complications, e.g., heightening security concerns, it's worth it.

THE INGREDIENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION

As we complete this overview of the "micro" level of the Adopt-a-People movement, we would do well to highlight a few of the prerequisites to success. First, as I mentioned earlier, people group adoption is a long-term commitment, and as such calls for tough-minded *perseverance*.

A recent article in *TIME* magazine reported that at least 1000 children adopted in the U.S. each year are returned to adoption agencies by their

new parents. These 1000 children represent only 2% of total adoptions, but the failure rate is disproportionately higher among older children and children with special needs: 10% for children older than two, and a whopping 24% for ages 12 to 17! Why these abortive adoptions?

Some are sent back because of unmet expectations, others because they have severe emotional problems the parents cannot handle. In a risk-averse age when consumer standards have become more exacting and family commitments seem less binding, there is a danger that adopted children could be viewed as commodities that come with an implied warranty.

The reporter then slips, admirably enough, into an editorial posture:

...Still, there are no warranties on adoptions. Those who set out looking for perfect "designer" children are likely to be disappointed. Nor is it possible—or even necessary—to know everything about a child... Instead, adoptive parents, armed with as much information as possible, should face the inevitable mysteries—just as all parents do.³

[Churches] need to know that adopting an unreached people is not merely a noble, practical response to the Great Commission, but also the carrier vehicle for other benefits that more directly address their felt needs.

The parallels with people group adoption are obvious and helpful, and they suggest another prerequisite to success, the flip side of perseverance: *an embrace of risks and a keen sense of adventure*. Why not decide at the outset to delight in the surprises?

As I've reviewed Adopt-a-People case studies, *creativity* seems to be another important element. When church and mission leaders unleash laymen to run within specified guidelines, good things happen! Survey trips, video letters, and specialized newsletters are just a few of the helpful tools that result.

It's also crucial that mission leaders *clearly impart and continually reiterate the goal* of all this activity: the establishment of an indigenous church

community that can demonstrate and proclaim Jesus to its kinsmen. When the adopting church gets a strong grasp of the goal, it is better equipped to hang on now and let go later.

Finally, it's evident that an Adopt-a-People emphasis, if it is to succeed within a church, must be *integrated with other goals and activities*. If it stands alone, with no mechanisms and forums to reinforce it, it withers.

One southern California church, for example, made a splashy adoption commitment in 1983, but the adoption has sunk into obscurity since then, largely because of the absence of integration. Therein lies much of the value of the "generic" tools and services produced by the U.S. Center for World Mission—such as the Year of Vision curriculum, guidelines for monthly mission fellowships and "loose change" offerings, and customized editions of the *Global Prayer Digest*.⁴

BUT WHO AND WHERE ARE THE UNREACHED PEOPLES?

Let's now shift our attention to a range of opportunities and obstacles on the "macro" level—issues related to the Adopt-a-People relationships between churches, mission agencies, and specialized agencies such as the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse. Here's where much of the tough work remains to be done.

The first and foremost task is to obtain a more comprehensive, accurate list of the unreached peoples of the world, as well as a continually-updated status report on the extent to which these peoples have been selected by mission agencies and adopted by churches. This is the primary mandate of the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse and also the focus of other, complementary projects, such as the joint efforts of David Barrett, Patrick Johnstone, and Todd Johnson and the ongoing initiatives of Global Mapping International. If indeed we are serious about a "closure" mentality and a "countdown" to the year 2000 or any other date, we must do a much better job of getting our arms around the big picture, and soon.

A frustrated church leader in Hong Kong, at the time unaware of the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse, gave

voice to many others when he pled in a recent letter,

Cannot you or someone else act as a central clearing house for all these various agencies and record the progress being made by the church as a whole? If you, these various agencies, and all of us the church as a body are really serious about getting to each of the really unreached groups, then why isn't this thing organized so that somebody (an information center) is keeping score in a serious, methodical way? (But surely somebody has proposed this long ago....) Who really knows for sure how many "unreached" groups are really still unreached at any given point in time? If there is no such information center keeping track, but rather any number of different agencies keeping their own records.... *it's pretty obvious nobody really knows (italics mine)....*

Before I respond to this representative plea, allow me to reiterate four provisos commonly voiced by the staff of the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse. First, the nature of this task is such that we will never have the definitive list of unreached peoples until the job is done, until all peoples have actually been reached. (Witness Wycliffe's experience in attempting to tabulate the Bibleless peoples of the world.) Second, the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse cannot and does not aspire to tackle this task alone; we are enmeshed in a matrix of complementary research and mobilization efforts.

Third, we are progressing and learning more every month! There's no cause for disillusionment, but, to the contrary, much to be thankful for as mission leaders begin to bear down on this subject.

Fourth, most people who insist on obtaining a comprehensive list really don't need one to accomplish their immediate objective—identifying one or a few unreached peoples to select or adopt. All that's required in such a case is to link arms with a mission agency that has already clearly identified a few unreached peoples within its sphere of influence and expertise, and the Clearinghouse and other ministries are more than capable of serving as a broker to link churches and agencies in this way.

But even after such provisos, we must acknowledge the truth of what this Hong Kong leader had to say as well the legitimacy of his frustration. The flurry of frontier mission rhetoric in the 1980s has generated high expecta-

tions that we know who and where most or all the unreached peoples are. But our knowledge base is admittedly sketchy, resembling an assortment of occasional "sightings" more than a comprehensive list.

The Problem of Definitions and Labels

What are the obstacles to obtaining such a list? First, incredibly enough, we are still groping for common definitions and labels that we can not only affirm in principle but also apply in practice. The Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse, for one, has chosen to utilize the consensus definitions and labels developed at the March 1982 meeting mentioned earlier. These terms not only include seven stages to reaching an unreached people, but also foundational definitions of both "people/people group" and "unreached people." A people or people group is defined as

a significantly large ethnic/sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another. From the viewpoint of evangelization this is the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance (italics mine).

An unreached people is likewise defined as

a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without requiring outside (cross-cultural) assistance.⁵

It should be noted that participants at the 1982 meeting have since differed as to whether the italicized phrase in the definition of a people ("as a church-planting movement") was actually approved by this group. The Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse has chosen to include the phrase because (a) the phrase imposes a helpful, specific descriptor of the spread of the gospel, and (b) the other definitions in the 1982 cluster appear to hinge on frontier church-planting.

So, with such definitions, what's the problem? For one, many people—even many mission leaders—remain ignorant of the consensus that has been reached. Other mission leaders have affirmed the standard terms publicly

but then permitted other operational definitions within their respective agencies, largely because of public relations pressures and the desire to dignify existing ministries.

Yet others have made sincere attempts to apply the 1982 terms but found them inadequate to answer practical questions. For example, within the definition of "unreached people," what constitutes "an indigenous community of believing Christians"? Does this mean *evangelical* Christians, or *evangelical Protestant* Christians, or *evangelical Protestant Christians from my tradition*? (The answer will vary from case to case, depending both on mission field realities and the theological convictions with which each agency assesses those realities.) Or what constitutes "adequate numbers and resources"? How, for example, would this apply to the Japanese church in Japan?

It is largely in response to such ambiguities that mission researchers have begun to build on the 1982 definitions and propose greater specificity. For example, David Barrett and Todd Johnson propose that the definition of "people" given above be reserved for "minipeoples" or "unimax peoples" (in the acknowledgement of many categories of peoples, e.g., megapeoples, ethnolinguistic peoples, micropeoples, sociopeoples, etc.).⁶ Barrett and Patrick Johnstone, working on a Peoples Database, have suggested three numerical codes to measure "reachedness."⁷ These are helpful attempts to provide more empirical means by which more consistent assessments may be made, but they have yet to filter throughout the mission community or to enjoy the stature of the 1982 agreements.

The Problem of Data Collection and Verification

While the standard definitions are imperfect and incomplete, they are nevertheless used to good benefit by a number of agencies. We then face the problem of collecting data, assessing it, and seeking verification from independent sources.

For its "inner circle" of data, the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse has chosen to enlist evangelical Protestant mission agencies as "participating agencies" in the Clearinghouse, solicit-

ing their knowledge of unreached peoples in exchange for help in promoting their work among these peoples to churches and individuals who make inquiries of the Clearinghouse. Participating agencies—now 50 in number, and growing—affirm explicit guidelines that spell out their qualifications and responsibilities as well as the benefits they can expect to receive.⁸ The Clearinghouse then seeks supplemental data from primary and secondary researchers around the world, including centers for world mission, permanent national research functions, DAWN projects, specialized research institutes, and various individuals.

One kink in such a strategy has been the discovery that many mission administrators—even those who are genuine enthusiasts for the Adopt-a-People idea—face enormous obstacles to obtaining accurate data from their own missionaries and about their own mission fields. I've already mentioned the public relations pressures that tempt administrators to fudge on the standard definitions of unreached peoples, or the ecclesiastical constraints that incline them to impose parochial interpretations of these definitions.

Beyond this, mission leaders are often dependent on the ability and willingness of middle managers to solicit information from field missionaries and then to process it accurately—no small task for groups of people who already consider themselves overworked and understaffed. In addition, many field missionaries are simply ill-equipped to respond to unreached people surveys. For this reason, there is growing discussion of the need for itinerant "coaches" who could equip missionaries within and between agencies to report data from their respective fields.

Another difficulty in data collection and verification is the common resistance to rigorous peer review even when such review is needed and edifying. I occasionally have the awkward duty of telling an agency participating in the Clearinghouse that I have serious doubts about the accuracy of one of their reports and that I would like to obtain their permission to submit this report to others for verification. Some agencies are more receptive than

others to such a step, but—receptive or not—peer review is a necessary ingredient to data integrity and truth in advertising.

INFORMATION SECURITY IN THE AGE OF NETWORKING

Another fundamental concern is the security and confidentiality of information, especially regarding the presence of missionaries, tentmakers, or other Christians among particular peoples. How can we effectively help Christians with similar Spirit-given burdens for the same people—both "selectors" and "adoptors"—to find one another and work together without disclosing too much and actually disrupting the very ministries we're hoping to strengthen?

It's in this area, and many others, that I'm grateful for the Global Mapping Users Group. This group of mission leaders, most of whom are active users of database management tools developed by Global Mapping International (such as the Global Research

Participating agencies—now 50 in number, and growing—affirm explicit guidelines that spell out their qualifications and responsibilities as well as the benefits they can expect to receive.

Database software package), has been working throughout 1990 on an *Information-Sharing Handbook* that suggests standard guidelines and includes customizable agreements between two or more agencies. The Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse has contributed to this process and plans to build on these guidelines in its relationships with participating agencies and others. The *Handbook* is due to be released to the public in October 1990.⁹

It is clear that the absence of explicit, clear guidelines for information-sharing has had a chilling effect on networking on behalf of unreached peoples. But even while we're hammering out such guidelines, we can agree on provisional solutions. For example, in sensitive situations the Clearinghouse staff will often simply take the name and address of an inquirer and pass this information on to the appropriate agencies, telling the inquirer only that we know of

others who can help him and that it will be up to these undisclosed agencies to decide how much of their plans and aspirations to reveal to the inquirer by means of their own filtering devices. It's not very fancy, but it works for a significant subset of inquiries we receive.

MAKING THE "SALE" TO CHURCHES AND OTHER FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

All this behind-the-scenes development of infrastructure won't accomplish much unless others can successfully make the initial Adopt-a-People "sale" to churches and other fellowship groups. Fortunately, in addition to the mission leaders now beginning to advocate the Adopt-a-People idea to their respective constituencies, a growing number of ministries are beginning to make "neutral" or "generic" sales pitches to a wide spectrum of Christians.

For example, within North America the Association of Church Missions Committees and the Mobilization Division of the U.S. Center for World Mission have been slowly engineering what is simply called "the North America Campaign." A central feature of this campaign—still in its developmental stage—is the proposal to utilize the regional offices of both APMC and the U.S. Center to prompt and equip North American churches to adopt at least 6000 unreached peoples. Other associations in other regions of the world have picked up the idea and made comparable projections scaled to the size of their Christian communities. For example, Costa Rican Christians are now hoping to adopt 30-50 unreached peoples.¹⁰

This parceling of responsibility for adopting the world's unreached peoples is undoubtedly a helpful step, even if it is linked to a total of 12,000 unreached minipeoples that we've yet to verify. Such a plan rightfully acknowledges the Adopt-a-People enthusiasm and resources around the world, especially among younger, non-Western missions (and most notably among Latin American Christians).

Another, hidden benefit is that this development will soon push us to more squarely face the question of which

Christians from which reached peoples are the best candidates to approach which unreached peoples. The Adopt-a-People movement has become a game of three-dimensional chess, and it will be fascinating to see the extent to which, for example, American churches are willing to adopt North African peoples in partnership with Argentine mission agencies, or how it will work for Korean churches to adopt peoples in Nigeria via Filipino agencies. Or who will rally behind the Bolivian missionaries with a burden for Mongolians? What an exciting day to be alive!

Key players in the Adopt-a-People "sales" effort will likely include that new breed of missionary alternately called the "non-residential missionary" (NRM) or "unreached people advocate." The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention of the USA has taken the lead in recruiting and training NRMs, whose itinerant mandate is to stimulate and sustain cooperative mission efforts on behalf of their assigned peoples. Others, notably Caleb Project and the U.S. Center's Mobilization Division, have picked up the scent and are seeking to recruit larger numbers of Unreached People Advocates who will ensure that every people receives due attention.

A CALL FOR GODLY, COLLECTIVE AMBITION

As we come to the end of this overview, I want to return to the theme with which I began—ambition. I believe that while we can be justifiably grateful for the recent progress of the frontier mission movement in general and the Adopt-a-People arena in particular, we must be candid in acknowledging that we have barely begun to extend ourselves, to dream big dreams and then to resolutely and collectively act on those dreams. We must confess that we are nowhere near a "wartime" footing. And what would a wartime footing entail? A sense of urgency and the need for speed, a sustained commitment to excellence and professional thoroughness, and an unprecedented coordination of the gifts within the Body of Christ.

A Sense of Urgency

It seems to me that it's time for mission leaders to talk a great deal more about the reality of the horrors of hell,

and not merely in sermons on the mission conference circuit. We need to remind *each other* that each day, while we plod along, thousands upon thousands of priceless men and women cascade into the Abyss.

Is it quaint that I would reiterate such a basic truth in a professional journal? Would our work pace be acceptable in a war *between* nations? I think not. Then why do we tolerate it in Christ's redemptive mission *among* the nations?

Herein is no justification for frantic appeals or workaholic tendencies, merely a call to align reality with rhetoric, especially rhetoric that would dangle the year 2000 as a possible completion date. By the way, I for one am hearing fewer and fewer serious references to "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000." Does this betray an admission that we're losing our window of opportunity?

A Commitment to Excellence and Thoroughness

I am often ashamed when I look around me and see the exertions and ambitions of unregenerate man and then compare the resources committed to these great projects to what has been assigned to the Adopt-a-People effort. Admittedly, missions will always be a minority concern, and frontier missions even more so. But does this prevent us from allowing the Superconducting Supercollider, the Human Genome Project, or the Hubble Space Telescope (flaws included) to spur us to new zeal?

Are we really serious about establishing the church among every unreached people, by the year 2000 or any other date? Do the love of God and the fear of God really constrain us? What should I have said when a perceptive caller asked me one day, "Isn't the Adopt-a-People idea the heart of the U.S. Center complex? Why, then, don't you guys appear to be serious about assigning the kinds of personnel required?"

Within recent issues of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* a prophet from a century past, A.T. Pierson, has appeared again and again. Among the many stirring challenges Pierson issued, one has stood out to me: his righteous indignation at the stark contrast between the secular and the mission ambitions of his era, the latter

years of the nineteenth century. Listen to Pierson's anguished cries on three separate occasions over a period of ten years:

These are days of giant enterprises in the interests of commerce, science, art and literature. Why not carry the spirit of sanctified enterprise into our religious life and work?¹¹

It seems to me that the Church of God is trifling with the whole subject of missions. Why should we not show a spirit of enterprise in the Church such as the world shows in all business schemes?¹²

I am more and more satisfied that if the Church would but imitate the laudable "push" and "dash" of the men of this generation, the children of light would flood the world with the Gospel in as little time as Ahasuerus dispersed his royal decree from the Bosphorus to the Indus. Will any one tell us why not?¹³

"The spirit of sanctified enterprise"—that's a phrase I've taken into my prayer closet and my conference room. I've come to see all too painfully how the absence of the discipline of the marketplace within the world of nonprofit Christian ministries can lead us to tolerate a sluggishness that would likely result in bankruptcy for the commercial enterprise. Is it not time, to use the title of a recent article in *Christianity Today*, for the "taming of the shrewd"?¹⁴ To say such things is not to advocate a slavish imitation of corporate models and mores, nor to minimize the devotional or supernatural, only to provoke us to love and good works.

A Coordination of Gifts Within the Body of Christ

I wish to add my voice to the growing chorus of Christians who are calling for an unprecedented coordination of gifts and abilities within the mission community. David Barrett has been especially eloquent in railing against what he calls the "standalone mentality" that characterizes so much of our strategic planning and review.¹⁵ Bill O'Brien, executive vice-president of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention/USA, has called us to "yield our corporate giftedness," Ralph Winter of the U.S. Center has suggested that we take "marching orders" from one another, and Bob Waymire of Global Mapping has likewise heralded the value of

mutually-acknowledged "category stewards."

And Paul McKaughan, the new director of the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (USA), recently added his own insights on this subject:

It is important that we as leaders begin to interact together and find out what God's will is for us collectively. I've heard "comity" talked about. Comity is a marvelous principle, but I don't think we're talking about geographic comity today. I don't even think we're talking about "people" comity. But I do think we may be talking about visionary comity. We may be talking about surrendering some of our prerogatives. We may be talking about applying some of our computer skills. We may be talking about some of our unreached peoples ground force.

We are all accumulating a body of knowledge and we're all trying to do everything. We can't do everything in the world in which we live. And we're going to have to begin to trust one another enough to use the tools and the abilities and the giftedness of the various members of our community in order that the body of Christ can move with an expeditious and a decided tread towards this goal of world evangelization.¹⁶

I believe that the coordinated decentralization of function within the frontier mission movement is a very good thing. But I'm also beginning to see evidence of what I would call, by contrast, the "Balkanization" of the movement. The latter comes when we unilaterally determine our respective functions, and the movement thereby becomes fragmented and disjointed. The former comes when we submit our agendas and proposed niches to one another, and the movement thereby begins to hum like a well-oiled machine. We're often reticent to talk explicitly about role definition because it leads us to deal substantively with selfish ambitions, either real or perceived. But we need to talk about this nonetheless.

Allow me to illustrate once more with the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse, which seeks seconded workers as its primary avenue of personnel recruitment. I readily confess that the Clearinghouse does *not* currently have the personnel required to adequately exercise its mandate. (That includes its current director, for I am neither a database manager nor the son of a

database manager, merely a general-purpose editor and administrator who has made himself available!) While I believe that the Clearinghouse is worthy of the cream of the crop of the frontier mission movement ("for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"), I am much more concerned that the *functions* of the Clearinghouse be capably performed, either under our own roof or someone else's. The stakes are much too high to cling to any vestige of selfish ambition!

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The next few months will be critical for the Adopt-a-People movement around the world. We should be keenly aware that we're now in a relatively-narrow window of opportunity both for the Adopt-a-People idea and the AD 2000 movement within which it nests. An Adopt-a-People report is scheduled for the September 13-15 meeting of the International Society for Frontier Missiology in Denver,

We're often reticent to talk explicitly about role definition because it leads us to deal substantively with selfish ambitions, either real or perceived. But we need to talk about this nonetheless.

Colorado, and the limited experience of the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse will provide a series of case studies for the "Dallas III" huddle on research and information management in mid-October.

Then, perhaps most significantly, an international Adopt-a-People Consultation is scheduled for October 22-25 in London. This consultation—co-sponsored by the International Society for Frontier Missiology, Global Mapping International, the Global Network of Centers for World Mission, and the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse—will be the forum in which approximately 50 Adopt-a-People activists from around the world will rigorously review our progress to date and attempt to anticipate the future.

May our Lord and Savior grant us grace—during and between such meetings—to not settle for half measures, but to imbibe Pierson's "spirit of sanctified enterprise" even as

we lay our personal ambitions on the altar. ■

Darrell Dorr is the executive director of the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse, based in Pasadena, California, USA. He has held various portfolios at the U.S. Center for World Mission since 1980 and is a former editor of the International Journal of Frontier Missions. Author's address: 1539 E. Howard Street, Pasadena, CA 91104, USA.

END NOTES

1. The basic March 1982 definitions can be found in Ed Dayton, "Reaching Unreached Peoples: Guidelines and Definitions for Those Concerned with World Evangelization," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Volume 2, Number 1, January 1985, pp. 31-38. Subsequent, minor modifications have been made by the IFMA Frontier Peoples Committee and the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse, cf. the Adopt-a-People Glossary.

2. Dale Kietzman has proposed a five-point spectrum of adoption "types" based on his observation of what agencies currently offer to and require from churches. The five types are: (1) Prayer only; reporting through agency's normal publications.

(2) Prayer only; special reports mailed at least quarterly. (3) Prayer plus minimal financial commitment (amount not stipulated); reporting through agency's normal publications. (4) Prayer plus fixed financial commitment; special reports mailed at least quarterly. (5) Minimum financial commitment of at least US\$100 monthly for at least three years, with specific reporting in both directions provided.

3. Andrea Sachs, "When the Lullaby Ends: Should adoptive parents be able to return unwanted children?" *TIME* magazine, June 4, 1990, pp. 82-83.

4. These and other materials may be ordered from the U.S. Center for World Mission, Mobilization Division, 1605 Elizabeth St., Pasadena, CA 91104, USA, (818) 398-2200.

5. Compare the varying versions of these definitions offered in the Ed Dayton article cited in note 1 and Ralph D. Winter, "Momentum is Building! Many Voices Discuss Completing the Task by 2000 A.D.," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Volume 3, Numbers 1-4, January-October 1986, pp. 67-78.
6. David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *Our Globe and How to Reach It: Seeing the world evangelized by AD 2000 and Beyond*, Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope, 1990, pp. 124-125.
7. Patrick Johnstone, "People Groups: How Many Unreached?," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Volume 7, Number 2, April 1990, pp. 35-40.
8. For a copy of its guidelines for participating agencies, contact the Adopt-a-People Clearinghouse, 1539 E. Howard St., Pasadena, CA 91104, USA, (818) 398-2282.
9. You may learn more about the Global Mapping Users Group by contacting Global Mapping International, 1530 Elizabeth St., Pasadena, CA 91104, (818) 398-2420.
10. Luis Bush, "Costa Rican Evangelicals Poised for Mission Advance," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Volume 7, Number 1, January 1990, pp. 11-13.
11. Todd M. Johnson, *Countdown to 1900: World Evangelization at the End of the Nineteenth Century*, Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope, 1988, p. 7.
12. Found in "The Evangelization of the World in the Present Generation—How Made a Fact," a speech delivered at the First International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions on Friday, February 27, 1891. This address is included in *Student Mission Power* (published by William Carey Library), pp. 81-88.
13. Todd M. Johnson, *Countdown to 1900: World Evangelization at the End of the Nineteenth Century*, Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope, 1988, p. 42.
14. Paul De Vries, "The Taming of the Shrewd," *Christianity Today*, March 19, 1990, pp. 14-17.
15. David B. Barrett and James W. Reapsome, *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World: The rise of a global evangelization movement*, Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope Publishers, 1988, pp. 59-62.
16. Paul McKaughan, "AD 2000 and Beyond," *AD 2000 and Beyond*, May-August 1990, pp. 5-9.