

TOWARDS THE IDEAL DEPLOYMENT OF MISSIONARIES

■ When you examine the deployment of missionaries today, you'd think we are deliberately ignoring the least evangelized peoples. How can this change in the coming years? Is it possible for better deployment among the unreached to become a trend in the 1990s?

By Dr. Howard Brant

INTRODUCTION—BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DEPLOYMENT

Four thousand years ago, God told Abraham, "I will bless you, I will make you a great nation, and in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

Two thousand years ago, Jesus stood on a mountain top in Israel and declared, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples in all nations."

By the same token, John the Revelator looked down into human history and saw that at the end time, there would be a multitude standing before the throne who were from every people and nation and tribe and tongue.

From four thousand years ago, the plan of God for the nations has been clear. We stand in that drama somewhere near the closing scenes. As we look at what God has been trying to do and what He has commanded us to do, we see that His agenda is to get a people for Himself from each and every one of these people groups. By our very presence here today, we are declaring that we want to participate with God in this divine activity. We have bought into His agenda and want with all our hearts to see it accomplished. Whatever other questions or differences we may have, we long to see the Gospel in the "uttermost part of the earth."

OUR QUESTION

As we define our question we want to ask the hard question about how the resources of missions in terms of deployment of missionaries are being expended. Todd Johnson and David Barrett, in their new book *Our globe and how to reach it*, have done us a great

service by pointing out the fact that a high percentage of mission human resources are presently being channeled into areas of the world where the church is already in existence, whereas, by comparison, those places where the church has not yet been planted have just a very small portion of the harvest force allocated to them.

FACTORS WHICH IMPACT THE DEPLOYMENT QUESTION

Before we talk about what can be done to correct this situation, let's reflect on several factors which came to bare on the question of how long a mission agency might be engaged in one place.

1. First of all, let's remember that many of these places which we refer to as "evangelized" were unreached themselves not too many years ago. The emergence of the evangelical phenomenon throughout the world is a relatively recent affair. Sometimes the newer missions and newer agencies that came to the situation forget that the facts have not always been as they are today. It is, in fact, because many of the older mission agencies have fire and vision and tenacity that many of these "evangelized" countries can be called that today. We need to affirm what God has already done as we look towards the future.
2. Second, we don't fall into the trap of thinking that because a mission works in a so-called "evangelized" country that all their personnel are necessarily working with "evangelized" people groups. By the same token, there are plenty of organizations who are working in the "une-

vangelized" nations but are working almost exclusively with "evangelized" peoples. Though it may be helpful to think again in national terms in order to get some macro picture, we must not get confused by starting to think about deployment in terms of political boundaries—but rather in terms of the unevangelized people groups or segments within those nations.

3. Third, we must note the changing emphasis and shifting strategies of the missiological world. Dr. Jim Pleuddemann points out that not two decades ago, the prevailing wisdom in missiological circles was that we ought to seek the ripened harvest fields of the world and throw our resources in at that point so as we do not miss the ripened harvest. Now, only 20 years later, the prevailing winds are shifting and we are hearing concerns that missions are in harvest fields too long and they really be out there among the hidden and unreached fields of the world.
4. Most importantly, though we all agree on the Great Commission as our ultimate objective, not every mission agency shares the same vision of corporate strategy for accomplishing the Great Commission. Some agencies focus on development as a means of creating good will for the Gospel and breaking down resistance. Some focus on the conversion of individuals through evangelism. Others think that evangelism is only the beginning and new believers must be disciplined into maturity.

Still others feel that conversion and discipleship must lead to the planting of the church and without that the missionary mandate has not been completed.

There are yet others who feel that we even need to go beyond church planting and need to stay on until that church, or group of churches is equipped for every good work, including the propagation of the Gospel within and without their own societies.

Perhaps those with the farthest reaching goal see their role as creating not only individual converts, or churches, or equipping the saints, but even to the development of whole missionary societies in the receptor cultures.

We can see that the length of stay of a mission agency and the amount of resources which they are willing to commit to any one people group is directly related to their corporate strategy.

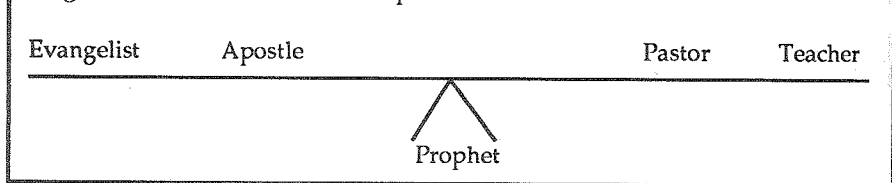
In SIM International, for example, we have a long term corporate strategy. We see a seven fold process in the founding and development of a church. We start with pre-evangelism and move to evangelism. We then go on to discipleship and then, church formation. But we also want to see those churches organize into a national entity and then to take up their own missionary vision. Finally, we are ready to partner with the missionary arms of these new societies and start the process all over again in a new and unreached area.

Now that is a long term vision. It isn't fulfilled in a day and it involves a long term commitment to our objective. With this in mind, we might say that ideal deployment of our missionaries may look quite different than what it looks like for another agency who may not share the same corporate vision.

- This leads me to my fifth and final point under this consideration. Some of us are becoming increasingly aware that there is in fact a very awesome force which is being awakened in the world today which may be God's tool to finish the task—and that is the Non-Western Missionary movement.

We are naive if we simply look at

Diagram 1. Gifts of the church in Ephesians 4



the resources of the West when it comes to world evangelism. The potential of missionaries coming out of the Pacific Rim countries, out of Eastern Europe, out of Latin America and Africa simply stagger the imagination. Resources placed in facilitating those agencies are certainly not misplaced and must not be withdrawn. They should rather be encouraged and strengthened.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN NURTURING AND EVANGELISM

Perhaps the hardest thing in the world to do is to keep balanced. As we think of this question of ideal deployment, some will want to keep most in nurturing and support ministries, while others will want to put most of the resources into front line evangelism.

I think the Scripture encourages us to keep a balanced view. Note if you will in Ephesians 4, there are five offices or gifts which God gives to the establishing of his church. There are the apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher and pastor. Of these five, I would think that the apostle and evangelist are clearly frontier types. The teacher and the pastor are clearly nurturing ministries. Perhaps the prophet ministers to both sides. That would give us a nice balance between nurturing and new outreach ministries (see Diagram 1).

By the same token, Barrett and Johnson call our attention to the fact that there are seven key commands used in the Great commissions. These

are "receive, go, preach, witness, disciple, baptize, teach."

To my way of thinking the words "go, preach and witness" refer to the frontier situation of evangelism. The words "disciple, baptize and teach" speak to nurturing ministries. The word "receive" speaks to the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the whole of the activity. In this again, I see a beautiful balance with three on each side, and the Holy Spirit being the fulcrum over which the whole operation is beautifully balanced (see Diagram 2).

Given this balance in emphasis, we do need to analyze the data before us and ask if indeed one side of the equation is being too heavily emphasized to the neglect of the other.

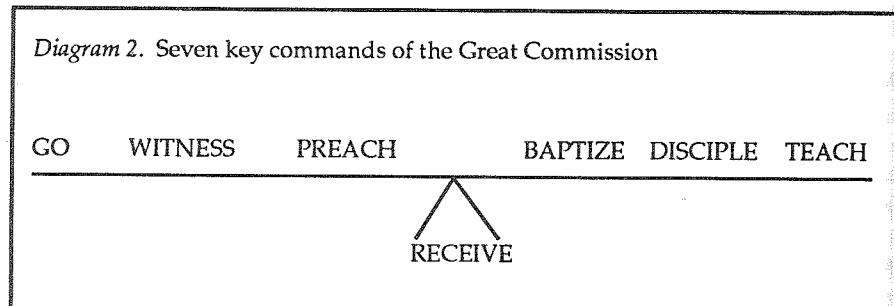
The reality is that we continually need to be evaluating our programs and looking for ways to trim off the fat and leave the lean.

THE QUESTION OF INERTIA

Now all that is one side of the coin. There is another side as well. We confess quickly that there are places where existing the missionary forces are not deployed well.

- There are institutions which were started years ago that have outlived their usefulness.
- There are situations where the missionary has planted the church and should have moved on long ago but lingers far too long.
- Perhaps, worst of all, there does tend to develop in any organization

Diagram 2. Seven key commands of the Great Commission



a kind of black hole effect where people get sucked into the center—often in positions which were created to meet a specific need or to suit the vision of same individual—and then they are perpetuated because there is an empty office or a blank space of an organization chart.

How well I remember when my wife and I were young missionaries in Ethiopia and were given the challenge of planting the Gospel among the Gurage people. Here was a group of 750,000 people, and only four families who had any personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. We lived in a grass house and every night we would go to sleep to the sound of the shamans drums.

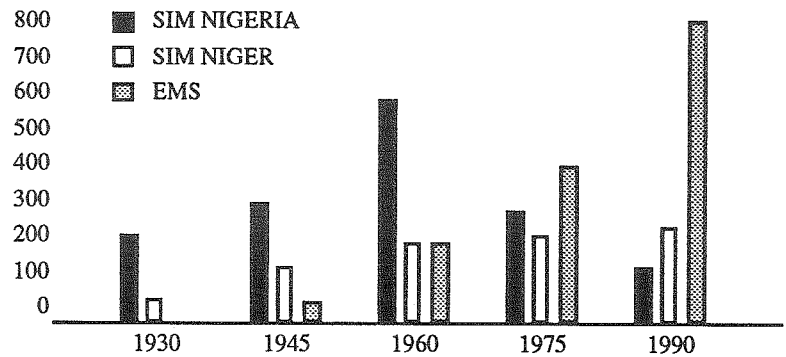
At the same time, I was somehow on our field council as a Junior Missionary. After ten days of sitting through reviews of work in the hospitals, the schools, the need for teachers and development workers and bookkeepers etc., I was totally frustrated. Didn't anyone care about the unreached. What was missions all about anyway? I remember making a major speech one day to that council and recalled to them that in the early church the apostles saw that the work was getting large and there were many needs so they encouraged the people to choose out six men who could do the supportive work of the deacons so that the apostles could get on with the job.

I made the point that the ratio in the early church was six people in support ministries and twelve in apostolic ministry. I called upon our council to return to the Biblical ratio and get two thirds of the operation out there among the unreached preaching the Gospel and let one third work behind the scenes in support ministry. You can imagine that I was met with long pauses and a lot of throats clearing. Some of my colleagues still remind me of that speech.

What I didn't realize then, but understand much better now is that mission agencies are very complex animals. They do respond over time to needs and shifting situations. But the time frame which one must take is a much longer view than most of us are prepared to give. We want action now—but if we look at the long term, we may be surprised that what we are suggesting here, does take place—but just in a

Diagram 3.

SIM DEPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA AND NIGER BETWEEN 1930 AND 1990



much longer term than we thought.

Diagram 3 represents SIM's deployment of missionaries in two countries. Nigeria is a World B country according to the scale that we're using. In other words, there are quite a few believers in Nigeria and these figures that you see here would show SIM's distribution of missionaries over the years 1930, '45, '60, '75 and '90. You can see that in 1960 we actually had over five hundred and eighty foreign missionaries in Nigeria. But then you can see that moving down in 1975 and 1990, as that number has decreased substantially. The country of Niger, which is just to the north of Nigeria, is a very highly Islamicized country (World A). You can see what happens in this country starting in 1930—that we begin to see a steady rise in the number of missionaries. It is in fact true that a number of the missionaries that came out Nigeria went into Niger.

There are many factors involved here. One is the fact that many people in both Niger and Nigeria speak Hausa so there's a natural connection there. But you will see that there is a decline. There is a re-deployment. What I think is even more significant, however, is that during that same time you see the birth of a national missionary society (EMS). That takes off in about 1945, and to date in 1990, it goes right off the graph at over 800 missionaries.

I think you see that given long enough, given a long-term view, re-deployment does take place. From this case study, we see it does happen, but it

does take time. Those who are calling for massive shifts in western mission deployment in the next two to five years will likely be disappointed. But if we look at what is happening in the long term and what is happening in Third World missions there is reason for optimism.

AIDS IN KEEPING THE FRONTIERS BEFORE US

Perhaps this is the place to highlight a few of the more recent innovations which have been of great help to all of us in thinking about the question of deployment into frontier situations.

1. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to Ralph Winter for helping us define "people groups."
2. The new nomenclature, which I believe comes from the Southern Baptists, of "segments" is even more helpful because it helps us to get a two dimensional view—placing the sociological grid over top of the ethno-linguistic. This is particularly helpful when we move into the urban setting where sociological categories are far more important than anthropological ones.
3. I think every major mission agency is starting to feel the influence of the "Perspectives" course. It is opening up the minds of young people whose lives are being changed and influenced towards frontier situations.
4. The concerts of prayer being organized throughout the country

organized throughout the country are Right On and may ultimately be doing more to strike the match of motivation than any other single thing that could be done.

5. We are deeply indebted to Inter-Varsity and the Urbana movement which has gone far beyond Urbana itself and has branched out into regional meetings with specific mission emphasis. These conferences like "Go" and "Venture" etc. are being used by the Lord to activate numbers of young people for frontier mission.
6. The concept of the nonresidential missionary is very helpful. As I've followed along about what is happening in terms of Mongolia over the past few months, I've just thanked God over and over again for some stalwarts who three and four years ago gave themselves to be advocates for that country. Now the country is opening up and they are ready to move in.
7. The adopt-a-people concept is starting to pay off as churches are moving in behind people groups around the world. If they can hang in there for long term view with us this is going to pay major dividends.
8. I'm impressed with what I hear about the church planters school started by Thomas Graham which tries to evaluate a person's gift in the area of church planting. This kind of evaluation tell us where a person's gift might be used best. When a person can be affirmed in the area of evangelism and church planting, this gives them confidence to strike out into frontier situations.
9. The research that is being done is going to be very helpful. In particular the past two meetings of the Inter Agency Information Sharing group in Dallas has brought together both the hardware and the software people so that there can be collaboration on research and networking of information.
Might I just say, however, that in order for this research to be of any help to organizations such as ours,

that research is going to have to break down categories and be specific about the kinds of organizations which are being listed as working among any given people group. We don't accept the notion that every group that calls itself "Christian" or even has a global plan for reaching the world by the year 2000 is going to help people into the true body of Christ. Though we appreciate the problem of the researcher in not wanting to pass judgment on whether any given group is really evangelizing from a true Biblical perspective, we need indicators which help us decide whether the job is really getting done or not.

10. The year 2000 goals are helpful to some individuals and organizations. Certainly anything of that sort can be seen as a heuristic device to motivate and spring some into action.

I just want to raise a word of caution however, that we should not be bound to some arbitrary date. In our enthusiasm to motivate for closure, we don't want to lose sight of our long term goals. We don't want to wake up on January 1, 2001 without any idea of what we are called to do.
To my mind, the urgency of our task is not written in terms of decades or century markers, but by the fact that people who pass into eternity without Christ are lost for eternity.

That is true before AD 2000, on AD 2000 and after AD 2000.

I personally think that the addition of the words "2000 and Beyond" are very helpful.

A CLOSING CONSIDERATION

In all our discussion about frontier situations and finishing the task, there is one theme that is often omitted.

Is it not true that in the past, revival at home has meant missionary advance abroad? Barrett and Johnson point out that at the present rate, world evangel-

ism is more than offset by population growth. I believe the figures are that they are about 133 million newly evangelized every year and 142 million new births every year. That is a net loss of about 7 million people a year.

Barrett and Johnson acknowledge that unless something of massive proportions happens in the next few years, we will be only marking time in terms of global evangelism.

I'm reminded of Peter's vision before he went to the house of Cornelius.

Up until that time, the Gospel had been working throughout the Jewish community—but it took a major break through of massive proportions to break the Gentile barrier and allow the existing Christian community to see Gentiles came into the kingdom of God.

I wonder if our problem could not be boiled down in just about the same way. We have the resources to finish the task. If 12 men so changed the world in their generation that within a 70 years span the number of believers jumped from 12 to over a million, how much more could we with all that God has placed within our hands do much more.

The problem of Peter, however, is the same problem of today. He was saying "Not so, Lord!" That is a blatant contradiction isn't it. Surely, if we would put away all our "Not sos" and let the Lord of Harvest do His work, we would see the unfinished task—finished.

In the final analysis, I doubt that the key to finishing the unfinished task lies as much in our inability to plan and strategize and redeploy—as it does in our unwillingness to obey the still small voice of God's Spirit. I think I hear the Spirit saying to the church today as he did to the church of Philadelphia "I set before you an open door." ■

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