

A STUDENT EXAMINES "THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NONRESIDENTIAL MISSIONARY"

■ Is the bold new strategy of nonresidential missions succeeding? Undergraduate Michele Philemon says "Yes," and the evangelization of the world awaits the adoption of all unevangelized population segments of humanity by these intrepid advocates.

By Michele S. Philemon

Christianity is a religion which subscribes to the belief that God is for all people. For such believers, it is considered a way of life rather than just ideas that one knows inside of one's head. Christians make being "Christ-like" a commitment of the heart. Therefore, the goal of many such believers is to share the love of and the story of Jesus Christ with those who have never known it.

Southern Baptists and many other denominations use missionaries to spread the word of God among the people who have not heard. As with most subjects of the world, various opinions have formed concerning the issue of missions. The primary goal of such work is stated in Romans 16, verses 25 and 26. It reads, "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him..."¹ In this writing of Paul, he believed that the gospel, as revealed to him by God, was universal. In accordance with this Scripture, Donald McGavran, who is thought to be the father of the contemporary church growth movement², explained several concepts of missions. The first idea is that missions is for discipling men and women—society after society. This process of leading many people of each nation to Christianity will ideally result in justice and racial equality. A second idea is that missions is for helping all people of all religions and all parts of society to live better lives. This means going beyond the church doors to dealing with famine

relief, aiding with agricultural needs, and providing education. The result of this type of missions would be that the people learn to behave justly toward those with whom they live.³ However, today's idea is somewhat a combination of both concepts. Missionaries of this century do not only witness to the people on the streets or in the markets. They can be role models, support systems, program organizers, teachers, manual laborers, and so much more. The gospel need not have limitations because God does not have limitations.

The traditional foreign missionary has proven to be very effective. This is the individual (or couple) who has gone to live among a group for approximately four years at a time, will return home for possibly a year, and then go back into the field. He is welcomed to serve the country and is allowed to openly disciple and develop churches. However, the new global perspective is focusing on reaching those countries to which access is limited and using other ways to approach these hard to reach people.⁴

In order to understand the concept of this paper, there are certain terms that must be defined. First, a "people (s)" is an ethnolinguistic group that has its own language and is ethnically distinct. Second, a "people group" is an "umbrella term" used for a population segment that has political, economic, religious, cultural, and geographical commonalities. An "unreached people group" is one in which there is not an indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize their own people group.⁵

The number of unreached people groups is tremendous, and the tradi-

tional missionary approach will not always work. McGavran was extremely involved with research and evangelistic strategies. He measured the success of the witnessing by how many were won to Christ. He thought this was a fair measure because of the theology of stewardship. With this test, people were forced to evaluate the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the Lord's work.⁶

According to Ralph Winter, head of the US Center for World Mission, it was this type of thinking that led McGavran to single-handedly launch a missiological movement for "unreached peoples" and also create a scholarly field of evangelical missiology.⁷ Keith Parks, the President of the Foreign Mission Board, made some comments about the missionary. He believes the work of a missionary is very challenging because one must first be able to understand oneself within a culture in order to deal with Christianity as it applies to other cultures. Though the gospel must be experienced in judgment of culture and must be experienced as above culture, it has to be compatible and acceptable for every culture. It needs to be at home in any setting.⁸ Because this is an issue, there is a need to get the gospel into those countries which cannot otherwise be reached. The kind of missionary who can serve the people without actually being with them daily for years on end is a "nonresidential missionary." This term grew out of research associated with David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia* and was coined in 1986 by a team of mission researchers working at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia.⁹ This type of missionary is concerned with learning a language, a culture, and wit-

nessing. He is a full-time missionary who is assigned to a single population group but who does not live with them. The nonresidential missionary targets an unreached people group in a restricted country and aims at giving everyone in that group a chance to respond to Christ through a network of Christian influences.¹⁰ Therefore, the nonresidential missionary is an effective means of witnessing to people groups who do not have an adequate opportunity to hear or respond to the message of Christ.

There is a tremendous need for nonresidential missionaries. Even though the Southern Baptists have many missionaries evangelizing countries—sharing the gospel, a great number do not have the gospel. One would like to believe that very few countries are unevangelized. However, an article in *The Commission* by Mark Harvey, conveyed to the readers that hundreds of specific people groups are not only without the gospel, but they do not even have access to it.¹¹ If the groups were open to traditional approaches, then those approaches could be used. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many areas. The statistics for those unevangelized is extremely high. There are approximately 1.3 billion people—more than 2,000 peoples, 1,000 major cities, and 30 “closed” countries—who are unevangelized. Also, about 500 peoples do not have any Christian missionaries, churches, media options, or even Bibles.¹² These figures are very startling when one considers that Christianity is not a new religion. Numerous countries have gone to war, individuals have faced persecution, and lives have been sacrificed to maintain the right to worship God freely. Although witnessing is not a prerequisite for salvation and is not necessary to maintain eternal life, it is still an intricate part of the Christian way of life. Therefore, one would expect a greater percentage of the world to know about Jesus Christ. It is primarily those living in the belt of the eastern hemisphere from Saharan Sahel of West Africa through the Middle East and Central Asia, then eastward, including much of China, and then north to India, Indochina, and Indonesia southward who are not evangelized.¹³ Altogether, one-fourth of the world's population is unevangelized.¹⁴ If the situation was such that these people were lost only because they do not know Christ, then that could easily

be rendered by developing an extensive outreach program. The fact is that they have no way of even hearing the gospel without someone like a nonresidential missionary.

David Garrison, the director of the nonresidential missions for the Foreign Mission Board, has spotlighted many people groups in need of Christ. Two of them are the Kazan Tatars and the Makassarese. The first group is the Kazan Tatars who number more than ten million. Many of these Turkic ethnolinguistic peoples are located from the foothills of the Altai Mountains in Mongolia to the Aegean Sea in Europe. Of these people, 100,000 are Christians. Though the amount does not sound small, 5.1 million of them have yet to hear the gospel. This is due in part to the fact that there is not a Christian radio broadcast nor a New Testament which has been translated into the Tatar language. The other group with a significant need for Christ is the Makassarese people who live in Indonesia. Of the three million people, there are only one hundred known believers. This is less than 1/100 of one percent of the population. For every one Makassar Christian, more than 24,000 have not even heard the gospel. The primary religion in this area is Islam, but a Bible was translated into one of the main dialects in 1990. Thus, even though radio broadcasting of any form is nonexistent in their language, God is opening doors.¹⁵ The world is full of “Tatars” and “Makassarese” who could benefit from the nonresidential missionary.

The nonresidential missionary is able to reach population segments that other career missionaries cannot. However, there are barriers that attempt to keep the word of God out of certain areas. Since World War II, the world has encountered many changes. Autonomous nations have developed, and with the wars for independence have come boundary disputes. Therefore, as a result of this new nationalism, Western missionaries have been restricted from countries. In 1988, forty-five countries were completely inaccessible to a Christian witness of any degree.¹⁶ However, this is not a novel concept. The Bible tells of the city of Jericho being closed, of Philip penetrating lands with the gospel, and of Damascus being very hostile to the

witness of Paul.¹⁷ Today's missionaries also face socio-cultural, political, and geographical barriers. For example, the nomadic peoples are in a constant pursuit of water or pastures, and continually are moving from the heat to the cold. It is impractical to think that a traditional missionary would chase the nomads from one place to another. But, the nonresidential missionary could research where they are at different points in time and plan a method to reach them. The nonresidential missionary could determine what type of radio broadcast would reach the people as they traveled, what their needs were (doctors, hydrologists, etc.), and who could most effectively witness to the groups.¹⁸ Also, some countries forbid any form of Western presence such as Afghanistan, Mongolia, and Iran. Additionally, some are very difficult to reach because they are located in very isolated areas.

The nonresidential missionary utilizes all resources to reach such peoples. Partnerships with countries on good terms with these hostile nations have proven to be very helpful. For example, Indian Christians have set up businesses in Soviet Central Asia. Latin American Christians have done the same thing in the Muslim territory of North Africa. The believers in Nigeria and Zambia have sent students to China and to the USSR. And, Christian Filipino domestic workers are helping in rich households of the Persian Gulf.¹⁹ These people are useful in reaching out and spreading the gospel. They are able to make contacts behind the closed doors that the missionary cannot. The nonresidential missionary may use other people or take on other identities to reach the people. A good example of this is a “tentmaker.” This is a person who is in a full-time secular position over seas, but who leads people to Christ. Official tentmakers must fund their own ministry. Acting as a tourist is another way of learning about the population, distributing tracts, learning the language, and witnessing. Nonresidential missionaries also arrange student exchange programs which allow Christian students the opportunity to do direct evangelism. Prayer is another method used to overcome the barriers placed on the missionaries. All of these can be effective and allow Christianity the opportunity to go where it has never gone before.

The nonresidential missionary approach is very productive. Even though people believe the concept is too new to be effective, the exact opposite is true. It is not new, and it is successful. Youth With A Mission (YWAM), Association of International Mission Services (AIMS), and other groups are not only involved with this type of ministry, but they provide training for others who are interested.²⁰ The Southern Baptists, however, have only recently realized a need to join other Christians in going to the depths of the earth to preach about Jesus Christ. More denominations are sharing databases, methods of evaluation, and translating agencies.²¹ The nonresidential missionaries are not just "out there" on their own. They report to home offices that oversee their progress and offer assistance when necessary. They also communicate with resource networks, such as the World Evangelization Database, and all nonresidential missionaries work together as a global team.²²

Southern Baptist seminaries are going to have to expand their range of teaching. Currently, the education is directed toward preserving the current congregation rather than developing new ones.²³ McGavran believes more of the curriculum should include effective evangelism. He suggested teaching the theology of evangelism, teaching ministers how to teach laypeople how to disciple, teaching how to increase the number of congregations in minority groups, teaching about the Christianization of other continents, and teaching a variety of ways of evangelism.²⁴ McGavran goes on to say that these courses should be taught by people who have been effective evangelizers. For example, they should be people who have multiplied congregations by converting non-Christians to believers. The idea is that the seminaries and divinity schools strive for not only academic excellence but for Christian effectiveness as well.²⁵ If all nonresidential missionaries pool their knowledge, their efforts will not go unrecognized.

Numerous people groups need to be disciplined and develop a Christian way of life in addition to being just "reached." This may require playing a number of roles, but the nonresidential missionary is committed to doing whatever it takes to carry out the Great

Commission. However, many object to this approach. It has been accused of being unbiblical. No, the term is not in the Bible specifically, and neither is the term missionary.²⁶ But, the work of both is somewhat defined in the Great Commission. The Greek translated Matthew 28:19 to read, "as you are going, teaching, and baptizing, make disciples of all peoples."²⁷ This first of all shows an expectation that people are going. It also says "all peoples." This means everyone. It does not mean only those who can be reached easily, or those who ask about Jesus, or those who invite Christians to be a part of their group. It means absolutely everyone.

The nonresidential approach is also objected to because it is considered to

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be impersonal and impossible without actually living "with" the people.²⁸ Those who oppose this approach believe that radios, billboards, and tracts are assumed to be supplements for witnessing, but they should not take the place of doing it personally. Because the New Testament emphasizes a Christian way of life, a nonbeliever needs role models to demonstrate what that is. The idea is that love takes time, and a nonresidential missionary is unavailable to show it. *The Gospel Blimp*, a satire of witnessing, also expressed that the Bible says "Go Ye" not "Get them to Come."²⁹

However, there are historical examples of nonresidential type missionaries. First of all, Paul went after the unreached Gentiles. In Romans 15 verse 20, Paul wrote, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation." He continues in verses 21, "Rather, as it is written: those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."³⁰ He is noted for writing letters and making temporary visits to peoples. Paul was in prison during part of his ministry, but he still continued to guide his converts. He used the resources he had available to extend the discipleship in the areas where he had witnessed.

Paul served the people in whatever capacity he was needed. Another example of one who served the world with an approach similar to that of a nonresidential missionary was Jesus. Because Jesus is also God, his true home is not as a man on earth. But, he came here and worked as a carpenter. He had a ministry that was inordinately effective. Jesus also pooled his resources. For example, he delegated responsibility to his disciples. He taught people as much as he could while he was a human, yet he did not stay forever. He left those he had trained to carry on his work. And, for the things they did not have the Scriptures and prayer. These two very esteemed individuals were able to disciple and teach a Christian way of life without being a permanent resident of the areas in which they witnessed.

The nonresidential missionary is genuinely concerned about the people group for whom he is responsible. Therefore, because he knows he cannot be with the people group for extensive periods of time, he makes provisions. This type of minister creates a strategy for outreach. It might be through radio broadcasts or literature. It could be that he will train expatriates who will return to the homeland to share the good news. The nonresidential missionary also uses tentmakers, educators, doctors, social workers, etc.³¹ The hope is that the people will establish churches within their own group. Their discipleship is facilitated, and they are equipped to do the work. Should it be impossible for the nonresidential missionary to be with his specific population segment, he will direct other resources to their aid. The churches that are planted must be indigenous of the culture God has called the missionary to work with so that the message will not be foreign to them.³² The nonresidential missionary is working with the people. He doesn't force a Western gospel on them because when he is with the people he attempts to create an impression of God that they will be able to comprehend.

The nonresidential missionary is able to teach about Christ in a variety of ways because a wealth of resources are available in large cities. It has been suggested that people cannot fully know Christ unless they hear about

Him in their own language on their own terms. However, should this be the case, provisions are made to share the gospel in just that way. There is a free flow of information by means of computers, telecommunications, telephones, and even the postal service that are available outside of the residence of the unreached populations. Agencies and individuals such as refugees and migrant workers are able to share relevant data about the people groups with the missionaries.³³ The nonresidential missionary networks with Southern Baptists and Christians all over the world. For example, Wycliffe Bible Translators have agreed to translate a Scripture for an unreached people group of 16 million. International Bible Society has agreed to publish it, while other agencies have agreed to deliver it. The whole project began as a cooperative one in which someone agreed to broadcast the gospel for a group of Christians who manufactured and delivered radios preset to receive the transmissions.³⁴

The Baptists use the media to reach their people groups. One method is radio drama. It began in the Philippines and involves follow-up with the local churches. It is heard by many because it is done on secular stations. The Filipinos would listen to a problem being dramatized for about twenty minutes and then to a panel discussion format which offered about ten minutes of counseling. The people listen because the problems are real life situations to which the Baptists offer biblically founded answers.³⁵ Radio opens many doors for the nonresidential missionary because so many things can be done with it in the people's own dialect. Bible classes can be taught, testimonies can be shared, songs can be sung, etc. One way radio opened doors for a group in Guatemala was through a program called "Greetings." The listeners would write letters to be read on the air. They consisted of everything from messages for family members to questions about God.³⁶ The people were very pleased with such an open form of communication, and many were won to Christ. The radio also offers an opportunity for follow-up through Bible Correspondence Class which is offered free of cost. The people can enroll by either mail or telephone. Then, once a person graduates, he will receive a diploma and a pamphlet, "Using Your Bible Cor-

respondence Course Materials to Begin Your Own Bible Study."³⁷ In addition, the Mass Media Center directed by Allen Hill, has also developed materials that will enable a group to move from Bible study into a worshipping body. It is called *How to Lead a Bible Study Group in Worship* and includes call to worship materials and choruses.³⁸ Another method is the cinema. The "Jesus" film has been translated into many languages. It can be shown with a portable generator and lasts about two hours. The problem with the film, however, is that many people think that the Jesus on the movie screen is real and do not understand that he is played by an actor.³⁹ Regardless, it makes the story very true to life because they can see how Jesus was and hear about him in their own language. That allows them to think about the sacrifice he made as a very personal one.

Networking is not new. The Bible even gave examples of co-workers and delegation. First of all, Moses led twelve tribes in the Exodus. Then, Jesus had twelve disciples who were symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. Another example of Jesus and one of Paul is that they did not baptize believers. They knew that once they were gone someone else would have to assume the responsibility.⁴⁰ The ideas behind networking have proven to be successful for ages gone by. Since the resources are available, it would be shameful not to use them. Therefore, the nonresidential missionary researches his people group and is then able to share Christ in a variety of ways.

The nonresidential missionary approach has proven to be very effective in spreading the gospel. David Garrison cited several examples in *The Nonresidential Missionary* of families serving the Lord in this capacity. He also gave several case studies of people groups before they had such a missionary and then after they had one. One such family, the Knowles (all names and places have been slightly altered for protection of the ministry), began ministering in Asia in 1926. Within eight years, 1000 people came to know Christ. Then, Maoist Communism invaded the villages, and the Knowles eventually had to leave. They refused to give up though and continued to pray for the people and explore ways of reaching them. By the 1980s when the

country began to show signs of reopening, their son and daughter-in-law had joined them in their pursuit to evangelize the village in China. David Barrett's *Seven hundred plans to evangelize the world* opened the doors to the nonresidential missionary approach. Now, the family has added a third generation to their mission team, and they are once again attempting to rekindle the gospel among this group for which burdened.⁴¹

The Parks are another example of a nonresidential missionary family. They are concerned about a large group of non-Chinese who live in the mountainous interior of China. This people group has its own language and race, but they do not have missionaries, Scriptures, or churches. Studies indicate they are not totally without religion though because there is a mixture of shamanistic and animistic practices. They are known for their skills in archery and had several people on an Olympic team when it was hosted by Seoul, Korea. It was this opportunity that enabled the Parks to use bilingual friends to witness to the athletes. Several returned from the Olympics with tracts and Chinese New Testaments. Since this time, much prayer has been focused on this isolated group in China. As a result, tourism became possible this year in the province. A group of Christian tourists have already begun to prepare a visit. They plan to take New Testaments and gospel tracts in the Mandarin language with them. Also, a rural medical clinic has permitted Christian doctors and midwives to witness to the people. One young clinical assistant from the university has already been converted to Christianity as a result. She is now studying the Bible and translating key Scriptures. Thus, it is evident by this that the Park's ministry is making a difference.⁴²

Garrison told of the Altai who are related to the Turko-Mongolia family. This group is primarily Muslim and geographically isolated. In 1988, a nonresidential missionary was assigned to them, and within six months 300 churches had committed to pray for the Altai. Also, an educational exchange program within the capital city has been arranged with the Ministry of Education that would allow 25-50 students, educators, and researchers from Christian universities in the West to

attend Altai universities. Two years later, 40-50 Christian tentmakers, students, and friendship evangelists have been granted permission to live in this area. This is only the start of what God has planned for these people.

Because the duties of a nonresidential missionary are exceedingly demanding, there are certain qualifications one must meet to serve in the role. To begin with, it is imperative that the applicant be called of God. He must also be committed to cross-cultural communications, be at least 24 years of age at the time of appointment, be active in a Southern Baptist church, have good health (physically, mentally, and emotionally), be trained and involved in personal witnessing, be a citizen of the U.S.A., have a maturing Christian faith, have high convictions for the sanctity of marriage, have a degree beyond a baccalaureate or equivalent experience, and at least 30 hours of seminary training if the graduate work was from another institution of learning. The preference is for people with ministerial backgrounds and who have strong management and research skills.⁴³

Once an individual (or a couple) has been accepted to serve as a nonresidential missionary, there is necessary training in which he must participate. The shortest program which is two and one half weeks includes a self-instruction manual. The longest program is eight and one half weeks and includes a survey trip to an area where Christ is unknown. However, all of the training programs include investigating every possible Christian resource, researching the target population, and bringing resources such as computers to serve a specific people group. They also consist of computer and telecommunication training, as well as administrative training.⁴⁴

Before the actual training begins, several preparations must be made. First of all, prayer is essential to the effectiveness of a nonresidential missionary. Therefore, it must begin on an individual basis and grow to incorporate others who will also pray. Next, it is necessary to begin a process of evaluation that will be ongoing and include feedback from others. This will allow the work to progress. Although single

men and women are eligible for this work, should the missionary be married, it is necessary that both partners go through the training. Finally, to prepare for training, one must have a working budget for networking and access to long distance telephones, correspondence, and database information retrieval for the purpose of research. The trainee also must have a laptop computer and various software to take to workshops, seminars, etc.⁴⁵

It is apparent that the nonresidential missionary has a very complex job. He researches and surveys a specific population segment of the world, learns the language, and designs and aids in mobilizing an evangelistic ministry. He

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exhausts all resources to make the gospel available where it has not previously been. Basically, the objective of a nonresidential missionary is to disciple and form new churches among the groups who will reach out first to their own people and then to their neighbors who have not heard the good news of Christ. Therefore, the effectiveness of the missionary must be measured by continually evaluating the conditions of the people group and determining if churches have been the result of the evangelism.⁴⁶ The statistics speak for themselves unreached ethnolinguistic groups to be evangelized by a method other than those used traditionally. This is not to say they are ineffective because with numerous populations they are the very best option. However, 1/4 of the world have still never even heard of Jesus, and they need to. Thus, it is obvious that the nonresidential missionary is an effective means of witnessing to people who do not have an adequate opportunity to hear or respond to the message of Christ. ■

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