

WHEN FEELINGS BEND STATISTICS: Taking a Second Look at "The Numbers Game in World Evangelization" By Robert T. Coote

■ What is at the heart of the inability of otherwise missiologically-minded leaders to deal with statistics in world evangelization? If we can overcome innumeracy, we will see that the facts do speak of amazing trends and the sovereign hand of God in all the peoples of the world.

By Ralph D. Winter

Robert Coote has done us all a service by his article entitled, "The Numbers Game in World Evangelization." Although his title is surely overkill—the numbers game is a *criminal* enterprise—we must recognize that his article does raise an important issue.

I. Introduction

His article first appeared in *Transformation* (Jan '91), and more recently in the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. The editors of *Transformation* asked me to provide a formal response to Coote's article to appear alongside it in their journal. *EMQ*, on the other hand, being a more popular journal, reprinted Coote's article without any counterbalance. What follows here is not a repetition of my response in *Transformation*, but a discussion which has grown out of reflection in a graduate seminar here at our university.

The reader is free to suspect (but not assume) that my main purpose is to find fault with the arguments in Coote's article, especially the close scrutiny he gives to optimistic statements. I suggest, however, that I am primarily attempting to reinforce his important thesis—that both personal feelings and carelessness can distort statistics. I am questioning his questionings as a method of underscoring his thesis. What could be a more eloquent warning about the ease with which statistics can be misused than to demonstrate evidences right in his article of the very thing his subtitle so properly deplures, which reads: "Not only are our statistics confusing, they can be used to arouse false hopes, improper motivation, and wrong strategies."

Only good intentions

First of all, in the mission circles in which we are working we are not dealing with anyone whose articles are *intended* to "arouse false hopes, improper motivation and wrong strategies." That may be true in the wider sphere of society where all kinds of cults are in business. But, neither Coote nor I are accusing anyone of such *intentions*. However, both he and I are rightly concerned that misunderstandings are in fact arising.

Unintended errors

The problems, thus, are more basic than devious intentions. Both Coote and I are concerned about the *unintended* misuse of statistics—arithmetic errors, for instance, but also the subtle, unnoticed impact of feelings and perspectives upon our *interpretation* of numbers. For example, it may actually be easier to calculate exponential growth rates than it is to disentangle one's own strong feelings from the interpretation of the results of our calculations. Incidentally, both these problems—the arithmetic and the interpretation—are the result of what is being called these days, "innumeracy," (like "illiteracy," "cultural illiteracy," etc.).

Dare we care deeply?

Finally, I want to be sure that no one is being blamed for having strong feelings, convictions, or even vested interests. For example, it is surely not dishonorable to care and to care deeply about the completion of world evangelization. Also, it is not unworthy to pay special attention to evangelistic exaggerations, as Coote does. And, since it is perfectly reasonable for Coote to

question whether that kind of deep psychological involvement can possibly affect the way I and others have interpreted statistics, it is equally reasonable for someone to try to check to be sure that his personal concerns not be improperly evident in the way he interprets things.

II. To start with: A lurid example

But even before plunging into Coote's material, let's look at a more recent example we can utilize as we go further.

A new book says, "There are 133 million newly evangelized each year in the unevangelized world, which number is offset, unfortunately, by 142 million new births a year. Thus, despite the new converts, we are still losing ground every year in this category."

(I would rather not give the source of this quote; it is a hasty interpretation of a simpler, less challengeable statement in still another recent book.)

First of all the author of this quote is an error when he interprets "newly evangelized" to mean *new converts*.

Secondly, it is quite improper (with no reference to the death rate) to assume that a birth rate of 142 million is necessarily going to offset the number of *newly evangelized*—who are presumably adults. Also, we need to know the proportion of the 142 million new babies that might be born into Christian families.

However, even if all of the other counterbalancing factors were taken into account (see the list in the box on page 138), a still more basic question lies wrapped up in what is apparently a built-in assumption in this quote: namely, that *things are going wrong if the*

number of additional Christians in the world in a given year is smaller than the number of additional non-Christians. It is a persistent mystery how the raw growth of two communities can be in the favor of the larger one while the increasing percentage of the total can favor the smaller community.

An understandable mystery

Why not just compare annual raw increases? The reason constantly comes up, and is delightfully mysterious, but the facts are plain.

Try this out: no one will deny that from the time of the twelve disciples until the present the *percentage* of Christians has grown from practically zero to over 30 percent of the world's population. All the while, paradoxically, the raw number of additional Christians in the world has each year been LESS than the raw number of additional non-Christians in the world! It is still true.

In the table the total of all Christians (whoever calls himself a Christian) is projected to increase by 371 million between 1990 AD and 2000 AD. Meanwhile all non-Christians increase by almost 600 million. Here is the key point: even if the non-Christian increase is 591 million and the Christian increase is only 371 million, note that in the last column, *the increase in world percentage of all Christians goes up .82% while the non-Christians in the world total actually lose out by .82%.*

This mystery is the basis of much unwarranted pessimism about world Christianity. It is, however, simply the phenomenon of a smaller group growing less in a period of time than a larger group and yet gaining a greater percentage of the total—due to the smaller group having a larger annual *growth rate* despite a smaller annual size increase!

The category of Pentecostals/Charismatics, for example, is projected to grow an additional 190 million

between 1990 and 2000, while Muslims will add 266 million. However, the Pentecostal/Charismatic *percentage of the world population* (last column) increases by almost 2% while the Muslims increase is only 1.5%. Why? Because the Pentecostal/Charismatic constituency has a greater *growth rate* even though it has a smaller annual *increase in size!*

The graph below shows the fact that the increase in a group's percentage of the world is dependent on annual growth rate, not size. See the line climbing to the left.

However, the reason to stay with this mystery in such detail is very clear: doom merchants are all the time quoting huge numbers of *additional* people in the world, and comparing that to the additional number of Christians. But this does not say anything at all about who is gaining in percentage!

What IS important is the group of serious Christians—"Committed Christians" (at the top of the list in the

table)—which includes more than the Pentecostal/Charismatic group. It has been reported to be growing at over 6% per year. There simply is no other group anywhere near that size with so steep a growth rate. Even if a small group somewhere is growing faster, the test is whether that group will ever get to be 500 million and still be growing as fast as 6% per year. Of course, no one can guarantee that the 500 million Committed Christians bloc will continue growing at 6% indefinitely, yet it may grow even faster.

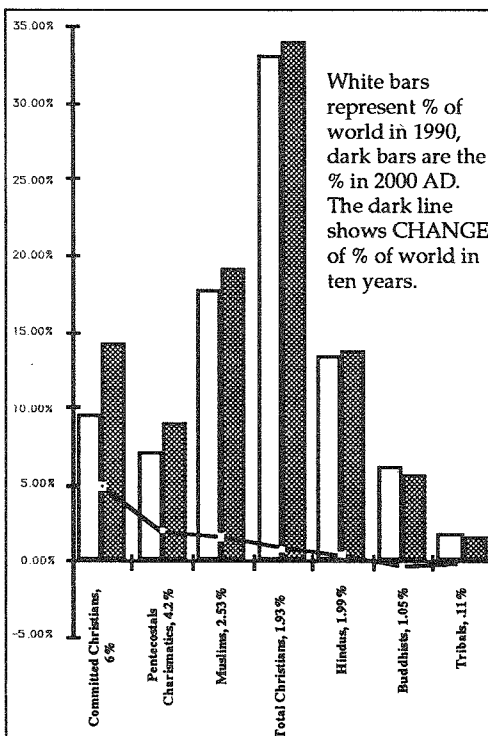
Unnecessary pessimism

I recall a famous mission scholar of a generation just older than I (someone who never knew me by name), who wrote despairingly something like this: "Christianity has made great gains historically, but now in view of the population explosion in the Third World, Christians are inevitably losing out." He apparently did not realize that what counts is *growth rate* not raw increase, especially if it is merely biological growth. Contrasts in birth rates are not very important. Both then and now the now-500-million vital core of the Christian movement has been growing by both biological and evangelistic mechanisms. Nothing on earth anywhere near that size has anything like 6% annual growth.

III. Coote on Narrowed Perspective

Coote's first example is intended to reinforce his first valuable thesis: "The data we are fed too often intensify our natural provincialism instead of broadening our perspective."

What is on his heart in this case, I would guess, is that he would like to burst through the evangelical veil with the suitably humbling information (from Barrett's *Encyclopedia*) that certain Roman Catholic and even Lutheran countries have a better record in



Population of Selected Groups	Annual Growth Rate	Size in 1990 AD	Size in 2000 AD	Ten year additional size	Percentage of world in 1990 AD	Percentage of world in 2000 AD	Ten year percent growth	INCREASE in % of WORLD
World Population	1.68%	5,297,042,000	6,259,642,000	962,600,000	100%	100%	18%	-
Committed Christians	6.00%	500,000,000	895,423,848	395,423,848	9.44%	14.30%	79%	4.87%
Pentecostals/Charismatics	4.20%	372,651,300	562,526,000	189,874,700	7.04%	8.99%	51%	1.95%
Muslims	2.53%	934,842,200	1,200,653,000	265,810,800	17.65%	19.18%	28%	1.53%
Total Christians	1.93%	1,758,777,900	2,130,000,000	371,222,100	33.20%	34.03%	21%	0.82%
Hindus	1.99%	705,345,900	859,252,300	153,906,400	13.32%	13.73%	22%	0.41%
Buddhists	1.05%	323,349,500	359,092,100	35,742,600	6.10%	5.74%	11%	-0.37%
Tribals	0.11%	99,424,000	100,535,900	111,900	1.88%	1.61%	1%	-0.27%
All non-Christians	1.56%	3,538,264,100	4,129,642,000	591,377,900	66.80%	65.97%	17%	-0.82%

Note: all of the above raw numbers come from the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Jan 1991, except the line for Committed Christians which is from the Lausanne Statistical Task Force

sending missionaries than does the United States.

However, to make this point, he quotes an un-named major evangelical organization saying that North American evangelicals constitute "the world's most missionary-minded church." Note that this statement does not refer to a country but to a movement, and thus cannot be directly disproved by appealing to the overall record for a mixed America.

Incidentally, America has a very strong Catholic constituency with a very weak missionary sending activity. In fact, if Roman Catholics in the U.S.A. were to send as many missionaries as the Roman Catholics in Ireland, it would radically alter the picture Coote labors to present. As he states it, by comparing *only* Protestant missionaries from the entire U.S. to *all* missionaries from Ireland, he forces U.S. evangelicals to try to make a showing for the huge Roman Catholic bloc in our society. Then, as sort of an afterthought, when he finally figures the U.S. evangelical missionary total in proportion to the size of the evangelical population, this change alters his case so greatly that it almost destroys it. As a result U.S. evangelicals are fourth, not sixteenth, and way ahead of Norway, which he has just said was ahead, etc. In fact, if he did not now reduce the 71,000 American missionaries to 36,000 (by eliminating short-termers) U.S. evangelicals would come in *second*, not 16th.

I wonder also if Coote is not handling the

the word *missionary* a bit provincially. The person who first claimed American evangelicals to be mission minded was probably pro-

vincial in not thinking about Catholic missionaries nor about avid Catholic countries like Ireland (which, by the way, was far more of a sending country in the era before it became Catholic). Is Coote himself being provincial by excluding the huge numbers of missionaries sent out by Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints as he does his country comparisons? Are not such missionaries counted in the other country totals?

It is not my purpose to paint a rosy picture. In my mind what counts is

"unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." By that measure U.S. evangelicals would have to be somewhere near the bottom of the list in mission sending. That is the truth we ought to face. But, in any case, I certainly agree that we must try to avoid provincial statements

IV. Coote on the Relative Growth of World Religions

At this point in his article some of my own work is cited. Some time ago I endeavored to disprove an absolutely preposterous report (from a Muslim publication) that *Muslims are growing 500% faster than Christians*. I showed that the true difference was more like Muslims growing faster by .5% rather than 500%. Coote also finds me challenging an equally preposterous report about China—one that is equally gloomy for Christians.

Coote seems unmoved by a misuse of statistics that dashes all Christian and missionary hopes. His attempts to find slight flaws in my objectivity seem to protect the contrived hopelessness of blatant errors.

For example, when I calculate the rate at which all Muslims are growing is .5% faster than Christians instead of 500%, Coote, using a defective method, tries to prove it is .8% instead of .5%. (Note in the table across the page the difference expected between 1990 and 2000 is .6%, e.g. 2.53% minus 1.93%). He reasons that a growth rate is more accurately calculated if a longer period of time is employed. (I showed in my

response in *Transformation*

that in general this is not true.)

But I am not so much bothered by his defective method of calculation as

by his seeming indifference to a monumental example of deliberate statistical distortion with which I was dealing.

Furthermore, my more important point, namely, that really vital Christianity is an unmatched global phenomenon, is down-played by Coote as he warns about the possibility of shallowness, selectivity, and transitory existence, and adds: "We run the danger of creating an exaggerated sense of 'victory at hand,' by down-playing the growth of other groups [what other

groups?] and singling out high-growth Christian populations." [Brackets mine, RDW]

I will admit that if you believe, as I do, that heart-felt Christianity is the real thing, then it is not unreasonable to keep an eye on heart-felt Christianity—which is what usually grows rapidly.

Indeed, the most unfortunate confusion arises if you let yourself be drawn into an argument about whether Christians or Muslims have a higher birth rate. Biological increase is a significant mechanism *only if evangelism is not in the picture*. Pauline Christianity really has little to do with biological growth rates. Evangelism is a mechanism that can readily outstrip many times over even the most fertile population growth rates. This is why comparisons between the world total of nominal Christians and the world total of any other major religion simply is not of great interest. We must, in order to be true to our own faith, "single out" hearty, robust Christian faith. That is the kind of Christianity that grows rapidly, and always has, all down through history.

V. Coote on "16,400 new Christians per day in Africa"

Coote is quite right that such numbers are not properly meant to be a measure of the number of adults converted on any given day—in Africa, China, or anywhere else. Such numbers, properly understood, are simply the net increase in the Christian community each day. I, myself, have many times tried to help people avoid this understanding.

However, his zeal to reduce the "16,400 new Christians per day in Africa," to only 780 evangelical converts per day overlooks some of the complexities. He rightly understands that evangelicals may jump to the conclusion that such a number is the number of heart-conversions each day.

But what Coote may not have realized is that the average evangelical is less concerned about what denomination or Christian tradition is involved, so long as people are really heart-converted. His analysis assumes that the evangelical would disavow 80% of those who are converted.

In any case, there are still other factors. Without claiming an exhaustive study of overall population growth factors, those mentioned in the chart on the next page do come to mind, adding

new dimensions to the possible meaning of the "16,400" type of figure. In making up this table, I certainly don't claim anything but estimates.

An exception to my own guess work is the "crude birth and death rates" for Sub-Saharan Africa, which come from the Population Reference Bureau. Even there I had to estimate an average of the differing rates for the differing countries.

The numbers for *conversion in* and *conversion out* could be way off, perhaps half as high or low. The conversion "up" and "down" need to be explained. For evangelicals *conversion* is a spiritual event-process, not simply enculturation. For the record, the numbers here assume that in only one fourth of the families augmented by new births are young people coming "up" into a personal conversion experience, and, at the same time, about 1/5th as many who defect "down" from their earlier conversion.

Please understand that I am not pressing for the reliability of any of these numbers. This is just an exercise to indicate the relative complexity of the process whereby it would be legitimately possible to move as Coote does from "16,400" to a number of heart-conversions, assuming that is what is of interest.

Furthermore, I hasten to stress that no matter how faithfully we employ a more complicated route to the answer, the simple number we finally get is rather meaningless. For example, I am afraid that I am the one being quoted by Coote in the same section in his reference to a 20,000-a-day increase of Christians in China. He was kind to omit my name in view of his rejection of the number. However, he also omitted my reason for calculating the number.

As in the case of my attempt to put the Muslim periodical's "500%-faster-than-Christian" number into better perspective, so in the case of the China calculation I was attempting to qualify someone else's rather outlandish statement, one which should certainly concern Coote or anyone else interested in avoiding misinterpretations of statistics. In this case I had reacted to a highly pessimistic statement that "even if there were a Pentecostal revival in China, and 3,000 people were to come to Christ every day, it would still take 900 years to win China."

A statement so careless as that

would seem to call for a critical reaction when, in fact, by almost any reckoning far more than 3,000 people are being added to the church in China every day right now. So, again, my intent was not to give a rosy impression so much as to react sensibly to a careless and pessimistic statement. I freely admit that I was reacting not only to the carelessness but to the damaging pessimism. *But is the pessimism something he would like to protect by overlooking the recklessness of the statement?*

I readily accept Coote's desire to prevent me from being overly optimistic. However, I sensed no equivalent concern on his part for the drastic pessimism I was trying to correct—either in the case of the Muslim calculation or in the case of the China prediction. In fact, looking back at his article, I note that he preferred to call the Muslim report I was dealing with a "garbled report" rather than what it really was, a perfect example of the kind of manipulative falsification he is decrying.

Then, is it not of interest that five evangelical publications snapped up the 500%-faster story without stopping to check its rationale? I think so. I think that is exactly what the basic issue of Coote's article addresses: the use of statistics to confuse, arouse false hopes or unjustifiably to dash reasonable hope.

Last but not least is this simple observation: of what value is it to wave around single numbers like 16,400? I did not produce a comparable number for China in order to wave it around, but to *compare*—*compare* it to another quite misleading number. What does 16,400 mean by itself, unless it is compared to something else? Is it good news, bad news—what is it? My table suggests the daily birth/death figures

For Sub-Saharan Africa	Estimated % per year	Resulting No. per day
Birth In	4.60	25,205
Death Out	1.80	9,863
Migration In	0.00	0
Migration Out	0.10	548
Conversion In	2.00	10,959
Conversion Out	0.20	1,096
Conversion Up	1.15	6,301
Conversion Down	0.23	1,260

Heart conversion, if that is the important thing:	
Conversion in	10,959
Conversion up	6,301
Total heart conversions daily	17,260
Conversion out	-1,096
Conversion down	-1,260
Net daily conversions	14,904

for Sub-Saharan Africa as 25,205 minus 9,863 making a net 15,342—not far from Barrett's 16,400. But so what? Barrett is much more likely to be right than I am, when all I did was grab some numbers off the Population Reference Bureau sheet to generalize for Sub-Saharan Africa. Again, it is easier to generate numbers than interpret them.

VI. Coote on the Trend of the Centuries

One of the longer sections of Coote's article focuses on the novelties surrounding the introduction by David Barrett of the new category "Great Commission Christians." Coote is unhappy with the phrase, and with the numbers associated with it, and especially with the trend in the ratio of Great Commission Christians to non-Christians. The *trend* is something which I am guilty of both calculating and diagramming and also publishing.

Once again, I am involved in a somewhat secondary manner since I merely accepted Barrett's numbers and then made use of them in a diagram of little men carrying a decreasing "burden," as you see in the diagram across the page. (I will not burden the reader with the full-page diagram or the complete historical table of numbers which was published earlier in IJFM. Coote found it in the March 1989 issue of *Mission Frontiers*.)

At first, I used the GCC phrase, but more recently have decided that my own readers would fare better if I simply spoke of, "committed Christians," or simply "believers." The GCC phrase may give the impression to many that these are people who are specifically committed to the Great Commission, whether that is Barrett's idea or not. Coote is quite right that many in the charismatic tradition are virtually oblivious to the Great Commission, despite the best efforts of many stalwart leaders in that sphere.

Coote spends a great deal of time struggling with the possible implications of the phrase, but finally "accepts the speculation that 'Born-again' of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (p. 49) equals Great Commission Christian."

This is quite an error of exegesis, since my published GCC figure for 1980 (and Coote recognizes my figures as being approved by David Barrett) is only 275 million, not the 420 million the *Encyclopedia* gives for Born-again Christians in

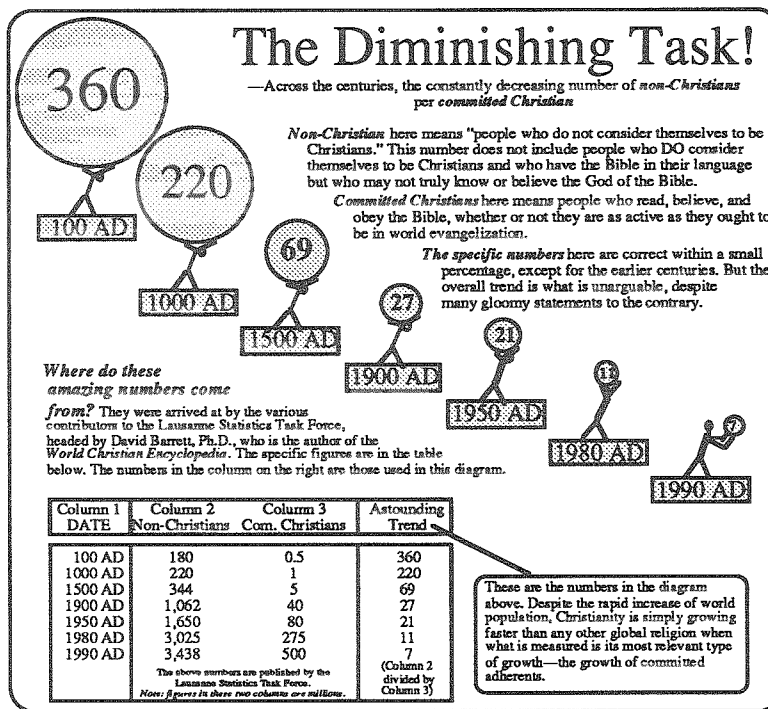
1980. Thus, Coote's chart on line three, for 1990, inserts 500 million for Born-again (which would be more like 750 million, if you sustain the same ratio of Born-again to GCC which the two published figures display for 1980, e.g. 275 to 420). Also, he omits, on line six, the 1980 figure of 275 for GCC, although the 275 for 1980 was just as clearly published as the 500 figure for 1990. Noticing this would have helped him considerably.

However, he does have a point with which I agree in his concern for the apparently small number for GCC in the year 1900. I myself would have estimated a higher number, perhaps by a factor of 2, both for 1900 and for 1950. But, I am not a primary data gatherer. I generally ponder the published reports of direct researchers such as Barrett, for whom there really is no peer.

But, in any event, I don't understand the need to be exercised by the precise quantities in the series that produces the remarkably diminishing "burdens" of the little men in the diagram above. The trend is what is inescapable, in my opinion. And, it is the trend that is the primary message. What difference would it make if the 1900 and 1950 figures were twice as high? No difference at all in the trend. Even Coote calls it "a most startling trend"—although he may imply that so startling a trend is not likely to be true! But the trend here portrayed cannot be destroyed by tinkering with a couple of numbers in the first half of this century.

VII. Coote on Quantifying Unreached People Groups

This, now, is the subject closest to my heart, because the operational essence of mission is to work toward a living, indigenous fellowship of believers in all the nations of the world. Here is where tracing the development of thinking in mission circles over the last two decades is especially helpful. Rather than to sit back and point out every discrepancy of definition or numerical estimate, we can enjoy the mounting consensus which has been reached as many concerned and self-less workers and thinkers have



response but of degrees of organized response—a question of the presence or absence of a church movement rather than the response of a certain number or percentage of individuals.

This distinction is reflected by the definition—"an unreached people is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance." I have suggested we call such a group a *Unimax* group—maximum in size and still sufficiently unified to be reached with a single mission penetra-

tion.

participated in the intensifying discussion. It is not so confusing if you take things in the way they actually unfolded. By 1982 when the *World Christian Encyclopedia* came off the press, a considerable consensus was already in the offing, but was not reached in time to make a decisive contribution to the *Encyclopedia*.

The *Encyclopedia* came out a few weeks too late to benefit from the most significant meeting I know of in the last 20 years—if we are talking about meetings convened for the purpose of refining mission terminology. It was a Lausanne-sponsored meeting, jointly chaired by Warren Webster of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society—one of the most erudite mission executives of this generation—and Wade Coggins, who was at that time the Executive Director of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (as it was known then).

The planners, the Lausanne Strategy Working Group, brought together over two dozen key mission leaders for two days to hammer out crucial definitions for a number of things, especially the phrase, *Unreached peoples*. This meeting reflected strategic thinking from a mission agency point of view rather than a purely evangelistic point of view. For those key people in March of 1982 the essential thing was not a question of degrees of individual

tion.

Why is this kind of a concept so important? Missionaries are involved in many other things. They win souls, plant churches and penetrate peoples (note the pyramid diagram on the next page). But the unique function of a mission agency is penetrating peoples. Local churches win souls and even reach out to plant new churches. The average congregation in Guatemala during the years I was there was in the process of planting at least three new churches. I recall one congregation that had 25 outlying "missions" which were expected to grow into churches.

The pyramid diagram is expected to imply that it is possible to win souls without planting churches, but not the reverse. It also suggests you can plant new congregations without any new people group being penetrated (although not the reverse) since thousands of congregations are planted every month around the world within already-reached groups. The dilemma of current missionary deployment is that few missionaries are in a position, except indirectly, to contribute to the achievement of new missionary beach-heads in unreached people groups—e.g. where there is not yet an "indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group," as the wording in March of 1982 put it.

Thus, in counting Unreached Peoples, if we are to go by the only

definition that has the backing of a large, especially-convened group of experts, we are essentially dealing with a concept which is unknown in secular and scientific literature. The March '82 definition is operational, not merely ethnic or cultural: it simply asks if a church-planting movement can reach everyone in a given group without encountering obstructive "barriers of understanding or acceptance." Note the last word, *acceptance*. If there is *anything* which obstructs the extension of the church-planting movement, then another group must be recognized and another missionary beachhead must be launched. This is a *missionary* definition, not entirely an ethnolinguistic definition.

(A side note: if a group is divided by geography, another beachhead of an *evangelistic* nature will be necessary but it will not necessarily be a *mission* beachhead, where you have to start from scratch, where church leaders from the other place are not acceptable.)

At the time the *Encyclopedia* was published, the most widespread definition—that of the Lausanne Committee's Strategy Working Group itself—was based upon "20% practicing or professing Christians," to which Barrett's *Encyclopedia* added the idea of "20% evangelized people." These are helpful and important measurements, and may even be easier to employ than essentially to roam the world and count *the number of needed missionary beachheads!* And it is understandable that the flurry of interest in the crucial subject of unreached peoples over the years would have created a lot of speculation, with different things being numbered in different ways. It is safe to say that quite a few writers have never quite come to terms with the fact that the March '82 group was working in operational mission terms, *not merely evangelism terms, or even church-planting terms*, let alone secular or scientific categories. The definition asks questions secular materials do not attempt to answer, however important they are to mission leaders.

It is also true that the peoples strewn around the world are not like a bag of marbles poured out on the floor. Peoples come in clusters. There are peoples within peoples. This is simply the ethnographic reality. There is no use getting disgusted with the very nature of God's creation! Perhaps all remaining "12,000 unreached peoples" are

contained within only 3,000 "clusters of peoples." We will never know until we get there. Coote is right that the drop from 16,000 to 12,000 in my writings was an attempt to be agreeable with researchers who did not have as cautious an attitude as I did about how many peoples there might still be within some

progress by the size of the mission budget in their local church. Others measure what *proportion* of the local budget is for missions. Others ask what is legitimate to include in a mission budget (a good question!). Others measure how many missionaries their denomination sends, both in absolute

Penetration of peoples—missions

Planting of churches (congregations)—evangelism

Personal soul winning of individuals—evangelism

of the larger peoples. I have spoken of hoping for the best numbers and planning for the worst numbers. Note that I choose the latter path. But who cares about the details? Let's go and find out! We will find out only if we finish the job.

VIII. Coote on the definition of evangelization and the meaning of the year 2000

Barrett's method of ascertaining how much evangelization has been done in a given people, city, or country, was, and is with some changes, the most complex approach of any researcher. It means exactly what it is defined to mean, and can be very useful. My personal bias is to focus on the penetration of unreached peoples as the most carefully and trenchantly defined measure of ultimate progress. This is what is conveyed by the slogan "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000," coming out of the 1980 World Consultation on Frontier Missions at Edinburgh (to which more mission agencies sent representatives than to any other meeting in history thus far).

But I do not question the value of any and all efforts to think through questions of evangelization (as contrasted to specifically people-penetration). Coote simply does not distinguish clearly between the two basically different approaches. Again, the fact that the subject gets complicated ought not to "tempt the reader to toss the literature into the trash" any more than a tenth-grade student ought give up as he gets deeper into chemistry and begins to doubt he will ever understand everything clearly. He probably won't. Reality is complex.

But there is room for different measures of progress in world missions. Some folks measure mission

figures and per member. (But what kind of members?) Others observe, as has Ed Dayton, with great insight, that missions is not sending missionaries but reaching peoples. But what about milestones in the process of reaching? This is why the March 1982 meeting suggested stages in reaching peoples—*reported, verified, evaluated, selected, supported, reached*, etc.

Worst of all, there simply are not enough people "out there" on the job to feed information back, by whatever measure we choose to use.

Missions is not a task to perform so much as a war to be won, an emergency to be recognized, a priority to be acknowledged.

Missions involves research goals only intermediately. Missions ultimately is the reuniting of an estranged global family

And let us not be afraid to recognize the historical and spiritual significance of the year 2000. No one I know is predicting that Jesus will come back at that time. But many leaders I know believe with me that we can enthusiastically work toward whatever goal our individual ministries may seem able to achieve, and, in any event, not forget that all of our organizational goals pale beside the significance of the brilliant, incredible purposes of God Himself. It is His hand of initiative we are groping to study, understand, reinforce. We can each do our own part without ignoring the overall trends and purposes which are far beyond our power or reckoning. Surely the Gulf war and Soviet events have taught us that!

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