

Unreached, Least Evangelized and Adoptable Peoples

■ The “ins and outs,” the “pros and cons” of identifying and listing the unreached peoples of the world for the purposes of adoption and targeting. Certainly no easy challenge, but nevertheless essential for the task which remains. Kaleb Jansen, director of the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse, plus two respondents tackle the issues involved.

By Frank Kaleb Jansen

The Problem

When in Feb. 1991 I accepted the challenge to lead the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse I was puzzled by the fact that eleven years after Len Bartlotti coined the term, less than one hundred people groups had been adopted. In spite of numerous conferences, consultations, dissertations, publications and organizations concerned about the unreached peoples and how to reach them, it looked like this “elephant had given birth to a mosquito.” One hundred out of 17,500 or 12,000, whichever number you prefer to use, clearly spells fiasco if we had hoped for significant church participation.

To me some of the reasons why this concept had not reached the grass roots were obvious:

1. It was unclear in the minds of many what “unreached” and “people group” concepts meant. Years of discussion among missiologists that finally lead up to the meeting (Chicago, March 1982) where 22 agencies/researchers hammered out a definition had in reality left a cloud of confusion. The years since that august meeting changed little in how the terms were employed. Basically everybody went on to use the words as it seemed fit for their own ministries.

2. The definition itself, although actually brilliant, nevertheless is hard to remember, as well as to communicate and to measure. This is especially true on the popular level.

3. A third problem was that nobody had identified nor made a comprehensive list of the unreached peoples. The numbers floating around were more or less qualified guesswork and therefore impossible to act on with any concrete definition.

4. The introduction of the term “least evangelized” as a term to replace “unreached,” based as it is on more than

one hundred criteria developed by David Barrett, added to the confusion as agencies, ministers and writers started to use them as synonymous. Furthermore, new inventions of words like megapeoples, macropeoples, minipeoples, and people clusters, etc., did not exactly help clarify the task for “Joe and Jane Christian.”

The Approach

To fulfill our mandate at AAPC, which was to produce a comprehensive list of the unreached peoples and identify who was working among them or targeting them, plus develop materials that mission agencies and churches could use for adopting these groups, we realized in the process that we had to set our parameters and develop our criteria for the work entrusted to us.

First of all, we decided that a people group must have a proper name identifying them by their language or ethnicity, i.e., it must be an “ethno-linguistic” people group that can be identified.

Secondly, it must be possible to locate people groups geographically so that agencies can focus on them and missionaries can be sent to them so that the church can be planted among them.

In the third place, a bona fide mission agency must have identified them as an “unreached people group” according to the 1982 definition.

In the process we also discovered that there are different stages of “reachedness.” It starts with the initial discovery of a hitherto totally hidden people to the full blown stage when it becomes questionable if the group still needs outside, cross-cultural assistance. We found the classification of seven stages that Ed Dayton developed very useful. We have embraced the following criteria:

1. The group is REPORTED as unreached by somebody.

2. The report is VERIFIED by others that the group is unreached.
3. The report is EVALUATED by bona fide mission agencies.
4. The people group is SELECTED (targeted) by a bona fide mission agency or church.
5. The group is ADOPTED for prayer, information gathering and sharing.
6. The group is ENGAGED by mission agencies and missionaries.
7. Finally the group is REACHED.

For the purpose of mobilizing individuals, churches and agencies on a global scale to adopt the remaining unreached peoples, we had to communicate some basic criteria or “reasons to adopt” a specific group that was simple enough so that even children could understand it. We ended up with five such criteria that embraced the vision and objective of every major evangelical ministry. Pastors, evangelists, broadcasters, church-planters, Bible translators, publishers and distributors all agree that it is central to an evangelical understanding of the Great Commission to give a positive answer to the following criteria to adopt a people:

1. Have they HEARD the Gospel?
2. Have they RESPONDED to it?
3. Do they have an indigenous, evangelizing CHURCH movement?
4. Is the Word of God TRANSLATED into their mother tongue?
5. Is the Word of God readily AVAILABLE to this people?

Through our own research and interaction with hundreds of individuals, agencies and churches, as well as other researchers, we found 6,065 people groups that were needing, for one or another of these reasons, to be adopted

and also could be placed in a category 1-6 in the stages of reachedness. In June 1992 this list was sent to about 200 individuals and agencies for verification and validation. At the time of writing this article (December 1992) information keeps trickling in from remote places, but the overall picture is becoming clear: That there currently seem to be some 6,000 unreached or adoptable peoples in the world today. The exciting thing is that in more than 80% of these groups a work has already started. Hardly any group of over 25,000 is "untouched" or totally hidden from Gospel. I personally believe that by 1995 we will see every people group on earth adopted!

The Next Step

The people that took part in the validation process will in January 1993 receive the list again with all the corrections for a second review. At the same time there is a process in place in cooperation with SIL and the SHARE network to try to merge all the people and language related data-bases for the purpose of publishing a book for the Adopt-A-People Consultation II, coming up in April 1993. This book will contain all the unreached and adoptable peoples with their names and alternate names, their location by longitude/latitude, their languages/dialects, their stage of reachedness and the reasons to adopt them. Since this book will also serve as a yardstick for the AD 2000 movement to measure the progress of the gospel towards their goal of A Church For Every People by the Year 2000, it will also contain information on partnership and coordination for those related to a new people group, such as groups which have People Profiles, the *Jesus* film and/or gospel broadcast in

Adoptable Peoples

their languages. The book's data will also be available on a book diskette.

Our hope is that with maximum exposure and sharing, although in some sensitive areas discretion is required (like "who is working where" cannot always be disclosed), we will definitely experience an unprecedented flow of valuable information through the mission industry which will ultimately assist and bless everyone.

Is the List Needed?

Some people have questioned the validity and need of a list for various reasons. I can understand a mission agency that has stretched themselves to the limits in targeting one hundred new groups, and then is terrified with the thought that thousands of their supporters are starting to pray for 5900 other people groups which they have no plans to work among. Another objection has come from researchers that claim it is extremely difficult to make a list that is anywhere near to reality. It is said that we will never know how many or who the unreached peoples are until the work is actually begun or nearly completed.

To the first objection I would say: If this groundswell of mission interest is a threat to our plans, let's make new ones. The rising interest in frontier missions is caused by our prayers and pleas for more laborers to the harvest fields. The Lord of the Harvest is answering these prayers; let's cooperate with Him and not ever quench the Spirit in any form or fashion.

For the other group, I would ask them to look to men like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, or in our own century men like Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators who initially thought that there were

only 586 languages in the world. Their shortcomings in "accurate" knowledge did not make them lesser giants in the kingdom. If they had not dared to publish what they did we would not have had the wonderful information in books, like the *Ethnologue* and others, with more than 6,000 languages and 12,000 dialects today.

Once the book with the listing of adoptable peoples is out and into the hands of several thousand brothers and sisters in Christ we trust them to critique it and share their knowledge and statistics where we have fallen short. Even with the acknowledged reality that the world we are trying to measure changes day by day, and so a list like this has to be dynamic, yet we see no way to coordinate it all, like the production of the much needed Peoples Profiles. The situation so far has been that students and others produce profiles for the same few people groups over and over again. As an example, we now have 19 good profiles on the Kurds. Yet how can we make slogans like "A Church for Every People" if we do not even try to document who "every people" is, who they are, where they are located and to what degree they have been reached?

We need your prayers and your cooperation to complete this work as a service to the Lord for the Body of Christ. We truly need to bring into the family of God those hidden, unreached and adoptable peoples that still are kept in bondage and captivity by the Enemy of God and of mankind. May it be by the year 2000! ■

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First response: Bill O'Brien

The Value of Listing Unreached Peoples

Thank you, Frank, for identifying and reminding us once again of the sovereign purpose of God, for reminding us that the worldwide church and the worldwide resources available for God's sovereign mission and purpose are not tied to any single dimension of finger in the body of Christ. Thank you as well for sharing with us some of the reasons why believers ought to adopt peoples in the world who still do not know Jesus. I think it is very important that Frank has produced this list and has identified peoples as adoptable peoples and not necessarily an official list of unreached peoples. That is a very significant distinction. This is really a ministry option and not primarily a research project. That is very important. The AAPC will do the Body of Christ a service through informing, alerting, sensitizing, praying for the unreached, which in God's sovereign way will evoke giving and going to the frontiers. Through this program Frank is also desperately doing something and not just talking about it. I don't know if you've seen the new book called *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing the Word* by Walter Ong. It reminds us of oral cultures, in which once the word is let go you don't get it back. Only in print literacy can you "freeze frame" something. And usually it stays in the frozen state of things. But in rhythm and sync, even in New Testament times, to say the Word was to do the Word.

One reminder is that we sometimes confuse the list and think this is an official list of unreached peoples. In that light we might ask, are the English-speaking Brits living in Mexico unreached? Or the Santa Cruz in the Solomons, are they really unreached? We need to keep in mind what this list is, and what it is all about, and not ask it to do something it was never designed to do. We must not superimpose upon it a function that is not inherent to the purpose of the list itself.

Also, Frank has called for a response from everyone because I think he acknowledges that he's been dependent upon the reports of agencies, churches, missionaries, of groups, etc., whoever would respond. The danger here is that

such responses represent the way the responder defines unreached peoples. For instance, my agency might send a group back as being reached by the way we define peoples. Another group sends a list back by the way it defines peoples and so there is no single point of reference for the way unreached peoples are defined. I think this factor is what has somewhat clouded the whole research issue.

You know the theological and missio-

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logical dimensions can become so encumbered in verbosity that it gets in the freeze frame mode and there is no action. Not having been unaccustomed to the atmosphere of controversy, I am reminded that it is sometimes easier to get in the James and John mode and jockey for positions on the left and right than it would be to adopt the priorities of the Master himself.

I think this reminds us that we are a great deal like the Matthew community that David Bosch describes in his book *Transformation In Mission*. As Bosch reminds us, Matthew, in his gospel, was trying desperately to embrace a community of believers who were divided among themselves. Bosch describes them as the "legalists" and the "enthusiasts." He had within his parish, or his *ecclesia*, so to speak, those who were dependent upon the Torah and the law, and those who were dependent upon the Spirit by faith and the miracles they were performing. He never tried to play one off against the other. He in essence was saying, "You're both wrong and you're both right."

The seeming contradictions of particularity in Matthew ("Go only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel," and his universalistic focus in the Great Commission of discipling all the peoples), were by design in order to embrace them both, trying to move them both to a position that neither had achieved at

that point in time. Likewise, I sense something of the Spirit nudging us all to move beyond the current positions where each of us really is and get us to some point where He wants to take us.

I hope we are not asking researchers to do something for us that research is not designed or able to do. Macro-research as I understand it, the large kind of reporting we get from Todd Johnson and David Barrett and others (for whatever agreement or disagreement with definitions), involves a consistency in terms of the point of reference, always comparing apples with apples and oranges with oranges. The 1.8 billion are, by the loosest definition, Christian. That includes anybody who wants to be part of the church, which may or may not include those who define themselves as born again. But at least it is a consistent point of reference. By the use of a

consistent point of referencing, we know how many more there are that still need the Gospel.

What are we going to do about this issue? Are we simply going to talk? We may be trapped in the mode of referring to the Church as the New Israel. And if the Church is the New Israel, then in a sense we have repeated history and turned election into privilege and programmed the church in such a way that we believe all the Gentile pagan peoples will have to come to Zion somehow. But if we understand ourselves to be the Expanded Israel rooted deep in God's sovereign covenantal purposes, then we still have to deal with both a mandate to bear witness to the Good News of the kingdom and a promise that we will do it as we are empowered to do so. With the combination of technology and motivation, there is no excuse for the Expanded Israel not to be aware of any people without the knowledge of the Good News of Jesus Christ. I pray that in the continuing struggle and dialogue over definition we will not be guilty of missiological triage, writing off over a billion people who've never heard the good news for the first time while we try to decide in which priority they should hear the Gospel. ■

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Robby Butler, second response

The Pros and Cons of Making an Unreached Peoples List

Introduction

I've had the privilege of talking several times with Kaleb Jansen and Luis Bush and a number of other individuals about the list of unreached people groups which Kaleb has been working on for the AD 2000 Movement. Apparently someone thought it would be good for me to share some of my perspective with you. I appreciate this opportunity.

Complexities

Let me start by stating that at the U.S. Center for World Mission we have long recognized that trying to formulate an exhaustive list of the remaining unreached people groups is a very complex task. Unless it is done very carefully, such a list will inevitably raise a great deal of controversy, uncertainty and confusion. The first question is whether a group is truly unreached or not. While some groups obviously do or don't have a viable church movement in their midst, there are a number which are less clear that could spark hours of debate over their suitability for the list. A second question is whether or not a group is too large or too small to be a missiologically significant people group—e.g., the largest sufficiently unified group. Thus, while names can easily be gathered for different segments of humanity, such names often represent different things to the extent that a list of names easily becomes an attempt to count "apples and oranges." Once it is clear that a name represents a single people group as outlined in the 1982 definition, the final test for whether the group is reached or not is whether there are any doubts about it having a viable, indigenous, evangelizing church movement. One good indicator that the job is pretty well done among a group is when it has itself become a mission sending base to other cultures.

Benefits

At the IFMA meeting which just concluded, one speaker joked that the charismatics pray for miracles, because "they don't know any better," and sometimes miracles happen. Maybe Kaleb Jansen didn't know better than to try to produce a list of unreached peoples. There are problems with what he has produced, and the list itself is not exactly a list of unreached people

groups, but his effort was produced with a great deal of good thought and research and prayer for which we can be grateful. It is a good beginning.

Ecclesiastes 12:12 might be paraphrased: "Of the making of lists there is no end." The list that Kaleb is developing is not simply a result of his own research. It is an effort to harvest the combined knowledge of mission agencies around the world. This is a very helpful way to proceed. Missionaries are, after all, the individuals that are right out there among the people groups, and are often the most likely to know the true realities of the situation.

We are glad for the recent IFMA vote for a study of the people groups that each member mission 1) has reached, 2) is currently reaching, 3) plans to initiate work among in the next five years, and 4) would target if additional resources were available. Such a survey should provide a wealth of additional information to help Jansen as well as all of us.

Cooperation

While Jansen mentioned that part of the mandate of the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse was to help mission agencies know where the unreached peoples are, he has realized that agencies are in general his most reliable source of information on people groups. Kaleb's efforts, and the efforts of the AD 2000 Movement, are contributing to a growing corporate awareness and agreement about the size of the task and what is left to be done before a viable, indigenous church-planting movement will be established among every people group. Just as we gather here at the ISFM because we believe that we can accomplish more cooperatively than independently, so Kaleb's efforts and those of the AD 2000 Movement are stirring us to cooperate more fully. Kaleb's list is a valuable focus for prayer, research and further study, and is indeed an excellent beginning.

Task Unknowable

Whatever list we develop, it is important to realize that we really won't know how many unreached people groups there are until the job is finally done—until we actually enter each pocket of humanity and effectively communicate the Gospel to all the people groups of the world. As each pioneer church-planting movement encounters barriers that prevent it from spreading, we discover the existence of

additional peoples that we may not have recognized before.

Multiplicities behind Names

Jansen's list has a lot of names on it. Some of those names represent 20 or 30 or even 200 groups that will need separate church-planting efforts. Affinities and similarities between groups that use the same name may make the job easier, but if we fail to recognize cultural barriers just because a name on a list doesn't represent a fine enough distinction, we may unnecessarily delay the fulfillment of God's purpose for some of the peoples that share that name. Kaleb and I looked at one name on his list that represents a cluster of roughly 120 people groups that may each need a separate church planting movement.

Thus, we at the US Center for World Mission aren't really troubled by the fact that the AAPC list only has 6,000 names while we estimate that 11,000 breakthroughs needed around the world. When we actually get out there we may discover 20,000 breakthroughs are necessary. We'd be glad to discover that the job is easier, but we don't do ourselves a favor by minimizing the task just because we don't know the precise numbers. Let's make the best list we can and the best estimate we can.

Not Definitive

The important thing is that whoever uses this list realizes that it is not a final reference. The greatest danger would be to misuse the list, and to allow it to draw attention away from or blind us to unreached people groups which didn't get named on the list. When new barriers to the spread of existing church-planting movements are recognized, the determination of whether another unreached people group has been discovered or not will fall mainly to the individuals working with that group—not with a people at a distance from the realities. We can gladly take a list like this as representative, as helpful in stimulating our thinking.

The body of Christ needs basically to be sensitized to the fact that whole groups of people are separated from the gospel by invisible barriers. Then, we need missionaries especially to be alerted to and to be watching for barriers that limit the influence of existing movements in their part of the world. If this list can help us think in these terms, and more missionaries and lay individ-

uals tackle the problem of introducing the gospel into cultures that have previously been neglected, the list will have proven itself very useful.

But if we say that this list is definitive, that all the work that needs to be done is represented by the list and that we simply need to count off the names on the list, then the list will, in part, lead us astray, and become an obstacle to finishing the job rather than a tool toward that end. In actual fact, it may often be the little groups that for the most part don't have names for themselves, or who for one reason or another haven't made it onto this list, that are the most likely to be missed in our mission strategies and efforts.

Taxonomy

This effort to gather names of unreached people groups has surely brought into view all of the major blocs that contain most of the unreached people groups of the world, like the Sundanese, the Tajiks and the Uzbeks. Many of these names on Kaleb's list represent large clusters containing millions of individuals and widely varying numbers of people groups.

A few years ago, David Barrett and Todd Johnson developed their own nomenclature for the taxonomy of people groups, since there are many ways of grouping individuals. While the "people group" concept, as of the historic meeting in March of 1982, divides the world into "the largest groupings within which the gospel can spread without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance," the world can be divided in many other ways, and the names which Kaleb Jansen has collected represent a wide variety of concepts. In some cases the names represent a geographic

base, in others they are politically defined, and in yet others they represent differences in ethnicity or religion.

Barrett and Johnson have defined for us races, sub-races, ethno-linguistic families, and following Winter and the 1982 definition, have recognized groups and sub-groups, e.g., macropeoples, megapeoples, minipeoples and micropeoples. Barrett's minipeoples are intended to be equivalent to people groups. His 1989 estimate is that there are 60,000 minipeoples if you include both reached and unreached. The unreached portion of Barrett's estimate is still in the same ball-park as the 11,000 estimate of the USCWM.

There are many possible taxonomies for dividing up humanity. Jansen's own book, *Target Earth*, includes listing languages, peoples, clans and households. For these categories he does not employ precisely the same numbers as Barrett, but then he is counting different things.

The important point is that within the 6,000 names listed by Jansen, you don't have just one kind of thing listed. Instead, you can find examples of nearly every level of grouping in any taxonomy you might choose.

When Luis Bush asked us to review the India section of Jansen's list, we found it essential to keep these kind of taxonomical distinctions in mind. Many of the different possible levels of groupings within southern India are represented in Kaleb's list. We reorganized the names in India and noted that many people groups were listed more than once because they are spread across more than one of the geographical sectors that Kaleb uses in his list.

Conclusion

Jansen's work represents a helpful step forward for world evangelization. Fur-

ther steps would increase the usefulness of this list:

1. Instead of listing only names that include unreached people groups, list all significantly large identifiable clusters of populations around the world and then tag them with the number of existing church movements already present and the number of additional estimated breakthroughs needed so that each of the unreached people groups among them can be reached. Where a name truly represents a single people group (requiring a single pioneer mission breakthrough), it should also be indicated whether this people group has yet developed a mission outreach to other cultures. This is perhaps the single most important step forward. Additional steps might include:

2. Instead of noting a single geographical location for a cluster named in the list, and then relisting that cluster separately in other locations, list the cluster once and then indicate all the representative locations within which that entity can be found in significant numbers.

3. List the number of individuals represented by the name in each separate location.

4. List the primary languages and religions for each of the names on the list. ■

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