

# AAPC Consultation II

## A Second Reflection

By E. David Dougherty

It was a privilege to participate in the April Consultation on the Adopt-A-People movement in Colorado Springs. The timing of the meeting was especially appropriate in moving toward a comprehensive approach to world evangelization based on frontier missiology. Earlier meetings had to focus on other aspects of the task—now we are ready to focus on mobilization—the specific purpose for which Adopt-A-People has been designed.

- \* In the 1970's and early 1980's the theoretical foundations of people-group-based strategies for world evangelization were established.
- \* In the decade of the 1980's frontier missiology became the dominant force guiding strategy and tactics for evangelization for both mission agencies and churches—largely through the efforts of Dr. Ralph Winter and the U.S. Center for World Mission, as well as the efforts of IFMA, EFMA, World Vision's Marc, and others.
- \* Now, in the decade of the 1990's the application of frontier missiology to the mobilization of resources (prayer, personnel and funding) has captured the imagination of many churches and mobilizers led by the Adopt-A-People program, APMC, the AD 2000 Movement in the U.S. and others.

In his report Kaleb Jansen has already highlighted many of the benefits and blessings of the consultation—which occupied his time and energy for many months. All those attending owe a debt of gratitude to him for undertaking this herculean task on relatively short notice. I would like to emphasize some of the points in retrospect, and perhaps provide an alternate perspective on aspects of the conference.

### Audience

Though Kaleb noted that Colorado Springs 1993 attracted a different kind of audience than Northfield 1885, he did not point out explicitly what that difference was. At Northfield, the meeting consisted mostly of pastors gathered from throughout the Northeastern U.S. At Colorado Springs, it was mission agency executives, denominational leaders and key mission mobilizers who came from across the U.S. and around the world to consult about mobilizing the churches for a major assault on the final frontiers of missions.

The involvement of key leaders sets this meeting apart from previous meetings, and emphasizes the strategic importance of its conclusions. It would be good to note that the AAP Clearinghouse has scheduled a meeting more like the Northfield meeting, designed specifically for local church leadership, in April 1994.

### Format

Although Kaleb found the “television” format of the meeting highly positive in adding focus and clarity to the proceedings, as well as preserving the presentation for posterity, many participants however felt the format was unnecessarily restrictive. A major impact of the format was to totally eliminate interaction and discussion from all but two sessions. There was very little opportunity for “consulting” in this consultation.

### Continuity

In the sweep of recent history, there have been a number of national and international consultations focused on the idea of the final frontiers of missions. From Dr. Winter's presentation at Lausanne 1974 to Edinburgh 1980, through the AD 2000 meeting in Singapore 1989 there has been substantial agreement on the dimen-

sions and thrust of frontier missions.

In his reflections, Kaleb refers to “misconceptions and even unsolvable conflicts based on differences in opinion on what really took place at the meetings.” My observation is that many of those so called “misconceptions and conflicts” arose from unshared assumptions, more than from failure in the communication process, or the lack of videotapes of the meetings, etc. Second, these differences sometimes originate in the personal and organizational agendas of those involved. And finally, highly committed, strongly gifted and powerfully effective leaders can be expected to experience personal conflicts as they work together to effect a major paradigm shift in the way we “do missions” as evangelicals.

What is different in this instance is that, while there has been differences of opinion and conviction—without which previous consultations would have been sterile and boring—the major directions and definitions have been developed through consultations and consensus.

However, it should be noted that at the April meeting, some major changes in definition and direction were introduced, not through the consultation process, but arbitrarily by the conveners. One of these major changes relates to the definitions behind production of the list of “unreached and adoptable” peoples. For instance, it appears that these arbitrary changes do not necessarily move AAP forward, in the frontier missions movement, but may lead it backward in terms of clear thinking about the target for church planting.

It seems to me that the conceptual breakthrough which made frontier missiology the dominant force it is today was due to defining the target for proclaiming the gospel in terms of the *desired result* (a viable, indige-

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nous, evangelizing church) rather than in terms of the *necessary activities* (presence, proclamation, persuasion, etc.) to achieve the result. In missiological terms, this has implied defining the audience in terms of culture and society, the structures and channels through which communication flow, rather than defining the audience in terms of language and location—the boundaries which define the missionary’s activities of preaching, meeting, sharing, etc.

However, on page i-iii of the list published by the AAP Clearinghouse and introduced at the consultation, Kaleb provides his rationale for redefining the concept of unreached peoples in terms of ethnicity and location, rather than in terms of social structure and culture. Instead of being a breakthrough on the cutting edge, this change appears to me to be a reversion to the mission thinking which dominated the scene in the pre-frontier-mission era. For example, my own agency (OMF-formerly the China Inland Mission) has pamphlets and articles, dating back 100 years which listed target audiences for our ministry in terms of ethnicity and location. While the new list is certainly more comprehensive than anything produced to date, it does not reflect continuity with current frontier missiology, so much as continuity with a by-gone previous generation of missions thinking.

The addition of the concept of “adoptable” groups to the idea of “unreached peoples” is another

example of changing the ground rules by fiat, apparently without the benefit of consultation or mission consensus. I understand that Kaleb’s own background and organization is *Bibles for All* and that he has a particular concern for translation and publication of the Scripture in every language. However, I’m not sure that the addition of these elements is very helpful to the concept of identifying unreached people groups for world evangelization.

### AAP Strategy

Kaleb describes the AAP challenge proposed by Terry Riley, Associate Director of the Clearinghouse, in which each U.S. church is assigned an unreached people group according to its zip code, as “the working plan for AAPC, how we can best serve our constituency and the unreached peoples of the world.” Kaleb notes that “Terry’s plan was... never debated.” However, as a new member of the Clearinghouse board, I distinctly recall that Terry’s proposal sparked animated debate and discussion among the board members. It is my further recollection that the board explicitly agreed not to pursue this strategy, at least not at this time.

The problem with the zip code strategy is that it not only ignores, but essentially counters the basic principle of *partnership* which has become so important for churches and mission agencies. In other words, the strategy ignores the very principles which frontier missiology is founded on—that of using existing

social structures and communication networks rather than operating on the basis of geographic location. If it took us 150 years to learn the importance of this in our evangelism strategy and planning, let’s hope it won’t take us another 150 years to apply the same principle to our mobilization strategy and planning.

To one observer, a key leader of a mobilization organization—the consultation had a negative impact—losing much of the excitement and enthusiasm for reaching the peoples of the world for Jesus Christ in the clutter and woodenness of “staged” speeches. However, on balance, I saw a spirit of contagious optimism throughout the meetings. The worship team made a tremendous contribution to the meetings, as did the opportunity for interaction and encouragement between sessions, at mealtimes and at breaks. But there just wasn’t enough time allotted for these essential components.

Adopt-A-People is no longer an unproved strategy for mobilizing resources for world evangelization and the Colorado Springs consultation has helped this program grow toward maturity.

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