

AD 2000 and the Global Consultation on World Evangelization

Strategic Implications

by Phill Butler

Much has been said about the emerging power and potential of the Non-Western church; in particular its role in the future of missions and frontier evangelism. As president of Interdev we live each day with the reality of this power and potential.

Of the seventeen operational Strategic Evangelism Partnerships in which we are involved (in as many language groups or specific geographical areas), over 160 mission and church-related agencies are participating. 25-30% of these missionary agencies are Non-Western! This percentage is steadily rising. North American agencies account for less than 50% of the total. Every new partnership that goes together typically has representatives from the Church in a minimum of 10-15 countries.

Without going into detail, in our role of partnership development among the world's major unreached people groups, and least evangelized cities, we live daily with the fact, not the possibility of the shift in the modern missions resource pool paradigm—resources of personnel, prayer, and money.

This change in the East-West, North-South balance in the Church is accelerating—not slowing. It will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. It seems that after nearly two centuries of prayer and genuine sacrifice on the part of so many, such realities should be seen as:

1. Cause for an incredibly joyous celebration that God has been so faithful in providing “return on investment” for His Church.

2. Opportunity to demonstrate to the watching world through effective, functional partnership with our non-Western brothers and sisters, that Jesus' message is the truly universal one it claims it to be—not the European or Western one the detractors so readily suggest it is.

The extent to which these two responses are occurring, or are likely to occur, is outside the scope of these brief observations and comments. However, it is in this wider historical context of God's work that the AD 2000 Movement and the upcoming Global Consultation On World Evangelization (GCOWE) must be considered.

The Non-Western Connection

The rapidly-changing realities suggested above are clearly reflected in the AD 2000 Movement. The Movement prismatically refracts the light of God's work in the world in a way that is frequently very difficult for the Western Church and her missions-related structures, to acknowledge, understand, or effectively relate to. In often jaded Western church and missions circles it is difficult for many to acknowledge that the AD 2000 Movement is deeply rooted in and reflects the reality of the ascending power and potential of the Non-Western Church.

While a dozen and one charges may be leveled at the AD 2000 Movement (like triumphalist, rooted in Western “management by objectives” techniques, a collection of a thousand disorganized ad hoc agencies, driven by a false emphasis on eschatology, etc., etc.), the reality is that the Movement has captured the interest and imagination of Non-Western leaders in a way in which no other modern international missions and evangelism emphasis has.

Knowing something about change, the theory and practice of the adoption of innovation, it should not be unexpected that the fiercest resistance to the AD 2000 Movement has come from those parts of the world where the Church in the last two centuries found her power base—namely Europe and other Western areas. In the adoption of innovation, classically it is those with least

to lose who adopt the innovation first. Those with most to lose are usually last.

I will leave it to others to serious consideration as to why AD 2000 has so effectively captured the imagination of so many in the Non Western world. Such an analysis might itself shed light on key factors in any future East-West, North-South dialogue and collaboration.

AD 2000 and GCOWE Plans

The AD 2000 vision, stated most simply, is “a Church for Every People and the Gospel to Every Person by the Year 2000.” To facilitate and encourage the realization of this vision, the Movement has organized itself into two broad categories of activity, namely geographic and functional.

Geographically, the AD 2000 Movement has identified regional coordinators who are encouraged to facilitate a national strategy for evangelization in each country in their region. In turn, in each country a national coordinator has been identified and is being encouraged to facilitate the formulation and, ultimately, the implementation of that country's national strategy for evangelization.

Functionally, the AD 2000 Movement has encouraged the formation of “resource tracks” dealing with a range of specialized issues related to evangelism such as research, unreached peoples, urban concerns, young people, missionary training, saturation evangelism, pastors, denominational leaders, etc., etc.

All of these elements are due to flow into GCOWE (Korea) in May, 1995 in what is billed as a mid-decade assessment of where the Church is in planning and implementation of the goal of a “Church for Every People by 2000.”. As Luis Bush has empha-

sized, he sees the event as a working conference for evaluation, planning, and strategy development, and hence the title “Global Consultation on World Evangelization.” At the ten-day conference the schedule will be divided into three main streams; plenary, resource track, and country groupings—each stream having eighteen hours to work together.

AD 2000 reports, plus my own anecdotal experience suggest that hundreds of ad-hoc evangelism initiatives have already been started over the last 2-3 years—inspired in some way by the Movement. Some 100-150 pre-GCOWE national or regional events are known to be planned. Therefore the Korea event in May certainly is not the starting point. Also AD 2000 has been looking for some time now at the post-GCOWE activities—trying to match resources with what may be needed to help facilitate the various evangelism strategies, national or otherwise that will arise out of the event.

Basic Concerns

Selection Process

Despite their best efforts, the GCOWE participant selection process has the potential for creating serious divisions and fragmentation among believers in countries.

To what extent are those selected truly representative of the Church theologically and denominationally? Does it reflect a balance of the diverse interests in the country when selection has been primarily on a “national” basis rather than taking into consideration the complex regional and linguistic realities? Developing a “representative” group of participants for, say, the UK or France would be difficult enough—but imagine India, Mali, or China.

Does it reflect a balance between those established in power and reputation and those who are “tomorrow’s leaders”? Also is it representing a spirit of and vision for reconciliation and cooperation in the Body of Christ in their region or country?

Furthermore, will participants be seen as an “elite” group that may or may not be perceived as meriting the implied

leadership role ascribed to them by their selection?

The Structure

The AD 2000’ structure, and GCOWE as an “event,” and the Movement’s emphasis on development and implementation of national evangelism strategies are fraught with the potential for serious negative consequences.

For instance, to what extent will the GCOWE participants from any given

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country be effective in drawing in the widest possible cooperation from within the Church—in both the research and planning phase and the implementation phase of any proposed evangelism strategy?

If a national strategy for evangelism is conceived, planned, confirmed, etc., at GCOWE, could the GCOWE participants get “ownership” and real participation when they return to their country and, in effect, “announce” such plans to others who haven’t been part of the process? Does the AD 2000 Movement and GCOWE encourage a long-term, “process” orientation vs. an “event” mentality—an issue critical to serious evangelism and church-planting strategies?

Can the current structure of geographical and functional tracks that presently are the “warp and woof” of AD 2000 Movement be effectively integrated in national strategies? Though the GCOWE planned schedule seeks to take this into account, I have serious doubts that an emphasis on development and implementation of a national strategy, and effective integration of all the resource track interests into such a strategy, can be pulled off. Our experience in strategic partnership develop-

ment suggests that the most effective, lasting, and ultimately “successful” church-planting-evangelism partnerships do not try to do too much at once. In industrial terms, trying to integrate the “vertical” and “horizontal” elements of a strategy simultaneously, with a team that’s never worked together before, is a sure recipe for failure.

Integration

The effective integration and partnership between Western and Non-Western Church leadership, and their respective resources, is not a subject explicitly addressed anywhere in the AD 2000 Movement. While implicitly referenced in many aspects of the Movement, I believe this issue, as outlined at the beginning of this paper, desperately needs high-visibility, candid, practical and intentional treatment by the Movement. Otherwise the potential of much of the Church’s resources will be dras-

tically emasculated because of mismatch and misunderstanding that will continue to occur between East and West, North and South. While I have not seen the topics for all the planned plenary sessions at GCOWE where this subject may be addressed, the topic is far too pervasive and critical to be left to the “top down” communication of a plenary session.

Who is Listening?

An alternative, if not much longer, litany of concerns dealing with economics, ecclesiology, etc. could be mounted by many, I’m sure. Our stance at Interdev is that we work in a complex, imperfect world. Satan will do anything he can to dismember the Body and discredit efforts and, as brothers in Christ, we can be part of the problem or part of the solution.

No matter what “read” you make of the AD 2000 process, we feel that it cannot be ignored; that it has been blessed by God in a unique way! Acknowledging the stated or unstated concerns, what must be done is to seek to maximize the potential, come along side, and assist in helping this Movement be as effective as possible. Understanding, of course, that any such “para-

plete” role can, itself, have only limited impact on a Movement as diverse, large, and ad hoc as AD 2000 is.

The good news, we believe, is that Luis Bush, who has been the human “engine” in the Movement along with Thomas Wang and who has given so much sacrificially to the vision, and a number of the Board and senior colleagues are indeed aware of these issues. They are listening, and are doing a great deal to minimize any potential damage and to maximize the long-term impact of the Movement. What many do not understand, of course, is that, like it or not, a true Movement is, by definition, a constellation of ad hocacies which no one can control. At best, one can hope to guide the river as it gains volume and velocity.

Recommendations

First of all, the AD 2000 Movement and GCOWE (and the various, as yet unforeseen initiatives that will flow out of GCOWE) must be encouraged to be true to the nature of the Movement itself. AD 2000 is a great collection of ad hocacies—being given encouragement, guidance, some resourcing, and communications facilities. Any future “national” or regional strategies that come out of the Movement should encourage this same spirit of informal, ad hoc, inspiration, communication, encouragement, and collaboration.

The death knell of the Movement’s effectiveness, it seems to me, will be when it seeks to encourage national strategies conceived by a non-

representative group which, in turn, is perceived to be an imposed strategy, top-down in character rather than highly participative with wide ownership. AD 2000 must, in every country, language, great city or other “bounded” population group, seek partnerships or collaboration among the many who, in turn, by the nature of their collaboration and cooperation will energize Kingdom initiatives into every nook and cranny of society. This strategic, intentional partnership of efforts becomes the national strategy but with wide ownership and participation.

Such an approach would also allow the twin geographic and functional elements of the Movement to work happily alongside each other. Neat and tidy integration of a “plan” would not be the issue. The goal should be an intentional partnership of varied resources behind a common vision where communication, concerns, prayer, etc. are part of the mutual experience. This allows for the specialist interests to move ahead without having to be neatly integrated into some kind of national strategy. Experience suggests that such an approach of consensus-based, wide-ranging partnership could also facilitate the integration of Kingdom resources from East-West, North-South.

Secondly, a primary effort should be made to equip AD 2000 regional and national leaders in such partnership development and on-going facilitation skills. These critically-needed skills are fundamental to effective implementation of an approach as I’ve outlined

above.

Thirdly, there needs to be an emphasis as wide-ranging as possible within the Movement on process vs. event. Similarly, there needs to be emphasis on partnership rather than strategy—whether it is for a country, a language group, or a great unreached city.

While we might have “designed” the whole AD 2000 Movement quite differently, it’s clear that the Holy Spirit didn’t call us to such a role (and certainly we would have been quite ill-equipped for it!). We have appreciated the AD 2000 leadership’s responsiveness, openness, and willingness to consider alternative approaches whenever it has been a realistic option. Despite our expressed concerns, our Interdev team has chosen to get involved in the AD 2000 effort—seeking to support, encourage, and bring to its vision any relevant experience and resources we may have. We would encourage your similar, prayerful consideration and commitment.

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