

Missing Peoples: The Unserved "One-Fourth" World: Especially Buddhists, Hindus & Muslims

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Editor's Note: This Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper has been written by S. Kent Parks (1) and John Scott as an overview of the topic to be discussed at the Multiplex session on "Missing Peoples: The Unserved "One-Fourth" World." Responses to this paper through the Lausanne Global Conversation will be fed back to the authors and others to help shape their final presentations at the Congress.

LOST SHEEP, LOST COINS, LOST PEOPLES

One day Jesus' companions, the tax collectors and sinners, crowd around him to listen: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them? Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one?" (Luke 15). This crowd doesn't have any trouble understanding Jesus. They know what it means to be lost.

Years later, in stunning visions revealed to him on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John sees a Lamb, looking as if it has been slain, standing in the center of the throne in heaven. Spontaneous worship breaks out: "You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5).

The purchase price of blood has been paid, and in the heavenly vision Jesus is receiving the worship due him. The work is already done. Or is it?

How did Jesus intend for all these lost people, from every tribe, language, people and nation, to discover that He has already paid the price for them? In his stories about lost sheep and lost coins, Jesus reminds us that the most natural thing to do when something is lost is to go looking for it. Even if, in the case of sheep, it means leaving ninety-nine others behind to find the missing one. Jesus even tells us that the Shepherd is "happier about the one than about the 99 that have not strayed" (Matthew 18:13). Has that truth really gripped us?

The diversity of peoples around the heavenly throne in Revelation 5 compels us to ask: If such rich diversity is the Church's destiny in eternity, how is it that so many peoples are still missing from the picture John saw in his vision? What impact does their absence have on the rest of us? Have we ever stopped to wonder what we in the global church are missing because they are missing?

When Jesus' priorities for the lost and marginalized are ignored by His church, so are almost two billion people. Who is this forgotten fourth of the world's population?

HIDDEN PEOPLES ? THE FORGOTTEN FOURTH

At the historic 1974 Lausanne Congress, Ralph Winter shook the evangelical world by bringing the plight of "Hidden Peoples" to their attention:

Our exaltation about the fact that every country of the world has been penetrated has allowed many to suppose that every culture has by now been penetrated. This misunderstanding is a malady so widespread that it deserves a special name. Let us call it "people blindness"; that is, blindness to the existence of separate peoples within countries. (2)

These "separate peoples" are mostly Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist, and include significant urban populations. They have been described as unreached people groups, least-evangelized, least-

reached peoples, and in what is possibly the most accurate and unsettling description of all, ignored peoples. Dr. Winter and others after him have tried to generate a global movement of the Church toward these peoples. Yet despite all the papers and discussions and conferences, today, 36 years later, this forgotten fourth without access to the gospel still makes up over 28% of the world's population (3) and 41% of the individuals in the world are members of a people group with no viable church. (4)

To put this in perspective, Bill Gates had just graduated from high school and was about to enter Harvard University when Dr. Winter addressed the first Lausanne Congress in 1974. That same year the first advertisement for a personal computer appeared, with 1K of programmable memory, for \$565. Today there may be as many as 2 billion computers in use, operated in the remotest of locations, with at least a million times as much memory as that first computer. Who could have imagined such staggering change back in 1974?

Why is it we have not seen a correspondingly dramatic change among Missing Peoples during this same period? What happened? Or more importantly, what did not happen? And why didn't it happen?

CHALLENGES

Sadly we must admit that the primary reasons for this neglect lie within our global Christian community: we spend most of our time and resources on ourselves, we still suffer from "people blindness," our priorities are elsewhere, and we are engaged in theological battles among ourselves. On top of this, the personal cost of ministry to these peoples is high, requiring workers to cross cultural, linguistic, sociological and religious barriers. And many of these peoples have been geographically distant as well. We'll focus first on these and other external challenges.

External Challenges

Orality / Literacy: More than a billion adults in the world prefer to learn through oral means. Some have no other option. They continue to be isolated from the gospel, not by their ignorance, but by the Church's continued insistence on the written word for evangelism and disciple-making.

Bible poverty: While the Church continues to focus on reaching majority populations that are similar to them, many people groups have yet to hear the good news of Jesus Christ in their own language. Language is not simply a matter of understanding; the identity of many people groups is wrapped up in their language. And where translations do exist, in various formats, distribution is often inadequate, especially outside the Global North.

Culture/Society: Resistance to outside influences helps insulate cultures from exposure to unhelpful intrusions, but also to the liberating truths of the gospel. Further, well-intentioned but poorly trained cross-cultural messengers sometimes end up inoculating their intended audience to the gospel by their methods. What appears to be resistance to the gospel may simply be a reaction to our approach rather than a rejection of Jesus.

And as churches we are often blinded to our own cultural failings and injustices, focusing instead on the shortcomings of other nearby cultures. We are often unwilling to cross cultural barriers because of our conformity to our own culture, or our prejudice against communities who are different from us.

Political Isolation: Numerous governments restrict or forbid the evangelization of their citizens, and persecute believers inside the country. In one Middle Eastern nation, rewards are offered to anyone who exposes a prayer group. And workers are often unable to get to the peoples they wish to serve.

Religious isolation: Individual religious authorities or religious communities often do everything possible to prevent their members from being exposed to Christians and their message. Somali seekers put their lives in danger every time they listen to Christian radio broadcasts.

Geographical isolation: Many groups, e.g. Tibetans and nomads, live in remote locations, and have little communication with the outside world. This makes it difficult to send and support cross-cultural missionaries, and natural conditions like climate often prevent these missionaries from living in an area for an extended time.

Because the usual church mindset is focused on stationary facilities and programs, nomadic peoples pose a particular challenge. In the words of a Somali camel herder in Eastern Africa: "When you can put your Church on the back of my camel, then I'll believe that Christianity is meant for us."

Persecution and Terrorism: Terrorism and religious fundamentalism provide massive challenges to the spread of the gospel. Persecution of Christians results in the death of over 165,000 believers every year (500 a day). While many Christians are faithful to their Lord's call in the face of such persecution, others back down out of fear.

Social Isolation: The caste system in South Asia is one example. Economic poverty is also a two-edged sword: the needs of the people can be overwhelming, and the extreme living conditions create personal challenges for Christian workers.

Migration: Today over 30 million political refugees (equal to the total population of Uganda or Peru) are displaced within their own countries, and over 100 million have fled to other countries. Economic refugees number in the millions.

Internal Challenges within the Body of Christ

In addition to these external challenges, and the internal ones noted above—people blindness, lack of priority given to Missing Peoples and the high personal cost of ministry—other powerful hindrances include:

Misuse of God's resources. Christians still give only about 1% of our money to Christian causes. Of this money given to Christian causes, 95% is spent on the Church. Less than 1% is used to reach 28% of the world without access to the gospel. 90% of missionaries work among the 33% of the world that claims to be Christians. Only 2-4% of Christian cross-cultural witnesses serve this 28%.

Awareness is confused with progress: As the worldwide church has become increasingly familiar with unreached peoples, the "10-40 window," "World A" and date-oriented networks such as the AD 2000 movement, some have wrongly assumed that the needs of these peoples are already met. Others believe the numbers are exaggerated—there can't be that many Missing Peoples. Still others have simply grown tired of the message and express a desire to move on to something else supposedly more relevant.

A Misunderstanding of "ethne"

Jesus tells us to make disciples of all ethne. The power of ethne (people group) imagery to focus people's strategic thinking began to be used to re-define all kinds of strata of society as a "people group." So young people, the disabled, prostitutes, or taxi drivers in certain cities (which are actually segments or a strata of society) began to be defined as a "people group." But this definition is not really an ethne. A better understanding of the term ethne would correspond to an ethno-linguistic/ethno-cultural people group which includes the various strata of youth, urban, rural, rich, poor, disabled, etc.

"Christian" culture as opposed to Gospel truth

Many writers have illustrated the truth that lost people often reject our trappings for the gospel as opposed to rejecting Christ. Jesus is so hidden in our cultural and theological wrappings (including materialism, phariseeism, denominationalism, etc) that they don't seem to have any chance to hear

the basic gospel. One of the main challenges in reaching the unreached is being willing to let go of our ethnic and Christian cultural baggage as we struggle for a standard of only biblically necessary truth in sharing the gospel and seeking to make disciples of the unreached.

Theological battles among ourselves: Differing views about evangelism and eschatology have led to misunderstandings and divisions in the Christian community, draining off energy that could be going into ministry. Most mission practitioners agree that "word" and "works" must go hand in hand. (5) But in the absence of dialogue that might have led to mutual understanding, differing beliefs about what this should look like in practice have generated unhelpful caricatures (6) from all sides of the conversation.

What does it mean to bear witness to the Good News? Those focused on the urgency of presenting a verbal salvation message are often characterized as promoting an overly simplistic, truncated gospel. And those focused on the priority of justice and social renewal are seen as detracting from the chief task Jesus gave his followers to present the message of personal salvation.

Differing views on eschatology follow in the same vein. Some take Matthew 24:14 as their primary framework for building a theology and strategy of mission: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." For them the fundamental question is: What can we do to evangelize the world most quickly and hasten the Lord's return? Others are wary of what appears to be shallowness in theology and ministry, questioning the belief that we can hasten the Lord's return by our efforts. They also wonder whether big strategies to evangelize the world are led more by the Holy Spirit or by an entrepreneurial spirit. Some cannot imagine doing ministry without the correctives of theological reflection and contextualization, while others question whether all that theory ever results in action.

A WAY FORWARD

If urgency is only related to time and evangelism is restricted to verbal proclamation, surely it is inadequate. Or if urgency relates only to matters of justice and social concerns, and evangelism is restricted to deeds, it is equally inadequate. But there is a way forward that provides a meaningful synthesis, built on the following beliefs:

Matthew 24:14 is both a statement of what God will do and of what will happen when Christ's body is obedient. God is looking for people who will be on the front lines with Him as He fulfills this. But our disobedience can delay its fulfillment. Israel experienced this with the 10 spies and the 40-year delay caused by their disobedience, bred of timidity and rebellion.

Thus, obedience-based discipleship is essential. Unless reproducing congregations of obeying disciples emerge to help transform their society, then our efforts are not only inadequate, they are counterfeit. Jesus' command is to make disciples of people groups (ethnê), not create clubs that meet on Sunday.

While this discipleship process is always costly and takes a lifetime to develop fully, real change can begin to happen quickly, as followers are taught to obey in word and deed in their community. Actual movements have emerged in China, South Asia and Africa that are rapid, deep, and transformational. (See below)

The Spirit calls us to follow him on a macro-level even as each of us serves locally. God is a God of order and he is equally able to lead in both micro- and macro-planning. Yet any plans, if not inspired by the Holy Spirit, are useless.

Most importantly, the fact that the forgotten fourth are missing the joy of knowing and loving Jesus for even another day must create in us a sense of urgency. Our urgency comes from the fact that we are so in love with Jesus that we want to introduce every people group to Him as soon and as fully as possible to give people access to abundant life in Jesus and enable them to escape their

powerless, futile lives outside of him, now and in eternity (Ephesians 4.19ff).

Lessons Being Learned

The challenge of reaching these Missing Peoples is huge. But it has compelled some to rethink radically their approaches and to pray fervently for breakthroughs that would lead to discipleship that is deep, transformational and community-wide. Some of the lessons being learned from new approaches to ministry among least-reached peoples are counterintuitive and defy conventional missiological wisdom (7).

1. Those who look like the wrong people to start with may be the right people Go slow to go fast.Focus on the few (or one) to win many.No personal evangelism so that many will hear. No mass evangelism so the masses will hear.Share only when and where people are ready to hear.A new/inexperienced insider is more effective than a highly trained, mature outsider.
2. Trust the Scriptures to speak (even among people who have no Bible background)Start with Creation not Christ.It's about discovery, not preaching or teaching.Obedience is more important than knowledge.
3. Trust ordinary people to do extraordinary thingsDisciple to conversion, not convert to make disciples.Focus on ordinary people not professional or vocational Christians.Let the lost lead the Bible studies.
4. Expect reproduction through multiplication, not additionThe best time for a church to plant a new church is when it is new.Buildings kill church planting.
5. Expect the hardest places to yield the greatest results

Reflecting on these lessons could enable us as representatives of the global Body of Christ to be catalysts for effective ministry among the world's Missing Peoples. As we consider our own contexts, which of these counter-intuitive lessons might we adapt and apply to the ministries we are already involved in?

Transformational Movements to Christ

As a result of putting such lessons into practice, amazing things are happening among least reached peoples, especially in China, South Asia and Africa. God is raising up multiplying groups of Christ-obeyers who are changing their communities, unencumbered by programs, buildings or administrative overhead. Over 100 such movements have emerged in recent years.

These Christ-ward movements, also called transformational Church Planting Movements (CPMs), blend all aspects of the gospel;encompassing social transformation, verbal sharing of the Gospel, obedience-based discipleship, miracles, worship and more. For example, in parts of Latin America, cell churches have stepped in to provide health, welfare and education where governments have failed to do so (Jenkins, The Next Christendom).

Three characteristics of such movements are reproducibility, synergistic mesh of ministries, and sacrifice and difficulty (see Garrison, Church Planting Movements). As cross-cultural witnesses enter a group and people respond, new congregations of disciples emerge, often meeting in homes. These congregations are taught to obey the Scriptures, to start new congregations and to minister in their community and beyond. Emerging disciples are trained to be leaders in the congregation and in the community, and to train immediately other leaders who will train other leaders. For more information on the characteristics of transformational church planting movements that have been documented in a wide variety of different contexts across the globe, see the following articles: "Church planting movements defined" World A, B & C "Church planting movements: 10 universals, 10 common elements, 7 killers" Church planting movements then and now?

What God is doing in the Hindu World (2622 Missing Peoples, 987 million individuals (8))

Nepal: The strong breakthrough in Nepal that crosses caste lines throughout the country is one of the amazing works of God. In 1950, there were no known believers. The first church was formed in 1959 with 29 believers (9); there were an estimated 7,400 Christians in 1970; (10) by 1985 there were about 50,000 believers. At the climax of persecution in 1990 there were 200,000; (11) 574,000 in 2000; 904,000 in 2010. (12)

India: In a place historically known as a "missionary graveyard," a church planting movement among the Bhojpuri people over 20 years resulted in more than 80,000 new churches and over 4 million baptized, obeying believers. (13)

Madhya Pradesh State in India: a church planting movement produced 4,000 congregations in seven years. (14)

What God is doing in the Buddhist World (575 Missing Peoples, 617 million individuals) (15)

Mongolia: In 1989 perhaps four former Buddhist believers could be found. A church planting movement in the 1990's in Outer Mongolia produced more than 10,000 followers of Jesus while a subsequent movement in Inner Mongolia has resulted in more than 50,000 new believers. (16)

Thailand: In central Thailand a worker started with community and economic development and continued with intentional church planting, leading to the beginning of transformation in the local community.

What God is doing in China

In 1949 there were some 1.5 million Protestants in China. Now there may be more than 100 million or more Christians (17) who have grown in number through sacrifice and commitment in sharing their faith, prayer and worship despite persecution. In Henan Province Christ-followers grew from a total of a million to more than five million in only eight years. (18) In southern China a church planting movement produced more than 90,000 baptized believers in 920 house churches in eight years time. (19) In 2001 a newly emerging Church Planting movement yields 48,000 new believers and 1,700 new churches in one year. (20)

What God is doing in Africa (21) Over the past century, the number of believers has grown from nine million to more than 360 million. Each month an estimated 1,200 new churches are started in Africa. In eight months, 28 Ethiopian evangelists led 681 persons to Christ and started 83 new churches. Today, after years of resistance to the gospel, some 90,000 of Kenya's 600,000 Maasai are followers of Jesus Christ.

What God is doing in the Muslim World (3354 Missing Peoples, 1.46 billion individuals (22))

Turkey: In 1960 there were 10 known believers. In the year 2000, there were an estimated 2,000. In 2010 the World Christian Database shows 14,000 believers. (23) While many see openness, there is still a long way to go.

Bangladesh: From 1998 to 2003, the Isa Jamaat Movement produced more than 250,000 Muslim background believers worshiping in an estimated 8,000 contextualized churches. (24)

The Arabian Peninsula: Progress has been slow in this area since Samuel Zwemer's efforts beginning in 1890. Key prayer focus upon this area since the 1990s has resulted in some beginnings. Despite the challenges, there are an estimated 74,000+ Arabian Peninsula believers. (25)

STOP SPIRITUAL INJUSTICE

While these stories are encouraging, over one quarter of the peoples of the world still have no opportunity to hear the message of God's love or see it demonstrated in action. Dare we call this lack of response on our part, which leads to needless suffering and hopelessness on their part, anything less than "spiritual injustice"? Today these Missing Peoples have virtually no choice with respect to the gospel. They have yet to follow the One who said, "Follow Me," not because they have rejected His call, but because they have never heard it.

Whenever someone goes missing, especially children and youth, the whole community quickly mobilizes to search for them. Why hasn't that happened with all these Missing Peoples? What does it say about our priorities as a global Church when 3% of workers and less than 1% of the finances given to mission go toward seeking out these Missing Peoples?

Most people come to faith through a relationship with someone they know and trust. Yet over 8 out of 10 Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists do not personally know a single Christ-follower. What are the implications for the Kingdom? Every day which passes without reaching out in friendship to these Missing Peoples means they miss out on the opportunities we all take for granted?; to know Jesus personally, to be filled with his joy and peace, to have his Spirit in us, to experience abundant life and have his power to help change society.

Imagine the impact if, rather than simply continuing to justify our own arenas of ministry, we invested our collective energy in addressing this spiritual injustice, and said, "Yes, we as a worldwide church are not going to allow this to continue."

LOST AND FOUND? NOT YET!

Remember the Apostle John's vision of the slain Lamb? Later he saw another vision of "a great multitude" from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb? They serve him day and night in his temple, and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:9-17)

What a beautiful picture. But have we missed the trauma that makes the triumph in this vision so powerful? These peoples have been hungry and thirsty. They have not had enough food or clean water. The sun has beat down on them with scorching heat. They have lacked protection from the elements. They have had no shepherd to lead them to fresh water. They have had much to weep over. How powerfully that describes the Missing Peoples in today's world.

Listen again to Ralph Winter's words to the first Lausanne Congress in 1974:

We must have radically new efforts of cross-cultural evangelism in order to effectively witness to 2387 million people. And we cannot believe that we can continue virtually to ignore this highest priority. (26)

We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of continuing to ignore these people. Yet this is exactly what has happened. Here we are thirty-six years later, and many of these same groups are still Missing Peoples.

At the most recent major Lausanne gathering, the 2004 Forum in Pattaya, Thailand, the participants affirmed that:

Major efforts of the church must be directed toward those who have no access to the gospel. The commitment to help establish self-sustaining churches within 6000 remaining unreached people groups remains a central priority. [bolding ours]

What does it tell us today if our ?commitment to help establish self-sustaining churches within 6000 remaining unreached people groups? has made so little impact on our behavior or on these communities?

What will it take for us to make this central priority truly central to the mission of the Lausanne movement and the worldwide church? What are we willing to commit ourselves to?;individually, organizationally, regionally, and collectively?

What will it take for us to re-allocate the resources available to us so that these Missing Peoples no longer have to face a hopeless, Christ-less life now and in eternity? What relationships, skills, capacity, intercession and influence are we willing to bring to bear?

And finally, what will it take for us to make this the last Lausanne Congress where we need to highlight Missing Peoples? Not because we've given up and turned our backs on them, but because they are no longer missing and have taken their places around the throne as priests to serve our God.

The two billion people who make up these groups don?t know they are missing. But Jesus does. He knows every one of their names. And he is inviting us to join him in places like India, Pakistan, China, Nepal and Bangladesh where the highest concentration of unreached peoples live?;reaching across culture and language, discomfort and danger, and often great distance, to befriend them and share the good news of the Kingdom.

Why should we do this?

Not because it is our duty,

though it is.

Not because it will bring eternal life to many,

though it will.

Not because it will improve the living conditions of the poor,

though it will.

Not because it will improve stability in the world?s institutions,

though it will.

Not because it will improve environmental stewardship,

though it will.

Not because we will be rewarded,

though we will.

We should disciple the nations because Jesus is worthy to receive their honor, glory and praise.

(Revelation 5:12 and 7:9) From Joshua Project, ?Status of World Evangelization ? 2004?

© The Lausanne Movement 2010Pseudonym?The New Macedonia,? Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization, 1974.David Barrett, Todd Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, ?Status of Global Mission, 2005, in Context of 20th and 21st Centuries,? International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Jan.

2005, p. 29. Joshua Project defines an unreached or least-reached people as a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group. And many would add a third "wonder": Caricatures are created when the distinctive features or peculiarities of an issue are exaggerated to produce an obviously foolish or grotesque effect. These counterintuitive statements from various Church Planting Movements around the world have been compiled by David Watson. We hope to have a fuller document available soon: "Counter-Intuitive Lessons Learned from Least-Reached Peoples." Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net/great-commission-statistics.php) Operation World (www.operationworld.org/country/nepa/owtext.html) World Christian Database Operation World (www.operationworld.org/country/nepa/owtext.html) World Christian Database A Survey and Analysis of the Bhojpuri Church Planting Movement in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Northern India, October 2008. This was an extensive joint research project by CityTeam, Asian Partners, IMB, OM and other local partners. David Garrison, Church Planting Movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World, (Midlothian, VA: Wigtake Press, 2004), 36. Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net/great-commission-statistics.php) Garrison, 68. World Christian Database reports 114 million Christians in China in 2010. Garrison, 53 *ibid.*, 49 *ibid.*, 85 Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net/great-commission-statistics.php) World Christian Database Kevin Greeson, Camel Training Manual, (Midlothian, VA: Wigtake Press, 2004), 12 World Christian Database "The New Macedonia," Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization, 1974.