# Adopt-A-People and the Two-Thirds World Mission Movement

by Larry D. Pate

Hasan is a Bektashi. He lives in the mountainous regions of Central Albania. Hasan's extended family was scattered under the oppressive regime of the Communist dictator Enver Hoxha whose reign of terror lasted until 1990. After the collapse of this most atheistic of regimes, Hasan and his family were free to meet more often. They led their clan back to the religious ways of their fathers. They began animal sacrifice on Mount Yamouri, "the Mountain of God," which is located near the border between the states of Berat and Skrapar. Even though clans like Hasan's were partly scattered by the anti-religious decrees of Hoxha, most of the people in Skrapar and Berat states are Bektashis. They are a special Sufist sect of Islamic peoples. They remain both hidden and unreached as a people group.

The Bektashi have a problem when it comes to being given an effective witness of the gospel. They have not yet been recognized in mission circles as a legitimate target for a specific evangelization strategy. They are one of many hidden people groups around the world. They are considered just part of mainstream Albanian culture. Yet there are many indicators that a special strategy to reach them is necessary. The Bektashi practice specific beliefs, customs and principles which multiply the tenets of Sunni and Shiite Islam (the two largest divisions) by about 400%. The Albanian government considers them one of four major religious groups in the country and separate from mainstream Islam. The newly emerging churches have not penetrated the group in the mainstream of their culture. There are few converts. The Bektashi sect, numbering several hundred thousand, displays many characteristics of a people group which needs a separate strategy of evangelization and church planting.

Can the Adopt-A-People movement (AAP) help reach groups like the Bektashis around the world? Can AAP capture the hearts of Christians around the world so that such groups will actually be presented with a viable witness in the mainstream of their cultures?

More specific to this article, what role will the Two-Thirds world missions Movement (TWMM) play in implementing such a task through the AAP concept? Do the TWMM leaders identify with the movement? Does the non-Western church identify with it? What needs to change before the Two-Thirds World missionary enterprise will fully identify with the movement? Those are the issues addressed in this article.

**Two-Thirds World AAP Movement**

In Latin America the AAP movement caught on early. Largely due to the vision of leaders of the the Latin American missions movement called COMIBAM. The AAP concept was embraced strongly there as early as 1991. A Latin American Adopt a People Consultation was convened in San José, Costa Rica in October, 1992. The principle leaders have been Edison Queiroz from Brazil, Rudy Girón from Guatemala, and President of COMIBAM, and US missionary to Costa Rica, Randolf Sperger.

The Latin leaders reasoned that they have a responsibility for world evangelism at least equal to their proportion of the evangelical church in the non-Western world, approximately twenty-five percent. Taking the USCWM figure of 12,000 unreached peoples in the world, they decided to adopt twenty-five percent of the world's unreached peoples, apportioned between the countries, i.e., according to the size of the evangelical population of each country. Costa Rica, for instance, adopted forty eight specific unreached people groups. The leaders of the movement in Latin America hope to see a total of 4,500 unreached peoples adopted by the mission movements of all the combined Latin countres. They reason that they should adopt 50% more than their share in case other parts of the world cannot complete their portion.

In partnership with the Indian Missions Association and the Youth With A Mission base in Puna, an AAP office in Madras, India, has assisted in the completion of a research project which has catalogued 4,635 people groups within that country. Files are being completed to determine who is working among each group and which are yet to be reached. People group profiles are being prepared for such people groups as rapidly as possible. The AAP Movement has made significant progress in that country in spite of the fact that the churches of India have tried to minimize socio-cultural differences.

The AAP movement is spreading to points as diverse as Lagos, Nigeria and Seoul, Korea. While these movements are relatively young, they have captured the imagination of many leaders in those countries.

## Questions and Issues

The AAP movement is no longer in its infancy. It is spreading to various points of the globe with a degree of enthusiasm on the part of several. It holds promise to capture the imaginations of many believers and point the way toward evangelizing the unreached— one people at a time. That is the focal point of its strength and importance. But it is being embraced mostly by leaders with strong ties to the West. It has not yet been accepted by the grass roots practitioners in the Non-Western missions movement. At this point in its development, it may be wise to ask ourselves some important questions about the future of the movement as it relates to its effectiveness in Third-World contexts. Is the current model sufficient to capture and empower Third-World missions to maximize their potential effectiveness within the AAP movement? Questions we need to ask ourselves, if we desire to see the movement "globalized":

*1. Can the AAP concept as currently designed carry the weight of what needs to be done?* To focus on the unreached as people groups is the genius of AAP. That vision should spread. But we should also make it clear that focusing upon adoption is only the "A" of reaching a people group. The "Z" is actual evangelization. There is a lot of work and understanding required to get from A to Z. Focusing on the "A" of the process, may inadvertently give many people the false idea that people groups will somehow get reached almost automatically because they were adopted by some group. In other words, the whole process, not just adoption, should be stressed, including literature on the whole process of reaching unreached groups. I suggest more linkage directly with those groups who can move adopters from A to Z.

*2. Can AAP move from a focus on the data and technology to a focus on the peoples and how to reach them*? We in the West have a fascination with technology. We are enamored with the machinery, the lists, the machinations and manipulation of data. We just plain love it. Not so with the Non-Western World. They have largely been denied the means to obtain the technology and they tend to see through our love affair with equipment and technology.

Marshal McCluhan stated "the medium is the message." He meant that the technological medium which delivers a message eventually takes over the meaning of the message. We must be careful,since we have computers to rapidly develop lists of data, that we also develop the tools to use the data, lest what we fear overcomes us—the data becoming more important and not its application.

It is possible in the unreached peoples movement to suffer from a massive influx of "infoware" i.e., getting better and better at developing lists of general information which is valuable, but it shouldn't obscure the rest of the task. In that vein, we should also have a class of data which includes information about the religious background, culture, history and basic contextual information of particular peoples. This information is as valuable as "infoware" because it points the way ahead toward a strategy to reach a people group.

What is needed is "wisdomware," which is more than just information and knowledge about an unreached people group, but a synthesis of all data needed to devise a workable strategy to actually evangelize each unreached people. Taking a people's historical and religious context, world view, value system, attitudinal realities and a host of other important facts into account, a workable strategy can be devised. These are invaluable tools that AAP can add to its repertoire of services. That is what the Book of Proverbs calls "understanding." Wisdom-

ware is not the devising of specific strategies, it is the effective compiling and organizing of all the data necessary to allow the end users to really build an effective strategy; in this case, to evangelize a people group. With this, the AAP concept can point us toward "wisdomware" as much as it does to "infoware", so that the overall mission can be accomplished effectively.

*3. Can the centralizing nature of information collection somehow be exchanged for the decentralized reproduction of people group projects?* All the futurist pundits tell us that information is power. Power tends to centralize in people and places.

Missions Advanced Research Center (MARC) stored vast amounts of information in their Peoples Files database. Books were published, essays written. It drew great attention to people group thinking. The work had a positive impact and broadened the missiological thinking of many.

In the October, 1992 Adopt-A-People Consultation for Latin America, (cited above), there was an agenda on the part of some to establish national research centers for each Latin American country. The idea was to have a center in each country to both collect and disseminate data on unreached peoples. But in discussing the data which is available to be shared, it became plain that most of it is 3-20 years old and needs to be updated. Being practical as they are, the Latin leaders concluded that the most they should try to do is establish two or three regional centers for Spanish-speaking countries and one for Brazil. They felt it was not cost effective nor strategically important to establish national research centers in each country only to distribute data which is old and in need of revision. They felt it wiser to put their efforts into discovering the most current information about groups they actually intend to reach in the immediate future.

**Adopt or Reach-A-People?**

Contextualizing the AAP movement within a Latin American context, an area with limited technological resources, has developed a healthy pragmatism when it comes to the relative value of AAP data. They have tremendous pressures upon them to recruit, train and send missionaries. They understand the importance of research, but they feel they can afford to seriously research only the people groups they actually intend to reach! They might welcome help to do that more than they would welcome partnership to establish a research center. In the minds of most missionary practitioners, the latter is understandably not at the top of their priority list. From a Third-World perspective, we should seriously consider changing the name of Adopt-A-People to Reach-A-People. That name would more adequately reflect the challenge before the AAP. It also rids the overtone of paternalism inherent in the name. Either within itself, or by partnering with others, AAP must move closer toward strategies which actually reproduce people group projects. The movement should start with the "Z" of people reaching and work backwards. *It must progress from being a movement of " techies" with vision to being a movement of visionaries with technology.* If it is to capture the imagination of mainstream Non-Western missions it will need to deliver a "wisdomware" based product which can be employed in the present tense.

In its present form, the AAP model may actually be limited in many foreign settings and thus be unable to contribute to reaching people groups like the Bektashi. It is not likely anyone will readily admit they are an unreached people until someone is sent to reach them. Fortunately, there are missionaries from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras intent on doing just that. Unless the AAP can contribute tools needed by such missionaries, it will likely remain a low priority in the minds of most Non-Western mission leaders, thereby missing the potential impact this movement can have around the world.

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