Analyzing the Frontier Mission Movement and Unreached People Group Thinking
Part I: The Frontier Mission Movement's Understanding of the Modern Mission Era
by Alan Johnson

Alan has worked in Thailand as an Assemblies of God missionary to Thailand since 1986. He currently serves as the program director for the Institute of Buddhist Studies and is a member of the committee on two-thirds World Mission focusing on the non-western Assemblies of God mission movement and its role in bringing the Gospel to least reached people groups. He and his wife, Lynette, have two daughters. Alan is serving as the Missionary in Residence at Northwest College for the 2001–2002 academic year. They will return to Thailand in the fall of 2002.

believe that the ethos of the frontier mission movement and unreached people group thinking can be found in its understanding of the events of the modern missionary era. A close examination of this understanding will reveal both the similarities and differences that are shared with standard evangelical missiology.

In evaluating a mission philosophy it is critical to understand its historical roots. The frontier mission movement grew out of a specific understanding of mission that spurred the development of what we now call the modern mission era. David Bosch, in his book *Transforming Mission*, points out that from the very beginning there have been differing theologies of mission and that "there are no immutable and objectively correct 'laws of mission' to which exegesis of Scripture give us access and which provide us with blueprints we can apply in every situation."[1] Bosch divides the history of Christian mission into six major paradigms. He notes:

> In each of these eras, Christians, from within their own contexts, wrestled with the question of what the Christian faith, and by implication, the Christian mission meant for them. Needless to say, all of them believed and argued that their understanding of the faith and the church's mission was faithful to God's intent. This did not however, mean that they all thought alike and came to the same conclusions.[2]

Developing a philosophy of mission is a dynamic and interactive process between an understanding of Scripture and also a particular viewpoint on the missiological state of the world. I believe that this interactive process becomes very clear when we look at the frontier mission movement's understanding of mission history, and it helps to provide keys for understanding the major concepts that power the movement.

Evangelical Roots

Johannes Verkuyl points out that in the modern historical period of mission there have been six major definitions of mission which have governed missionary practice.[3] Four of these would be identified with those that are commonly found among mission efforts of evangelical background. These include the goals of converting the lost, planting churches, and developing indigenous church movements that support, propagate and govern themselves. The frontier mission movement, with its emphasis on planting a church movement among every people, group sits squarely within this basic evangelical framework. Thus they share

the same understanding, motivation and goals of mission that the evangelical standard missions both denominational and interdenominational hold.

A New Lens on Mission History for a New Missiology

Although the frontier mission movement sits within the broader framework of evangelical missiology, yet, as a mission philosophy, it has some distinct elements that make it capable of being defined as a separate movement underneath the broader evangelical umbrella.[4] One of these defining elements is the specificity in which the movement defines the terms "mission" and "missionary." The frontier mission movement advocates that Christian World Mission is the redemptive activities of the church in societies where the church is not found.[5] Thus a missionary is one who crosses out of a society that has an existing church movement over cultural boundaries to bring the gospel to a society that does not have the church. They maintain a sharp distinction between *evangelism*, which is the work of the church among its own people in the same cultural group, and *mission*, which means crossing a cultural boundary to bring an initial penetration of the gospel among a cultural group. These cultural boundaries that must be crossed in order to bring the gospel to a new group become the new "frontiers" of mission, which is where the name of this movement is taken from.

The historical viewpoint that drives this definition can be found in Ralph Winter's analysis of modern mission history in terms of four men and three eras.[6] In these three overlapping eras Winter sees fresh initiatives to fulfill the Great Commission generated from the faith and vision of four key men. During this period of time that covers the late 1700s till present we see that although the task of preaching the gospel remains

the same, the dimensions of that task in terms of what remains to be done changes. A recognition of these changing dimensions in dynamic interaction with the biblical data on mission lies at the foundation of the definition of mission and missionary that powers the frontier mission movement.

The first era

The first era extends from the late 1700s till about 1865 and was initiated by the work of William Carey. Although his ideas were unpopular at first, his book *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* led some of his friends to form a small mission agency. Although Carey was not the first Protestant missionary, "his little book, in combination with the Evangelical Awakening, quickened vision and changed lives on both sides of the Atlantic."[7] Within a few short years numerous agencies had sprung up both in Europe and America and there was an outpouring of dedicated people who literally were sacrificing their lives to move into new lands with the gospel. This initial movement focused on the coastlands of Africa and Asia, and by 1865 footholds were established throughout these regions.[8]

The second era

The second era was initiated by Hudson Taylor, and covers from about 1865 to the present. Taylor stirred up controversy in his day by suggesting that the inland peoples of China needed to be reached with the gospel. The question was asked as to why more agencies were needed when there were already many in existence, and why one should go to the interior when the jobs on the coastlands were not yet finished.[9] Taylor himself formed the China Inland Mission and from his influence over forty new agencies sprang forth dedicated to reaching new peoples in the

interiors of Africa and Asia.[10] Winter notes that the result of this movement, which continues to this day, is that "by 1967, over 90 percent of all missionaries from North America were working with strong national churches that had been in existence for some time."[11]

The third era

While the first era reached the coastlands, and the second began thrusts to the inland territories, the third era moves away from geography to an emphasis on socio-cultural and ethno-linguistic groups. The roots of this era extends back to the 1930s in the work of Cameron Townsend in Central America and Donald McGavran in India. Both of these men went to the field as second era missionaries, part of the Student Volunteer movement. Like Carey and Taylor (who saw respectively the need of initial penetration and penetration of the inland areas) these men encountered barriers that helped them to see new unreached frontiers for mission.

Cameron Townsend in his work among indigenous Indian populations in Guatemala learned from earlier missionaries that people needed to be reached in their own language. His recognition of linguistic barriers led him to found Wycliffe Bible Translators, dedicated to translating God's Word into every existing language on earth. McGavran, laboring in the diversity of India's social groups, discovered the concept of homogeneous units of people that need to be penetrated with the gospel message. Winter summarizes this viewpoint:

> Once such a group is penetrated, diligently taking advantage of that missiological breakthrough along group lines, the strategic "bridge of God" to that people is established. The corollary of this truth is that fact that until such a breakthrough is made, normal evangelism and church planting cannot take place.[12]

McGavran then became the father of both the church growth movement and the frontier mission movement, "the one devoted to expanding within already penetrated groups, and the other devoted to deliberate approaches to the remaining unreached people groups."[13]

Hesselgrave credits the work of McGavran, anthropologist Alan

McGavran then became the father of both the church growth movement and the frontier mission movement …

Tippett, and systems analyst Ed Dayton with the creative analysis of the homogeneous unit principle to arrive at the conclusion that a better way of thinking about world evangelization was in terms of "people groups" rather than nations, continents or individuals.[14] Once this viewpoint is accepted then the very specific definition of missionary follows. In his 1974 Lausanne address McGavran attributes the specific definition of missionary he uses to Professor Jack Shepherd:

> A Christian of any culture or nation who is sent, across cultural and linguistic frontiers [where there is no church], to win men to Christ and incorporate them in Christian churches.[15]

Critical Issues Based on the Definition of Mission

Because this historical perspective and the definitions that grow out of it are so foundational to the thinking of the frontier missions movement, several observations need to be made at this point.

A major assumption: Missiological reality changes over time

I believe that an underlying critical assumption that is not dealt with explicitly in the writings of the frontier mission movement is that missiological reality changes over time. By missiological reality, I mean one's view of the world through the lens of mission in terms of the level of completion of the Great Commission. Traditional evangelical missiology operates on the assumption that wherever people do not know Christ personally they are eternally lost and therefore, no matter where they are, they are the object of mission. Since there are always lost people in every generation this means that for the most part missiological reality changes very little. The world may well have more and more Christians, but for practical purposes in terms of the Great Commission the task remaining is still huge.

The frontier mission movement, on the other hand, bases its strategy on the changing nature of missiological reality. As people groups are penetrated and "reached" by the gospel there is no longer the same pressing need for the cross-cultural missionary, the work of near neighbor evangelism can be carried out by those of that culture. The unique and critical missionary task is to cross cultural boundaries into a new group so that an initial breakthrough of the gospel can occur there.

This means that as the nature of the task changes over time there is a need for new paradigms of mission to respond to those changes. The narrow definition of mission and missionary employed by the frontier mission movement grows specifically from the fact that as the Christian church expanded in each era it became necessary to more precisely focus definitions of missionary labor based on the remaining task. The overview of mission history above shows that in each era there were fresh initiatives to proclaim the gospel that were based on the perception of the task left to be completed. After beachheads were established in the coastlands in the first era, the cry went forth to reach the inland areas. When the inland areas had beachheads established, there was a recognition that the remaining task needed to be conceived of in terms of language and ethnic groups, and fresh new initiatives for mission have arisen, through the frontier mission movement, to meet that need.

Changing missiological reality demands a change in the missionary role

The fact that these eras overlap and understanding the nature of this overlap shows that the missionary role in a culture is a dynamic rather than static one. Drawing upon the work of Henry Venn and using the terminology of Harold Fuller of Sudan Interior Mission and Geoffrey Dearsley of S.U.M. Fellowship, Winter identifies four distinct stages of mission which happen when a new group is penetrated with the gospel.[16] These stages are as follows:

- A Pioneer stage—where the gospel first is brought to a group with no existing Christians or church movement.
- A Paternal stage—where expatriates train national leaders as a church movement is emerging.
- A Partnership stage—here the missionary and the national leaders work as equals.
- A Participation stage—in this level expatriate missionaries are no longer equals, but work only at the invitation of the national church.

What happens in the transition periods of overlap is that while the work of mission has progressed to stages three and four in many places, it is recognized that pioneer work is still needed elsewhere. In Hudson Taylor's day it was the peoples of the vast inland territories. In this century through the work of Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran it was seen that the need for pioneer mission no longer could be accurately described in terms of nation states and geo-political boundaries as in the past, but rather in terms of ethno-linguistic groups.

Strategically this means that the missionary role is a dynamic one, changing as the emerging national church movement devolopes. It also means that within a given culture or geo-political unit, all four stages could be in progress and necessary at the same time. Based on the changing missiological landscape, unreached people thinking emphasizes the strategic importance of the narrowest definition of the role of the missionary as the pioneer. In a world where literally thousands of people groups do not have strong existing church movements, the crucial mission priority is the crossing of cultural boundaries to engage in the pioneer church-planting task. This does not diminish or negate the importance of the kinds of training, development and special contribution roles that are vital to emerging or even developed national churches, since they can be expected to keep with the missionary task, but it does place the highest priority upon the pioneer penetration of those groups that are unreached.

Changing missiological reality brings the hope of closure

One of the distinctive elements of the frontier mission movement that is somewhat different from traditional evangelical missiology is the belief in our ability to complete the essential basis of the Great Commission in a measurable fashion. This is often expressed through the term *closure*. Evangelical missiology also believes in closure, but the optimistic belief in the possibility of actually finishing the task is diminished by the way in which they define the task in terms of reaching lost people everywhere. In contrast to this, when the task is conceived in terms of penetrating peoples it opens the door to a host of specific definitions that can measure in terms of those definitions the progress of the task. Thus

changing missiological reality, which now becomes measurable through the "reaching" of people groups, fuels the hope of closure, completing this aspect of the task of the Great Commission and fulfilling the condition of Matthew 24:14 so that the end of this age can come.

A major part of the second era missions thrust came out of the Student Volunteer Movement that started in 1888. Their watchword was "The Evangelization of the World in This Generation." Timothy Wallstrom points out that by this phrase they meant neither the Christianization nor conversion of the world, but rather the presenting of the gospel to every person so that responsibility for their response lay with them and not the Church or an individual Christian.[17] The goal was not met at that time, but now in the third era, with more specific definitions and strategy in hand there is a deep conviction that this indeed may be the final era of missions.[18]

The Biblical Basis for Unreached People Group Thinking

I have suggested in the section above that the specific definitions that drive the unreached people group philosophy are rooted in a particular assumption about missiological reality that is based in their understanding of mission in the modern era. However, there is another critical influence that works in conjunction with missiological reality that I call biblical reality. Scripture has always been the driving force behind mission. But as Bosch has pointed out, Christian mission over the centuries has found its primary motivation in different places in the Scriptures.[19]

In the paradigm of the modern era it has been the Great Commission of Jesus that has been at the heart of missionary enterprise, and this remains so in the frontier mission movement, which has its roots in evangelical missiology of this period.[20] However, I want to suggest that there has been a dynamic interplay between missiological reality and biblical reality so that each has in turn refined the understanding of the other. The call to worldwide mission embodied in the Great Commission thrust forth the missionaries of the first two eras. However,

as second era missionaries Townsend and McGavran encountered barriers to the progress of the gospel and as they worked on solutions to those barriers, they helped to create a lens that defines a new missiological reality and launched a fresh era of missionary initiative. This new understanding led in turn to a fresh examination of the Scripture to understand the Great Commission in these new dimensions. This inevitably led to a more refined view of missiological reality that has resulted in the full flower of unreached people group thinking today.

Biblical arguments for People Group Thinking

John Piper asks the question, "Is the emphasis that has dominated mission discussion since 1974 a biblical teaching, or is it simply a strategic development that gives mission a sharper focus?"[21] Specifically he wants to see if the missionary mandate is to reach as many individuals as possible, all the "fields" of the world or people groups as the Bible defines them.[22] The crux of the matter concerns the interpretation of the terms *mishpahot* (families, peoples) in Genesis 12:3 and *panta ta ethne* (all the nations) in Matthew 28:19. Richard Showalter, after an extensive review of the Hebrew terms *mishpahot* (clans) and *goyim* (peoples) concludes that as used in the Genesis commission they are:

> particular, yet inclusive, references to humanity in all its subdivisions. We find this underscored in the both the meanings and usage of the words. In general, the *goyim* are larger subdivisions and the *mishpahot* are smaller. A free, but not misleading, sociological translation might be (cultures) (*goyim*, *mishpahot*) and (subcultures) (*mishpahot*).[23]

In commenting on the meaning of *mishpahot* Stanley Horton points out that the

word has a "much broader meaning than the word 'family' does in English today. In Numbers 26, it is used of divisions of tribes, what might be better called clans."[24] In his analysis of *goy* he concludes that it can be used of political, ethnic or territorial groups of people.[25]

In his work on the term *ethne* in Matthew 28:19, usually translated as "nations," John Piper is concerned to show that the term is not limited to just geographic or political groupings. He points out that even in English the term nation can refer to a people with a unifying ethnic identity as when we speak of the Cherokee nation or the Sioux nation.[26]

Piper shows that the singular *ethnos* in the New Testament never refers to an individual but rather to a people group or nation, while the plural *ethne* can refer to Gentile individuals (Acts 13:48; 1 Corinthians 12:2) it can also be used of people groups (Acts 13:19; Romans 4:17–18). He concludes "this means that we cannot be certain which meaning is intended in Matthew 28:19."[27] However, Piper amasses a weight of biblical evidence to support his view that the term as used in Matthew 28:19 does indeed support the view that people groups are in mind. He bases this conclusion on the following arguments:[28]

1. The 18 references to *panta ta ethne* (all the nations) in the New Testament favor a people groups view.
2. The term appears 100 times in the Septuagint, all of which refer to people groups outside of Israel.
3. The blessing of Genesis 12:3, reiterated in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14, as translated by the Septuagint uses the term *phulai* (tribes) while *mishpahot* itself can be used to refer to grouping even smaller than a tribe.
4. The New Testament references to the Genesis promise in Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:6–8 support an ethnic groups viewpoint.
5. There is an abundance of Old Testament texts which he puts in the categories of exhortations, prayers, promises and plans which demonstrate "that the blessing of forgiveness and salvation that God had granted to Israel was meant also to reach all the people groups of the world. Israel was blessed in order to be a blessing among the nations."[29]

6. Paul's conception of the mission-ary task, particularly as is seen in Romans 15:18–21 shows that he was not concerned just to "win more individual people to Christ (which he could have done very efficiently in these familiar regions), but the reaching of more and more peoples or nations."[30]
7. John's vision of the missionary task as seen in Revelation 5:9–10 with his use of peoples, tongues, tribes and nations is supportive of a people group viewpoint.

Piper concludes on the basis of this broader contextual witness that it would "go entirely against the flow of the evidence to interpret the phrase *panta ta ethne* as 'all Gentile individuals' (or 'all countries'). Rather the focus of the command is the discipling of all the people groups of the world."[31]

However, there are dissenting voices to the exegetical views that have been presented here. In his article, Showalter points out that Hesselgrave argues that although his understanding of the Great Commission allows for the methodology of approaching peoples as peoples rather than as individuals, it is not required by it.[32] Frank Severn, though accepting the vision of Revelation 5 and 7 which shows the gospel will reach all the divisions of mankind, cites Kittle to show that *ethne* is used non-sociologically and refers generally to individuals who do not belong to the chosen people.[33] He also points out that most commentators do not read ethnicity into *panta ta ethne*, and cites Bosch to show that Paul's methodology as depicted in Romans 15:20 is illustrative of regional and not ethnic thinking.[34]

Evidence of the Need for a New Mission Paradigm

It is apparent that there are two conflicting views of how to understand these key words in the commission passages of Genesis 12:3 and Matthew 28:19. What I want to suggest here is that both sides of this issue are actually very close to each other, having at their heart the best interests of those who have never heard and who have not believed. Where they differ is in emphasis and in how the biblical data is implemented into actual mission strategy.

The frontier mission movement with its emphasis on unreached people wants to redress the imbalance that has occurred

in the mission world and trumpet the need for reaching into every group, clan, culture, subculture to plant a beachhead of gospel witness. But they admit that this frontier mission work is not the only work and use the biblical example of Paul leaving Timothy, as a foreigner, in Ephesus, to continue a work that he began.[35]

Those who feel uncomfortable with the emphasis on peoples are not rejecting the need to reach all the peoples of the earth (as Severn notes in his understanding of Revelation 5:9 and 7:9). Rather, they harbor a deep concern for "passing over multitudes of 'Gentiles/people' who live in neighborhoods, cities, regions, and nations where the church does not yet exist or where there are so few believers the gospel has yet to be fully preached there."[36] Severn also cites the same text concerning Timothy to show that Paul's missionary team was involved not only in pioneering stages but in the strengthening stage of church planting as well.[37]

Although I personally feel that the weight of the linguistic and contextual evidence favors a people group focus in Scripture, I want to suggest here that the peoples/people debate is virtually a moot point. First, the polarization that appears in the literature is actually only apparent and not real. It has created the impression of conflicting agendas when in reality the agendas of both "peoples" and "people" thinkers are identical. Everyone wants to see people come to know Christ personally and to reach the whole world. Second, as Hesselgrave points out:

> …almost all agree that whether the Great Commission requires it or not, the best way to plan for world evangelization is to divide its population up into some kind of identifiable and homogeneous groupings for which sound strategy can be devised and implemented.[38]

What this is indicative of is the need to develop a framework for viewing the task that can incorporate the concerns, emphases and strategies of both sides.

The Pre-Lausanne Roots of People Group Thinking

The frontier mission movement and unreached people group thinking did not just spring up from a vacuum in

Ralph Winter's 1974 presentation on cross-cultural evangelism. There was a building momentum in the mission world to focus on peoples rather than just geographic regions or geo-political boundaries. Schreck and Barrett have developed a historical outline they call God's global plan of redemption that traces key events from biblical times through to 1986.[39] The details that follow are taken from this outline and the work of Patrick Johnstone[40] and highlight in the modern mission era the gradual momentum that came to clarify the task remaining in terms of people groups.

In his *Enquiry,* William Carey presented the first global survey of Christian world mission. By the end of the next century, Johnstone notes that the great drive toward the completion of world evangelization was a motivating factor to get data as accurate as possible for measuring the task remaining. The 1880s saw the production of a survey of every province of China, and in 1887 Broomhall brought out a book entitled *The Evangelization of the World*.

By the time of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 there was a call to reach peoples and non-Christian peoples in a document entitled "Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World." Influenced by this document, C. T. Studd founded World Evangelization Crusade in 1913 to focus on "the remaining unevangelized peoples on earth." Beginning in 1916 the World Dominion Movement in Britain began to publish detailed surveys of missions by countries and peoples. The late 1920s saw the directors of missions in China and Africa focusing on unreached peoples and unevangelized tribes, while in 1931 the Unevangelized Fields Mission (UFM) was founded.

L. G. Brierly of WEC began his career as a Protestant missionary researcher in 1936 doing surveys on "remaining unevangelized peoples" known as RUP's. The publication of *The Bridges of God* by McGavran in 1955 brought a whole new set of terminology regarding people movements to the fore. By the mid 1960s survey research in Africa was listing various tribes at different stages of being reached and

Mission Advanced Research and Communication (MARC) was founded to provide technical support to the church to build momentum for world evangelization and the modern idea of people groups was born.

In 1968 truly global surveys began, both in Africa. "Two books became pivotal for numerous other global surveys linked with the Lausanne Movement, World Evangelical Fellowship, and numerous unreached peoples surveys by MARC/World Vision and others."[41] The first was the *World Christian Encyclopedia* by David Barrett started in Nairobi as a successor to the World Christian Handbook Series, and published in 1982. The second was *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone, first published in 1972 as an effort to compile complete denominational and religious population breakdowns for each country and whole world for the purpose of motivating prayer. The year 1972 also witnessed a consultation on the Gospel for Frontier Peoples held in Chicago and the publication of a survey on the status of 213 Muslim peoples, 411 groups open to Christianity, and 236 unevangelized peoples in Africa (Pentecost, Edward C. *Reaching the Unreached*. South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1974, a thesis done under Winter at Fuller).

By the time of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974 Hesselgrave notes that the conveners of the congress had made an important distinction among concepts. They chose to separate the terms unreached people and unevangelized people rather than having them be synonymous.[42] In preparation for the Congress, MARC had prepared an *Unreached Peoples Directory* consisting of 424 unreached people groups to which Winter wrote the introduction.[43]

It is clear that long before the 1974 Lausanne Congress that there was a growing interest in quantifying the remaining task of the Great Commission. From the charts and maps of Carey, to the cry of the Student Volunteer Movement, down to the work of McGavran and Townsend, there was continual sense of need for a fine-tuning of the picture of the remaining task.

As the gospel penetrated deeper and deeper into the various countries, national boundaries and divisions of humanity, there was a rather natural progression to begin to see the task in terms of peoples rather than geo-political nations. This initial research revealed that even as more and more countries of the world had existing Christian movements, there were still many groups within the boundaries of those countries lacking a vital Christian witness. The stage was being set for the articulation of a new paradigm for viewing the missionary task. The articulation of that new paradigm happened at Lausanne through the presentation of Ralph Winter's paper on cross-cultural evangelism, who was chosen because of his previous involvement in previous conferences and research.

Lausanne 1974 and Ralph Winter's Presentation
Background to Lausanne

Although the brief history above shows some of the antecedents of the unreached people group movement, the importance of Ralph Winter's paper presented at the International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 as a catalyst to the formation of a broader movement cannot be understated. This congress grew out of the vision of a number of leaders who met in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1960 to discuss and pray about the task of world evangelization.[44] The first outgrowth of that small gathering was the Berlin Congress on Evangelization in 1966 where Dr. Carl Henry served as the chairman. Between Berlin and Lausanne there was a building momentum towards a larger world level meeting through a number of regional congresses and Billy Graham noted that in the eight year period between Berlin and Lausanne that nearly all the major countries of the world had held congresses on evangelism.[45]

In preparing for the Lausanne Congress it was intended from the beginning that the meeting itself not be a single event but rather a continuing process.[46] Those who attended were considered participants rather than delegates as it was not to be a legislative body, but rather a convening of evangelical leaders and practitioners from around the world to, in the words of Billy Graham, "seek how we can work together to fulfill Christ's last

commission as quickly and thoroughly as possible."[47] It was also intended that one of the results of the Congress would be a statement, known as the Lausanne Covenant, that would be produced and serve as a theological rallying point for the ongoing movement.

Ralph Winter's Paper

Winter's paper entitled "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism" became both a culmination and starting point in terms of missionary thinking. This presentation marked the end of an era of missions and the beginning of another that focused on peoples rather than countries. He begins his introduction by pointing out a misunderstanding that he saw rising in the thinking of many evangelicals. It was based on the incredible success of the Christian mission so that it was possible at that time to say that the Great Commission had been fulfilled at least in a geographical sense. In the light of this success many had come to believe that the job was nearly completed and the task could be turned over to national churches that engaged in local evangelism.[48] Winter said:

> Many Christian organizations, ranging widely from the World Council of Churches to many U.S. denominations, even some evangelical groups, have rushed to the conclusion that we may now abandon traditional missionary strategy and count on local Christians everywhere to finish the job.[49]

Winter conceded at this point that it is true that most conversions are going to come from near neighbor evangelism, but there is an additional truth "that most non-Christians in the world today are not culturally near neighbors of any Christians, and that it will take a special kind of 'cross-cultural' evangelism to reach them."[50] This then is the critical thesis of what has become the frontier mission movement and is at the heart of unreached people group thinking.

The need based in missiological reality

Winter used three major points to show the truth and urgency of his thesis. His first point focuses on the need for cross-cultural evangelism and takes the perspective of what I have called above "missiological reality." He begins with four illustrations (from Pakistan, the Church of South India, the Bataks of north Sumatra and the Nagas of east India) which show how existing

Christian movements can be effective in reaching their own people and at the same time cut off from other populations that are geographically nearby due to religion, caste, language and other cultural barriers.

This leads him to develop a continuum of evangelism that is the single most important concept that underlies his thesis. Again, using illustrations from contemporary experience he shows how it is crucial to understand evangelism in terms of the cultural distance of the evangelist from the hearer. Rather than seeing all evangelism as equal, he devises a scale from E-1 to E-3 (E here is for evangelism) with the following definitions: E-1 is evangelism done among one's own cultural group, which is also called "near neighbor" evangelism. E-2 occurs when evangelism crosses a boundary of what he calls "significant (but not monumental) differences of language and culture."[51] Finally, E-3 is evangelism at even farther cultural distance from the hearer. "The people needing to be reached in this third sphere live, work, talk, and think in languages and cultural patterns utterly different from those native to the evangelist."[52] The examples that he presents in this section are all based in language differences, but he notes that "for the

purpose of defining evangelistic strategy, any kind of obstacle, any kind of communication barrier affecting evangelism is significant."[53]

The need based in biblical reality

In his second point Winter develops what I have called above the theme of "biblical reality." He draws upon Acts 1:8 to show that the mandate there contains not only the call to cross-geographical boundaries but cultural ones as well. He then applies his E-1 to E-3 evangelistic continuum to the work of Peter and Paul in reaching Gentiles. We see from the account in Acts 10, where the Lord had to help Peter overcome his cultural prejudice against Gentiles in order to go to the home of Cornelius, that reaching out to Gentiles was an E-3 task for him. For Paul, on the other hand, as a Jew with a familiarity with the Greek world, reaching Gentiles was an E-2 task to Paul. Winter's conclusion to both of these major points is the same and is worth quoting in it entirety:

> The master pattern of the expansion of the Christian movement is first for special E-2 and E-3 efforts to cross cultural barriers into new communities and to establish strong, on-going, vigorously evangelizing denominations, and then for that national church to carry the work forward on the really

high-powered E-1 level. We are thus forced to believe that until every tribe and tongue has a strong, powerfully evangelizing church in it, and thus an E-1 witness with it, E-2 and E-3 efforts coming from the outside are still essential and highly urgent.[54]

The remaining task

His third point deals with the scope of the task remaining in terms of the need for E-2 and E-3 efforts. Winter develops the concept of "people blindness," meaning the blindness to seeing separate peoples within the border of countries. He points out that the task remaining is immense in two dimensions. The first is in sheer size, his data and the preliminary data produced for Lausanne revealed that about four/fifths of the non-Christian world were beyond the reach of Christian's E-1 evangelism. Secondly, it is immense in the sense of the complexity of the task of E-2 and E-3 evangelism across cultural boundaries. He makes the point that one of the primary obstacles to E-2 and E-3 work comes in the area of follow up. In evangelistic efforts around the world people of other cultures are frequently won but there is no understanding of the need to gather these people into their own churches which would create "infusions of new life into whole new pockets of society where the church does not now exist at all."[55] **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1]David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books), 8.

[2]Ibid., 182.

[3]Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 180ff.

[4]In this article I am making a distinction between different kinds of missiology. In this sense I am using missiology as a kind of lens for viewing mission. Thus there is not a single correct lens but rather a series of lenses (or one could say frameworks or paradigms as well) among which there would be significant overlap. The comparison I am making in this article is between what I am calling standard evangelical missiology (summarized by Verkuyl) and frontier mission missiology. The two are not mutually exclusive yet the latter has its own unique perspective within the broader umbrella of the evangelical viewpoint. I believe there is also a lens of Pentecostal missiology, again within the broader framework of evangelical missiology, but which has its own unique perspectives and insights. However, within the limited scope of this article I have included the Pentecostal paradigm within the evangelical viewpoint. For a more detailed development of the theme of a Pentecostal missiology see John York's *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* pp. 148-158, and Everett Wilson's *Strategy of the Spirit* pp. 3-5, 7, 56-69.

[5]Ralph Winter, "The Meaning of 'Mission,'" *Mission Frontiers Bulletin* (March-April 1998): 15.

[6]Ralph Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras," *Mission Frontiers Bulletin* (November-December 1997): 18-23.

[7]Ibid., 19.

[8]Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 21.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., 22.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]David Hesselgrave, *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Missions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books, 1988), 51.

[15]Donald McGavran, "The Dimensions of World Evangelization," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1975), 105. In his paper McGavran did not provide any citation for his definition from Jack Shepherd.

[16]Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras," 20; Ralph Winter, "Frontier Mission Perspectives," in *Seeds of Promise: World Consultation on Frontier Missions, Edinburgh '80*, ed. Allan Starling (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1981), 59; and Ralph Winter, "The Long Look: Eras of Mission History," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1981), 170.

[17]Timothy Wallstrom, *The Creation of Student Movement to Evangelize the World* (Pasadena, California: William Carey International University Press, 1980), 19.

[18]Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras," 23.

[19]Bosch, 182, 339. Bosch says, "I have indicated that in every period since the early church there was a tendency to take one specific biblical verse as *the* missionary text. Such a text was not necessarily quoted frequently. Still, even where it was hardly referred to, it somehow embodied the missionary paradigm of that period" (339).

[20]Bosch notes that in the missionary paradigm of the Enlightenment era it is more difficult to identify a single biblical motif since the period is marked by such a great diversity. He suggests that the most prominent would be Paul's Macedonian vision (Acts 16:9), Matthew 24:14, John 10:10 for those in the Social Gospel stream, and the most widely used of all in the period, the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 (339-340).

[21]John Piper, "The Supremacy of God among 'All the Nations,' " *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13:1 (January-March 1996): 16.

[22]Ibid., 16.

[23]R. Showalter, "All the Clans, All the Peoples," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13:1 (January-March 1996): 12.

[24]Stanley Horton, "Blessing for All," *Enrichment* (Summer 1999): 93.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Piper, 17.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., 18-22.

[29]Ibid., 20.

[30]Ibid., 21.

[31]Ibid., 22.

[32]Showalter, 12.

[33]Frank Severn, "Some Thoughts on the Meaning of 'All the Nations,' " *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (October 1997): 415.

[34]Ibid., 414.

[35]Piper, 22.

[36]Severn, 416.

[37]Ibid., 414.

[38]Hesselgrave, 52.

[39]Harley Schreck and David Barrett , eds., *Unreached Peoples: Clarifying the Task*, (Monrovia, California: MARC, 1987), 44-56.

[40]Patrick Johnstone, *The Church is Bigger Than You Think*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1998), 89-93.

[41]Ibid., 92.

[42]Hesselgrave, 52-53.

[43]Ibid. 53.

[44]Billy Graham, "Let the Earth Hear His Voice," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), 16.

[45]Ibid.

[46]A. J. Dain, "International Congress on World Evangelization," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland,* ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1975), 11.

[47]Billy Graham, "Why Lausanne?," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1975), 22.

[48]Ralph Winter, "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1975): 213.
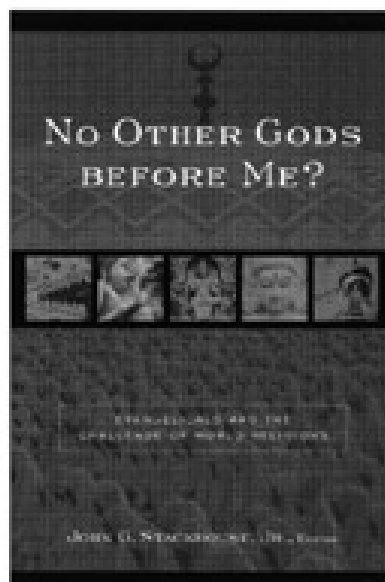
[49]Ibid.
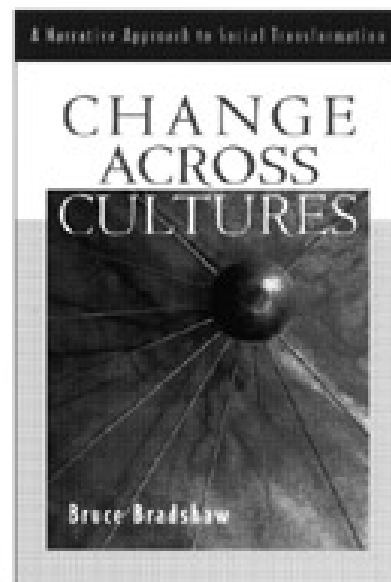
[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid., 218.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid., 215.

[54]Ibid., 220.

[55]Ibid., 223.