

A Pentecostal Approach to Ministry Among Unreached Peoples: Finishing the Mission

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# A Pentecostal Approach to Ministry Among Unreached Peoples: Finishing the Mission

## INTRODUCTION

The last twenty five years of this century have witnessed the rise of two major movements which have changed the face of world mission, both of which have a direct influence on the completion of the Great Commission. The first, calling itself the frontier mission movement, has to do with a whole new way of thinking about missions that focuses on the concept of people groups and the need for establishing a viable church among every people. The second is the explosion of the missionary sending movement in the churches outside the borders of the western world.

This paper examines how key concepts of frontier mission missiology can assist our world wide Assemblies of God mission movement. Particular focus will be given to how the emerging 2/3 world missions movement can be used of God to meet the spiritual need of the least reached people groups of our world. I will suggest that the need of the unreached world that has been documented by the frontier mission movement should be a major focus of the 2/3 world missions.

The paper will begin with a brief examination of the major concepts of the frontier mission movement and then assess its core contributions to missiology. The final section will explore some implications of frontier mission missiology for our Pentecostal practice of mission. The goal is to develop a Pentecostal approach to reaching unreached people groups that engages our world wide mission resources.

## ANALYSIS OF THE FRONTIER MISSION MOVEMENT AND UNREACHED PEOPLE

### GROUP THINKING

The frontier mission movement represents a diverse group of organizations and key

authoritatively on its behalf. The major concepts that form the shared thinking of those involved act as a mission philosophy or paradigm that provide a perspective for understanding the missionary task. This section seeks to provide a conceptual understanding of the thinking and major concepts of the frontier mission movement.

### Lausanne 1974 and Ralph Winter's Presentation

Although there were a number of historical antecedents concerned with reaching the unreached, 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. His 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 engaged in local evangelism.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> Winter conceded at this

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<sup>1</sup>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.

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.”<sup>3</sup> 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 call “missiological reality,” meaning a view of the status of the world in terms of the completion of the Great Commission. 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 religious, 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.”<sup>4</sup> Finally, E-3 is evangelism at even farther cultural

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup>

#### 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 geographic 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 its 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.<sup>7</sup>

#### 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 theme of “people blindness,” meaning the blindness to

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 215.

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 4/5ths 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 beyond 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 that would create "infusions of new life into whole new pockets of society where the church does not now exist at all."<sup>8</sup>

### Definitions and Concepts

This section provides a brief overview of the key definitions and concepts that make up frontier mission missiology and distinguish it from other evangelical views.

#### Defining frontier missions

The plea of Winter's 1974 Lausanne paper was for cross-cultural evangelism. This plea was based on the reality that although existing Christians and congregations do near neighbor evangelism well, there are cultural barriers both on the side of the evangelist and the non-Christian. These barriers mean that for all practical purposes those who are not culturally near neighbors of a church movement will be unable to gain an adequate hearing of the Gospel. Winter quotes Arthur Glasser's summary of the situation as this: "If every congregation in the world were to undergo a great revival and reach out to every person within

their own people—that is, to everyone in the cultural spheres represented by each congregation—over half of all remaining non-Christians would still not be reached.”<sup>9</sup>

However, because of the fact that the terms “mission” and “missionary” were used in different ways that were firmly entrenched, Winter found it necessary in his advocating for cross-cultural evangelism to develop a new set of terms to help bring clarification to the issues. The key ideas can be found in his definition of frontier missions which “is the activity intended to accomplish the Pauline kind of missiological breakthrough to a Hidden People Group.”<sup>10</sup>

#### A distinction between frontier and regular missions

The frontier mission movement is distinguished by the fact that it adds the adjective “frontier” to missions to separate this activity from what it calls “regular” missions. It is important to understand that these terms were adopted in order to bring a sense of precision about the remaining task of the Great Commission and how to complete it. They reflect an understanding of missiological reality where the Church has reached virtually all geo-political nation states and where many countries of the world have thriving Christian movements. As was noted in the summary of Winter’s 1974 paper, unreached people group thinking specifically defines a missionary as one who crosses a cultural boundary to share the Gospel. What Winter strives to point out is that in the missiological reality of today, most “missionaries” in this narrow sense who are crossing real cultural boundaries do so in order to work among a culture where there is an already existing church movement of some sort. This

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<sup>9</sup>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), 48.

he terms “regular” missions,<sup>11</sup> which is involved in all kinds of good work assisting national church movements, doing works of compassion, training leaders and discipling new believers. The term “frontier” is then reserved for another kind of cross-cultural work, the kind where there is no existing church movement among a particular people. As seen in the definition above, the condition of frontier missions depends upon two things: the need for a missiological breakthrough among a people which is “hidden.” The idea of “hidden” here means that the group does not have a strong enough Christian movement resident that can do near neighbor evangelism and thus requires a cross-cultural missionary to come and share the Gospel.

#### Defining missiological breakthrough

Missiological breakthrough is the process “whereby a church in a new tradition is born within the indigenous culture (not borrowed and patched in from another country or cultural tradition)...Such a breakthrough classically was Paul’s concern, that is, to produce a truly Gentile synagogue.”<sup>12</sup> The goal of such a breakthrough is a viable church, which is a concept very important to the missiology and strategy of the frontier mission movement.

Winter notes that the viable church is:

...not just anything someone may call a church, and this emphasis then corresponds to the previous statement: at least that minimum yet sufficiently developed indigenous Christian tradition to be capable of evangelizing its own people without E2 or E3 help. A barely viable church must be understood as a minimal goal. Nothing here should imply that nay such church anywhere should be considered totally independent of the world family of Christian, nor that it cannot both minister through and profit from continued cross-cultural contacts and expatriate help. All it means is that the missiological breakthrough has been made. This would seem to require at least a cluster of indigenous evangelizing congregations and a significant part of the Bible translated by the people themselves.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 64-65.

It is important to understand at this point that these definitions are human constructs designed to help us create a tangible form of measurement for the completion of the Great Commission. Jesus said to make disciples among every ethne, so the concept of missiological breakthrough defines in a minimal sense what it would mean to bring the Gospel to a group of people that previously had no Christians at all. It is significant to note that the task here focuses not on simply telling people the Gospel, nor planting a single church, but rather it is to seek to develop a movement of churches that are capable of doing the work of near neighbor evangelism without outside help. It is not so much an issue of the size or percentage of believers as one of vitality of that Christian movement.

#### Defining hidden peoples

The second component of the definition of frontier missions has to do with a people group, particularly a group that Winter defines as “hidden.” At this point Winter introduces another continuum to help illustrate his point. This continuum parallels the one on evangelism with its E-0 to E-3 distinctions of cultural distance from the hearer, except that it looks at how far the individuals in a people group are culturally from a church movement. Thus P-0 to P-3 refers to individuals in people groups that are either very similar to that of the evangelist (P-0 meaning nominal and not born again, P-.5 meaning those on the fringe of the church but having a church within their people, P-1 referring to those who do not identify themselves as Christians but have an indigenous evangelizing church within their group) or who are increasingly dissimilar (P-2 and P-2.5) or who do not have any Christian movement close to them culturally (P-3).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 62-64. Winter employs the terms megasphere, macrosphere, minisphere and microsphere to help explain the idea of cultural distance of an individual from a Christian tradition. For the purposes of evangelism, “a megasphere is simply a group whose cultural

The critical missiological point that Winter strives to make here is that even though there are many missionaries crossing E-2 and E-3 boundaries, they are most often doing so to work among a people that is P-1, meaning that they have an evangelizing church within their own cultural group. He points out that when the E number is larger than the P number “there is an inherent waste of effort, even though for other purposes such activity may be justified.”<sup>15</sup> Thus “regular” missions takes place when cross-cultural missionaries work among a people that already can do near-neighbor evangelism. As a missionary, it is E-2 or E-3 work for them, but to the local people it is an E-1 situation. Winter is not denigrating such work, which has importance in leadership training and development of missionary activity from that group to other groups. Rather, he is pleading for the necessity of a proliferation of work by E-2 and E-3 missionaries among P-2 and P-3 groups, which is the special and complex work of missiological breakthrough and what he terms true “frontier” missions. These P-2 and P-3 groups are “hidden” because there is no church culturally close enough to reach out to them and they require a cross-cultural effort. These are precisely the type of groups and situations where existing churches manifest “people blindness,” being unable to see past their own cultural walls and prejudices in order to reach out to a group that is different than them.

#### Key Assumptions of the Frontier Mission Movement

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Macrospheres then are “evangelistically significant sub-communities” and when those sub-groups have significant divisions they are called minispheres. “A microsphere is, in the same way, a breakdown of a minisphere, but in this later case we shall agree that the microsphere differences are not sufficiently great enough to require a separate missiological breakthrough.” Thus P-0 to P-1 have a church in their minisphere, while P-2 has no church in its minisphere but is culturally near to another minisphere with a church within the same macrosphere. For those in P-2.5 the closest church is in another macrosphere, while those in P-3 the closest church is in another megasphere.

Frontier mission missiology is based in some assumptions that are not always made explicit in the literature but that are very important to understanding the ethos of the movement as a whole and its particular missions strategy. This section will examine three key assumptions that are at the heart of the movement.

### 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. As I noted above, 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 need for the cross-cultural missionary, since the work of near neighbor evangelism can be carried out by the people 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. Frontier mission thinking divides the modern missionary era beginning in the early 1790's into three eras. The first era, initiated by

marked by the work of Hudson Taylor, began a completely new thrust to reach the inland areas of the great continents. The second era continues to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and is overlapped by a third era which started in the 1930's with the work of Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran which focused on penetrating barriers of language and ethnicity to bring the Gospel to specific people groups

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.<sup>16</sup> These stages are as follows:

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<sup>16</sup>Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras," 20; Ralph Winter, "Frontier Mission

- 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, there is a recognition that pioneer work is still needed. 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 grows and develops. 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

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<sup>80</sup>, 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:

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, 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 than traditional evangelical missiology is the belief in our ability to complete the task 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 completion of the task. Thus changing missiological reality, which now becomes measurable through the “reaching” of people groups, fuels the hope of closure, completing the task of the Great Commission and fulfilling the condition of Matthew 24:14 so that the end of this age can come.

### THE CORE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FRONTIER MISSION MISSIOLOGY

It is quite natural that in a vibrant and emerging movement like that of frontier missions and unreached people group thinking that there should be conceptual and strategic problems. Some of the major areas of unresolved issues concern the problem of a minimalist conception of the Great Commission, strategic problems with the concepts of closure, difficulties with the reached/unreached distinction, the implication that frontier mission is the only valid form of mission, and the rise of amateurism in missions. With full recognition of

movement, there are a number of major contributions that it has made to missiology in general and that are valuable to us in our work as Pentecostal missionaries and mission agencies

### The Importance of Cross-Cultural Evangelism.

In my opinion the most important contribution to missiology from the frontier mission movement is found in the theme of Ralph Winter's 1974 paper at Lausanne: the importance of cross-cultural evangelism. Using both biblical and missiological reality Winter hammered home the point that in order to finish the Great Commission there must be the penetration of peoples which were not capable of being reached by near-neighbor E-1 evangelism. By its very definition, since there were either no Christians or not enough of a Christian movement in such cultures to carry out vibrant E-1 work, it necessitated a believer crossing out of their own culture to enter another and seek to root the Gospel there.

Winter made a further refinement of this concept by not only conceptualizing the cultural distance of the evangelist from the hearer with the E-0 to E-3 scale, but he also conceptualized the distance of that people from a culturally relevant church in the P-0 to P-3 scale. Peoples that are P-2 and P-3 are far from a church movement that is understandable or relevant to them and Winter called them Hidden Peoples. His challenge was a wake up call to evangelical missions to make a course correction to ensure that every people has a chance to hear and respond to the Gospel. This is an incredibly powerful concept that has forever changed the way that we view the missionary task. The call to cross-cultural evangelism becomes an evaluation criterion to help missionaries and agencies keep the focus or refocus on those who are least reached. This call also serves as a standing reminder to church movements and missions of our proclivity to focus on ourselves and “our” group and thus become blind to the spiritual need of those different from us.

## Addressing the Imbalance

One of the difficulties faced by the frontier mission movement has been the precise definition of terms and concepts such as “peoples,” “reached,” and “unreached.” However, we cannot let those uncertainties obscure the fact that there are major blocks of people in our world with little or no Gospel presence among them. Furthermore, among these least reached peoples there is a minority portion of the world missionary force present. The call to cross-cultural evangelism is a call to address this tragic imbalance that grieves the Spirit of harvest. E. Michael Jaffarian, who works with David Barrett and Todd Johnson at the World Evangelization Research Center, stated in 1996 that what they define as World A, those who are least evangelized and have little or no Christian presence, make up 32 percent of the world, and have only 1 percent of the missionary task force.<sup>17</sup> Certainly this deployment of resources is not pleasing to God.

## The Passion to Reach the Lost

The frontier mission movement provides a clarion call to all involved in mission that we must reach the lost. Those who have never heard must have the chance to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ. This also was the heartbeat of the early Pentecostal pioneers in mission. However, as the missiological landscape changed over the century, what were once pioneer fields have now become the home of powerful national churches. It is too easy for Pentecostal missionaries to become caught up in the maintenance of mechanisms designed to assist emerging church movements, rather than staying on cutting edge evangelism among the least reached. Jim Plueddemann points out that a major weakness of standard mission agencies is the tendency to lose vision and focus in the midst of being engaged in hundreds of

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<sup>17</sup>E. Michael Jaffarian, “Paul Tipped the Balance Toward the Frontiers,” Evangelical

strategic activities.<sup>18</sup> Those of us Pentecostals working in standard mission agencies should beware of the ease in which our own successes now threaten us with the possibility of having a large proportion of our staff doing primarily support work.

Unreached people group thinking reminds us that no matter where we are working, there is a people somewhere that is unreached and we are bound to labor in our context to see that God's global purpose to reach all the peoples is fulfilled. This passion provides a powerful reorientation to the work of every missionary no matter where they are located to make sure that the least reached both near and far are given the chance to hear the message.

#### The Strategic Role of Every Missionary

The reorientation that a passion to reach the lost provides means that every missionary has a critical role to play in reaching the frontiers, even if they themselves are not located in an unreached people group. One of the most overlooked and yet strategic contributions that frontier mission missiology makes is in assigning a vital role to every missionary. In my opinion it is a great misfortune that Ralph Winter's thinking on this very point has not been picked up and articulated with more vigor during the decade of the 1990's with its extreme emphasis on the 10/40 window. In his presentation to the Evangelical Mission Society in 1991 Winter is adamant that the most strategic thing in reaching the unreached is not mass redeployment of existing missionaries or mass diversion of new missionaries going out from the West.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the most strategic work is for the existing missionary force to gain a new perspective, that which comes from people group thinking, so that they are:

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<sup>18</sup>Ralph Winter and others, "Six Spheres of Missions Overseas," Mission Frontiers Bulletin (March-April 1998): 17.

<sup>19</sup>Winter, "Are 90% of our Missionaries Serving in the Wrong Places?," Mission

...making sure that prayed into and breathed into everything they do is a new vision for the so-called younger churches to get involved in their own mission sending. That means national churches sending out evangelists not only to their own people but training up pioneer missionaries with the special skills to go to truly frontier people groups.<sup>20</sup>

If we can set aside for a moment some of the rhetoric and promotion that has gone on with the good intent of addressing the imbalance of the world missionary force, the essence of frontier mission thinking for every missionary regardless of location becomes the power of a new perspective. This perspective, moving a national church movement towards participation in a frontier effort, makes whatever kind of work we are engaged in strategic.

### The Missionary Role of 2/3 World Churches

In his same address to the Evangelical Missiological Society Winter also makes the point that “the most exciting reality in missions today is the gradual discovery of the vast unrealized potential of our precious sister churches as the source of new missionaries to go further out.”<sup>21</sup> If existing western missionaries in these emerging and younger movements can play a strategic role in training pioneer missionaries, then it is the role of these churches to come full cycle and begin to send their own laborers to the unreached. Frontier mission thinking provides a framework for embracing and directing the work of the non-western missionary force by highlighting the urgency of cross-cultural evangelism among the unreached. In this way, while recognizing the sovereignty of the Spirit of harvest in calling laborers to various fields, whether among the so called reached or unreached, there is a natural and strategic connection for non-western laborers to start in new ground among those who have had the least access to the Gospel.

### Sharpening the Focus of Mission Agencies

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

Ralph Winter reminds us that the work of penetrating a new culture with the Gospel is a significantly more difficult task than near neighbor evangelism. There are special skills necessary for “picking the lock” to root the message in a pioneer mission situation. By defining classical mission in this very narrow sense and resolutely holding to this ideal, the frontier mission movement provides clear criteria that can help mission agencies sharpen their focus of ministry in the midst of competing demands. When everything is defined as mission, then nothing is mission. Frontier mission missiology reminds mission agencies of their unique skills and expertise in pioneer penetration of new groups to plant the church. At the same time, while not wanting to limit mission alone to only “spiritual” versus more wholistic concerns, frontier mission thinking challenges the agencies to allow the frontier perspective to permeate all of its activities as well as dedicating a portion of its new personnel towards true mission frontiers.

#### APPLICATIONS FROM FRONTIER MISSION MISSIOLOGY FOR PENTECOSTAL MISSIONS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

With an overview of the frontier mission movement and analysis of its major contributions in focus we can now turn to the task of developing a Pentecostal approach to reaching unreached peoples. I am making a distinction here between Pentecostal missiology in practice in a specific context, as when we are working to reach a particular people group, and missiology in the broader strategic sense that guides mission agencies in their planning. As Pentecostals we have often done a better job at the former than the latter. I want to suggest that the insights of the frontier mission movement can help us as Pentecostals to develop a strategic missiology. I believe that Pentecostal mission to the unreached in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be characterized by three things: the leadership of the Spirit in using the data about the

unreached, the dynamism of the new sending countries in reaching the unreached, and coordinated efforts to build national church planting movements.

### Pentecostal Mission to the Unreached Will Use Data Under the Guidance of the Spirit

John York in Missions in the Age of the Spirit points out that while Pentecostals have a great deal in common with other evangelicals in their thinking about mission, there is still a distinctive Pentecostal missions paradigm as well as missiology.<sup>22</sup> The hallmark of the Pentecostal missions paradigm is the belief that the Spirit “has been poured out upon the Church as an endowment of power to accomplish the discipling of the nations.”<sup>23</sup> The book of Acts shows repeatedly that the spread of the Gospel was directed by the Spirit. Thus Pentecostal mission is preeminently mission led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

By saying this we mean that the Spirit will guide not only the calling of missionaries but will also lead the missionary and agency as to where they should go. Our belief in the leadership of the Spirit means that we understand the sovereign Spirit can place any worker anywhere at any time in accordance with His will. From our human perspective, there is an element of mystery here, as the Harvest Master decides the times and places that He will move upon a given people or country and His servants must be ready to heed His call.

However, recognition of the sovereignty of the Spirit in guiding and directing mission does not imply that His servants always hear His voice with clarity or unerringly understand His will. The power of the frontier mission paradigm is the reminder that great blocks of people in our world do not have a church to practice near neighbor evangelism among them. In addition to this, the research this paradigm has driven over the past two decades has now produced a database with irrefutable evidence of peoples who do not have access to the

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<sup>22</sup>John York, Missions in the Age of the Spirit (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2000) 148-160

Gospel message. The reality is that Pentecostals have followed and at times lagged behind their evangelical colleagues in the push to bring the Gospel to least reached peoples.

This disparity between our profession and practice is problematic. It simply cannot be that the Spirit of Harvest is neglecting to call workers into the least reached fields. *If God loves the whole world and is not willing that any should perish, and if He also desires that there be some from every people around His throne, then it is inconceivable that the Holy Spirit would not be leading and calling vast numbers of missionary servants to penetrate these least reached groups.* My challenge to all of us is that we simply take advantage of the information that is readily available on the status of the least reached and as agencies and mission teams begin to fast and pray over this data to hear clearly what the voice of the Spirit is saying about our involvement.

This in no way means that we are taking some kind of a mechanistic “by the numbers” approach to mission where we just pick some group out of a list because it is on the list. It does mean that we acknowledge the fact that such a database exists, that this is indeed missiological reality in our day and we invite the Holy Spirit to talk with us about our part in reaching those who do not have access to the saving message.

Pentecostal Mission to the Unreached is the Task of the World Wide Church But Will Be Led by the 2/3 World Missions Movement

In making this point I am constrained here by the limits of our current terminology. It is necessary for a moment to view our world wide Assemblies of God movement from a sociological rather than a spiritual perspective. The distinction I want to make is between the chronologically older mission efforts that have come primarily out of North America and Europe and the “younger” missions that are sending from bases in Latin America, Africa, the

Indian subcontinent and Asia. For ease of communication I will use the terms “West” and “2/3 World” to refer to these two centers of mission.

I have argued elsewhere<sup>24</sup> that though the frontier mission paradigm is a powerful tool for helping us understand the world from a missionary perspective, it is inadequate to embrace all that God is doing in the world and there is therefore a need for a more comprehensive framework for understanding mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Part of this new framework is to affirm the value of every missionary wherever they are located while bringing a strategic reorientation to their ministry philosophy and practice. My arguments were addressed to Pentecostals in the West operating in standard mission agencies that have broad commitments to national churches throughout the world. The challenge to Western missions organizations will be to bring about this kind of reorientation to their mission teams in their current locations, while at the same time endeavoring to step up their efforts to place new workers among the least reached. While in some cases it may be possible to completely change the mission paradigm of a Western agency (as with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptists) this is not always going to be possible nor is it always desirable.

What I want to argue here is that for both practical and missiological reasons, as it concerns the focus of mission and the placement of missionaries, the 2/3 world missions movement major upon the pioneer penetration of least reached groups. The practical reason can be framed in this way: for Western based organizations, their long standing relationships with existing national churches constrains their work so that it is primarily facilitative and supportive of those churches. Those who come to such agencies with a Spirit led burden to

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<sup>24</sup>Dr. Johnson, “Frontier Missions and Beyond: An Emerging Paradigm for Missions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Paper presented at the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Northwest College, March 2000. A longer, more detailed version of this paper with the same Footnotes continued on the next page.

work among the least reached will be sent, but for the most part their system will produce new candidates for their already developed fields of labor. In contrast, missions coming out of the 2/3 world do not have the same long standing relationships and commitments with already existing mature national churches. This means that the focus of mission and the placement of missionaries can much more easily be directed to the least reached peoples.

The missiological reason is even more compelling than than the practical one. It has to do with Winter's continuum of evangelism (E-0 to E-3) and his continuum of a people's cultural distance from a relevant church (P-0 to P-3). His original application of these concepts was to churches in the West. However, if we change the center of mission from the West to somewhere in the 2/3 world it becomes clear that there is strategic significance in sending missionaries to people groups where the Christian movement is smaller than among the sending people. It makes no sense for 2/3 world missions to send a missionary into an E-2 or 3 situation that is P-1 for that people, and where there are most likely already Western missions working. So to avoid reduplicating efforts and to keep from sending missionaries to places where a national church is already capable of doing near neighbor evangelism, 2/3 world mission agencies can focus on founding beachheads of the Gospel among the least reached.

I want to suggest that the 2/3 world mission movement has been uniquely raised up by God at this time in history in order to lead the way in the final push to proclaim and root the Gospel among the least reached peoples of the world. While the task of taking the Gospel to the remaining peoples who have never heard is the responsibility of the world-wide church, I believe that this last great thrust will be led by the dynamic younger movements.

In contemplating this great task before us I think that both Western and 2/3 world based missions have potential pitfalls that need to be considered at the agency level. For those in the West it is a problem of the pressure of current mission obligations to push the needs of the least reached off the ministry horizon. For missions in the 2/3 world the problem is the pressure of wanting to have quick results from their work in order to feel that they are on par with the work of their Western colleagues and to gain continued support from their sending base of churches. I have seen this reasoning process happen in discussion with a leader in Asia who mentioned they wanted their General Council to send missionaries. I suggested that it would be most natural for them to go to a people of the same ethnicity but another major religion that are virtually unreached within the borders of their own country. He rejected this reasoning, saying that instead they would go to some tribal groups (some of which have vast numbers of Christians already) so that they could get quick results. This leader noted that we Westerners can go to hard to reach peoples and get no results as our sending base is strong and will be behind us whether we have success or not. They, on the other hand, need success to get churches planted quickly so they can fund their own activities.

In both cases, whether from existing obligations or from pressure to get quick results, the end result is that the needs of the least reached are neglected. The peoples that make up the final frontiers of mission are often the most resistant groups, dwell in places that are difficult to enter due to geography or political and religious considerations, and often live in abject physical poverty. Bringing the Gospel to them will not be easy or convenient, but to do so is to participate in what is closest to the heart of the God of mission.

Pentecostal Mission to the Unreached Features Coordinated Efforts to Develop National Church Planting Movements

John York says that the two critical features of Pentecostal missiology have been the focus on the indigenous church and partnership.<sup>25</sup> The genius of Pentecostal missions, particularly as it has been practiced by the Assemblies of God, has been the creation and nurture not only of single individual indigenous churches or small groups of them, but rather the development of an organized movement of churches. We call this the national church, and it is in essence a dynamic church planting movement. There is great strength in an affiliation of local Christians, empowered by the Spirit to reach their culture, planting local congregations as widely as possible and given the New Testament responsibility of governing, propagating and supporting themselves. This is a major part of the mission philosophy that has made the world-wide fellowship of the Assemblies of God into one of the largest Protestant denominations in the world, with somewhere over 30 million adherents.

I believe that what the frontier mission movement calls missiological breakthrough is best achieved by this approach that has characterized our entire mission movement from the beginning. What Winter calls minimum missiological breakthrough is not simply the planting of a few churches among an unreached group but is a very robust concept. It means that the Church of Jesus Christ becomes so rooted among a people that they are able to carry on the work of evangelizing their own without any outside help. We have done this in the past and it must remain a hallmark of our strategy in the future.

In saying this I am not implying that I think that the planting of an Assemblies of God national church among a single people group in most cases would mean that the task is done. In large and diverse peoples it will take the efforts of many laborers and multiple church planting movements to achieve missiological breakthrough. The goal is that the Church of Jesus Christ be planted and we realize that we are just one expression of that Church in the

world. However, my point is that this goal is best pursued by mission agencies following the model that we have used.

With that as background, the real thrust of this point is that I believe a Pentecostal approach to reaching the least reached must feature a coordinated effort to develop national church planting movements. This coordination encompasses all three players in today's mission scene: the agencies and missionaries of the Western and 2/3 world and the national churches. I want to discuss coordination among these three groups under the rubric of partnership. The concept of partnership originally grew out of the need for understanding the relationship between the missionary fellowships of the sending agency and the national churches they were working with. Partnership results in a team approach to missions with the missionary working in relationship with the national church organization that is developing rather than parallel to it. Partnership in this sense, was and is still an important part of missionary strategy in places where missionaries are going to work with already existing national church movements.

However, when we change the scenario to reaching the least reached of the world, the playing field changes radically because of two new factors. The first is that among the unreached there are no national churches to begin with. Frontier mission missiology helps bring clarification here because by definition a people that is unreached does not have within it the resources to evangelize their own group. Practically this means that in many cases there are no believers at all or merely some isolated ones, no existing national church structures, or sometimes only a very small emerging national church. A second factor is that when talking about the least reached we are talking about "peoples" and not geopolitical boundaries. This means that it is quite possible to have country A with a national church existing among

In this context partnership takes on some new dimensions. There is a need for partnership between the national church and mission in reaching out to a third group, and between missionaries from the West and 2/3 world. Let's look first at the scenario where missionaries are coming to a country reach people C but where the national church already exists in people B. Partnership in mission means that respect needs to be exercised on both sides of the relationship. For the missionary and agency coming to reach people C there must be respect for the already existing national church among people B in that country and every effort must be taken to work with them in developing a new thrust to that people.

In many cases missionaries come and begin to work completely independently of the already existing national church structures of the Assemblies of God. This proliferates small church planting movements, reduplicates efforts, and complicates issues of who the new churches will affiliate with when the agency has to pull out or move on. When at all possible it is a much more optimal situation to partner with the existing national church to do outreach either to their own people group (as in the case of an unreached group with a small national church) or to go into another unreached people.

On the side of the national church, respect for the incoming missionary and agency desiring to work among an unreached people means that they welcome and seek to partner with those who want to reach a group that is different from their own. In some cases national churches can jealously guard their turf so that any missionary coming is "their missionary" and they resent it when someone wants to work among a different people group. Although the needs may be great among their own people, there must be a recognition that the Lord of the Harvest is calling workers to go to those who have never had access to the message of the Gospel.

Finally, partnership in this new era means respect and cooperation between both Western and 2/3 world missionaries. We are all trying to build God's Kingdom, not our own, so we need to put the servanthood and love of John 13 into practice in real tangible ways rather than just talking about it. International missionary fellowships are going to be standard equipment now and not just an option. Western missionaries and leaders are going to have to drop the big brother attitude and the "We paid for it so we control it" mindset. Multinational teams will have to become just that, and not exercises in tokenism as those who pay the bills call the shots. Missionaries from the 2/3 world will need to realize that there are responsibilities to the donor base and that we all go through other peoples funds faster and with less deliberation than our own hard earned finances. They will also have to be willing to trust some of the school of hard knocks wisdom that is out there among the Western agencies and their staff when it comes to complex national church development issues. The easiest and fastest road often turns out to be the one that will not get you to your final goal. The bottom line is that it will take a lot of grace on all sides. The unprecedented opportunity to link our efforts together by joining an international missionary force with a world wide network of national churches means that we have a chance to mobilize a Pentecostal harvest force in the neediest harvest fields. The choice is ours, we can if we will. I believe that we can accomplish far more working together than we will ever be able to do working apart.

## CONCLUSION

Pentecostals have led the way in mission the last century. However, missiological reality has indeed changed and the frontier mission movement provides us some critical frameworks for understanding the new states of the world and helping us to see the great need of the least reached. It is time to finish the mission. The unreached are part of the assigned

deeper commitments to the least reached and to each other to work together to make it happen.

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