

Editorial:

Unreached People Groups

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people in the West saw missions as going from here (usually a Western Christian country) to there (usually any non-Western country), where the gospel was promoted as part of the civilizing process of Western Civilization. While not ubiquitous, it was commonly perceived. Strategic missions operations were set in “polities”—the dividing of countries among missions agencies and denominations to further corporate efforts—and tied to colonialism. With the advent of Pentecostalism and Pentecostal Missions, who generally were not part of these strategic operations, they initially were dominated by the “Spirit-led” strategy of where to go in missions. As the mid-twentieth century missions work moved forward into the post-World War II world, many countries moved away from their Western colonial control with the resulting implications for missions. By the end of the twentieth century, due to several decades of pioneering work in countries around the world and the missiological emphasis on the Indigenous Church Principle and Partnership in Missions, today there are very few places in the world without an indigenous church of some form (Evangelical, or Pentecostal).

In the last few decades, Evangelical and Pentecostal missions’ leaders made a concerted effort to highlight people who do not have access to the gospel message. Various emphases like the Joshua Project, Operation World, and Wycliffe Bible Translators are just some of many ministries focusing on the peoples or groups with little or no access to the gospel of Jesus Christ. By this focus, it created the natural collision between the traditional Pentecostal emphasis of being “led by the Spirit” and the reality of the current need of being strategic (although many people would argue that this has always been a need, if not a value). The issue is not just an issue of limited resources and allocating according to the need, it is also an awareness that historically during most of the twentieth century, the majority of missionaries worked in areas where churches and a gospel witness already existed, but relatively few went to the unchurched or least witnessed to areas (including Islamic, Buddhist, Communist, and other restricted access areas).

Alan Johnson, while writing for Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) (USA) and an internal consultation on unreached people groups, has endeavored to unpack the issue and discuss the relationship between being intentional and strategic while also being “led by the

Spirit.” Johnson interacts extensively with various related scenarios to strategically engage unreached people groups, including countries where a viable indigenous church exists in the country from another ethnic group. Five missions scholars from diverse perspectives respond to Johnson’s piece: Teresa Chai, a Malaysian missiologist who teaches at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio, Philippines; Paul Alexander, a South African who, besides being a president of theological educational institutions in South Africa and the United Kingdom, is now the President of Trinity Bible College, Ellendale, North Dakota; Deborah and Shawn Galyen, who are Assemblies of God World Missions (USA) missionaries in Europe; Anne Dyer, a British Assemblies of God missions historian who manages the Donald Gee Centre’s archives in Mattersey Hall, Mattersey, United Kingdom; and Murray Cornelius, the Assistant Superintendent for International Missions of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Johnson then responds to their interactions.

In addition to essays on the unreached people groups, this issue presents two other essays. The first by Charles Self on an intellectual history of the Pentecostal missions historian, Gary B. McGee. Beyond his historical survey and thematic summary, Self concludes by identifying values modeled by McGee that are worth emulating. Ed Brye wrote the second essay on the importance of translation in the missions’ enterprise with interesting implications for Pentecostals who have a distinctive of “speaking in tongues.” He creates a case-study on the Bedoid peoples of West Africa to undergird the argument. The importance of being strategic is highlighted by both Self and Brye.

Hopefully, Johnson’s essays, coupled with the respondents as well as the additional essays, will further the discussion within Pentecostal missiology and other Christian missiologists about the unreached and the lost of our world. Further, Self’s essay on McGee reveals a Pentecostal missions scholar worth emulating: “McGee was a Pentecostal Erasmus: a man of even temper, ecclesial loyalty, critical mind and manifold intellectual interests—all in service to Christ” (76). This issue of the *International Journal of Pentecostal Missiology* is dedicated to the memory of Gary B. McGee (April 22, 1945 - December 10, 2008).

Paul W. Lewis, Editor