

INTRODUCTION

Jesus gives every believer an important mandate, through the Great Commission, to go to all nations across the globe to make disciples by sharing the content of the message of the gospel (Mat. 28: 18-20). One should mention that the Greek translation of this order, *panta ta ethne*, suggests an inclusion of all groups of people. In fact, since the establishment of the primitive church, many considerable initiatives have been taken toward the promotion of the Great Commission and the expansion of the message of Christ. Various missional organizations and mission agencies in different countries have been working strategically in order to spread the gospel in every corner of the planet earth. Indeed, numerous unbelievers have been touched and brought to the kingdom of God. However, one should acknowledge that there are still many people that have not heard the message yet. There are approximately eleven thousands unreached people group currently living in different parts of the world.¹

An unreached people group can be defined as a people group within which there is no practical indigenous church movement with sufficient strength, resources, and commitment to sustain and ensure the multiplication of churches by making disciples of Jesus Christ.² Even though the message of the gospel has reached various areas of the globe since a long time ago, there are currently numerous unreached people groups waiting to be evangelized. Thus, this paper intends to analyze the true mission of the church based on the order of the Great Commission and plans to argue and prove, in light of the number of unreached people groups, that the church is not sufficiently fulfilling its command. Indeed, one will propose a strategic method that can be used in order for the church to effectively accomplish its mission.

The actual Mission of the Church

The real mission of the church is to transmit the message of the gospel to all nations. In reality, the assignment of the church is rooted and guided by several fundamental biblical references. In fact, Jesus provides a mandatory mandate, through the Great Commission, to not only make disciples, but to also educate them everything that he had taught (Mat 28: 18-20). This command is followed by a great promise that He will always be with His disciples during the process in

¹ Joshua Project- <http://www.joshuaproject.net/links.php>. retrieved on September 9, 2013.

² House2Harvest- http://www.house2harvest.org/research_upg.html. Retrieved on September 9, 2013.

order to provide the necessary assistance. Thus, one should not have any fear or preconceive potential failure in mind because the presence of the Lord will always be there. Those who are called to become true disciples of the Lord should feel convinced to execute the command of this Great Commission. In reality, sharing Christ with the unbelieving world including the current unreached people groups is the actual assignment of the church and all Christians should be doing it with enthusiasm and determination. In agreement with this statement, some argue that winning men and women for Christ, through discipleship, should be the priority around which the life of every Christian should be oriented.³ In fact, a real love for the Lord should lie at the center of an actual motivational factor for the fulfillment of that mandate. Jesus, before rising to heaven, further declared that the disciples would receive the Holy Spirit, then they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the world (Acts1:8). In his letter to the Ephesians, apostle Paul states that God calls individuals to serve in different capacities in order to teach, train and to prepare His people for service and create unity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4: 11-16).

One can further acknowledge that the church is also rooted in the Old Testament scripture (Genesis 12: 3). Indeed, mission is God's plan for the spiritual emancipation of humanity. In light of this argument, one should mentioned that in the conference of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, Germany in 1952, an important agreement was reached by bringing the mission of God and Trinity together as theological demand for missions. It was stated: "The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depth of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit, be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God."⁴ Throughout the Holy Bible, one can notice the motivation of God to redeem His people every time they fall. One can further note that God always uses specific individuals in order to achieve His redemptive plan. From the Eden Garden fall through the current time, God's redemptive plan for mankind has not been changed due to His absolute nature. As a result, God still counts on selected and willing individual to carry out His operation. In fact, the job of the church, as previously stated, is the

³ Harley L. Kopitske, "The Master Plan of Discipleship." *Concordia Journal* (Oct, 1990), 16, no 4,424.

⁴ Johannes Gerhardus Jacob Swart; Hagley, Scott J; Ogren John; Love, Mark, Toward a Mission Theology of Participation, *Missiology* (Jan, 2009), 37, no 1, 76.

responsibility of every Christian to extend God's message of salvation to every corner of the planet earth. The authority to perform this task is given by Jesus Christ and led by the Holy Spirit.

One can further argue that the mandate of the Great Commission is inclusive to all nations, all countries and all people groups. To this effect, Winter contends that there is sufficient evidence from the Greek translation for all nations to mean all countries or large groups of people (*panta ta ethne*).⁵ Consequently, the order is given to all Christians to, cross-culturally, go and make disciples to all nations and group of people. Indeed, one may ask the following question in reference to the accomplishment of this mandate. Currently, how effective is the church in fulfilling its assignments? In other words, have all nations heard the message of the gospel and all people groups reached? It is essential to introduce some considerable statistical insights regarding various unreached people groups around the globe.

Unreached People Group

An unreached people group is defined as a people group within which there is no practical local church movement with sufficient strength, resources, and commitment to sustain and ensure the multiplication of churches by making disciples of Jesus Christ.⁶ Currently, there are various unreached people group across the globe. In fact, the total of outstanding unreached people groups is frightening. There are differing statistical references regarding the actual number of unreached people groups around the globe. According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, an estimated total of 27, 0000 unreached people groups exist while others claim that the actual number of the unreached is 16,000.⁷ Thus, one can argue that the approximate number of the world unreached people groups is between 16,000 and 27,000. Those unreached people groups are spreading in various regions around the world with the largest concentration in the 10/40 window area, which is an approximate of 8,738 unreached people groups.⁸ In fact, experts in the area describe the 10/40 window as the rectangular area located North of Africa, the Middle East

⁵ Ralph Winter; Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives On the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 135.

⁶ House2Harvest- http://www.house2harvest.org/research_upg.html. Retrieved on September 9, 2013.

⁷ Joshua Project

⁸ Ibid.

and Asia between 10 degree north and 40 degree north latitude.⁹ It is also called the resistant belt, which includes the world's largest population of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. Evidently, that geographic area is so called due to the actual challenge facing any potential reaching initiative. Based on revised statistical information, the 10/40 window presumably has an estimated population of 4.65 billions of individuals and additional countries, such as Indonesia, are currently included.¹⁰

The 10/40 window is also called the stronghold of Satan for various reasons. First, many regional experts name the 10/40 window the center of the majority of the world's non-convert countries around the globe. The un-evangelized countries, Similar to unreached people group, can be defined as those that do not have knowledge of the gospel or merely a minimal knowledge about it without the means to successfully respond to it. Second, the 10/40 window is predominantly poor. In other words, that area has the majority of the poor or the poorest of the poor.¹¹ In reality, one should acknowledge that poverty can be considered as a potential constraint to the spreading of the gospel in a particular area.

On the other hand, one should note that the 10/40 window area is biblically and historically significant. Some believe that both the biblical Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel were situated in an area within the center of what is called today the 10/40 window.¹² Thus, one can contend that it is essential for the church of Christ to concentrate its talents and resources in to reach and educate those unsaved individuals. Not only that area is part of biblical history, but God has a special plan of salvation for them like any other nations and people groups. Indeed, the path to cross to bring the gospel to those people can be dangerous and there may have some potential challenges to conquer, but the church should not panic and stop fulfilling its mission.

An Unfulfilled Mission

Based on of the various aforementioned data presented about the unreached people groups around the globe, one can effectively argue that the church is not adequately fulfilling its

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Joshua Project

mission. As previously mentioned, the true duty of the church, based on the mandate of the Great Commission, is to spread the content of message of the gospel of Christ everywhere and make disciples of all nations. As Corbett puts it, “God is in perpetual engagement with the created world, seeking always to bring order out of chaos, good out of evil.”¹³ To accomplish this mission, God relies on individual believers, specifically the church to take necessary actions. Indeed, one may justly ask the following important question. Why are there so many unreached people groups around the globe when the church has been in existence for over two thousand years? Are sufficient resources and potential effort being focused in the right direction and targeted the right group of people? Evidently, the available data about various people groups around the world can effectively demonstrate the existence of a strategic problem within the church in executing its task. In fact, one can proficiently contend that the church has not been completely achieving its task, which is the spreading the message of the Lord to every corner of the world. In line of this argument, Erickson argues that the gospel lies at the center of the ministry of the church.¹⁴ Thus, if the church fails to share the content of the message with all nations, including all people groups across the globe, it is obvious that its mission is far from being effectively fulfilled as ordered by Christ.

Potential Challenges

One can affirm that there exist numerous challenges to be faced by any missional initiative to evangelize the world unreached people groups. In reality, sharing Christ with non-converts or people with different beliefs can be considered as serious challenge. Furthermore, the geopolitical system and national religion can also be seen as potential issue. For instance, one can consider China, which is currently listed by the Joshua project as the second country, beside India, with the highest unreached people groups.¹⁵ China has a total of 511 people groups and 427 are listed as unreached people group. In general, China’s main religion is known as Buddhism. Based on contemporary or even recent missionary activities within the Chinese territory, one may have reasons to believe that China has been somehow reluctant to Christianity.

¹³ Corbett, Ian D, The Theology of Mission in Contemporary Practice. *Anglican Theological Review* (Wint. 2010), 92, no 1, p 119.

¹⁴ Millar J. Erickson, *Christian theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 1069.

¹⁵ Joshua Project- <http://www.joshuaproject.net/links.php>. Retrieved on September 9, 2013.

Another apparent challenge that one will have to deal with is previous perception toward Christianity. Considering China as an example, in their article titled Christian Witness to the Chinese People, Thomas Wang and Sharon Chan argue, “Invasion from the West in past centuries has left Chinese people with deep suspicions about Christianity. Perhaps the greatest missiological problem we face today is how to resolve these unfortunate and deeply rooted misunderstandings.”¹⁶ Beside the noted previous perception, the lack of a universal communicative means can present another type of disturbing concern. For instance, if one intends to reach the Achang of China, their lack of written materials in the Achang language would be a potential issue. The aforementioned Achang is an unreached people group located by the Yunan near Myanmar border and the Chinese town of Ruiii and they have an estimated population of 30,000 people.¹⁷

Obviously, there are many serious issues remaining to be addressed and cleared up. Through the development of good strategy, some of those evident issues can be effectively solved. In fact, considering the written communication issue, one can argue that for so long that a people group has an oral language and a way of communicating, effective reaching and evangelization can take place. Thus, one should essentially take this fact into consideration while formulating a strategic plan in order to reach this people group. In addition, it may be necessary for one to consider some corrective approaches that would eliminate any apparent bitterness and facilitate the effective propagation of the redemptive message of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, a particular missionary must prove that Christianity is founded on love and that love must be shown in actions.

In effect, one should acknowledge that the biggest constraint or obstacle that can prevent the transmission of the message of the gospel to all unreached people groups around the world is the refusal to act, which is a determination to show a passive attitude toward the lost souls in every corner of the planet. In essence, what should the church do in order to be more effective and more efficient in executing its assignment? Beside an authentic determination, one can affirm that a good strategy is crucial to effectively target and win the unreached souls for the Kingdom of God. With good strategy and a considerable method, the church can effectively reach many

¹⁶ Winter, Ralph and Steven C. Hawthorne, 587.

¹⁷ Joshua Project.

currently unreached people groups. In fact, the authentic disciples of Christ within the local church must cultivate a true passion to evangelize the lost world.

STRATEGY

An effective strategy is important for the success of any initiative to bring the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the abandoned people groups. In *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization*, Edward Dayton and David Fraser state, “As Christians, a strategy forces us to seek the mind of God and the will of the Holy Spirit. What does God desire? How can we conform to the future of that He desires.”¹⁸ One can concur with the aforementioned authors that a considerable strategy is one of the essential keys necessary to effectively reach and evangelize any particular people group. One can further argue that, in line of the aforementioned statement, an evangelistic mission without proper planning may actually fail. One has to recognize that true planning requires time, commitment and determination. Furthermore, one must have a specific goal in mind to achieve.

Another important element in strategic planning is the selection of core values. McRaney puts it best when he writes, “Every church and other organization need to have core values which guide their intended achievement and an understanding of those values are essential to developing high-performing services or ministries.”¹⁹ The core ministry values are biblically rooted in the Great Commission, The Great Commandment and the New Commandment.

Education must be considered as another crucial element in the strategic process to bring the gospel to the unreached people groups. Barna argues that the church should strive to make zealous and matured disciples, through education, who are capable of producing other disciples to facilitate the multiplication process.²⁰ In fact, education is one of the required components of the mandate of Great Commission. In other words, education is an important key in discipleship ministry. The church should make and train authentic disciples with the ability to reproduce themselves by making other true disciples everywhere, in all nations including all people groups. It is imperative for the church to have disciple ministry classes in order to effectively prepare

¹⁸ Winter, Ralph and Steven C. Hawthorne, 577.

¹⁹ Will McRaney, “Values-driven Leadership: Discovering and developing Your Core Values for Ministry.” *Theological Educator* (Fall 1997), no 56, 135.

²⁰ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*. (Colorado Spring, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 32.

young men and women who can become true leaders to spread the gospel around and win the lost world, specially the unreached, for the Kingdom of God.

Indeed, one may ask the following important question: what is the most proficient method to use in the strategic process of reaching the unrepentant world or specifically the identified unreached people groups of the world? In reality, one can affirm that a potential evangelistic method to reach those individuals would vary depending on which country or actual people group. Each nation or people group has their own culture, language, preconceived beliefs, social, economic and historical background. Therefore, an effective evangelistic method must be based on careful study of a particular people group. In fact, one may propose an evangelistic strategy based on one specific unreached people group and it can be applied to any other unreached people group with similar background. In addition, it can be served as a possible template for other people groups with different situations and backgrounds.

One can consider an unreached people group previously mentioned, the Achang. As previously stated, the Achang is one of the Chinese unreached people groups located between the Myanmar border and the Chinese town of Ruili. The Achang people group has no written or literary language. Thus, translating the Holy Bible in written format into Achang would be considered a very complex assignment. Fortunately, based on the people culture and customs, they pass on important traditions from one generation to another through storytelling.²¹ Therefore, one can state that one of the most valuable ways or approaches to transmit the message of the gospel to the Achang people group is through Biblical storytelling in both audio and audiovisual format couple with church planting activities. In reality, based on the characteristic of oral language and the tradition of this people group to communicate face to face, it will be more effective to introduce audiovisual materials that will make the Bible stories more vibrant and interesting. For instance, the actual stories of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ in storytelling format in video should be appealing to the Achang. However, one should ask this important question: How should an evangelistic or missionary group approach and access that people group?

One can consider the apparent challenges previously mentioned and plan accordingly. To effectively deal with potential resentment, Wang and Chan offer the following solution: “The

²¹ Joshua Project

incarnational servanthood approach seeks to work outside church structures by placing mature Christian professionals and business people in China. These people make significant professional and economic contributions to the country while at the same time rubbing shoulders on a regular basis with their Chinese counterparts. It is hoped that the incarnational servanthood approach will ultimately affect the attitudes of government leaders resulting in more trust, affirmation and freedom for Christianity.”²² In fact, this is a missionary advice given for the country as a whole, but it can also be applied to specific unreached people groups like the Achang. Generally, servant evangelism can be very effective because it creates the needed atmosphere to share the message of the gospel. Evidently, this approach was used in the past by other missionary leaders, such as William Carey in India, and was proven to be successful.²³ Acknowledging the importance of servant evangelism, Earley and Wheeler argue, “Servant evangelism is a combination of simple acts of kindness and intentional sharing of the gospel. Servant evangelism involves intentionally sharing Christ by putting love in action.”²⁴

Indeed, one should have reasons to believe that similar strategy and evangelism method can be applied to evangelize various unreached people groups across the 10/40 window areas and elsewhere around the world. Once this approach is being successfully applied, proper church planting activities should be implemented. The missionary groups can start by establishing house-based churches in order to educate and train the new converts so they can become authentic disciples of Christ.

CONCLUSION

In summary, one should note that the church has an enormous responsibility, rooted in the authority given by the order of the Great Commission, to bring the message of Christ to all nations and all people groups. Some considerable efforts have been made to bring the message of the Lord to many nations around the world. However, there still exist numerous unreached people groups in various countries across the globe. Consequently, based on the available data on different world unreached or neglected people groups, one has sufficient reasons to argue that the church is not currently effectively and sufficiently completing its actual assignment to spread the

²² Winter, 587

²³ Ibid, 568-571

²⁴ Dave Earley and David Wheeler. *Evangelism Is...How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010), 151.

message to all nations and all people groups. Despite some apparent challenges, one strongly believes that, with fortitude and conviction, the church can achieve its directive. Indeed, some evangelism strategy and method are provided that can be implemented in order for the church to successfully target and evangelize those unreached people groups of the world. In effect, sound evangelistic strategy and effective methods are fundamental in order to bring the gospel of the Lord to various presently lost people groups around the world.

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