

Tools For the Task

Let's not confuse them with church planting

It is amazing to see what has happened in recent years:

* A number of people groups that had only a handful of believers now have thousands. I know of one case where 1,000 people from a Muslim background are now followers of Christ. In another, 5,000 people from Buddhist/Animistic heritage are believers. More striking is the movement in another Muslim-background people where some 70,000 are following Christ. As many as 500,000 from a Hindu background have placed their allegiance on Christ.

* Of the 372 mega-languages identified by researchers, there are now 294 mega-languages in which there are broadcasts. Many other small languages are aired locally.

* There are 371 languages with an adequate Bible, 960 with an adequate NT and an additional 902 with some Scripture. 1,500 are in process.¹

* There are 624 translations of the Jesus film out now; 94 of those are in audio; an additional 282 are in process.

* There are 5,206 languages that are recorded on audio for distribution.²

We can rejoice for what God is doing! These tools are making a dramatic impact and are evidence of God's hand at work.

We need to remember, however, that tools are a means to an end and not the end in themselves. If we had the Bible in every language, radio programming on the air, and/or on audio tape we could not say that we were done with the task. Many tears have been shed for people who did not believe even after the Bible was translated. Those who raise their hand after an evangelistic message may have made an important, initial decision. But if they go un-disciplined they may well be like fruit that falls to the ground—it rots!

We will not be done with the task until Christ declares that we're done by returning. Though the unique missionary task of reaching unreached people groups will someday be done, our work in evangelism will never be done until Christ returns. The goal of Matthew 28:18-20 includes the "making disciples of all nations." Yet, most commentaries I have seen don't even attempt to interpret that phrase.

If you link Matthew 28 with Romans 15:19b-20 where Paul argues that he has "fully preached the Gospel" in the entire region—an area that includes most of modern day Israel, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Bulgaria, Greece and Yugoslavia—then we must conclude that he was talking about the uniquely missionary task of establishing the church rather than the evangelistic task which will continue until Christ returns.

One of the toughest parts of the mission task for church planting missionaries is to know what to do when they get there—even after they learn the culture and language. As Ralph Winter has said, "It is one thing to learn a language, it is another to know what to say."

He wasn't talking about whether or not to speak of the Gospel. The great need is to know how to say it in a way that makes sense to them, not just to us.

Another problem—that we all know in our heads if not our hearts—is that prayer is crucial. As a member of the board of Christar (formerly International Missions), I have learned much—including lessons on prayer. Before a missionary is sent out by Christar, they must have 100 people committed to praying for them daily. I know of another large mission that requires a prayer team of 50.

That is great. Of course, those praying need to know how to pray. Missions like Christar do that through various

communications—prayer letters, etc. But in the churches I am most familiar with, I wonder if we are passing on that skill.

It seems that a focus of much of the current prayer movement is on prayer for revival in our nation. More prayer for everything is helpful—some would say foundational—to mission. But focused prayer for what Jesus said He would do, to build His church (Matthew 16:18) must be there.

It seems that many are not interested in praying over the long-term for churches to be established among unreached people groups. Perhaps they see it as "old hat" or perhaps it seems to take too long in our society oriented toward quick results. I have heard of churches that are doing what I call "easy missions," so they can see the results quickly. But they are not, for the most part, touching the unreached world.

No single thing is the answer. We must combine the tools with effective church planting as we seek the Lord for those in darkness and beg Him to move now on His will through us. We need to focus on what He has told us He wants throughout the Scriptures. We want to see Him glorified from among all the nations.

Are enough of us asking for and working toward that?

1. www.wycliffe.org/wbt%2Dusa/trangoal.htm
2. members.aol.com/glorenet/

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