

MISSIONS METHODS AND PRINCIPLES



SOUTHWESTERN
JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

A Course Correction in Missions: Rethinking the Two-Percent Threshold

Robin Dale Hadaway¹

Professor of Missions

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Kansas City, MO

rhadaway@mbts.edu

Introduction

In February of 1990 my wife Kathy and I met with the renowned Christian researcher David Barrett, the author of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*.² He consulted with each missionary couple prior to their departure for a restricted access assignment at our mission agency's headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. Barrett said to us, "Many a missionary has journeyed to North Africa intending to reach the Z people³ but after a few years they would tire of the resistance and move on to a more responsive group. Only by focusing on the Z will this tribe ever be evangelized." Subsequently our family moved to the capital of the country where we served as Strategy Coordinator⁴ missionaries for the Z people of North Africa. We were part of an experiment in our mission, the International Mission Board (IMB). Cooperative Services International (CSI) had been formed to focus on specific unreached tribes regardless of their geo-political boundaries (the Z are spread over three North African countries). We saw the first believers from this people group come to faith in Christ and follow him in baptism during our stewardship. The first churches also emerged from this unreached people during this time.

In the mid-1990s I was part of a group of CSI missionaries devising a

¹Dr. Robin Hadaway has been professor of Missions at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri for eleven years. Previously he and his wife Kathy served in church planting with the International Mission Board, SBC (IMB) in North Africa and Tanzania for twelve years. Afterwards, Hadaway was the IMB Regional Leader in Eastern South America, supervising about 350 missionaries in Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay for six-and-a-half years. He also served as a senior pastor for six years and as an officer in the United States Air Force, attaining the rank of Captain.

²Barrett, David B. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900-2000* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982).

³The Z people number about 1.5 million and reside in North Africa. They are almost one-hundred-percent Muslim. When we accepted the assignment there were no believers or churches among the Z people.

⁴When we received this assignment we were called Non-Residential Missionaries (NRM's). Cooperative Services International (CSI) was the division of the International Mission Board (IMB) formed to work among unreached peoples in restricted-access countries. The Hadaways were the second NRM couple to live inside the country of their people group and one of the first ten couples in the program.

strategy to reach a country in Central Asia for Christ. In addition to working with the Z people in North Africa, I also oversaw missionaries working with other people groups as a Field Coordinator for CSI. In this role I deployed missionaries among various people groups in the Middle East and North Africa. The leader of this group identified the people groups within a limited-access country from a list published as the *Ethnologue*.⁵ Besides the expected peoples such as the Kurds, Armenians, and Persians, an unreached tribe called the “Persian Bantu” appeared on the list. As a former missionary to the *Sukuma* people (a Bantu tribe in Tanzania), I doubted their existence, but this group was initially targeted by my mission agency nonetheless.

A number of years later I was serving as the Regional Leader (Director) for the same mission agency in Eastern South America. I was asked by my supervisor when I was going to reach the unevangelized indigenous tribes in the Amazon Basin. My regional researcher and strategy associate determined that there were only about 185,000⁶ Native Americans out of approximately 175 million persons⁷ in the country of Brazil. Thirty-five thousand of these come from one tribe (the *Yanomami*) who have been targeted by other mission groups for years. I declined to move missionaries from the population centers of Brazil to work among a scattering of 70,000 Native Americans, less than 1/10th of 1% of the population of the country.

Over the last twenty-five years many mission agencies have dropped or significantly reduced their work among the majority populations of Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America to focus on smaller and smaller people groups or exit altogether. How did we reach this point in missions? When one is in the middle of a trend it is difficult to discern if the paradigm has permanently shifted, or if we are at the far end of a temporary pendulum swing. Is mission strategy due for a course correction, or have recent shifts become axiomatic? Let’s look at recent mission history.

Historical Perspective

Although there have been small mission endeavors throughout Christian history, the “Great Century of Missions” (1792-1910)⁸ launched the global movement that forms the basis for world missions today. When British Baptist William Carey sailed for India in 1793, he could not have imagined that a tidal wave of missionaries would follow in his wake. The cour-

⁵The *Ethnologue*, compiled by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), tracks the spoken languages of the world. The Persian Bantu are no longer listed as a linguistic group in the *Ethnologue*.

⁶The IBGE 2010 Census (Brazil) lists 896,917 native people for the country, but this count includes the *Quilombolas* (descendants of slaves) who are indigenous to another continent and have intermarried with Brazilians of both European and American Indian lineage. Even the larger number amounts to only 0.47% of the population of Brazil.

⁷Brazil’s population is now estimated at just over 200 million.

⁸The term was coined by Kenneth Scott Latourette in *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 7 vols. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1945).

age, deprivations, and feats of early Christian workers like Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, Henry Martyn, Robert Morrison, Henry Venn, Buck Bagby, Lottie Moon, Amy Carmichael, John Nevius and countless others stagger the mind. These early missionaries were basically “on their own.” Judson was so isolated in Burma that he did not even know for several years if he and his wife were receiving support from Baptists in America.

Latourette calls the mission history years of 1914-1944 “Advance Through Storm.”⁹ This is because after the Great Century of Missions, missionaries had to deal with two world wars while simultaneously laboring for Christ on the foreign field. Ralph Winter followed with a history of his own entitled, *Twenty-Five Unbelievable Years: 1945-1969*.¹⁰ Winter describes the remarkable missionary advance that followed the end of World War II. When M. Theron Rankin was elected to lead the Foreign Mission Board (FMB then, IMB now) of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1944, he immediately put into place a program of missionary advance based upon a “careful study of conditions where the war had taken its greatest toll.”¹¹ Rankin’s successor, Baker James Cauthen, continued the Advance Program which resulted in an increase from 34 countries to 94 countries and a tripling of missionary personnel at the FMB to 2,981 by the time of the latter’s retirement in 1979.¹²

Winston Crawley, former FMB missionary, and Area Secretary (Director) for the Orient continued the historical summary precedent by writing a short history of world missions from 1970-2000. Crawley points out that these years saw monumental changes. These changes included the dawn of the information age, the fall of Communism, exploding population and urban centers, the rise of Islam and secularism to name just a few.¹³

Prior to the last decade of the twentieth century, strategy remained pretty much the same regardless of the mission society. Mission work by necessity was quite different than today. Missionary families journeyed to their countries of service by boat, and communication with the field was carried by the mail transported back and forth by these ships. Although funded from constituencies abroad, mission entities were usually democratically operated overseas. Missionaries on the field set their own priorities with minimal interference from their home offices. They voted on their budgets, planned their strategies and submitted personnel requests. Local administration was necessary because of the slow and cumbersome communication

⁹Winston Crawley, *World Christianity: 1970-2000* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001), 5.

¹⁰Winter, Ralph D., and Kenneth Scott Latourette. *The Twenty-Five Unbelievable Years, 1945 to 1969* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1970).

¹¹William R. Estep, *Whole Gospel Whole World: The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention 1845-1995* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 267, 277-78.

¹²*Ibid.*, 319.

¹³Crawley, *World Christianity*, 9-34. Crawley said in his book, *Global Mission: A Story to Tell* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 262, “the Foreign Mission Board did not make formal reference to mission strategy until 1965.”

between a mission and their home country.¹⁴ Although missionaries in the nineteenth century such as Carey¹⁵ and Taylor conducted some cultural and demographic research, Winston Crawley said that until the 1970s, mission agencies had planned “without much awareness of ‘strategy.’”¹⁶ Missionaries entered new countries by opening hospitals, clinics, orphanages, and schools—all the while sharing the Gospel and starting churches. Whatever the mission-sending agency, strategy primarily involved sending missionaries to geographic countries without prescribing what they should do when they arrived.¹⁷ Some thought was given to segmenting and researching the ethnic groups within those countries,¹⁸ but it fell to Donald McGavran and later Ralph Winter to systematize missiology. They would change the discipline forever during the last half of the twentieth century.

Donald McGavran wrote his groundbreaking work, “The Bridges of God” in 1955. This writing puts forth the thesis that men and women outside individualistic Western countries usually become Christians within their own strata of society.¹⁹ In his later book, *Understanding Church Growth*, McGavran points out that most nations are not homogeneous but “belong to pieces of a mosaic.”²⁰ Furthermore, McGavran said, “People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.”²¹ This became known as the Homogeneous Unit Principle. This principle states; “Peoples become Christian fastest when least change of race or clan is involved.”²² This became the basis for tailoring individualized strategies for particular ethnic groups that has become the norm today.

Ralph Winter, McGavran’s associate at Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, California), intensified this emphasis on ethnicity as a missionary

¹⁴Even when our family arrived in Tanzania in 1984 we did not have a land line telephone our first several years in the country and cell service did not become widely available in Africa until the twenty-first century. When we arrived in our country in North Africa in 1991 we communicated with our mission organization by telex because there were only three international telephone lines going out of the country. We did not have a telephone in our home anyway and nobody we knew had a phone. If you wanted to talk to someone you had to go see them or hope they would stop by.

¹⁵William Carey prepared a chart of the religions of the countries on the continents of his day (see *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, eds. [Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009], 315-16).

¹⁶Crawley, *World Christianity*, 70.

¹⁷H. Cornell Goerner, *All Nations in God’s Purpose* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 155.

¹⁸There were exceptions. The Baptist Mission of Tanzania organized the Sukuma Project to reach the largest tribe in Tanzania. Our call to missions resulted from hearing about the Sukuma Project in the summer of 1980 at the Glorieta Baptist Conference Center in New Mexico.

¹⁹Donald A. McGavran, “The Bridges of God,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., Ralph Winter and Steven A. Hawthorne, eds., 53.

²⁰Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 46.

²¹*Ibid.*, 163.

²²*Ibid.*, 165.

strategy by coining the term “hidden peoples.”²³ McGavran says,

All are speaking of very large numbers of homogeneous units—ethnically, geographically, culturally, and economically separate segments of mankind. Depending on how such segments are defined, there are thousands or tens of thousands of them—the hidden peoples.²⁴

C. Peter Wagner and Edward R. Dayton begin calling “hidden peoples” by the terminology of “unreached people” and a movement was born. Since these early days of unreached people group thinking, the race to reduce them to their lowest common denominator has only accelerated. John D. Robb says,

The people group approach makes ministry **manageable** [bold his]. It breaks down the enormous task of reaching the world for Christ into manageable segments. David Barrett has estimated that humankind may be composed of around 9,000 separate ethnolinguistic peoples. If this is so, there may be as many as 25,000 or 40,000 distinct people groups. We do not know exactly.²⁵

Due to this segmentation trend, most mission agencies have diverted or reassigned their personnel from the majority populations in most countries in order to concentrate on their hidden or unreached peoples. McGavran conceived the Homogeneous Unit Principle in order to reap the greatest harvest of souls in mission. He wrote, “Thus today’s paramount task, opportunity and imperative is to multiply churches in increasing numbers of receptive peoples of all six continents.”²⁶

It is true that much of the world has been neglected in evangelism and missions. Our family responded to the great need for preaching the Gospel to the Z people of North Africa. I enjoyed my work in North Africa and can speak of the great need there. Peter Wagner cautions, however, against associating need with priority.

Some have postulated the greatest “need” on where there are fewest missionaries in relationship to national believers. This is not necessarily a valid point... The law of the harvest demands that laborers, whether missionaries or nationals, be sent to the harvest field in the greatest number possible, as long as each is reaping to his capacity.²⁷

²³Ibid., 51

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵John D. Robb, *Focus! The Power of People Group Thinking* (Monrovia: MARC Books, 1994), 24.

²⁶McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 40.

²⁷C. Peter Wagner, *Frontiers in Missions Strategy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 32.

Missions today are being driven primarily by need rather than by a more balanced combination of factors. Before turning our attention to potential solutions, how did we arrive at this situation? In the field of missiology presuppositions are vitally important. What are some of the presuppositions underpinning modern missions thinking?

A Key Presupposition in Modern Missions

David Sills, Professor of Missions at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary identifies a crucial statistical presupposition in his book *Reaching and Teaching*. As it became clear through research that the unreached people groups of the world were being underserved or ignored, mission agencies sought ways to determine which areas were reached or unreached in relation to one another. Maps began to be composed to depict the relative “lostness” and “reachness” of the world in relation to other parts of the globe. Sociology played heavily into these choices.

Initially, missionaries were working with the figure of 20 percent evangelical as sufficient to consider a group reached; this was based on a sociological axiom that if 20% of a population accepts a new idea, the adopters can perpetuate and propagate it within the group without outside help. Missionaries made the application that if a group was at least 20 percent evangelical this group could continue the work of evangelism without the help of outside missionaries, thus freeing the missionaries to move on.²⁸

When I moved from Eastern Africa to Eastern South America to become the Regional Leader in the summer of 1997, the IMB was using the twenty-percent figure in their statistics. Few South American countries fell under this threshold but within a year the percentage was lowered to twelve percent. The following year the first version of the Church Planting Progress Indicator (CPPI) was unveiled by the IMB, featuring a precipitous drop in what had been considered the measure of “reachedness.” Two-percent evangelical believers became the new statistical benchmark for the IMB and most other mission agencies. Suddenly the goal posts had been moved. How did this happen?

Patrick Johnstone, the editor of *Operation World*, Luis Bush of the Joshua Project of the AD 2000 Movement, and some others decided that the twenty-percent figure was too high. They determined a much lower threshold was appropriate for measuring relative “reachness.”²⁹ Johnstone writes [*italics and bold mine*];

The original Joshua Project editorial committee selected the crite-

²⁸M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 108.

²⁹Ibid.

ria less than 2% evangelical Christian and less than 5% Christian adherents. *While these percentage figures are somewhat arbitrary*, there are *some that suggest* that the percentage of a population needed to be influenced to impact the whole group is 2%.³⁰

It is interesting that a few evangelical researchers could change the thrust of missions even among Southern Baptists so quickly and so thoroughly by flipping the proverbial “statistical switch.” If the twenty-percent designation was somewhat arbitrary, then two percent is astoundingly so. Who are the “some” who suggest that two percent of a population can influence the majority? That question is never answered. The last fifteen years has seen a dramatic reduction in force in missionaries in Latin America³¹ and Sub-Saharan Africa³² within the IMB. The philosophical basis for these reductions was the adoption of the two-percent threshold. Sills points out that “it is significant that the context of the discussions was never to classify whether an individual was reached or not, but rather which groups were unreached.”³³ Instead, maps have been drawn showing significant parts of Latin America, Africa, and even parts of Asia color-coded green (reached) using the two-percent evangelical benchmark as the basis.³⁴

The only sociological study I could find to support using a minority percentage of adherents to influence a majority is entitled “Minority Rules.” This study says that an extremely committed ten percent within a population segment can influence the remaining ninety percent to embrace their thinking. Furthermore, the article insists that when the minority falls below ten percent, the minority opinion has no measurable effect on the majority. The article reads in part as follows [bold and italics mine];

Scientists at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have found that when just 10 percent of the population holds an unshakable belief, their belief will always be adopted by the majority of the society. The scientists, who are members of the Social Cognitive Networks Academic Research Center (SCNARC) at Rensselaer, used computational and analytical methods to discover the tipping point where a minority belief becomes the majority opinion. The finding has implications for the study and influence of so-

³⁰Patrick Johnstone, quoted in Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 109.

³¹The drop from about 1,200 adult missionaries among the four America’s regions in 1997 to about 250 missionaries in the American Peoples Affinity in 2014 is a fall-off of about 500%. This reduction has been accomplished primarily by normal attrition (retirements, resignations, and transfers).

³²The Sub-Saharan Peoples Affinity combines the three former IMB regions of Eastern, Southern and Western Africa. This part of the world has dropped from about 850 missionaries to some five hundred today.

³³Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 110.

³⁴“Closing the Gap: Critical Issues and the Unfinished Task” (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, SBC, 2010), Powerpoint Slides, 27.

cietal interactions ranging from the spread of innovations to the movement of political ideals. **When the number of committed opinion holders is below 10 percent, there is no visible progress in the spread of ideas. It would literally take the amount of time comparable to the age of the universe for this size group to reach the majority,**” said SCNARC Director Boleslaw Szymanski, the Claire and Roland Schmitt Distinguished Professor at Rensselaer. “Once that number grows above 10 percent, the idea spreads like flame.” As an example, the ongoing events in Tunisia and Egypt appear to exhibit a similar process, according to Szymanski. “In those countries, dictators who were in power for decades were suddenly overthrown in just a few weeks.”³⁵

From the introduction of the two-percent benchmark in the late 1990s, I have contended this is an arbitrary measurement without a statistical basis. Unfortunately, much of modern strategy for most mission agencies is based upon such sociological sand. Somewhat of a case could be made for a 10% threshold but this is based upon this one study (above) and one wonders about the advisability of basing the relative “reachness” or “lostness” of a people group or country on one secular sociological study. If a ten-percent threshold replaced the two-percent benchmark for depicting “lostness” and “reachness” on evangelical maps, however, at least it would give a more reliable indicator of what is really happening on the ground. The evangelization maps of Latin America and Africa would turn from green (reached) to yellow and red (unreached).

Rethinking the Criteria for Mission Engagement

It is certainly true, however, there must be some basis for both the proportional deployment of personnel and when a country or people group is able to reach itself. What should these factors be? There is no doubt that the Z people of North Africa (less than 1/100 of one-percent evangelical and Muslim) have a greater *need* of the initial proclamation of the Gospel than the *Sukuma* tribe of Tanzania (about seven-percent evangelical), my first missionary assignment in 1984. But is need the only criteria? What are the appropriate factors to consider when devising a missions strategy and advance today?

Winston Crawley properly observes that “Since 1970, attention of the Christian mission enterprise has focused increasingly on people groups, rather than on nations.”³⁶ Let me return to my discussion concerning the contributions of Donald McGavran and Ralph Winter to the field of missions. While McGavran discovered the Homogeneous Unit Principle, it was

³⁵J. Xie, S. Sreenivasan, G. Korniss, W. Zhang, C. Lim, B. Szymanski, “Social Consensus through the Influence of Committed Minorities,” *Physical Review E* 80, no. 1 (2011): 1-9.

³⁶Crawley, *World Christianity*, 73.

Winter who called them “hidden peoples” which became “unreached peoples.” Crawley writes [**bold and italics mine**];

Winter effectively shifted the main theme of today’s missiology from church growth to unreached peoples, thereby becoming the most influential missiologist of the 1980s and 1990s. It is interesting that McGavran first directed Christian attention to people groups, as a lead-in to his concern for growth; and that he and Winter were colleagues at Fuller--**but their strategy thrusts move in opposite directions. McGavran** wanted major effort to concentrate on *responsive peoples, where the harvest is ripe*, but **Winter** *urges concentration on places where the gospel seed has not yet been sown.*³⁷

Of course nobody can deny that the pendulum has moved almost totally in the direction of unreached peoples. The harvest missions view of the Church Growth Movement has been totally eclipsed and seldom, if ever, mentioned. But is it time for a course correction? I think so.

A Call for a Return to a Biblical Balance in Missions

Jesus presented a dual mandate that is recorded in the Gospels. There is no doubt that the current push to reach all the peoples of the world is a biblical mandate. In Acts 1:7-8, Jesus lays out the church’s task [**bold mine**].

It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the **remotest part of the earth** (NKJV).

We are to go to the last frontier, to the edge, to the unreached, the unengaged and uncontacted people of the world. Paul spoke about going to “preach the gospel even to the regions beyond”³⁸ and his ambition to preach the Gospel in unreached areas must be emulated today. Paul wrote [*italics added by NASB translators*], “and thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named, so that I would not build on another man’s foundation.”

I engaged in this kind of mission work for seven years. It is exhilarating, rewarding, and necessary. Every mission board should participate in the pioneering missionary enterprise. When I lived in North Africa I was the only missionary of any kind in the northern Muslim part of the country. Nobody else could gain access so I could preach and witness without any

³⁷Ibid., 74-75.

³⁸2 Corinthians 10:16.

interference. Sometimes I would drive for twelve hours and not see another vehicle or foreigner. It was extremely fulfilling to see the first believers and churches emerge from a previously unreached people.

But there are other mission mandates in the New Testament. Jesus spoke also of the harvest. The Scripture reads, "Then He said to His disciples, 'the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest'" (Matt 9:37-38 NASB). The harvest mandate is one that seems to be neglected today. McGavran said,

That receptivity should determine effective evangelism methods is obvious. Unless Christian leaders in all six continents are on the lookout for changes in receptivity of homogeneous units within the general population and are prepared to seek and bring persons and groups belonging to these units into the fold, they will not even discern what needs to be done. An essential task is to discern receptivity and when this is seen, adjust methods, institutions, and personnel until the receptive are becoming Christians.³⁹

Although the Z people of North Africa are more responsive than most Muslim peoples, they could not be called particularly receptive. When I worked as a missionary in Tanzania and Brazil, the receptivity in those countries was amazing. I would share Christ with individuals and many would believe. Churches were rapidly planted. Just because a missionary works in a harvest field does not mean it is not real missions. Sometimes it can be more dangerous than a restricted access country. I was in a meeting of all the missionaries in my region in Eastern South America a number of years ago. I asked everyone who had been robbed at gunpoint to raise their hands. About eighty percent of those present raised their hands. Then I asked how many had been robbed at gunpoint more than once to keep their hands raised. Only a few hands went down. Conversely, when I lived in a restricted access North African country my two daughters could walk down a dark street in the capital city without fear. Nobody would ever do that in South America. I know that with today's emphasis on unreached peoples a strategy based upon receptivity might seem missiologically incorrect. McGavran answers these misgivings.⁴⁰

Recognition of variations of receptivity is offensive to some missiologists because they fear that, if they accept it, they will be forced to abandon resistant fields. Abandonment is not called for. Fields must be sown. Stony fields must be plowed before they are sown. No one should conclude that if receptivity is low, the church should withdraw evangelistic efforts. Correct policy is

³⁹McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 192.

⁴⁰Ibid., 190-91.

to occupy fields of low receptivity lightly. The harvest will ripen some day. Their populations are made up of men and women for whom Christ died. While they continue in their rebellious state, they should be given the opportunity to hear the gospel in as courteous a way as possible. But they should not be heavily occupied, lest, fearing they will be swamped by Christians, they become even more resistant. They should not be bothered and badgered...Resistant lands should be held lightly. While holding them lightly Christian leaders should perfect organizational arrangements so that when these lands turn responsive, missionary resources can be sent in quickly...Reinforcing receptive areas is the only mode of mission by which resistant populations that become receptive may be led to responsible membership in ongoing churches.

Rather than looking to receptive places to place missionaries, most mission groups are sending their personnel to resistant places. Many of these somewhat hostile people groups are indeed becoming more resistant due to the large number of Christians being sent their way. Clyde Berkley, former Strategy Associate for Southern Africa developed a “receptivity to lostness” formula to assist mission strategists in allocating personnel and financial resources.⁴¹

Besides the missionary mandates of need and receptivity, there is a third directive revealed in Scripture. Within the Great Commission passage there is also a discipleship dimension. Lately, mission societies are concentrating their personnel and strategic resources on unreached people groups who number less than two-percent evangelical. This has resulted in moving away from work once it has reached this threshold. This means turning the evangelism, church planting, and discipleship work over to a relatively small national group of believers (two percent). This is because the missionary task has been determined to be primarily a pioneering enterprise. In this scenario, national believers are left largely to disciple themselves. Jesus said in the well-known Great Commission passage of Matthew 28:18-20 [bold mine];

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (NKJV).

David Sills has pointed out in his book *Reaching and Teaching* that the

⁴¹Clyde Berkley, “Priority and Strategy” in *Rejoicing Together: Balancing the Biblical Perspectives* by Robin Dale Hadaway, an unpublished booklet presented to IMB senior leadership at the Regional Leader Forum, November 2002, 22-24.

teaching mandate in missions is sadly lacking today. Sills writes;⁴²

In a new emphasis (or de-emphasis), some major agencies have so focused on church planting and evangelism that they have neglected the need for theological education, pastoral training and leadership development. Some have reasoned that in order to fulfill the Great Commission, we must pour our efforts and resources into evangelism and church planting. Some even believe that Jesus cannot return until we reach every people group – and that He will return immediately after we do.

In the rush to produce a Church Planting Movement (CPM), the maturation of believers has been placed on the back burner or left for others to accomplish (nationals and other mission groups). This lack of “teaching them to observe all things” has led to doctrinal drift in some places⁴³ and a shallow faith in others. Third-world Christianity has often been described as “a mile wide and half-an-inch deep.” Mission societies should broaden their definition of missions to include not only reaching the last frontier, but also reaping the receptive in the harvest fields and teaching and discipling the new converts from both. In this spirit, I offer the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Immediately raise the two-percent evangelical population threshold back to twenty percent or at least ten percent. I believe exiting a people group that is more than two-percent evangelical is the historical equivalent of the United States declaring victory in the Vietnam War, only to see the country fall three years later.
2. Determine the places that are the most receptive to the Gospel and send new missionaries there in greater force.
3. Increase the teaching and discipling in missions by appointing a cadre of missionary trainers and seminary professors to teach in our churches and seminaries world wide.
4. I would recommend deploying missionaries overseas in the following proportions for all missions societies.
 - a. 40% Unreached
 - b. 40% Harvest
 - c. 15% Training and Theological Education
 - d. 5% Administration (finance, logistics, & personnel)

⁴²Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 18.

⁴³This year both the Brazilian Baptist Convention and the Korean Baptist Convention voted to ordain women to the Gospel ministry. One wonders if the IMB had remained more engaged with these conventions if this would have occurred.