

The Unfinished Task It Can Be Done

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It was nearly two thousand years ago that Jesus challenged His church with the Great Commission - to make disciples of all nations. Today, as we rapidly approach the 21st century, we are nearing a milestone that Christians once that Christians once only dreamed of reaching. Within sight for the first time ever is a goal that for centuries has ignited the hearts of missionaries: "A church for every people and the Gospel for every person."

This great "Unfinished Task" is the motivational goal of the AD2000 & Beyond Movement - not only that it be done, but that it be done by the end of the millennium - by December 31, 2000!

Perhaps this overwhelming goal sounds too ambitious, too far-reaching. But consider for a moment Coca-Cola's well-publicized goal to place "a Coke in the hand of every person on the earth by the year 2000." If reaching the entire world with a soft drink is not too ambitious for a business corporation, how much more should Christ's own church be committed to reaching that same world, in the same time frame, with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ?



A hundred years ago, evangelist D.L. Moody said concerning the spread of the Gospel to the whole world by the end of 1900, "*It can be done; it ought to be done; it must be done.*" However, five years before the end of the century, his colleague, A.T. Pierson, conceded, "We despaired of hope."

Today, a few years before the end of *our* century and millennium, hope and anticipation have regained the upper hand over despair and pessimism. More than 4,000 Christian leaders representing 186 countries have committed themselves in writing to the goal of a church for every people and the Gospel for every person by the year 2000. With that common goal in sight, they gathered in May of 1995 for the Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE '95) in Seoul, Korea, which Ralph Winter - founder of the U.S. Center for World Mission - said may have been "the most strategic Christian gathering in history."

It is apparent, then, that many Christian leaders from around the world believe "The Unfinished Task" can, indeed, be finished. They have committed themselves and their resources to the effort, joining hands to seek completion of the task in this century. Embracing the conviction of D.L. Moody from a century ago, they accept even more strongly

that, "*It can be done; it ought to be done; it must be done.*"

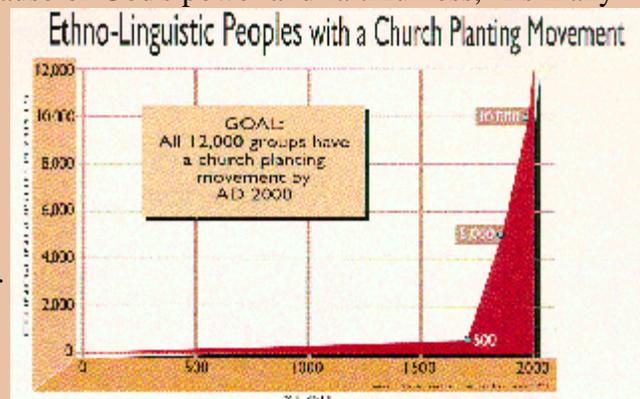
It Can Be Done!

Because So Much Has Been Accomplished Already

The first thing we must understand about the goal of "a church for every people and the Gospel for every person" is that *the greatest portion of the task has already been done*. As *Operation World* author Patrick Johnstone (Chairman of the AD2000 Unreached Peoples Network) has observed, "There is cause for much praise to God in the progress over the past 200 years, and more especially in the past 30, and cautious hope for the initial attainment of our goals."

Planting "a church for every people" is a task that is already well underway and entirely within reach. Of 12,000 known ethno-linguistic peoples in the world (distinct cultures with their own ethnicity and/or language), an estimated 10,000 already have a church-planting movement in their midst! Because of God's power and faithfulness, His many servants have prepared the way for this great moment in history.

"The Gospel for every person" is entirely possible as well. We have long been told that by the year 2000, over 95% of the world's population - people from every culture, language and country - will have access to the good news of Jesus Christ through a portion of Scripture in their own language, literature distribution, radio transmission, audio recordings, the "Jesus" film or public evangelism. In fact, it is no longer a case of one means or another in terms of access to the Gospel, but one means and *others*. By the end of the century, experts now tell us that 95% of the world's population will have access not only to some portion of Scripture in their own language, but also to Christian radio broadcasts...and audio recordings...and the *Jesus* film!



Throughout the world we see much evidence of a rapid acceleration in divine activity toward the fulfillment of the goal. God is moving as never before.

Because Of Prayer Mobilization

God's Word promises that He answers the prayers of His people when they pray according to His will. These promises underscore the pivotal role of a *growing prayer movement focused on world evangelization*. Revival expert and scholar J. Edwin Orr once wrote,

"When God is about to do something new He sets His people a-praying." This is already happening in churches around the world.

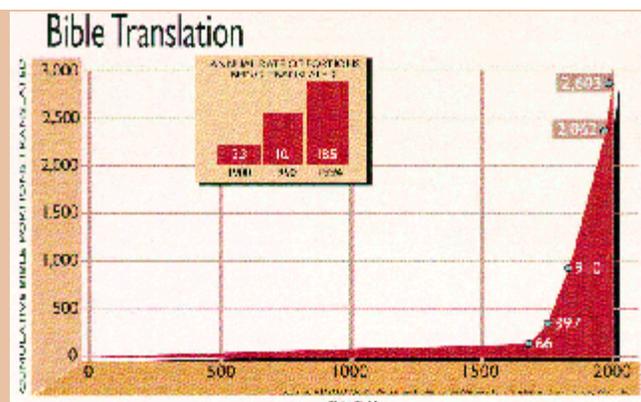
In 1994 an article in *Christianity Today* asked, "Is a Global Great Awakening Just Around the Corner?" The article answered, "With millions of Christian believers holding mass prayer rallies worldwide, scholars and prayer movement leaders are asking whether this development foreshadows church renewal on a global scale." It went on to cite prayer initiatives like the *Day to Change the World*, held June 25, 1994, and the AD2000 Prayer Mobilization Network's *Praying Through the Window* in October, 1993. The article then proposed that "a prayer movement that greatly surpasses anything, perhaps in all of Christian history, is rapidly gaining momentum."

And this momentum of prayer is still growing. *Praying Through the Window II*, held in October of 1995, focused on the influential "Gateway" cities of the "10/40 Window." A third *Praying Through the Window* scheduled for October of 1997 will focus on the least-evangelized peoples targeted by Joshua Project 2000. Add to this the thousands of churches and small groups who have committed themselves to adopting and praying for specific people groups and the evidence is overwhelming: God's people are praying as never before for the evangelization of the world.

Because Of Accelerated Outreach Efforts

"The Gospel for every person" means that every person on earth will have access to the good news of Jesus Christ. But how can we know for sure that worldwide access to the Gospel can be accomplished?

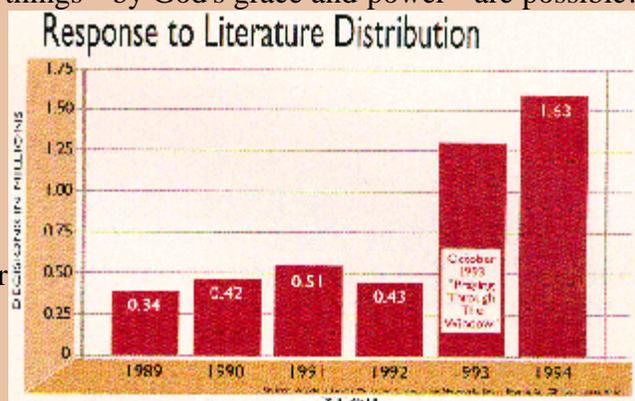
First, the Gospel for every person by the year 2000 can become reality *because of the technology available today*. Consider the



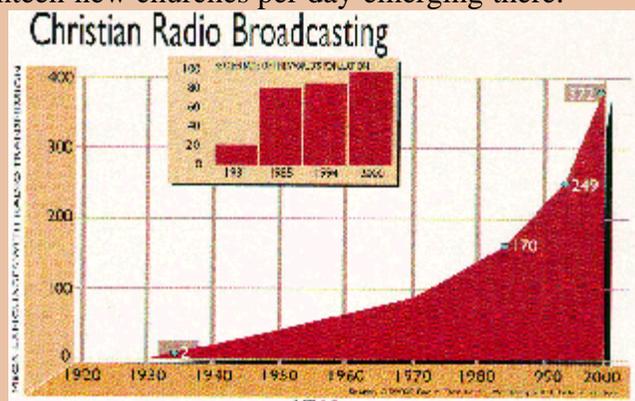
ministry of one evangelist who is honorary co-chairman of the AD2000 & Beyond Movement - Billy Graham. Since 1949, Graham has preached to more than 180 million people in more than 180 countries and territories. Yet the impact of just one day - April 14, 1996 - dwarfed even that lifetime exposure. The global broadcast of Graham's 1996 World Television Special that day to nearly every country in the world exposed more people to the Gospel than all his combined audiences in 45 years of ministry! Never before in history have so many people heard the Gospel message in a single day.

If the combination of today's technology and one evangelist can expose so much of the world's population to the message of Jesus Christ in such a short time, just imagine what great things - by God's grace and power - are possible!

Second, the Gospel for every person by the year 2000 can become a reality *because the Scriptures are available in the languages of the world's people*. By the year 2000, eight out of every ten people will have access to the entire Bible in their own language. Nine out of ten will have access to a New Testament. Today, the acceleration in Bible translation is so remarkable that more than 18 different language portions per year are being translated, compared to just over three per year in 1900.



Third, the Gospel for every person by the year 2000 can become a reality *because of massive literature distribution*, which is occurring systematically as well as randomly throughout the world. The AD2000 God's Word and Literature Network, for example, is systematically distributing Christian literature to every home in the world. In India, whose population will reach nearly one billion by the year 2000, agencies are working to distribute Christian literature to every home in the more than 600,000 villages by century's end, with an average of seventeen new churches per day emerging there.

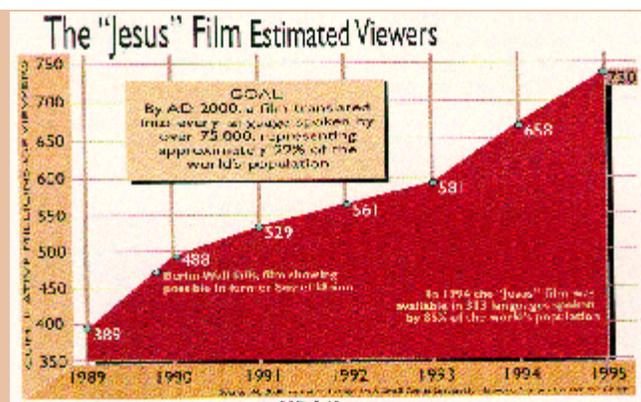


Fourth, the Gospel for every person by the year 2000 can become a reality *because of audio communications*. This includes all radio and recorded Gospel messages as well as other media that do not require reading skills for the hearer.

Because of a dramatic rise in illiteracy, the United Nations has called the 1980s "the lost decade." Audio technology has emerged as the obvious and vital mass medium for reaching these estimated two billion people.

In less than ten years, the number of languages within evangelistic broadcasting has increased from 170 to 249. By the year 2000, radio broadcasts are expected to cover an estimated 99% of the world's population. The AD2000 Audio Communications Network, with the involvement of more than 20 agencies, seeks - through a plan called *Target 4000* - to recruit at least 70 recording teams to finish the cassette recording work that began in 1940. By the year 2000, audio Gospel recordings will be available to 96% of the world's population.

Fifth, the Gospel for every person by the year 2000 can become a reality *because of the "Jesus" film*. As of January, 1996, over 730 million people in 217 countries of the world have seen this stirring film, with 42 million known decisions for Christ. With 445 churches and mission agencies involved, a new translation is being completed



every 10 days. The goal is that by the year 2000, the "Jesus" film will be available in languages known by 99% of the world's population.

It *Ought* To Be Done!

A close look at the Bible tells us that "The Unfinished Task" of "a church for every people and the Gospel for every person" *ought* to be done.

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). When Jesus gave the Great Commission to His followers, He commanded them, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The word He used for "nations" was *ethne*, which can easily be translated "ethno-linguistic peoples" instead of "nations" (countries with politically drawn boundaries). In reaching the world for Christ, believers should take the good news of Jesus Christ to unreached ethno-linguistic peoples.

The Bible tells us that people from every ethno-linguistic group will be in heaven. John wrote in Revelation 7:9, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

Scripture not only stresses the need to reach all people groups, it also emphasizes that every person should hear the Gospel message. When Jesus commissioned His disciples He said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Based on these verses, the AD2000 & Beyond Movement is mobilizing Christians worldwide to bring to each ethno-linguistic people a church and to provide each person access to the Gospel.

It *Must* Be Done!

Knowing that "The Unfinished Task" *can* be done and *ought* to be done, we also acknowledge it *must* be done. But what has to happen before we can realize the vision of "a church for every people and the Gospel for every person by the year 2000?"

Through the AD2000 & Beyond Movement process, we believe God has raised up a number of specific, effective strategies for completing the task - country-wide efforts, denominational initiatives, region-wide projects, city-wide programs, networks of agencies, and partnerships between many organizations who labor together toward the year 2000. "The Unfinished Task" among unreached peoples is a common focus for all of them.

Over several years, more than 2,000 plans which target the year 2000 have emerged independently, in country after country around the world. Together they are an indicator of what we must do in the years ahead. We must acknowledge, support and encourage them, filling any gaps that emerge and enriching them any way we can.

The Apostle Paul admonished all believers to run the race to obtain the prize. By God's grace and provision, we have come a long way. But as we approach the end of the race, it is time to quicken our pace. It is time to begin our sprint. Paul wrote to the Romans, "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here" (Romans 13:11-12).

We acknowledge "The Unfinished Task" includes several serious concerns. We must not oversimplify the scope of the work. We must guard against a failure to cooperate within the



Body of Christ. We should not underestimate the human, spiritual and financial costs of reaching the world's remaining unreached peoples.

But we must remember that God is on the move! He is superintending the events of our time. He is the source of the world's growing spiritual thirst. That means that *now* is the time. Let us go forward with God's help and work together in harmony toward the year 2000 and beyond to complete "The Unfinished Task" that lies before us.

It can be done! It ought to be done! It must be done!

What Can You Do?

The data shows that the Gospel will soon be available to almost every human being alive today. What can be done to assure that people respond and churches are planted, especially in the remaining least-evangelized peoples without a church? Joshua Project 2000 has been launched to give you a way to contribute to the completion of the task. The goal of Joshua Project 2000 is to pioneer a church-planting movement among each of the approximately 2,000 least-evangelized peoples through prayer, research and mobilizing church-planting teams.



You can pray for the least-evangelized peoples. The Joshua Project 2000 list is available for one dollar (US). Encourage your church, Bible study group or prayer circle to adopt an unreached people group for prayer. Make plans to participate in the October 1997 *Praying Through the Window III* which will focus on the least-evangelized peoples.



You can form or join a research team to visit one of the Joshua Project 2000 peoples. A Joshua Project 2000 video and a training manual prepared especially for short-term research teams are available. The research data that you collect will be shared with missions researchers and will be used to produce people profiles for prayer and strategic planning.



You can explore joining a long-term church-planting team. Your church or fellowship can link with an agency or denomination sending church planters to one of the Joshua Project 2000 peoples and support them financially and in prayer.

For more resources, referrals or specifics on how you can be involved, contact:

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Reprints of this article, "The Unfinished Task: It Can Be Done," are available for 50 cents each, plus shipping costs. Minimum order: 10 copies.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.

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Footnote: The number of languages varies on the charts due to differences in definition. The Bible Translation chart reflects the known languages definitely requiring translation. The Christian Radio Broadcasting chart uses language to designate a broadcasted language understood across various dialects.

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