

# Cross-Cultural Evangelism

Panya Baba

And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

About a year ago, one of the village heads posed this challenging question to a cross-cultural missionary: "Do you really believe what you are preaching to us?"

"Yes," replied the missionary with conviction.

"How long ago did your people get this news?" he asked.

"About sixty years ago," replied the missionary.

The leader paused and asked, "Why didn't you come to tell us before my father and other relatives died? If God will judge those who do not believe, what will God do to those who receive the message and do not quickly tell others?"

The unfinished task of world evangelization in our generation is still too enormous to be left to a few active Christian workers and missionaries. The task calls for the involvement of the universal church of Christ in evangelism regardless of geographical boundaries. Existing local churches, denominational and non-denominational agencies, parachurch agencies, lay people, and individual believers of Christ are to proclaim Christ cross-culturally until he comes.

Cross-cultural evangelism means evangelizing and planting new churches among people groups culturally different from the evangelizing Christians.

## The Unfinished Task

It is shocking to see that more than two billion people, or 40 percent of the world's population, have yet to hear the gospel of Christ. According to the record of provisional data from Lausanne II:

There are about two thousand ethno-linguistic groups of people among whom there is no indigenous community of Christians with adequate members and resources to evangelize their groups. There are also about one thousand unevangelized cities and thirty unevangelized countries.

We have heard by the speakers at this Congress that most of the unreached groups live in countries where normal missionary work is restricted and where there is no

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existing church to witness to them, such as in socialist countries or in countries where other world religions dominate. Here we must include those unreached religious groups living even in the so-called Christian countries like the thousands of Muslims who live in Western countries today.

In Nigeria alone, there are still over one hundred unreached people groups. The Butawa people received their first missionary couple just three years ago. The three largest unreached tribes in Nigeria are Muslim groups. Research reveals that there are fifteen thousand towns and villages in the whole country of Ghana without Protestant churches. There are two million unreached people in Southern Ghana and three million unreached people in Northern Ghana.

There are many other countries that have people yet to be reached with the gospel. These are the lost sheep that must be brought into the fold (John 10:16). The key is for cross-cultural missionaries to go there first to witness and evangelize.

## Trends in Our World

As the result of God's punishment for the pride of mankind at Babel, the world is filled with an incredible patchwork of cultures. This multi-cultural setting makes the task of reaching the world a difficult one. However, this also makes the need for cross-cultural evangelism an imperative. Some of these people groups are being absorbed by others within the country, but most have retained their cultural uniqueness. Each culture has its own language and social structure and would need a viable strategy for their evangelization.

Traditional homelands are gradually being deserted and large-scale migration to urban centers is increasing. The question arises as to how the giant cities with different immigrants having different cultures will be evangelized. Christians are seen in the large cities setting up churches of their own tribes or groups. The implication of this is that they can still be identified in the urban areas.

The fulcrum of missions is rapidly moving from the West to the Two-Thirds World. As we have heard, there are over twenty thousand cross-cultural missionary workers from the Two-Thirds World alone. The church in this part of the world is facing the task with great courage. And it is hoped that by the year 2000 there will be 160 thousand cross-cultural missionaries from the Two-Thirds World alone.

Let us also not forget that recent statistics show that 93 percent of all cross-cultural missionaries are working in churches or church-related projects and only 7 percent are working among unreached people. This is an unbalanced missionary focus.

The growing evangelical movement in the Two-Thirds World is offsetting the loss experienced in Europe. For example, it took less than ten years for the Nigerian student movement to become one of the world's largest evangelical student movements.

## The Possibility of the Great Commission

Despite the trends in our world, reaching the unreached people groups is not impossible. We are commanded to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15), and we are to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

During the Global Consultation on World Evangelization by A.D. 2000, an encouraging statement was made. "We believe that we can bring the gospel to all the people by the year 2000." This can be accomplished with sufficient dedication, unity, and mobilization of available resources, powered and directed by God.

As we seek to finish the task, we can see that there is no alternative to cross-cultural evangelism. Saved Christians must go to proclaim the gospel to unreached people

wherever they are. "How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they are sent?" (Romans 10:14–15). The Turkana tribe in Kenya was counted as an unreached group until missionaries went to settle among them ten years ago. Now the tribe is being touched with the message of salvation. Five of the unreached people groups in Nigeria, namely the Gwandara, Koma, Koko, Dirim, and Kambari are also being reached. More than three hundred new churches have been planted among these tribes during the past seven years because cross-cultural missionaries were sent to them. They would still have remained unreached today if no one had been sent.

### The Emerging Harvest Force

We live in an exciting missionary era. The Lord of the harvest is doing a new thing as we work on the final harvest for world evangelization:

1. *The rise of the new missionary force from the Two-Thirds World.* Some receiving countries are now beginning to send missionaries.
2. *The growth in Christian workers.* It is encouraging to notice that in 1989, the total number of Christian workers has risen to 3.8 million while the number of Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries alone is about .27 million or 270,000.

There is no doubt that there has been appreciable growth of the missionary work force. However, even with this number of workers, we still need more workers to cope with the unfinished task. We need to mobilize Christian professionals, "tentmakers," students, lay people, and women for cross-cultural evangelism and church planting.

### Obstacles or Hindrances

1. *Lack of Vision.* "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 28:18). There are many local churches that are yet to catch the cross-cultural missionary vision. We need to pray fervently for the renewal of the vision of cross-cultural evangelism in our local churches. Some local churches are evangelizing successfully in Jerusalem and Judea, but have yet to enter Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. If each local church would make it a goal to send or add just one new couple or two couples of cross-cultural missionaries from now until 2000, we would see a great increase. My denomination alone could come out with three thousand missionary couples by 2000.
2. *Denominational Differences Resulting in Strife.* This hinders the cooperation vital for cross-cultural evangelism. We should work together instead of separating from one another. This togetherness does not demand an organic organizational structure. Each church can have autonomy, but we must remember that there is no church, mission, or organization that can finish the task alone.
3. *Economic Constraints.* Many Two-Thirds World mission agencies who serve countries across their national borders cannot support their missionaries because of foreign-exchange restrictions. The principle of partnership should be applied as the Holy Spirit guides. A two- or three-party partnership could be considered.
4. *Lack of Burden, Compassion, and Genuine Love for the Lost.* Romans 9:22–23, Matthew 9:36, and 2 Corinthians 5:14 give the motivation for

mobilizing more Christians for cross-cultural witnessing.

5. *Entry Restrictions.* Some countries close doors to cross-cultural missionaries. Various categories of missionaries should be utilized to overcome these barriers.
6. *People Missionary Movement.* Most of the major religions spread through the process of immigration and trade. In the early church, God used the persecution of the church for a "People Missionary Movement" (Acts 8:1–4). Members of our local church today should be taught how to be a part of a People Missionary Movement during persecution or in time of relative peace. We are all witnesses for Christ wherever we go.
7. *Inadequate Training.* The principles of cross-cultural evangelism and discipleship must be taught to the workers to equip them for the most effective service.

### Proposed Strategies

1. *Prayer Cells.* Each local church should organize prayer for cross-cultural evangelism programs. Jesus told his disciples, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38). In the Bible, when the Antioch church devoted itself to prayer, the Holy Spirit ordered the separation of Paul and Barnabas for cross-cultural evangelism (Acts 13:2–3).

A good example of this kind of praying is found in the Korean church, when its members devote themselves to prayer on the mountains. As a result, members and churches multiply. Prayer is like the electrical switch to the power of the Holy Spirit. We do nothing apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). The power of the Holy Spirit is not limited. The Bible is still the same. The Spirit is far ahead of us—preparing people to receive the Word. But we are reluctant to go and share.

2. *Provide Adequate Cross-cultural Training for the Workers.* Adequate training is imperative. The training need not be identical everywhere. We should not transfer patterns wholesale without considering the cultural relevance of such patterns to the receiving countries. We must study their beliefs and their social and traditional practices. The World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) missions commission spent several days discussing this issue. We agreed to print, at some time in the future, a pamphlet on effective training procedures.

Areas that we need to look at with greater flexibility than we have done in the past are: (a) verbal communication, (b) non-verbal communication, (c) individual personal approach, (d) family or relative approach

3. *Emphasize the People Concept.* Each mission agency, local church, and parachurch group should adopt the unreached people concept as we seek to finish the task. As we do this, let us begin as Paul did by reaching out to places where Christ had not been made known (Romans 15:20–21). I like the goal of, "A church in every unreached people group by the year 2000."
4. *Mobilizing the Local Church.* Pastors and mission leaders should get together and organize more Mission Awareness programs, conferences, and seminars. The church needs to release many types of missionaries—tentmaking missionaries, professionals, short- and long-term missionar-

ies—all are needed to fill vacancies on the fields.

5. *Cooperation or Partnership.* It is not possible for one single organization to finish the task of world evangelization. It is, therefore, necessary for us to keep providing a forum for cooperation or partnership between emerging and established missions, parachurch, and denominational missions so that we can avoid competition and duplication. Examples are:

- The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in cooperation with others. “More than a dozen sister denominations overseas are coordinating their mission efforts in this worldwide movement called Bold Mission Thrust.”
- During the past three years, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Board in the United States has entered into cooperative agreement with several other mission agencies in Asian and Latin American countries in order to give the final thrust for cross-cultural evangelism.
- The Cooperation of three major Christian radio ministries (HCJB, FEBA, and TWR) with a common goal of reaching the entire world by the year 2000 is a very challenging development. They are presently proclaiming the gospel in more than one hundred languages. According to information given Dr. Ron Cline, more than 90 percent of the world’s population can now hear the Good News in a language they can understand.
- The Indonesian Missionary Fellowship provides opportunity for both western and non-western missionaries to work together towards a common goal in cross-cultural missions.

6. *Redeployment of Some Missionaries.* Our missionaries should be redeployed to work in unreached areas. We need to balance the distribution of the force we have.

7. *Planting Mission-Minded Churches.* Many church members are not interested in cross-cultural evangelism. The whole idea is foreign to their thinking. We need an effective missionary endeavor based on the local church in order to produce workers and support for cross-cultural evangelism. The mission of the church is not only local, but global. Pastors are the key for training laity in discipleship and mission awareness.

8. *Applying the Right Cross-Cultural Approach or Method to the Unreached People.* The right strategy speeds up understanding of the gospel and hastens the work of cross-cultural church planting. Some unreached people have very strong family ties, and decisions have to be made by the head of the family or religion or village. We need to be sensitive. Both people movements and the individual approach should be utilized where appropriate (Acts 8:26–39, John 4:10–42, Acts 16:32–34).

- Verbal and non-verbal communication of the gospel in cross-cultural evangelism should be considered.
- Sacrifice is needed in order to identify with people from other cultures. We need to learn from the Master himself who emptied himself and “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians

2:7, KJV). We are to learn from Paul who said, “To the weak I became weak, to win the weak” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

A case in point is the Dirim people, who live high in the mountains of Nigeria near the boundary of Nigeria and Cameroon. For several years, the first three Evangelical Missionary Society (EMS) couples sent to the Dirim had trouble in evangelizing the people. They had isolated themselves from other tribes due to long years of tribal warfare. They rejected any attempt by the government to develop their areas and ran away from any visitor or stranger who attempted to get near them. They regarded any person apart from their tribe as an enemy, therefore, an enemy could bring them no “Good News.”

When the EMS discovered this secret they began the non-verbal approach to building bridges of friendship and reducing their fears. They did this by spending days helping them in farming, free of charge. The missionaries’ wives also fetched drinking water from the streams and would carry it to their wives’ small thatched kitchens, without mentioning anything about the gospel.

After several weeks some of them began to come nearer and question the missionaries. “Tell us who you are? Why are you different from other tribes people who fight against us? Why are you so kind and helpful to us?”

When the missionaries responded to their questions and shared the love of God with them, the Dirim village leaders summoned a meeting of the village heads and discussed the uniqueness of the missionaries and their message and then passed the information to all the family heads and relatives. They said, “We recognize these preachers as people of a different God from our gods. They are so kind with love to us. We also agree that their message is true and for our welfare. Therefore, anyone interested can accept them and their message because they came and are here for our good.” Within a short time there was a breakthrough. Fifteen of them accepted the Lord Jesus. Now, new churches are being planted among the Dirim tribe. Let us remember that Jesus didn’t say let your light be shown only, but rather, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, KJV). In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35, KJV).

## Conclusion

The challenge must go beyond this Congress. We should be good stewards who carry the cross-cultural missionary vision to the grass roots of our local churches. Each local church’s vision for cross-cultural evangelism must not stop in its Jerusalem and Judea, but go beyond that to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. We are called to repentance from our past failure to accomplish the task of world evangelization. According to the *Global Consultation of World Evangelization A.D. 2000 Manifesto*:

We humbly confess our pride, prejudice, competition, and disobedience that have hindered our evangelization. These sins have impeded God’s desire to spread abroad his gracious provision of eternal salvation through the precious blood of his Son Jesus Christ. The revelation of God in Christ is plain. The commission to his church is clear. The unfinished task is apparent. The opportunity to work together is ours.

We are called to rededicate ourselves to a deeper commitment to the unfinished task of cross-cultural evangelism, so that our work force will be increased as we seek to complete the task by A.D. 2000 and beyond. We need to produce more audiovisual

materials that are applicable to the people we reach. In this way, more cross-cultural missionaries will be recruited. May the vision of Lausanne II teach us to see we have been too long reluctant to accomplish the task of cross-cultural evangelism. It is our responsibility to proclaim the gospel to all peoples, tribes, and tongues of the world so that they will stand before the Lamb clothed with white robes and with palms in their hands, worshiping with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9–10).

## VIDEO PRESENTATION

# The Challenge of Other Religions

Producer: Richard Klein

From earliest times, man has sought to know the unknowable, touch the untouchable, and to find peace for his troubled soul. His search for God has followed many paths, from paganism to the occult. Man has worshipped his deities in the smallest of objects and the largest of celestial bodies.

But while man's individual creeds are innumerable, there are only a few religions of significant historical, cultural, and apostolic importance. And only one is the truth.

Perhaps the oldest and the most complex challenge to Christianity is Hinduism. Based in India, and tracing its origins to the third millennium B.C., Hinduism has no central, discernable founder. The word *Hindu* refers to an array of beliefs, encompassing nearly every form or style of religion that has been conceived or practiced, not all of which are consistent with one another.

Hinduism has regularly absorbed internal and external challenges throughout history. It is seen as the most tolerant of the world's great religions. Permeating the Hindu faith is a pervasive sense of reality in the unseen or spiritual. The Christian concept of forgiveness is alien to the devout Hindu. In its place is the doctrine of *karma*, or "retribution." Today, as it has in the past, modern Hinduism has sought to incorporate the ideals and ethics of other major religions, such as Christianity, while simultaneously adapting itself to human secularism and the science of evolution.

Presently, there are 690 million adherents of Hinduism, representing 13.3 percent of the total world population. Hindus are predominantly born into their faith, rather than converted, and are, therefore, found mainly in India. However, Hinduism can be found in those areas of the globe where large numbers of Indians have migrated, including Malaysia, Java, Borneo, Fiji, and East Africa.

Buddhism, an outgrowth of Hinduism, was founded by Siddhartha, a prince of sixth century B.C. India. The word *Buddha* was, in fact, a somewhat generic title, meaning "the enlightened one."

Defied by his followers in the centuries after his death, Buddha never intended to found a new religion, or even to reform Hinduism. His original teachings dealt more with ethics and self-awareness than anything resembling doctrine or dogma. However, in a movement resembling the geographical expansion of Christianity under Constantine, Buddhism developed a distinctly non-Hindu missionary imperative during the third century B.C. The new faith swept through Asia, replacing or absorbing existing religious systems, while at the same time losing its foothold in India.

Within this century, Buddhism has begun a fresh revival. Spurred in part by Western interest in the exotic religion, Buddhism gained new popularity following the