

Reservation regarding “The Peoples Approach”

First it is important to establish that –

- God created a world characterised by diversity. People are of diverse cultures, societies, personalities and many other things. Therefore, we cannot judge merely on the basis of diversity. Our judgement of anything should be made on the basis of Truth as established for us in the Holy Scriptures.
- In the history of missions, God used His people in diverse ways.
- We are not in a position to judge former generations who acted according to the light they had and according to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
- God is constantly speaking to His people and always ready to direct them into new and fresh ways that are relevant to the different situations and places He puts them in.
- God is concerned for all people: groups, families and individuals.
- God does not only see the individual as part of a group, but also the group as made out of individuals.
- God is the God of His “people” but also He is the God of “Abraham”, “Isaac” and “Jacob”.

Jesus has provided for us an example to follow. It’s obvious that our Lord in His ministry on earth had a **clear understanding** of the procedures and approaches He carried out.

Following is a general look at Jesus’ ministry as can be seen in the Gospels:

1. He started with the Jews although He had contact with “individual” Gentiles.
2. He selected a more-or-less homogenous group of 12 disciples and trained them for future evangelism:
 - a. most were fishermen
 - b. all were Galileans
 - c. all were men.
3. He “extracted” them from their towns, homes and families as He took them with Him for training all around Judea, Samaria and parts of Galilee.
4. He taught them that “He” comes first and that nothing should stand between them and Him, not even their father or mother etc. (Matthew 17:27-29). Peter expressed “*We have left everything and followed you . . .*” Did Jesus discourage this? Verse 29.
5. The security they needed was not from their society, but rather from Jesus Himself, and from fellowship with each other. They lived together and supported each other. Yes, they were extracted.
6. Some people were called to follow Jesus and they accepted but they wanted their families and other interests first, so they turned away. Jesus did not accept their excuses (Luke 10:57-62).

7. Jesus did not put a special emphasis on opinion leaders. He was with the poor and the lost.
8. Many of the stories in the Gospels record interviews between Jesus and individuals. Example: the Samaritan woman. Jesus looked at her, not as an opinion leader, but as a sinner. He saw her **personal** need and met **her** thirst. The result was: many from her town came also and believed, each one individually. It was the conversion of a **group of individuals**, but not a **group conversion**.
9. Jesus trained His disciples to go door to door, from town to town. He cared for **each** and **all** people living inside these houses.
10. Jesus instructed His disciples to leave those who resist and refuse the Gospel after they have had the chance **to hear**.
11. Jesus did nothing to protect the converts from **persecution** except integrate them into the new group. (Many people used to follow Him in addition to the twelve.)
12. In fact, Jesus taught the disciples to expect persecution and suffer for His sake.

CONCLUSION

Jesus, who understood human nature very well preached to individuals and to groups, and He desires **all** to know the Truth. But He had a dear concern for the individual, for the lost sheep and the prodigal son (Luke 15). He approached households and individuals.

The Book of Life has the names of **each** and **all** those who “*have been washed by the blood of the Lamb*”

Bearing all these facts in mind, and at the same time recognizing the many positive aspects of the “peoples approach”, we now come to the reservations regarding this approach. These reservations are based on the implications and underlying assumptions of this approach.

1. In the desire to point out the validity the approach, and underlying assumption is that the failure to reach the Muslim world can be attributed to the traditional approaches of foreign missions to Islam. It would be more realistic to attribute such failure to the lack of love of the Church and to her disobedience of the Great Commission. The labourers are truly few.
2. In the desire to emphasise the importance of group conversions it is all too easy to forget, ignore or undermine the value of individual decisions. The individual should not be absorbed in the group. “...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over **one** sinner who repents (Luke 15:10)
3. In the desire to bring about group conversions within a culture there lies the danger of undermining the necessity of each individual in the group recognizing the need for repentance for his own **personal** sin.
4. Another danger is making the message easy by overlooking certain cultural practices and not proclaiming God’s judgement on them for fear of arousing resistance in the group.
5. As a result, another assumption can be challenged: that we need to minimise or remove resistance to the Gospel in order for people to be converted. Jesus taught otherwise.

6. In the desire to achieve certain goals, there lies a danger of assuming that secular management techniques can guarantee success and give the desired spiritual results.
7. In the desire to develop overall strategies planned with one approach in mind, there lies the danger of imposing upon certain situations a method which may not be appropriate. Greater consideration should be given as to the various situations in which a peoples approach may need to be substantially adapted.
8. In the desire to produce quick and measurable response in peoples, there lies the danger of allowing the Christian worker who has deep and strong convictions in a certain method to minimise the importance of his utter depending on God and His Holy Spirit for guidance and direction. No method works without dedication and God's intervention.
9. In desire to work on finding the right method, it is all too easy for the vital spiritual issues to be minimised. Prayer and fasting, perseverance and tenacity, compassion and gentleness can never be passed over in favour of any given method. The incarnation of Christ in the life of the evangelist still remains the greatest attraction to the unbeliever. The Gospel is not just to be preached, but also to be lived.
10. In the desire to reach a given community, great emphasis is put on reaching leaders and opinion-makers. Whilst not condemning this in some situations, it needs to be recognised that this presupposes that the conversion of the power base results in the conversion of the powerless. Conversion can only occur when each person accepts Jesus as **his** saviour.
11. In the desire to see people saved and growing in the Lord, an assumption is that since extracting converts results in their being persecuted, it is better to have group conversions in order to minimise persecution,
12. In the desire to produce intact Christian communities or churches of converts it is presumed that we can and should pre-engineer the structure of these future churches. No such predictions are possible.

FINAL WORD

Granted that people movements are theoretically manageable and sometimes even possible and expedient, it has to be balanced out. God is totally interested in the individual and totally interested in communities. But whatever the method or approach, it is the attitude the evangelist has that counts. It is his dependence on God and submission to His will that will guarantee his success. Success is not measurable by positive results. It is the duty of the evangelist to proclaim the Gospel and make it known to the masses. Whoever accepts, we ought to disciple. Those who refuse have been given by God the right to choose.