

## **REPORT ON THE TEHELKA COVERAGE OF MISSIONS IN INDIA (Summary by David John Lee, March 4, 2004)**

On February 7, 2004, the independent Indian newspaper *Tehelka* ran a ten-page “exposé” of around 60 U.S.-linked missionary agencies targeting India. The authors present their report as fact-based investigative journalism, using a wide range of sources, including “moles” inside the mission agencies themselves.

Their chief accusation is not that the agencies are corrupt (on the contrary, they applaud the missionaries for doing “inspired social work”), but that the agencies are engaged in a conspiracy to evangelize the subcontinent.

It should be noted that the multi-agency Christian initiative AD2000 (later dubbed the Joshua Project) is characterized by the journalists as “based on a military model with the intent to invade, occupy, control or subjugate” India’s population.

This impression is reinforced by two things.

- The massive scale of intelligence-gathering done by missionary agencies.
- The choice of the name Joshua (the Old Testament leader who sent spies ahead of him prior to invading the Promised Land), with its overtones of secrecy, espionage, and hostile intent.

They comment about the Joshua Project: “The ethno-linguistic profiling of the people groups in India, probably, cannot even be matched with data with the Government of India... The launch of the Joshua Project in the mid-1990s resulted in scores of American research teams arriving in India to lay preliminary roadmaps for the church-planting mission.”

From the journalists’ standpoint, this alone looks bad enough. But it looks a lot worse in the light of the perceived close alignment between American Christian evangelists and the current U.S. administration.

The authors argue that President Bush supports Christian mission (in India and elsewhere) as a “return gift to the Christian Right for having loyally supported his presidential campaign.” But that’s not all. Conveniently for U.S. political interests, they say, the Joshua Project “has put in place a system which enables the U.S. government to access any ethnographic information on any location virtually at the click of the mouse.”

Beyond an assertion that the Southern Baptists “have traditionally worked hand-in-glove with the CIA,” the authors offer no proof that American religious and political operations overlap. But the suspicion that they *might* is a damaging one for the Christian church. The quasi-covert nature of missionary planning, allied with the fact that many U.S. evangelical leaders are politically connected, makes this conspiracy theory all too plausible to an Indian who opposes the Christian Gospel.