

FURTHER REFLECTIONS



A New Kind of Evangelism

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Some of you know that I am working on a Ph.D. with an emphasis on the life and missiology of Ralph D. Winter. Thankfully, I took the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Winter for many hours of interviews and discussion before he died in May 2009.

In the process of that study, I continue to discover insights I believe will be of great interest to those of us who are committed to the advance of the Kingdom of God today. While I wish I could ask Dr. Winter further questions, I find it interesting that others who have tracked with him on any given subject often have insights from him that are helpful.

One of those people is Bruce Graham, who was on our staff when my wife and I arrived in 1982. Bruce and his wife were here until 1991, then spent almost 15 years in India, training workers, until they returned to Pasadena in 2006.

The other day, as some of our colleagues in Pasadena were discussing articles in the new *Perspectives Reader*, discussion focused on Dr. Winter's presentation at Lausanne 1974 in particular. Today, when most people talk about that presentation, and about the impact it had on mission thinking, they usually talk about the idea of unreached or "hidden" people groups.¹

Certainly that was the element of the presentation that gained the most traction and that captured the imagination of many believers around the globe.

But the other day Bruce made another point that helped me to more clearly understand that presentation. He noted

that while the "unreached" status of many Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other peoples was clearly an important part of Dr. Winter's 1974 presentation, the main thing he felt Dr. Winter was trying to say was that we needed a new kind of evangelism to effectively reach them.

Because the Billy Graham *Evangelistic* Association was sponsoring the 1974 consultation, speakers were encouraged to use the word *evangelism* instead of *missions*. Dr. Winter inserted the phrase "cross-cultural evangelism" into the name of his presentation: *The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism*. Winter was saying that (1) if we keep doing things the way we have been, we will never touch the unreached peoples, and (2) crossing cultural barriers takes a new kind of evangelism, a new way of understanding what the Bible says and how to communicate biblical truth.

Naturally, this topic was being discussed at the time at the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary, where Dr. Winter served as a professor. While the students (all experienced missionaries) were studying the growth of the Church in the fields they served, they were also being exposed to anthropology, cross-cultural communication and the history of the spread of Christianity—and how these disciplines might impact the people groups among which they were working. All of this ferment at Fuller fed into Dr. Winter's 1974 presentation on the task remaining and the need for cross-cultural understanding.

In a study guide produced to accompany printed copies of Dr. Winter's 1974 presentation, several

discussion questions highlighted the related issues. Some of those questions are listed below.

- List various obstacles of which you are aware as you attempt to communicate the Gospel. Use the following to organize your thinking: language, religion, economic, social, psychological, cultural, geographic.
- Why is "cultural distance" the crucial factor in the E-1, E-2, and E-3 evangelism in your area of work?
- What kinds of cultural subgroups are within your area? How are you going about reaching them? Could you make changes in your approach to them that would make your work more effective?
- Should local churches be multi-cultural or a more unified culture? Realistically, what happens to Christians who do not conform to the cultural pattern of a particular local church? What do you think should happen?
- What kind of obstacles to follow-up are caused by differences in sub-cultures? How can local churches and other religious groups in your area avoid or overcome these obstacles? Is your church able to assimilate and accommodate people with different life-styles without making them change their cultural differences to conform to your group's norms?

Perhaps these questions would be good for all of us to ponder today, as we reach out in a world where even small towns often display cultural diversity. Why not discuss these with the mission committee at your church or others with similar interests? f

¹ By "hidden" Winter and the USCWM did not mean that the people were hiding but that they were often hidden from the view of the church.