

# 'Two Sides to Every Issue'?:

## An Exchange Between Bob Finley and Ralph Winter

Ralph Winter's note: Below is Dr. Finley's response to a preliminary edition of this issue of *Mission Frontiers*. Here and there I have added some comments on specific statements - in which case we have put those statements in boldface type.

Dear Dr. Winter,

You were very kind and considerate to send us a copy of your magazine prior to publication, and you have demonstrated your ethical integrity by inviting me to respond to your comments concerning Christian Aid.

I am happy to say that we would be the first to acknowledge that there is some validity to all the things you have written. At the same time we would affirm that there is also validity to all the things we published in the recent issue of our magazine to which you refer.

There are two sides to every issue. In our magazine we can only present one side, which is the explosive growth and effectiveness of indigenous missions during the past 50 years, and why they should be included in our missionary giving. We also point out certain contrasts between native missionary ministries and the work of foreign organizations and denominations who send their representatives to countries where indigenous missions are located. In so

doing, we confess, **we sometimes make the natives look good while being less favorable to the foreigners.** But such contrasts are not always valid, and it is good that you are pointing this out.

RDW: Basically, that is our point. You say "sometimes." Perhaps it should be "always"?

Because there is so much to be said about the extent and outreach of indigenous missions today, **we have no**

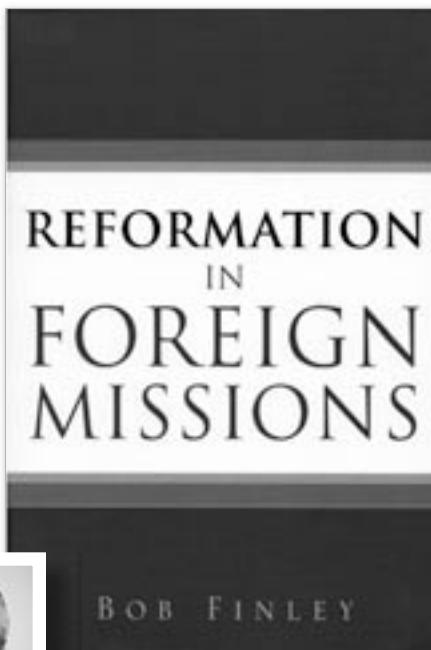
**space left in our magazine to pay tribute to all the great things that have been and are being accomplished by traditional missions.** These achievements have been well documented by others, as every student of Christian missions is well aware.

RDW: But you do apparently have space to say oceans of negative things, such as, "Generally, with a few exceptions, those who go from one country to another as missionaries end up hindering rather than helping the cause of Christ" (page 9 in the magazine, quoting from your book).

But few are aware of the fact that our Lord has raised up over **6000 evangelistic ministries in "mission field" countries that deploy over 400,000 native missionaries today.** Our mandate is to make their works known.

RDW: There are far more than that – in view of your definition below. They, however, are "type 3 and 4" activities in the diagram I have inserted below.

This figure does not include those whom you call "pastors" or "evangelists." We define a missionary as being equivalent to the biblical "apostle": one who bears witness for our Lord, including planting a church, where there is no church or witness. **He may or may not work cross-culturally. If God saves and prepares him while he is away from home, and he returns to his home community as its first witness for Christ, he is a pioneer missionary.** Saul of Tarsus went as a foreign student at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, and was called of God to return to Cilicia as an apostle among his own Greek-speaking people. **That's how we define a missionary.**





## Two Sides to Every Issue?

RDW: Here is the chief problem. You have the right to define "missionary" in any way you wish. But if your definition differs from your hearers', and you don't warn them of that, they will be seriously misled. Most of the time "missions" means "crossing new language and cultural barriers to plant the Gospel in a language or culture where it has never been made clear." Once there are churches and believers within that society (not just at a distance), the delicate mission task of framing the Gospel in a different culture is finished and evangelism begins.

If space permitted, I could satisfactorily explain and clarify every criticism or objection that you have raised concerning things that have been published by Christian Aid. If we carefully examine both sides of these issues, I am confident that we will see that what we have said is true, while there is also validity in your evaluations.

For example, when you quoted us as saying Nepal does not admit foreigners as Christian missionaries, you said our response would be that they are not admitted under "missionary visas." In fact, in times past they have had to sign affidavits that they would not propagate their religion in Nepal, but would confine their activities to "social work" ...

RDW: Your article on page 3 says, very misleadingly, "Foreign missionaries are still not allowed." The truth is that during the past 50 years dozens of mission agencies have had hundreds of missionaries in Nepal. Their witness by their works has often spoken louder than words.

Many of the foreign "social workers" have undoubtedly been used of the Lord while in Nepal. But there has been a downside also. Numerous Nepali Christians have told me that the presence of the foreign colony has had a devastating effect on the spiritual lives of Nepali Christians. While their parents suffered terrible persecution, imprisonments and death for boldly witnessing for Christ, the younger generation has seen foreign "missionaries" hold back from openly proclaiming Christ lest they be put out of the country. And those Christian young people have imitated the foreigners and compromised their testimony to avoid persecution. Also, the comparative wealth of the foreigners has been envied by Nepali believers and caused them to become

covetous of material gain. So, as I said, there are two sides to these questions.

RDW: Even greater envy may arise when one national worker is given a motorcycle and another isn't.

I have dealt at length with all of these matters in a book titled *Reformation in Foreign Missions*. It is available for purchase from booksellers, Amazon.com, or other sources, but we would be happy to send a complimentary copy to any of your readers within the USA who are seriously concerned about current trends in the furtherance of the gospel.

**"You have the right to define 'missionary' in any way you wish. But if your definition differs from your hearers', and you don't warn them of that, they will be seriously misled."**

—Ralph Winter

To request a copy, call 434-977-5650, e-mail [lucy@christianaid.org](mailto:lucy@christianaid.org), or write Christian Aid, P.O. Box 9037, Charlottesville, VA 22906. A member of our board of directors has agreed to contribute the cost of these complimentary copies to promote better understanding between Christian Aid and the U.S. Center for World Mission.

RDW: We encourage our readers to get a copy of this book. It extols the work of people speaking their own language, which is good. It goes to great lengths to deride in every way possible the work of people who work cross-culturally, ignoring the continuing necessity of that kind of work. It gives the impression that such activity is no longer necessary or that anyone – Western or non-Western – needs to work cross-culturally.

Again, thank you, Dr. Winter, for inviting me to share in your excellent magazine. I was greatly blessed a few years ago when you invited me to speak to your staff in Pasadena. As the Apostle Paul said of the saints at Rome, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." In quoting him let me be somewhat coy by pointing out that until then no foreign missionary had ever visited Rome. The churches there were started by Andronicus and Junius who found Christ while "strangers from Rome" visiting Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. But even though these Roman "nationals" were said to be "of note among the apostles," I suppose you might say they failed to qualify as "missionaries" because they didn't work cross-culturally.

With love in Christ,  
Bob Finley

RDW: The only reason people flocked to Jerusalem for holy days from all over the empire was because Jewish families had for centuries been scattered all over the empire. *They were the cross-cultural missionaries.* Greeks and Romans were attracted to their synagogues and became “devout persons” or “God-fearers,” as they are called in the Book of Acts. These people of faith, whether Jews, Greeks or Romans, did not go to Jerusalem to gain their basic faith but, at Pentecost, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Their faith had been gained originally cross-culturally from Jewish families in the Jewish “dispersion.”

Thus, they were, indeed, able to communicate in their local language, whether they ever went to Jerusalem or not. Paul was an “apostle” all right, but in the Greek language so was a little boy “sent” to buy a loaf of bread. Nevertheless, for most of his ministry Paul was not a “cross-cultural” missionary in the usual sense. He was proclaiming Christ to people who were already devout believers in the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He had little success where he was outside his own bi-cultural (Greek/Jewish) heritage. That’s how tough cross-cultural work is!

Those of us who are students of missions will freely grant that the Gospel can more effectively be presented by someone who speaks the same language and culture – “native” or “indigenous,” as you put it. This is perfectly true. But, note, there are still many pockets of dear people where there does not exist a single believer who can witness in his or her mother tongue.

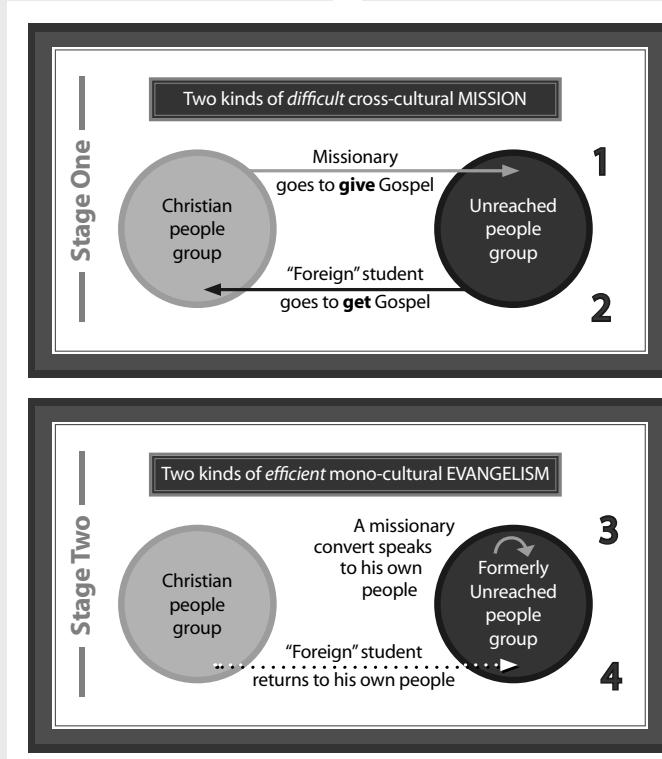
Before that can happen, before anyone can witness in his own language, a cross-cultural breakthrough must occur – either by means of a missionary from outside or by means of one or more of those people going outside.

When a foreign student becomes a Christian, that is precisely where the “cross-cultural” activity takes

place, and it is exceedingly more complicated to make sense to a foreign student than for that foreign student to speak to his own people once he becomes a believer and returns to his own country.

It seems obvious that, in the case of an untouched group, either someone has to go out from that group and learn the truth cross-culturally (mechanism 2) or someone has to go to that group from outside and present the truth cross-culturally (mechanism 1). Both processes are true missionary, cross-cultural events, and *very complex*.

Why applaud the “going out to get the Gospel” pattern (mechanism 2) and denounce the “sending to present the Gospel” pattern (mechanism 1)? Going afar to get and sending afar to give are essentially the same, tough, cross-cultural problem. Both are pioneer efforts, that is, Stage One – what we call *mission*.



Once a person goes and gets the Gospel then, of course, it is much easier for him to communicate to his own people (mechanism 4). Or, once a missionary from the outside takes the Gospel and someone comes to faith, that person can then communicate to his own people (mechanism 3).

These are both Stage Two, what we call *evangelism*.

It does not matter what these two stages are called; they are momentously different in degree of complexity. Your main point is that you are so enthusiastic about the impact national Christians are making (Stage Two, mechanisms 3 and 4) that you do not have space in your materials to praise cross-cultural efforts, Stage One, mechanisms 1 and 2 – just space enough to run them down?

In any case, I appreciate the fact that your letter does indeed acknowledge the role of foreign missionaries, even if your magazine and your book are full of negative reports about standard missions. ☽