

# FURTHER REFLECTIONS



## How Is Missions Working Out For You? Part 1

Greg H. Parsons, Global Director, U.S. Center for World Mission

“So,” Dr. Phil often asks, “How is that working out for you?”

Our answer to that question in relation to global mission is influenced by our background and experiences. My experience goes back to 1976. I was a college student with a strong global interest. A friend and I were so serious about it, that we took a couple dozen from our college group up to a Student Conference on World Evangelization, where Ralph Winter was to speak.

As we sat there listening to him—less than one month before the USCWM was founded—we were shocked. Why hadn’t we heard this before? We were the “on-fire” ones—even promoting missions and prayer for the world in our church.

I now know that what he shared was based on what he had presented at the Lausanne Congress in 1974. He had been refining it for the years. At that point, 2,387,000,000 of the world’s population were categorized as non-Christians, beyond existing church outreach and needed a special kind of evangelism, which he called “cross-cultural evangelism.” The major blocs were: Muslim, Hindu and Chinese worlds. (Later, Chinese was changed to Buddhists.) He noted that this represented 87% of all those needing evangelism.

A few issues back, I quoted Todd Johnson that as of 2007 or so: “Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims have relatively little contact with Christians. In each case, over 86% of all these religionists do not personally know a Christian.”<sup>1</sup>

So, how is it working out? Turns out, not so good.

I am excited about the progress we have made on a number of fronts. Certainly, amazing things have been happening. And, to be fair, those two numbers, (86% and 87%) while parallel, are not based on the same data or perspective. So we ask: what is wrong? Why not more?

BUT THE FACT THAT 86% OF THE MUSLIMS, HINDUS AND BUDDHISTS OF THE WORLD DO NOT EVEN KNOW A CHRISTIAN, SIMPLY MUST CHANGE.

We could blame training. We could blame global tensions or religious conflict. We could blame churches or missions or seminaries or...

The talk Ralph Winter gave in 1974 was called: “The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism.” While he was expecting disagreements on some points, he did not consider the title itself would be a problem. Some people were upset about it.

The reason for the reaction was that it seemed to be saying that this, special, uniquely missionary task was more important than any other. The 2,700 people at the Congress were involved in many different kinds of ministry. While the main, unifying factor was their desire to see evangelism progress, only a few worked with Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists.

As usual, Winter was looking at it from an engineering perspective. If you have cultures (or people groups) where almost no believers or churches are reaching them, then what needs to happen *first*—

meaning the “prior” thing—is cross-cultural evangelism. It is not the most important, but it needs to happen first, before other things can happen.

Today, my fear is that many of the things we call “missions” are simply inter-church aid. We talk about “serving the national believers” or sending our money to them to “do it.”

But what do you do when there are no believers there? Send money? That doesn’t work, as John Piper said in a tribute video for Ralph Winter, “We all know that the unreached people groups have nobody in them to send your money *to*.”

Thus, “priority!” So, as a first step, we need to get there, where this “prior” step has not been taken. We can’t ignore training or experience and spiritual growth. Nor should that take 4 years post-college.

How many of your church’s global workers are serving with Muslims? Hindus? Buddhists? I don’t mean working, say, in the Middle East with Arab Christians, or working in India with tribal people groups or Dalits. Those can be good things. There is lots of other work that needs to be done everywhere.

But the fact that 86% of the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists of the world do not even know a Christian, simply must change.

What are you doing to help that change?

Next Issue: I’ll talk about other things we can do to be more effective in efforts on the ground. f

<sup>1</sup> *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 43:4, Oct. 2007, p. 495