

NEW WINE AND OLD WINESKINS

by
Roy Stults, D. Miss., Ph.D.

The Loss of the Prevailing Model

We are asked to address the question of changing the prevailing paradigm of missionary training that has been primarily focused on training Western missionaries for cross-cultural ministry to less developed countries. I realize this is a generalization that does not prove true in all situations, but training Western missionaries and non-Western missionaries for work in Western countries is less prevalent, most likely because we think that training people to live in modern, Western countries is not necessary (these are not true missionfields, we think, in the traditional sense) and we have not put emphasis on training non-Westerners in their own context for global missionary work. However, since there has been an almost universal declaration that Western countries are missionfields (though different from traditional missionfields) along with the rest of the world, it seems likely that we must address that issue at some point. We certainly must address the question of training non-Western missionaries in a manner commensurate to their context and cultural heritage. They will not come to the table with the same assumptions and needs as Western missionaries, which means they will need training tailored to them.

We live in an increasingly multicultural situation, both in North America and in many countries around the world. It is redefining our constituency as a church. It is leveling the missionary force, where missionaries are called, trained, and sent from many countries to many countries, living and working with people from cultures very diverse

from their own. While there is an enormous amount of commonality among people of all backgrounds and cultures, there are some clear differences that need to be addressed to be fair to those who may not be from a Western country or embrace American culture as its first culture. It is important that we be sensitive to the differences. It is equally important that non-Westerners receive training that fully prepares them for cross-cultural or intercultural ministry.

The leveling of the missionary force is concomitant with the leveling of missionfields as well. Every church in every country has the responsibility and calling to send persons to every nation of the world. This idea was being articulated well before Lausanne II: Manila; but they clearly articulated it. There is no longer a bifurcation of *sending* and *receiving* nations. Yoshinobu Kumaza comments about this as follows:

The general tendency of Christian missions in the twentieth century can be summarized by the phrase “the dewesternization of Christianity”... What does this mean for mission? It means that the less developed nations that were long treated as mission lands are such no longer. Instead, they are now sending out missionaries to other parts of the world, including the Western world. The Western world has rapidly become a mission land itself. (Kumazawa, p. 139)

Samuel Escobar speaks for Latin America:

With its five hundred years of Christian presence, shouldn't Latin America be considered rather as a ‘mission base,’ from which missionaries go as messenger of Jesus Christ to plant Christianity in other continents of the world? (Escobar, pp. 126-27)

At that time of Lausanne II: Manila I was teaching missiology at Asia Pacific Nazarene Seminary where we were preparing future missionaries (and some who were already doing missionary work while studying) from many Asian and South Pacific nations. It was a great teaching experience but it was an even better learning experience.

One semester I was assigned to teach Asia philosophy to Asians! It is not impossible for a Westerner to teach Asian philosophy to Asians, but the irony of the situation did not escape me or my students. Being kind and understanding students, they both affirmed my role as teacher and helped me to see it from their viewpoint. So, as I taught what I knew from reading a lot of books and recalling my visits to many Korean cultural and religious sites, my teaching was *supplemented* by the insights of persons who grew-up immersed in Asian religion and philosophy. I learned more than I taught.

Perhaps this should be the model of the church as we seek to be an inclusive church, truly including persons from every nation. Perhaps we should begin our discussion of training missionaries from non-Western cultures by listening to them. Many who come from countries that have been recipients of Western missionaries will have insights that will help the global church train its global force in more profound ways.

How did the Prevailing Model Emerge?

It can be said that the idea of Western missionaries going to non-Western countries is really an accident of history. The earliest missionaries were not, of course, from Western countries, but were from the Middle East and eventually from countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. They traveled the trade routes on foot and by boat and the gospel was spread to the perimeters of the Roman Empire. Stephen Neill, referring to Simon of Cyrene, said the “Cyrenians took part in that decisive step which carried the Gospel out of the field of Israel directly into the Gentile world.” (Neill, p. 33)

As missionaries turned west it was apparently more receptive than the East. As Christianity became more entrenched in Europe it became increasingly self-absorbed and unconcerned with the rest of the world. This was due to the fact that Europe was backed-up to the Atlantic Ocean by advancing Islamic armies. Although the Islamic armies were pushed back, they still provided a barrier to Western Europe going out in mission until the great age of exploration that awakened Europe to the exotic nations once beyond its scope. Old Christendom lasted a thousand years and modern missions (the story of the beginning of modern missions being written by Westerners about Westerners) was born almost in defiance of the church whose attitude was that if the world needed saved, God didn't need our help. William Carey felt otherwise!

The age of exploration led to the dominance of Western (predominately Christian) nations and the building of colonial empires. It was not uncommon for missionaries to go from the dominant countries to the colonial possessions to do missionary work under the protection of the colonial powers. This established the sending nations/receiving nations' bifurcation that prevailed until the breaking up of the colonial empires in the 1960s. Independence movements sprang up in the colonial countries and forced the dominant Western countries to retreat. This set up a new situation for Western missionaries. They were more vulnerable and were forced to work with emerging national leadership, many of whom who proved to be quite competent.

This had a ripple effect in missions. Westerners did not at first realize that they were no longer considered as preeminent in missions so the Western attitude of dominance and self-confidence continued for many years, especially in evangelical circles. We were slow in recognizing the need to change directions and attitudes!

There is still a predominance of Westerners in leadership, even in places we have been for decades. But, times are changing and we need to recognize that we are truly a global church, which means that there are no greater or lesser parts.

As a result of the changes of the 1960s terms like *indigenous* came into prominence in relation to leadership and in terms of organization and style. One example of this was the *three-self* movement in Korea that came about through the teachings of John Nevius, missionary to China. As a result of the desire to make missions more indigenous in the remaining years of the 20th century, evangelical missions attempted to decentralize and transfer power to local/national churches and leadership, as much as a particular denominational leadership structure would allow. Churches in these countries began to see that they were an integral part of the global missions and the next step was to send out their own missionaries. There were very few opportunities for training outside the West. Indigenous sending agencies sprouted up and some training was given. Zeal to serve often meant that these missionaries would be sent out prematurely. I recall a discussion about Korean missionaries sent to other Asian countries and replicating some of the same mistakes that Western missionaries had made. Interestingly, the seminary located behind APNTS that was built by Koreans for Filipinos had Korean and English words on its gate!

The New Challenge

In the late 1970s when I was teaching at Korea Nazarene University, the thought crossed my mind that what was missing in the curriculum was a course in missions. If there was one earlier, it had somehow dropped out of sight. So, we started this course

and it became increasingly clear that God was calling Korean young people to be missionaries. The thought never crossed my mind before that time. In reading stories about Korean church history, I discovered that the Korean church (Presbyterian) had sent out its first missionaries in 1912! That fact had been lost in history. I felt that God was calling me to prepare to train Asian missionaries in Asia. Later the door opened for me to teach missiology at APNTS in Manila.

In 1984, the centennial of the first missionaries' arrival in Korea, tens of thousands of Korean young people dedicated themselves to serve as missionaries if the Lord called them. Over the next few years Korean sending agencies, training schools, and colleges spring up to meet the need. In 1989 I went to an Asian mission conference in Korea organized, sponsored, and supported by Asians. Fifteen hundred delegates from over 50 nations gathered at a large church complex in south Seoul, with Westerners there as observers! A new day had dawned. I realized that the nature of missions would be changing at more rapid pace.

In essence, we are addressing an issue that probably should have been addressed a couple of decades ago. Two things are certain: the missionaries of the 21st century will be significantly different than those in the past and the world they will be going out into will be much more complex.

Thoughts on New Wine

There is one more thing that is certain: we cannot put the new wine of the new context into old wineskins. We need a new wine skin.

It is difficult to conceive of missionary training in the new context as generic—one model fits all. While there is a lot of commonality among humanity, we cannot allow this to become the standard for global missionary training. There will, of course, be many universal elements of training that all will need to have, but each context will require adaptation. The goal of training is to produce effective workers (Steffen, p. 964). If we are more interested in outcome rather than perpetuating particular methods, we are free to be creative and adapt the training to meet the goal of effectiveness, once we define what we mean by that.

It is important to begin to articulate the essential elements of missionary training which of necessity will be contextualized. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Conceptual: there needs to be solid theological and theoretical training where missionaries understand the rudimentary principles of missions and learn to conceptualize how mission will be accomplished. I believe there is a difference between missionary education and training. Missionary education is more formal, more rigorous and more comprehensive than training. It prepares persons for long-term ministry and a level of competence greater than those who receive training only. Training is more pragmatic, more related to skills and relationship building, and less rigorous than education.

2. Practical: conceptual training is supplemented and complemented by training in and developing the skills necessary for cross-cultural ministry.

3. Relational: it is essential that missionaries work together in unity and harmony. It is common knowledge that relationships not health is the main problem that causes missionary attrition.

4. Personal: attention must be given to the individual's personal adjustment, health, psychological stability, and level of spiritual maturity. I had the opportunity to create and teach a course at NTS on missionary spirituality. I had noticed in reading missionary biographies how much the spiritual life factored into the success of great missionaries. Books like Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret became a staple for me as I sought to find God's will in each situation and as I sought to understand spiritual warfare.

With the idea of missionary spirituality in mind, it is not hard to appreciate the overall goal of missionary preparation mentioned in Introducing World Mission: "The overall goal of missionary training is to equip the prospective missionary to be a godly person who is both competent and effective in his or her missionary service." (p. 17)

Tom Steffen lists the long-term training needs of missionaries as "character, commitment, competence, and culture." (Steffan, p. 965) He also sees the need for training missionary families rather than "fragmented, individualized training." (Steffen, p. 965) Actually, this last point needs to be extended. What he says is that most missionary training is piecemeal, a little bit here and a little bit there. What is needed is "a more systemic profile-based training model geared to the whole family...to counteract such fragmented, individualized training." (Steffen, p. 965) I believe that in essence what this implies is a contextualized form of training geared to meet the needs of whole families, instead of just the parents. I believe he is saying that we need to think of the process by which the person is shaped and formed for missionary service. I also believe that the Church of the Nazarene has a good handle on this, at least for North Americans. How can this be extended to the rest of the world?

Steffen sees profile-based training taking place through three forms of education or three arenas: Formal education (which is generally the way I defined education above), Nonformal education (which is more like training as defined earlier), and Informal training, which is not structured and happens as people talk about and observe missions. He says is it “much more than the acquisition of cognitive knowledge,” (Steffen, p. 965) which it is, but the tendency today is to decrease if not eliminate cognitive knowledge from the equation is something of an impediment to missions. One can know too much and this will make decrease your effectiveness as a missionary? Although I am sure he does not mean it, such a statement in our present context demeans the need for formal education. It is the fact that the Church of the Nazarene makes formal education a priority for missionary preparation that makes it a more effective tool for long term missionary work. This is superior to agencies that may give a brief orientation in the skills and mechanics of missions and then send their people on their way.

In regards to training, Steffen has something good to say (although it shows a Westerners pragmatic bias):

Whenever possible, it should be field-based, mentor-intensive, and team-oriented; require immediate application; and include constructive feedback that addresses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. (Steffen, p. 965)

Factors of 21st Century Global Missionary Training

As we attempt to rethink the training of global missionaries, there are a number of factors that must be considered. Here are a few to consider:

1. Missions of the 21st century will require multinational teams. The lone missionary couple or family is not only not smart deployment it makes no sense in

the complexities of today. This will impact the type of training for missionaries in the new context.

2. Because missionaries will come from and go to a variety of nations, the best way of thinking of missionaries is to see them as resource persons who are in partnership with a particular national church. It is a cooperative venture, not the imposition of an expatriate to a particular nation without their consent and cooperation. This will impact who will participate in training.
3. Mission work done in teams is more group-oriented and more communal, something that persons from traditional cultures find very comfortable while Western missionaries will need special instruction and pre-field education to deal with it.
4. The new context calls for a plurality of methods to enable a plurality of models to develop to meet the complex needs. Missionaries must be trained to be creative and flexible in order to create a model that best fits a specific context.

Possible Areas of Conflict

It is not difficult to predict that there will be numerous areas of potential conflict. With multicultural people training for a variety of nations, there are many collision points, where aspects of various cultures will clash. Here are some suggested areas:

1. Male/female relationships:

Each culture defines what is appropriate, and when cultures interact there is potential for great misunderstanding or behavior that one culture sees as normal

being seen as inappropriate by another. This is a potential problem for multicultural and international teams.

2. Authority structure:

Cultures value certain authoritarian styles and do not like others. Some value a hierarchical authority system while others prefer a participatory style, creating possible collision points. In the past the international church had to get used to the American leadership style, but in the future, as other nations become more integrally involved, the issue of how to lead and what to expect from followers won't be quite as simple as the past.

3. Cultural and racial prejudices:

Since every culture is ethnocentric and each has its own prejudices, how will this impact the attitude of missionaries working alongside people of other cultures, if they consider other cultures somehow inferior to their own?

4. Economic and social status:

Some tension is felt by people who feel they must work with people of a different social status. Status can often indicate perspectives and educational levels that could hinder true mutuality among missionaries. There are some who naively believe that such things do not happen with or among missionaries. While most missionaries are able to overcome their cultural biases, it is because they usually come from cultures that allow cultural self-reflection and criticism. Not all cultures are comfortable with this reflection.

5. The goal of the mission:

No doubt missionaries have different views of what is to be accomplished on a particular field or in a particular nation. There can be conflict over goals and even over the steps to reaching these goals.

6. The problem of *lingua franca*.

While missionaries are learning the language of the field, multinational teams must communicate. Can we assume that English is the natural medium? I don't think so. It cannot be *assumed*.

Conclusion

We may perhaps think that a discussion of multinational and multicultural teams may be speculative, something that may happen but certainly not a present reality. If it is not a present reality, then we have been negligent to use the resources that God has given us.

If it is not generally a reality at the present, it will need to be so soon. So, these discussions have great significance for developing and refining missionary training that will effectively prepare missionaries from every nation as they seek to go to every nation. It promises to be an exciting but a challenging prospect.

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