

On Mission 2020

Topic Focus: Mobilization

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The 4th Era of the Modern Missions Movement

I am greatly burdened. We've had the Great Commission for almost 2000 years. The US and other countries have been sending out foreign missionaries for two to three hundred years. With all of our entrepreneurship, and technology and can-do spirit, we still have well over 2 1/2 billion people cut off from the gospel. To keep doing something over and over again, but expecting different results, that's what some people call insanity. We better look at this world of evangelization mandate from a different angle, if we are going to fulfill what is on Jesus' heart.

Let's peer into the rearview mirror of missions history, attempting to see it from God's perspective. Doctor Ralph Winter, founder of the US Center for World Mission has had a stellar job of teaching us when, where and how God has been at work over the centuries. You're probably familiar with his Classic Article Ten Epics or Epochs of missions history where he breaks the last 4000 years down into 10 super centuries with each 400 year period characterized by unique missions thrust. In his timeline, the period from 1600 to the present he calls the ends of the Earth, believing that we're in history's 10th and final stage of God completing His mission to embed a gospel-sharing, national-led church in every remaining unreached people group on the planet.

In another article, "Four Men and Three Eras," Winter highlights the people and movements that spawned the final push to complete world evangelization. These three eras were the Coastlands, the Inlands and the People Groups. And he lists the four men who spearheaded these eras - William Carey launched the first era in 1792 to the coastlands of India. Hudson Taylor launched the second era by going to the inland villages of China in 1865. Finally, a third era began, initiated in the 1930s by Wycliff Bible's Cameron Townsend and missionary to India Donald McGavran. They discovered the peoples of the world were not broken down into countries, as much as they were by nations or ethne, a myriad of complex and longstanding affinity groups, each with their own language, culture and religion. Third era missionaries had to contextualize their message and customize their approach to make the gospel most accessible and acceptable to each and every unique, unreached people group.

When I first met Doctor Winter in 1985 while taking the impactful Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course. I felt sure as so many leaders did that the Great Commission will be fulfilled by the year 2000. It would totally be done finished turn off the lights and go home. And yet, here we are many years later still praying, still working, still raising up workers to penetrate

the thousands of remaining unreached groups who have never even had the opportunity to hear the gospel.

Well, why is that? What is God up to? What are we to make of this so-called delay? Doctor Winter taught us that each of the three eras thought they were the final era - God's chosen instrument to conclude His purposes. Could it be that behind the scenes, the Lord of the universe is gradually, quietly, brilliantly initiating a fourth era in which He is building upon the first three, providing us new insights to multiplying the gospel into the remaining unengaged people groups. What if, in God's history books, that article is actually entitled "Five men and Four Eras?" What if Doctor Winter himself is the fifth man being used by the Lord usher in a 4th era? An era not describing locations or categories, like coastlands, inlanders or people groups, but a fourth and possibly final era, that was simply a strategy.

The missional multiplying strategy of mobilization. Well missiologist tell us the need is for 100,000 new, long-term, cross-cultural missionaries to penetrate these unreached groups. But who are these new workers? And where will they come from? In the past 70 years, Evangelicals have grown globally from just 100 million to well over 600 million. With over 80% of the total now residing in Africa, Asia and Latin America. But as much as God has been moving in these regions, they send out only 20% of the world's missionaries. I believe these are the sleeping giants that God is awakening to finish the Great Commission. But before missionaries can be sent out, they must first be mobilized. We call these huge pockets of un-mobilized believers around the world the unsent people groups. And these traditional mission fields are being transformed into radical new mission forces. The whole church mobilized to send missionaries to the whole world. This is the heart of the fourth era of the modern mission movement. The body of Christ in every country embracing Acts 1:8 and raising up and sending their own missionaries to the unreached.

Doctor Winter constantly exhorted believers with the mobilization message. That first, reaching the saved was the key to ultimately reaching the lost. In fact, numerous times, I heard him trying to talk people into not becoming missionaries. Why? Well, because the need to sound the alarm was so great. He knew that mobilization will result in a multiplication of missionary sent, claiming the number one priority is for more missions mobilizers. Anyone who can help 100 missionaries to the field, is more important than one missionary on the field. In fact, mission mobilization is a more crucial right now than even field missionary activity, he said. If he's right, maybe we need to re-calibrate our approach with some fourth era reasoning.

A recent statistic that keeps me from sleeping sometimes, 86% of all Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists in the world will never meet a Christ-follower. Life cannot go on normal knowing billions of these precious souls will live and die and never even have the chance to talk to a believer. What can you and I do about it? What is the solution to this tragedy? Business as usual will not cut it anymore. This is where mission mobilizers come in.

Doctor Winter believed the greatest mission mobilization movement in all of history is now gaining momentum.

Moving ahead with a quickening pace with more goals that are concrete, measurable and feasible. Our organization, Center for Mission Mobilization has been working with respected missiologists and researchers from various countries to put together a Mobilization Index. It provides a wide range of demographics for 57 countries that have over a million Evangelicals. One of the key stats contrasts the number of evangelicals versus the number of cross-cultural missionaries sent out by each country. The US isn't in decline in this category, but approximately one of every thousand evangelicals here is a missionary. Let's take Kenya for instance, that nation along with 12 others makeup English-speaking Africa, containing over 130 million Evangelicals. Our research shows that there are less than 5,000 cross-cultural workers sent out from those 13 countries. That's one missionary for every 26,000 Born-again believers. So you can see the huge mobilization gap there. But what if mobilization teams were placed throughout that region seeking to raise up just one cross-cultural worker for each 1000 Evangelicals? That would increase their missionary sending from 5,000 and 130,000 cross-cultural goers. The greatest missionary force in all of history.

So how can we see new mission movements ignited throughout the world? Will it be through sticking exclusively with the roles that we're familiar with like church planters and evangelists and student workers or theological educators? Or will we acknowledge God is up to something new? And a former, a critical category of workers is emerging, the mission mobilizers! Maybe God is handing us a new template that He wants us to operate from, to redirect many of our people and resources towards the unsent in order to mobilize national believers to reach the unreached, that may very well be right there in their own region. Would you personally begin a journey to understand this powerful potential of mobilizing the unsent? Would you converse with your coworkers about what this might mean for your team, church or organization? Do we have enough humility to embrace this seemingly backseat role in a new era of world evangelization? Will we be content to play our part in the global body of Christ selflessly encouraging, empowering and mobilizing the global unsent church to move past their identity as a mission field in order to fulfill their calling to be the greatest mission force the world has ever seen? If you're a missions pastor or you give to missions, consider re-evaluating your giving and sending strategies pointing more of your people and resources toward mobilization.

If you're a mission agency, why not study our Mobilization Index to aid you in making strategic decisions whether you ought to be sending missionaries or mobilizers to each country? If you're already a mobilizer, but operating in the global North, consider shifting your efforts to the global South where 10 times the number of people are coming to Christ each day. Yes, these brothers and sisters who are now the majority of global evangelicals could use your help, to help stir up a spiritual tsunami among the global church where there are huge, untapped pockets of believers, yearning to be mobilized and lead out. It's their turn. Lastly, this fourth era is not an ending. But an exciting new chapter of God's great plan. It's a global mission mobilization movement in which the whole church rise up to powerfully advance Jesus' Great Commission to the ends of the Earth. Each of us have a strategic part to play.

If not us, who? And if not now, when?