

RESPONSE TO DR. RALPH WINTER'S PAPER

Philip Hogan

Dr. Hogan, Springfield, Missouri, USA, is the Executive Director for Foreign Missions of the General Council of the Assemblies of God.

In responding to the excellent paper by Dr. Ralph Winter, one cannot help but worship at the shrine of his tremendous grasp of the remaining world missionary challenge and his inimitable way of categorizing these challenges into neat little categories so that they can be easily grasped by those of us whose minds are not nearly so methodical.

While it is true that spiritual factors seldom ever reduce themselves into human equations, there is a dangerous tendency to be over-idealistic when we attempt to analyze in human terms the great spiritual challenges of our times. Yet we can be grateful to Dr. Winter and his paper because it is a kind of a prism which brings into focus many views and serves to get all the issues out before us very clearly.

It is well that Dr. Winter, in his first paragraph reviews the heroic accomplishments made by Christianity in the world today. This is worthy of emphasis. This is, thank God, no hollow victory and we need not gather here as a council of despair.

Dr. Winter further acknowledges that the real frontier is not geographical but cultural. Modern ingenuity of this twentieth century has bequeathed us communication and transportation possibilities that change the "Go ye" in the Great Commission, from one of geography to one of cultural and sociological distances.

Dr. Winter makes a further excellent point when he reminds us that it is people and not political groupings that should concern the evangelist and the church-planter.

This brings us to the main presuppositions of Dr. Winter's paper, that is, the E-1, E-2, and E-3 concept of spheres for the purpose of gospel witnessing.

If Dr. Winter's premise is correct that the easiest and most successful evangelism is done at the shortest cultural distance, that is, in the E-1 sphere, then we should by all means take every opportunity to reach people from the great Hindu-Muslim-Chinese block who for study or business or any other reason, leave their cultural surroundings and expose themselves to the outside.

For instance, what about the great world of foreign students which constantly invades the campuses of the West. For certain, a great deal of splendid effort is being put forth to reach these people, yet, it is only reasonable to conclude that much more prayer and spiritual focus should be beamed their way if they, indeed, can come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ outside of the cultural block of which they are a part, and then go back to be E-1 emissaries.

With respect to Dr. Winter's further observations that successful

E-2 evangelism must look towards gathering the results into local units of the Body of Christ, which are formed around the cultural milieu in which they are converted: while one cannot deny that practically this seems like the proper thing to do, actually pressed to its final conclusion it would mean a very great proliferation further within the Body of Jesus Christ. Must we forever remain divided on the basis of culture, language, or color? Is it not possible to believe that newly-won Christians can be so obsessed with the object of their new love that the expulsive power of this new affection will overcome human dividing lines? Is it too much to believe that the sovereign Lord of the harvest can so revive the existing structure until it lowers the prejudice barrier to include all true-born sons of God into a warm fellowship?

Perhaps this is the proper moment to inject into this brief response what I hope will be my main contribution. That is, simply an appeal to all of us to recognize the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit and to emphasize once again the truth of Acts 5:32, "And we are his witnesses of these things and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God has given to them that obey Him." Truly the task of worldwide witnessing is a joint task. It is the cooperative endeavor between the Lord of the harvest and his church, made up of human vessels. Sometimes in the very act of analyzing, we rule out, on the basis of human categories, the overriding factor of our times that we are witnessing worldwide, an outpouring of the Spirit of God upon persons and in places for which there is no human design and in which there is not one shred of human planning. The inscrutable ways and origins of the Spirit, indeed, add a strange and fiction-like quality to serving God in these days.

A few years ago Hendrik Kraemer, the noted missions professor, spoke to a group of missions administrators in Chicago. At the conclusion of his address, the subject of Japan and its recent history came into discussion.

It was observed by different participants in the discussion that immediately following World War II, when the emperor had renounced his deity, the inevitable spiritual vacuum created by this act afforded one of the greatest opportunities any nation has ever known for evangelism.

Further observations were made concerning how propitious it would have been if the churches in the rest of the world had focused their attention on the emperor himself. If he had accepted the claims of Jesus Christ, perhaps a whole nation could have been won in a day!

The venerable Dr. Kraemer listened to this for some time, then remarked "I never did agree with you Americans. You seem to have the idea that by getting together and using the proper methods you can do anything. You leave out of consideration the operation of the Holy Spirit." This blunt Dutch professor indeed said it all and said it well. Some of us who are privileged to travel widely and see much in this twentieth century must be overwhelmed and humbled before the moving of the Spirit's own sovereign presence in the world.

Make no mistake, the missionary venture of the church, no matter how well planned, how finely administered, or how fully supported, would fail like every other vast human enterprise were it not that where human instrumentality leaves off, a blessed ally takes over. It is the Holy Spirit

who calls, it is the Holy Spirit who inspires, it is the Holy Spirit who reveals, and it is the Holy Spirit who administers.

The very promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit is connected with worldwide witnessing. "But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

I am persuaded to believe that after taking advantage of every tool, pursuing every possible human plan, all one needs to do to find plenty of service is simply to follow the leading of the Spirit. When one engages this truth and begins to live by its principle, there will be whole communities, whole cities, whole nations, whole cultures, and whole segments of pagan religions that will suddenly be thrust open to the Gospel witness.

Who would have thought in 1964 that Indonesia would be one of the ripest mission fields in the world today. Yet on the turn of events that happened around the stroke of midnight, the whole political and spiritual complexion of a vast nation has been changed. All the charts, plans, and maps of all the missiologists of the world could not have designed these moments.

Today we are witnessing an outpouring of the Spirit upon groups and individuals that our prejudices and our provincialism are sometimes slow to accept.

The essential optimism of Christianity is that the Holy Spirit is a force capable of bursting into the hardest paganism, discomfiting the most rigid dogmatism, electrifying the most suffocating organization, and bringing the glory of Pentecost.

Dare we stand in awe, my friends, and witness in these days the wonder of the ages? The Spirit of God is being outpoured upon persons and in places for which there is no human design and not one shred of human planning.

Indeed, if we will be alert, we can be like a spectator with a box seat, watching the greatest drama of all times unfold before us through which the sovereign Lord of the harvest, through his Spirit, is presenting the claims of Jesus Christ and calling out a people for his Name.

In Mark, the fourth chapter, there is a parable which is peculiar to Mark. He alone relates it to us. It says, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. It is like what happens when a man casts seed upon the earth. He sleeps and he wakes night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows and he does not know how it does it. The earth produces fruit with help from no one, first the shoot, then the ear, then the full corn of the ear. When the time allows it, immediately he dispatches the sickle for the time of the harvest is come." The earth produces fruit with help from no one, or as it is stated in the King James Version, simply, "The earth bringeth forth fruit of itself."

Please understand me, I am not pleading for a kind of "sitting where they sit and letting God happen" kind of attitude. But what I am pleading for is that at the end of every human endeavor there must be a simple dependence upon the Holy Spirit who, beyond the shadow of any doubt, is at work in his world in an unprecedented way and if we sow in faith, believing in the magic power of the seed, we must, as well, believe that

there will be receptive soil, sometimes suddenly and beyond the power of any human reasoning. When the wind of God truly blows, E-3 evangelism becomes as easy and successful as E-1 or E-2, and perhaps one of the major concerns of this conference should be that we discover where God walks and get into stride with him in his march through time and eternity.

God is working his purpose out as year succeeds
to year,
God is working his purpose out and the time is
drawing near,
Nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that
shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory
of God, as the waters cover the sea.