

Join the World Christian Movement

Ralph D. Winter



Ralph D. Winter is the General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship (FMF) in

Pasadena, CA. After serving ten years as a missionary among Mayan Indians in the highlands of Guatemala, he was called to be a Professor of Missions at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. Ten years later, he and his late wife, Roberta, founded the mission society called the Frontier Mission Fellowship. This in turn birthed the U.S. Center for World Mission and the William Carey International University, both of which serve those working at the frontiers of mission.

When you decided to sign up for the Perspectives class, you may not have realized what you were getting into—that it is not so much a *class* as it is an introduction to a *movement*. Perhaps you didn't catch the full significance of the word *movement* in the title of the course—Perspectives on the World Christian *Movement*. Now you know. Now you understand you are being seriously invited to join that movement—the World Christian *Movement*!

But what are the next steps beyond spectator status? It may not be clear to you yet just what God has in mind for you. You don't want to make a false start. What can you do for sure? What do you need to learn next? How is the calling to mobilization different from, but as important as, that of a front-line missionary?

Most people think of the cause of missions as a bunch of missionaries out there in a tropical forest working with their bare hands. Well, for that matter, some people think wars consist of boys out there on the front lines popping away with guns, but wars are usually a “war effort” encompassing many more people than those right at the front. So, missions is a “mission effort” that necessarily involves far more people in the support structure than those right at the front.

To be more specific, suppose you grew up with a great interest in the drilling of oil wells. You saw a video as a young person of the “wildcatters” who sometimes strike oil in unexpected places. You decided you would like to become a well-driller.

As you studied the subject, however, you discovered the “oil industry.” You learned all about oil refineries, oil diplomats who dicker with foreign governments, geophysicists who make precise measurements of feedback from deep under the earth, etc. So then you decided you would rather be a geophysicist! But you wouldn't have known such a possibility existed if all you knew about were organizations apparently recruiting only well-drillers.

In the same way, the World Christian Movement has become a highly developed international enterprise. At the core of this historic global movement are professionals and hundreds of dedicated, seasoned organizations. It's proper to look upon this core of the World Christian Movement as the “mission industry.” In the USA alone it's at least a five billion dollar per year activity—and its influence is far beyond what that money would do in any commercial venture.

To find your way into this incredibly influential enterprise, it is helpful to distinguish the roles of front-line teams who labor cross-culturally—let’s call them *missionaries*—and those who marshal support for them—let’s call them *mobilizers*. Whatever your role may be, as a missionary or as a mobilizer, you need a working relationship with others in the mission industry. William Carey wasn’t a loner.

Next to doing nothing, the most certain way to squander your life’s work would be to maintain an ignorant detachment from this astounding movement of dedicated mission professionals. Most of the important mistakes have been made. Most of the crucial matters of missiological wisdom have been explored. If you ignore this seasoned wisdom, the tempered courage, the proven ideas, and the heartfelt prayers of the generations before you, you are simply consigning yourself to beating the air for quite a while. This may apply even if all you do is join an organization that has not been around for some time.

Never concede to doing something so small that it could be accomplished entirely in your lifetime. Be a part of something that began before you were born and will continue onward toward the fulfillment of all that God has purposed to accomplish. God has uniquely formed you to be part of this significant movement. You cannot participate in what you don’t know about. Becoming a student of the mission industry is the best way to become a valuable part of the World Christian Movement.

Mission Agencies

As soon as possible, begin to get acquainted with the astounding array of mission agencies.

“Service missions” serve other agencies. Some are purely technical, like Mission Aviation Fellowship, with work ranging from jungle air strips to a marvelous internet service open to all agencies. Others are literature missions, recording experts, Bible translators, or radio experts. Missionary radio today outranks all secular radio systems in its reach and sophistication.

“Standard missions” concern themselves with every aspect of human need, whether medical, educational, church planting, etc.

Place great value on these incredible organizations. No one need start from scratch. Since agencies are designed for teamwork,

they are not only able to sustain efforts over many generations, veteran workers are able to pass on to newcomers the cumulative know-how and field knowledge of generations of earlier workers.

Training Institutions

Springing from, but feeding the mission agencies, are mission training institutions, seminaries and Bible colleges. These institutions have long offered programs in the many disciplines (such as theology, linguistics, anthropology, history, and many more) that undergird the grand discipline of missiology. Those offering formal degrees in a residential setting are most visible, but it is getting more common for training to take place away from campuses. “Distance education” brings instruction not only to where trainees live and work, it often brings to learners the material they need most, at the optimal moment for them to take it in.

Pressing the extension idea further are BA and MA degree-granting programs that offer training by way of mentoring. Internet-mediated learning is fascinating and helpful, but the most effective training resource will continue to be local, face-to-face mentoring.¹

Mission Associations, Societies and Publications

The people in these various missions and schools are intentionally networked by organizational associations and professional societies. Be a student of the mission industry. No missionary or mobilizer can be fully effective without an awareness of CrossGlobal Link (formerly the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association or IFMA) and The Mission Exchange (formerly the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies or EFMA).² Avail yourself of their meetings and publications, which are the cutting edge of missiology.

What you will do as a missionary or a mobilizer is so important that it is foolhardy not to gain professional skills in your pursuit of this high calling. Why not become an eager participant in the mission industry by joining a professional mission society? The ISFM (International Society for Frontier Missiology), whose official journal is the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, might be the place to start.³

Mission Frontiers talks about the cutting edge of missions in the form of a newsprint bulletin that goes to 85,000 people all over the world. Produced by the U.S. Center for World Mission on a donation basis, it comes out every two months.⁴

The *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*⁵ draws on a wide range of authors—from field practitioners to missiologists—to address contemporary mission issues from an evangelical perspective. You may not be planning a career in missions, but you will find valuable information that will increase your mission intelligence and equip you to mentor others in issues crucial to effective mission involvement.

Local Churches

Churches obviously play a crucial role in the missionary enterprise. Many churches offer components of training beyond normal teaching. Some ambitious churches have attempted to send their own mission teams. To succeed, these churches, of necessity, form new mission structures. Such overachieving vision is commendable, but is usually best expressed in alignment with existing mission structures. The entire complex tapestry of the mission industry is affected by the vision and knowledge of the sending churches.

The good news is that, more than any other force, the cause of missions unites an enormous variety of otherwise separate church traditions. It is truly amazing what unity and understanding has *flowed back from the field* to the disparate church traditions at home. It turns out that all our home church traditions shine best on the mission field. Seemingly dead traditions often have marvelously devout and competent missionaries on the field. Surprising to many people is the fact that missionaries on the field from many traditions cooperate very readily in all kinds of joint projects.

Church people back home don't know all this. You don't very often find congregations holding joint picnics—like Presbyterians with Nazarenes. Yet their missionaries cooperate on the field with no trouble at all.

The bad news is that congregations usually need to be extensively educated and mobilized to be effective in the World Christian Movement. The cultural momentum of church traditions, when imposed on the mission field has often

impeded the World Christian Movement. It is short-sighted for any group to come up with a new emphasis and make it seem so important that all the other traditions are now wrong or inadequate. Read the story of the last two thousand years in the most balanced account ever written—Kenneth Scott Latourette's *A History of Christianity*. You will see that every age has been marked by groups spurting out in many different directions as godly people have struggled and groped for better light. We can look back and "improve" on practically everything that we see, but meanwhile our own form of Christianity may itself be bogged down by all kinds of cultural baggage!

For example, the very idea of missions itself is a "new" emphasis in the Protestant tradition. Why didn't the Reformation leaders, who so highly prized the Bible, find the Great Commission in the Bible? It took William Carey, a kid in a poverty-stricken backward gulch in rural England, to come up with clear-eyed questions as to what the Bible plainly said about God's concern for all of the peoples of the earth. Sure, his elders had all the "right theology," but they failed Bible 101 in regard to the main theme of the Bible.

Why do the widely-respected Westminster Confession of Faith, the Lutheran's Non-altered Augsburg Confession, and even the Nicene Creed (to which we all pledge allegiance) say nothing whatsoever about the Great Commission? It is a wonder that missions ever came up at all. In few Christian traditions around the world is the call of missions a major or even minor concern for the vast majority of their adherents. How strange!

Why Mission Mobilizers?

This strange situation brings us to the very reason mission mobilizers are so crucial for the advance of the World Christian Movement. It is evident that the World Christian Movement has moved forward by a dedicated few calling the church to its central mission. Over the centuries the Church has occasionally exhibited powerful passion for Christ's global cause and then, within a few years, sunk into a self-absorbed morass of disobedience.

Congregations that have set their heart on other things need a heart transplant! How would you like to have a heart transplant

done by an untrained person? Unthinkable! Transplanting a heart is too important to leave to an untrained person. *But the task of reaching the nations is the most important task that God has assigned to His Church.* And this requires transplanting a heart of vision and understanding in order to do it right. A mission mobilizer owes it to the Church and the nations to acquire the skill and knowledge necessary to help do an effective heart transplant of vision and understanding.

This is equally true of the role of a field missionary. The mobilizer who stays home may need to learn about more parts of the world, but the missionary needs different tools. Missionary skills are different. Mobilizers and missionaries have two very different kinds of jobs, both of them essential—equally essential—to the World Christian Movement. Many people unthinkingly equate “missions” with missionaries. But there would be few missionaries unless there were also intensely committed and skilled mobilizers.

The famous “Cambridge Seven” stayed home long enough—a whole year—to visit the universities of England before they went out to China. Who knows, perhaps 500 missionaries went out because of their pre-field work as mobilizers! We have already read about one of those students. C. T. Studd’s older brother never did go as a missionary. But he went from campus to campus in the United States and, among other things, persuaded John R. Mott to go to the Mt. Hermon meeting. What if that had not happened? Or, *what if Mott had decided to be a missionary rather than a mobilizer?* Probably no two people in history are traceably responsible for more missionaries going to the field than Mott and another SVM student, Robert E. Speer, who also stayed home to be a full-time mobilizer.

But were they qualified to do that without field experience? Oh, they eventually traveled all over the world. In fact, they gained a more comprehensive view of global needs than was possible for any one missionary. Mott could plan and lead the 1910 meeting at Edinburgh in a way no missionary was qualified to do.

But they had signed the pledge to go. That meant that they were qualified to stay—if only because they were willing to go! Note, however, if they had not been willing to go, they would not have been spiritually qualified to stay. Why? Because those who are not willing

to stay, if that is God’s will, are not—and cannot—be qualified to go!

Yes, being a mobilizer is just as much a spiritual calling as being a missionary. After all, missions is a cause, not just a career. In the end, as we shall see, a mobilizer needs to know a whole lot of things a missionary does not usually know, and vice versa.

But beware! Just as missionaries face special problems in their cross-cultural work, so do mobilizers. In some ways it is much more difficult to be a mobilizer. Most churches will not readily support mobilizers. Or, worse still, they can “survive” missionary letters, but it is too much to have to cope with local mobilizers who are constantly reminding them of their global obligations!

Look again at these two different types of work within the World Christian Movement: *the mobilizer and the missionary.*

Mobilizer and Missionary

Which one is for you? God obviously does not want everyone overseas. In the days of the massive Student Volunteer Movement, four out of five who volunteered to go to the ends of the earth ended up staying home. That’s right: 20,000 out of 100,000 volunteers were able to make it to the field *only because four out of five were willing to continue to believe and work for the cause of missions back home.* Stirring up the church and keeping it envisioned is a much larger task than the frontline work itself.

I can’t believe that God is content with mobilizers that are not the Bible students and prayer warriors that missionaries have to be. I can’t believe that a person doesn’t need to be as committed to the Lord if he stays home to mobilize. Mobilization, either as a full or part-time task, requires intense prayer, vision and commitment. By contrast the missionary task is a relatively well-accepted “calling,” while mobilization is not! All pastors are mobilizers of many good things and can be superb mission mobilizers. They are certainly worthy of support. We think ministers of music and youth workers are worthy of support. Why not mission mobilizers?

Mobilizing Yourself

More basic than anything else: you cannot be a mobilizer if you are not yourself mobilized! But how do you become mobilized?

Feed yourself. Get to conferences, subscribe to periodicals, buy the key books and study the issues for yourself, or you will never be all God wants you to be as a mobilizer.⁶ You yourself must be caught up in the drama of the global countdown of the kingdom of God. It is not enough to be caught up in local church goals for next year.

Support missions yourself. “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also” (Matt 6:21).

Use the Global Prayer Digest daily with friends or in a family setting. Pray for specific missionaries. *Nothing that does not occur daily will ever dominate your life.* Being a World Christian is of little value, really, unless you are a *daily* World Christian! The *Global Prayer Digest* can change your life more in one month than many “drive by” experiences that gradually fade away.⁷ Everything grows slowly. How can you keep growing without daily renewal of vision?

Write missionaries. Be aware of their problems and needs. They may want you to buy something to send to them. Take them in overnight as they pass through your area. Go on picnics with them and their children. Debrief them. Share with them from your studies. Compare notes from one field to another.

Of course, don’t wait to begin mobilizing in your local congregation. Also, be ready to visit other local congregations. Become active in forming your denomination’s policies and mission strategies as well as in participating in interdenominational mission events.

How About You?

Are *you* thinking clearly about yourself? *You* need to ask God on your knees where *you* fit in. Maybe the place God has for *you* is teaching a Sunday School class with a relentlessly international perspective. Maybe God wants *you* to be one more globally-minded pastor—that kind of pastor is worth more than quite a few missionaries. God will likely ask you to do the hardest thing you are capable of!

The key thing is to realize that the development of your own *career* must not be your main concern, but rather the development of the mission *cause*. *The question of career vs. cause will be an issue in your heart of hearts again and again.* Jesus, today, might have put it, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and your career will take care of itself.” We have already said a lot

about preparation, especially the kind that can be pursued right on the job. But if you are willing to prepare *and* work, simultaneously, for the rest of your life, God may indeed reward you with a startling career—but *you will probably not know the details in advance.*

Someone has said, “God reserves the best for those who leave the choice with Him.” Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, said, “Don’t ever do something that others can do or will do if there are things to be done that others can’t do or won’t do.” See, getting what we want—by going after it—is not in the cards for Christians. Jesus turned it completely around the other way: “He that seeks to save himself will lose his life; he that will lose his life for my sake will find it” (Luke 9:24). God’s will for us is not mere *advice*. We can’t “take it or leave it”; we must “accept it or reject it.” His will is His command.

Make no mistake. God honors those who seek His work above their worries. One of our staff members once said, “Now I think I understand what faith is; it is not the confidence that God will do what we want Him to do *for us*, but the conviction that we can do what He wants done *for Him* and let Him take care of the consequences.”

Is your problem that you can’t see very far into the future? As Trotman said, “If you can’t see very far ahead, go ahead as far as you can see.”

Lots of people would be glad to follow God if He would only tell them in advance exactly all the wonderful things He would do for them and what high-sounding job titles they might one day hold. But remember Genesis 12:1. *It is characteristic of the Christian life that God asks us to go without telling us where!* This is not to be considered unfair or capricious on His part. The fact is that when we walk in the little light we have and keep going on and on taking steps in faith, the ways in which He leads us are almost always, as we look back, something we could have never been told in advance!

Untold marvels lie *beyond* each step of faith. You don’t really have to know what is beyond the next step, and you can’t find out without taking the next step. Again, it is characteristic of the Christian life that we do not know very far in advance. In fact, if you think you’ve got the next few years lined up you may well be

mistaken, or you may still be trying to make your plans for God to bless.

Wouldn't His will inevitably focus on your doing "your utmost for His highest?" It is not a question of how much of our own desires we can get away with. Some young people make the final, dramatic decision "to be a missionary" and immediately begin thinking where the climate would be nicest. You can't be any kind of a solid Christian if you are unwilling to do anything He asks. What does he ask? Nothing more than all we are and possess. That's all. He doesn't ask us to do the easiest job we can think of but the hardest we are able to handle. He does not ask us to do what we cannot do, although He often enables us to do what we could not do without His special grace. He is not a tyrant who doesn't care about our welfare in the task. It is amazingly true that when we are willing to do the most difficult thing, we find that we are better off because of it. Oh, sure, missionaries have their share of disease and pain, but some of the most diseased and pained are people who stayed home in order to avoid all that!

Jesus said, "Are you burdened and weary? Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; you will find me gentle and kindly, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke fits perfectly and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30). Jesus Himself "endured the cross and ignored the

shame for the joy that was set before Him" (Heb 12:2).

But we sometimes seem more geared to do our "utmost" than we are to seek out patiently, deliberately, and painstaking that role which will make the maximum contribution to "His highest"—the coming of His kingdom and power and glory to all the peoples of the earth. Again, beware of how easy it is to make that difficult choice to live for Him rather than for ourselves, throwing away our secular aspirations, and then turning aggressively to try to find out the most pleasing assignment within the new arena of life. It is not to please ourselves that we give our lives to Christ, yet we may find that His will involves greater pleasure and fulfillment than anything we ourselves could have chosen!

A famous missionary wrote back to fellow students and pled with them: "Give up your small ambitions and come East to proclaim the glorious gospel of Christ." For me to give "my utmost for His highest" is no guarantee of health, wealth, or happiness—which, incidentally, is true of any choice one can make—but that kind of crucial choice is, in the experience of thousands who have tried it, the most exhilarating and demanding path of all callings. You don't lose if you go with God, but you have to be willing to lose or you can't stick close to God. 🌍

Endnotes

1. The *World Christian Foundations* program allows you to achieve an M.A. or B.A. degree while you continue in work or ministry anywhere in the world. Instruction is centered on weekly mentoring sessions which allow both work and study. For the latest information, consult www.worldchristianfoundations.org.
2. CrossGlobal Link and The Mission Exchange are each comprised of about 100 mission agencies. CrossGlobal Link has Canadian members as contrasted to The Mission Exchange, which represents only the National Association of Evangelicals (USA). More recently AIMS (Accelerating International Mission Strategies) has arisen within the general sphere of the charismatic tradition. The Association of Professors of Mission (APM) consists of seminary and college professors. The American Society of Missiology (ASM) was founded from its beginning to intentionally include anyone seriously interested in missiology without regard to his/her denominational orientation. The ASM publishes the journal *Missiology, An International Review*. When you join the society you are automatically a subscriber to the journal. Send \$37 (\$27 students) to 12330 Conway Road, St. Louis, MO 63141. The Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS) evolved from the Association of Evangelical Professors of Missions in order to welcome into its membership mission executives as well as professors from fields other than missions. It has a newsletter but no journal; instead it gives members a free book (or two) per year from its EMS monograph series.
3. The International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM) has chosen to focus upon the remaining task in the world today still requiring the earlier type of "pioneer" work—for example, the initial-breakthrough type of mission activity. Its annual dues, \$18, include a subscription to the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (www.ijfm.org). Send that amount to: IJFM, 1605 E. Elizabeth St., Pasadena, CA 91104.
4. Subscribe to *Mission Frontiers* (www.missionfrontiers.org), 1605 E. Elizabeth St., Pasadena, CA 91104. No charge.
5. To subscribe to *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* send \$28.95 to Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60189.
6. For resources and encouragement in mobilizing, visit www.perspectives.org and watch for future updates.
7. Subscribe to the *Global Prayer Digest* (www.global-prayer-digest.org) for \$12 per year, 1605 E. Elizabeth St., Pasadena, CA 91104.