

MISSIONARY TRAINING: A DISCIPLINE¹

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The discipline of missionary training for cross-cultural ministry has long been recognized. Recent missionary training programs have caught the attention not only of field missionaries but also of church and professional mission leaders around the world. In the past, traditional denominational leaders treated missionary training as merely emergency events. If one decides to go, then some kind of training was to be provided, but there was not much consistent strategic planning for it. According to Titus Loong, it has been like having a brand new car and not knowing anything about mechanics. Whenever there is a problem, the owner learns spontaneously about that part of the car.² However, the time has come for the missionary leadership of the church to provide adequate training for cross-cultural workers.

In this paper I would like to address the issue of missionary training as a natural discipline and responsibility of the church. I also attempt to debate that the missionary training enterprise must be postulated by denominational Christian organizations not only at the grass-root level, but

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² In an abstract from his plenary presentation at the Asia Missions Congress II, Pataya, Thailand, in September 29-October 3 1997, Titus Loong addresses issues related to the expansion of missionary training and mission education. See Titus Loong, "Equipping the Next Generation of Missionaries," *Asian Mission* 1 (July 1998), pp. 7-10 (9).

at the very top level of leadership as well.³ Twentieth century Christian denominations have grown extensively as organized religious systems. Consequently, they need to revise their vast structures and adjust them to the new reality of world evangelization. For a Christian organization to delegate its missiological responsibility to a missions department may not be the solution to a measureless need. Eventually the specialized missions department would become a hindrance to the entire constituency to become actively involved in cross-cultural service. Therefore, it must be emphasized that the whole organization, including its top leadership, must be decisively involved in the task.

Furthermore, I am also suggesting a definition of missiology that could be applied to the discipline of missionary training. This conceptual framework may contribute to justify the need to dedicate larger denominational and cooperative efforts to train cross-cultural workers. On that account, and as a matter of practical commitment, I also suggest, among many other efforts, a model of missionary training program that would offer alternatives to the traditional models in order to train the cross-cultural workers effectively. It is my interest to initiate a dialogue that may eventually convey academic and professional insights to the missionary training task as we head towards the future.

Furthermore, I also suggest that Southern Hemisphere⁴ missionary trainers may benefit greatly by learning from the functional structures (or networks) whereby they could fellowship, exchange ideas and resources from one another. They must share their teaching load and multiply themselves by equipping new trainers. There are new trends in world evangelization that are heavily saturated by networking efforts and cooperation. This is observed particularly as the church faces the reality of the twenty-first century mission service.⁵

³ On the issue of denominational management as it relates to missionary training, see Raja B. Singh, "What Does Missionary Training Stand for?," in *The Management of Indian Missions*, ed. Ebenezer Sunder Raj (Madras, India: India Missions Association, 1992), pp. 185-87.

⁴ The term "Southern Hemisphere" has been used recently to refer to that part of the Christian movement other than West Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, that are traditionally know as the "Northern Hemisphere" in the world Christian movement.

⁵ See Loong, "Equipping the Next Generation," p. 9. See also Robert Ferris and Lois Fuller, "Transforming a Profile into Training Goals," in *Establishing Ministry Training*, ed. Robert Ferris (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1995), pp. 242-48 (242).

Missiological Basis for Training

Missionary training is both an academic discipline and a practical commitment. Concerning this issue, Jan A. B. Jongeneel has written an extensive article where he addresses missiology as an academic discipline. After a historical and theological research, he concludes that as a discipline missiology involves both methodological connection and methodological commitment to the mission of the church. The combination of these two elements gives natural identity to a theology of mission.⁶ In his report, Jongeneel renders a definition of missiology that could well fit the interest of missionary training as a formal discipline.

Missiology is the academic discipline, which—from a philosophical, empirical, and theological point of view—reflects upon the history, theory and practice of world mission. This as a means for both preaching the gospel, healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, and idolatry, for the glory of God and the well being of all human beings.⁷

Also Allan R. Tippet offers his definition of missiology as “the discipline or science which researches, records and apply data relating to the biblical origin, the history, the use of the anthropological principles and techniques and the theological base of the Christian mission.”⁸ One may also observe in this definition of missiology that Triplet includes the methodology and data bank. In this case, these are particularly directed towards the process by which the Christian message is communicated. The last includes the incorporation of converts into those congregations and the growth and relevance of their structures and fellowship.⁹

Missiology, then, is the study of individuals being brought to God throughout history. Therefore, if there is an observable discipline of missiology in the cross-cultural extension of the Christian movement, then missionary training becomes indispensable for the church to continue to extend herself even unto the uttermost parts of earth as stated at the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). Missionary training must be therefore a natural discipline in the educational nature and expansion of the church.

⁶ Jan A. B. Jongeneel, “Is Missiology an Academic Discipline?” *Exchange* 1 (1998), pp. 208-11.

⁷ Jongeneel, “Is Missiology an Academic Discipline?” p. 210.

⁸ Allan R. Tippet, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), p. xiii.

⁹ Tippet, *Introduction*, p. xiii.

Moreover, in a recent publication, Jonathan Lewis tries to match the desired outcome of missionary training with its methods and context. He offers three identified domains that must head the training enterprise:

- (1) *Cognitive* outcomes are produced through *formal* methods in a *school* context.
- (2) *Skill* outcomes are produced through *non-formal* methods in the *workplace* context.
- (3) *Affective* outcomes are produced through *informal* methods in a *community* context.¹⁰

In the same article, Lewis argues that the best missionary training models combine all three domains, use all three methodologies intentionally and provide all three contexts together. He also suggests that if ministry training is to be effective, this will need to focus on the true objective of training—godly and effective cross-cultural workers.¹¹

A review of the history of the western missionary movement will reveal that commitment to missionary service has been the result of a simple and direct act of obedience to the great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no evidence that deliberate efforts were made to establish effective missionary training programs. Normally, in the West, the character of a missionary was often shaped at a young age, at home and at church. Whenever they returned home after a long-term service on the field, they lived among their Christian community. Homes and pulpits were always opened to them.

Likewise, as the Southern Hemisphere missionary movement emerges, the home and the church have also become the first training ground for the development of a missionary character. Although this element is very basic in the formation of a missionary character, the church, however, must be educated in the raising, development and training of new and qualified missionaries. In this way the congregation actively participates as a full partner in the training of the next generation of cross-cultural workers. Concerning the participation of the congregation in cross-cultural formation, one Asian missionary trainer suggested, “Missionary training programs in the two-thirds world should have more nationals as trainers,

¹⁰ Jonathan Lewis, “Matching Outcomes with Methods and Contexts,” in *Training for Cross-Cultural Ministries*, ed. Jonathan Lewis, Occasional Bulletin of the International Missionary Training Fellowship (Wheaton: WEF, 1998), pp. 1-3. Italics are mine.

¹¹ Lewis, “Matching Outcomes,” pp. 2-3.

for they know the culture of their people."¹² This component, then, includes not only the participation of the entire church but also the employment of nationals as trainers to ensure an objective cross-cultural formation.¹³

Most missionary trainers agree that the Asian church has come of age. Asian churches are now mobilizing a great number of members to engage in either long- or short-term missionary service. These Asian Christians understand the cost and the challenges for cross-cultural ministry. They are now learning about missions at any regular Sunday service, during praise and worship, and even at prayer meetings. Task groups are also encouraged to organize mission-exposure trips. Moreover, when a church grows larger, a mission pastor should be appointed for the congregation. He or she will design the training programs for the church. The mission pastor will also encourage individual and corporal commitment to support the cross-cultural enterprise through the regular programs of the local church.

Missionary Training

By missionary training we understand the ability to provide instruction in the cross-cultural discipline. Such an instruction includes spiritual foundations or practices designed to impart proficiency to undergo the missiological task. This training is driven to form proper missionary skills, as behavior, spiritual habits and mental attitude.

Concerning the philosophy of training, Richard L. Hopkins states that training must be planned and managed: it does not just happen. Ad hoc training is never the most effective training.¹⁴ Hence, training represents a technology. The trainer has an understanding of the learning process, and

¹² Met Castillo, "Missiological Education: The Missing Element in Mission Strategy," *Asia Pulse* 1 (1973), pp. 2-5.

¹³ Castillo, "Missiological Education," p. 5. See also, Neuza Itioka, "Third World Missionary Training: Two Brazilian Models," in *Internationalising Missionary Training: A Global Perspective*, ed. William D. Taylor (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1991), pp. 111-18. More information on the subject can be found on Sunder Raj Ebenezer, "The Philosophy and Ethos of OTI Training," in *The Management of Indian Missions*, ed. Sunder Raj, Ebenezer (Bangalore, India: Indian Evangelical Mission, n.d.), pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ Richard L. Hopkins, "Philosophy of Training" in *Training for Cross-Cultural Ministries*, pp. 5-6. See also Kohls, L. R. with H. L. Brussow, *Training Know-How for Cross-Cultural and Diversity Trainers* (Duncanville, TX: Adult Learning Systems, 1995), p. 60.

has knowledge of and an ability to draw upon a large variety of appropriate training techniques and exercises. The trainer knows components, which are the most effective in training designed to increase or update knowledge skills, and modify attitudes.

The trainer's expertise is training. Training should cause a change. Good training does make a difference. Those changes should be specified beforehand in learning objectives. And whenever possible, the learners should have an input in planning their own training.

Henceforth, training should be action-oriented and involving. This forces relevance and makes learning meaningful. When possible, training should be individualized, because everyone learns in different ways and because entry-level skills and competencies vary widely.

Lastly, trainers should function as facilitators, coaches, consultants, guides, and stimulators.

Cross-cultural Training in the New Millennium

The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a systematic approach to cross-cultural training, particularly, as worldwide evangelization intensifies. International movements such as the AD 2000 and Beyond and other worldwide movements have created a remarkable mobilization of the church worldwide towards the evangelization of the world at the end of the century. Also, the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship has provided a systematic service on missionary training, facilitating national, regional and global consultations and producing academic and training materials focused on cross-cultural evangelization. Its focus on the trainers as they become critical in properly equipping the trainees has been determinant in its agenda. Likewise, other major prayer movements are also operating across the world. These and other actions have kept Christians aware and intensely mobilized them for world evangelization at the end of the twentieth century.

Moreover, at the end of the second millennium, cooperation has also become the common language among international mission agencies. Networking is the main source of assets available to for world missions. Henceforth, training of cross-cultural workers has become a necessity. The church has to engage a complex world where trainers and trainees must become both experts and knowledgeable to be able complete the task.

Effective Cross-cultural Training

If the church of the future wants to continue to be effective in reaching out to the lost world, cross-cultural training and equipping of its leaders at all levels of leadership must take place.¹⁵ The denominations will have to open its doors to new and fresh input from other sister organizations. The twenty-first century will demand an interdependent relationship within the entire body of Christ, particularly in the training of cross-cultural leadership.

The most important single element in missionary service appears to be personnel. How could the church be effective in training missionary personnel today? As we answer this question, we realize that the chief problem today is the lack of qualified personnel for cross-cultural service. Therefore, there is a genuine need to develop a creative missionary training program within the denominations. Hence missionary organizations could be more effective if they invest heavily in missionary training. This action would eventually lessen the levels of missionary attrition.¹⁶

Models of Cross-cultural Training in Asia

Asia has become a key participator in contemporary world evangelization. It is not only because of its location within the 10/40 Window, which comprises the neediest geographical area of the world, but also because of the missiological opportunities offered at the region by both the great number of non-Christian people and the number of missionaries arising from the same area. As a matter of fact, David Harley conducted a survey among six missionary training centers in the southern hemisphere to identify the most important theological issues that need to be addressed by students in their own missionary context. Out to those six

¹⁵ In cross-cultural training of denominational leaders at all levels, I also include the top executive officers. Recent surveys reveal that most denominational leaders lack proper understanding of the missionary enterprise, and most of them are not actually committed to cross-cultural involvement. This could be due to the fact that they have not been provided missionary training for their level of capacity. More information on this issue can be found in Paul E. Pierson, "A North American Missionary Trainer Responds to Two-Third World Concerns," in *Internationalising Missionary Training: A Global Perspective*, pp. 193-96.

¹⁶ Extensive information on missionary attrition has been documented by John Kayser, "Training and Missionary Attrition," in *Training for Cross-Cultural Ministries*, pp. 6-7.

centers, three are located in Asia: The Global Ministry Training Centre (GMTC) in Korea, the Outreach Training Institute (OTI) in India, and the Asian Cross-Cultural Training Institute (ACTI) in Singapore.¹⁷ And together with these, I would also mention the Asian Center for Missions (ACM), along with the Great Commission Missionary Training Center (GCMTC) and the Living Springs International (LSI) in the Philippines. These are only few among many other training centers that have emerged lately as puissant in equipping and sending cross-cultural workers to the field.

The Asian Center for Missions

At this point I include the Asian Center for Missions (ACM) as a model among many other missionary training centers with the intention to represent the action that the Asian church has already taken specific steps towards cross-cultural training.

The Asian Center for Missions (ACM) is a cooperative effort of some six major Christian organizations in the Philippines.¹⁸ They are working together to fulfill the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to “go, and make disciples of all nations (people groups)...” The work of ACM is to train, equip and send out laborers into the great harvest fields of Asia. ACM also aims to network and develop partnerships with churches and Christian organizations in the region to fulfill its vision and purpose: training and sending Asians to preach the gospel to Asians.¹⁹

Instead of a traditional missionary training by calendar year, ACM offers an intensive modular training program. This is composed of five months of classroom instruction and group interaction, and a one-month missions-exposure trip to the target mission field. ACM classes are

¹⁷ David Harley, *Preparing to Serve Training for Cross-cultural Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), p. 137.

¹⁸ The six ACM partner organizations are: the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC), the Philippine Missions Association (PMA), the Philippine for Jesus Movement (PJM), the Asian Seminary of Christian Ministries (ASCM), CBN Asia, and the Jesus Is Lord (JIL) Church. ACM was organized in 1994.

¹⁹ According to a report of Russell G. Shubin, “in the four brief years since its founding, the Asian Center for Missions (ACM) has become the Philippines’ largest agency sending workers outside the Filipino archipelago.” See Russell G. Shubin, “The Escalating Filipino Force for the Nations,” *Mission Frontiers* 20 (September-December 1998), pp. 38-40.

organized around teams of missionaries who are already bound to a particular people group. Teams study the language and the culture of their target community. ACM students are equipped in preaching, evangelism, church planting, discipleship, cell-dynamics and counseling by missiologists and mission leaders.²⁰ The curriculum is designed to equip the candidate missionary with enough vital information and ministry skills to perform effectively in a foreign cross-cultural setting.²¹

An ever-growing network of Asian churches has been established to help direct the missionary teams to specific areas of people groups. ACM seeks to place its graduates where the local churches need workers most. The support of indigenous churches and existence of missionary efforts on the field help to provide fellowship and prayer support for the teams. Hence, ACM missionaries raise their own financial support, and the center is working to build a worldwide network of churches and individuals who are willing to provide additional funding to keep these missionaries on the field.

ACM has grown from one training center at its inception to nine regional training centers in the Philippines and three other centers in India, Indonesia and China by 1998. It has trained over 160 missionaries and sent 91 of them to the mission fields of Burkina Faso, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand.²² As a result of ACM efforts, cell churches have also been planted in Hindu strongholds in Varanasi and Vihar in India.

The fact that ACM has succeed in training missionaries should not neglect the fact that this is still a young center and its leaders are still learning to cope with the weaknesses and limitations typical of the nature of the program. On one hand, the strength of ACM can be found in the relationship of cooperation that has established among several Christian organizations in the Philippines and Asia-wide. On the other hand, ACM's major weakness is its lack of experience in the training discipline. Its

²⁰ Concerning the effective participation of missionary educators, see the article of Lois McKinney, "New Directions in Missionary Education," in *Internationalising Missionary Training: A Global Perspective*, pp. 241-50.

²¹ Learning through a modular approach in contrast with the traditional model can be effective in the training of new missionaries. See Harley, *Preparing to Serve*, p. 97. Also see Barbara H. Burns, "Teaching Cross-cultural Missions Based on Biblical Theology: Implications of Ephesians for the Brazilian Church" (A Doctor of Missiology thesis: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 1983), p. 73.

²² *Catalog of the Asian Center for Missions* (Manila, 1999), p. 2.

graduates are yet to be evaluated after a long-term commitment. Moreover, stability and consistency in the training process are still issues that ACM will have to face soon.

The Desired Outcome of Missionary Training

After looking closely at the ACM model, one comes up with some questions that need to find objective answers. What makes a good training program? One simple answer would be that a good training program effectively prepares a person to fulfill his or her calling as a cross-cultural servant of Christ. But how can this effectiveness be measured, that is, what makes a cross-cultural worker effective? A set of different criteria may need to be developed to answer the preceding questions, but there are certain qualities and skills that a trainer must look at to answer those questions. What are they?

1. Cross-cultural workers of Christ must be mature Christians, humble and adaptable, willing servants, flexible and teachable.
2. They must be good team players, able to do personal evangelism, to teach, and to practice sound pastoral care with new believers.
3. Cross-cultural workers should be committed to learning the language and culture of the target people, and willing to accept and learn from nationals.
4. They must be committed to Christ to do His will. They need to learn to cope with stress, and know how to strengthen themselves spiritually.
5. They should be people who have faith, who know how to pray and to rely on God alone. They are prepared for setbacks, disappointments and unanticipated events that may occur in the mission field.
6. Cross-cultural servants must also know how to relax and laugh, and are careful to maintain physical fitness through appropriate recreational activities.
7. They should also know how to set up a house in their adopted culture that will be truly home for their family yet also a place where the nationals will fit comfortable when visiting.

The training that is described here appeals to providing the type of instruction that is appropriate to the different situations missionaries will be facing in the field.²³

²³ Met Castillo identifies some areas of concern related to the lack of adequate training. The untrained may end up frustrated and defeated. See Met Castillo,

The Selection Process

The candidate is prayerfully chosen through a rigorous process of selection. The applicant is carefully evaluated by a committee based on the characteristics of the kind of missionary needed in the field. A review of an objective selection process indicates that there are some consequential elements to be considered in the screening of candidates. They are to be considered according to their spiritual maturity. Missionaries must be committed Christians with a personal and growing relationship with God. They must experience a strong desire for others to come to know Christ. This element is necessary to confirm his or her call. They need a conviction that this is God's will for them.²⁴

The academic records and intellectual ability need to be considered. A degree is not an essential requirement for a cross-cultural worker, but the ability to learn is definitely essential. Likewise, interpersonal skills and physical and mental health are also crucial in the selection. The candidates may have to face heavy physical, emotional and spiritual pressures in the future and may do so in an isolated situation.

Theological and doctrinal beliefs and experience in Christian service are also observed. As they are to be trained to serve in other cultures and with Christians from different traditions, they must know and accept that there are also Christians from other traditions. Consequently, even though they hold firm certain theological and doctrinal commitments, they should not impose their position on others.

Conclusion

An individual may reach the conviction that God is calling him or her to become a cross-cultural servant in a number of ways. A thorough study of the experiences of men and women in the scriptures will teach that God dealt with each one differently. Abraham heard God speaking to him (Genesis 12:1). Moses saw a burning bush (Exodus 3:2), Isaiah saw a vision (Isaiah 6:1), Amos had a growing inner conviction (Amos 3:8) and Paul had a vision (Acts 16:9). Some were guided by unusual or supernatural events. Others were convinced through prayer, the reading of

"Let's Think Clearly about Missionary Training," *Bridging Peoples* 8:1 (1991), pp. 2-4.

²⁴ See Harley, *Preparing to Serve*, pp. 60-66.

the word, the advice of others or through circumstances that the Holy Spirit was guiding them to a particular area of Christian service.

There is no such thing as a pattern for guidance. Hence, it may not be necessary that God will speak to somebody in a spectacular way. However, it is important that the guidance of the Holy Spirit is clear and the person is certain that this assignment is God's will for his or her life. Cross-cultural servants will face many difficulties and even discouragement, yet if they are convinced that they are in the right place it will help them to strengthen their hearts.

Once an individual reaches the point of full conviction that the Lord has called him or her to be a cross-cultural servant, the next step is to receive the confirmation of the church and the proper training for missions. Here is where the task of training will make a tremendous difference in the life and ministry of a missionary. The church or Christian organization must then establish a program that should properly respond to the needs of the cross-cultural worker.