

THE CRUCIAL LINKS IN THE FRONTIER MISSIONS CHAIN

■ Organizations are often in contact with others with a similar function but are seldom in contact with those caring for their people further down the line. Yet without these critical links, the entire process of mobilizing, training, church planting, and mission planting breaks down. What can be done to remedy this?

By *Ralph D. Winter*

Introduction to Dr. Winter

Dr. Winter doesn't really need an introduction in this group, but I just jotted some things down here to remind us of some of the things he has done. He graduated from Cal Tech, Columbia University, Cornell University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and probably more. Those are the schools I uncovered. He was a missionary to Guatemala. He's the author of several books including *Theological Education by Extension*. He's the founder of the U. S. Center for World Mission and William Carey International University. He is currently the president of WCIU.

He, along with Mrs. Winter, who is also here, are parents of four daughters. I think from my perspective, maybe the greatest accomplishment of this couple is the fact that all four of their daughters with their husbands are strategically involved in concluding world evangelization and are carrying on in very critical roles. For that I respect them greatly. Dr. Winter has been a faithful advisor to Caleb project ever since we've been around, and we've found him always ready to serve.

Dr. Winter, we're glad for you to come and address us on the crucial links in the frontier missions chain.

—Greg Fritz, emcee

Introduction

You'll notice that the overall topic of this conference is identical to the topic given to me for this opening presentation. Either that was an accident or it implies that my presentation should introduce the subject.

The key word in this title is "links" and I think that while no one link will

be discussed in this whole conference that will be totally novel or new to anybody, nevertheless, the matter of linkage between the links does deserve our attention. Many ministries are focused on a single link in the chain and don't seem to be concerned about the next link and the interfacing between links.

Here is an illustration. I (along with others, I'm sure) have been kind of fantasizing for years about what would happen if the two major high-school-level organizations, Youth for Christ and Young Life, could be linked in some way to corresponding university-level ministries. Although both of these specialize on high school ministry I don't think they have to be linked to each other. (That's an interesting example of the value of non-linking.)

But the thing that I see is that twenty thousand high-school graduates move out of the hands of these two fine organizations every June and just drift off into nowhere. There is no link—no formal link—between those twenty thousand young people and, let's say, Inter-Varsity or Campus Crusade. Now again, I don't think Inter-Varsity and Campus Crusade need to be linked between themselves as much as there needs to be linkage between the high school organizations and the ones on the university level.

I'm not sure that there isn't a great deal of following through that is inevitable. It might be very difficult actually to try to link up every single student, but in this computer age it would seem to me to be ridiculously simple 1) to compile a database of all those who are graduating every June out of the hands of those two high school level organiza-

tions and 2) simply send the disks off to the college level ministries.

Wouldn't it be easy to sort out a list of the students coming out of one agency's hands into every campus in the United States? Of course, there might be some campuses where neither of these two college-level organizations were working. But you are still better off than to have no intentional links at all.

This is what I consider an example of linkage between levels.

I consider it very providential that one of the people who is working with us is George Patterson, the CBHMS church planter, par excellence, who used to work in Honduras and who's now gone into global-level strategic thinking. In the last few years he's been primarily involved, no longer in Honduras, but in mission mobilization, on a global level. He's got all kinds of ideas.

It wasn't so difficult for him to come up with a magnificent matrix. It's an eight foot chart with fourteen columns across and six rows down, that is, six aspects of each of the fourteen links in the frontier mission chain of events. For each of the six points under number one, for example, he has a full page of typewritten material. But each page is scrunched down photographically and pasted on this board that's eight feet wide with fourteen columns and six rows. That's eighty four pages in case you wondered, and a set of those eighty four sheets would make a book. A book on what?

Well, he's suggesting that we need to think of fourteen links in the entire mobilization scheme. This, by the way,

is *mobilization* on a rather large level of perception, because, as you'll see in a moment, this chain does not just get you to the field. It's getting to the field, building the church and then making sure that the mission field church is itself mobilized to send missionaries that is the complete cycle. You could spend hours just looking at all of those 84 carefully typed pages. I am sorry that all I have done in my one-page overview chart is to present the names of the columns ("The Links") and the names of the rows ("The Principles")—I would call the rows the *aspects of the activity* of that stage (see page 48).

Back to the chart of fourteen columns and six rows: there's a seventh level running across all fourteen columns at the base, which I didn't reproduce here, which consists of the academic course work that would cover and lead a person through the eighty-four-element matrix. He has three courses, for example, that run across all fourteen columns. He has other courses that are specific to each of those columns.

I confess I said to myself, "When a person turns something in, in a graduate program, he doesn't expect it to be accepted without any modification or critique, surely." You'll notice the phrase at the top, "Suggested components." You don't turn in final conclusions in graduate work. You present *suggestions*—as he has done—and there's inevitably a great deal of give and take and tussle as the thing is argued around, and it will probably come out a bit differently. Nonetheless, I don't think I could produce a better outline of the linkages in between where we are and where we want to be.

I would like to point out now what I was saying a moment ago. First of all, let me just give you some of the novelties here. George, somewhere along the line, was in a class where the teacher told him "you shouldn't argue forward but argue backward" meaning you don't say "how can I get from here to there?" You start out where you want to be and then you say, "what would be the step prior to that and the step prior to that and so forth?" That's essentially what he's done. Most of us would probably go up like this 'cause this is where we are, see? And so we would say starting here at the home church, the first four items going up are home

based activities. There have to be key leaders who begin to counsel and then there have to be home base churches and program leaders. Now if you want to know what all that means down through the six rows, read the six sheets of paper that fall under number thirteen and then you get missionary trainers and then you get missionaries in training and now you move to the agency level and the next six items, ten, nine, eight, seven, six and five, have to do with the normal missionary mechanism of sending people to the field and all different kinds of things that are involved in producing new Christians. The last four things which he has listed first is what you find in the field mission situation which, by the way, is already true for untold millions of new believers in the Third World. And as those churches overseas realize their potential, their potential leaders are mobilized. Their pastors and elders are mobilized and that eventuates in key leaders in the new national churches who are prepared to reach out and they then reach out to churches in currently unreached fields, etc.

While I think it's a little easier to digest it going the other way, nevertheless his reasoning is valid. If you want to get to number one, what do you have to do to get there? Number two, three, four, five and then you end up where you are. (Each of these six points—"the Principles"—underneath is an elaboration and the subpoints under them are all pertinent to each of these fourteen stages or links.)

Now Patterson himself employed the word "links,"—that is not an addition to make it fit into this conference theme! This is a very amazing providence. All of us are sophisticated enough to write down all kinds of organizations that are involved at every level. There are very few—I would say there is *no* organization that is involved in every level. On a high school campus Young Life does it's job. Later, these students wander off and maybe Crusade will pick them up, maybe Inter-Varsity, maybe nobody. That's somebody else's problem. They did their job, see? Well, let's be honest, all of these jobs are futile by themselves. The linkage is absolutely essential and in so far as that linkage is unintentional or even ineffectively intentional, we are in big trouble. Big trouble!

I think one of the spectacular developments in the history of Caleb Project was when they began to link directly into the mission agencies with their traveling teams. They actually incorporated brand new candidates that were already on their way to the field stopping off for this tour of a hundred and twenty campuses in four different vans.

I mean, it was an amazing thing when they first made their linkage proposal. There at the Keswick conference center in New Jersey...the Caleb people were there in force. I don't know exactly how they worked it out. I think they got a break on room and board by waiting on the tables—which was a suitably humiliating process, I suppose—but just really being handy and friendly...it was the first time that you had that many younger people at an IFMA conference (an Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association Executives' Retreat).

It was a long time ago and these young people here tonight were a lot younger then, but it was a marvelous thing and that linkage has produced a very fruitful combination. But notice: that's only one of the links that's necessary.

Let me give another example. This time negative. Probably the greatest failure in the entire modern mission period would have to be the obvious and essential but nonexistent link between the national churches and their own missionary outreach. I have thought about this many, many times. I've prayed about it. I've talked to people. I've discussed this with classes. There is absolutely no explanation that I can think of that makes reasonable the nearly total absence on the mission fields of the world—especially if you go back twenty years—of any missionary vision on the part of the national church. Now, excuse me. I should be careful. I don't simply mean that the national church lacks vision—it's the missionaries working with the national church who have lacked the vision for the national churches to be engaged in mission to other groups. It never seemed to occur to them that any of their precious believers ought to run off and leave the work and become "useless missionaries". Useless in what sense? Useless to the work in which the first world missionaries were involved.

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This shows you how easy it is for any little particular link to become an island universe and to be actually a break in the chain rather than a link in the chain.

Now to some great extent, through the providence of God—not through the enlightenment of the missionaries themselves in most cases—there has been a tremendous flourishing and development of what everybody knows about today, the so-called Third World missionary movement. I can remember encouraging a man in one of my classes years ago to do a study of mission field mission organizations. I challenged the whole class but he was the man who came forward—his name was David Broughm. He had been knocking around in the South Pacific and Indonesia and Singapore and so forth. I said, "Why don't you do your term project on getting as many names of as many (what we now call) Third World mission agency leaders and agencies as you can. He turned in fifty four agencies that he somehow knew about or found out about just during that one term. The next link in this particular chain was that Peter Wagner picked this up and got three guys in one of his classes and they actually wrote a book that was published—written by Wong, Larson and Pentecost. Then, of course, to bring it right up to date, we have Larry Pate and his magnificent tome on the entire scene. You might almost say that Larry Pate has put the crown on the subject—created a respectable subject of discussion out of what wasn't even thought about in mission circles a few years ago.

This, I believe, is a perfect example of the tragic absence of linkage.

So this conference and my introductory, off-the-cuff comments here, and George Patterson's magnificent outline should lead us not only to see these things as stages, or different components in a process, but as things that have to be linked.

At this point I wonder if any of you would like to suggest a missing linkage—like I gave between the high school and the college level, or as I've already given, between the mission field churches which would be number five on this outline and then needs to be linked to number four...why is it that so

few missionaries have ever planted the concept of missions.

While you're thinking...let me give an example of the sort of thing I'm talking about. I can recall very early in my own mission field experience talking to myself and others about the opportunity of the tribal mountain Indian group with which I was working becoming missionaries to other tribes and groups. I recall working with Max Lathrop, one of the great pioneers of Wycliffe work in Mexico who's now way on in years. He used to work down in that picturesque little lake between Guadalajara and Mexico City, off to one side—Lake Patzcuaro. Between the two of us the First Interamerican Indian Conference was held there.

Then there is another town, Ixmiquilpan, north of Mexico City where the second meeting was held. It was originally a barren hillside. Then an Indian group that had come to the Lord began to build little huts on the side of the hill. Those huts became bigger and better buildings. Soon these Indians were widely known in the whole town of Ixmiquilpan as very reliable and honest

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tradesmen. That hillside eventually flourished and there they had a beautiful church and everything else. That was where these Otomi Indians hosted the second of the conferences.

But let me tell you—here's the key point—that was a great idea, but you can't believe how many of the missionaries were against it. I don't want to tell stories out of school but Wycliffe tried their best to kill it and they eventually did because Wycliffe workers with the Indians, well, I say predominated. They were about two-thirds of all Indian workers in Mexico and Guatemala and the idea of the national church becoming missionary was unthinkable.

I have to give you one more illustration while you're thinking about missing links or missing connections between links.

I was way out in the jungle, way north of San Cristobal de las Casas. First we flew out to a tiny jungle air strip, then we hiked about twenty miles—seemed like a hundred—down into the swamp land of the Yucatan Peninsula. This was the site of a Chol Indian Bible school and I was talking to a group of people there at a special meeting Thursday of Easter week. I was talking in Spanish. I had two guys with me who understood only English. The missionary there was translating for me, Al DeVog, a Reformed Church of America missionary who was working along side of Wycliffe people—this is where John Beekman worked. He was translating from my Spanish into the Chol language—but the two guys that came with me could not understand either the Chol or the Spanish, and so they were nodding off. The altitude was about 100 feet above sea level, and it was so hot and sweltering, the worse kind of a place to stay awake even though in this particular church to make people stay awake, they didn't have chairs. They just had bars. The seats consisted of rails about two feet off the ground supported by little posts.

Meanwhile since this was Thursday of the Easter week I was trying to think of something that would be relevant to the church calendar and so on. And I would say Jesus walked right into his death deliberately to fulfill the will of God and I

was saying, "who knows what our next step of faith might be." I was trying to think of next steps of faith these people might take. Well, they live next to a tribe called the Tzotzil, who are absolutely and adamantly opposed to the gospel. The Chol Indians, the majority of whose tribe are believers but the Tzotzil, they will kill you.

So I said, "maybe for some of you the next step of faith and of obedience will be similar to the obedience of Christ—that took him to Jerusalem to his death. Maybe the next step for Chols is to ask God for guidance with regard to reaching out to the Tzotzil people." I have no idea how that was translated into Chol, but anyway, (since they expect you to speak for at least an hour) I came around again to the same sort of an illustration a second time. Finally, I hit the subject of one group of Indians

being missionaries to another—I hit it a third time. This time Al DeVog had had enough. So he snaps to me in English—now this is the first English spoken in that whole time as these two guys were dozing there in the heat and the humidity—so he snaps to me, "Say that again and I'll knock your block off." (Laughter.) And so on we go. These two guys could hardly wait until after work to find out what it was I said in Spanish that they didn't understand—and that had elicited that comment.

Well, now, okay. That's just a little illustration of the breakdown of the link. I cannot imagine anything more preposterous in the entire history of the Christian movement than for this gorgeous global enterprise which has been primarily the result of western missions in the last hundred years to have been left without a missionary vision at least in so far as the missionaries themselves communicating that vision.

I've always given the Christian Missionary Alliance as an example of the exception to the rule. Every single CMA mission field (except in Latin America for some strange reason) has always been expected to develop its own mission sending structure, from the very early period of that establishment of the mission field church. Thus, for example, missionaries from the Philippines are being sent down to Sarawak and to Borneo. This has been going on for years.

This is finally beginning in CMA fields in Latin America (not especially because of CMA missionaries) because of the amazing new mission movement sweeping Latin America.

I'm sure there may be some other exceptions but for most other missions the idea of mission field Christians going on from link five to four to three to two to one has just been a broken link. That's why the Third World mission movement today is such a surprising development. Like a root out of dry ground growing up, in most cases, without the encouragement of the missionaries themselves.

I'm going to tell you one more little illustration and then we'll get some feedback from you—I've been giving you warning, right?

When I got to the field in Guatemala years ago, in 1957, one of the stories they were telling (and I just thought it

was a joke. It was just a funny story. It didn't penetrate at all). But they were saying "take all the sermons you ever preached about missions at home and put them at the bottom of your trunk so that when you get home, you can pull them out and preach them again. But here you've got to preach stewardship because these people just don't know how to give." It takes a long time to establish a giving pattern in the national church and stewardship around the world is one of the remarkable emphases and developments in the last twenty-five years.

When you go home, pull the other sermons out because you've got to preach missions? It never dawned on me how basically bizarre that was—when you go home, you've got to talk to the people about stewardship for missions. But when you're on the field, you've got to talk about them supporting their own pastors.

Apparently it was too much to believe that the believers on the field could become missionaries.

Now there's a lot that could be explained about this. I don't want to just present this as an unmitigated scandal, but even pastors in this country are sometimes loathe to see some of their key people move on and go to the field.

However, here too you note that a link is missing—there's no link between those two things and I would say right now, Larry (Pate) can correct me...that ninety percent, okay, eighty percent...Seventy percent of all Third World missionaries have not been encouraged into existence by any western missionaries whatsoever. (Larry says closer to ninety percent). That is an appalling situation in my opinion. I don't believe it would have been difficult to remedy the situation had anybody come along to point out the missing link earlier, I don't know. I don't think the proper linkage has been forged yet. To a great extent it is still unremedied.

That's an example. What are some other missing transitions or missing interfacing here? It's very easy for people on the same level. There are two kinds of links, horizontal and vertical. I'm talking about vertical links, where you go from high school ministry to college ministry...where you go from church mobilization to field initiation and

planting the church to that church becoming a mission sending church, etc.

All these are links in a sequential process. Where are we breaking down? Where is this process most in need so that if we're going to finish this job, we ought to try to patch up the link or the linkage there first of all? You may not think of all the answers right now, but this conference—the whole three days—are devoted to this sort of thinking.

[Question: Why wouldn't the mission field churches just automatically get involved in missions?]

All right now. Notice that to some great extent that's exactly the same as the linkage failure I was talking about in our own home culture. You might say that the missionaries that came to us in the first place—centuries back—didn't implant missionary vision in our midst to the extent that they should have, and so our seminary curricula—many a seminary has gone on for many years without anything at all on the subject of missions.

Walter Hannum of the Episcopal Church Missionary Community tells how when he got through seminary—the General Seminary in New York—the mission board of the Episcopal denomination sent a couple of people out and they said, "If there's anybody here in this graduating class who's going to go into missions, we've got a three day seminar for you." They tacked three days on to three years, and off he goes for twenty years to the Yukon valley in Alaska. Wonderful. Solid preparation. Right?

But, okay. I think there is an interesting parallel. In other words, even in our own Western sending church, we need to confess that our own marvelous missionary enterprise is a bit "Johnny-come-lately". We must remember that the Protestant movement classically is devoid of mission theology. That is the reason our systematic theologies, our seminary curricula, our pastoral training still go on to some considerable extent as if there were no Great Commission.

Only a little over a hundred years ago, however, was there a tremendous quickening of pulse and pretty soon there was a mission professor in every seminary. However, this did not last very long. A two-volume Norwegian Ph.D. dissertation describes in lurid detail the development of mobilization

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that flowered and undergirded the greatest single surge in human history into missions—what was called the Student Volunteer Movement. But that was soon gone. It evaporated within a generation.

In that two-volume book the story is told of the Alexander Duff Chair of Mission Theology at the University of Edinburgh. It was originally a full blown professorship. Well, you know, money has a way of eroding in value and the endowed amount produces less interest each year in actual effective buying power and so they finally said "Well, we can no longer hire a full-time missions professor. But, anyway, maybe not all the students are interested in missions so we couldn't keep a fulltime professor busy..." Or, like the average missions pastor—he also does all the weddings and the funerals and stuff and the calling... So they reduced the Alexander Duff Chair of Mission Theology to a week-long lectureship. Instead of having a fulltime professor, they just paid for someone to come in and sprinkle some goodies during one week each year. And eventually they reduced that week down to a one-night stand. It's a sad story but these examples abound.

That is the way things grow and decline. We should note that in the last twenty years our seminaries have really changed—putting in mission courses, mission professors. I suppose there is probably fifty times as much going on in our evangelical seminaries in the area of missions today as there was twenty years ago. And that's wonderful. You can't lay the credit to any one person or any one movement—God has raised it up. But you see, that linkage is precarious, it's perishable, and it is merely a "tack on."

Look at the classical Protestant theological statements like the Augsburg Confession of faith, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith, or the Heidelberg Catechism. You look in vain for the slightest reference to missions. My generation went to the field on the basis of the social momentum of this merely "tacked on" mission vision, and we have planted churches all over the world and now those churches have inherited our own "tacked-on" mission

theological books.

A lurid example is that of George Eldon Ladd. I remember hearing him in chapel speaking once on the Great Commission. He was a professor at Fuller when I first studied there, and was still a professor when I returned twenty years later as a professor in the same school where I once was a student. In the later period I heard him give the most incomparable chapel talk on the Great Commission that I've ever heard from anyone. But shortly afterward his own massive tome appeared on New Testament Theology—his life work—and it does not have one line on the subject of missions.

Okay, that is our "link" but it is not hooked up! The breakdown is inherent in our own culture. And now you see the same kind of linkage failure in the mission field culture. We shouldn't be too surprised, I guess.

Okay, can anybody else think of a linkage problem?

My generation went to the field on the basis of the social momentum of this merely "tacked on" mission vision, and we have planted churches all over the world and now those churches have inherited our own non-mission theological books.

[Question: How do we know that the churches on the field go straight and do all they are supposed to do?]

First, notice these are second generation churches on the mission field of the mission field. Secondly, number one ties right back to fourteen again. If this chart were drawn properly it would be actually a full circle and I think that's exactly how Patterson is thinking. It's just that listing it was hard enough to do with an eighty-four panel matrix. It would have been worse if he'd tried to put this in a huge horizontal cylinder where you'd have to turn the cylinder to read it, and when you got to number one it would lead right on automatically to number 14 again.

When Patterson talks about churches in currently unreached fields, he's already trained those churches to

perform that same cycle of outreach again.

Yes? [Question: Is all this something people learn sitting in class?]

To be fair to George Patterson—if he were here he would tell you what's on his heart—Patterson is not going to let anyone just sit in a chair in a classroom. Not for very long. At every point, the person in the master's decree program is himself involved right there doing it. It's what Patterson calls "obedience oriented education." It isn't just practicing. It isn't just going through the motions. It isn't just artificial exercise. You are literally involved in the real process as far as Patterson is concerned. At least this gives you some idea of what a brilliant guy like Patterson would come up with. Now I'm overtime but of course this subject will continue for the next day and a half. Thank you.

[Note the questions asked by people present did not come through on the tape, and so we have had to try to reconstruct what the questions might have been by the nature of the answers given. I am sorry if anyone's question did not get properly reconstructed! RDW] ■

Ralph Winter is the president of William Carey International University. He and his wife Roberta live in South Pasadena, California, USA. Author's address: 1539 E. Howard St., Pasadena, CA 91104 USA.