

# The 5th International Korean Mission Leaders' Forum The Challenge for Koreans and Americans Together

by *Ralph D. Winter*

**I**t does not seem to me best for my role here to tell Koreans how to do mission. Korea now has considerable experience in the cause of the Christian mission. Now it is the time in history for Koreans to tell us and for us each to compare notes and to strengthen each other, not for either Koreans or Americans to be the older brother.

One of the most important things I have learned is to study seriously *the previous record of events, the historical background* of events in order to be able to see clearly what the future ought to be like. I earnestly commend that approach.

Let me give some examples of my great appreciation for the study of the historical record.

## *Learning From the Past*

1. In 1973, I made a presentation here in Korea at the founding of the Asia Missions Association. That became an article entitled “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission.” It is an historical analysis that traced the experiences of missionary outreach throughout the last two thousand years, distinguishing between what are termed modalities and sodalities—two different complementary forms of the church of Jesus Christ. It was later published in the journal, *Missiology, An International Review*. That journal is the official journal of the American Society of Missiology (ASM), a society which I helped to found in 1972. It formally involves Catholics, Conciliar Protestants and Independent Evangelicals.

2. In 1973 I wrote a chapter for the book *Church Growth and the Word of God*, edited by Alan Tippett in celebration of the 75th birthday of Donald McGavran. My chapter compared the Korean church and its potential for mission to the spectacular record of the medieval Celtic church. The Celtic church also was a “mission field church,” but was *the only major mission force beyond the New Testament for the first thousand years*.

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3. Eight years later, I realized that an additional and special emphasis was needed on “The Task Remaining,” the *frontiers* of mission. Missionaries had been so successful that on every continent and in almost all countries churches had become well established and missionaries had become increasingly interested in “overseas church work.” It was as if the Great Commission was now being reworded to say “Go into all the world and meddle in the national churches,” rather than to go to all the world and disciple every people.”

As a result I took the initiative in the founding of the International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM). This new society was deliberately different from the ASM in more than one way. Unlike the ASM it focuses specifically on the new and cutting edge of missions, the *frontiers* of mission. The ISFM is not as interested in the flourishing church life which is the result and product of missions. The ISFM is not as interested in the endless discussions which derive from church life. The ISFM is specifically concerned for what *mission agencies*, not *churches*, are doing. Unlike the ASM it has from its founding incorporated younger people in its meetings and has fostered the existence of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions (ISLCFM).

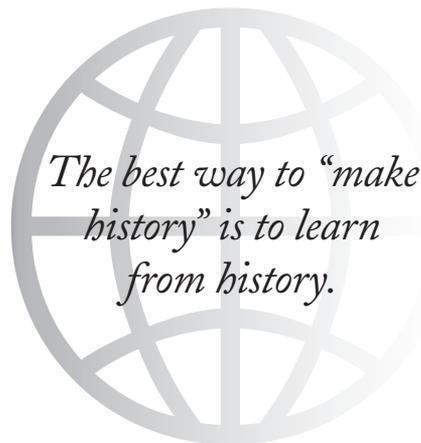
4. It has become linked to the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, which was actually initiated by the ISLCFM, but which is now the formal journal of the ISFM.

5. My own organization, the Frontier Mission Fellowship, is patterned intentionally after our reflections on the extensive and difficult experiences of Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission (which today is called the Overseas Mission Fellowship). We have gained a great deal from the seven volume history of China in relation to that mission. It was written by the grandson of one of the early leaders in that mission, Benjamin Broomhall. We hope soon to republish those seven

volumes in two volumes which will be much less expensive and will be widely available, especially to students from mainland China.

6. For the bicentennial celebration of William Carey’s work in India I wrote a chapter entitled “William Carey’s Major Novelty” which describes the nature and governing structure of his mission in North India two hundred years ago. That chapter was also later published in the journal *Missiology, An International Review*.

7. One of my doctoral students is compiling a book of articles which



explore two thousand years of experience in mission structures. Another of my doctoral students is studying the impact in the last twenty-five years of the significant World Consultation of Frontier Missions held at Edinburgh, Scotland. Its “Call” was formulated at a meeting in 1974 with a Korean present, and was attended by Koreans when it was held in 1980.

I have mentioned these things simply to illustrate my great concern in looking forward to the future by learning from the past. The best way to “make history” is to learn from history.

### ***Governance Does Matter***

1. Recently one of the faculty members of the William Carey International University has written a brief summary of the 110 years of experience of the Africa Inland Mission. His presentation has not yet been published but I have brought along a copy of that document for your interest. It is a good example of

what can be learned from an historical study of mission agency structure.

2. Chapter 20 in my recent book, *Frontiers in Mission*, is entitled “How to Run a Mission Society.” This was written some years ago to describe the importance of most mission decisions being made not by the home office but on the field. A far more extensive treatment of home rule compared to field rule was done by two seasoned missionaries. Their paper is published in five parts (The NT, Patrick of Ireland, Ricci, Carey, Hudson Taylor) in three separate issues of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* in 2001. You will notice that they illustrate the subject by reaching back in history.

I feel sure that at this date the KWMA missions have already learned many of the things I will be saying. I am eager to hear comments and questions about any of these.

3. It seems clear from history that a mission society is best governed by the missionaries themselves, not by a home council unless that home council is appointed by the missionary members of the society. It does not take long before the field missionaries have learned many things which the people back home have not understood and cannot readily understand. Furthermore, the missionaries are the biggest of all the “donors.” They are donating their very lives as well as giving up the higher salaries of many of the church leaders back home.

This point may be hard to understand. But failure to understand it is what wrecked the mission William Carey started, and almost ruined the mission Hudson Taylor started. It has ruined several contemporary missions which I will not name.

On the other hand, new, young missionaries on the field are not likely to understand things very quickly either. Thus, even on the field it is not wise for a strict democratic voting system to be established. Ordinarily a Presbyterian type of “representative democracy” is best because it allows the older and more experienced mis-

sionaries to have a greater influence on the decisions that need to be made.

4. It may be best for a director to select his own successor with the extensive advice and council of other members of the missionary force. One reason for this is due to the very human tendency for a purely democratic process to elect the “safest” leaders who are not necessarily the most innovative, those who are least likely to impose hardships or difficult goals. Or, a purely democratic process may tend to choose the most “exciting” or “charismatic” leaders instead of individuals who are more cautious and wise as well as enterprising.

5. I like very much the idea of the Korean World Mission Association developing an “accreditation” system for its members. I think this is worth pursuing and urging other associations of missions to adopt. This can be a major contribution from Korea.

6. I even think that the recently established Global Network of Mission Structures ought seriously to consider this approach. It can learn from Korea in this way as well.

This is a topic which can well be discussed by email long before the projected 2010 conference of the GNMS commemorating the 1910 conference at Edinburgh, Scotland (as well as the more recent Edinburgh 1980 conference).

7. It can be further discussed at the projected 2010 meeting as well. Both the World Council of Churches and the Lausanne Committee are planning conferences also for 2010. Both of them have in mind the 1910 conference, but neither of them intends to follow the 1910 pattern which created a conference made up solely of delegates sent by mission agencies. There were no church leaders involved unless sent by a mission agency. Both the World Council and the Lausanne Committee are doing good work with their own constituencies which are primarily made up of church leaders not mission leaders.

8. History also seems to confirm that the best mission strategy is not simply

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to plant churches. More important than planting churches is the idea of “planting mission agencies.” It is well known that Hudson Taylor was involved in the creation of 14 mission agencies—in the West. However not even Hudson Taylor saw the value of planting mission agencies in China. The biggest single weakness in all Western mission history has been the failure to intentionally plant mission structures.

I have been studying and teaching mission history for 35 years. The most serious mistake in all of Protestant mission history, as I understand it, is the failure of Western missions to create mission structures in the mission field. It is important to plant churches but it is even more strategic to plant missions. Alexander Rhoads was a French Catholic missionary to Vietnam. In all Asia except for the Philippines, Vietnam has the highest percentage of Roman Catholics. This is largely due to the fact that Rhoads did not plant churches but only catalyzed teams of younger people whom he trained in church planting. They did the church planting. He did the mission planting.

Twenty years ago I know of only one Evangelical mission agency which had the policy of planting a church movement with a mission-sending structure built into it from the start. That was the Christian Missionary Alliance. Today there are many so-called “Third-World Missions.” However, very few of them came into being due to the initiative of Western mission agencies. This was a serious mistake.

### *Troubling U.S. Trends*

In closing let me share three examples of trends in the mission scene which are a problem in the United States. They may or may not be a problem in Korea.

1. First, there is the amazing growth of the number of young people who find it possible to raise up enough

money to go somewhere around the world for a brief, two-week trip. In most cases this is justified as a “short term mission.”

In most cases it is not really mission but education. As education it is a good thing. As mission it is almost always a failure or worse still harmful to mission efforts. Young people need translators, need help finding their way around. It is very burdensome for missionaries to provide that help, and yet when the “Short Termers” don’t see any missionaries the value of the trip is decidedly reduced.

The biggest problem I see is that often churches back home may think that they don’t need to support long-term missionaries or are simply tempted to support short termers instead. By now in the USA there may be 500,000 short termers going out per year at enormous expense compared to 50,000 long term missionaries whose support is more difficult than ever to raise.

2. There is a trend in the USA to send money instead of missionaries. The idea is that after all these years of mission work thousands of churches have now sprung up in the mission lands and there are plenty of people now who can be hired with money instead of Americans being sent out at great cost.

It is true that in many places, notably Korea, there are many churches now which don’t need long-term missionaries to help them do their work. However, they also don’t need foreign funds to hire their pastors or evangelists. They don’t probably need foreign funds to send missionaries either. In most cases missionaries need to be supported by their own people. Those who are supported by funds coming from a great distance may easily be tempted to do without sufficient accountability.

But the main point is that there are still many places in the world which

do not yet have any pastors or missionaries who are part of their own group. People from the outside are still needed. Also, it is very often true that people, no matter how generous and loving, are not well accepted in another culture nearby where there has been enmity for centuries.

God sent His own son to live among us and demonstrate, not just explain, His will to us. People need demonstration not just explanation. Years ago a little girl went to work in a missionary home north of Beijing because her family needed some extra income. Her parents told her strictly not to listen to anything the “foreign devil” missionaries might tell her. She obeyed her parents and did not listen. But she saw the missionary husband being kind and thoughtful to his wife and the wife was kind to her, and that alone attracted her to Jesus Christ. This kind of demonstration of God’s love cannot be achieved by sending just money.

3. Lastly, in the United States today many local congregations are growing larger and are getting to the place where they want to send their own missionaries directly to the field, not send them under a mission society or a mission board. We now have about fifty years of experience in mind to help us evaluate this trend. The overall impression is that this is not the best way to do things. A mission society or mission board must have experienced missionaries running things. They in turn need to help new missionaries understand the unexpected realities on the field.

The churches that seek to ignore the mission societies and send their own missionaries directly to the field may continue for, say, ten or twenty years. However, they almost always later decide that they need the intermediate help of a wise agency through which they can send their missionaries.

I know that talking together is the way for Koreans and Americans to

help each other. Talking together not only today but constantly in the future is the best way for us to work together. Thus, at this point, I am sure we must begin a time to hear your comments and questions. **IJFM**

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