

## **Response to Dr. David J. Cho's Asian Mission: Historical Perspective**

Ralph. D. Winter, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

It has been a great pleasure for me, for many years now, to be associated with Dr. Cho from time to time, in his activities. But his paper actually sums up more than I was aware of and put together a larger picture that is very thrilling and amazing. It seems to me that there is no way that we can possibly conclude otherwise than to say that David Cho represented not only Korea, but that he also represented the world. He is really a world citizen. He has been living in Moscow, or he is getting the Nigerians to start the mission society. He is constantly thinking about the whole world.

Most people are not happy with somebody who is always thinking about big ideas. But on the other hand, suppose he died a year ago. At this meeting it would have been inevitable for someone to have to sum up all these different things that have happened in Asian and Third World mission history and it is a real delight to have David Cho himself here to do that. Probably no one is better qualified to do that. It is a very astonishing story. This document in itself is a remarkably comprehensive

---

<sup>1</sup> Ralph D. Winter, Ph.D. is a senior mission thinker who has been actively involved from the beginning of the massive mission transition from simply thinking in terms of countries or individuals to thinking in terms of peoples. He is founder of the U.S. Center for World Mission, and is currently chancellor of William Carey International University.

historical presentation which I am sure we will value. On the other hand, as has been pointed out by Dr. Aghamkar, whom you have heard just now, there are many things that could have been included. In fact, if we included all the things we like to include, it would probably have been a hundred pages and we would be here all day long listening to his paper.

I myself have little to contribute in terms of critique of the actual facts presented. The majority of everything he said was absolutely sound and truthful. I think there are some additions which he would not have time to go into that might be mentioned however, and I will try to mention some of those. Two of the major things he promotes, clarifies and documents are the tremendous growth of the churches in the non-western world and also the tremendous growth of the missionaries in the non-western world. This is absolutely true. However I think it would be helpful to point out that it probably needs to be qualified when we speak of the decline of churches in the west or the decline of the mission movement in the west.

The thing that is obvious and which is clear in this paper is that there are three or four times as many missionaries and thrice as many believers in the non-western world. This is not to be questioned, and the thing I would add is that in my country, in America, which I probably understand a little better than I do Europe or even Asia, 25 years ago there were ten churches that were mega-churches. Today there are a thousand mega-churches in the United States. There are thousands and thousands of additional churches that have been planted in just the last 25 years. And so if it is a decline, that is only a relative decline. The churches and missions in America are smaller by percentage but not in absolute number. And I think this may be true in some European countries as well.

As far as missionaries are concerned, Americans, and I do not fully agree with this, I am not trying to praise American mission but simply describe a rather horrifying trend, Americans are now giving up on sending long-term missionaries. Many years ago, they gave up on that and probably thought of a moratorium not

because they had failed, but because they had succeeded. The reason for a moratorium and the withdrawal of missionaries was because the national churches were going so well on their own. It wasn't a decline in conviction or vision, but it was actually a superior insight into the growth of the national churches – they do not need Americans and British and Germans looking over their shoulder and telling them what to do. They know very well what to do and the whole idea of partnership and association therefore displaces the idea of western dominance.

But on the other hand, it is as though the western churches or mission agencies have declined in number. And I can say the horrifying fact in America today is that mission agencies are being sidelined although they are not necessarily decreasing in number – they are not increasing in number.

In the last 25 years, the amount of money going into long-term missionaries has not greatly increased, though it has increased. But the amount of money going into short-term missions – all of you know what I mean by short term missions – usually two weeks, it is more or less a tourist job---- -- it is young people going out there and getting scared by the foreign situation and coming home with weird stories to tell. And many times they say, "I would never want to be a missionary because it is too scary." Short-term mission phenomenon is a dubious and questionable but the amount of money today in America going to short-term missions is five times the amount of money going into long term missions.

This is not exactly a decline, it is an unfortunate explosion. It is not a good thing, it is in many ways a bad thing. It is an enormous enterprise. 1.7 million short-termers from America alone are splashing around the world confusing themselves and everybody else. While this is not necessarily a good thing, it certainly does not represent a decline in interest. It represents what I have termed the amateurization of mission. Missions is no longer a professional concern, and the current professional missionaries have made their mistakes as well. But if you think long term missions

have made mistakes, think about the mistakes short-termers make. They make far more mistakes than long-termers do. And so they are becoming amateurs, and the world is being swamped by amateurs today. An additional trend in the United States in the more recent periodicals like Christianity Today is not short-term missions in the usual sense where you send young people out for ten days or two weeks, it is where congregation like one in Texas written up in Christianity Today where the whole congregation goes in mission. Not at the same time, but they say in the next four years we want every family in the church to be a missionary family. This is nonsense. This is harmful. This is expensive. This is not wise. But it is not decline. It is explosion of nonsense, you might say.

So I am trying to say, “Asians have to try understand long term missionaries and forgive them for their failings. You have a far worse problem today. You have churches and families and so forth who do not know what they are doing, wanting to spend your time to show them around, to translate for them, to protect them from all the evils of the orient and so forth, like that. This is not a decline but it is certainly--- and the money that’s going into this is incredible.

Evangelicals in my youth were poor people. Today evangelicals are wealthy people. They do not know what to do with their money. And there is a great deal of interest across the whole world today in poverty and disease and concerns of the sort which standard long term missionaries of the past have never had the ability to do much with. But today the enormous resources in the west are being confused and we’re listening to people like Bill Gates who has billions of dollars to spend on poverty and disease and we should be glad for that, but it is very unfortunate that Christian churches have not been in the forefront of those global problems. There is no substantial Christian mission enterprise, World Vision, or any other that is focusing, even in part, on the extermination of malaria, for example. This is too big a problem, for the average mission agency. It is not too big a problem for Christians in

the world today except that it is now non-Christians who are leading the way. And this is very unfortunate.

The matter of partnership and cooperation in the future is very significant, and I cannot, for a few moments cover all the possibilities but it would be interesting to point out that the Jewish people were the first missionaries. One hundred years before Jesus was born they were sending missionaries around the world and in the Bible, we see Jesus complains that they were traversing land and sea to make a single proselyte and turning them into hypocrites which means they were changing their clothing and culture but not their hearts. So Jewish people were sending missionaries and those missionaries were not necessarily doing the right thing then, any more than they are now. Then the Greeks inherited this thing. And the Greeks depended partly on the Jewish scriptures and the Jewish faith but they were essentially not in partnership with the Jewish, but alongside the Jews. And then the Latin Church was born. And they depended partly on the Greeks and the Greek Old Testament the Septuagint but they were not partners so much as they were good neighbors. Or maybe bad neighbors at times. And then the Germans came into the picture. And they relied and continued to rely to some extent on the Latin Church and the Greek church and the Jewish church but they were not partners, they were good neighbors, maybe bad neighbors on occasions. And then the English came into the picture. The English are the most colonized nation in the world. They're perfect example of what happens when you're colonized. They were colonized by the Celtic people, they were colonized by the Germanic tribal people, then they were colonized by the French, and there is no such a thing as the English language, the English language is a mixture of German, and French and Celtic languages and they are still colonized by literally overseas people, from across the British Channel. If it were not Germanic tribal people, it would have been the Anglo-Saxons, or it would have been the French.

There are still churches in those other cultures. It is not that those other cultures are declining. The Roman Catholic church is not declining, it is being outnumbered. So the word is outnumbered. And this is not necessarily failure. It is equally success.

And so in the circumstance the future it seems to me of the world in which we live, and I am speaking of the Christian world, is a world of good neighbors. I am not sure that partnership is the answer. The American churches for example are friendly to the English churches. We look to people like John Stott, and Tim Rice and other scholars and in England we bow on Scrapper and those people, and we look to German scholars and so forth, but in America, we are not dominated by English or German. We are doing our own thinking and this is probably a good thing. So our present relationship, Americans with English, is that of good neighbor rather than partners. And there are some missions that have started in England and have a partner in America which for a while persisted and then later like the regent –missionary union, it split up and now there’s a British and American version of that mission. Other missions have stayed together but by and large, the vast majority of all missions – German, English, Norwegian, Swedish or American are not partnership missions. They are mixture of two or three different languages which is inconvenient., to sat the least. They are actually good neighbors who learn from each other. Let us be neighbors that are able to learn from each other. I know we in America have a great deal to learn. So that David Cho’s paper talks of rejection which was the early situation, and then also talks about absorption, and that’s not necessarily the answer for all people of the world to be absorbed in the western missions, although I remember 25 years ago talking to a young person in Korea and he said, “what mission should I join?” and at that time there were very few mission to join. I said, “well, you can join the Western mission and then after five years go out of it and start a Korean mission. And so this is the way we can learn from each other but I think the future would be less and less of absorption and will be parallelism, not partnership. We will

be good neighbors, not any sort of situation in which the question is who is going to be the partners.