

INTERVIEW

Waving the Flag for 'Hidden' Peoples

In many respects, Dr. Ralph Winter seems quite humble and unpretentious. He speaks in soft tones, and his clothes are simple and not expensive. He works at an old wooden desk which is scratched and piled with books and papers.

Upon meeting him, you might not realize the strategic contribution he is making to world missions today. As founder and director of the U.S. Center for World Mission, he is spearheading what could be one of the most significant projects in mission history: developing strategies to reach the world's "hidden" peoples.

Four out of five non-Christians in the world today, Winter says, are hidden — walled off by linguistic or cultural barriers from any existing missionary efforts. By his estimates there are more than 16,000 hidden people groups; many are in

in India, China and the Muslim world. In all, more than two billion people are hidden and will not hear the gospel without pioneer missionary efforts.

Plans call for a total of 60 Centers for World Mission in numerous countries. Each will work to identify hidden peoples, develop strategies for reaching them and encourage Christians to implement these strategies. More than 40 mission agencies already have representatives working at the U.S. center in Pasadena, and a new university has been established to help the research workers and to offer courses to college students interested in expanding their knowledge of missions. The center has purchased a former Nazarene college campus and is conducting an unusual fund-raising drive to pay for it.

Winter recently talked with

Worldwide Challenge about the hidden peoples and about the center's financial crisis. Excerpts of that interview follow.

WWC: Could you give some examples of what you call "hidden peoples"?

Winter: What makes a hidden people is that, first of all, there is no church in their society that can evangelize on the wavelength of their own culture. The distinctive feature of the society could be linguistic, ethnic, social, economic, geographic, vocational — you name it.

Right now we feel that just the tip of the iceberg is showing, the tip being the tribal peoples. To some Christians, they're the only mission field left. The function of each center for world mission is to wave the flag for the other hidden peoples, to lift the iceberg out of the water.

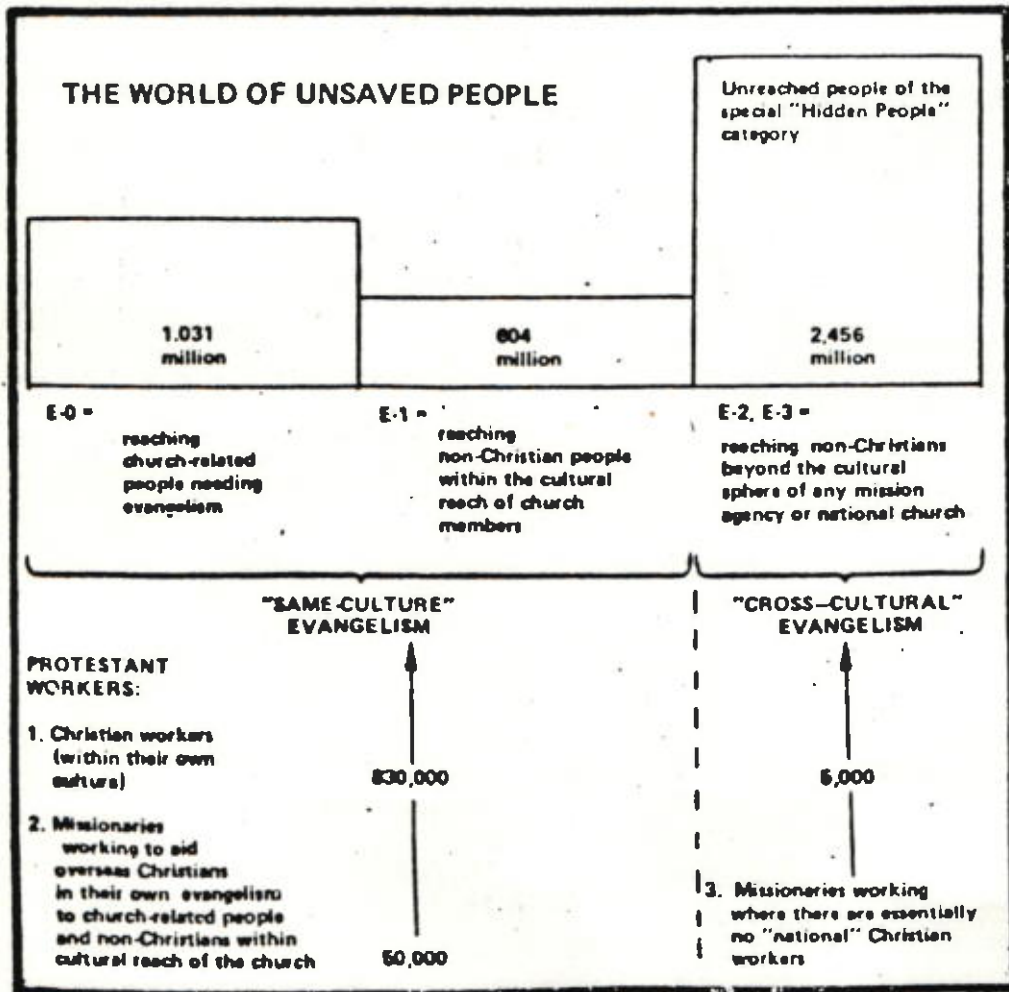
In India, for example, there are 2,900 castes or classes of people in which there are no Christians at all. India has 3,000 sub-nations, of which only about 100 have some Christians living in them.

WWC: Where are the rest of the 3,000?

Winter: They're in different castes. Almost all the churches in India are located in what formerly was the so-called "untouchable" class. These people can't be touched, so to speak. They live in a special little ghetto outside the village, and that's where the church is. This means that a missionary methodology is needed to get into those other compartments of India's society structure. And to do that takes intelligent, deliberate strategy.

You say, "That's India. That isn't true of the Muslim world. The Muslims love each other." But, you know, only seven percent of the Muslims speak Arabic. What do the rest of them speak? They speak 580 other languages, minimum. Maybe a thousand, depending on what you call a language. If you're going to win Muslims to Christ, you're going to have to deal with 3,500 separate sub-nations.

Let's talk about the Chinese. Everybody knows that all Chinese read the same language. Yet they don't *speak* the same language. There are two groups of people in China: the Han Chinese — who are the real Chinese — and a great number of other kinds of people who are not Han Chinese. The Han Chinese alone speak at least 200 different languages, and it's very important to talk to Chinese in their own language. Mission work among them re-



quires maybe a thousand different beachheads.

Even the deaf people of the world are a major hidden group. There are more deaf people than there are refugees in the world — seven million deaf people in Brazil alone with practically no mission work among them. Once you learn the deaf person's language, you can go anywhere in the whole world and talk to anybody who's deaf.

WWC: What would you say are the major accomplishments of the centers in the few years that they have been operating?

Winter: For one thing, the phrase "hidden people" has caught on. I'm told that the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization is using it. A man called from the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and said that in their July meeting they had voted to go from 170 missionaries to 600 by the year 1990 and to open 10 new fields where they could reach hidden peoples. I hadn't used that phrase in the conversation before that.

Recently, I gave the opening address at an Evangelical Foreign Missions Association meeting, and the theme of the entire meeting was "The Unreached Peoples of the World." They focused particularly on the hidden peoples. The fact that I was asked to speak wasn't a personal honor so much as it was a recognition of the campaign that we're waging.

An interesting sidelight to that convention is that some of the mission agencies there said that lots of churches were giving them additional money specifically for hidden people missions. But some of them don't have hidden people missions! I was gratified that they have this problem!

WWC: From what I understand, the U.S. Center for World Mission has already made several payments on the \$15 million it owes for the campus in Pasadena. How is the fund-raising drive going now?

Winter: We owed \$660,000 by last September 15, but we overran that deadline by nearly three months, and we've got another payment coming up immediately. So it's really a spiritual crisis for us.

We have a goal of bringing a new vision for world missions to 10,000 churches and getting one million people to commit themselves to a one-time donation of \$15.95. But we're not running around the United States asking for money. The primary way information is spreading is by word of mouth. The problem is it isn't working quite fast enough.

WWC: Why do you ask for only a small donation?

Winter: We want it to be big enough so

that people don't forget what it was, but we want it small enough that people don't say, "Hey, you're diverting money from missions." We don't ask for a second gift, and we don't ask for more than 50 donations per church so that we'll have to take our vision to more churches and more people. We're not limiting anyone; they can give whatever they want. Any church can give what it wants. But we expect to return or reassign elsewhere all gifts to our founding budget that are larger than \$15.95, once enough small gifts come in.

WWC: The task of reaching these 16,000 hidden people groups seems incredible. What needs to happen in order to reach these people?

Winter: You say 16,000 is a big job. I don't believe it is. Reaching into that many societies is a lot easier than reaching the 2.5 billion people involved! Let me tell you why.

First of all, there has never been as much awareness — technical, statistical, factual awareness of the entire task — as there is now. There have never been as many Christians willing to do something about it. One agency alone has said, "We'll reach 800 hidden people groups by the year 2000." At a mission executives meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland, next October, they hope to parcel out the 16,750 hidden people groups.

But even more important, we don't have to win all those people as outsiders. The primary mission task is to get a beachhead in each new society and then let the gospel grow by normal evangelism within that society. Thus, to finish the missionary job is relatively simple.

Finally, there are now more than 200

million evangelicals spread out all over the world. If only one new missionary couple were sent out per 1,000 evangelicals, in addition to what we already have, that would be more than 400,000 missionaries coming from about every country and going to every sub-nation.

To my knowledge, there's not one country in the world where the percentage of honest-to-goodness Christians is not at least gradually increasing. I don't know of one country where the percentage of true Christians is declining.

Let me give you an example: East Germany. When the communists first occupied it, 80% of the people were registered as Christians. Now, after 25 years, only 60% are registered Christians. So we're going backwards, right? Not on your life! The number of honest-to-goodness evangelicals in East Germany is probably more than a million — probably more than ever before in history. At some universities, more than a thousand Christian students meet together. It's against the law in East Germany to advertise a Christian meeting, so it goes by word of mouth. They meet for two or three hours and sing and pray and testify. Then they're gone.

To me, these are bright signs of vitality. People may want to be pessimistic about the remaining missions task, like the guy who looks at the glass of water and says it's half empty, while another person says, "Hey, it's half full." In our case, a third of the world's population now professes to be Christian. There are five times as many evangelicals as formal Communist Party members in the world. We have twice as many evangelicals today as there were people on the earth in the days of Jesus! That can't be all bad.

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WORLD POPULATION **

the
last frontiers
2.4 billion people



Committed Christians 230 million	Nominal Christians 1,031 million	Non-Christians within current range 604 million	unreached Chinese 737 million	unreached Muslim 669 million	unreached Hindu 506 million	unreached Other 544 million
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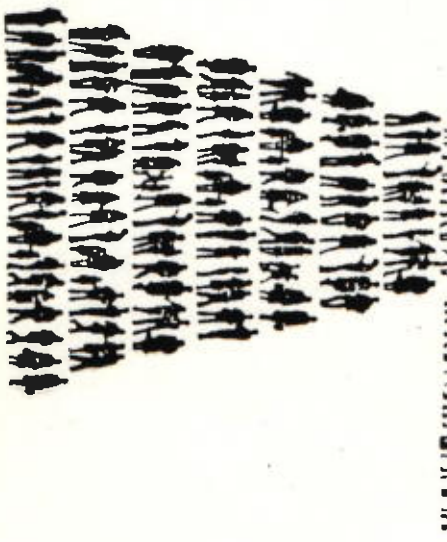
500,000*
discipling committed Christians around the world

200,000*
renewing nominal Christians around the world

3,700
reaching nearby non-Christians

250
pioneering frontiers in the three largest people blocks

3,100
pioneering among tribes and other unreached peoples



Christian Workers

North American Protestant Ministry Force

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Durham, N.C. 27704