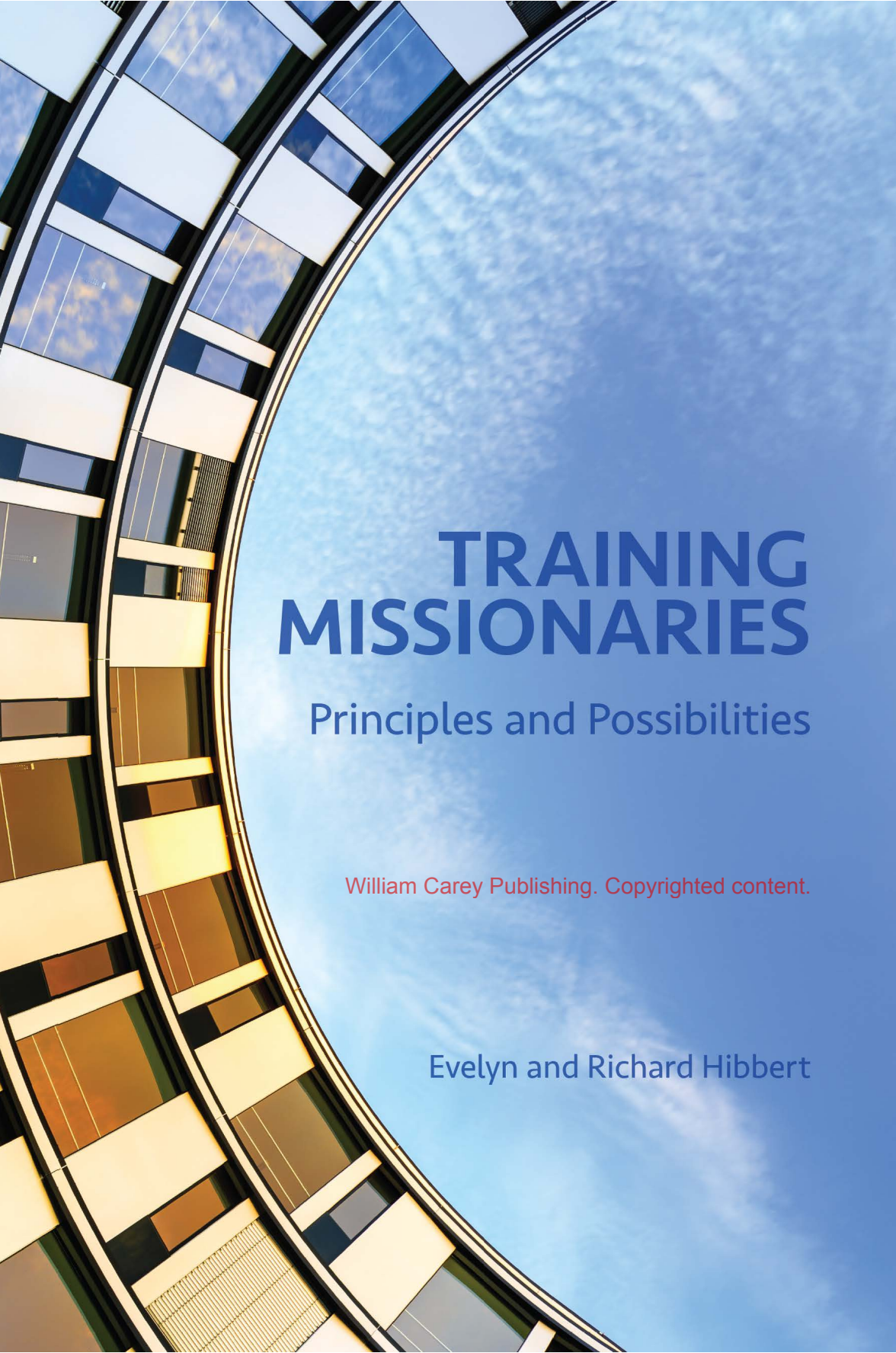


TRAINING MISSIONARIES

Principles and Possibilities

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Evelyn and Richard Hibbert

Training Missionaries: Principles and Possibilities
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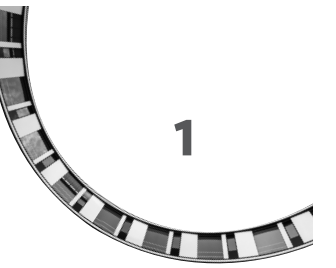
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THE NEED FOR AND PURPOSE OF SPECIALIZED MISSIONARY TRAINING

A missionary is someone who is sent out by a church in one cultural context to serve God among people from another culture by communicating the gospel, discipling believers, planting churches, teaching the Bible, and training leaders. Missionaries need a different kind of training than pastors, evangelists, and other Christian workers serving among people who are culturally similar to themselves. Three aspects of cross-cultural ministry distinguish it from monocultural ministry: its focus on relating to people who are culturally different, its emphasis on contextualizing or adapting ways of communicating and practicing Christianity in order to make sense to the local people, and its unpredictability. The unpredictability arises from lack of familiarity with the context and the lack of control over our lives when we live in different political and social settings. This can range from not knowing when, what, or how to eat, to precarious residence permits, and even war and other kinds of physical danger. Each of these three aspects of cross-cultural ministry requires missionary training to have additional emphases in contrast to training for ministry in one's home culture.

THE NEED FOR SPECIALIZED MISSIONARY TRAINING

Missionaries who lack specific training in cross-cultural ministry tend to replicate methods of evangelism, church life and ministry from their home context that are often unsuited to the new cultural context they work in. Without special training, it is natural for all of us to uncritically export our culturally shaped ways of sharing the gospel, discipling people, meeting as a church, and training leaders. But this approach can have negative consequences. It leads to churches and practices that local people see as alien and ugly, not because of the offense of the cross but because they have been shaped by a foreign culture.[4]

4. Darrell Whiteman, "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21: 3–4.

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The need to provide specialized training for missionaries has been recognized for at least a century. The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh highlighted the need for such specialized missionary training. One of the conference's focus groups researched missionary training around the world for two years prior to the conference and wrote a detailed, book-length report.[5] David Harley, who has dedicated decades to the study of missionary training, believes this group's report "is probably the most thorough report on missionary training that has ever been produced."[6]

The Edinburgh Conference's missionary training group discovered that most missionaries were being sent out with no specialist missionary training. They praised the character qualities and spiritual life that they saw in missionary graduates of Bible colleges such as those set up by D.L. Moody and A.B. Simpson whose aim was to prepare missionaries, but they felt that there was too little specialist training for cross-cultural ministry. They also noted that the vast majority of missionaries were educated in theological colleges where they received no missions training.[7]

The widespread lack of dedicated training for missionaries stimulated the Edinburgh group to recommend that specialist missionary training colleges be started. They felt that this training should be oriented around four dimensions: spiritual, moral, intellectual, and practical. Genuine spiritual vitality was in their view the most important of these. Training, they believed, should help prepare missionaries in how to maintain their spiritual life in situations of hardship and little or no Christian fellowship. Secondly, they saw moral or character qualities such as humility, respect for people of other cultures, and an attitude of being a learner about culture as vital. The third "intellectual" area included training in the Bible and Christian doctrine, and missiological subjects such as the science and history of missions and world religions. The final area the group considered important was practical training in things like elementary medicine and hygiene.[8]

5. "Report of Commission V," (Edinburgh & London: World Missionary Conference, 1910).

6. C. David Harley, "Missionary Training : The History of All Nations Christian College and Its Predecessors (1911–1981)" (doctoral, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 2000), 25.

7. Ibid., 28.

8. Ibid., 29–30.

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The conference's report singled out one of the very few colleges that was dedicated to providing specialist missionary training at that time—Edinburgh Missionary Training College. The missionary training group felt that this college gave the kind of specialized training they thought was needed. It had been founded just over two decades earlier to train women missionaries. The founding principal, previously a missionary in India, had set up an integrated program of worship, study, and practical training. The course was highly interactive, with nearly all classwork conducted by discussion. Community life was foundational in nurturing students' relationship with God and discovery of their unique identity, and conflicts were treated as a vehicle for growth. An atmosphere of freedom was intentionally fostered, with very few rules, so that trainees could develop in their ability to make good decisions in complex situations as they would have to do on the mission field.[9]

In the mid-1990's and the early 2000's, two multi-agency, wide-ranging international studies of missionary attrition—exploring why missionaries leave the field and how to keep them longer on the field—convincingly reaffirm the need for pre-field training in cross-cultural ministry. These studies were published as *Too Valuable to Lose*[10] and *Worth Keeping.*[11]

The first of these studies showed that pre-field missionary training that addresses being, doing, and knowing is among the top three factors that prevent long-term missionaries leaving the field prematurely.[12] The follow-up study of nearly six hundred mission agencies in twenty-two countries found that agencies that retained missionaries better had much higher pre-field training requirements than low retaining agencies. High retaining agencies expected their missionary candidates to have two to three times as much formal missiological training and 50 percent more practical missionary training than low

9. Ibid., 52–54.

10. William David Taylor, ed., *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition,* Globalization of Mission Series (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997).

11. Rob Hay, *Worth Keeping: Global Perspectives on Best Practice in Missionary Retention,* Globalization of Mission Series (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2007).

12. Detlef Blöcher and Jonathan Lewis, "Further Findings in the Research Data," in *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition,* ed. William David Taylor (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 105–25.

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retaining agencies. In addition, high retaining agencies had a considerably higher emphasis on ongoing training than low retaining agencies.[13]

Summarizing the implications of these studies for missionary training, Detlef Blöcher, a member of the team coordinating this study, emphasizes that there is a clear correlation between retention and pre-field missionary training in missiology and practical missionary skills. He writes:

> Best practice mission agencies provide careful candidate selection and sound pre-field training. They encourage their missionaries to engage in continuous training and development of new gifts and to actively work towards the continuous improvement of their ministries. . . . This global trend calls for increasing training standards of missionaries and a lifestyle of lifelong learning.[14]

THE QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE MISSIONARIES

Missionary trainers and agencies often design their training with a profile of an effective missionary in mind. The profile outlines the qualities that they expect missionaries to have. Profiles help mission agencies select candidates who are best suited for missionary work and help training institutions develop curricula that develop the characteristics outlined in the profile. The Gateway Missionary Training Centre in Canada, for example, has produced a particularly well thought through profile, or list of training outcomes, to guide their missionary training.[15] It contains the following qualities, which they expect trainees to grow in as a result of their training:

Spirituality: Demonstrates growth in relationship with God
Character: Reflects Christlikeness in attitude and action
Interpersonal skills: Demonstrates ability in relating to others

13. Detlef Blöcher, "Training Builds up Missionaries: Lessons from ReMAP II," *Connections: The Journal of the World Evangelical Alliance Missions Commission* 4 (2005): 23.

14. Ibid., 24–25.

15. Robert Brynjolfson, "Student Assessment in an Outcomes-Based Program," in *Integral Ministry Training: Design and Evaluation*, ed. Robert Brynjolfson and Jonathan Lewis (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006).

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Physical and emotional health: Evidences a balanced holistic approach to life
Church: Demonstrates a commitment to the universal body of Christ locally and globally
Bible and theology of missions: Has a firm grasp of the Bible and mission theology
Teamwork: Able to function effectively in a team
Cross-cultural adaptation: Understands and values cultural differences and demonstrates adaptability
Contextualization: Understands the culture and adapts the gospel message to communicate it effectively
Language learning: Demonstrates competence in acquiring another language
Communication: Communicates effectively in a variety of settings
Evangelism: Intentionally seeks opportunities to introduce people to Jesus Christ
Discipleship: Is a disciple and makes disciples of Jesus
Practical skills: Willing to learn and to perform activities related to daily living
Family and single life: Understands and demonstrates what family and/or single life involves here and on the mission field
Pre-field ministry: Knows the steps and practices skills/activities that are essential to getting to the field

The focus in this list on character qualities and ministry skills is reflected in most training outcomes profiles developed by other organizations as well as profiles listing the desired characteristics of missionaries beyond their training.[16] This same focus can be seen, for example, in the profile of qualifications for

16. These include the profiles produced by Latin American missionary trainers in Robert Ferris, ed. *Establishing Ministry Training: A Manual for Program Developers* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 147–52; the profiles produced by Asian missionary trainers for missionaries and for missionary trainers by the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia Missions Commission that can be found in Titus Loong and Steve Hoke, "Working Consultation for Asian Missionary Trainers," *Training for Cross-Cultural Ministries*, no. 2 (1993); and the partial outcomes profile of Redcliffe College described in Colin Bulley, "Non-Formal and Community-Based Learning," in *Integral Ministry Training: Design and Evaluation*, ed. Robert Brynjolfson and Jonathan Lewis (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006).

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