

Shining a Light into a Dark Corner

Looking at Mission Information Work

Chris Maynard, presenting at the 8th Lausanne International Researchers Conference

Summary

Drawing on insights from the presenter's recent work on a Taxonomy of Mission Information Work, this presentation will look at the big picture of mission information work itself. Who are we? What do we do? What are the major challenges in front of us?

There will be a brief look at some of our forerunners from the Bible through to the 20th century noting some of the results and benefits of mission information work. We will dwell on the brutal facts of our current situation – the increased need and difficulties of the work. The importance of organisation, training, cooperation and unity will be explored, before a review of our purpose and some critical factors for future success.

Introduction

Mission Information Workers! What we do is vital to the Body of Christ. We should expect great things and attempt great things for there are many problems yet to be overcome.

Bob Wymire, one of our forerunners, described our job as “Shining a Light into a Dark Corner”. We help the body of Jesus to “see” into the dark corners. Jesus commanded his disciples to Look, to See, to Understand. So in obedience to Jesus we look, we see, we understand. He said *The light of the body is the eye. So if your eye is focused, your whole body is full of light. But if your eye is evil, then the whole of your body is in darkness.* If we are focused we help the Body of Christ to be filled with light. We enable the body of Christ to LOOK at the world (to lift up her eyes to the harvest fields), we enable the body of Christ to SEE what God has done and what God is doing in the world (so she has the opportunity to join in), We enable the body of Christ to UNDERSTAND herself – her strengths and weaknesses, her successes and her failures (to have a sensible estimate of herself). We are a small part of God's guidance system for the body.

Forerunners

Moses under God's direction carried out three different censuses in the desert. The last census (Numbers 26) was explicitly to enable a fair allocation of the land. God said, “To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one; each is to receive its inheritance according to the number of those listed.” (Incidentally, for someone involved in mission information, it makes a good Bible study to consider all the passages with the phrase “according to the number”.)

God told Moses the purpose of this last census, and God specified many of the details of how it was to be done, but he left it to the human leaders to do the counting and to do the mathematics.

In Joshua chapters 18 and 19, in order solve a delay in accomplishing God's purpose, Joshua initiates a geographical survey of the land, but wisely also leaves room for God to have the final say.

And consider how important the bringing of information is at many points in Bible history. In 1 Samuel 11 the Spirit of God did *not* come upon Saul *until* he heard the report from the men of Jabesh about the attack of the Ammonites. In Nehemiah 1 Nehemiah does *not* set himself to pray and fast *until* he hears the brief report from his brother Hanani of how desolate Jerusalem is. As mission information workers, we are not a Saul or a Nehemiah. These are the leaders of God's people. But we *can* be the men of Jabesh or the brother Hanani bringing news with clarity and integrity that releases the Spirit of God in others. We *can* bring news with clarity and integrity that releases the Spirit of God in others – especially in those who are leaders, and those who will become leaders of God's people.

Some of the early missionary pioneers like William Carey and Hudson Taylor had to act as their own information workers. Both men had maps on the wall where they worked – maps that spoke to them of the millions of unreached people. Carey was primarily a missionary, Taylor was primarily a mobilizer, but both of them needed to know the facts about the world or about China which would enable decisions about where to go. The information they gathered and the insights that they gained from it motivated themselves and others to great things. The information they gathered and the insights that they gained from it motivated themselves and others to great things.

Much nearer to our time, and nearer to this place, there was a man in Zimbabwe in the 1960s. He wanted to help people to pray for the world. So he just gathered a few facts about a few countries of the world and shared them during a season of prayer in the mission to which he belonged. That is all that he planned to do. But he saw how effective that was so he did it again, taking in more countries and more facts and figures. The man was Patrick Johnstone and that information grew into "Operation World" and grew more. And all the time he was thinking, how can I help people to pray for the world. But because he was so thorough with his information work, mission leaders found that they could use the same information to help them make important decisions. He started as a missionary but became devoted to the mission information work and strategy.

I am skipping over many – especially many people who supported Bible translation and the discovery of hidden people groups that still need to hear the gospel for the first time.

But let me take one more.

Bob Wymire is a wonderful man. He saw the importance of information work, especially mapping. He is the one who founded GMI (Global Mapping International which sadly closed its doors last year). Much of his effort was given to support the efforts to plant churches throughout a whole nation (often under the name "DAWN" – Discipling a Whole Nation). How crucial information is to that sort of initiative.

What a paradox that we often have to research the opposite of what we want to know. We want to know where to plant the next church and in order to do that we have to research where the existing churches are. We want to reach the unreached, and in order to do that

we have to know where the reached peoples are. We want to know where to make the next Bible translation, and in order to do that we have to know where Bibles are, and what languages they are in.

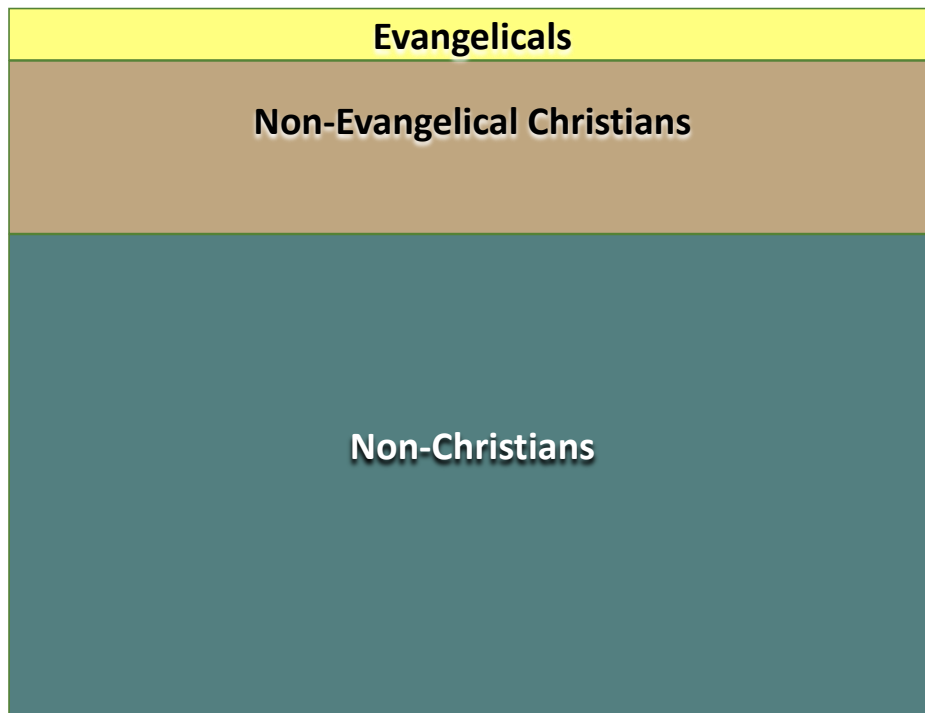
Learn from our forerunners - even from those you don't agree with. Maybe you think you can do better. I hope you can. This is one of the reasons for this talk. I am convinced that together we HAVE to do better than those who have gone before. We need God's help to raise our game.

Helping the Church to See

We help the Church to see. Let me give you just ONE example.

In John 4:35 Jesus said, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest."

How the World looks



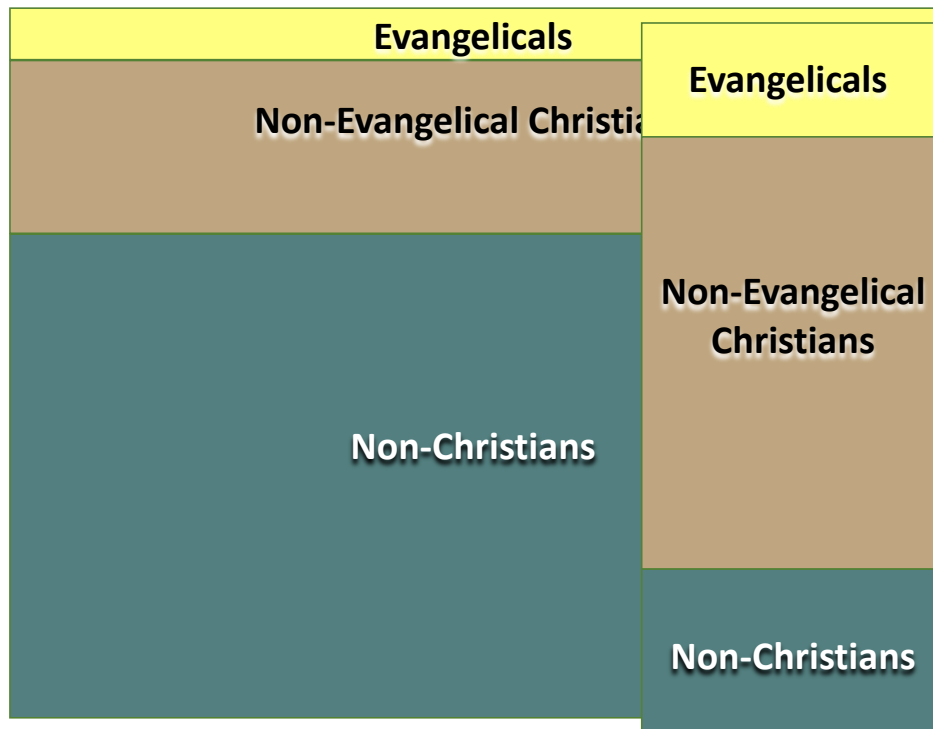
Data for 2010 sourced from Operation World DVD www.operationworld.org

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When we lift up our eyes this is the world that we see. 2/3rd of the world not yet harvested! I have put in "evangelical" Christians separately. This is Operation World's understanding of evangelicals – people who believe in the authority of the Bible, the uniqueness of Jesus, the importance of personal conversion and the need to pass on our faith, most of those, of course and Protestants, Anglicans or belong to independent churches, but some are Orthodox or Catholic.

So this is the world, but if most Christians lift up their eyes that is not what they see. This is more likely what they see.

How the World looks to Most Christians



Data for 2010 sourced from Operation World DVD www.operationworld.org

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Why the difference? The problem is that most Christians are where most Christians are. 85% of Christians live in countries where more than 50% of people consider themselves Christians. 85% of Christians, if they literally lift up their eyes, they will see Christians.

So instead of seeing the world as we know it, they see this. That is why for many in the Church the major issues are people leaving the church or nominal Christianity within the Church.



But 88% of the non-Christians live in the other part of the world, that most Christians don't see. They need our help to see beyond.

This is about the world, but I would bet you that in your country most Christians are where most Christians are, and maybe even in your city most Christians are where most Christians are. Probably also most Christians are where there is most justice. They need our help to see beyond – to get the gospel to every person, to impact every sphere of society.

We help the Church to see. But now let's take a deeper look at ourselves.

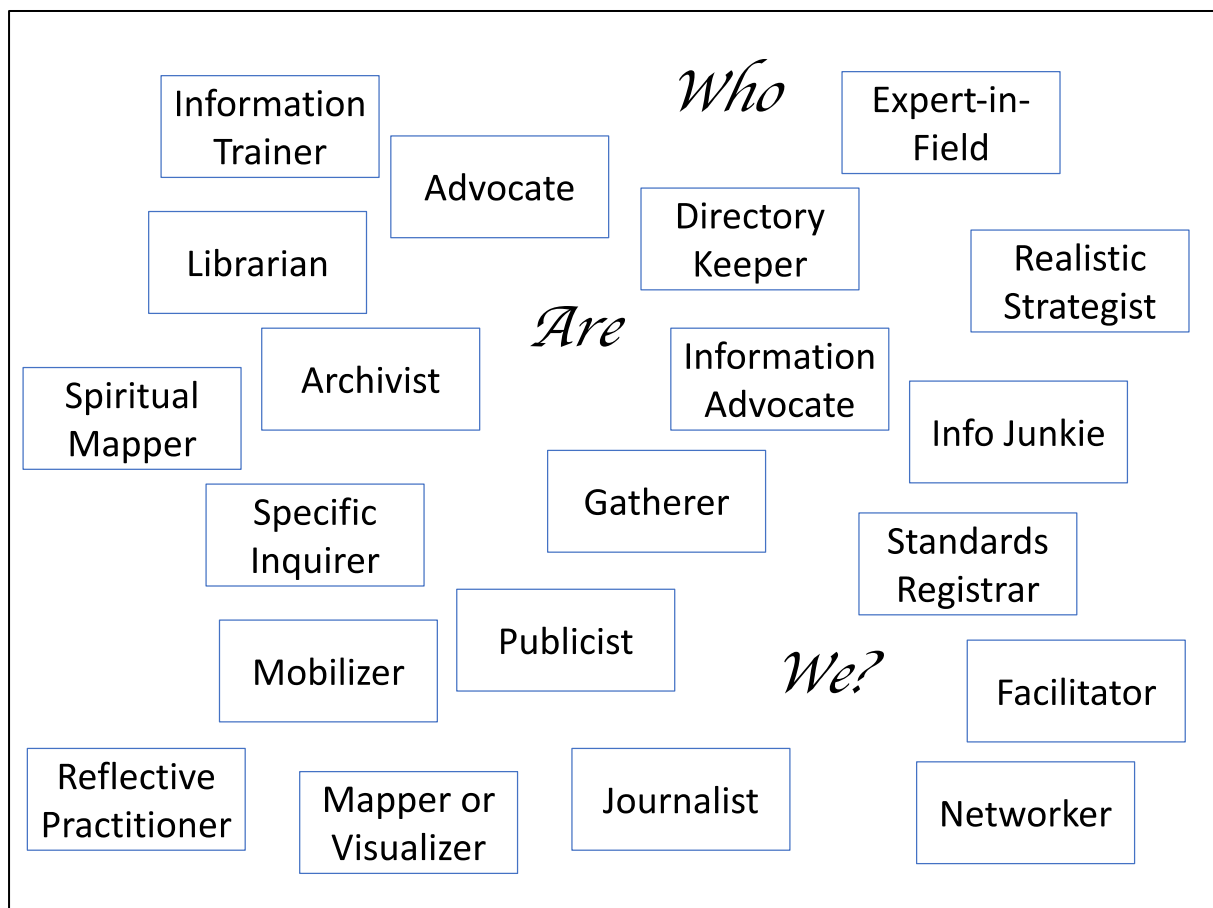
Looking at Ourselves

Sporadically over the last few years, I have worked with a data manager and prayer warrior at SIL on what we have called "A Taxonomy of Mission Information Work". First let me explain why I tend to use the phrase "Mission Information Work" rather than "Missions Research"

Most people in Missions use the term "Missions Research" and that's fine but that puts a particular spin on what we do, when actually we do many more things that just research.

Mission(s)
Research

As I see it mission information includes research but is bigger. Some researchers see themselves as not responsible for interpretation or communication even of the results of their own research. And yet this is an important part of our service to mission. Creating a mission newsletter may be a crucial communication to supporters, but may involve only a small element of internal research to gather the material.



So one of the things we did was to look around at the world of mission information and just see what sort of people were in it. And we are a very mixed bunch! Maybe you see yourself in this slide. Maybe not. There were more types that I haven't included here, but you can find them by clicking on the link of the January edition of "Correct Me If I'm Wrong" on the CMIW website. And if you don't find yourself there – let me know!

After some months (or maybe it was years) we saw a bit of a pattern, and we arranged these roles like this, and we gave each column a general name.

Who Are We?

Collector Sorter Connector Analyser Publicizer

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Gatherer | Librarian | Networker | Facilitator | Journalist |
| Directory Keeper | Mapper or Visualizer | Expert-in-Field | Spiritual Mapper | Publicist |
| Specific Inquirer | Archivist | Information Trainer | Reflective Practitioner | Mobilizer |
| Info Junkie | Standards Registrar | Information Advocate | Realistic Strategist | Advocate |

... and others!

This suggests to me two apparently opposite things at the same time. One is that we need each other, but the other is that we are naturally divided, and if we don't make a special effort we will not understand each other and end up going separate ways.



Naturally  ***Divided***

The “sorter” will not understand the “connector”. “We have to get this information properly organised” – “No. Don’t worry about organising it. We need to connect the right people”.

And as we pursued other aspects of the Taxonomy we found many other reasons why the people in this room may have difficulty co-operating.

Some are looking at the whole world – other a local situation.

Some have a specific motivation to “Finish the Task” – some just want our work to be more fruitful. Some see everything in terms of personal salvation – others have a view of advancing the Kingdom of God through many means.

Some include all Christians in their thinking – others are restricted to some understanding of “evangelicals” or even to their own denomination.

Many work only in the English language and are divided from what is going on with Christians who don’t speak English.

That is why in Mission Information Work we need to get good at building bridges. And some of these bridges will look very fragile and not very beautiful. But they are necessary if we are to achieve what God wants us to do in this work.

Brutal Facts

There are many other brutal facts that make our job more difficult than it was 50 years ago. There is greater need for secrecy in some areas because of persecution and greater difficulty in keeping secrets because of communications.

There is increased complexity in the Church, more denominations, more autonomy, more languages, more individuals than ever before – praise God for most of those!

There is the increasing complexity of mission – more agencies, more directions, more methods, more languages, more missionaries.

The world is also a more complex place.

And we are falling behind!

I suggest that our global information about missionaries and their location is worse than at any time since the protestant missionary movement began. Even our information about the number of Christians is deteriorating. Hudson Taylor had a very good idea of how many Christians there were in each province of China. Today we have very little idea of how many Christians there are in the whole of China. I recently heard a suggestion that there are between 30 million and 130 million. About India there is also disagreement. And together they make up a quarter of the world!

And we have MORE need for information. It was relatively easy when mission was from the West to the Rest. When it is everywhere to everywhere it is much more difficult to see where we should go. Good, shared, authoritative information is a good basis for unity.

Where We Fit

Let's take a step back now and look again at where we fit in to the big picture. There is a famous statement by John Piper, that mission exists because worship doesn't. "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate." - John Piper "Let the Nations Be Glad!" It is a thought-provoking understanding of mission. So let me then position mission information work in the same way. If mission exists because worship doesn't" then mission information work exists because mission doesn't (or could be more fruitful). We exist to reveal the truth about the world specifically in order to stimulate or improve mission work, to shine a light into a dark corner, to inform decisions for action, to show what God is doing – that many may glorify God and join in what He is doing.

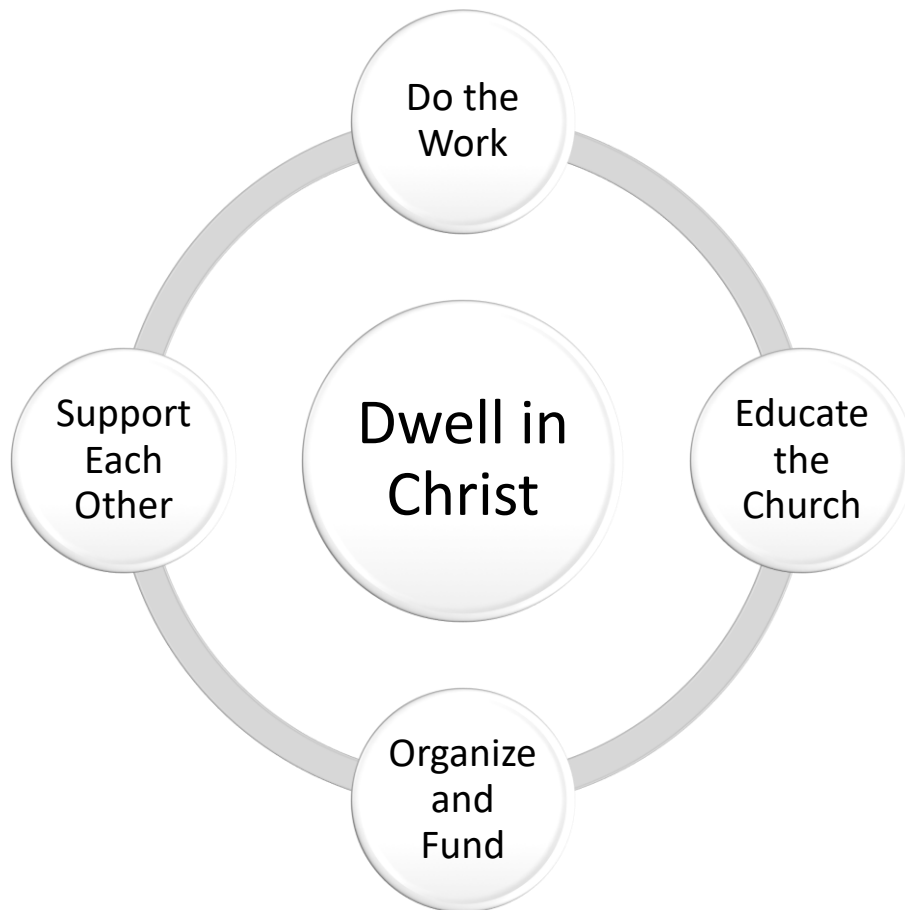
Seeing Ahead

We need to do the work – with excellence, with results – find dark corners and shine a light on them. But I contend that that is not enough.

We must support each other – in conference like this, in training, in mentoring, by sharing tools, in unity, and in data standards to facilitate sharing.

We also need to educate the Church, not just with the results of our research, but about the value and importance of the work we do. We need to educate church leaders and mission leaders, and even educate the Christian educators.

And we must pay attention to our own organization and funding. We have to find niches in friendly mission agencies or academic institutions, to pay attention to recruitment and retention of workers, and submission and connection to Leaders.



Our is not a mechanistic profession. Yes, we use mathematics and statistics and anthropology and sociology and economics. But those alone *cannot* yield the results for which we pray. We need God’s guidance at every step of the way. Which project will you start? How is it designed? Who should help? Who should be made aware of the results? How will it be funded? Should we use a percentage, or an absolute value? These are *spiritual* questions, and we need God’s help.

Hudson Taylor’ booklet “China’s Spiritual Need and Claims” contained and was based squarely on statistics, yet he himself tells how every page was “soaked in prayer”. We cannot do this work without each of us having a sound knowledge of the Bible. But if we do dwell in Christ then we will be like a good eye in the body of Christ helping to flood the whole body with light. And shining lights into dark corners of the world.

If we do not dwell in Christ, we will be like an evil eye and only contribute to the darkness. It will be like the blind leading the blind. Both will fall into a ditch. God forbid.

The full taxonomy can be found
http://www.globalcmiw.org/resources/taxonomy_of_mission_information_work_2018-01.pdf