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Interview of Gordon Hogan (Pakistan)

Gordon Hogan

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Gordon Hogan who has been engaged in evangelistic work in Pakistan for seven and a half years and who is presently working with the Four Seas College of Bible and Missions in Singapore was interviewed by Winfred Wright on April 25, 1970.

Wright: Brother Hogan, I would like for you to comment first of all on the historical background of the work from the beginning until the present time, both in Pakistan and in Singapore.

Hogan: The country of Pakistan came into existence in 1947 as an outgrowth of religious feelings between Hindus and Moslems in India. It wasn't until February, 1961, that churches of Christ first sent a missionary there, and we were the first family. We located in the city of LaHore which has a population of 2,000,000 people. About a year later J. C. Choate arrived and stayed with us for several months and then moved to the city of Karachi which has 2,500,000 people. Now the church in that country, at least in the western wing of it, has about ten congregations from the border in the north which is the Himalaya Mountains, bordering on Afghanistan to the south which would be Karachi. J. C. left after about four years. My family was home briefly in 1965 and then back again, and now there are two additional American families there--the Wayne Newcombe family in LaHore and the Jim Waldron family in Karachi. There is now a small preacher training school in Karachi which serves the western wing. The country itself is the fifth largest in the world with 131,000,000 people. The work has been of evangelistic nature primarily, and now in these later years with the training school we hope that evangelists from their own people can be trained.

In Singapore the church has existed since 1955 when Ira Rice first went to south-east Asia. The brotherhood in that region now numbers about 800 from the north in the Malayan Peninsula to the island of Singapore where on the island we have six congregations, four English speaking and two Chinese speaking. Four Seas College of Bible and Missions has been in existence since 1965. We've graduated 18 students thus far, and all of them are meaningfully employed either in the church or in commerce. We are hoping that this particular college which teaches Bible and Bible related subjects will become a focal point for training workers through all of south-east Asia.

Wright: What is the general religious background of the people in this area of the world?

Hogan: We are sort of mixing these two. I shall try to keep them separated as I talk. In Pakistan, the religious background is Islam. In Singapore and southeast Asia, it is primarily Buddhism with animism, Confucianism, Hinduism and some Islam coming into the picture.

Wright: What about the cultural and economic background and how have these effected your work?

Hogan: Once again, the situations are strikingly different. In Pakistan it is a very backward country in the sense of economics. Culturally, it grows out of the mysticism of south Asia in the east. The people are wed to Islam which brings about a great many problems. Economically the average income would be about \$55 per year. The literacy rate is very low--about 15% of the population and maybe 10% of that can understand what they read and write.

In Singapore we have the second strongest economy in all of Asia, second only to Japan. The literacy rate is extremely high. It is beyond 80%. The cultural background, of course, is Oriental. It is a dynamic society, one in which we have a government that is relatively free of corruption and a people that are determined to build a nation.

Wright: In talking about Pakistan you mentioned the problem of illiteracy. What are some other serious challenges which you have had to overcome in your work in Pakistan?

Hogan: I think probably illiteracy or ignorance is the greatest of all because this spills over into every other area. An ignorant people are usually a superstitious people. They are set in their particular groove of cultural, and it is very difficult to change this when people cannot read for themselves and learn. I suppose this would be the most difficult of all--superstition which grows out of ignorance and illiteracy.

Wright: In Pakistan, what methods did you use principally for evangelizing?

Hogan: In the very outset, of course, it was purely an evangelistic approach in that we would go into villages and make ourselves known and simply preach the message of Christ orally. Later on, we introduced Bible correspondence courses and this has been the single most effective way to reach the people who will in themselves later become the leaders of their own people because we did this work primarily in English which meant we reached the bi-lingual people--those who were educated both in English and in their own language. This would probably have been the best medium of contact that we had and in the long range will look back and say this is where the most amount of good was done through the Bible correspondence course contacts which brought us into contact with the people who are the leaders now and in the future.

Wright: What methods have you used that you found to be ineffective and therefore you had to eliminate from your work?

Hogan: Well, we used so many different types of approaches. We thought of terms in the beginning of maybe sending promising students to America. That was maybe the first of 10,000 mistakes made. Fortunately we didn't do a great deal of this. In fact, it was only one girl. I think we had an advantage in that we were able to study with and to be with men who had been in Asia and worked in Asia. As a consequence, as we began to use a particular method it was almost as if an echo was saying, "This didn't work somewhere else," and as we could see it developing in this avenue we would abandon it. As a consequence we didn't get involved in too many of these way out sort of things and spin our wheels.

There are probably things we could have done that we didn't do if that would answer your question rather than things we did that didn't work. I think in a measure all

of the things that we used worked to some extent. We could not use radio work. It was government controlled; therefore, that was out of the picture. We did use a lot of literature in spite of the fact that it was an illiterate society and in this way we reached those who were the leaders. We used a lot of meetings. We still think that they are extremely valid. Gospel meetings, one right after the other, in that particular country, people would come.

Wright: Were there any special approaches that you used that you might consider unique to your mission work?

Hogan: No, I don't think so. I think it was fairly traditional as we look on it. Ours was more or less an overgrown country town. This leant itself more to our particular roots in America in the sense that maybe we had beginnings in this country in that kind of frontier sort of society, and it seemed to work there.

Wright: What did you do in Pakistan for training converts? This might be a good time to talk about your school in Singapore.

Hogan: In Pakistan, it was just more or less a one to one situation. As we converted young men, then we would take them personally and train them. The conversion rate was not so fast that we were covered up with new converts. The first convert became our translator as is usually the case in a situation like this. In fact, this was probably our single best training program for those who were leaders. They became translators and co-workers like a Timothy-Paul relationship. Then, later, of course, we had small classes for new converts just like we would have here in the United States. Sometimes we would have a seminar type arrangement where J. C. would come from Karachi, and he and I would work together in particular areas of church government, worship, etc. to ground the converts better. Every visitor, which unfortunately there were not a great deal of, we would put them to work in whatever area they seemed to be best fitted. We tried to begin a training school in Pakistan in 1965, but for the lack of experienced teachers we had to abandon that. Later, of course, it has come into being. We are grateful for that.

In Singapore, the situation was different. We had a literate society and they themselves could read. The training process of new converts was much easier because you could put them back to work very quickly. They take hold; they are natural leaders. They are not shy or at least the men aren't in doing things of this kind.

Of course, the college was just an outgrowth of the church itself, another arm of the church if you please. In this way we can take them for two years, train them, give them 90 hours of Bible which is a pretty good dose, and have seminars in various particular areas of leadership. As a consequence, we have trained men who are capable of going out to churches now and lead in Bible school training programs, and they are in great demand.

We also have women in the church who are teachers once again of other women. This is a great advantage because usually in Oriental and south Asian societies, the men are the domineering factor and the woman takes a back seat. Usually she is not taught in depth as the man is. This is not true in Singapore. In fact, it may be just the reverse in some isolated cases. We believe this is one of the keys for evangelizing in particular southeast Asia.

I could say a great deal about my feelings concerning students coming from Asia to America. I feel very strongly about this. I think we need to keep them in their own setting--economic setting, socio-culture arrangement so that we don't upset this balance. Four Seas College represents this kind of training. It would be academically on the level of the first two years of school right here at Harding. Our Bible credits are transferable, at least to York College, although we are not interested in this at all. It is gaining a great deal of respect in that part of the world.

Wright: You mentioned your feelings concerning the Asians coming to America for training. How do you feel about those whom you train receiving American support?

Hogan: I feel very strongly about this too. I avoid this. In fact, I probably go to all kinds of elaborate procedures to avoid this kind of thing even to the extent of turning down money for students support if the supporter insists that he must correspond with the student. I do this because I am concerned for the student's soul. If I had my way about the matter, there just would not be any national or American support. There is no point in our dealing with the exceptions to this because that's not under consideration. I have talked to missionaries around the world for ten years now, and I don't think any responsible missionary would disagree with this.

Wright: How is Four Seas College itself funded?

Hogan: It is funded by churches in America and individuals. It is purely a missionary effort, and in this case seems to be a valid way of doing it until such time that alumni of the school and the churches in southeast Asia can carry it on.

Wright: For someone who wanted to participate in the school and in the other mission activities of the area, what language training should be acquired?

Hogan: You need none if you can speak English. Seventy-five percent of our population in Singapore speaks English. The area roundabout us in southeast Asia for the most part their educated speak English or at least some form of it. All of our work is done in English and so there is no need for preparation in some other language. After one comes to that part of the world to work in a situation like this, then we do have arrangements with one of the best Chinese language studies in the world. This is also true of the languages around about.

Wright: Brother Hogan, as president of the college, I am sure a lot of your work is fund raising and gaining support for your work. What has been your greatest problem in gaining and maintaining support?

Hogan: Some how keeping people tied in, helping them to see the benefit of a program like this. It is such a long range process that people become weary in well doing. It is the constant process of feeding information and keeping communications between what we are doing, the results of what we are doing, both good and bad, and it is not all good. Some of the students just don't make it. Brethren here at home have to understand that just as students don't make it here at Harding, some of them don't make it at Four Seas College. This, I suppose, would be the most difficult, although I can say we haven't really had a great deal of difficulty in this. The brethren have received us in a wonderful way. I don't really have any argument with my brethren. They have been a real blessing.

Wright: To close out our conversation, what do you think we can do to improve our mission work? Perhaps here you can just spin your own philosophy of missions.

Hogan: I would say first of all that those who engage in mission work, some how or another, need to be slapped in the face with life before they decide to venture into an area where they are going to be introduced to another form of life that will become extremely difficult to bear. That would call for maybe more maturity in candidates that go and a very deep faith in God and His word without compromise.

I could say a great deal about what I have run into since I have been back in America concerning this, but the people that I faced in most of Asia are concerned about an anchor. They want a God that's there and they want a God they can go to with assurance. They want a book they can believe in with all their heart. We need to be conveyors of that kind of message.

Methods are going to vary with the person and the persons who go, the conditions under which they meet it, and we need to be the kind of flexible people that will use the proper methods within the guidelines and framework of the scriptures themselves, that will get the job done. Don't be afraid of public opinion, whether it be on that side or this side, if it is right. This seems to be extremely important. Let's let folks have their culture and their customs if it doesn't breach a principle of truth and righteousness. It shouldn't go against our grain after awhile if we will just be patient and not try to get out ahead of the Lord and ahead of the people that we are trying to deal with.

As much as is in us, let's take the message of truth that saves souls and let the people of the land work out their own framework in which they shall reside. I think probably that might be a philosophy that is not a great deal different from many others that you have interviewed, but it is one that I believe in.

Wright: Thank you for taking this time to talk with us. We believe that your experiences over the last decade have given you something to say to those who are planning to become missionaries themselves. May God bless you in your work.