

When I Write, I Feel the Pleasure of God: The Life and Work of Scott Moreau

ems

INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT MOREAU BY ANTHONY CASEY

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Scott Moreau (DMiss, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) missionary to Africa for fourteen years and more than thirty years serving as faculty at Wheaton College.

Scott Moreau is the inaugural recipient of the Evangelical Missiological Society Lifetime Achievement Award.

This award is voted by a jury of leaders and peers in missiology and seeks to honor those who have faithfully labored for the cause of the Great Commission and made significant contributions to the field. This life history interview is a reprint of the original Fall 2020 publication and is a fitting way to once again honor Scott Moreau, a generational leader in EMS and beyond.

Scott Moreau (DMiss, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) served in Africa for 14 years before joining the faculty of Wheaton College, where he has served as Professor of Intercultural Studies for 30 years and most recently as Dean of the Graduate School. Scott is a longtime board member with the Evangelical Missiological Society.

This interview is part of a series showcasing and celebrating the life and work of veteran missiologists. The intent is to get to know the people behind the ideas, shedding light on their early years, calling, development, and contribution to the field of missiology. This interview has been lightly edited for length and flow. The interview was conducted by Anthony Casey.

Anthony: *Scott, tell us a little bit about when and where you were born.*

Scott: 1955 in Butler, PA. Growing up, we moved eight times before I was 13 years old and those were all interstate moves. I got used to the idea that I'm not going to stay in one place very long and that that was part of the pattern. We moved every time my dad got a promotion or a transfer. Geographically, from Chicago in the North to Harlingen, TX in the South and from LA in the West to Atlanta, GA in the East. Pretty much all over the map.

A: *Was there one place you stayed during your formative years or was it really just place to place every few years?*

S: Golly, everything was so short, but by the time we moved to the Chicago area that was 7th grade for me. That time was pretty formative and the longest chunk.

A: *Can you tell us a little about your parents? What were they like? What kind of personalities did they have? What did they do?*

S: My dad was a salesman for a petrochemical company. Easy to get along with and outgoing, but absent a lot and that certainly played a role. When we were at home, it was mom who ruled the roost and that was just the reality growing up. Mom and I had similar personalities and that resulted in some tensions and challenges. I was number three out of four. The black sheep of the family was number one, so he kind of sheltered the rest of us from frustrations or normal childhood pranks and punishments and things like this. But I would say I have a pattern with my mom that plays significantly in my scholarship. I grew up with the impression I could never be good enough to please her so I developed this pattern of trying to please my mom. It plays into people pleasing some, but it's really person focused and the focus is my mom. I always wanted her to be proud of me. It's funny, even as an adult that plays a role, and my wife Emily would get angry at me occasionally when I was acting out of the norm for her because I was trying to impress my mom talking about things I was doing and so on.

Now neither of my parents were believers, so faith didn't have much of an impact on them. As a matter of fact, my mom was not excited when I chose to follow the Lord's leading and become a missionary because she wanted me to be a scientist. She actually wrote me a very long letter when I was in college and beginning the process of transferring to Wheaton. She noted that from very early I was gifted in mathematics and science so she wanted me to at least double major. If I was going to major in Christianity in some way, shape, or form, she still wanted me to major in math or physics and I wound up being a physics major. I thought that was good advice, but still with this sense of 'OK, I'm going a direction that's not pleasing to her. What does that mean?' I didn't change that path because the Lord had a bigger pull on my life, I'm grateful to say.

But this idea of pleasing her still shows up in a lot of ways even today. Now, when I'm writing, is it good enough for her? A little anecdote that captures this: I wrote a book on spiritual warfare and found out that my mom was reading it and the only

feedback I ever got was that she told my dad who told my wife who told me there was a typo on page 72. As you can see, trying to please her became an impossible task. So there's a dance she and I have gone through over the years and I've stopped playing my part in the dance more recently. I'm not looking for her approval anymore because I know it's not gonna come, not the way I want it to. If it did come, it would scare me. I think that there's a psychology behind that, and I'm not even completely sure what it is, but it's the reality that I have to deal with in my own life.

A: *So, in college, you majored in physics? Did you enjoy math and science growing up? What were you planning to do?*

S: I loved math and science! Actually, I started at the University of Illinois in their aeronautical engineering program. I looked at the job market and thought electrical engineering would be better, so I switched focus. The saddest part of leaving U of I was leaving the engineering program. Wheaton, of course, is a liberal arts college and the University of Illinois is a public university where in engineering school, I had 18 hours of Social Sciences, English, etc., and got that out of the way. I was looking forward to nothing but engineering courses. When I transferred to Wheaton, I had a boatload of things I had to catch up on.

I knew I had been called to ministry; that's why I was at Wheaton. But I still wasn't quite ready to give up science. I still today have a small section of my bookshelves where I have my physics books. I still enjoy it.

My junior year at Wheaton, I had to take a career attitude test to see what career might be a best fit. I knew I had been called into ministry – not missions yet. So it gave my supposed career choices. Number one was computer programmer. Number 50 was pastor. What do I do with this? I just said OK this is the Lord's call but maybe I shouldn't be a pastor. I can preach and I can teach but shepherding is not where my strengths lie. And caring for people as opposed to caring for ideas is not where my strengths lie either. You know, I've got friends and so on. It's not that I don't care about people, but shepherding people – that's not who I am and that's fine. I'm glad I know that as a 65 year old!

A: *So you had this ministry calling in college. How did you become a Christian?*

S: I became a Christian my senior year in high school through the ministry of Young Life. I had a bunch of my close friends who were coming to Christ and I resisted. That was from sophomore year on. They got involved with Young Life and I stayed

away from it for a while. Then I went to a summer camp in between junior and senior year. It was there I realized I wanted to receive Christ, but I didn't want to do it at camp because it was too emotional and everybody was doing it and I thought, if I go home and come to Christ in a few months, then I know it's something that's going to stick. That was the logic part of my brain that was working in that direction, and that's what I did. It was around Christmas and I asked Christ in my life. It was probably two or three nights in a row because I didn't feel anything. Then I started getting involved more with Young Life.

A: *I saw you were on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ for a time. Were you exposed to them in college?*

S: I came across a Navigators Bible study at the University of Illinois and joined. I was involved with Navigators my freshman year. Sophomore year when I went back, I realized Navigators was not the only ministry on campus, so I tried out Navigators, Cru, and InterVarsity for a semester. It made for a busy life, but I loved it. I was growing and eventually, I saw that Cru seemed to have the best mix of discipleship and social activities. I wasn't that excited about the evangelism part. I was still reasonably new in my faith and I knew there was a commitment to sharing my faith. I don't have the gift of evangelism, but that doesn't excuse me from being able to bear witness for Christ.

Then, when I transferred to Wheaton, I started working with a Cru staff member and then my senior year I was leading the ministry on Wheaton's campus. We would go to a junior college and share Christ in the cafeteria and things like this.

As far as a calling to ministry, I was in a prayer meeting at the University of Illinois and it was as if God said to me, "What are you going to do with your engineering degree?" I had felt called to ministry, so I thought, well, nothing. God said, "It's time to move on" and that started the process of transferring to Wheaton. I figured I'd get better ministry training there, though I still double-majored in physics.

So I was involved with Cru and decided to join staff. I got to blend the two things I love. I was going with Cru on an experimental assignment to teach physics and general science in a southern African school – 10th and 12th graders in Swaziland. I ended up staying with Cru for 14 years. When I was 22 years old and new to staff, I thought if I stayed long enough, evangelism will become a natural reflex and I won't have to force myself. After 14 years, it still hadn't happened. My wife and I realized it was never going to be a natural reflex, so when God called us back to the

U.S. with our young family, it didn't happen through a dream or vision. It was just a realization that she was ready to go back. It took me another 18 months to become ready.

It was good for us to be with Cru in Africa, but neither of us were ready for a campus ministry assignment in the U.S. I was already teaching at a Cru-based seminary in Nairobi so I thought maybe I could find a place to teach in the U.S. That started the search that led me here to Wheaton as a professor.

A: *Interesting. So, backing up a bit, how and why Africa?*

S: Ah, my senior year of college I'm thinking about this call to ministry. I thought, ok, I could be a pastor, work with Young Life or Cru, or be a missionary. Those are the options. Wheaton is a place where you hear about missions a lot. In chapel I heard about an opportunity to teach math and science in Nigeria and that piqued my interest. At an interest meeting, I met an anthropologist who came alongside me and helped me weekly think through culture. It was an incredible one on one time. He had been a missionary as well, but he was an anthropologist by training, so he blended the best of both worlds and I realized I wanted to go. In my mind, I wanted to go to Nigeria and teach science and math. When I joined staff with Cru, one of the early interview questions was "Are you willing to go anywhere that we send you?" and I kind of gulped and said yes and they said, "but what are your plans?" Well my plans are I sense God's call to go to Nigeria. When they assigned us, I didn't get Nigeria, but it was still Africa.

I was content with that and we went over as part of a large team. Cru was experimenting with vocational missions, so nurses, doctors, and teachers were on our team. There were 70 of us on staff with Cru in Swaziland. It was kind of the incubator for Cru to think things through. Eventually they decided the vocational thing didn't work as well because it got in the way of people being able to be engaged in ministry full time and the people it produced didn't have all the deepest embedded Cru values. And that would be characteristic of my experience as well.

I still love the ministry and applaud what they do and how they go about doing it. There are things I would critique, but I would critique things of myself as well. They were a great 14 years. It's just unimaginable to me that this is my 30th year at Wheaton. So, now I've been here twice as long as I was on staff with Cru.

A: *So you were already in Africa with Cru. I know you do some continuing biblical studies as part of their training. Was it through that that you started as a student at TEDS? Explain that process.*

S: Yes, I went to Swaziland first and wasn't sure what my next step was after my two-year term. I went to one of those Cru continuing studies classes taught by a professor who was the founding president of a seminary Cru was establishing in Africa. He was telling us about the seminary. All my light bulbs went off. I thought, I could train African pastors using my teaching gift because I had realized in my second year of teaching physics that high school level physics is uninteresting and unchallenging, and it's boring for me. My personality is such that if I am bored, I become boring myself and I thought continuing teaching physics isn't the best route for me.

So, when this thing came up with the seminary, I thought this could be where God has me next. So I applied to TEDS to start the M.Div. I thought it was a good seminary where I could get a good education and then come back to Africa. I had no idea what I wanted to study outside of the core Bible and theology classes. I'm not the greatest language student. With theology, I think myself into circles. Funny story – I took a theology midterm and had a 104 degree fever. I stayed in my winter coat the whole time and just answered questions in a haze on the fly. I got the highest grade out of 100 students. But when I have time to sit there and think about things, I change my mind five times. I became an average theology student. But the missions classes were interesting. I didn't have the greatest teachers, well, one was very good, but the rest.... But I had been living in another culture for over two years. I'm changed. And this missions stuff absolutely fascinated me.

I ended up taking enough missions courses to have a missions emphasis with my MDiv. TEDS was just starting their DMiss program when I was there. I decided to enroll. I was in their second or third cohort ever. So I did the DMiss at TEDS and then went back to Africa and started teaching at the seminary. It was there I met my wife. We married after a year and had three of our four children there.

A: *Would you like to say anything about any of your professors at TEDS that were particularly influential?*

S: Well, I was a TA for the department and actually worked for Hesselgrave and Tim Warner. John Nyquist was there. Probably the most influential on me was Bill Taylor. He was there at Trinity at the time for a short stint. He was the best teacher

of the group. Warner was kind of dragged into the spiritual warfare movement at the time, so I was watching him as an outsider and kind of wishing he would drag me along with him, you know, and just see what this stuff is all about. I was interested but didn't know what to do with it.

At the time, at least, Hesselgrave was a scholar that had his feet in the regular academic world as well as in the Christian academic world. He had a foundation that I really admired and appreciated. I was a research assistant for some of his book writing, so I got to know some of his works from the research vantage point and really appreciated it. You know, his book on cross-cultural counseling was probably 10 years ahead of the game. I don't think it ever sold very well; it just wasn't very popular and it wasn't because it wasn't good, but it was written by a strange person, a missiologist who doesn't have his feet in the counseling world. Well, he's got anthropological training, so he should be able to talk about that. But at the same time, the field wasn't ready for it then.

A: *What was your DMiss project at TEDS?*

S: I developed a mission curriculum for the Nairobi International School of Theology. So it's a project that will never see the light of day. I surveyed East Africa focused on the curriculum. I had the Cru ethos that I had to fit, but I had the African context that I also had to fit. I understood the Cru ethos, but I didn't understand the African context so that's what I spent a lot of my work, my research, my thinking on. I looked at East African Church History. East African history. Not as much missionary history, but that played a role because it was a Christian institution. How does all this form a framework for thinking through a curriculum for missions in Kenya? What do Kenyans think about missions? That was early on so they weren't quite there yet. They have really come there now, but they weren't quite there yet. And that's what I lay at the feet of the missionaries. We didn't think about raising people up to become missionaries early enough. When I say we, I mean the whole missions community.

A: *Alright, today you're at Wheaton. What was that transition like? Did you think you'd be there long term since you had a pattern of moving so much?*

S: I really didn't think I'd be here this long. My wife was an army brat, so she and I both had moved around a lot. Growing up, she had lived internationally. If you had told me I was going to spend the next 30 years at Wheaton, I'm not sure what I would have done! My first few years here my DMiss was kind of denigrated like it

was a second-class doctoral degree, and then it was a seminary degree, so it was almost third class. It was better than a DMin, but not much, and so my need to prove myself to my mom spread out at Wheaton and I had to prove myself to my colleagues. Not as much in the missions department as the colleagues across campus. Do I have what it takes to teach at Wheaton?

I looked into doing a PhD. I went down and talked to some people at the University of Chicago. I went up to Trinity because they had invited a few people who had done DMiss degrees to do the PhD. But by the time that became a possibility, I had received tenure at Wheaton and I thought, OK, I don't have to have a PhD to be able to stay here. But early on, I had a lot of – and I found I'm not unique to this – a lot of “am I cut out to be here? Can people see through me?” You know what I mean? I got past that eventually.

I think it took becoming a full professor to move to that stage where I thought, OK, I've been accepted. All I can do from here is die or retire at Wheaton. And so I thought, OK, not sit back and relax, but I don't have to prove myself anymore. That's been a freeing thing, though I can still turn back toward that old path a little bit too easily. So, to answer your question, coming to Wheaton as a professor was a part of a three-year culture shock returning to the U.S. from Africa.

Frankly, when I was here as an undergrad, I did not like Wheaton. There was a snootiness to the place. The mature Christians were already locked into their friendship circles when I transferred in as a junior. What was left were the people who struggled. The people who were bitter. The people who were angry. Here I was, a gymnast and a physicist – two strikes against me. I didn't fit into the normal frame of relationships, at least from my perspective. I was unsuccessful in crossing the gender lines and having healthy relationships. I think that tied into my thinking about my mom. I was always expecting to be rejected so it made it easy for me, when I thought there was a hint of that, to just run away.

My roommate ended up committing suicide three years after graduation. Another person said Christianity was just a phase he went through. Another person - as soon as he left Wheaton - disavowed himself of being an Evangelical. These are the people that I spent a significant amount of time with. And you know, one told me I was too smart to go on staff with Cru. What in the world does that even mean? You know, it just didn't make any sense to me at that point in time. I thought, well, he's trying to help me. But you know, until God calls for an intervention, I'm still moving in this direction.

So I came on as faculty with that kind of background at Wheaton. But Jim Plueddemann, who was here as a faculty member, wonderfully helped me. I had to reintroduce myself to Wheaton and Wheaton had to reintroduce itself to me. I thought, I'm teaching in the Graduate School, I'm not an undergrad. I'm not an 18 year old. I'm not working with 18 year olds. I don't have to motivate graduate students and I'm on the teaching side of the line and it is a different atmosphere. So I've grown to love and appreciate Wheaton, but it took a while.

A: *Let's transition and talk about your writing. You've written a lot. Do you or did you write because you wanted to or because you had to? Did you write to get tenure, or because you had these ideas burning inside that you had to give expression?*

S: Well, I started writing when I was in Africa and there was no tenure. I had a half dozen articles in the *East African Journal of Theology*. I did a series on cults and an article on John Mbiti's view of time. So I'd say it's fair to say there's an element in which writing is in my blood. You know, I've said this before: Eric Liddle said, "God made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure." Well God made me to write and edit and when I write and edit, I feel His pleasure. I think that's a fair statement to say, but at the same time I can't overlook the fact, "Hey Mom, look what I did." That thinking played more a role when I first came to Wheaton.

I started writing because I wanted to help the African church. That was what was driving it and you know, there's the idea of getting something in print is kind of cool, but I was a tiny fish in a very small pond.

It's funny how serendipity plays a role. I was new at Wheaton and Walter Elwell's office was down the hall. He's an interesting character. He has a photographic memory. I think he had written or edited 25 dictionaries related to theology and so on. He had a New Testament introduction. Anyway, he came down and stuck his head in my office and said, "Is there anyone in this department who's willing to help edit a book on 20th Century global Christianity? The main editor, JD Douglas needs help with the non-Western peoples." I said oh yeah, I'd love to do that and it was just virtue of serendipity that I became an associate editor of that book and that led to Baker trusting me enough to write a contract with me on the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*. That project led to the Encountering Mission series, and so it's kind of one thing led to another.

At Wheaton, there is a sense that you need to publish. Wheaton just has assistant, associate, and full professor, and then it's emeritus or death. So you only get a few chances to advance and once you get to the third, there's nothing more you can do. It was nice for me that I could stop there when I reached full professor and not worry, but by then I still liked to write and edit.

But as much as I like to write and edit, I still don't think of myself as a scholar per se. That might surprise some people. I think of myself more as an activist-practitioner-scholar. Whether that's good or not, whether that's accurate or not, that's where my head is. I write textbooks, and those involve a level of scholarship, but they're not the same as a scholarly monograph. I also edited the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* journal, which isn't so much a scholarly journal as a feet on the ground training missionaries type of journal.

So those are the types of writings that I'd say characterize me. I'm good at putting out the textbooks. Maybe not the monographs as much, though my most recent book on contextualization would probably fit that category better than my textbooks would, but it still was written with the idea of it being a textbook.

- A:** *How do you conceptualize or approach a new writing project? You said you have this practitioner-scholar framework. Do you write on something that's gripping you? Or do you write on something that's needed? And then how do you move from idea to the page?*
- S:** I write on something that's gripping to me. It can be gripping for a number of reasons. When I proposed the Encountering Mission series to Baker, I had access to a database of like 4000 missions courses that were being taught in North America and I was able to catalog or categorize all those and say “here's the reason you need this book in the series” and the publisher loved that because people almost never had research behind what they were proposing. With this proposal, I was able to say you've got 150 courses on Introduction to Missions, Mission History, etc. We need a mission history textbook. My *Introduction to World Missions* didn't need to be justified, but with all the others, I was able to justify the need for the book on the basis of what was being taught in the academy and Baker was thinking of it as a textbook series.

Introduction to World Missions and the *Encountering Intercultural Communication* – those two I was passionate about. The first is for practitioners. The other is half theory, half what does this mean for church planting and discipleship. I've written

two books on contextualization because that's what I teach and what I'm passionate about. I wrote on spiritual warfare, in part, to express my voice in the midst of a cacophony of voices. So much of what was out there was sensationalist or attention grabbing. I wanted a more moderate view that wasn't anti-spiritual warfare, but wasn't so pro that it became evangelistic in a sense. I wanted something in the middle so that's what drove that book for me. So each book had slightly different driving factors. With *EMQ*, I thought, this reaches more missionaries than any other journal. When they asked me to be editor, I loved that part of the picture and had already loved reading the journal. I thought this is something I have a passion for. Seventeen years was a pretty good run with that.

A: *Is there anything that you're working on now or that you've left unwritten that you might mention?*

S: You know, I was just telling a friend of mine that lately I've been dealing with some depression. I'm tired. This was pre-corona. Corona has actually recharged me a little because it suits introverts. Dream come true you know! With an empty nest at home, I can be introverted. My wife is introverted as well.

At this moment, what I've been doing more is having fun making videos, whether for courses or for a church planting network or for my kids at our church. I've been trying to put together things that take advantage of the creativity that books don't quite do for me. I've had dreams of something like quantum missiology – you know, my physics background- but I thought, yeah two people will read that. My colleague and I will enjoy it and that will be it. I've thought about things but nothing is really grabbing me right now. So that's where I stand.

A: *Sure, that makes sense. Tom Steffen said nobody reads books anymore so he doesn't know why anybody writes them. And then he put out another one on oral hermeneutics that has just come out. Ha.*

S: Well, even hearing Tom saying that makes me think. What can I do, not in the Tik Tok world, but in the video world? I have a YouTube channel which I don't broadcast much. That's where I have a lot of material I used for online classes and so on. I've started playing around with things like Doodly that lets you draw in the videos. It takes between one to two hours of work per minute of published video.

So a finished video might be 7 minutes and you think that's not much, but it was a lot more work than 7 minutes would imply. And yet that's where our culture has gone. Jay Moon would say it's a digit-oral culture and those types of things appeal to digit-oral people. So maybe that's my next step. Instead of writing books, I'll start making more videos.

I've got this massive collection of images of Christ from around the world. It's 5,335 catalogued images so far with another 1,100 that I haven't cataloged yet – copyrights and other issues. What do I do with that? I've used some of them in presentations and so on. I've made 60 or 70 videos of these with someone like Michael Card or Fernando Ortega playing in the background. Using these images like this takes a wordsmith or a storyteller as they show events in the life of Christ. I really love them for devotions and at conferences, but it's not the kind of thing you can post publicly because of some of the copyright issues. So I'm not sure what to do with all those, but I'd love to figure something out as I'm nearing the age of hanging up the Dean's hat at Wheaton and going off to a green pasture somewhere. I'm probably still looking at around five years until that.

A: Thanks so much, Scott, for your time and for such an insightful look into your life and work!
