

# The Story of Faith Missions

**Non-denominational missionaries going where established churches couldn't...or wouldn't**

We may have more wealth in these days, better education, greater comfort in traveling and in our surroundings even as missionaries, but have we the spirit of urgency, the deep, inward convictions that moved those who went before us; have we the same passion of love, personal love for the Lord Jesus Christ? If these are lacking, it is a loss for which nothing can compensate.

*(Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor.)*

How excited are we about the tremendous opportunities we have of reaching millions who are in spiritual darkness and who need the Gospel more than ever? If missions were a mere human invention, it would be up to us to either support it or to ignore it. But it is entirely different when we know that missions are not an option or a personal preference, but a God-given mandate. Because our Lord commanded His Church to spread the faith, it is our privilege and duty to pray for our missionaries, to support them, and to give them a place in our hearts. In the past two centuries considerable progress has been made in spreading the Gospel. By the time of World War II American soldiers discovered that Christians were even to be found on remote islands and in the jungles. In the beginning of the twentieth century 80 per cent of Christians were either Europeans or North Americans. Today 60 per cent are citizens of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

## **The start of modern missions**

The modern missionary impulse began with William Carey (1761-1834), an English missionary to India. He has been called the "Father of Modern Missions" as his life and ministry spanned the so-called "Great Century" of missionary outreach; a century (1800-1914) which changed the religious map of the world.

Two generations after William Carey's 1792 publication *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, which launched the new era of missions, Hudson and Maria Taylor founded the China Inland Mission (CIM), which was not just another mission, but the first mission of a new era, the era of interdenominational faith missions. What led the Taylors and like-minded to found new mission societies? No classical (denominational) missions were able or willing to evangelize the millions of unreached people speedily. For example, the names of many faith missions illustrate their aim to reach the unreached. Because faith missions did not want to compete with classical missions, they added to the geographical area in their names another element, which indicated that they wanted to spread the Gospel in an unreached area: *China Inland Mission*, *Africa Inland Mission*, *Congo Inland Mission*, *Unevangelized Africa Mission*, *Unevangelized Tribes Mission* and *Sudan-Pioneer-Mission*. Klaus Fiedler observes that some missions, such as the Southern

Morocco Mission, the North Africa Mission, the Kurku and Central India Hill Mission and the Heart of Africa Mission, did not need to add such an element to their names, because the whole area was unreached.

At the present time these missions have more missionaries under appointment than do denominational agencies.

## **The history told**

Klaus Fiedler's outstanding work *The Story of Faith Missions* is the first thorough history of the theology, practice, and continuing impact of faith missions around the world, and the most comprehensive study available on faith missions in Africa. Extensive use of illustrations, charts, and copious endnotes to each chapter add enormously to the reader's understanding of the full scope of the faith mission movement which has played such a vital role in the development of worldwide missions. In order to facilitate a historical understanding, Fiedler provides a detailed history of the China Inland Mission, since it served as a pattern for all faith missions working in Africa. And in two articles based on his book, I intend to provide a brief historical sketch and an evaluation.

The term "faith missions" was not coined by the faith missions themselves. No faith missionary ever claimed to have more faith than missionaries who worked with denominational missions. The term is derived from one of its innovative concepts - the "faith principle" of financial support. But the most important characteristic is not its "faith support: but of its interdenominational character. As we explore the history of faith missions we must keep in mind though that not every interdenominational mission operates as a "faith mission."

## **China Inland Mission**

Hudson James Taylor (1832-1905), founder of CIM (now Overseas Missionary Fellowship) was born in Barnsley, England, where his pharmacist father was a Methodist local preacher. Like his parents, Taylor was a Methodist. His conversion at the age of seventeen took place in the context of that church and its holiness theology. In 1852 he joined the Hull Brethren Assembly and was re-baptized. He joined the Brethren because he was looking for a wider "unity of all of God's children." He did not want to be denominationally defined. Yet, later in life he joined the Baptists. After his conversion, Taylor set his heart on mission work in China. He even interrupted his medical studies at the London Hospital to go there in 1854 under the auspices of the short-lived China Evangelization Society. Failing health forced him to return to England in 1860. Taylor remained burdened for China, especially for the interior. Having found no existing society willing to sponsor him or to take on any more responsibility than they already had, Dr. Taylor founded CIM, which turned out to be a completely new missionary movement. In 1866 sixteen candidates sailed with Taylor for itinerant work in a land "where a million a month [were] dying without God." Taylor solicited no funds for his mission. He expected his support to come only "as an answer to prayer in faith." "Jehovah-jireh" which means, "The Lord will provide" (Gen 22:14) became a favorite CIM word. Since Taylor was not tied to any denomination, CIM did not care to which church a missionary belonged; an affiliation was not even registered. Candidates came even from churches with opposing views on baptism, such as Presbyterian and

Baptists. Taylor's guiding principle was not correct doctrine, but effective evangelism. Nevertheless, he knew enough about the church membership of his candidates that he could say: "Those already associated with me represent all the leading denominations of our native land – Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, Baptist and Paedobaptist. Besides these, two are or have been connected with the 'Brethren' so-called."

Taylor was motivated by two convictions: First, he was convinced that all who do not believe in Jesus Christ are eternally lost. Therefore, Christians must make every effort to present the Gospel so that everyone has a chance to hear it. Secondly, Taylor believed that Christ was to return before the millennium. He thought it was possible to evangelize the world before His return, or even to speed it. This conviction made it so urgent to go to unreached areas to preach the Gospel, and the recruitment of a great number of missionaries and evangelists.

Taylor's mission fervor was matched by his pioneering innovations. He adopted Chinese dress and hair braid, and paired foreign missionaries with national Christians. Since the task was so urgent, Taylor selected candidates less for their educational than their spiritual qualifications. Although he, a university trained doctor, did not despise education, he didn't believe it necessary to insist that missionaries must have all the educational preparations usually required by denominational boards. Men and women from all walks of life were acceptable. Whatever training he or she would need would be provided on the mission field by "roughing it," or through senior missionaries. Since the Chinese would be scandalized if Western male missionaries would attempt to evangelize Chinese women, CIM accepted women as missionaries, even for work in remote and dangerous areas.

By 1891, CIM had more than 640 workers, but Taylor's influence extended far beyond CIM. He mobilized and motivated people for worldwide missions and laid down mission principles still employed by faith missions everywhere.

Taylor not only had deep convictions and a burden for those Chinese who had not heard the Gospel, he also "walked the talk." He lost two wives and four children to disease and famine. Soon after the shocking martyrdom of seventy-nine colleagues and children during the Boxer rebellion in 1900, he became ill and retired. In 1905 he undertook a last visit to China, the land he loved and for which citizens he had sacrificed so much, and died there.

## **Sudan United Mission**

The founders of faith missions were remarkable, visionary, and committed Christians. True pioneers! The founder of Sudanese United Mission (SUM) was no exception. Karl Wilhelm Kumm (1874-1930), born in Hannover, Germany, attended the East London Training Institute. Eventually he attended universities at Heidelberg, Jena and Freiburg and received his Doctor of Philosophy degree from the last. In 1898 he went to Egypt to prepare for missionary work among the Muslims under the auspices of the North Africa Mission. There he met and married Lucy, daughter of Grattan Guinness, an evangelical leader in Britain who had for some years experienced a burden for the evangelization of the Sudan. Guinness also published a periodical entitled "*The Sudan and the Regions Beyond*," with the purpose of stirring up interest in missions. Kumm's greatest hero was the famous missionary David Livingstone, referring to him as "saint, physician, explorer, missionary, pathfinder, and pioneer for God - 'the John the Baptist' of the 19th Century."

Kumm's biographer summarizes his feelings as follows: "More and more he had absorbed the spirit of David Livingstone, and he longed and prayed that in the year which celebrated the Centenary of his hero's birth, there should be inaugurated such a forward movement in missionary enterprise that Christianity should sweep the continent for which Livingstone gave his life." Kumm himself has been described as "a bold missionary explorer," one who was attracted by the unknown, by the difficulties and by obstacles. He was poetic, intense, and forceful, able to captivate his audience, whether in public speaking or in writing. Though Kumm became a missionary statesman, he seldom made any reference to denominations. He simply did not think in denominational terms. He was born a Lutheran; in Britain he became an Anglican. He also had a deep interest in the Keswick (holiness) movement. In 1904 the Kumms moved to Britain started the SUM, an independent, nondenominational mission, not in opposition to existing mission societies, but to evangelize the unreached in the Sudan. Already in 1904 the SUM was able to send its original party of four men, with Kumm as leader, on an exploratory venture to Northern Nigeria. Kumm was driven by two realizations. First, the hold that Islam had on the population south of the Sahara desert, and second, how the Muslims were winning the animists of the Sudan to their faith. It was his ambition to win these people for Jesus Christ before Islam took them over.

A British citizen from 1910, Kumm moved to the United States in 1919 to lead the SUM branch there. The most famous of the women pioneers sent out by SUM-US was Johanna Veenstra (1894-1933), whose father was a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) minister who died when she was only five. At nineteen years of age, she entered Union Missionary Training Institute in Brooklyn. Between school years, at a missionary conference she heard Kumm speak about the work of SUM. Three years later, having completed additional training in Reformed doctrine and midwifery, Veenstra left for Nigeria, arriving in January 1920. Together with other single women, she laid the foundation of what is now called the Church of Christ in Nigeria. She was an able speaker and had access to many CRC churches. Her gracious ways and public speaking did much to endear her to her denomination. Some CRC leaders became interested in becoming involved in Africa but this did not take place in Veenstra's lifetime. Within a short time span, SUM became one of the largest faith missions, with the unusual feature of combining interdenominational and denominational branches. But a CRC Branch of SUM was not established until 1940.

### **Faith support**

How do faith missions get their support? So far there has been no detailed study on their ways and means of financing their work. Some agencies require each missionary to raise his or her own support, while others form a central pool for which every missionary raises money and out of which salaries and project funding comes. Having served on three different faith mission boards, I know from experience the challenge of raising funds. Because the cost to send Western missionaries keeps on increasing, mission offerings on the home front just don't seem to keep up with the needs.

Most of the faith missions ask for money or in some way make their needs known. When a contribution has been made once, letters keep coming explaining needs with a self-addressed envelope for a donation. Faith mission representatives tour churches, presenting challenges and seeking support. Many of the larger evangelical and fundamentalist churches have yearly mission conferences where

missionaries are invited to talk about their work. Consequently, there are churches that support ten or more different faith missions.

One of the most innovative concepts of faith missions is “the faith principle” of financial support, which assured their independence. Faith missions believe that God will provide even if it appears that no money is available. This makes it possible for them to continue to send out new missionaries. At the beginning, a society like CIM instructed their missionaries not to ask for money nor to tell anyone but God about their financial needs. Hudson Taylor formulated it thus: “God’s work done in God’s way will not lack God’s supply.” He took this concept of financing missions from George Muller (1805-98), a German born faith mission advocate, who went to England to do mission work among Jews. In 1834 he founded the Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad with the purpose of establishing day schools, and adult schools for teaching Bible, and supporting mission work. Muller achieved fame for founding the Bristol Orphanage Mission Work. His greatest contribution was the example of his life of faith and prayer. He was determined not to ask for financial support and instead prayed for the needs of the orphan missions. He decided to trust the Lord alone for the supply of his needs, trusting that the Lord would meet them without his prompting others to give. In conclusion, the ideal of faith missions can be summed up in a poem:

Three things the Master asks of US  
And we who serve Him here below,  
And long to see His kingdom come  
May PRAY and GIVE or GO.  
He needs them all - the open hand  
The willing feet, the praying heart.