

Missions: Home and Abroad

A missionary has been defined as a person sent forth to proclaim, the Gospel, both at home and abroad. Modern missionaries specialize in medical, educational, agricultural as well as in evangelistic areas. The missionary mandate is clear. Just before His ascension Jesus commanded His disciples, "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have told you" (Matt.28:19,20). But through the years many have questioned the need for missionary work. They said, "If God is sovereign, and chooses who will be saved, no evangelism is necessary." But those who object to missions because of the sovereignty of God in salvation are talking rubbish. True, God does not need us to save anyone. God is all-sufficient. He does not need helpers, but in His mercy He has chosen to lead people to Christ through His redeemed children. History provides ample evidence that those who held high the doctrine of God's sovereignty did the most for missions. The apostle Paul, who rejoiced in God's sovereign grace, was also the first missionary pioneer.

John Calvin (1509-64), the great Reformer who taught the Pauline doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation, had a real burden for souls. His writings bear constant witness to his concern for the salvation of the lost. He placed great value upon the worth of each individual. In each person he saw the image of God. Man is of great worth to God. He never ceases to love him despite his rebellion and fall into sin. For Calvin the greatest demonstration of love was the death of God's Son on the cross. Calling his listeners to action and to witnessing, he cries out in one of his sermons: "May the souls so dearly purchased by the blood of our Lord not perish by our carelessness!" What a mission challenge!

The Bible ends with this wonderful Gospel invitation: "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev.22:17). This invitation is addressed to all, to the least as to the greatest, to people of every race and colour. Calvin's heart desire was for men and women to come to know the Saviour. This great theologian was a pastor at heart, always coming to the aid of the troubled, the anxious and distressed individual. Judging by the lives of the apostle Paul and John Calvin, nothing so promotes missions at home and abroad as the conviction that salvation is all of God.

When we arrive at the airport in a foreign country, we have to go through Customs before we can go to our final destination. And a customs official will ask us, "Have you anything to declare?" We may reply with either yes or no. As I thought about the question of the customs official, I began to wonder about the Gospel message entrusted to the Church. Don't we have a Gospel to declare at all times, wherever we are? Historically, the Reformed church has taught that the marks of the church are:

1. the sound proclamation of the Gospel.
2. the exercise of discipline.
3. the right administration of the sacraments.

We believe in the preservation of the faith and in the importance of correct doctrine. And so we should. But some Reformed theologians have added a fourth mark – missions. Being Reformed has always meant being evangelistic. History shows that every mission society founded in the golden age of missions was founded by Calvinists.

Why mission work? The church proclaims the gospel to the glory of God, in obedience to our Lord's great commission, and out of compassion for the lost. How involved are we in mission work? Mission activity seems quite unreal. We support our missionaries with our finances, but it is hard to pray for people whom we have never met. As we pray: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," we must not forget that it involves obedience to commands like, "Go-and make disciples of all nations." Concern for missions ought to be regarded as an indispensable mark of a Christian life style.

Throughout the history of the church there has been a continual tension between building and defending the church. Some stress numerical growth; others want inner growth and purity. Some see the church's task as missions only; others have a fortress mentality. Don't reach out. Keep what you have. Missions and evangelism are not a hobby of a few. It is the task of the whole church; all members form the missionary task force. Together we build the church. T.S. Eliot in Choruses from the Rock describes the church as ever in need of rebuilding, "the church must be forever building, and always decaying, and always being restored." From experience we know that what has been built must also be defended. We don't need to choose the one over the other. The symbol of the church is the trowel and the sword. Both are necessary for the up building of the church. Nehemiah 4: 18, "Each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked." Nehemiah taught us to be active--to build and to defend the faith. The trowel and the sword are for all of us. As T.S. Eliot wrote:

There is work together
A Church for all
And a job for each
Every man to his work.

Russia

When I was at the US World Center of Missions in Pasadena, I heard a report of God's work in Russia.

A representative of World by 2000 Radio Center had spent two weeks in Moscow at a conference of evangelical Christians; 150 were from the West and 750 from all over the Soviet Union to plan strategy for evangelism. Such a meeting would have been unheard of a few years ago.

Russia is in a dramatic stage of transition. The bankruptcy of the communist regime is evident in every sector. As far as facilities are concerned, Russia has third world conditions. Food is scarce. They fear a famine. Missionaries from abroad have received permission to work as administrators in branch offices of their respective missions. In many schools the Bible is taught. Christian radio broadcasting is now possible. Christian

literature can be printed. Though it is easier to get a permit to print than it is to get the paper. Russian Christians show a tremendous enthusiasm for their newly found freedoms. They preach in the streets, plant new churches as a result of their literature outreach. Christian professors from the West are invited to teach. Interest is shown in Christian sociology. Russian leaders begin to realize the emptiness of a system without God. But despite all the upbeat news about new freedoms and opportunities for the Gospel, the reporter also shared some discouraging developments.

Freedom is still not everywhere. There is still opposition in outlying areas. Militant atheism, Islam, the New Age Movement, the sects and the cults are also using their freedoms for their propaganda. Christians lack cooperation. They can't seem to work together. They have been isolated from each other so long that they find it hard to get to know each other, and work together. So the church in Russia needs our prayer support. We concluded, therefore, our meeting with a time of prayer for our brothers and sisters in the Lord in Russia.

Iraq

The 20th century has dealt severe blows to Iraqi Christians. The first world war and its aftermath brought terrible destruction. Kurds and the Turks killed many Nestorians. Numbers took refuge in Persia. Most of the Iraqi Christians who did not suffer overt physical persecution, lived in a depressed state as second class citizens in a predominantly Muslim nation.

Despite the hardships and opposition, both Roman Catholic and Protestant missions have been active in Iraq. The Anglican Church Missionary Society was in operation from 1880 until the end of the first world war. The most enduring effort has been the United Mission in Mesopotamia begun in 1924. This mission was a result of the united effort of the Reformed Church in the U.S. (German), the Reformed Church in America, and the (Northern) Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Its objective was to win Muslims to Christ. Kenneth Scott Latourette observed that the government had given the individual the freedom to change his religion, even if that should be from Islam to Christianity; but social pressure made such a step next to impossible. In 1969 Iraq expelled western missions. They were not allowed to return.

Governments may close borders. But modern communications do get through. More than a hundred years ago Iraq was an isolated nation. Radio has given Christians for the first time in 1400 years of Islamic history the opportunity of lovingly, relevantly and patiently to present to all of the Muslim world the Gospel of redemption. Rev. Bassam Madany, radio minister of the Arabic Back to God Hour, returned from a tour to the Middle East in 1975 with this description of the communication revolution in the region. "Radio, and to a lesser extent, the printed page and personal correspondence are the most powerful and available means for the spread of the Gospel and the eventual birth of a true church of Jesus Christ in the Arab world." Rev. Madany regularly receives letters from Muslim countries, including Iraq. The response is most encouraging. In October, 1990 the Bible Society in Jordan was able to send Scriptures to Christians in Iraq. This year (1992) the

society received permission to send a truckload of 47,000 scripture calendars. And it was hoped that permission would soon be received for more Bible shipments.

The Christians in Iraq need our prayerful support. The ministry of the Back to God Hour, Christian literature and Bible distribution all need our full backing. They should know that Christians in the West do care for them.

Our Lord entrusted the Church with the Gospel. We must be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Ever since our Lord's ascension, Christians have gone into the world in obedience to their Lord's command. Converts were won and churches built. Some Christians look back to the days of the early Church with a sense of nostalgia. They say, "If we could only recapture the dynamics and the excitement of the early church, we would see the church grow once again." But we can never relive the past. Despite all the gloom and doom of our times, Christians never had such an opportunity to spread the Gospel as today. Today's confusion and pessimism present a splendid opportunity for a bold Gospel witness. Furthermore, we never had so many competent "professional missionaries" as today. Thank God for them. Yet if world evangelization would depend on "professionals" the task wouldn't get done.

Evangelism is not for specialists only. All of us are the Lord's witnesses. Dr. Carl F. Henry observed. "Besides enlisting competent professional missionaries we need urgently to recover 'the missionary nature of the congregation', an emphasis widely neglected in our lifetime." We never had so much training materials and witnessing techniques as in recent years. We never had so many conferences on how to evangelize as now. In workshops hundreds of new ideas are promoted. There is room for a variety of techniques and methods. Some approaches are more appropriate than others, depending on the circumstances. But the best method has always been and still is the person-to-person evangelism. Roger Palms, editor of *Decision magazine*, was led to Christ by a certified public accountant. This man talked to him about Jesus Christ. Through the Scripture Palms was shown the meaning of salvation. He said that this was the first time that anyone had ever done that for him. His CPA friend began with Romans 3: 23, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Afterwards the CPA friend turned a few pages in his Bible to Romans 5: 23, "The wages of sin death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." As Palms studied these verses he knew that the Bible made sense. Then the CPA turned to Roman 10:9,10. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The point is that Palms came to know Christ because a man who knew his Bible took the time to explain the way of salvation.

William Carey

In 1792, William Carey, a "consecrated cobbler" from England published a book popularly called "the charter of modern mission with its argument, review, survey and programme."

Entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, it stated the reasons for missions and made practical suggestions in a forthright manner. His booklet contributed greatly to the formation of the "Particular Baptist society for propagating the gospel among the Heathen" in October, 1792.

William Carey, an evangelical Calvinist, adopted as his motto: "Expect great things. Attempt great things." And he certainly practiced what he preached. In June 1793 Carey and his family, which included five young children set sail for India. After a journey of five months, the largely unprepared mission arrived in Bengal. Carey never returned to England. He was a self-educated tradesman who became an expert in languages, an Orientalist, a Bible translator, a professor in a prestigious college; and a founder of a grand scholarly institution of his own. He was a man with many gifts and great, dedication to the Lord's mission program. Yet Carey's main legacy was not his work in India. Someone observed that Carey "did more than any other man to awaken the conscience of Protestant Christians to the spiritual need of millions worldwide who had never heard of Jesus Christ." He has even been called the "father of modern missions." He was a man of vision, who risked his life for his convictions.

Carey was obedient to our Lord's Great Commission (Matth.28:19f.). His life was an inspiration to untold thousands who have followed in his footsteps. Millions have benefited. Carey's book ends with this challenge, "Surely it is worth while to lay ourselves out with all our might, in promoting the cause, and kingdom of Christ. And what was worthwhile in 1792 is still worthwhile today.

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