

What about the nominals in Greece? Can these be effectively won to Christ by the Greek Orthodox Church? Or must many societies send missionaries to Greece? What about Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran nominals in California? Should reviving each brand of nominal be the exclusive prerogative of that Church which first baptized them? If so, this means renewal. Or, conversely when once a Christian has lapsed into or grown up into nominality, is it the plain duty of the devout of any Church to win him into a living relationship to Christ in a living Church? This means the founding of many new churches.

From this editor's chair, it appears that what is happening is much talk about renewal on the part of the older Churches plus a considerable proliferation of missionary societies on the part of the devoted. Over 40 societies are at work in Europe today seeking to win the nominals into new living churches. Neither the talk about renewal nor the missionary societies have so far broken through into significant achievement. Each no doubt spurs the other on - and should, for the task is gigantic.

Perhaps the quotation from EMF will spark some letters to the editor of the Church Growth Bulletin!! It is typical of many missionary societies at work in Europe. They are part of the world mission of the Church in the latter half of the twentieth century.

GIMMICKITIS

By Ralph Winter, Ph.D., United Presbyterian missionary to Guatemala.

A girl once wrote me about a thesis she was doing for a theological seminary. She was assembling methods whereby a hypothetical mission could reach the Indians of Colombia. She wrote:

I have described the linguistic analysis of Wycliffe Bible Translators and New Tribes Mission, the ministry of medicine and radio, and the educational programs being offered for Indians by various mission boards. I have mentioned the Child Evangelism teacher-training program being used in primitive areas of Peru, and the Gospel Recordings work. Is there any other type of ministry which would be a means of evangelizing, training, or helping Indians?

I replied that our secret weapon was that of the Apostle Paul, founding churches; and that the things on her list by themselves were mainly gimmicks. What did I mean by mission gimmicks? Let me give some examples.

An early gimmick was medicine. Consecrated doctors showed how the love of Christ could be demonstrated in a marvelous way by medicine. Their wonder-working seemed to rival the direct powers of deity. One of the biggest medical centers in Asia today is a Christian hospital. Then came the agricultural missionary. If people's health is a legitimate concern, better food through modern agriculture is equally reasonable.

Then there is the airplane. Countless hours and labors and many lives have been saved by this special tool. Electronics came in, too. The megaphone has given way to the portable, transistorized loud speaker. Special agencies multiply -- for child evangelism . . . "scientific" translation of the Bible . . . computerized promotional literature . . . the player-piano typewriter that makes donors think they are getting special attention, and many others.

How about schools? Thousands of Christian schools circle the globe. Hardly a single diplomat from Africa in the U.N. did not get his schooling in a Christian school. I recall talking to a missionary not so long ago who at one time had Lumumba as a student! It is impossible to imagine what the overseas Christian movement would be like if no one had established schools. Even today 90 percent of the schools in Ghana are run by Christian missions or national churches. The biggest engineering school in Latin America is run by our Presbyterian Church.

Literacy, too, is now a specialization and a world movement. So is the writing of Christian literature and the founding of theological seminaries.

I'm sure I've forgotten other "means." But I haven't forgotten my point. The point is that all these things can become (and by themselves are) no more than gimmicks. Medical work can become as sterile spiritually as it is clinically. Agriculture can go dead. Airplanes can be misused. No matter how good a job is done in any of these lines, none of them is adequate in itself, and the honest people involved in all these programs tell you so themselves.

We must not be so dazzled by these "special tools" that we forget the essential task. People interested in missions are always hoping to hear of some new technical break-through that will suddenly speed the battle in their favor in a way that has never been done in history. Thus this girl doing her thesis. She asked me if she had left out any gimmick that could be put to use by her hypothetical new mission board for Colombia; I answered her as follows:

First I would warn you that what the United States hears about Christian activities overseas is a distorted version. With most activities going on here, missionaries are not connected. I think of some 500 church services conducted weekly in this little country by Guatemalans alone. Less than one percent are conducted by foreign workers. Most of the work, like the iceberg below water, is unseen by U.S. supporters.

American missionaries, alas, are more and more involved in peripheral and technical programs and specialized services using recent inventions or costly gadgets. This is the picture U.S. supporters get of the Christian work overseas.

Nothing you devise ought to stray far from a program that can be "owned and operated" by Colombians in this present day.

An American Church may send a new mission to Colombia and set up a Church in addition to those already there. But this effort should be, from the beginning, no more than a catalytic to Colombian manpower. Colombians should take over as soon as possible.

You want to plant churches which will soon gain Colombian bones and muscle, go on their own, extend and perpetuate themselves while drawing from concepts and developments of Christian effort across the world. You want to plant a denominational Church, linked as a sister to a Church in the United States. I fervently believe in Christian sub-groups (in friendly independence of each other) calling people out of the world into intimate Christian fellowship in local congregations. To me this is the one basic strategy of the centuries.

I used to be an expert in the gadgets and gimmicks. I was always looking for something new which would do the trick. But here in Guatemala it has become steadily clearer that the one slickest trick of all is the implanting of congregations. "The care and feeding of congregations" is thus to me the central strategic activity to which all gimmicks must be bent.

Gimmicks and gadgets break down. A living Church has a self-renewing, self-healing quality. It grows by itself. For over 30 years now Guatemalan churches have built all their own buildings and paid all their own pastors' salaries with no help from abroad. One church alone in the past three years has helped start three other churches.

The Church here has grown so much bigger than the little United States team that started it, that it now can use far more help from abroad. But it should be help in the vital process of winning people to Christ and into solid tangible local Christian congregations which reach out to new persons with acceptance and positive love.

Many kinds of missionaries are needed; but among them should be many field missionaries whose only expertness is their knowledge of the claims of God upon a man's heart . . . who know only what the cross in daily experience means . . . who love Christian fellowship and help others find it. Such men will never be superseded by gimmicks at home or abroad. They will not throw away the technical tools, but they will never lose sight of the essential purpose of Christian mission. The Church overseas can use far more help of this sort now, for the opportunities before it for the discipling of the nations are much greater than they have ever been.

Where growth is slow and little, there must be a willingness to examine Churches which have had marked success, such as the Pentecostals in South America and the Episcopalians in East Africa, and try to discover why they have been successful.

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