

NEW METHODS FOR A NEW AGE IN MISSIONS

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IF there is anything clear in the picture of missions, it is that we stand at the beginning of a new era. Our problem is not how to carry out better the missions on which we have been engaged, but how to conduct the new kind now required.

The objective remains the same—that the Church of Jesus Christ may grow and spread throughout the world, making available the power and righteousness of God to every nation through a living, indigenous church in every nation. The growth and expansion of the Church is demanded by the Great Commission. It is also required by common sense. When the resources of missions devoted to philanthropy are spent, they leave behind them no organization to continue the acts of mercy. But when they are devoted to establishing growing churches, then they create partners in the task of proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples of all peoples and teaching them all things commanded by our Lord. The honour of the newer nations, too, demands church growth. Mission activity from the outside runs a constant risk of being considered an affront to national honour. Church growth from the inside avoids that risk.

But the methods of achieving church growth must change to fit the different characteristics of this new age. A long list of these characteristics could be made. Here we shall limit ourselves to describing those three which have determinative bearing on the multiplication of the churches. We shall state the characteristic as it has existed in the past and then contrast each with its opposite in the age now upon us.

First, the nineteenth century had very few great, growing churches in non-occidental lands. The missionary enterprise necessarily proceeded without allying itself to great, growing indigenous churches. This was a severely limiting factor in the conduct of foreign missions. It affected every aspect of mission strategy.

Since in the beginning there were no great, growing churches anywhere, missions specifically sought out lands which were without Christ, lands in which no missionary work had ever been carried on. Thus automatically all missions engaged in spade work. Almost all of it was accomplished by trial and error. No one *knew* how peoples

would become Christian and numberless methods, enterprises, labours and institutions were accordingly tried out. Foreign missions backed up every good work regardless of whether it eventuated in a growing church or not. Since the planting of the Church of Jesus Christ was the aim, and men were giving their lives to achieving it, the sending churches allowed great latitude in the procedures used on the field. Since there were usually no mature churches with which to co-operate, a mission-centred strategy grew up which did not count on help from national churches. And, facing great opposition without any allies, the missionaries stuck grimly to their stations despite tedious exile and sudden death, and *carried on the work of the mission*.

We should not be surprised that in such circumstances great church growth seldom occurred. (That which did occur, as in Oceania, sections of India and Africa, was considered atypical and not very desirable.) If we add to these internal handicaps the considered opposition and resistance of the older cultures, we can readily understand that a characteristic of missions during the past century and a half has been that of inch by inch advance. Facing this continuous lack of rapidly growing churches, foreign missions developed a methodology. This is seldom described or stated. Yet it is universal. It lies at the heart of most missionary thinking, planning and working. It is an orthodoxy held tenaciously by liberals and fundamentalists alike. It is extremely important to realize that it was developed in an age of very slow church growth, which conditioned the methodology as a mould conditions a brick. Consequently it accepts very small church growth as inevitable and, indeed, as soundly Christian. It proposes to hold on where it is maintaining mission work, even if church growth never occurs. For the sake of convenience we shall call this widespread methodology the mission station approach. Any hundred-word summary of as vast a formulation as the philosophy of the mission station approach leaves much to be desired. But enough has been said to show how the situation confronting it, the mould in which it was cast, exercised a determinative influence on its nature, expectations, methodology, institutions and even on aspects of its theology.

The mission station approach founded churches which were startlingly alike, regardless of the founding denomination and of the nation in which they were planted. They arose at or near the mission stations. They were composed of rescued persons and of occasional converts. Their membership at the earlier stages was largely employed by the mission or the missionaries. It profited greatly by extended

exposure to mission education. Such churches grew very slowly—chiefly by the excess of births over deaths. They faced great resistance to Christianity on every hand. This is to-day a most common variety of mission church.

Furthermore, in the face of this steady resistance of the non-Christian cultures, the mission station approach soon began institutional work which was acceptable to the non-Christians, did not enlarge the church appreciably but was nevertheless counted as 'good mission work'. It soon came to overshadow both the church and direct attempts to establish churches.

The continuous lack of rapidly growing churches is still characteristic of large areas of non-occidental lands in which mission stations, with their static churches and big institutions, are the typical expression of the Church's world outreach.

The opposite of this first characteristic of the closing era is that to-day there are growing 'people movement' churches in some areas of nearly every major field of missionary endeavour. These are the occasional outcome of missionary effort. They resulted when Christianity found a responsive people and spread within it as the Faith spread within the Jewish people in New Testament times. Thus they are chiefly in the beginning one-people churches, though later many of them also take in 'the Gentiles'. These churches spread across many a countryside. There are very few rescued people among them. Their members have come to Christ in chains of families. No significant proportion of their membership is employed by the mission or the missionaries. They grow like weeds, at 60 to 1000 per cent a decade. They furnish over 90 per cent of the population of the younger churches. They are located in almost every major field of missionary endeavour: Formosa, Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Oceania, Burma, India, Pakistan, Africa and Latin America.

Thus we see to-day two distinct types of missions and churches. First, there is the mission station approach, with its 'one station few churches', non-reproductive churches and large mission institutions in the midst of highly resistant cultures. Second, there is the 'people movement' approach, with its 'one station many churches', reproductive churches lightly assisted with mission institutions in the midst of one or more peoples which are turning to the Christian Faith. Despite the fact that the mission station approach is a very common condition, in most non-occidental lands one can without difficulty find areas of receptivity, with a church of a hundred thousand here, or forty thousand

there or ten thousand elsewhere. Missions, unless they deliberately choose to carry on *all* their work in mission station approach areas, need no longer be without greatly growing churches. Missions can easily find comrades, leaders, workers, friends and staunch allies who have the habit of growth. Missions no longer have to wonder how growth will occur. The growing churches are constantly showing how growth will occur. Missions no longer have to engage in activities which may, they hope, prepare populations some day to accept Christ. They can engage in the baptizing of converts, the organization of churches, the training of the ministry, the central task of missions, *now*.

All this constitutes a change in climate like the end of the ice age. What we describe ushers in a new era. The severely limiting factor has vanished. The existence of these great sister churches, *which can grow and are growing*, is a new fact of tremendous importance for missions conceived as christianization. The objective of missions remains the same, but the methods can now be changed. We are still going down the road toward the City of God, but we have surmounted the long hill; and we shall make better progress if we shift out of low gear into high.

The second characteristic of the past hundred and fifty years, the change of which is of crucial importance to church growth to-day, is the individualistic mode of becoming Christian. Modern missions have arisen out of a western society, in which men and women acted primarily as individuals. The myriad decisions of everyday life in the West were formed without asking the clan and the chief and the grandfathers what should be done. Western man was conscious of himself as an independent unit. Many churches grew entirely out of individual accessions. The devout members of almost every church reached that state of devotion by individual consecration. The missionaries and their supporters had become Christian that way. The theology of the day fitted that pattern.

It was inevitable that in the missions of this kind of society the accepted mode of becoming Christian should be individual, personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Group accessions of any kind were frowned upon. As a result they seldom occurred. When they did, they were seldom recognized as pearls of great price. That is why 'people movements' to Christ were only an occasional outcome of Christian missions.

But to-day we discern a New Testament mode of becoming Christian which is at once individual and social, and which is both more effective

and more biblical—the ‘people movement’ to Christ. The group nature of the in-gathering in the early churches may be readily discerned if one will but read the first ten chapters of the *Acts of the Apostles*, underlining each recorded case of induction into the Church. He will find that as a rule groups, or entire villages, or households made up of man and wife and all their dependents and kinsmen, or multitudes were inducted. As he follows the story through the missionary journeys of St Paul he will be struck with the same fact.

It is important to note that a ‘people movement’ to Christ is not a mass movement. The term ‘mass movement’ should not be used. It gives an incorrect idea of what happens. A people seldom moves *en masse* into a new faith. What happens is that here a group of fifty and there a group of eighty and yonder one of six, after much instruction and weighing of the issues, decide as groups to accept the Christian Faith. The process goes on year after year as new groups make up their minds to follow Christ. Thus churches arise without the social dislocation of the convert. He becomes a Christian *with* his family, clan or section of the village. This is not a mass movement. The term is misleading.

A ‘people movement’ to Christ affords opportunity for systematic instruction and community worship from the very beginning. There is in it a large amount of personal decision. We see more and more clearly that the ‘people movement’ to Christ provides both more and better Christians than the ‘one by one against the current of the people’ method does.

The third characteristic of the past hundred and fifty years has been the large culture-carrying capacity of missions. During these years western culture was invading a backward, stagnant East. Missions appeared to people of non-occidental lands as part of the new conquering way of life and as a means of acquiring that culture. While missions were trying to plant the Church, they unintentionally brought about a social revolution on a very large scale. They brought vast enlightenment and amelioration. Not the least of their achievements was the creation in the sending countries of such a friendly interest in the subject lands of the East that the achievement of self-government was, in the case of nation after nation, not the wresting of control from a tyrant’s hand, but a joint giving and demanding of self-government which over a period of years brought the Philippines, India, Burma, Ceylon, the Gold Coast and other nations into full self-governing nationhood.

But the culture-carrying days of missions are largely over. If the East desires western culture, it will send its own sons and daughters to the West to acquire it and bring it back. The East to-day and Africa to-morrow are not going to sit humbly at the feet of western missions. Except in Africa, where nearly all education is being given through the Church, mission schools have become a very small part of the total education facilities available. Usually government schools and colleges are better provided with resources than are mission schools. Thousands of nationals are touring the West and returning to interpret it to their lands. The day when missions could profitably devote a large part of their power to carrying culture has passed. And it *should* have passed, for there is now a much better use for missionary resources than to expend them on aiming for a by-product. They can now be devoted single-mindedly to the growth of the Church.

We see, therefore, these three new and striking characteristics before missions to-day. Any one of them taken by itself would necessitate large changes in our methods of carrying out the Great Commission. The three of them taken together, and reinforced by other considerations which cannot for lack of time be mentioned here, make profound changes in mission methodology inescapable. What are these changes?

The leaders of churches and missions around the world, recognizing these and other new developments, are in process of creating a methodology for this coming era. A methodology of missions which is true to its divine mandate, fitted to its present environment, linked constructively to missions as they have existed in the past and elastic enough to cover the bewildering variety of church and mission situations, is not something on which anyone can be dogmatic and doctrinaire. Therefore we shall indicate certain major aspects of the new methodology by asking questions.¹

In this new climate will not any methodology make church growth rather than mission work the criterion of support? In allocating support it used to be asked, 'Is this a good piece of mission work?' Will it not now be asked, 'Is this producing church growth?' Similarly, will not any new methodology give high priority to actual church growth rather than to enterprises which prepare, we hope, for possible future church growth? This has been Roland Allen's stress for the past forty years—heretofore unheeded, but now coming into its own. Allen pointed out that St Paul never engaged in activities which pre-

¹ In his new book *The Bridges of God* (World Dominion Press) the writer presents a considered statement which treats at some length many of the questions raised here.

pared for later discipling. He always baptized and established churches. We can now see why this occurred—a fact hidden from Allen. St Paul went where great growth was possible. Since great growth is now possible for us also, should we not follow this basic Pauline practice?

Will not methods for the new age, sensing the centrality of church growth now so abundantly possible in the responsive peoples, test all mission activities and apparatus for the degree of church growth which they actually attain? Must not all the paraphernalia of mission work—the technical gadgets, the modern machines which require so much upkeep and do such wonderful things—be constantly tested against actual achievement in church growth? If, for example, audio-visual apparatus is being used in some responsive stratum of society and is blessed of God to the multiplication of churches, it should certainly be used. But if such complicated and expensive machinery, considered as a 'modern necessity', is tying up the time of a trained missionary presenting the Gospel to those who continue to reject it and is thus achieving no church growth, the alert missionary will certainly ask 'Should it be used?'

In the twentieth century human needs stand out vividly against the abundant life now possible where power has been harnessed and justly distributed and society has been correctly organized. There is constant temptation to foreign missionaries, who see these needs most vividly, to attempt direct fulfilment of them, forgetting (a) that national governments alone can obtain the vast public or private monies needed to make power available; and (b) that the most certain and permanent lever which foreign Christians can apply toward the achievement of a more just social order is to help multiply Christian churches. Therefore, again and again, all mission activities need to be tested to see whether they are well-intentioned but feeble attempts at tasks beyond their power—at, for example, the truly herculean task of lifting the standard of living in a modern State; or whether they are attempting what they can now achieve—the development of more numerous and more Christian churches, thus permanently introducing the life of God into some sections of needy human society.

In this new era will not any new methodology accept a time limit for the creation of the younger churches and for the genuine disappearance of the mission as reasonable and feasible? As peoples are disciplined, it becomes possible to avoid the idea that the task of missions is endless proclamation to a disobedient people, endless philanthropy to gospel

rejectors and endless service to static little churches. It becomes possible to see that the task of missions is to disciple responsive peoples, train leadership for their churches, turn over complete authority to that leadership and then move on to other discipling tasks, confident that the new churches, led by the Holy Spirit, illuminated by the Bible and fortified by the fellowship of the oecumenical Church, will do as well as did the churches at Corinth and Ephesus. Since this is so, would it not be reasonable to set a time limit of perhaps fifteen to thirty years for a specific unit of work to be completed, and for the mission really to move on?

One of the perplexing questions is that of the standard of assistance to the younger churches. There is at present a scandal in missions. It is that where the Church does not grow and has had years of education and nurture and the non-Christians do not obey the Good News, there we pour in missionaries at the rate of one missionary to two hundred Christians. But where the Church is growing by leaps and bounds, the new Christians, though eager to learn, are illiterate and untutored and the non-Christians are pleading for baptism, there we supply missionaries at the rate of one to a thousand, or one to two thousand or even one to eight thousand. Will not the newer methodologies formed to fit the new era reverse this proportion and wipe out this scandal? Would it, we ask, be advisable (a) to assist small growing churches (50 per cent per decade or more required to qualify as a growing church) with no national leadership and great possibilities of growth with the highest proportion of missionaries per thousand Christians; (b) to assist large growing churches with national leadership with a medium proportion of missionaries per thousand Christians; and (c) to assist static churches, whatever their size, with the smallest proportion of missionaries per thousand Christians?

In this new era, with its very great stress on independence and its overwhelming nationalism, is it not clear that the social implications of the Gospel must be voiced by the national churches under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures? This becomes abundantly clear if we imagine Russian churches carrying out missions in America—as they well may some day. Would it be advisable for *them* as foreign missionaries to maintain that the social implications of the Gospel demanded more socialism and less free enterprise in America? American churches might so demand, if they felt Christ demanded it, but could Russian missionaries do so? Does it not then follow that, to the extent that missions are concerned with social amelioration

around the world, they had better count on such amelioration arising from the spontaneous efforts of large national churches whose consciences are stirred in the oecumenical Church by God and His Word? The newer methodologies ought to be able to avoid the suggestion of Satan that concentration on the multiplication of the churches means less effective social emphasis. They ought to be able to see that, on the contrary, the growth of a numerous church is the only basic guarantee of massive re-inforcement of the Christian point of view in every nation of the world.

With all this, the newer methodologies should claim the static mission station churches as staunch allies, led by able Christian brothers. The world Church should continue to assist them, but lightly, maintaining perhaps one missionary per 2000 to 4000 Christians as oecumenical links. Should growth develop in any static church, a different standard of assistance by the world Church would apply.

The world Church faces in very truth two groups of men. (a) Hundreds of thousands, who can be disciplined this year and every succeeding year for the foreseeable future, only if resources are concentrated behind the growing churches which exist in the midst of these responsive myriads. (b) Millions, from among whom, no matter how persuasively, evangelistically and institutionally Christ is proclaimed, only a handful will follow Him this year or any succeeding year for the foreseeable future. Any methodology of missions formed to-day faces these two groups and their inescapable dilemma: if we spend men and money to witness to the millions of gospel rejectors, the hundreds of thousands who are able to be disciplined will die without accepting the Saviour. Can any methodology, no matter by whom it is framed, do other than say, *'Only after the hundreds of thousands have been disciplined is the world Church justified in spending treasure in witnessing to the millions of gospel rejectors'*. This is the new situation. In the nineteenth century this choice did not confront the world Church. Then it had no multitudes who could certainly be disciplined. But now it has. Any strategy of missions for this coming era must come to grips with this central situation. It must answer the question: Will you by-pass those who can now be saved in order to carry on mission work among those who cannot now be saved?

Finally, will not any methodology in this new era give an honoured place to the 'people movement' to Christ as the New Testament's own mode of in-gathering? Will it not be recognized that to use the New Testament pattern, not imposed blindly but adapted to each people,

is both more effective and more Christian than it is automatically to apply western individualistic techniques to all? It must be recognized that a degree of church growth has taken place in many peoples in spite of the individualistic techniques. Successful 'growing church' leaders, both nationals and missionaries, have come to use 'people movement' techniques, without calling them that. But greater and better church growth will come as these are more clearly understood and consciously used. Nor should it be supposed that the methodology of the 'people movement' to Christ has been well worked out and now stands ready to be revealed to the Christian world. Probably the greatest single need of the expanding world Church is to find out about how whole peoples really become devoutly and reproductively Christian. We know some things about the process, but we need to know a great deal more. How, for example, can we nurture the beginnings of group movements from among the intelligentsia which do occur from time to time? How can we keep them growing in the very peoples in which they are born?

We have been considering all this from the human point of view. But we should also view it from the divine point of view. Those hundreds of thousands who can now be won each year are those whom God purposes to disciple. If we stubbornly cleave to the *status quo*, God's redemptive purpose will be frustrated for hundreds of thousands of souls each year. The new methodology about which we have been talking simply attempts to co-operate with God. If there are more effective ways in which the Church may be planted, or more efficient methods for inducting those now ready to accept their Saviour into the Church, they should be set forth and adopted. One touchstone, in this growing era now upon us, for every methodology proposed is: *does it disciple those whom God has called?* The second is: *does it promise to lead the churches to a greater century than they have ever known?* God is trying to give His churches great victory. Any methodology which is of Him will lead us into it.

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