

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

by

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MISSION BOARDS (Continued)

TYPES OF MISSION BOARDS

MOST MISSION BOARDS may be divided into two general types: denominational and independent. We shall talk about the denominational boards first. Even though their work in recent years has not been growing as rapidly as that of the independent boards, and in many cases has declined, it still represents the greater part of Protestant missionary effort.

In the United States today the denominational mission board is usually set up by the denomination and is under the control of the denomination. It is not independent of the churches but is considered to be the organization through which the churches carry on their missionary work. It is the denomination at work for missions.

Also in the United States it is usual for each denomination to have only one board of foreign missions; or, in some of the larger denominations, a general board and a women's board. These boards are under the control of the governing body of the denomination and they make their reports to it.

Denominational missions of course depend on the churches of their denomination to provide both the funds and the manpower for their missionary work. Candidates are expected to belong to churches of the denomination. There are very few exceptions.

The larger denominational boards often have work in a number of different fields. Although they do set up a field organization in each of these places, the board at home has the over-all supervision and has final authority. In earlier days the missionaries often had reason to criticize the boards because they didn't understand the situation on the field. Today this is not nearly so true. The boards often appoint experienced missionaries as secretaries and have them visit the fields periodically to keep in touch with what is going on.

Even though each Church in a denomination may be given a quota for its missionary giving, the offerings in the churches are still voluntary. The board may make an appeal for money, but that is as far as it can go. Its income depends on the generosity of the members of the churches. It

draws up its annual budget and makes its plans on the basis of what it estimates will be the probable giving during the year.

When the board appoints a missionary, it puts him on a regular salary. This salary is always small, and it has no relation to the value of his work. Missionary salaries are not competitive. Perhaps they ought rather to be called living allowances. The amount varies from field to field according to the cost of living. It is proportionately more for those who have children, since it is based on needs instead of merit. And because it is only intended to cover the needs of the missionary and his family, the mission does not usually care to appoint missionaries who have dependent relatives or unpaid debts. They wouldn't be able to meet these extra obligations.

One problem in mission financing has always been hard to solve. People just don't like to give to mission boards. Whatever the reason, many of them prefer to give to individual missionaries or to special projects. This has forced missions to adopt various plans of "personalized giving."

Generally the idea is that one or more churches may take on the support of a missionary and consider him their missionary. The missionary then keeps in touch with his supporting Church and, if it is not his own home Church, he is expected to visit it when he is home on furlough. The amount of his allowance is set by the board in every case, but it is provided by a specific Church.

The independent missions are so called because they are not under the control of a Church or denomination. They usually have a self-perpetuating board of directors. That is, if one member of the board resigns or dies, the others elect a man to take his place. In many cases the missionaries themselves are not considered employees of the mission but members of it, having a voice in all its affairs. Sometimes churches and individuals who donate to the mission more than a stated amount per year are considered members with a right to vote in the annual meeting.

A large part of the independent missions, though not all, are called faith missions. They got this name, not because they claimed to have more faith than others, but because of their financial principles. They make it a rule not to make any direct appeal for funds except to GOD alone. They believe He will move upon the hearts of Christians to give for any work that is truly of Him. Of course their missionaries can't be assured of any stated salary. They have to look to the Lord to send in what they need. Such a plan sounds utterly visionary. But it works. In fact, it has proved very successful in many missions.

The independent missions get their support from the growing number of independent churches in the homeland as well as from many people and even churches within the denominations. Some simply prefer the independent missions to their denominational missions. Others have enough interest to make these donations above and beyond what their quota is in the denomination. Denominational stalwarts don't like the idea. They do their best to oblige the people to give all their gifts just to the denomination. But they usually find that you can't control free-will giving.

Some of the independent missions, especially among the Baptists, are really denominational in character. They are not under the control of the denomination, and sometimes they adopt the faith principle of financing, but in other ways they are denominational. If they are Baptist, all the members of the mission have to be Baptist; candidates are told that they must be Baptist "by principle, not for convenience"; and the churches they establish on the field are Baptist both in name and in practice.

But perhaps the largest part of the independent missions are interdenominational faith missions. That is, their membership and support comes from different evangelical denominations as well as from the independent churches. They are conservative in theology. They usually hold to a brief doctrinal statement that covers the fundamentals of the faith but omits some of the controversial points that have separated the denominations. On this basis they welcome Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and many others into their fellowship.

The first of these interdenominational missions, and the one that has served as a pattern for many others, is the China Inland Mission. It was founded in England in 1865 by Dr. J. Hudson Taylor. Taylor had spent several years in China as a missionary and then returned home broken in health. But he had a continuing passion for the conversion of the Chinese people.

Without going into details, these are the facts that led to the starting of the mission. Taylor was burdened for the vast interior of China. But it was not really open at the time. Besides, the missions already in China did not believe they could take on any more responsibilities than what they already had. To reach the interior a new mission would be needed. But it wouldn't have any denomination to sponsor it.

Now Taylor in his experience had come to several conclusions. One was the conviction that "GOD's work done in GOD's way will not lack GOD's supply." If this was true, then it would be wrong to go into debt. Why should we try to borrow from men what GOD has seen fit to withhold? Taylor was also sure that evangelism was the great need of inland China. For that purpose it was not necessary to insist on missionaries who had all the educational preparation usually required. He believed the mission boards were passing over many who might prove very useful missionaries.

But while Taylor had learned to trust GOD for his own needs without making appeals to men, it would be different to form a mission on that basis. What if he should get young people out to China, and then the funds should fail? Could he carry such a responsibility? His reluctance was not overcome until he came to realize that if GOD was moving him to start the mission, the responsibility was GOD's, not his. In that confidence he went ahead.

In the missions that have followed the example of the China Inland Mission, the following principles are generally observed:

- (1) No solicitation of funds or missionaries is permitted.
- (2) No debts are allowed.
- (3) No salary is guaranteed.
- (4) Missionary candidates from any evangelical denomination are acceptable.
- (5) Evangelistic work is to have first place.

Even though they hold to the faith principle in financing, not all the faith missions use the same plan. There is room for a great deal of diversity. However, in general two main plans, with modifications, seem to stand out.

First is the pooling plan. Under this plan all gifts for missionary support are put into one common fund, or pool. When the regular distribution is made, usually once a month, each

missionary gets his share. Single missionaries in the same field all get the same amount. Married missionaries get a larger amount, depending on the number of children they have. There are other details, but the principle is that of share and share alike.

The missions usually set up some definite amount as an objective, an amount that they think will cover the missionary's needs. The larger missions can foretell with reasonable accuracy their probable receipts, so they draw up a budget on that basis.

The pooling plan has several advantages. It avoids inequalities among the missionaries, since all share alike. The missionary with a thrilling story to tell gets no more than the one whose service is more humdrum but perhaps just as valuable. Even if people at home try to by-pass the rule and send their gifts directly to the missionary, it makes no difference. He has to report these direct receipts, and they are counted in the common pool and deducted from his next remittance. Most missions do, however, permit bona fide gifts for such things as birthdays, Christmas, a new baby, etc., without their entering into the pool.

The plan impresses upon the missionary the need of praying for the needs of the whole mission and not just his own. When one profits, all profit; when one gets a short remittance, they are all short. No one is ever left completely without support, even if his supporting Church drops him. This tends to greater unity in the mission and exalts the mission above the individual missionary.

But the plan also has some weaknesses. It has happened that missions have sent to the field more missionaries than they could support properly. Then all the missionaries suffered hardship. (Though it should be said to the credit of the missionaries that they didn't complain.) But the greatest weakness is in the attitude of the donors at home. There are many who insist that they want their gifts to go wholly to the missionary they are supporting. They don't want them pooled.

No amount of explanation will satisfy them. If the missionary doesn't get just what they send, then they won't send.

That is what has given rise to the second plan, the individual support plan. Under this plan the individual missionary gets exactly whatever his friends and supporters give for him. It may be much or little. But it must be specified for him. The mission will provide information about the amount he should have to be properly supported, but it doesn't take responsibility for his support.

However, it does make this provision. All unspecified gifts to the mission are put into a general fund. This fund is meant to cover all expenses except the missionary's personal support. If the missionary does not get enough personal support for his needs, the mission may add to his income from the general fund, provided there is enough money to do so.

The individual support plan also has some advantages. It capitalizes on the desire of so many donors to give to individual missionaries. And it makes a close bond between them and the missionary they support. It also spurs the missionary to keep in touch with the people who support him. He can't count on being carried along by what the others are able to do.

But it also has its weaknesses. Gifts to the general fund are usually insufficient. Too many people prefer to give to a person rather than to the mission. Then some missionaries get better support than others whose work is equally valuable.

They may have more friends or may be better at inspiring interest through their talks and letters. And because the worker is more prominent than the work, the sense of unity in the mission is weakened.

The picture we have given of these two plans is not complete. We have oversimplified it. What most missions do is use one or another of the basic plans with modifications. This has become more and more true of those that use the individual support plan.

Today it is not at all uncommon for such a mission to expect a missionary to get both personal and service support. That is, a certain part of the funds donated for him is designated as service support. This money is to cover services rendered by the mission on behalf of the missionary, but which he does not personally pay. It may include such things as the cost of sending his money to him, his rent, and his share in any number of other expenditures for his benefit. This relieves some of the pressure on the usually depleted general fund.

Each mission is willing to explain its plan of financing to a donor or candidate on request.

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