

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

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE -

WHAT A MISSIONARY DOES (Continued)

LEAVING ASIDE some of the other details that fill up a missionary's life - letters, reports, dealing with government officials, and the like - let's turn for a brief view five major missionary activities: evangelism, counseling, church establishment, teaching and literature.

EVANGELISM

When we talk about evangelism, everyone thinks immediately of preaching. And of course the missionary does preach. He preaches whenever and wherever he can. It may be in a Church building; it may be in the open air. It may be in a city street chapel, where people are continually coming and going; it may be in the village council house, where they have gathered especially to hear his message. It may be in a large convention, or in a neighborhood meeting held in somebody's hut.

He often preaches more than his minister in the homeland. I remember the amusement of a mission director as he told me about an applicant to his society. The young man apparently thought he would impress the mission with his abilities and experience. "I think I would be able to do the work all right," he wrote. "I'm used to preaching. I preach at least twice every Sunday and once in the middle of the week, besides occasional sermons at other times." The director laughed and said, "I told him we didn't have a missionary on our field who preached that little!"

Oh, it isn't always the best of preaching in a homiletic sense. It may have to be less formal. How can you develop a theme with a firstly, secondly, and thirdly when you are preaching in a market where most of the people just stop for a few minutes and then move on? It is like street corner preaching in the homeland.

And many times you can't get by with a ten or fifteen minute sermonette. The people are there to hear GOD's message and it may be a long time before they will get another chance. They want "**all the counsel of God**"--or at least as much of it as they can get. Some of them came many miles on foot just to hear that message. So keep on, preacher; give them good measure!

Late one Saturday a dusty traveler reached our home. He was a Christian from a town where

there were no other believers. He had trudged two or three days on foot to reach our city. He stayed with us over Sunday, and early Monday morning he started back, another two or three days' journey. "Every once in awhile," he told us, "I get so hungry for Christian fellowship that I just have to come down here for a Sunday and hear a sermon or two. Now I'm going back well fed."

The invitation is a standard part of an evangelistic meeting in the United States. At the close of the sermon, sometimes while the congregation sings a hymn, people are urged to accept CHRIST and to indicate their decision by raising their hand.

In many mission fields this just doesn't work. As a missionary to Africa wrote, "If we did such a thing, every hand in the place would go up! But it wouldn't mean anything." "If people are really converted," say others, "they ought to be able to stand up and say so."

And they do. On a recent visit to Puerto la Cruz, Venezuela, my sermon was interrupted right in the middle by a woman who stood and said, "I want to accept CHRIST as my only and sufficient Saviour!" Then she sat down. Nobody was shocked, nobody thought it was unusual, and after a pause the sermon went on.

Of course personal evangelism is the foundation of all evangelistic work. After the beginning, the people themselves do most of it. But the real missionary never ceases to be a personal evangelist and some give a great deal of time to it. Even in many of his talks with groups, the missionary often just "gossips the Gospel."

Some missionaries spend a good deal of time traveling. They have to if they are to do a good job. You see, the missionary is supposed to be a settled pastor, ministering to one congregation. His work is broader than that.

Now travel always sounds attractive to those who like to read books of travels. Sometimes they get just enough of a taste of it during a summer vacation to wish they could do more. But that is in this country, where everybody travels and traveling is made easy.

It's not always so on the mission field. There have been many improvements in travel in recent years. The word safari in much of Africa no longer means a long line of porters trudging single file down a trail bearing the missionary's equipment, and sometimes the missionary himself. Now the missionary may pile everything into a station wagon or truck and take along just a helper or two when he travels. In some places, even in primitive areas like the jungles of eastern Ecuador, he has the airplane at his call. But that doesn't mean that travel is easy. Or that it no longer takes much time.

Take the missionary in India, for example. Suppose he wants to go on a tour of the villages of his district. There are airplanes in India, but they wouldn't do him much good for such local travel. There are railroads in India, even if they may not be up to our American standards. But the railroads aren't much help in reaching many of these villages. So the missionary takes a truck, and as far as he can makes use of the highways.

He will have to plan his trip carefully and take a great deal more equipment than we might imagine necessary. In the first place he's not likely to find a hotel or a rooming house where he

can stay; so he takes a tent. That means, too, all the equipment for sleeping, washing and eating. For of course he can't just drop in at a restaurant, come mealtime. And even if there is a market where foods are prepared in the open air, he finds it wiser to get his meals cooked under his own supervision.

Then there are the implements of his work. He may have to have a portable organ along, or some other musical instrument. There are tracts, Scriptures and other books for those who read. Charts, flannelgraphs and other such aids help reach both the children and the older people. It may be that he can even take along a projector and show slides, using his truck to provide the electricity.

But the missionary to India has an easy time traveling compared to some of the missionaries among the lowland Indians of South America. Sometimes these missionaries have the advantage of airplane transportation to and from their stations. That is a tremendous help. But it does involve work that we do not always remember. An airplane must have a place to land - a large, level, cleared space, free of trees, stumps and underbrush. It is a real job to make such a clearing, even with plenty of cheap labor available. It is also a job to keep it clear, for in the moist tropics vegetation seems to spring up overnight.

Then, too, the missionary must have some way of contacting the plane when he needs it. That means short-wave radio communication. Which is all very lovely until the set gets out of order. And of course no one can tell when or how often that may happen.

However, the plane is not used for the ordinary tours the missionary makes. It is useful only for the big hops. On the ground sometimes trucks can be used - yes, even where the government has spent little or no money on road building. One group of missionaries in Bolivia built their own road so that trucks could get to their station. Of course it was a rough job, and in such places the truck needs a power winch to pull itself out of mud holes. But it was usable, just as in some other places dry stream beds are usable as roads during the dry season.

But beyond the roadhead there is still need for traveling. There is much less travel by foot today than there once was, but the inland waterways are still an extremely important highway system. Whether it be by motor boat or canoe, the traveler in the interior sooner or later has to take to the "flowing road."

We Americans are losing the fine art of visitation. That is, the pleasant and sometimes stimulating conversations which once were the very heart of a visit are rapidly losing out. Now, when visitors appear, they must put up with a third party who tends to monopolize the conversation, a party to whom nobody can answer back - the radio. Or they face the even more formidable competition of the TV set, which demands the attention of both eyes and ears. It likewise gives you no chance to discuss the question - if indeed it is worth discussing.

Even pastoral visitation is becoming a rarity. Pastors are too busy with a score of other activities that seem more important. (Or is their "busy-ness" just a cover-up for an aversion to a task that is so spiritually demanding?) In some cases a "Church visitor" is employed, usually a woman, who has a hard time convincing anybody that her visit is much of a substitute for the pastor's. But in most cases the visiting just isn't done.

Visitation on most mission fields, however, still holds much former position of importance. The

visitor is usually welcomed. He is welcomed even when his host disagrees radically with his point of view. After all, how are you going to understand the other's point of view if you don't talk with him? And if you want an opening for personal evangelism, here it is.

Some years ago I made a sort of survey trip out along the Gulf of Paria in Venezuela. In the small port of Cristobal Colon I was held up for about a week, waiting for a way to proceed homeward. While there I spent considerable time visiting among the people, without positive results so far as I could see.

Two or three years later, after our return from furlough, the missionary then in charge of that district was visiting in our home. "You will be interested," he said, "in a report I just got from up the coast. Do you remember a woman in Cristobal Colon who was very much interested in the Gospel when you were out that way?" I told him I couldn't remember any such person. But then I had done a good deal of visiting in the town.

"Well, anyway," he continued, "this woman says you spent a lot of time one day explaining the Gospel to her and several others. She wasn't quite ready to accept it then; but she did later. And now word has come saying that she has died trusting in the Saviour, thanks to your visit."

And still, the most that I ever could remember was that one day a storekeeper had courteously offered me a chair outside his little store. His wife and a number of others had gathered around, as in a leisurely fashion we carried on our conversation. An hour? Two hours? I really don't know how long we talked. But that woman may have been one of the group.

COUNSELING

Visiting is often closely associated with the work of counseling. Whether in the homeland or on the mission field, those who need our counsel do not always seek us out. Many a time we must go and find them.

Now counseling is a most demanding sort of work. Young people who have never occupied places of leadership don't understand just how demanding it can be. They are likely to think of it simply as the giving of advice.

The proverb about the cheapness of advice probably started, because there is so much cheap advice in circulation - cheap, not only because it is given without charge but because it didn't even cost the giver so much as a few minutes of serious thought.

Opinions and superficial advice are easy to express. But what if a life depended on your judgment? What if following your advice might possibly bring anguish and remorse? And if it meant the eternal destiny of a soul?

Every missionary is called upon for counsel. Not for just the common spiritual problems which confront the pastor or the Christian worker here in the homeland. The variety of subjects on which the counsel of the missionary is sought is astounding. Somehow he is expected to be an authority on almost every subject under the sun. Yet he knows that he is not.

What is he going to do? To some of the people he has become a spiritual father. And fatherhood means care. Are the children to be blamed if they don't understand just what kind of subjects their father can best counsel them about? Isn't he supposed to know? How can they tell the difference between a spiritual problem, a social problem, and an economic problem? Just what is the difference?

Counseling takes a lot of time. Perhaps there is no other job the missionary has that is more time-consuming. Even when a man comes to you for counsel, he may beat around the bush for a long time before he comes to the point. And even then it may take a bit of prying to find out what really is the heart of the matter. Ask any dean of students.

And no job calls for more understanding. This is one of the reasons why missions want young people who are mature in thinking and acting. Maturity of experience shows itself more in counseling than conversation anywhere else. In counseling as in medicine the first problem is to diagnose the case. It calls for patience to lead the person to reveal just what is the trouble - patience and obvious sympathy that will inspire confidence. It takes discernment to see just what is the issue involved, and then to restate the case in such a way that the person himself will see it. It takes tact and self-control to avoid saying, "This is what you'll have to do," and to say instead, "This is what your decision will mean; but the decision is up to you."

It is in this field of counseling that the missionary can show his spiritual leadership. It is important from the beginning and it continues to grow in importance. There will come a time when native evangelists and pastors will do the preaching, when native teachers will displace the missionary teacher and even take over the work of the supervisor. But there will still be a need for the counselor, for the one to whom they can turn in confidence to help them solve the many problems they face.

THE CHURCH

We have already said that a part of the aim of missions is to establish churches. This should be the natural result of evangelism. In fact a working fellowship of believers must result if the evangelism is to have any permanent effect. So one of the missionary's most vital tasks is to help the Church get started and guide it in its early years. It also takes plenty of tact and spiritual leadership.

The faith missions, which have always strongly emphasized evangelism, gave comparatively little attention to the Church until recent years. Their emphasis on evangelism was needed. But they found that after the first advances the work did not progress as it should. Instead of becoming every year stronger and more vigorous, it showed signs of weakness. It continued to depend too much on the presence of the foreign missionary. They came to realize, at least in part, that without reducing their zeal for evangelism they needed to place more emphasis on the building up of the Church.

Looking back now, it is easy to say that we should have known better. Didn't Paul lay great emphasis on the Church in all his missionary work? Wasn't that part of the secret of his success? But we should realize that there are still many, both in the faith missions and in the denominational missions, who have not yet learned that lesson. They are not convinced that the

principles used in the first century can be applied today. The circumstances are different.

But on the whole, missions are laying greater stress on the church today than before. Especially since World War II and the closing of China we have seen the importance of developing a strong national Church which is not dependent on the missionaries. And to this matter the missionary has to give a great deal of attention.

We are used to churches in the United States. Even though our churches differ somewhat in their organization and procedures, there is a great deal of similarity between them. Fundamentally, they are all voluntary associations in which the members have a great deal to say about what is done. Whether the pastor is appointed by a bishop or chosen by vote of the congregation, his authority is limited by the will of the people. Democratic procedures are the rule, procedures with which we become acquainted as early as our grade school days. And there is so much similarity in the usual order of service that a visitor might find it difficult to tell the denomination of the church he is in, unless he already knows it. Most of us are familiar with these things from childhood.

This is not true in many mission fields. The people's manner of life has been entirely different. Society is organized on a different basis from what it is in the United States. Many haven't the foggiest notion of what democracy is, or what democratic procedures would be. A large part of them are used to chiefs, to dictators of one sort or another. And they think it only natural that these things should be carried into their church life.

For example, a young Bible school graduate in a South American country went to be the pastor of a Church. His country was one of those which have usually been run by strong-armed dictators. He had been taught parliamentary rules and Church government in his Bible school days. But it is hard for a few years of formal teaching to overrule a lifetime of experience.

Within a short time he got into trouble with his Church officers and some of the older members over, of all things, their political views. Without bothering to follow parliamentary procedure, he promptly excommunicated all of those who disagreed with him. "Long live the dictator!" Fortunately he didn't last long.

Church life is something entirely new to many people. Their religious life has been on an entirely different basis. Religion is more a part of daily life than it is here, but regular weekly services may be lacking. And of course witch-doctors don't preach sermons. Besides, religion is often a community affair - the whole town or tribe has a single religion, with no dissenters allowed. So it is quite a new thing to come into a church - an ekklesia, or "called-out group." How does one act in a Church, and how does the Church act in society?

We can't go into the details of this problem. But we trust we have said enough to show that it is something to which the missionary has to give long, careful and prayerful attention. How to lead the people to understand the Scriptural ideal of the Church? How much of our American Church organization to introduce? (We Americans love to organize to the limit - or even beyond it!) How much of the native pattern of life to adapt to Church purposes? When to stay in the background and allow them to run things - letting them make their own mistakes instead of making them all ourselves? How to encourage the development of a native leadership? And so on, without end.

One thing is certain: the Church will usually take on a much greater importance in the life of the people than it has at present in our American life. We have turned over so much to the state and to secular organizations - education, charity, relief, social affairs - that the church does little more than minister to what we call the "strictly spiritual." Even in a funeral service the mortician rather than the minister is in charge of affairs.

But in mission lands the situation is different. In fact, because it is so different many of our American missionaries find it difficult to understand and to adjust their planning and acting. You see, in coming into the Church the people have had to come out of non-Christian society, have had to break many of their former connections. It is not just a matter of attending a different type of religious service. They have to build a different life.

Sometimes they may have to find a different way of earning a living. A maker of idols cannot continue in that craft. He may need help to get something else. Usually their social life is changed. Sometimes the change is only in the companions; the activity itself is good-as in some games. At other times an activity is completely dropped - as with drinking parties, gambling and lewd dances. Then something else must be put in its place, for man is a social being.

It is in the Church that people have found spiritual life. In the Church they find a new and delightful fellowship. So it is only natural that they look to the church in any other case of need.

Just before the recent war in Korea, the Yung Nak Presbyterian Church started in Seoul. It was a refugee Church, one among many. The pastor had managed to escape from the terror in North Korea, and in the capital he found many other North Korean refugees. They met for worship and soon there was no auditorium large enough for the multitude of refugee Christians.

But they did other things. They all knew what it was to abandon all their possessions and escape to a strange part of the country where they had no home, no job, no friends but their fellow Christians. So through the Church those who arrived first began to help later arrivals. As they were able, they provided them with food. For some they supplied clothing. They set up a sort of employment bureau and helped many to get jobs. Then as each one got on his own feet he began to take a part in helping others.

They didn't question whether this was the Church's job. From where else should help come if not from their brethren in CHRIST?

~ end of chapter 21 ~
