

GOD And Missions Today

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3. GOD'S METHOD OF MISSIONARY WORK

PASTOR MONOD, of Paris, beautifully suggests that all true work done by a disciple is really a part of GOD's own eternal, universal work, assigned to the believer.

If we conceive GOD's work as a grand sphere, filling immensity and eternity, then every disciple's work is a part of that sphere, a small segment that lies over against him. If he has spiritual eyes to discern his duty, he may read upon that work of GOD his own name and the date of the present year. In other words, in GOD's plan each one of us has a definite assignment and, for each year, month, day, and hour, a specific duty. What dignity and beauty and glory such a conception imparts to human life! To know that in the great mechanism of the ages I am a part and have a place and sphere!

This thought I would now bring to the front: *the work of missions is not only a toil for GOD but a work with GOD.*

This is very fully and remarkably set forth in three principal passages of Scripture, whose full force appears only as we set them side by side and carefully compare them.

"For we are laborers together with God: ye are GOD's husbandry, ye are GOD's building . . . We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of GOD in vain" (1 Corinthians 3:9; II Corinthians 6:1).

"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of CHRIST in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister" (Colossians 1:24, 25a).

"But when the Comforter is come . . . he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:26, 27; cf. Acts 5:32).

Even in the New Testament no words can be found more pathetically beautiful. Here our work for souls is set forth as a co-operation with the Triune God, in three various aspects, as *co-labor*, *co-suffering*, and *co-witnessing*. But that which is far more remarkable and impressive in these passages is that the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY SPIRIT are individually, successively, and separately, presented as personally sharing with the believer the dignity of this exalted

service.

There is something awe-inspiring in the fact that, in each separate department of this work, and with each separate person of the Trinity, the believer is thus made a direct partaker!

GOD the FATHER is represented as beseeching men and building up a living temple out of believing souls. And the believer also joins with GOD in beseeching men to be reconciled to Him, and in building upon the one foundation, the temple of living stones.

GOD the SON is represented as vicariously suffering for the salvation of the lost, and gathering believers into the mystical body of which He is the Head; the believer is represented as sharing with Him this vicarious sacrifice and ministry and as filling up somewhat that which, without the believer, would be lacking.

GOD the SPIRIT is represented as a witness-bearer, first of all to the truth which He brings to bear upon the mind and heart; and then to the blood whose power He reveals in the death, and especially in the resurrection, of CHRIST. Once more, the believer is presented as also witnessing with the HOLY GHOST, as though needful to complete and confirm the testimony of the SPIRIT, according to the Levitical law, that in the mouth of two witnesses every word be established.

These passages, thus jointly considered, present the humblest human believer and disciple as a coworker with GOD the FATHER, a co-sufferer with GOD the Son, and a co-witness with GOD the SPIRIT.

Taken thus together, they suggest the highest dignity and privilege of every child of GOD. He is lifted to a divine level. His humble work for GOD is exalted to a work with GOD; his sacrifice and service is raised to a plane that is higher than angelic ministry. These words of the Scripture hint, if they do not affirm, that the believer is necessary to the completeness and completion of the work of redeeming a lost world.

He is a part of a divine mechanism, and, until he drops into his place and works with other parts to produce one result, something is lacking to complete adjustment, perfect movement, and ultimate success.

I. How is this work of missions a co-operation with GOD the FATHER?

Paul uses the figures of "building" and of "husbandry" to represent this working with GOD.

GOD is building up a temple of believers. The plan and work are His; He designs the working plan; He provides the building material; and when it is brought to the temple platform, no tool needs to be lifted upon it to fit it to its foreordained place in the great structure. But who are His builders? Paul and other apostles, as wise master-builders, laid the foundation, in JESUS CHRIST; and you and I are to carry on and carry up the Temple of the Ages. The centuries go by; GOD buries workman after workman, but the work never ceases.

The whole work is therefore one. Every disciple who faithfully witnesses to GOD is one of

GOD's builders. It matters not how prominent or obscure, however great or small, in human eyes. Wherever his place and whatever his work, he is building for GOD and working with GOD. God has chosen to work by him, and cannot, without abandoning His eternal plan, do without him. When in all its final glory the building stands complete, each workman shall, in beholding its perfection, trace the living stones which his hands have shaped for it and placed in it. And - how could it be otherwise - he shall share in the glory as he has shared in the toil!

The Divine Architect of the Ages condescends to choose human beings to carry out His thought and plan, according to the pattern showed in the Mount; and so, let it be said reverently, GOD waits for man's co-operation in His temple-building!

We turn to consider in a little more detail the agricultural figure: "**Ye are God's husbandry**"; that is, the product of GOD's tillage. But Paul says just before, "**I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.**" All our labor of plowing, sowing, reaping, would yield no crop if He did not give soil and seed, sunshine, dew and rain.

Equally true is it that all these gifts of GOD could produce no harvest without human hands to till the soil and sow the seed, to put in the sickle, and gather in the sheaves. GOD's harvest hangs on your toil and mine: it is the union of the divine and human husbandmen that gives the crop!

The field is the world. Vast indeed is this field. It is not only vast, but it is one of ever-recurring need. We cannot till any field for all time to come. Every spring brings the sowing-time and every autumn the reaping-time, so that every new season presents a new field for the plow and the sickle. And it is so with the field of the world. Three times in a century the population of our globe gives place to a new generation; so that if today the whole world were evangelized, within thirty years a new generation would present a new need of the Gospel message. Hence the greater demand for constant, persistent, and world-wide missions.

But again, every field has its crises. When the sowing time comes, the seed must be put in the furrows; it is now or never. When the harvest ripens, the sickle must be immediately put at work; again it is now or never - ripeness borders on rottenness, and the crop which is not reaped is soon not worth reaping. So the world-field presents its crises.

When the soil lies fallow and waits for the sower, if he goes not forth with his seed, he loses his chance. When the fields are white with harvest, to wait is to forfeit both his chance and his crop. And, in some part of the wide field, it is always a crisis: either the sower or the reaper is in demand; sometimes it is both, for sometimes GOD's harvests come so fast that the plowman overtakes the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows the seed.

Our LORD, whose apt metaphor teaches us so many lessons about the field, is not less instructive as to the seed. It is a curious fact that, in the great chapter of the kingdom (Matthew 13) two parables out of the seven - and these the first two - present the same field, the world, but not the same seed. In the former parable the "**seed is the Word of God**" (Luke 8:11); in the latter, "**The good seed are the children of the kingdom**" (Matthew 13:38).

In this difference lies a sublime lesson. GOD sows His field with two kinds of seed: His Word and His disciples.

It is the Bible with the believer behind it - the Gospel of salvation with a gospeller, a saved soul, to proclaim it; the message of life borne by the living messenger, the Word of GOD with the witness of GOD. Both the truth as it is in JESUS and the renewed soul as he is in JESUS are necessary in this seed-sowing of the kingdom.

More than this, there is a connection between these two parables and these two sorts of seed. At the first sowing, the Son of Man himself was the sower, and the seed was the Word of GOD; but, when the Word sprang up and yielded fruit, that fruit was not a new message or word from GOD, but a believer. And thus we sow the Gospel, and the crop is a crop of souls; we get from that first sowing of the Word of GOD a harvest of the children of the kingdom, who, in turn, become seed for a new crop of believers. Here is the great hope of missions, and the real secret of GOD's plan.

Yes, the field is the world, and the "good seed" is not only the "Word of GOD," but it is also the "children of the kingdom." And for a double reason.

If the good seed of the Word of GOD is sown and scattered at all, the children of the Kingdom must be the sowers.

If the blessed harvest of souls is ever to be reaped, the children of the kingdom must sow not only the Word, but themselves, in the soil of society!

And so they of whom the world is not worthy, and of whom it contemptuously says that they "bury themselves out of sight among the heathen," do indeed bury themselves, because seed never sprouts until it is buried in the soil! Like their MASTER, they dread most of all to abide alone; like Him, they shrink not from Gethsemane and Golgotha, so that dying they may no longer abide alone; but dying, live; and living, bring forth much fruit.

Life, everywhere, in plant and animal, shows its maturity and perfection by the power to beget other life like itself. And hence the disciple that does not make disciples, the Christian that has no passion for souls and no power to win souls; who has no work for CHRIST; who is not himself a seed of GOD to drop into the soil and yield a crop of other holy lives, should candidly ask whether indeed he is himself a child of GOD.

No more alarming sign exists in the Church of today than this: that so small a part of our church members ever lead a soul to GOD! With all our so-called refinement, education, culture, social influence, the Church has but few who are at work for souls, and who will at last bring in armfuls of sheaves.

It is a curious fact in botany that we may cultivate a plant until we destroy the ovaries or seed-vessels, so that the plant can no longer propagate itself. The wild rose, for example, has a fully developed ovary; but the beautiful double rose, full of leaves and beauty, the crown of horticulture, reveals no seed vessel. We find an analogous fact in the world of mankind. There is a sort of culture which is fatal to service. It develops a fine mind, a ready tongue, graceful manners, a beautiful person; but there is no love of souls, no power to win them - no holy self-propagating seed of new lives.

While the Church perhaps never stood so high as now in wealth, in culture, in commanding

worldly influence, it is only here and there one blade in GOD's harvest-field that bears the ear swelling with the full, ripe corn that GOD can use to sow His field, and bring thirty, sixty, an hundredfold returns!

The attentive student of the Word of GOD will observe a progress of doctrine - an unfolding of the Divine purpose as to missions.

The Old Testament type of piety emphasizes the preservation and conservation of truth and goodness. The New Testament lays stress rather upon the promulgation and propagation of the Gospel.

To the prophets of old, the body of believers was a flock to be shepherded, and the sacred courts, a fold for their ingathering. But when Christ begins to reveal to His disciples the genius of the new age, He says, "**Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.**" In this one phrase, fishers of men, there lies a little world of suggestion. While a fold suggests the Church, and the sheep, the disciples, and the shepherd, the pastor and teacher; the lake or sea suggests the world; the fish, the unevangelized and unsaved; and the net, the means of grace by which they are to be surrounded and, in a blessed sense, ensnared, or taken captive. And the fisher stands for the evangelist who goes to tell the Gospel story to those who know it not.

Sheep are not to be caught, but fed; fish are not to be fed, but first of all, caught.

In the New Dispensation, whatever prophetic office the minister of CHRIST is to fulfill in shepherding the lambs and feeding the sheep, he is never to forget that the more important office, certainly the more emphatic function, is that of the evangelist.

He is to look for his field, therefore, not in the church alone, or mainly: the "**field is the world.**" And - as we shall have occasion often to repeat - believers, far from being merely plants in the Lord's garden, to be tended by Him, absorbing His thought and care, are themselves the "**seed of the kingdom,**" to be sown in that broad field of the world, as the germs of a new harvest for GOD.

How many intelligent disciples there are who have not yet gotten from the Old Testament into the New!

They still think of themselves simply as the objects of pastoral care.

They are the Lord's frail plants, and not a few of them are very frail and need a great deal of tending. The pastor must move constantly among them, digging about their roots, gathering out the stones, pulling up the weeds, watering them, shielding them from too much sunshine, plucking away their dead leaves, pruning away their dead twigs, tying up their drooping stems against a support to prevent them from falling altogether prostrate.

There are thousands of these sickly plants that never grow healthy and strong in fact, the very means taken to remedy their feebleness keeps them sickly and dependent. And what is the result? Our pastors cannot be evangelists; it takes so much time and thought to care for the insiders that they have neither time nor strength to care for outsiders. The minister of CHRIST is resolved -

we almost said dissolved - into the mere shepherd, and ceases to be in any large sense a fisher of men.

Nothing needs to be emphasized more, in this Laodicean age, than this: that the Church is not the field, but the force; not the object of the labors of GOD's husbandmen, but itself the body of laborers who are to be thrust forth into the field, which is the world.

Until this is understood, and felt, and practiced; until, from the sphere of dim and distant idealization, it passes into prompt and practical realization, we shall have no new era of world-wide missions!

The whole Church of GOD should be a great body of evangelists; instead of first absorbing pastor after pastor, and then, like insatiate sponges, demanding the ministrations of evangelists besides, church-members should say to their minister, "Let us alone, and go after the lost."

We have not touched the depths of this great truth even yet.

Every witness for GOD who goes forth to sow the seed, and himself becomes seed for this harvest, prepares for not one crop alone, but many successive crops. Remember our Lord's singular words: "**Thirty, sixty, an hundredfold.**" It is of the nature of crops that they are cumulative-successive harvests advance, not by arithmetical only but by geometrical progression. Each crop yields seed for the next, and every seed brings forth an ear, with seed in the ear. A single seed yields a blade whose ear furnishes thirty fold; and so the second crop is nine hundredfold, the third crop nearly thirty thousand fold, and the fourth crop nearly a million fold, upon the seed first sown.

Let the seed and its harvest become to us GOD's own parable of missions.

II. We are also represented as being brought in the work of missions into close fellowship with Christ

The language used by Paul and already quoted (Colossians 1:24) is startling: it suggests a sort of incompleteness in the sufferings of CHRIST, a lack which only the disciple can fill. To understand this we must remember that the redemptive work advances to completeness by successive stages.

When our Saviour said on the cross, "**It is finished,**" atoning death was complete.

When He rose from the dead, justifying work was complete.

When He sent the HOLY SPIRIT, the applying agency was complete.

But one more step must be taken. The cross, the rent tomb, the coming Spirit, needed a proclaiming voice, to tell of Him who was delivered for our offenses and rose for our justification; and to be the mouth of the inspiring SPIRIT.

Three links there were in this golden chain by which man and GOD are to be reunited.

There was the link which the cross supplied,
in the place of a broken link of law;

there was the link that the resurrection supplied,
in place of the broken link of life;

there was the link which the HOLY SPIRIT supplied,
in place of a broken link of love.

But still the chain did not reach to man; it was one link short.

How was the work of CHRIST on the cross and in His rising, how was the power of the SPIRIT in His coming, to lay hold on men? Hear this same Paul: "**Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How, then, shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?**" (Romans 10:14, 15).

Give us the Church, moved by passion for souls, sending forth the herald and witness; give us the herald and witness, proclaiming everywhere the good news; then we have men hearing, hearers believing, believers calling and being saved.

Will anyone tell us how, without this last link, the other three are to reach mankind with saving power?

Is the blood-stained cross to plant itself on every hill and in every valley, and then the dumb Tree of Curse to speak to men of Him who on that Cross bore their sins? Is the sepulcher in the garden to transport itself into the regions beyond, and there repeat the awful scene that made angels rejoice and demons turn pale and soldier guards become as dead men? How is the HOLY SPIRIT to find utterance for the great truths of salvation *except through believers?*

There is something awful and overpowering about this truth. Yet it is not too high to be apprehended. I have been wont as a pastor to seek, in every case of conversion, to trace the human link by which the new soul was united to GOD. I have never yet found one case where some human agency had not been used by GOD.

It is the old story of rescue repeated on a more august scale of application. GOD's ladder will not reach the lost in this House of Doom *unless you add your own length to the ladder!* And so, as we are co-workers with the Father, we are co-sufferers with the Son. His cross is dumb, His tomb is dumb, until we give to them a voice.

As Mr. Hudson Taylor well says, one may stand near a burning house or sinking ship and yearn to save those who are in danger of death; but no out-stretched arms can reach one that is a yard and a half away unless the legs and feet carry the whole body forward to the scene of action.

It is comparatively in vain that a few members of the Church, which is CHRIST's Body, seek to be heroic in self-sacrifice for the lost and to uplift and redeem pagan peoples, while the Church as a whole is idle and indifferent. The best effort is both restrained and restricted, and there can

be no large outreach, no strong uplift.

The most consecrated missionary band finds, in an apathetic Church at home, a hindrance more fatal to success than the most violent opposition where Satan's strongholds stand.

GOD invites us all to join Him in the work of missions.

And once again, with solemn intensity of emphatic conviction, I record the growing, lifelong conviction, that the supreme charm of missions is that it represents GOD's own march through history; and that, therefore, he who is most enamored of and engrossed in this work of giving the Gospel to the destitute millions of the race is most closely in link with GOD and in line with His march. There are modern Enochs and Elijahs whose close walk with GOD invites translation; they are the Careys, the Morrisons, the Livingstones, the Hanningtons, the Judsons, the Williamses, the Hunts, the Pattesons, whose absorbing passion is CHRIST and Him alone - and who in the sublime work of world-wide witness join the Triune GOD in winning the world for IMMANUEL.

We need then to think of Christian missions as pre-eminently GOD's work - and ours; because it is GOD's and we are His and are workers together with Him, permitted to share this supreme privilege. The power and energy are not human but divine, and in any and every exigency we have only to appeal to Him to get new courage and confidence in the secret place of prayer. Because His trumpet never sounds retreat we shall never take a step backward, but always forward. And even those steps which seem backward, if we are following Him, are really advances, as waves recede only to rise to a higher flood-mark.

III. Our survey would be very incomplete without at least a glance at the believer's co-operation with the HOLY SPIRIT

The Spirit was especially promised as CHRIST's witness. "**He shall testify of me,**" and will "**guide you into all truth**"; for "**he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak**"; and "**he will show you things to come.**" "**He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you**" (John 15:27; 16:13, 14).

This language is explicit. The peculiar office of the HOLY GHOST is testimony to CHRIST; and, like any other true witness, He does not speak of Himself, testify to Himself, or glorify Himself. He brings CHRIST forward into prominence - His person and character, His obedient life and vicarious death, His resurrection, ascension, and second coming.

He testifies to Him before He comes by the prophets He inspired; then He testifies to Him when He comes by the evangelists whom He guided and whose memories He quickened. And so to each new believer He continues to open the Word and unveil CHRIST's blessed person, and in the heart disclose His power to save and sanctify, and so to witness to CHRIST still.

Our LORD says, "**And ye also shall bear witness**"! (John 15:26, 27; Acts 5:32); it is in the Greek the same word as that applied to the SPIRIT. In what sense is this co-witness true?

First of all, the believer testifies with the HOLY GHOST to the power of CHRIST as a personal

and present Saviour. And it is no irreverence to say that believers can bear witness to some truths which even the SPIRIT of GOD cannot so effectually attest. He can hold up the CHRIST of prophecy and the CHRIST of history - present Him on the cross and on the throne; and keep Him before our eyes as the object of adoring Love. But the HOLY SPIRIT knows nothing of sin and salvation from sin; and, unlike CHRIST, having never taken upon Him our nature, He knows nothing of our infirmities and temptations as one who has suffered in the flesh. The HOLY SPIRIT therefore needs and requires the believer to witness, from personal knowledge, to the actual work of CHRIST in the soul, as He Himself witnesses to His work for the soul.

We may pass this obvious thought, in order to develop another, far less obvious, but perhaps more important: The HOLY SPIRIT needs believing witnesses as the channel of His utterances and the vehicles of His power and grace to unbelieving souls.

If the New Testament be carefully examined, it will be found, in almost if not every instance of conversion, that the HOLY SPIRIT used a believer as His instrument.

- Andrew was used to reach Peter;
- Philip, to reach Nathanael;
- Philip the evangelist, to teach the eunuch;
- even Saul probably got his first impressions from the dying Stephen.
- Peter became the channel of the HOLY GHOST to Cornelius and his kinsmen and friends.
- Paul and Silas were the vehicles of communication with the Philippian jailer.

In the whole work of the SPIRIT upon unbelieving souls, He appears to have been dependent upon believers as media of impression and communication. So far as we know, in all His ordinary workings human agency is indispensable to the completeness of His operations.

The bearing of these thoughts on missions is vitally important.

We pray for the HOLY SPIRIT to "**descend upon all people,**" even upon those among whom no laborers have yet gone. How much warrant have we for such prayer? What if no blessing can come to the souls in inland China or interior Africa, in the Sudan and in Tibet, until believers are there as channels of blessing! What if this be our Lord's meaning, that the Gospel must be first preached as a witness, by a witnessing Church among all nations, before the end comes? What if the one condition of the Spirit's descent "on all flesh" be that GOD's witnesses must be wherever "all flesh" is found, to become the medium for such descending blessing - to call it down, and to receive, recognize, and convey it when it comes!

It is this deep conviction that the SPIRIT of GOD will not accomplish His sacred travail for souls until believers are everywhere present as His human agents, that leads me to press with persistent exhortation, the immediate and world-wide scattering of missionaries. While we concentrate our forces in a few fields we may indeed insure blessing to those fields, but we are rendering blessing impossible where there are no laborers.

If the Church would only obey her Lord and take whatever men and means are at her disposal and distribute them over the whole world-field, the most important condition would be supplied for an outpouring of the SPIRIT on all flesh, because in every part of the habitable earth some of

CHRIST's witnesses would be found!

The work of witnessing derives its principal charm from its close association with GOD. When in that eleventh chapter of Hebrews - that "Westminster Abbey of Old Testament Saints" - Paul gives examples of the witness-bearers of past ages, next to Abel, the first martyr, comes Enoch, whose brief record was "**and Enoch walked with GOD,**" All witnessing to GOD is walking with Him; and to bear witness to Him is to have Him bear witness to us, as He did to Enoch who before his translation "**had this testimony that he pleased God.**" This is of itself the all-sufficient reward and recompense of our work with Him: that when we undertake this world-wide witness to CHRIST, He comes and walks beside us and His personal presence becomes our Heaven.

~ end of chapter 3 ~
