

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

by

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**CHAPTER NINETEEN -
INDEPENDENT MISSIONARIES**

ON THE FRINGE of the missionary movement are a great many independent missionaries. They are called independent missionaries because they are not connected with any organized missionary society. Each one carries on his work independent of anyone else, and usually independent of any authority in the homeland.

There are a number of reasons for these independent missionaries. A large part of them originally went to the field under some organized society. Then, for one reason or another, they withdrew from the society but decided to keep on working in the field. Some of them are individuals who find it hard to work in harmony with others, or to submit to authority. In other cases their mission itself was at least partly at fault. But in any case they are missionaries who don't join another society but go on working alone.

There are others who go to the field independently because they haven't found a mission that would accept them. It may be a matter of health, or age, or some other lack in their qualifications. But when the regular missions turn them down, they somehow find a way of getting enough financial support to go to the field on their own.

A third group are those who believe they have a call to a specific field but can't find a satisfactory mission in that field. There may be some extremists among them who are very hard to please, or even some who don't want to be limited by authority over them. But often their argument is perfectly valid that there is no suitable mission for them in that particular field.

A last group, and one that we are going to deal with separately, is what are commonly called nonprofessional missionaries. Some of them are Christians whom circumstances have taken to other lands, where they do what they can in a missionary way. Others are earnest believers who have deliberately chosen to go to foreign countries to practice their trade or profession in order that they may also do some missionary work. They support themselves by their earnings, try to live a consistent Christian life, and devote their spare time to witnessing for CHRIST.

The two groups to which we are going to give most of our attention are the second and third. These are the ones who deliberately choose to go to the field independent of any mission society

and give their full time to the work. They are constantly approaching missionary counselors, explaining what they want to do and then asking, "Would you advise me to go out independently?"

I have never yet heard of an experienced missionary who answered yes to such a question. He will usually give a number of reasons why such a course is very unwise. But he is often too polite to mention two basic questions that the inquirer ought to face.

The first is this, "If the regular missions have turned you down, are you really fit for missionary service?" The missions do sometimes make mistakes. Sometimes they turn down a candidate who would make a good missionary. More often they accept one who should not be accepted. But they are less liable to mistakes than is any individual. Before going ahead, make doubly sure that it is really the mission that is making the mistake and not you. Remember that if you couldn't succeed in the mission you will stand even less chance independently.

The second question is for those who can't find a satisfactory mission in their chosen field. "Just why are you so sure that you should go to that field and not to any other?" Sometimes the candidate speaks quite confidently of a call. And of course if it is GOD's calling none of us would want to stand in the way. But there are so many imitations of the call of GOD. There are so many young people who feel attracted to certain fields without knowing a thing about the real situation and needs there. It is the fields that attract them, not needy human beings. Be sure it is GOD's call and not the echo of your own desires.

Now there may be an overpowering reason or a distinct call that will lead a missionary into independent work. But before he decides to undertake it, and before any local Church decides to sponsor any such activity, they should both know some of the handicaps that will have to be faced.

First of all, there are some fields today into which no missionary can gain an entrance unless he comes as the representative of a recognized society. This is not because the government discriminates against one form of Christianity or another. It is simply that it has found it much better to deal with responsible organizations than with every Tom, Dick and Harry.

Second, just where are you going and what is the need there? When a well-organized board decides to open a new field, it doesn't blindly plunge into it. First of all it makes a careful survey to find out what the needs are. It consults with other missions in the field so as not to duplicate what they are doing. In the light of these studies it plans its occupation.

The independent missionary almost never does this. His choice of a location is largely a hit-or-miss proposition. And more often than not he hits on a place where he comes into competition with other missions. But he seldom mentions it in his letters home.

Of course there are great needs in most fields. So if the independent missionary will work in co-operation with others, letting his work supplement theirs, he can often find a niche where he can make a real contribution. He may even, after a time, be accepted into the ranks of the mission. It has happened. But most independent missionaries are intent on starting a work all of their own, be it ever so tiny and evanescent.

A serious practical difficulty that faces the independent missionary from the beginning is his lack of experienced counsel. He doesn't know what kind nor how much of an outfit to take with him. He can easily arrange transportation in normal times to the principal ports or airports; but the newcomer without help who tries to proceed inland soon finds himself at the mercy of any glib swindler with a smattering of English. For of course he doesn't know the language of the country, and he is not familiar with its currency nor the legitimate prices. Not knowing where to find lodging, he usually takes advantage of the hospitality of some other missionary. (I have often admired the long-suffering generosity of missionaries in the major cities. How often they are imposed on!) At every step in his inexperience he makes unnecessary blunders from which the counsel of others could have saved him.

And what work is he going to do? Supposing he has somehow learned the language, and found or built a suitable house, and learned how to get along in the land, what will his ministry be? At home he would be called to the pastorate of a Church already established and would find that a big enough job for one man. Here he can't possibly do all that needs to be done.

There's the literature, for example. Even supposing the Bible has already been translated into the language of his people, where is he going to get the other Christian literature -the Sunday school lessons, the devotional books, the Christian magazines - that are so helpful to the pastor at home? And who will teach his teachers? Who will train his young people for Christian service? Missionary work is just too big for anyone person. It calls for co-operation.

And even as the work is too big for the independent missionary working alone, so the independent Church coming from his ministry is too small for satisfactory Christian fellowship and service. We often see this in the experience of the young people. When the time comes to marry, they are told that they should marry in the Church. Yet their own Church fellowship is so limited that they have little choice. The result is that many marry outside the Church and are lost to it. And who has ever attended a conference of churches on the mission field and has not been thrilled at the joy of some of the believers when they see that their small congregation is a part of a much larger fellowship!

But the final and often the greatest test of the work of the independent missionary comes when he must leave that work. It may be for furlough; it may be permanently. Furlough always is a problem. It is a problem even when someone else can fill in for the missionary on furlough. But in the organized mission the problem is minimized. Usually another missionary is assigned to relieve the one on furlough. Or if not, the mission makes some other provision to take care of the work while he is away. It is not likely to be dropped.

The independent missionary has only one choice. Either he must stay on at the risk of a complete breakdown in health, or he must abandon the work for the time of furlough at the risk of a breakdown in the work. Whichever he does, the work is likely to suffer.

Sometimes young people have objected, "But he ought to have a national worker prepared to take over by the time he goes home on furlough." Such a statement is only a demonstration of the prevailing ignorance in this country about missionary work. Unless he is building on another's foundation, the missionary will never have a worker prepared to take full responsibility for the work in just one term. If he could, there would be no excuse for his going back to that place. But it just doesn't happen.

And of course when the independent missionary dies or has to leave the field permanently, he has even less choice. The best thing is to ask some mission to take over the work. But what happens more often is that the work is abandoned.

NONPROFESSIONAL MISSIONARIES

We have already said what the nonprofessional missionaries are. In one sense they are independent, for they are not definitely connected with a mission society. In another sense they are not, for they seldom attempt a complete missionary ministry apart from what others are doing. They might rather be called auxiliary missionaries.

There are some very real values in the service of these part-time missionaries. One value is the same as the value of the testimony of the Christian businessman in the United States. It helps people to realize that Christianity is not just for the preachers; it is a vital faith in everyday life. Rightly or wrongly, some people get the idea that Christianity for the preacher is a livelihood; for the businessman it is a conviction.

Besides this, the businessman can sometimes reach individuals and even groups that are closed to the missionary. In his contacts with other businessmen and in his relations with government officials he can often speak a word in season about his Saviour. He may even get into a lengthy discussion of the Christian faith. People don't think this is inappropriate in other lands, where religious discussions are often more common than in America.

A third advantage of the nonprofessional missionary is that he may at times get an entrance into lands that are closed to regular missionaries. That is, he gets in not as a missionary but as a businessman, an engineer, a professor. And if he is wise and tactful in his approach he may prove the opening wedge for the full proclamation of the Gospel at a later date. At any rate he can commend it by his sincere profession of faith and Christian manner of living.

But don't think that there are no handicaps! There are a number of them, and they ought to be clearly understood. If you understand them they will take away the false impression that this is an easier and more effective way of doing missionary work. It is surprising how many get that false idea. It is a valuable service, and one in which we wish there were many more Christians engaged. But it is not easy; and its effectiveness is not to be compared with that of the full-time missionaries. Here are three of the reasons.

First, the one who is hired to do any secular job is expected to give full-time service on that job. He is not paid to be a missionary but to be a geologist, an engineer, a doctor, or whatever his profession or vocation is. It is only his spare time that he can devote to missionary work. That is, aside from casual conversations in the course of his work. And after a full day of hard work, it takes real consecration to take on other responsibilities of a missionary sort. Of course, too, his Christian service is limited to the immediate neighborhood of the place where he works. He is not free to take any long trips except on vacation.

A second handicap is often found in the nature of his work. Most such men are in the employ of American companies. So naturally the people think of them primarily as employees of the

company. Their interests are the same as the company's interests. If the people think, as they often do, that the company is exploiting them for its own advantage, then its foreign employees are a part of the plan. If they preach the Gospel, it is so the people will be more pliable tools of the company. Even full-time missionaries are accused of being paid agents of the American government. It is no wonder that an employee of a large American firm is suspected, and with much better reason.

Finally, the one who plans to be a nonprofessional missionary may find himself seriously hampered by the ones he works for and with. The company itself is not likely to be very much interested in his purpose. Not that it is opposed to Christianity as such. Rather, it just doesn't want its employees engaged in any activities that might put the company in a bad light and jeopardize its earnings. In some countries this may not be much of a problem. In others, as in strongly Muslim countries, it may be a serious one.

Then too, the worker needs to realize that he may be working in a non-Christian land with fellow Americans who are also non-Christian in their manner of living. That is, many of those who go overseas for business reasons may be members of Christian churches at home, but they appear to leave their Christian principles, with their membership, at home. As Dan Crawford once wrote about Central Africa, "In this climate European meat goes bad, European dogs go bad, and European morals go bad."

The worker may be fortunate enough to find some good Christian fellowship in his work. There are indeed a number of fine Christian businessmen to be found in many lands. But in most cases the situation will be just the opposite. He must be prepared to stand alone, if need be, and to resist the constant pull that would bring him down to the level of the others. His very loneliness will make the temptations all the stronger.

No, it is not an easy service, and the visible results are often disappointing. But it is a valuable service, *principally for those who could not qualify for full-time missionary service.*

This is one thing that must be borne in mind. It is for those who have not been called to a full-time ministry but are willing to carry on their trade or profession in a foreign land where their witness for CHRIST may help bring men to Him. If supposedly Christian businessmen abroad were as zealous for their faith as are the Muslim traders in Africa, what a tremendous effect their witness could have!

~ end of chapter 19 ~
