

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

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A CHURCH MISSIONARY PROGRAM (Continued)

IV. Material support

We have said that the Church should give material support in as large a measure as possible. Don't ask how large a measure that is. I don't know. An I can say is that I never knew a Church that was doing all it could. Yet I have known some very generous ones. The experience of those churches that have increased their giving year by year shows that there is always room for improvement.

The measure of a Church's giving is not the number of its members. Some of the largest churches are the poorest givers.

And we may add that some of the wealthiest churches are put to shame in their giving by some of the poorest. The thing is not to measure ourselves by what others are doing but to ever improve our own position.

For this reason we always do well to set an objective. Make it high enough so that it will not be easy to reach - it ought to be a challenge. But don't make it so high that reaching it is out of the question and the people will get discouraged. People are stirred to greater efforts when they have a definite, reachable goal.

And let the people know just what they are giving for. If there is any item on your missionary budget that you don't want the members to see, it shouldn't be there! There is no surer way to discourage giving than to keep the budget secret.

Sometimes churches are puzzled to know whether they should support only missionaries who are their own members. The answer is not as hard as some make it seem. Of course you should support your own members first of all. That is, if they are not out of fellowship with the Church. They are your representatives on the mission field in a way in which others could not be. They are a part of you. They are your responsibility. Then, if you are able to give more, or if you have no one from your Church on the mission field, give to others. The only question here is whether it is better to give full support to one or part support to several. There are advantages both ways.

Let the Church decide. But if the members of the Church who go out as missionaries are more than the Church can support, the problem is more serious. Even one missionary is more than some churches can support. What then? The only possible answer is this. Keep up your support of those already on your list. Take on the support of the newer ones as fast as you are able. Don't drop the ones nor neglect the others. Let the new missionaries needing support be a challenge to greater efforts in giving. But under no conditions drop the older missionaries so as to support the new ones.

There is a practice that sometimes afflicts our independent churches. I saw it first in the experience of one missionary couple about twenty years ago. In the middle of their second term of service, their two supporting churches, in different parts of the country, both announced that they were dropping their support. They had other interests. There was nothing the missionaries could do.

Such a thing usually happens when there is a change of pastor. The new pastor is not acquainted with the Church's missionaries. He may have some favorite missionary projects of his own. So he begins to push his own program and gets the Church to drop the old one. Not long ago a new pastor was called to a large independent Church. One of the missionaries supported by the Church was a young woman who had grown up in it. For years the Church had been an active supporter of the mission with which she worked. But now things changed. After a time the young woman got notice that the Church was reducing the amount of her support. Its gifts for missions had not decreased; in fact they were increasing. But the Church had some other plans.

This fault is not the only one the Church needs to guard against. Another is the temptation to seek bargains in missions. Recently a young candidate told me his home Church might not be willing to support him on the field. "They told me," he said, "that if I would go to another field it wouldn't cost so much." Maybe not. Maybe we ought to use "good business sense" and spend all our missionary money where we can "get the most for it." Maybe we ought to withdraw our missionaries from the barren Mohammedan fields and send them where results are easier to get. Maybe - but if we do we are turning our backs on the greatest of all missionaries, JESUS CHRIST. Look at what His mission cost Him! We are commercializing the consecration of our young people. They are spending their lives. We are trying to count the value of human souls in dollars and cents.

There are no bargains in missions. You get no more than what you pay for by sacrificial effort. **"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly."**

What does it cost to support a missionary? It depends. Better ask the mission. But this I can say, many missionary men are receiving less than a street car conductor, and many women are paid less than a stenographer fresh out of high school. Why? Because the Church doesn't give more.

"But it doesn't cost so much to live in other countries," some will object.

That belief, however, would be wrong. In many places it costs more, if you try to keep up the same standard of living. What happens is that the missionary learns to do without many of the things we enjoy at home. It just makes it easier that the people around him don't have them either.

The temptation to find bargains in missions makes some take up the idea of supporting native workers. The native can evangelize his own people better than the missionary. The missionary himself admits it. And in some cases he can be supported for a fraction of the cost of a missionary. So why not spend our money supporting native workers?

The missionaries themselves started this idea. Now they have to face it. Some are still spreading it, but more and more they are turning away from it. Over and over they have found that it doesn't work out in practice.

The first part of the argument is sound. The native can evangelize his own people better than the missionary in many cases. Often he can be supported for less than the cost of a missionary. But the conclusion doesn't follow. We still have to have the missionaries.

Let's put it this way. A certain factory hires 200 workmen to manufacture its product. Besides these 200 there are a number of supervisors, a large office force and several top officials. One day an agitator gets hold of some of the workmen. "Why should those officials get so much more money than you do?" he says. "You're the ones who do the work! What's the use of all those white-collar workers? It's you workmen who produce!"

It sounds right to the workers. But get rid of those others and what do you have? Only one word can describe it - chaos. Supplies dwindle; finished products pile up in the warehouse with no one to buy them; faulty pieces reach the consumer and break down in use; bills pile up; credit is gone; the factory has to close its doors.

The missionaries will be needed until they have nationals trained to take over the whole of the work, not just the preaching. We have said that native workers can evangelize their own people better than missionaries. This is not because they are better workers. It is largely because a foreigner always works under a handicap. People always listen more readily to one of themselves, one whose previous life they may have known and whose way of speaking has a familiar sound.

But native workers have to be converted first. Then they have to develop in Christian experience. And if they are to give full time to Christian work they must be trained. All of this means work for the missionary. But it isn't the end. The workers must be directed and supervised in their work. They must be counseled, occasionally rebuked, and sometimes discharged. Or would you be willing to hire a worker, sight unseen, and support him regularly in the vague hope that he will do good work without supervision? Some churches are actually doing it! And they have come to regret it.

Still, this is not what is turning the missionaries away from the hiring of native workers. It is something even more fundamental. While native workers can do a good job of evangelism, this doesn't mean native workers hired with foreign funds. Especially not today. We Americans are constantly being accused of trying to buy people with our money. So the native worker we hire is at once under suspicion. He is the American's hired man.

But let's go a little deeper. The hiring of native workers with American funds has seemed a good way of multiplying our ministry. We have usually thought of it as temporary. Through these

workers a Church would soon be built up, and then the mission could withdraw its support and the Church would take over. It was all very logical. But it didn't work. Two or three generations later we would still find the workers supported by American funds. And not too many workers at that. The Church also seemed very weak.

Missionaries have been learning that the so-called indigenous principles are the only sound principles on which to build a lasting work. The word indigenous simply means native. In its simplest form it means that the Church is to be native from the beginning. The natives are expected to spread the Gospel and win members for the Church; they are to pay all the expenses of the Church; and they are to run the Church. The terms most often used are: self-propagation, self-support, and self-government.

We'll not go into the details of these principles. But we want to call attention to the fact that the natives are to win their fellows, which we said is good. But they are also to pay the expenses. That means no money from American churches for their support.

There is only one reason why the missionaries have opposed using American money to pay native workers. In the long run it hinders the Church. There is no question about it. It has been proved over and over. One large mission adopted the policy some years ago of refusing to accept gifts for designated native workers. They would accept undesignated gifts to be used only at the mission's discretion. They were trying to shift the responsibility to the Church itself.

After a few years the mission was able to report that the Church was growing faster than ever before in the mission's history. Besides - and this seemed to surprise them - the number of natives engaged in the work was many times what it was before. In other words, they got more workers when they stopped putting them on the American payroll. It didn't happen immediately. It took time. But the end result was excellent.

What place does the missionary have in such a program?

Just the place that Paul had in New Testament days. He introduces the Gospel and welcomes the first converts; he helps the Church get started and begins their instruction in the Word; he counsels and admonishes them and is constant in prayer for them; he shows them how, but theirs is the responsibility for carrying on the work of the Church. And he trusts there will come a day when he, like Paul, can say, "I have no more room in these parts" (see Romans 15:23). As some have said, "The missionary's job is to work himself out of a job."

When we said the Church's objective is "to provide material support" for missions, we didn't mean just money. Money is the most widely useful. But sometimes you can do a great deal in other ways.

Of course some will think immediately of the "missionary barrel." The barrel isn't used as much as it used to be. In other days churches gathered all sorts of items, useful and otherwise, and sent them off to missionaries in faraway places. Some things were for the missionary and his family, others to be distributed among the people. The arrival of the barrel was always an exciting event. No one could ever foretell what might be in it. But in most fields such shipments are no longer welcomed. High tariff barriers have been raised by so many countries that the missionary may have to pay in duty several times what the shipment is worth.

So if you are thinking of sending your missionary a package - big or little - think again. Don't send it until you have checked with him. Then follow his instructions. You can't send him a surprise package this way, but better no surprise than a tariff that will cost him dearly. There is no way of prepaying duty charges.

But when the missionary is at home you can readily give him things that will be useful on the field. He will be glad to tell you what he can use. Only remember this, if you are buying new items at retail, you might do better to give the missionary the money and let him buy them. You see, he often is in touch with Christian dealers who will supply the goods at wholesale. Of course you will not give him used articles unless they are in tip-top condition.

The same thing applies to new missionaries whom you are helping with their outfit. The one difference is that the new missionary doesn't know exactly what he will need. He has to depend on an outfit list supplied by the mission.

Whether giving money or goods, there is one error to avoid. Don't give as if dispensing charity. And make sure that the congregation does not get that impression. Give as to a faithful worker who is worthy of his hire. He is the Lord's servant; give as to the Lord Himself.

~ end of chapter 26 ~
