

## PREFACE

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It is difficult to exaggerate the extent and the importance of the changes that are taking place nowadays in the thinking and practice of evangelical Christians in relation to the worldwide mission given by Christ to his church.

That mission is being seen, more clearly perhaps than ever before, as *world* mission, embracing every part of the world, including those countries from which missionaries have gone abroad. Every Christian lives and works on the mission field, for 'the field is the world'. Furthermore, the task of world mission has been entrusted to the whole church, not just a select group of elite Christians but to every man Jack and woman Jill among us! Nor is it a task for individualists responsible to no-one but themselves and God. We are to work in partnership, as members of the one church of God with forged links at as many points as possible.

Slowly, sometimes painfully, we are also learning that the missionary task relates not merely to the purely spiritual aspects of human need, but to the temporal ones also. Despite the fact that missionaries have for so long and so often ministered to health and educational needs, we are only beginning to realize, it seems, that these are not peripheral, secondary and distracting considerations, but are an integral part of God's all-embracing care for the needs of his creatures in which we are called to share.

We are also beginning to see that the degree of success that God has given to the endeavours of missionaries to propagate the church worldwide is itself transforming the situation and giving it new dimensions. Broadly speaking, it is no longer a question of the church reaching out to 'Macedonias' where it does not yet exist. The church is a patent and exhilarating fact—virtually worldwide (at any rate as far as nations are concerned). While in some countries it is still pathetically weak, in others it is virile, growing fast and reaching out to its own 'regions beyond'. The contrast, by the way, is not between the Anglo-Saxon world and 'Darkest

Africa' or the 'Neglected Continent' of South America. For the church in some countries of Africa, Latin America—and Asia for that matter—is in far better shape than in some countries within the Anglo-Saxon world.

Some of these matters are explored in the articles carried in this review. Most of them have their origin in papers given during a day seminar held by the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship on 24 September 1983. They have been revised or rewritten for publication and an additional paper has been specially commissioned.

David Porter's article lays a firm biblical foundation for the papers that follow. Freely drawing on the rich biblical teaching on mission, he shows that mission gives expression to the person of God, reflects the practice of God, fulfils the purpose of God, derives its pattern from God, and is—or should be—a characteristic feature of the people of God.

From his wealth of missionary experience, Ernest Oliver singles out three areas for special attention in his essay on 'The Challenge of Mission Today'. He vividly pinpoints new understandings and opportunities in regard to the church, culture and communications.

Despite all the changes in the situation, there is still a need for Christians to sit loose to their ties to one part of the world and be prepared to serve God wherever he may send them. Margaret Jones deals perceptively with the factors—personal, social and spiritual—that need to be taken into account when selecting people for work in a new culture; has words of wisdom to say, drawn from her own extensive experience in this field, regarding training for such work; and stresses the often neglected duty of churches which send workers abroad to maintain as high a level of pastoral care of them as is possible.

Ray Cawston, experienced missionary that he is and currently trainer of others, explores the theme of accountability. Ultimately, the missionary is accountable to God, but this does not exclude accountability to the sending church, to missionary colleagues and to freshly planted churches. It demands it. The biblical themes of 'partnership' and 'fellow-worker' are used to arrive at valuable principles. Financial accountability is also touched on.

Not the least valuable contribution to this review is the sustained plea from Olive Rogers for due recognition of the role of non-professional and short-term missionaries. The plea, coming all the more powerfully from one who has spent half a lifetime of professional, long-term work, is well argued, deeply rooted in scripture and profusely illustrated from Christian history.

The concluding article—apart from a brief but valuable note on

resources available for missionary education—attempts to look ahead in a number of directions. It senses the importance of the movement of personnel around the world by means of short-term missionary commitments and business appointments (as well as the more traditional long-term pattern which is likely to continue, though not so predominantly as far as western Christians are concerned). It lays stress on the vital need of forging direct links between churches from which missionaries have gone out and the churches which they have planted and which they have subsequently left—for perfectly good reasons—to fend for themselves. And it emphasizes the crucial need for a massive programme of sustained, well-informed education in missionary principles for the churches in this country, many of which are still thinking in terms of the missionary principles relevant to an age that has largely gone. In conclusion it presents a handful of recommendations, some of which are already being implemented, all of which need to be prosecuted with vigour.