

The New Missionary

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I

“NEW missionaries wanted.” What a train of extraordinary thoughts that sentence can produce ! Each word in it is provocative. Even the one that seems to be the least open to debate, the central word ‘missionaries’, has been variously interpreted and there are those who are unhappy to restrict it merely to those who are called to service overseas. There is a wise protest here, but, until such time as better terms are invented, it seems well to continue to use the term as an abbreviation for ‘foreign missionaries’.

But who wants new missionaries ? And in what sense are they to be new ? Is this merely a fresh appeal from the missionary societies, who may be regarded as having a vested interest in their own continued existence, or are there new factors in the situation which call for our earnest consideration ? Certain it is that we are living in a new world, a world for which God has a word which urgently needs to be spoken. The old compelling motive, the call of God, remains as indispensable to the vocation of a missionary as it ever was. “How shall they preach except they be sent ?”

But the great new fact of our time is the existence of the world-wide Church, and we may well pause to ask whether the word God has to speak to Africa should not be spoken solely by Africans, the word to India by Indians. In each of the so recently called missionary countries there is now a living Church, and it is on that Church that the main burden of witness and evangelization must rest. It is easy, however, to overestimate the strength of these younger Churches and to judge them purely by the great leaders some of them have produced. The interesting fact is that, strong or weak, these Churches are calling for new missionaries ; new in the sense of more and also in the sense of different.

This point was made clear beyond all dispute at the meeting of the International Missionary Council at Whitby, Ontario, in July, 1947, when the representatives of the younger Churches, meeting as a group apart from those of the older Churches, insisted on their need for more missionary colleagues. In the words of the report of that conference : “From the older churches the younger churches are asking for literally thousands of men and women as missionary helpers. . . . The younger churches ask for men and women of tried spiritual quality and of the humility which rejoices to lead by serving”.

More recent pronouncements from the conferences and synods of various Churches have only served to underline that request. Nor is China a real exception to this. Rather should we see China as fulfilling one of the predictions of Whitby somewhat more rapidly than had then been anticipated, for did not that same report ask for more missionary helpers “to take immediate advantage of opportunities in lands where it seems likely that the Gospel will not have free entry for more than another ten or fifteen years” ?

That more missionaries are needed and needed urgently few, with a knowledge of the facts, can doubt. There is equally little room for doubt that in many respects the modern missionary must be different. This is no great criticism of the missionaries of earlier generations, for while some of the 'newness' which is forced upon the modern missionary is due to the mistakes of those who went before, it has, to a much greater extent, been created by the magnificent work they did. What they achieved, despite their human shortcomings, can hardly be summed up better than in the words of Dr. Max Warren in *The Christian Mission*: "The tales of the idiosyncrasies of these missionaries of another day are legion. The limitations of their understanding are written in their own words for any who may want to pillory them. Sometimes the quality of fanaticism was not lacking in their service. The roads they built were not always straight or accurately cambered. But they were buried beside the road. And the road was built. Their epitaph was written long ago—'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace'". It is because of what they accomplished that the missionary of to-day is working on a stretch of road still further ahead, although he may at times be called upon to repair the old or even straighten out some unnecessary curves.

II

It has been suggested that the change in the missionary situation can best be expressed by saying that the age of the pioneer is past. This is scarcely true, for while few missionaries nowadays are called to open up entirely new geographical areas, all are called to face new situations and face them with all the courage of pioneers, or they will very soon cease to be missionaries. It is a true instinct which makes us connect the word missionary with the word pioneer. There are many ways of sub-dividing the modern missionary era, but one of the best surely is to think of (1) the age of the geographical pioneers, (2) the age of the institutional pioneers, and (3) the age of the pioneers of human relationships. Not that these ages are mutually exclusive, but the titles do represent the main direction of the missionary drive in each particular period. And for us to-day Alexander Duff is as far away as David Livingstone.

Pioneers of human relationships, those who "rejoice to lead by serving"—these are the kinds of missionaries for whom the younger Churches are calling; and "human relationships" is to be understood in its widest as well as in its narrowest meaning. Let no new missionary go overseas who does not know how to work easily and happily with other men and women. The day of the individualist is over, so far as the mission field is concerned. Many of the findings of the meeting of the International Missionary Council held at Tambaram in 1938 were rendered obsolete by the second World War, but the chapter on "The Place, Function and Training of the Future Missionary" is as up-to-date as anyone could desire. Two thoughts run through the various recommendations found there. (1) The younger Churches are "exposed to the disintegrating influences of contemporary life" (2) A major function of the missionary is "to be a

colleague and friendly helper in the upbuilding of the life of the younger churches ”.

Before we examine more closely what this must mean for the new missionary, it is worth while noticing that he is, in fact, one of the “ disintegrating influences ”. He is this inevitably both as the bearer of another culture and also as a preacher of the Gospel. Like Jeremiah it is his mission—and often most effectively so when he is least conscious of it—to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down ” as well as “ to build and to plant ”. For him, also, as for Jeremiah the first half of this commission may often seem more obvious to those to whom he is sent than the second half. In so far as this is due to the Gospel which he has to preach he need make no apology for it ; but this lays on him a very special burden both to distinguish clearly between the Gospel and our western culture, in its ecclesiastical as well as its political and social forms, and also to proclaim in no uncertain manner, by life as well as lip, that “ fellowship in the Gospel ” which can give the longed-for sense of ‘ belonging ’ in the midst of a disintegrating world.

The distinction between the message we bear and the western culture of which we are a part is by no means always easy to make ; and, quite apart from the intellectual difficulties involved, all too frequently we find national pride entering in—a pride which attributes more in our civilization to the influence of Christianity than deserves to be so regarded. We are prepared, of course, to admit that we are no longer a Christian nation ; but how rarely do we—to quote the Tambaram report again—“ witness against all the varied forms of secularized and materialistic life in the society in which we live, particularly that which derives from our own country ”. This is what the younger Churches expect of us and for many this must sound extraordinarily like a genuine *cri de coeur*.

It may be objected that there is nothing essentially new in placing the emphasis on human relationships, in stressing the fellowship of the Gospel. The idea of fellowship, indeed, has been central in Christianity from the time of the calling out of the Apostles. Yet it must be admitted that this emphasis has been largely obscured in recent times by our almost exclusively individualist approach to the Gospel. Furthermore, we are always more ready to bypass our differences rather than to surmount them. In this country if we cannot worship happily with our fellow Christians in one parish, we can always attend the church in a neighbouring parish or that of another denomination within our own. The problem cannot be escaped thus easily abroad. A congregation there cannot always be a “ fellowship of kindred minds ”, but for that very reason it has the opportunity of proving that it is the “ fellowship of minds that are not kindred ” which is really “ like to heaven above ”.

The call to the new missionary, however, is not a general one to good fellowship but a particular one to work alongside or, more frequently, as a subordinate to a man of another race, whose training on the intellectual level at least is likely to be considerably lower than that of the missionary. This may happen in school, hospital or parish. The young clergyman, for example, going out from this country after three

years' experience in a busy parish, will probably find himself acting as an assistant to a national clergyman, his senior in age, in years in the ministry and in experience, very obviously his superior in knowledge of the language and of local custom, but quite possibly his inferior in intellectual attainments, in theological background and in knowledge of modern methods of evangelism and parish work. This is a comparatively new situation and one calling for deep insight and spiritual understanding on the part of the young recruit. It is a test of grace which not everyone can pass. Yet here is one of the great needs of the younger Churches to-day, young men of experience who can work with sympathetic understanding with older men of the younger Churches and pass on to them something of the spiritual inheritance of the older Churches.

III

The most important of these co-operative enterprises on which national Christian and missionary are called upon to embark together is "the training of leaders, up to the highest level, for theological, educational, social, medical and pastoral work". So the Whitby Conference phrased it, and thus did it endorse the best missionary thinking of recent years. Not that we have always lived up to our best thinking. In theological training, for example, we have all too frequently been content with a very low level; a much lower level of education and of technical training than we have required for our doctors and teachers. To-day we have realized our mistake here, and in some areas at least are attempting to rectify it. The younger Churches are by no means yet fully equipped to out-think their rivals for the loyalty of the people, but great steps have been made recently to send out able young theologians from this country to train the men who will do the thinking, the preaching and the writing in the years to come.

No less vital is the stimulating of evangelistic effort by the ordinary church people. It is all too easy for a missionary, enthusiastic for the preaching of the Gospel, to defeat his own ends by drawing too firm a distinction between pastoral and evangelistic work. The missionary who insists that he has been sent to preach the Gospel and not to build up the local church may find the local Christians replying that it is their task to shepherd the flock and not to preach to the outsider, when the missionary desires their co-operation. Here again it is personal relationships that count and the right stress on the Christian fellowship as a group intended to be out-going in its witness.

The Tambaram report points out that "at least two types of pioneer missionaries are still needed in many fields: (a) those who will penetrate geographical areas whose populations are still entirely unevangelized, and (b) those who will discover and follow new lines of approach to the non-Christian people in whose midst the churches are set". But the report then adds the very useful reminder that "in both cases the function of the missionary is to help to make the Christian mission a more aggressive, positive force for righteousness and goodwill, after the mind and heart of Christ". Again, the stress is not

on the individual missionary but upon his place within the mission of the whole Christian Church.

The second type of pioneering to which reference is here made demands from the Church to-day a larger measure of concentrated and consecrated thinking than almost any other kind of work. New methods of approach are needed to people, the pattern of whose lives has been radically altered by the social, economic and political revolution. In Western Europe it would not be unfair to say that the industrial revolution found the Churches almost completely unprepared to fulfil this task of "frontier evangelism". Comparable situations obtain in Africa and Asia to-day, awaiting the coming of the missionary with vision and insight. Nor are these the only demands that will be made on the new missionary who is prepared to face such a challenge. For many of them a simplicity of living will be required far more difficult than that maintained by the earlier pioneers, for this new simplicity will be one of daily choice rather than anything imposed by the sheer force of outward circumstances.

To reach such groups the Church may well have to sponsor some revolutionary social experiments, a course to which her own inner nature ought naturally to lead her. The popular report of the Whitby Conference, "To-morrow is Here", has said concerning the interpreting of the Gospel in the new day: "In an age of revolution, the Church must demonstrate that it is not a bulwark of an outmoded privileged order but that the Gospel is revolutionary, and in a more thoroughgoing and constructive sense than is any competitor". It is a question of no small importance whether missionaries of the older Churches are capable of rising to such a challenge and to what extent the ordinary members of the older Churches would support them if they did.

Not that the younger Churches or the missionaries whose privilege it is to minister in them have always to wait for the approval of the older Churches. There are not a few ways in which the older Churches may learn from the younger; not the least among them being to walk the path of Church union. The modern ecumenical movement with all its ramifications grew out of the missionary movement, and the liveliest discussions on the matters of Church union to-day are to be heard on the mission field. The new missionary will be faced with these questions, not at an academic level nor as an optional extra along with other matters of church interest, but as a matter of first-rate practical importance.

It is impossible to conclude an article on the subject of the new missionary without asking what lessons there are for him to learn from the closing of the door of western missionary endeavour in China, even though there has hardly been time yet to evaluate this event accurately and to judge its full significance. One thing at least is clear and that is that missionary strategy has been right in so far as it has sought to establish a Church that was self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. The Church in China has proved strong in so far as it had achieved that end. The call to other fields is to pursue these ends as rapidly as possible. That the Church in China was ill-prepared intellectually to meet the challenge of Communism, everybody is prepared to admit, and that fact must be duly noted for the guidance of

theological education elsewhere. Should other Churches in other parts of the world find themselves needing to prepare to face the challenge of Communism, they will find their best preparation in a deep study of the Bible, a knowledge of Communist theory and practice, the development of a warm and close Christian fellowship, an understanding of the purpose of God in history, and a complete dedication of themselves to Christ. In the attaining of these the new missionary has a full part to play.

Here is a challenge as great as any with which earlier missionaries had to deal. It is all too easy, it must be admitted, for a missionary to be swamped with routine administrative work ; the rut being as familiar a place overseas as it is at home. But for those with eyes to see and with ears open to hear the voice of God there is still the call to " turn the world upside down " .

The Importance of the United States in the Missionary Movement To-day

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I

NOT long ago I was reading in Mr. G. Kitson Clark's book *The English Inheritance* the section in which he discusses the importance of the missionary movement in the 19th century. After pointing out that with the trader and the pioneer the missionaries penetrated everywhere, he proceeds to sketch the background against which their activities must be set. " In this century," he says, " the rest of the world lay at the mercy of Europe. Her arms were more powerful, her ships were larger and swifter, her commerce more highly developed than those of any other portion of the earth. That she would use this power to enrich the life of her own inhabitants was, and is still, historically inevitable and possibly historically desirable, but in what ways her power was likely to affect the lives and happiness of non-Europeans was, and is still, a question of the greatest importance, about which unfortunately a great many Englishmen have always refused to think without prejudice. In the last century European expansion was too often viewed with bland self-confidence and on occasion supported by an exuberant patriotism that could itself be the tool of some very ugly forces. Nowadays the pendulum has swung to the other end of its beat but not divagated into truth. The words which slip from the pen are ' exploitation ' and ' imperialism ' . Each word has at least two meanings and they are not normally used honestly. Exploitation can mean development of a territory for the advantage of its primitive inhabitants and the world or its enslavement simply for the purpose of gaining profit for certain Europeans. Imperialism can mean the extension of the rule of a foreign power over other men's territory