

*MISSIONARY METHODS IN THE TIMES OF THE  
APOSTLES.*

WE have more express and oft-repeated instructions for missionary work in the words of Jesus, and more clearly defined, and at the same time more richly coloured, examples in the Acts of the Apostles, than we have of any other Church work. The most important and difficult questions referring to *inner Church life*, which had to be answered soon after the Ascension of Jesus, are either ignored by the tradition of the community or only very slightly referred to, and even then rather in prophetic intimations than in distinct commands in the words of their Lord. And, in fact, the tradition, which has been reduced to writing, answers very truly to the historic reality. In many respects Jesus was content to plant faith and the kingdom of God in the hearts of His disciples, and to leave it to the productive power of this germ to fashion a visible body for itself. Jesus *commanded* time after time that missionary work was to be carried on, from the day He declared that the fishermen by the Lake of Gennesaret should be fishers of men till the day when, as the risen One, He commissioned the Apostles to make disciples of all nations. The Apostles were not only missionaries, the Lord had also called them to be the shepherds of the community that had been gathered in, the stewards and overseers of His house, the Church. But their name of "Apostle" was given to them because their Master had sent them out to preach, first to the lost sons of His own house, then to the cities of the Samaritans, and on the highways of world-wide traffic which led to the most distant heathen nations; and this name of "messengers, missionaries" Jesus gave

to them Himself.<sup>1</sup> For this, the principal work of their calling, and from which they derived their name, He did not leave them without instructions, which seem from their wording to enter into the minutest particulars, even to their dress and the whole outfit for their journey. The difference is undeniable which comes to light here between missions and other manifestations of Church life. It was a matter of course that the believer should live by his faith, and that the community of saints should edify itself, and endeavour to preserve its most blessed possession. But to carry the gospel to those who were outside, or even in opposition, was something so difficult and hazardous, so far removed from all instincts of life and self-preservation, that the oft-repeated commands, the newly-awakened sense of duty, and the indelible recollection of the binding and encouraging commands of Jesus were needed, and are still needed, to keep this work going. The missionary command of Jesus was the goad of the driver which was needed even by the Apostles. St. Paul felt it, for he says, "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 16); and he drove it deep into the flesh of his scholar Timothy, who had become indolent. We may also well say that the missionary command of Jesus to the Apostles was a light that illuminated their path, and which placed a glorious goal before their eyes in the pressure and darkness of an imperfect present. However, it is by no means the case that the Apostles possessed, either in the words or in the example of their Master, precepts of which the conscientious fulfilment would form their missionary work.

<sup>1</sup> Luke vi. 13, xi. 49; John xiii. 16; comp. Matt. x. 16, John iv. 38, xx. 21. I do not know of any satisfactory investigation of the apostolate. The unsatisfactory book by W. Seuffert, *Der Ursprung und die Bedeutung des Apostolats* (Leiden, 1887), ought to have incited some one to write another. A lecture given by me at the Pastoral Conference at Dresden, in the year 1890, on this subject has not been printed, because the want can only be supplied by a much fuller and more scholarly treatment.

Let us look more closely at the instructions Jesus gave to the Apostles when He sent them out for the first time on a missionary journey.<sup>1</sup> Two things are plain: that principles were laid down which reach far beyond the particular events recorded, but that the details, definite laws and prohibitions, were not rules binding on all future missionary work. Neither were they so regarded by the Apostles. It is true that we come across either one or the other of these rules in the later conduct of missions,<sup>2</sup> but they were not kept to the letter. The command which Jesus gave to His disciples, to go only to their countrymen was from the first only temporary. When it was set aside later by the command to convert all nations, that which had been placed before the eyes of the disciples all along as the end of their calling only came to light as an express command. Had they not long since been called the salt of the *earth* and a light of the *world*? But when it became a question of carrying out this command, no saying of their Lord clung to the memory of the Apostles, which gave a definite answer to the questions, when faith to their own people had been sufficiently kept, through which of themselves, in what direction, and under what forms and conditions the gospel was to pass over from Israel to the heathen. The instructions to go forth without money for the journey, without provisions, without a purse, and a double supply of clothing, and, on the other hand, to claim everywhere the hospitality of all good men, could not be carried out in all places. It

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 5 ff.; Mark vi. 7 ff.; Luke ix. 3 ff.; comp. x. 1 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 14; 1 Tim. v. 18; comp. Matt. x. 10, Luke x. 7. In the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* the same expression is applied to the settled prophets and teachers (c. xiii.); but with reference to the "Apostles," which means in this book the missionaries or itinerant teachers, the instruction of Jesus is altered, so that they may only claim the hospitality of the community for one day, or, at the most, for two, and that at their departure they were only to take provisions for one day but no money (c. xi.; cf. my *Forschungen*, iii. 298 f.).

is, perhaps, indicative of the way in which these rules were interpreted, even in the first generation, that they have not been once consistently transmitted.

According to St. Mark, the Apostles were to take a staff as their only equipment for the journey. According to St. Matthew and St. Luke, they were not to take one.<sup>1</sup> Jesus may have said either the one thing or the other, or both, on different occasions, but the meaning remains the same, and has certainly been rightly interpreted in essentials from the first. Jesus describes and demands by intelligible examples and characteristic marks of outward behaviour the spirit in which His messengers are to follow their calling. But this is nothing else than a spirit thankful for grace given, trusting in God, joyful in faith, self-denying; and without such a spirit no man is worthy to be called Jesus' disciple. Circumstantial instructions and methodical directions for the management of missions were not bequeathed by the Lord to His disciples. The disciples were to evolve the right methods for the conduct of missions from the nature of the task recognised as a duty, from a knowledge of the circumstances under which it was to be solved, from the leadings of God, and from their own experience. This was done by apostolic Christendom with great skill and magnificent results, not only because a consciousness of the

<sup>1</sup> Mark vi. 8; Matt. x. 10; Luke ix. 3. In his Syrian *Diatessaron* Tatian, who was followed by the Syrian translators of the Gospels, and also by the Latin harmonists of the Middle Ages, got rid of the contradiction by saying that Jesus forbade the carrying of a thick staff but allowed a thin stick to be carried (comp. *Forschungen*, i. 143; *Theol. Literaturblatt*, 1895, Sp. 18; *N. kirchl. Ztschr.*, 1894, p. 95). Still more foolish, however, was the alteration of the original *πάβδον*, Matt. x. 10, Luke ix. 3, into *πάβδους*, as though Jesus had only forbidden several sticks to be carried at the same time; for so the alteration must have been intended, although the object was by no means thereby attained. The contradiction is only apparent with reference to shoes or sandals. From Mark vi. 13, compared with James v. 14, we might conclude that Jesus instituted anointing with oil at that time. In fact, Tatian seems to have mixed up something of that kind with the last missionary command (*Forsch.*, i. 219, note 4; *Gesch. d. Kanons*, ii. 554).

duty to carry on missions was alive in the majority of its members, but also because that spirit, which Jesus had described as especially necessary for missionary work, was present in a remarkable degree in the leaders. Missionary work requires no other virtues than those which naturally belong to the normal conditions of Christian life, but it requires them in a marked degree; it requires whole Christians, or, in other words, it requires the *union* of those moral qualities by which faith is everywhere converted into fruitful deeds. And it was just to this union of opposing qualities, especially indispensable in mission work, that Jesus expressly referred in His instructions when He said, "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

These words applied primarily to the dangers which awaited the missionaries. They were to unite the wisdom of serpents and the harmlessness of doves because Jesus sent them as sheep amongst wolves. They were to show the wisdom of serpents, especially by being on their guard before men who would bring them to the judgment seat and seek to get them punished. They were to show the harmlessness of doves by trusting entirely to their Father in heaven, who by His Spirit would put into their mouths the right words for their defence in the hour of danger. But this rhetorical rather than logical enumeration of qualifications which must be united no more exhausts the meaning of these words than it confines them to times of persecution. They are of universal importance for all mission work. The right way in which to deal with men in order to avoid danger and persecution, or, if it must be, to endure triumphantly, and the frame of mind which this presupposes, cannot be essentially different from the way by which men must be won for the gospel. But this right method, which is, however, an art, depends upon the union of qualities which are very often separated, the qualities of which serpents and doves are the types. Jesus did not

hesitate to take the serpent, in whose image the old, evil enemy appeared, as the type of that good sense and thoughtful wisdom without which missionary work cannot be carried on with complete success. The serpent in Paradise, with as much skill as determination, knew how to make use of every circumstance in the position of those he wished to draw into his net. Missionaries, too, must study the circumstances under which they will have to work, and the inner and outer circumstances of those they wish to win. They must ponder over the ways and means which will lead them to the goal, they must choose the best and use them with determination. It is self-evident that their object can only be beneficial to the salvation of men, and not murderous like that of the serpent, and that this holy aim must not be sought by unrighteous means. But it is only in accordance with the experience of the one-sidedness of man's nature that the Lord expressly adds that the simplicity and harmlessness of which the dove is a type must not be lost sight of in the wisdom of the deliberations and the expediency of the actions. If such principles are not deeply rooted in the heart, no real devotion to the heavenly calling and no true inspiration for it, no heeding of the silent beckoning and still small voice of God, and no resignation to the hidden ways of providence are possible. Humble trust in the guidance of the Lord, when doing His work, is replaced by self-seeking and self-glorification.

When we consider the manifold missionary activities of apostolic times in the light of these words, and in the directions given by Jesus, the missionaries seem to be divided naturally into three classes. The gospel was then spread by those who felt impelled to do what they could, and who acted with the harmlessness of doves. We see no trace in their work of far-seeing plans, no definite methods. Others, again, carried on missions with such cunning

deliberation, with such skilful use of circumstances favourable for their object, but also with such complete absence of pure devotion to the cause of the gospel, that their actions reminded St. Paul of the guile of the serpent who tempted Eve.<sup>1</sup> But a third kind of mission in those times answers to the requirement of Jesus that the wisdom of the serpent should be added to the harmlessness of the dove, and to this last class the Lord, the righteous Judge, has accorded the prize of victory in the missionary contest.

### I.

In the first eleven chapters of the Acts of the Apostles we read of the activity displayed in spreading the Christian faith, and we see how the first of the three methods of carrying on missions predominated. In the nature of the case there was little room for human deliberation as to how, when, and where this activity should first be exercised, and there was little to suggest the development of definite methods. It was the express command of Jesus that witness should be first borne of His Resurrection to the people of Jerusalem who had taken part in the Crucifixion in varying degrees, but, nevertheless, deliberately. The element of the supernatural is predominant in the execution of this commission. Signs and wonders not only accompany the preaching of the Word as the confirmatory witness and judgment of God, but they precede it and prepare the way for it. An audience was provided for St. Peter's first sermons by the miracle of Pentecost, the unpremeditated healing of the lame beggar at the Temple gate, and the compulsory appearance of the Apostles before the Sanhedrim. The continued participation of the oldest community in the Temple worship naturally brought

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 3; comp. below, note p. 399. According to the context Romans xvi. 20 (cf. v. 17 ff.) links similar appearances of that time with the remembrance of Genesis iii. 15.

about the hearing of the gospel by many in the halls of the extensive buildings of the Temple. The miraculous powers, which issued forth from the community, formed a barrier against the barbarities of the populace and against the disciplinary measures of the Temple police. In fact, the whole theory of missions was summed up in the words of St. Peter: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts iv. 20). The theme of the missionary sermons was provided; it was the personal experience of the preachers: "He, whom ye have killed and believe to be dead, is risen and lives"; and the art of its delivery and the mode of its presentation consisted chiefly in the frank expression of undoubting conviction. The certainty that they had seen the Risen Lord, the lively remembrance of the teachings of Jesus which had thus been confirmed, the popular knowledge of the Scriptures which the Apostles had always possessed, and the fellowship in religious customs and a national point of view which united the preachers and hearers: all these things worked together to make these idiots and unlearned men impressive missionary preachers, to whom their opponents could not refuse a certain amount of admiration (Acts iv. 13).

Neither was the first important advance from this early stage of missions the work of human deliberation, the well-planned discharge of missionary duty. The local community of Jerusalem became the Church of the land of Palestine chiefly as the result of the persecution in which first flowed a martyr's blood. The violent dispersion of Christendom, which till then had been crowded together within narrow bounds, resulted in the release of her slumbering powers of expansion. It was as though the gardener who had reared his plants in narrow boxes had set them in the open garden; only there could they branch out and bear blossom and fruit. While those who had been called to be missionaries, the Apostles, even yet felt bound to



hold on in Jerusalem, those members of the community, who were scattered abroad from Jerusalem, could not help bearing witness to their faith in the villages of Judæa and Samaria where they had found refuge. Philip, whose calling had hitherto been to administer the funds for the poor and the widows in Jerusalem, that the Apostles might carry on unhindered their calling as preachers, became an evangelist, a leading missionary. The boldest steps, such as carrying the gospel from the Jews to the only half-Jewish Samaritans, the first baptism of a Gentile from a distant land, who inclined to Judaism, were carried out blindly, and by those even who had no personal commission to preach the gospel. The Apostles had the oversight, but with a single eye they recognised all as the work of God that had been brought about by simple faith, without the wisdom of the serpent. The work went on in this way for a considerable time. Antioch became a second Christian metropolis, the cradle of the name of Christian. The novelty did not consist in the fact that here, as in Palestine, a few, like Cornelius, of heathen birth, were joined to the otherwise Jewish Church as isolated exceptions, but that a community arose in which such exceptions formed a new rule. Neither was this decisive step taken by those who had been called to be missionaries. The original community in Jerusalem had been formed, in no small measure, from the beginning of Jews and Jewish proselytes from distant lands, who had been settled in Jerusalem a longer or a shorter period. Amongst them were people from Cyrene, Cyprus, and Antioch.<sup>1</sup> Driven out of Jerusalem, many of them returned to their old homes, and did not keep silence there about the new faith which they had received in Jerusalem, and for the sake of which they had been driven out. When such people, unknown to history,

<sup>1</sup> Acts iv. 36, vi. 5, xi. 19 f., xxi. 16; comp. ii. 5-11, 14, 41.

first dared, on their own account, to tell the heathen in Antioch of Jesus, it was certainly not done in the conscious conviction that now the hour had come to cross the boundaries of Israel. How could such people have felt called upon to take such a responsible step! Rather we see again here that which was most momentous occurring as it were by chance, and those who had been called to be the leaders of missionary work only subsequently proving and justifying the accomplished fact. Barnabas, who was sent by the Apostles to Antioch, could only state as a fact that the grace of God had produced true Christian faith in the heathen there. Reflections on the importance of the event, and conscious measures for the furtherance of the same, amongst which the permanent settlement of Barnabas in Antioch and St. Paul's migration from Tarsus were the most important, only followed this epoch-making event. If we knew the missionary history of those times more exactly, we should certainly be able to prove, in many other cases, that many prosperous settlements grew out of such simple, planless, and undesigned missionary work. This is at least very probable with reference to the Roman community. History knows nothing of any eminent missionary who there laid the foundation. Surely some traces would have been left in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans! On the contrary, we learn from the last chapter—if that chapter was originally intended for Rome—that at that time many Christians lived in Rome who had migrated there from the East. We find there, if we are not deceived, the family of the cross-bearer, Simon of Cyrene,<sup>1</sup> also Andronicus and Junius, who were already Christians before St. Paul's conversion, and who, therefore, must have belonged to the community in Jerusalem in the first year of its existence, and who were held in good reputation by the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xvi. 13; comp. Mark xv. 21.

Apostles there, as we learn from St. Paul.<sup>1</sup> The house of Aquila, which had served as abode and workshop to St. Paul for years in Corinth and Ephesus, was at that time to be found in Rome. It is probable that this family, who had formerly removed from Corinth to Ephesus, had, for the same reason, removed again from Ephesus to Rome, their former place of abode, in order that they might provide a dwelling-place for the Apostle, who for so long had desired to see Rome, and thus, according to their means and in their own way, furthered the cause of missions. But it must have been quite recently that Aquila and Priscilla had come to Rome, as less than a year earlier they were still at Ephesus. The origin of the Roman community, the importance of which at that time is reflected in the Epistle to the Romans, must not therefore be attributed to them, but to those other Christians who had migrated from Palestine to Rome. Now these men and women certainly did not go to Rome as missionaries; but having been led to Rome<sup>2</sup> by the same cause, or one similar to that which led the first Christians to Cyprus and to Antioch, they were not content to keep by themselves, but endeavoured to draw others into their company. It was thus that the foundation was laid in the most important centres, in the country districts of Palestine, in Antioch, and in Rome, not by carefully planned and systematic missionary work, but by little groups of Christians who, through God's providence, were led hither and thither, and who, by

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xvi. 7. The view that these two persons were numbered amongst the Apostles, and had taken up a prominent position amongst them, is grammatically possible but really inadmissible; for, however wide we may understand the circle of the Apostles to have been, Andronicus and Junius (or Junia?), even if they had belonged to it, could only have counted as Apostles of third or fourth rank.

<sup>2</sup> We must continually remember Acts ii. 10, and, with reference to the fixing of the date of Romans xvi. 7, we must remember the date of Acts viii. 1 or Acts xi. 19.

means of the sympathetic nature and infectious power of their exuberant faith, became the germ and seed of large communities.

## II.

Another mode of spreading Christianity, the extreme opposite of that which has just been described, is almost solely made known to us by St. Paul's opposition to it and by his letters. It also was initiated by the mother Church.

When St. Paul wrote the Epistles to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon, he was able, in spite of his imprisonment, to carry on missionary work that was by no means unimportant.<sup>1</sup> A considerable number of helpers assisted him. Luke and Aristarchus had accompanied him to Rome; others, like Timothy, Tychichus, Epaphras, and Demas, seem, on hearing of his unexpectedly favourable position, to have joined him for a longer or shorter time. Mark also, who had been estranged from him since the first missionary journey, drew closer to him again. St. Paul boasts of him, as of a certain Jesus called Justus (Col. iv. 11), that they had been fellow-workers with him in the kingdom of God, and had comforted him. The emphatic way in which it is said of these two, who are at the same time described as men of the circumcision, in connection with the fact that those other friends of St. Paul, already referred to, are called his fellow-workers, proves the correctness of the interpretation that St. Paul means to say that Mark and Justus were the only missionaries of the circumcision, who were working for the kingdom of God in such a manner as to give him consolation and encouragement. He needed such consolation, in view of the fact that other Jewish preachers were carrying on missionary work in Rome in a very trying manner. The great city of Rome, with its mixed population, offered large scope

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxviii. 30 f.; Eph. vi. 19 f.; Col. iv. 3 f.; Philemon 10. With reference to his helpers, comp. Col. i. 1, 7 f., iv. 7; 10-14, Philemon 23 f.

for varied missionary work. Jewish Christians who had received the faith independently of St. Paul, and who had devoted themselves to missionary work in no way connected with him, might well consider they had a right to carry on their work in Rome quite independently of St. Paul, chained and confined within his hired dwelling.

St. Paul had not founded this missionary centre, and could not lay claim to any special authority. Neither did he; but it must have been very painful to him that most of these Jewish Christian preachers either avoided his company or else actually placed hindrances in his way. We see in the Epistle to the Philippians, which was written somewhat later, how bitterly these men opposed him. The Apostle's position had changed. After a delay of two years his case had been tried. His friends far and near had been anxious about him and the cause of the gospel. But soon after the beginning of the legal examination it appeared that the charges, which had obliged him to appeal to the Emperor, were not credited by the judges in Rome, and that Christian preaching, which was proved to be the real cause of his imprisonment, was not looked upon as worthy of punishment by the court. It is easy to see that this change of circumstances was very encouraging to the missionaries in Rome, and that they would carry on their work more boldly than ever. But St. Paul cannot make known these joyful facts to the Philippians without also telling them of his sorrow that of these missionaries only some carried on their work in sincerity and with friendly feelings towards him, while others, on the contrary, carried it on in strife and envy, intending thereby to make his heart the heavier in his otherwise straitened circumstances. They used his temporary helplessness in order to supplant him and get possession of his sphere of work for themselves. St. Paul's noble nature constrains him to look beyond this personal trial; he rejoices, or at all events endeavours to

rejoice, that Christ is preached with success, whether in sincerity and truth or under false pretences, for very insincere and selfish objects. This state of things would neither have been allowed nor possible if those missionaries had not preached Christ and His Gospel, but had preached themselves and heretical doctrines. We learn from St. Paul's verdict that this was not the case. In earlier days he had also known people who had sought to check his work, and even to undermine it, but who nevertheless did not preach doctrine diametrically opposed to his, at all events openly.

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*(To be continued.)*