

and to write something like a biography of Jesus, in fact such an interest can be traced earlier. S. Schulz has argued convincingly that it is to be found in Mark, whose Gospel takes the form of a history of Jesus in which the various pieces of traditional material are fitted into a chronological and geographical framework. Mark, rather than Luke, is the first Christian historian (*Studia Evangelica* 11, 1964, pp. 135-145).

It is possible to work still further back. The earliest Christian preaching contained some account of the life of Jesus. If the scheme contained in Acts 10: 34-43 and 13: 23-31 is based on tradition, we have evidence here for an early, brief outline of the story of Jesus as the basis of the gospel. The extract in 1 Corinthians 15: 3-5, the great antiquity of which is in no doubt, shows clearly that an appeal was made to his-

torical facts as the foundation of the Christian message. From the very first, the early church regarded its theology as being based upon history and saw no contradiction between history and theology.

Here we must conclude our general considerations on the relation between history and theology in the Gospels. In the sequel we must ask more specifically whether the Gospel writers succeeded in carrying out their aim of producing reliable history. In particular, have form criticism and tradition criticism made it impossible for us to believe that the Gospel picture of Jesus is reliable? For the moment, our conclusion is that an affirmative answer to this question is unlikely. Theology does not necessarily imply the falsification of history; on the contrary it demands the reliability of the history.

Missionary Studies—Why and What ?

A paper delivered to a meeting of representatives considering an evangelical fellowship for missionary studies, on 19th January, 1968, by ANDREW F. WALLS, MA, BLITT, Lecturer in Church History in the University of Aberdeen. Part of this paper appeared in The Kingdom Overseas, June, 1968.

THE SELECTION of a title for this paper was, I think, unconsciously influenced by a book which haunted my childhood, entitled *The Wonder Book of Why and What*. Its front cover depicted an apple-cheeked little boy framed partly by one of those awful soft hats that nice little boys wore then (everyone of my age or older will remember what I mean, the rest can find out from the illustrations in *Winnie the Pooh*) and partly by an enormous question mark. It contained edifying answers to children's questions (I cannot recall asking any of them myself). The title of the opening chapter was simply — 'Why?'. All the other chapters were answers to the question 'What?' and ranged from casual enquiries like 'What is the sun?'

or 'What is at the bottom of the sea?' to real posers like 'What is inside a piano?'

Perhaps my treasury of juvenile instruction set a good example. *The Wonder Book of Missionary Studies* is, alas, not yet written: but its opening chapter must obviously be, 'Why?', and there is no reason why we should not think of a few other chapter headings beginning with 'What?'

Why missionary studies? Well, of course one reason for studying anything is always what the little elephant had in the *Just-So* story: 'a satiable curiosity'. Nor does it appear that insatiable curiosity is necessarily profane. 'Great are the works of the Lord,' says the Psalmist, 'studied by all who have pleasure in them' (Ps. 111: 2). That is as good a reason for 'satiable curiosity' as I can imagine.

But there are other, severely practical reasons why missionary studies demand the closest attention of all of us. I am going to suggest three.

1. *We cannot understand either the church or the world today without them.* Our own century has seen one of the most cataclysmic changes that God has

wrought in the whole history of His church and the curious thing is that most people haven't noticed that it has happened. The extent of the change may be roughly measured by thinking where Christians were to be found in 1568, 1668, 1768, 1868 and 1968. Between 1568 and 1868 there was really remarkably little change in terms of the areas where Christianity took root and expanded. Christianity was throughout that period the tribal religion of the Caucasian peoples of Europe and their descendants in the New World, together with some fragments of peoples under their dominion and a few isolated miscellaneous peoples like the Ethiopians and some racial minorities in the Turkish Empire. And its centre, its strength, its sheet anchor, its source of manpower lay in Europe. Take away Europe, and there would be little enough left.

We have lived to see Europe, if not taken away, at least evidently in the process of departure. We have seen in all the more advanced European countries a steady drift from Christian adhesion; and year by year denominational bodies of all sorts watch the erosion of their membership figures, and tremble lest they become a thin grey line. Where Christian assumptions were once axiomatic, one now has to work without them; and anti-Christian assumptions become more prominent, and those who make them noisier. How far are we now from the assumptions of Jane Austen's native land!

'Dear Miss Morland', says Henry Tilney, when he discovers Catherine has been suspecting his father of wife-murder, 'consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation. . . . Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?'

'We are English, we are Christians' and so Catherine runs off weeping at her folly, secure in the nature of her Christian country (though Miss Austen tells us that she would, if hard pressed, have yielded the northern and western extremities). But Miss Austen's English, who were Christians because they were English, are mostly dead or dying. A process beginning some time back — was it about 1868 just as Christianity was beginning to get a grip on new lands? — and rapidly accelerating in

our own day, has been steadily suffocating them. Soon it *may* happen that English people are Christians in spite of, not because of, being English.

THE CHANGING DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH

But what effect has this had on the place of Christianity in the world as a whole? Surprisingly little. Whereas in 1568, 1668, 1768 or even probably 1868 a Christian decline in Europe would, in all human likelihood, have eliminated Christianity from the world, it is in 1968 merely peripheral. For one thing, the Caucasians' descendants in the New World have come into their own, and without a wholesale rejection of Christianity; and, even more significantly, in many and various parts of the world the kingdom of God has been suffering violence and a lot of violent people who are not Caucasians have been pressing into it. Within the last century, the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa who profess and call themselves Christians has doubled itself every twelve years, and part of that continent has seen a revival of a sort and on a scale which eclipses anything Europe has seen for a century. A country like Indonesia, technically some 85% Muslim, is at present witnessing an extraordinary mass movement towards Christianity, in which some estimate 400,000 new adhesions. Further east in the Pacific, whole peoples profess the Christian faith. In South America some Protestant churches are recording growth rates of 100% in a decade and 2,000% in a generation. At a period when in some British universities the humanist societies can boast a membership larger than that of the main religious societies combined, it is interesting to find a sociologist's survey indicating that nearly 93% of the students at three Nigerian universities declared themselves to be Christians, and only 2.6% gave what would be the fashionable answer in many British universities, 'no religion'. Furthermore, the same survey in one university showed that 62% of those who called themselves Christians went to church at least weekly, and a further 20% at least monthly. More than half were active in religious societies, more than 60% listened regularly to religious broadcasts, nearly 30% read their Bibles daily and nearly 75% prayed daily. Nor is it only at the student level that such things are seen: I remember being roundly rebuked by a leader in a young men's progressive union in Sierra Leone because I had

not begun a down-town lecture with prayer: 'We are a Christian people, and do nothing without prayer.' In the same way an African head of state can, with perfect unselfconsciousness, tell the people of an area in danger of communal riots that they will have to give account to God for any blood that they shed.

Now of course, many of these things are what one might call cultural manifestations of Christianity rather than Christianity itself. Cultural manifestations are mainly a matter of *assumptions*: they reflect what everybody in a given situation assumes everybody else believes. (As an old lady remarked of a Western Isle where the sabbath is observed with more than Rabbinic strictness, 'It is not God we are fearing, it is our neighbours'.) I am saying nothing about the nature or depth of personal commitment in any of these instances: only that while Christian assumptions which once could be and were widely made in Western Europe are becoming less and less common with us, they are freely made in very considerable and very different areas of the world.

But who would guess this from the sermons, the lectures, the textbooks, the newspapers, the literature academic or popular, of the present day? No, what we have is handwringing and lamentation that Modern Man has turned away from the church, and various dodges to get him back again; assertions that Modern Man has outgrown religion and helpful suggestions that Modern Man would find it easier to accept some things Christians say if they did or did not say something else. And all the time thousands upon thousands of Modern Men are entering for the first time upon the peace and joy of faith. Millions of others acknowledge Christ, and, whatever impact this may yet have made on their lives, they constantly hear His word read and in measure preached and see His sacraments administered. The truth is that the majority of churches in the majority of countries outside Europe are, however slowly, growing. Every year there are more Christians in the world than ever before. It is not only that our God is too small but our *world* is too small and our *church* is too small!

I think that even our missionary literature does not always reveal the big church we live in; for those in the thick of the battle are naturally conscious of the weight and power of the adversary, and those with responsibilities

in mission councils have to deal with severe specific problems like the effect of devaluation or the refusal of visas. But one result is that many people see the church in the world as an extension of one they know, with a nil norm growth rate, an ageing community disenchanted with history — but in addition plagued with dreadful tumults and intolerable constrictions: visas refused for India, Protestant missionaries in Angola reduced to a third of what they were, war in Nigeria, endemic disorder in Congo, everywhere doors closing and the lights going out. They don't always realize that some problems have arisen simply because missions have been *too* successful, that there are more doors open in the world than there are people to go through them, and that if every missionary in the world were liquidated tomorrow, the life of the majority of Christian congregations — at *congregational* level that is — would go on without much obvious alteration. The very accuracy of membership statistics can be misleading, like the maps of world religions which show Britain as 'Protestant' and most of Africa as devoted to Islam or 'tribal religions'. When a reader sees the vastness of Nigeria and is told that 6% of the population is Christian, he does not guess that there are huge areas where almost every living soul would call himself a Christian and where you could hardly throw a stone without hitting a church. In fact, about 34½% of Nigerians described themselves as Christians in the 1963 census, including nearly three million people in the 'Muslim North'. Or, to take an example from Japan, where Christians are a much smaller proportion of the population: church membership figures total something like 700,000, yet about three million people declare themselves Christian in the census. Of course, this may mean little in terms of Christian discipleship: but then, in the days when people said 'We are English, we are Christians', no-one pretended this implied deep universal personal commitment.

OUR LIMITED STUDY

The point is that the centre of gravity of the Christian world has changed: we in Europe are no longer at the centre, we are at the edge. So far, however, there is little sign of this in our theological curriculum and literature. Theologically we are pre-Copernicans: we are the centre of our little world, and assume the universe rotates round us;

we are like the village that voted the earth was flat. Professional modesty restricts my remarks to church history. A good 'traditional' syllabus of three years' church history teaching in Scotland will devote a year to the early church (not closing the study at 461, as so many do across the border, because we have got to get the Celtic church in); a year to the Reformation (Calvin and Knox, of course, though Cranmer may get a mention); and then a year on Scotland. Notice how the syllabus narrows, narrows, narrows, until it reaches that culmination of church history, the study of Us as We are. Now most church history syllabuses do this, as do most textbooks, and it does not much matter if they do, provided we know what is going on. We must obviously understand our history and the factors which have led to our present position. It is only dangerous if we think this is the history of the *church* instead of a single part of it, seen from a strictly territorial point of view. Even when we talk of the early church, we usually mean the church in the Roman Empire, and we talk as if all early Christians were subjects of Trajan or Diocletian. This is because the Roman Empire, and its conversion, are important for us in the West. But, beginning from Jerusalem, the apostles bore witness to Christ, not only westward but eastward and southward — yet who thinks of the church of the East, the church of the Nubians, or the ancient church of the Horn of Africa as being 'the early church'? Even within the Roman Empire, we are after 461 usually interested in the Western half — because that is 'our' bit. We talk of 'the church' in the Middle Ages, but we really mean the Latin church — we reckon little of the rest of the Christian world that had no Middle Ages, made rude faces at Hildebrand, and never heard of Luther. And once we have the Reformation fairly started, we don't even bother about the rest of Western Europe: our tight little island bounds our concern. True, we notice something we denominate 'the missionary movement', and may even look at some 'missions' — but this again is treated as an extension of 'our' history; it is the deeds and achievements of certain missionaries that are in view.

I am told that Einstein once said 'I try to consider the atom as *Gott* sees it.' Ought we not — if I may use the phrase reverently — to try to consider the church as God sees it? Not as a remnant of evangelical Anglo-Saxon

Protestants with those whom they have led into the light, but as a great multitude whom no man can number, gathered out of every tribe and nation and kindred by a God who chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world and has never left Himself without witness in any age. The most important reason for missionary studies is surely that they are needed for the proper study of Christian history and Christian theology. We are in danger of raising a generation of ministers and Christian workers who know nothing of the parts of the world where most Christians are, do not even know that most Christians are there, and know nothing of how their brethren live and worship. Their world is too small and their church is too small — and the danger of this is that they may not realize how big their God is. Missionary studies are a good corrective for mini-theology.

Much has rightly been said about the value of the study of early church customs for the life of the younger churches; yet how much light the life of younger churches throws upon early church history! Let the early church historian *live* in a second century church, and he will not only find his church history studies are useful — he will find them enriched. We might understand our Bede better, we might make more informed judgments about the Middle Ages, we might even appreciate Judges and Amos and 1 Corinthians better if we lived for a time where people accustomed to act together, for whom individual action is unthinkable, are working out the implications of the beliefs they have accepted, or where an agglomerate urban church is sorting out the tensions between long tradition, social convention and Christian loyalty. It might help us to resolve problems of Christian life in our own society (which has inherited a pattern of marriage in which elements from Roman custom, mediaeval romantic tradition and Christian sanctions are fused, and which may now be abandoning the Christian sanctions) if we knew and reflected more about other patterns of marriage in the non-Western world, and how our brethren there live in relation to them. And when we are dealing with modern men for whom the demons are irrelevant, it may give us some encouragement, even if little direct assistance, to reflect that for millions of modern men the demons are of daily relevance.

2. *They are of direct value for the*

evangelization of the world and the building up of God's people.

It has usually been recognized, in theory if not in practice, that we cannot carry out either task without a close knowledge of the people we hope to serve. There was a period when missionary strategists worked on the theory that African languages would gradually die out, and that the process should be encouraged; but it was an aberration, and missionary workers have often been in the forefront of the study of Oriental and African languages. Linguists all over the world recently honoured the centenary of S. W. Koelle, the founder of the science of African linguistics — though I recall no specifically Christian commemoration of this humble CMS missionary who sat in the markets of Freetown with his ears wide open. Dr Paul Hair's recent book on the study of Nigerian languages is an instructive document; for nearly all his linguistic pioneers were missionaries and many of them — this is quite forgotten, and even denied — were African-born missionaries. In our own day the Wycliffe Translators have continued to demonstrate the value and necessity for the most rigorous linguistic standards for the communication of the gospel, the nurture of the Christian life, and the understanding of God's written word as underlying both. Again — a point recently enforced by Dr E. A. Nida — good missionaries have always been good anthropologists: and indeed in our own country scientific anthropology owes much to Christian missions. No human mind is a blank table. Whatever goes into it makes contact with something already there. No human individual lives simply as an individual: his life and responses are regulated in some degree by the family or society in which he lives. How can we dare approach people, carrying such tidings as ours, with no attempt to understand what is in their minds already or how their society works?

We all recognize this in theory: perhaps our practice would be better if we made better use of the facilities for such study both in this country and abroad. I also wonder if our anthropology is not also sometimes a little old-fashioned, as though we thought only of remote villages and their allegedly static communities. After all, more and more of the human race is living in cities, and the countryman in the city is the person most open to change of any sort. The first large-scale movement to Christianity in modern Africa — in Sierra Leone a century and a half ago — was among

transplanted country people who had lost their roots, and whose old customs and belief system did not fit the new situation in which they found themselves. In that same country today, a people like the Limba who have shown little enthusiasm for either Christianity or Islam in their home in the hinterland, have in late years been flocking to the city — and there dividing between the church and the mosque. The kaleidoscopic cities of Africa and Asia, often tumultuous, potentially violent, bursting with hope and frustration, provide Christians with a renewal of the challenge and opportunity which they in large measure missed in the cities of Europe. It is the cities which are now attracting the attention of the field anthropologists and sociologists in the universities and research institutes. Cannot we learn from them and apply their labours, enter into them — perhaps even improve on them?

It is even more remarkable how little spadework has yet been done on the Christian history of Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Why have some peoples responded quickly and readily to the gospel and others — similar to all appearances — slowly or negatively? Why has the gospel been welcome at one time and — among the same people — rejected at another? Why has church life followed such different patterns in different areas, in some places so fissiparous, in others so monolithic? These are surely important practical questions, and they require patient, intelligent study. We cannot give simple, dogmatic answers. The church is a divine society in which God walks by His Spirit; but it is also a human society, subject to the normal laws affecting human societies and institutions; and God who made humanity works as much in the one as in the other.

We need, then, more study of the society and more study of the church. A good deal of the literature about the churches of Africa and Asia is not history at all, and makes no pretence of conforming to scholarly standards. But even much of the scholarly writing is not so much church history as missionary history, for it has been compiled mainly from (vitaly important) missionary sources, like the correspondence in society archives. Valuable as this is, to rely on missionary sources alone can unintentionally distort the picture and deceive scholars as well as the general public. A friend of mine tracing the origins of forty congregations in Nigeria could find only three owing their origin to European missionaries,

and most had not been started by church agents at all. A Nigerian research student of my own is showing how Christianity spread through the Niger Delta without any significant European agency. In an African university it was my privilege to work with a collection of documents — minute books, baptismal rolls, marriage registers and the like — covering fifty years and more. Here was the African church working and worshipping, rejoicing and lamenting, sinning and repenting, *and* keeping its records, for half a century — and hardly ever did a European cross the pages. We all owe a great debt to Bishop Stephen Neill as an historian of missions, and yet his assertions in more than one publication about the relative failure of the Sierra Leone church to evangelize just do not take into account such material. Here was a church which produced a hundred ministers in fifty years, a large number of them missionaries (serving in Yorubaland, the Niger Delta, and as far afield as Kenya and Congo) and all from a population of less than 50,000. And here was one of the most remarkable incidents of nineteenth century church history: yet no-one seems to know it and good scholars can even deny it happened! How much grass-roots work has still to be done!

3. *Other people are doing these studies for us.*

No-one can study mankind in much of Africa or Asia without studying Christianity. Accordingly historians, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, are all working on our material. Often they are the *only* people doing so. The new recognition of the importance of religion in 'area studies' is very welcome; but scholars from these disciplines are at times unable to find the material or evaluate properly what they find: partly because we do not make it available, partly because they frankly do not always understand it. Here the missionary society archives, and the record books and papers scattered round churches and missions and pastors' houses all over the world, are of vital importance; and the Christian historian, the church historian, the practical missionary with his sensitivity and personal knowledge, all have a part to play in setting the record straight. And make no mistake, if we do not tell our own story, and tell it properly, fairly and honestly, with the most exacting scholarly standards, recognizing our failures and the earthiness of the vessels in which our treasure is contained, other

people will tell it for us; and some of them will guess where they have no information, and put the worst construction on what they imperfectly understand. It may be worth recalling that the most thorough study of Christianity in South West Africa to date is by a German Marxist who makes no secret of his 'opposition to colonialism and thus to missions'.

Here, then, are three good reasons — there are many more — for missionary studies, and some indication of what these studies may contain. How important they can be for our brethren in other continents, we have not yet begun to estimate. I have spoken of the great mass of professed Christians throughout the world and the Christian cultural manifestations of the sort we used to associate with Europe and now see there rather less. Some who know these countries may shake their heads, knowing just how little these things count, and just how much wickedness can co-exist with pietistic religion, just how superficial a mass movement can be. I do not deny this for a moment. I have often been disturbed that a whole village, say, may be visibly enthusiastic in its loyalty to Christianity and yet give no clear evidence of having understood the gospel. But I have had the same sense of disturbance in the writings of the second century AD. These men went through fire and torture for Christ's sake. They also revered Paul and treasured his writings: but most of them do not seem to have understood what we think he means by justification by faith. We now have a vast visible church in all continents; and within it a wide variety of faith and commitment, knowledge and ignorance, wisdom and incomprehension, virtue, self-abnegation, zeal, apathy, corruption and wickedness. But this too has happened before. Once there were great churches, adorned with scholars and martyrs, in North Africa and the East. Many of those churches disappeared altogether and all lost the proud primacy they once had in the Christian world. But this was not the end of the church in the world. God took their candlestick out of its place, and built His church among the barbarians of the North and West. It seemed a poor exchange at the time: it was a pretty thin and superstition-laden Christian veneer which one can see upon the Celts and Saxons and there lay ahead the whole Babylonish captivity of the Western church. And yet, by God's grace, Reformed Christianity, the faith and practice of Luther and Calvin and Knox and

Wesley and Simeon, was born among the descendants of those Western barbarians and we are here today because of what He did in a thoroughly corrupt, partly paganized church. Now I am not suggesting — God forbid — that the African and Asian churches might go through another Babylonish captivity. I am only saying, first, that God does in fact work by His Spirit through His word, and thus in communities where His word is received; second, that the total of such communities in the world is expanding, not contracting; third, that it is for Him to choose His own witnesses and instruments, and that He has in the past chosen different countries and areas to be His standard bearers, and not always those with the most highly developed technological civilization. Let us recall that for centuries it was Islam, not Christianity, which was associated with the greatest advances of human science and scholarship.

I have argued in another place that perhaps the greatest resource that the church of Europe can now pass on to its more numerous brethren is what one might call Christian technology: the long tradition of Christian thought and scholarship, with the study of the Scriptures at the centre, which has so often brought reformation and renewal. But if this technology is to be appropriated and worthily used, it must be broadened, deepened, and applied by study of the Scriptures and Christian faith and history, in the churches and societies of the non-Western world. And this in itself implies missionary studies.

In conclusion, may I suggest three practical considerations.

1. *Let us spoil the Egyptians.* Missionary studies, if worthily pursued, will be costly of time and money. But already considerable provision is made from public funds, in our universities, research institutes and libraries. It is surely bad stewardship to neglect or under-use those facilities.

2. *Let us make full use of our resources:* and remember that these include the correspondence, minute books and registers of our missionary societies, the similar documents in countless churches and houses, the 'junk' in the attics of ex-missionaries, the memories and reflections of older Christians and of missionaries. These are precious, and it is an act of unthinking vandalism to let them perish.

3. *Let us work in fellowship.* There is too much here for any individual. It is the concern of us all, at home or abroad, scholar, teacher, researcher, missionary secretary and council, missionary tutor and college, working missionary and practical men of every sort. Let us fulfil it together.

SPECIAL NOTE

As the result of widespread concern that evangelicals should make an increasing contribution to the study of Mission, an Evangelical Fellowship for Missionary Studies has recently been formed. Membership is open to all who are engaged in teaching, writing and research in this field. For further details, please write to the secretary of the Fellowship, the Rev. F. R. Entwistle, at BCMS, 157 Waterloo Road, London SE1.

Points of Contact

By G. D. FIELDER, MA BD. *An ex-Chairman of the TSF, Mr Fielder is at present IVF Travelling Secretary in Wales.*

'In this strange illusion
Chaos or Confusion,
People seem to lose their way,
Nothing left to strive for,
Love or keep alive for.'

(Noel Coward, *Twentieth Century Blues*)

In our day men think and act on the assumption that only in this life is there conscious existence. Death marks the end. The fact that this assumption brings with it the death of meaningful existence in this life, as Coward has seen, has widened still further the gap between Christian and non-Christian. In previous centuries the existence of God, ultimate accountability to Him, heaven and hell, were at least accepted risks to most people and provided a point of contact between them and Christians, particularly when it came to