

GOD And Missions Today

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Chapter 7

GOD'S CALL TODAY

THE CRITICS AND DERIDERS OF MISSIONS have often attempted to make out Christian missions a failure, but they have succeeded only in making themselves appear ridiculous. The contest between Christianity and paganism has been waged with all the advantage on the side of the powers of darkness. And yet, notwithstanding there is scarcely a land into which the missionary has not gone; and wherever he has gone he has planted the Cross, and about it the Christian home, school, church, college, theological seminary, printing press, hospital, dispensary, and every characteristic institution of Christian lands.

Though begun amid innumerable obstacles and discouragements, the work of modern missions has compelled from all intelligent, impartial observers the candid confession that, for the men and means invested, no success has ever been so great. If there be a divine providence; if the end of all history is Redemption, and the goal of all redeemed life is the restoration of man to the image of GOD, we should expect to see the most wonderful developments of history side by side with an awakening in the Church. We should look to see at least three developments:

- first, the wide opening of doors, making the whole world accessible;
- secondly, the provision of new and more perfect facilities for universal contact and communication;
- thirdly, the more thorough organizing of the Church itself for the work.

The first is a question of opportunity, the second of equipment and the third of activity and advance.

At this present time, we seem to have reached not only a crisis, but the crisis of missions. And what follows? That what appears to be an emergency to which we are unequal, is in fact a divine challenge to renewed prayerfulness, consecration, dependence on GOD, and confidence and courage such as faith inspires. Such crises have occurred at various turning-points of Christian history; and everything depends on how the Church meets the exigency.

The only way to meet such a crisis in missions is to appeal to GOD in believing prayer, and then take new courage.

Even discouragements are transformed into incentives and incitements to duty. Where we have Our Lord's plain command, especially when backed by such providential openings and leadings, the apparent hopelessness of our task is only designed to try our faith and develop our courage.

The Telugu field in India furnishes a marked illustration of answer to prayer. Mr. J. E. Clough of the American Baptist Missionary Society, on coming to Ongole, was waited upon by high-caste citizens, who gave him support and placed sixty-two of their sons in his school and furnished the funds for carrying it on, without restricting his religious teaching. One day three low-caste men presented themselves as converts and were made welcome. But at once an indignant committee informed him that if he had anything more to do with Sudras and Pariahs the high-caste scholars would be at once withdrawn. Two more low-caste converts applied for admission. The crisis had come - the school was likely to be wrecked against this Gibraltar of caste, and the social sea was in a wild tumult.

Mr. Clough and his wife went at the same time to different apartments to pray for divine guidance. Each cried for direction in this great extremity, and each took up a Testament to seek guidance in the Word of GOD. In the hand of each the Testament of its own accord opened to the same passage, I Corinthians 1:26-29: **"Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."**

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Clough, "I see it. I have not been building on GOD's plan: it must tumble down, and I must begin anew." And he left the room to go and tell his wife, whom he found coming into the study with her hand on the same Scripture. By this striking coincidence GOD led them henceforth to build from the broad bottom of the social pyramid, where the many are found. They at once announced their purpose, and every scholar left! But, though the upper classes at once changed from friends to foes, GOD on this new basis built the greatest single church of modern times, and the greatest revival since Our Lord's ascension; and of the thirty thousand Ongole communicants, more converts from the upper castes have been gathered than Mr. Clough ever would have hoped under the previous plan.

This instance is here given somewhat in detail that it may stand as a representative example of what blessing would have been forfeited had the Church of GOD at this critical time deserted her post and abandoned her work! GOD had in store the greatest blessings known since Pentecost, in the East Indies. He allowed the faith and patience of His people to be sorely tried, and when they proved faithful He poured out a blessing. And so it will be today, if this new crisis be met in the true spirit.

The great signal-gun of GOD is sounding out the call to advance! At the present critical hour the banners of GOD's hosts should bear one word emblazoned in capitals: Forward!

The motto of the great Apostle to the Gentiles was, **"The Regions Beyond."** Satisfied with no work already done, content with no other man's line of things made ready to hand, he yearned to

evangelize the regions beyond, where CHRIST had not been named (II Corinthians 10:16). That motto of Paul is the true watchword of this new age of missions. After all the work of a century, we have only just begun. GOD says, "Speed ye! Make haste! Forget what is behind, reach forward, press toward what is before! Push for the regions beyond!" Our work is not done - in a sense is not fully begun - so long as there remains one country or people or family where the Gospel has as yet not been proclaimed. A salvation provided for all and free to all must be at least announced to all.

The other signal word for this supreme hour of missions is prayer.

In the Pantheon at Paris is a superb painting of the death of St. Genevieve, the patron saint of the city. And the picture suggests the marked contrasts of history. Above is a triumphal procession entering the gates with all the pomp and pageantry of victorious war - the legions of soldiery, the captives in golden chains, the spoils of priceless value, all suggest the imperial glory of human power in the insolent boastfulness of conscious success.

Beneath, in a dimly lighted chamber, Christians gather about the rude couch of the dying saint. It is but a convent cell and a little band of praying disciples. Yet in gazing you feel that this is the far grander scene and that, in the circle of prayer, and not in the march of battalions, lies the secret power which is yet to overturn the empire of the Caesars and make the banners of the Church victorious.

If I could speak in a voice of thunder that would reach around the world to every Church and every Christian believer, I would sound as the motto of the present hour, "FORWARD! PRAY!" They are included in the counsel given by that Japanese preacher, Dr. Neesima, "Advance on your knees!"

All history is the Tribuna of JESUS of Nazareth. He is the central glory of the ages. The very universe was built to be His temple. The greatest of prophets, priests, and kings, the foremost of poets, philosophers, and statesmen, the leaders in art, science, and invention, turn toward Him who is greater, wiser and mightier than all. The ages move about Him, and the very heavens shine for Him.

His supernal glory a stable could not dim nor a manger hide. A hating world nailed Him to a Cross of shame, but they were only lifting Him up to draw all men unto Him. His very crown of thorns became a diadem of royalty, and His death destroyed death and turned the grave into the gateway of paradise. The Cross was not the symbol of defeat and shame, but of conquest and glory.

By the Cross of that Nazarene, the Church is to conquer. Missions represent, not a human device, but a divine enterprise. Its thought was a divine idea, and its Plan, a divine scheme; the work is a co-labor with GOD; the field is a divine sphere; the spirit of missions is a divine inspiration, and the fruit of missions a divine seal, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

The fullness of the times has come. The cup of GOD's preparation overflows. The open door of the ages is before us. Facilities, a thousand-fold multiplied, match the thousand-fold opportunities. But if it is the open door of the ages, it is also the crisis of the ages.

CHRIST is waiting for His final coronation. The Kremlin, that island in a sea of domes, is the sanctuary of Russia. But, in all this maze of temples, towers, ramparts, and palaces, nothing impresses one more than that singular Treasury where are seen the many crowns worn by the rulers who swayed their scepters over the kingdoms of Poland, the Crimea and Kasan, before they were absorbed in the ever-encroaching gulf of Russian conquest.

The structure of the future has its Throne-room; there lie the crowns of empire, waiting for Him to whom by right they all belong. And, when He shall return to mount His throne, these crowns shall be all laid at His feet. He waits for the grateful suffrages of a redeemed people, brought out of every nation, before He assumes His rightful dominion.

What can you and I do to hasten that consummation?

Let my closing appeal be to young men. Some of us have passed middle life and our sun is declining; with others of us the sunset hour already reddens the horizon. With you the dawn has yet to climb to its noontide. History is dense with its events. Every year, every day, every hour, is the prolific parent of opportunities that might make angels rejoice, and responsibilities that might make even angels tremble! These pages are now bringing to a conclusion a series of appeals which have been written as with my heart's blood, and in them the energy and enthusiasm of the inmost life have found utterance.

GOD is moving on. His march is swift, and our time is short. No such age has ever before shone on this planet. No such doors ever before opened to His Church. Who will fall into line with GOD, Join in His majestic march, and in the sure advance of His plan reach the golden fruition of the ages?

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