

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

A CHURCH MISSIONARY PROGRAM (Continued)

V. Personnel

BBB NOTE: Probably the single most important chapter in this book!

Most churches are inclined to think of the missionary enterprise as something apart from themselves. This is especially true when we talk about getting missionary candidates. Missionaries have to come from somewhere. They know that. But it hasn't occurred to them that some of their own young people might be missionary material. It hasn't occurred to them because nobody has suggested it. No one has challenged their young people with the need for just what they have to offer the unselfish devotion and service of their lives.

The Church is really the natural recruiting ground for missions. It is the one place where you will find nearly all of the young people who are interested in Christianity. Some of them have been reared in the Church, some were converted there, but practically all come to the Church for Christian worship and fellowship. They may not all be truly Christian. They may be there just because it is the proper thing to do. But at least they are susceptible to Christian teaching and they are in the place where they would naturally expect it to be given.

What are you doing with the young people in your Church? Do you have any definite aims and program for them? Not just for missions. That will come if your spiritual program is a vital one. But are you paying serious attention to your young people? Do you have some goals that you are earnestly trying to help them reach? For we can't have missionaries until we have consecrated young Christians. Yes, and instructed Christians, too. The entertainment of our young people is not the Church's task, though some act as if they thought so. Merely to keep them in some sort of association with the Church is not enough. A vital program means spiritual guidance. It means bringing them into a living relationship with the Lord and with His Word. It means trying to get them to accept His Lordship in deciding the course of their lives, whatever their line of work. And that is not easy. Neither are all ministers willing or capable of doing it.

What can the churches do about providing personnel for missions? For one thing, they can repeatedly challenge young Christians to such a service for their Lord. But before that step can

mean much, they must lay a foundation.

Young people should be finding their Saviour in the Church. Then, step by step, they should be going on into a deeper knowledge and experience of Him. And periodically they should be faced there with the need to dedicate their lives to Him. The regularly recurring "consecration meeting" of the Christian Endeavor movement had a sound idea behind it. Then challenge them to offer their lives for service abroad.

Of course confronting young people with such a challenge is also a part of our first objective, that of stimulating missionary interest in the Church. But here you have a special group in mind. When you issue the challenge for missions, you are aiming at the young people. Few older ones could go. And you will often find the young people more responsive than you think. Young people are idealists. This in spite of the carping criticism of "the younger generation" by disillusioned middle-agers. They are more ready to give their lives for an ideal than are their elders.

Challenge them first of all to a full dedication to CHRIST. They are Christians. Remind them that they are the ones whom **"he hath purchased with his own blood."** Tell them that **"he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."**

Such full dedication doesn't necessarily mean "full-time Christian service." But it may. It may even mean foreign missionary service. But we don't stress it for that reason.

- We stress it because no Christian can be fully effective without it.
- We stress it because we don't want missionary candidates who are not first of all dedicated whole-heartedly to CHRIST.
- They must be first dedicated to CHRIST and then to missions, not the other way around.

Then challenge them to look on the world's need and on their own possibilities.

The two go together. To know of a need that you can't help to meet is frustrating. To have a gift, an ability or training for which there is no need is just as frustrating. They won't analyze the world's need perfectly. Who can? And they may put too high or too low a value on their own ability to fill the need. But even such a dim vision will give to life the purpose that it needs. We all need to be persuaded that what we are doing really matters.

And finally, challenge them to offer their lives for the Lord to use and to get prepared for whatever He has for them.

Note that we don't say "to offer their lives for foreign missions."

There is a reason. We do want some of them for foreign missions. But it is much more important that they be ready for anything the Lord has for them. Some people are willing to volunteer if they can choose the type and place of service. But what the Lord wants are those who will put themselves in His hands and say, "Use me where You need me most."

It may be in foreign missions. But don't be surprised if it is in a line you never thought of. There is no reason why a Christian businessman should not be as sincerely dedicated to the Lord as any minister or missionary.

And note that we say to challenge them to get prepared.

This is often a weak spot. We challenge young people to dedicate their lives to missionary service; but we don't tell them at the same time that it takes dedication to get thoroughly prepared for the job.

As a result they are so impatient to "get going" that they slight their preparation or look for short-cuts. Why don't we tell them that they will have to spend time and work getting ready for this great ministry? Are we afraid they will get discouraged? They won't if they are the right kind. Instead, it is likely to increase their respect for the work.

But in your recruiting for missionary service do avoid some of the serious mistakes that are so common today.

Let me list five of them.

First is a superficial emotionalism that quickly fades away.

We are not discounting emotion. The emotions must be touched. We wouldn't give much for a missionary candidate who didn't feel keenly his call to witness for CHRIST. Again we say, we would like to have those who feel intensely, as Paul did, "**Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!**"

But the appeal that reaches the heart springs and has an enduring effect is not the same as the one that merely stirs up our feelings for the night. Decisions made in the warm glow of an exciting meeting are often regretted in the gray dawn of reality.

So don't whip up an artificial enthusiasm but try to touch the depths of the soul.

Second, avoid the glamorizing of missionary life and work.

Any missionary can tell you how quickly the glamour vanishes when you reach the field. To some it comes as a rude shock, for they weren't prepared for the stark reality.

Of course you can't help it that so many think all strange lands and people are glamorous. Their very distance from us makes them look romantic. But you can avoid heightening that impression. Put the emphasis where it belongs, on the great motives and purpose of missions, not on the bizarre, the strange and unusual features of missionary life.

Remember that even horror can have a romantic attraction. When you tell a missionary story, be careful not to overcolor it.

A third mistake is that of appealing to a sense of pity for the people because of their great

physical needs.

Such an appeal does have a place. But its place is not that of recruiting young people for the spiritual ministry of missions.

Even the nationals of other countries have often protested against this sort of appeal. They remind us that we have paupers and slums in our own country, as well as depraved criminals. They resent an attitude of condescending pity.

We don't want our missionaries to go to the field with such an attitude as their main motive.

In the fourth place, there is an unwise tendency to present foreign missionary work as the highest form of heroic consecration.

Really it isn't. Many a missionary will assure you that it isn't.

Missionaries are often embarrassed by the sort of hero-worship that is heaped upon them unsought and undesired. Not that there isn't a great deal of heroism exhibited in many mission fields. And for some young people it takes a heroic decision to get them out. But for many the decision to tackle an unromantic job at home is even harder.

In fact, for some the foreign field looks like a way to escape frustration at home. The highest form of consecration is to deny oneself and to take up one's Cross and follow CHRIST - regardless of where He may lead.

A final mistake in recruiting is one that is hardly worthy to be mentioned and yet is quite commonly made. It is the appeal to young people to help enlarge the ministry of their own Church, their own denomination, their own mission.

This is nothing but selfishness masquerading as Christian missions. We are not of those who oppose working with boards of like Christian faith, barring, of course, doctrinal error. As long as Christianity is a really vital force it is likely to break out in new ways at any time. Regimentation means stagnation.

But when any Christian group thinks chiefly of its own perpetuation or enlargement it is getting away from its Christian basis. The shameful competition and overlapping of work in some mission fields is not caused primarily by the fact that we have various denominations.

It is caused rather by those who confuse the glory of CHRIST with the glorification of their own organization. Don't be guilty of inspiring young people to go out with such a vainglorious attitude. Challenge them to preach not themselves but CHRIST.

Try to see that their chief concern is for the honor of CHRIST and that the world may experience the life of CHRIST.

But a further word.

Don't just challenge. Tell what kinds of missionaries we need. Of course that means that you will

need to know, yourself. It means you will have to be interested enough to keep in touch with the mission. Or at times you may prefer to have a missionary or a mission secretary deal with the matter. But do make it definite. Don't encourage those who are clearly inferior. Don't say, "You can probably be used somewhere." Could you use them at home? Don't encourage divorced persons, or those who are overage or "strange," or those who are not willing to work hard to prepare. Don't make candidate secretaries do all the weeding out. You know your young people better than they do. And don't hesitate to encourage some of them individually. They may need just a little encouragement. But don't push. Let the Lord do the calling.

Provide opportunities for your young people to meet missionaries and missionary candidates personally. Just an invitation to speak to the missionary after the service is not enough. Only a few of the more venturesome will do it. Arrange for a discussion group or something similar. Or maybe a small gathering in a home. These personal contacts are valuable. They bring home to your young people, as nothing else could, that missionaries are just ordinary people with an extraordinary devotion to their Saviour.

Again we say, the local Church is the natural recruiting ground for missions. Does your Church have the vision? Is it meeting the need?

~ end of chapter 27 ~
