

# **The Missionary Myth**

**A Realistic Look At Mission Work**

By  
**Charles O. White**

Published By  
**J.C. Choate Publications**  
**Winona/Singapore/New Delhi**

©1990  
by  
Charles O. White

First Printing, 2,000 Copies  
Typesetting, Kaye Hayes  
Printed in U. S. A., 1990

Order From:

J. C. CHOATE PUBLICATIONS  
Route 2, Box 156  
Winona, MS 38967

Phone: (601) 283-1192

To Mom and Dad,  
who taught me to love the Lord  
and to seek his will

## THE PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

Recently brother Charles O. White, missionary to France for a number of years, wrote me about the possibility of publishing his mission book. Two or more major publishers in our brotherhood had already turned him down. It was not that his material was not worthy of printing, but rather most of our brethren shy away from such subject content because most members of the church will not buy this kind of book. Is it therefore any wonder that we as the Lord's people are doing so little mission work? How can we ever hope to change this trend unless we become more aware of the world and its needs?

You are right. I accepted brother White's manuscript for publication. It is true that it will not sell well, but it needs to be printed, and somehow we hope to get it spread around. We are working toward the day when our brethren will wake up, so we can proceed to do the work that the Lord has given us to do, and books like this one will help.

Brother White's subject is "the missionary myth," misconceptions concerning mission work that fill the minds of most of our brethren. The author seeks to remove these by informing us and making us aware of what really is involved in mission work. He raises questions, draws on personal experiences, points to our inconsistencies, makes suggestions, and tries to excite us and challenge us to do more for the Lord.

It is hard to deal with such matters without appearing to be negative, and some would even charge that missionaries who speak out are bitter people. It would be so easy to be guilty of both, but the fact remains that someone must examine us, inform us of our ills, prescribe the proper

## The Publisher's Statement

remedies and medicines, and help us to apply them to our lives if we are to have hope of better times.

Brother White's work has been, and continues to be, in France, and therefore he brings to us a European flavor, a side of mission work that we seldom see. It is good for us to study the many facets of mission work, considering the fruitful field and also the difficult fields. Likewise, it is good for us to be shown the contrasts between the work at home and the work in far away places.

Perhaps the reason most members of the church are not interested in mission books is that they are too disturbing, and with knowledge comes a sense of responsibility, the uneasiness of guilt, and the demand for involvement. Certainly it is my prayer, and I am sure the prayer of brother White, as well as all missionaries, that we can somehow finally reach enough brethren through such books as this, or by example itself, that they will be shocked, excited, and moved to be more concerned about the souls of others than themselves, that enough will finally become involved that we can make a difference in this world for good.

J. C. Choate  
Winona, Mississippi  
January 9, 1990

## P R E F A C E

Years ago, after only a few months on the mission field, I wrote down the following list of what I called at the time the "Seven Missionary Myths":

1. Missionaries are "special" Christians.
2. Missionaries feel more strongly than other Christians the guiding of the Spirit.
3. Missionaries' spiritual lives are automatically rich and fulfilling.
4. It is easy for missionaries to give up home and family.
5. Missionary families are naturally more close-knit than other Christian families.
6. Simple faith is sufficient to guarantee success on the mission field.
7. The missionary's greatest enemy is atheism.

Ensuing years on the field have confirmed the existence of a certain missionary mythology, which has inspired the book you are about to read. It has been written from the viewpoint of a worker in Europe with a family, working largely alone. Some of my evaluations will, therefore, be valid only for those in roughly the same situation. Though I am indebted to the writings of several other mission workers, the sentiments expressed here are my own; I take full responsibility for them as such. At the same time I think it not too pretentious to consider that perhaps they also reflect the thinking of some, if not many, of my co-workers around the world, and especially in Europe.

For I have discovered that all missionaries, no matter

## Preface

where they work, labor under the pressure of such myths. Given the same list of chapter headings I have used, most any missionary could write his own individual version of this book (and many would do much better than I have done). The reason why more writing is not done on these subjects is obvious to missionaries themselves, if not usually to their supporters: missionaries have enough trouble gaining and keeping support as it is. Why complicate matters?

But these pages were not written primarily to air the concerns of current missionaries. It is my hope that they will be most helpful to those preparing to go to the field, as well as to those who have accepted the responsibility of sending and supporting them. **Need it be said that the task of evangelizing the world deserves much more attention than the Church is currently giving it?** We must make a greater effort to **secure able workers** and to **make our able workers secure**, through more adequate training and improved financial support.

I wish to express my love and appreciation to my sponsoring congregation, the Market Avenue Church of Christ in Canton, Ohio. These brethren, filled with the love of God for the lost, labor patiently with us in a difficult field, seeking not numbers but souls, not glory but service. It is a privilege to work under their supervision.

Special thanks are also due to Miss Cindy Iversen, who patiently transcribed the first rough drafts of this text, and to Mrs. Karen Mason, who carefully and competently typed the final copy.

It is my prayer that this book can be helpful in the ongoing mission effort of the Lord's Church. Let us put

## Preface

aside our pre-fabricated notions about mission work and soberly measure the reality of His pressing command: "Go ye into all the world . . . ."

Charles O. White  
Lyons, France  
January, 1990



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication . . . . .	iii
The Publisher's Statement . . . . .	iv
Preface . . . . .	vi
CHAPTER 1	
The Decision To Do Mission Work . . . . .	11
CHAPTER 2	
Qualifications For Mission Work . . . . .	21
CHAPTER 3	
Mission Philosophies . . . . .	38
CHAPTER 4	
Fund-Raising . . . . .	45
CHAPTER 5	
Missionary Spirituality . . . . .	58
CHAPTER 6	
Family Relationships On The Field . . . . .	71
CHAPTER 7	
Apprentices . . . . .	85
CHAPTER 8	
Relations With Supporters . . . . .	98
CHAPTER 9	
The Sponsoring Church . . . . .	116
CHAPTER 10	
Reports And Reporting . . . . .	134
CHAPTER 11	
The Furlough . . . . .	143
CHAPTER 12	
The Missionary And His Time . . . . .	159
CHAPTER 13	
When Missionaries Go Home . . . . .	175

### THE DECISION TO DO MISSION WORK

When I was in college, a well-known missionary once spoke at an evening service. At the end of an impassioned plea for committed workers to go to foreign fields, this able man challenged every young person in the audience to decide on the spot to do foreign mission work and to indicate his response instantly by going forward to the front pew during the singing of a final song.

In response to this very emotional plea, three college students went forward. Who the first was, I do not remember. The two others have both since left the Church.

Another student walked to the aisle that night. But when he reached the aisle, he turned and left the building. He left out of dismay at the method used to inspire susceptible young people to mission service. Were we really going to ask young people to commit their lives to mission work on the basis of 30 minutes of high emotional appeal, he asked? Were we really going to expect young people of the impressionable college age to commit their lives to something, even something very valid, because of the moving call of a man very good with words?

Momentary emotion is not a sound basis for missionary commitment. It has to be a deep-seated, profoundly rooted, sometimes hard-fought decision – and it must be just that: a **decision**. No passing emotion can form the foundation for a lifetime commitment to missionary service or, for that matter, to worshipping and serving God at all.

## *The Missionary Myth*

I am not denying, of course, the need or indeed the necessity of emotional involvement in one's service to the Lord. What kind of people would we be if every action, work, and thought were governed by cold, hard logic? What would a marriage be like without emotion? What would bringing up children be like without it? Only machines have no emotional make-up, and the latest scientific research is trying to put a little emotion even in **them**.

But Christian service cannot be built on temporary emotion. True Christian joy, for example, is a state of being, a state of mind. How else could Jesus go to the cross while talking of his joy? How else could he meet the agony of that moment and talk of his peace?

Here, then, is a good example of what we are talking about. The emotions that Jesus felt as he approached the cross told him to say, "Father, isn't there some other way? I don't really want to do this." The Bible even says that he was filled with anguish. But the anguish was of the moment; his decision was eternal. From the roots of that **decision**, he drew the strength to say to the Father at the end of his pained prayer, "Not what I want, but what you want."

It is good and proper to become excited emotionally about doing mission work or about seeing it done. The Lord expects our hearts to be touched and our spirits to be thrilled by magnificent reports from the fields, by calls for help and for more workers. But he does not expect us to construct a lifetime of commitment around a few shivering chills. Mission work in particular and service to the Lord in general deserve much more pondering than that.

### *The Decision to do Mission Work*

The veteran missionary who made that impassioned appeal twenty years ago is still serving faithfully on the foreign field, for which I thank the Lord. He is a man of faith and courage, a true example to the college student that I was and who left the room that night. But he has not remained there on the basis of his emotional feelings of that night 20 years ago in York, Nebraska. Emotions change. They can leave you hanging, whereas decisions compose the basis for a solid, stationary service.

We must remember that the Lord who calls us to the saving of souls next door or on the other side of the earth invites us to sit down first and to count the cost. And counting the cost is always more meaningful before than after, or perhaps during, the fact. Of what, exactly, does counting the cost consist? It is difficult to count costs that are as yet unknown. Situations and circumstances will occur that one could never have anticipated. Ask yourself the question, "What will it take to get me to give up mission work and go back 'home'?" If it is loss of financial support or missing family and friends, or lack of results, or illness, or depression, or fatigue, or having to deal with false brethren, or being accused of being a false brother, or being misunderstood, or feeling like an idiot while learning the language, or feeling rejected because you are not "native," or losing contact with dear friends, etc., you might as well not go in the first place. All of this, and much more (ah, **much** more), will befall you.

The issue is not what you will meet, but how you will meet it. Make your plans **before** you go. How long do you plan to stay on the mission field? A recent survey indicates

## *The Missionary Myth*

the average length of stay on foreign fields by missionaries of churches of Christ is only one year and 8 months.<sup>1</sup> While I suspect this figure to be unduly influenced by the inclusion of missionary apprentices whose term is normally only two years, it is nonetheless true that we need more men and women willing to say good-bye to homeland, family, houses and lands (Matthew 19:29) to go live and work in the mission field FOR LIFE.

Mission churches are tired of “passing” missionaries who make a brief appearance on the foreign stage and then disappear forever. Nationals are tempted to see the Church as a “fly-by-night” organization that cares little about the long-term. In the European context, where families and nations have been established on their holdings for centuries or even millenniums, what impression will a three-year term make? Europeans look for permanence and stability, traits that can be demonstrated only by workers who go to stay, who plan to “bury their bones” in the mission field!

I realize, of course, that not all can plan to stay. But a short term of service is not always better (for the Church on the field) than none at all. Think about it.

Whatever your decision as to length of stay, set your goal and do not look back. Make your commitment, place your faith in the Lord (you will not make it for two days without him) and GO. But know that if you are living in a missionary bubble it will burst soon enough. The sooner the better, actually. The quicker we rid ourselves of our misconceptions, the sooner we can get on to the real work. Getting ready to work is good; working is better.

Now a word about what your work will be like once

## *The Decision to do Mission Work*

you arrive on the field. It is most important that you make adequate preparation in order to arrive with a realistic viewpoint concerning what you will be doing in missions.

In mission work, we deal with realities. And the realities of mission work are often quite different from those imagined during preparation. The reason for this discrepancy is probably unimportant. Experience, by its very definition, is not available to those who have not known it. The important thing is to be prepared for what one will find and then to attack the job with vigor.

I remember a feeling I had when we first arrived on the field. I had been preparing for mission work indirectly for a number of years and directly for many months. I had many ideas in my head, ideas about the physical situation in which we would find ourselves, ideas about the people we would meet, ideas about the conversions that would be made, ideas about the growth of the church, etc. In short, I saw what is so easily seen by a person who has never been in the mission context. My expectations were, in a word, unrealistic. It did not take me long to discover that the reality of mission work is a far cry from what I had thought to find. The immensity of the task before me was crushing. I realized what a big bite I had taken and how utterly incapable I was of chewing it. I realized, perhaps for the first time in my life, how independent I had really considered myself to that point, how dependent I must be on the Lord from that point on.

And, faced with this pressing reality, I admit that I was scared. To the point that, like an adolescent Tom Sawyer, I wondered what it would be like to be present at

## *The Missionary Myth*

my own funeral, to listen to the accolades of those who would sing the praises of the young man who gave up family, possessions, and country to go to the mission field, where his life was taken before he even got started.

Don't you know how silly I felt when I realized I was entertaining such absurd, escapist thoughts? And when I came to myself, I said to myself: "I am not worthy to be here, not worthy to call the Lord my Lord, not worthy to announce his name and then to be so afraid as to entertain such thoughts of retreat."

I am no longer that way, of course. But I imagine that, if the truth were known, most mission workers have probably had such thoughts at one moment or another. The bottom line is that none of us does this work by or for himself. We are here for the Lord, we are here by the Lord. Everything is to the Lord. Once you have learned that lesson, you will make good progress in attitude-forming toward successful mission work.

You will therefore be coming to the field to do the Lord's work and not your own. If you are saying, "I already know that," then let me explain more fully what I mean: You are coming to do the Lord's work **as it will be found on the field, not necessarily as you had imagined it before coming.** It is precisely at this point that many missionaries have faltered. Often, when I am looking for something in the house, I have a picture in my head of the object I am seeking. And I can look directly at the object I am looking for and not see it **because it does not correspond to the picture I have of it in my head.** So it is in mission work. If the reality does not correspond to the

### *The Decision to do Mission Work*

pre-conceived picture, some missionaries are not able to function. Do not let that happen to you.

Does one have to be a "preacher" to do mission work? I sincerely hope not. I really do. Though it helps to be able to stand on one's feet and present a logically organized lesson, the mission field is not specifically cut out for pulpit men. On the one hand, the pulpit man, accomplished in the public proclamation of the message, usually owes at least part of his influence to his facility with the language and the public acclaim for his gifts. On the mission field, at least where a new language is involved, all of his facilities (as well as the acclaim that accompanies them) fly right out the window. In addition, it is truly a myth that only accomplished "public" performers can succeed in mission efforts. I was myself a teacher of high school French and English before entering the field. I did not then, and do not now, pretend to be a "preacher." I am simply a Christian who teaches. Since teaching involves the necessity of preaching, I have become an evangelist. I am not, however, a preacher in the anglo-saxon sense of the word. Were I to return to the world from which I came, I would **certainly not** seek work as a pulpit minister. This may surprise some. I assure you it is not because of a dislike of preachers, but rather because of a desire to be only what I am - a Christian who teaches. And even then, I am, as you would imagine, extremely conscious of my own shortcomings in this area.

Let me be very clear here. I am not suggesting that ANY Christian can do mission work. Some are simply not cut out for it. Let no one make you feel guilty for not



### *The Missionary Myth*

abandoning all and heading for the foreign field if such is obviously not your call. Some do not have the physical stamina or the psychological strength to bear up under the pressures of mission work. Some have ignored this reality and have gone anyway, only to suffer shipwreck in their faith, or their health, or their marriage, or all of the above! Be sensible. The Lord expects all to share the gospel. Not all are called, however, to share it on the other side of the world. Know yourself, examine your qualifications, your motives, your goals. Pray, ask the advice of trusted friends, sound your faith, take a look at your psychological and physical makeup. A strong Christian in his homeland can quickly become a feeble, insecure struggler in a foreign culture.

Those who wear the mantle of "missionary" must be strong, in many ways: in faith, in heart, in talent. They must be proven men and women, apt to teach, able to serve. Think about it: if they are not able to get around to teaching their neighbor at home, is there much likelihood that they will be able to do it in a foreign culture and in another language?

Let me tell you something all missionaries know but few mention: Missionaries should be elder material, for the simple reason that they often end up being just that, elders without the title! It is not that they seek the title. It is just that the functions are thrust upon them. The church being too small, sometimes for years, to have its own leaders and therefore its own elders, the missionary is called upon to feed, to guide, to teach, to "bishop," to preside, to "eld." In view of this, every young man preparing

## *The Decision to do Mission Work*

to go to the field should examine himself with particular care. Do you have enough intelligence, enough common sense, enough wisdom to tackle this? Are you riding on the wing of a vague ideal ("I've just an idea it would be **neat** to be a missionary!") or are you really choosing a pattern of service based on logical self-analysis and serious preparation? Do not make the mistake of thinking that simple faith will see you through. It will not. And you are **liable** to lose what faith you have in the process.

Churches, look for young men whom you can see as elders in a few years (and young ladies who could be their wives) to give your support to. Prospective missionary, do not fool yourself into thinking you are what you are not. Or that you are less than you are. I firmly believe that the Lord opens and closes the doors we walk in and out of. What he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open (Revelation 3:7). But we perhaps have a tendency to remember the first part of that truth and to forget that the second part is there, too. He does shut some doors. I have seen people beat down closed doors in order to come to the field. It is just as much a shame to do that as it is to not come to the field through a door that is wide open!

When young people write me about the possibility of eventual work on the field, I encourage them to pray and to observe how the Lord opens **or shuts** the doors. His will is that all must be involved in evangelism in the world. His will is **not** that all should be foreign missionaries.

The final decision is God's. You will decide

### *The Missionary Myth*

according to the leading of his will. All of that is really between you and him. If you are really serious about being a missionary, do pray a lot. Study your Bible a lot. Examine your motives and your goals as objectively as possible. Talk to the leaders of the church where you attend. Get advice from trusted counselors and Christian friends. Look at your psychological, mental, and physical health. Your decision will have to be made in dead earnest, for it will qualify as one of the two or three most important decisions of your life.

Having said all of the above, let me finish this chapter with an appeal. An animated polemic is currently taking place in the Church concerning the fields to which we should be sending our missionaries (see *MISSION PHILOSOPHIES*). Whatever your feeling about these matters, you surely agree that there is a crying need the world over for dedicated, committed missionaries. In the face of the desperate call for more workers, the Church has made but a token gesture, all the while congratulating itself for the efforts made to save the lost. Perhaps mission work is not for you. If not, please do not persecute yourself. Rejoice in the opportunities that God gives you to serve him where you are. Seize each one of them; use every talent you possess, and serve him joyfully and peacefully!

Perhaps mission work is for you. Perhaps you feel that, with the Lord's help, you can make a vital contribution to the deep need of a dying world. If so, you are not more special than the person I described in the preceding paragraph. Your place is simply not where you are now. Your place is elsewhere. Your place is on the field.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Image*, Vol. I, No. 12, November 15, 1985.

### QUALIFICATIONS FOR MISSION WORK

A. T. Houghton correctly observes that, though nothing should be said to disparage academic, professional, and technical achievements coupled with a good character as qualifying a person for mission work, "It cannot be too positively asserted that mission work is a spiritual enterprise, undertaken for spiritual results to be achieved only by spiritual means."<sup>1</sup>

There are as many people really worthy to do mission work as there are to be Christians in the first place: that is, NONE. As no child of Adam is morally qualified, of his own merit, to wear the name of Christ, none is worthy, either, to wear the mantle of the missionary.

It goes without saying that those who accept the mission of announcing the message of Christ should themselves have a good grasp of it, not only in its principles, but also, and especially, in its direct application to their own lives. Mission work is a drastically deepening spiritual experience. At the same time, only those who have **already** obtained a measure of spiritual maturity can reasonably expect to survive in the foreign field.

### CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD

Some faithful Christians are unable to know with assurance that the Lord is indeed their Savior, that is to say that they are saved. When these become missionaries, they can often sow more uncertainty than anything else.

## *The Missionary Myth*

How unthinkable it is to announce a Savior and Lord in whom you yourself are not entirely confident! Your hearers have the right to know your deepest feelings on this subject, for they are being asked to change their basic way of living, the essential principles on which their lives are built. If you do not speak from personal convictions, they can hardly be expected to have confidence in the One you announce.

There is in our modern world a dominant wave of humanism, the worship of man and of his ideas. Humanism can cause the Christian, looking at the world's religions, to say to himself: "Surely there must be some good in all of that. How can I be right and all of them wrong? How can all of those people be wrong?"

Avoid this trap. If Christ said anything, he said that no way to the only God is opened or can be opened apart from the way he has inaugurated by his own blood (John 14:6; Hebrews 10:19-20, etc.). **If you cannot conscientiously insist on the ONE WAY, re-examine your desire to be a missionary:**

It is essential that you should have no doubt in your mind that, though many religions may profess excellent codes of morals, there is **no way of reconciliation with a holy God except through the precious blood of Christ** (emphasis mine, CW).<sup>2</sup>

There is, in fact, no exclusivism in this, for the call of Christ is open to "all men everywhere" (Acts 17:30).

## *Qualifications for Mission Work*

Arm yourself with trust in the one Lord and be ready to announce (and live by) that trust. You will need it!

### PRAYER

The depth of your communion with the Father will play a decisive part in your mission work. Normally, no one should launch out on such a venture who is not already practiced in prayer. To those who are preparing to work in missions, I always say: PRAY. And when you have wearied of praying, PRAY some more. You cannot overdo in this area. And, if you really pray that the Lord's will be done, be prepared to see him indicate that mission work is not for you. There is no shame in that. Indeed, it is much better to seize well the Lord's will for you, even if it means giving up your desire to do mission work, than to force your will on him and to fail miserably.

This is not to say that all of your questions concerning your eventual service will be answered from the outset. But a close daily communion with the Master will help you to follow his leading and to discover the circumstances he has prepared for you, be they toward or away from the mission field. The more you pray, the more you will want, the more you will need to pray, and the more you will learn to appreciate and to depend on the intercessory prayers of others. Missionaries know that without their supporters' money, they could not pay the rent, but that without their prayers, they could not live.

What is the quality of your prayers? Have you developed the habit of **confession**? Of **repentance**? Have you ever wept with the Lord over your own sins? Over

## *The Missionary Myth*

the sins of those to whom you are called to announce his love? Have you “struggled” in prayer (not complained, but **struggled**: there’s a difference)? Can you pray for the “impossible,” believing in the sovereign power of God? Can you hear his reproof and submit to his will? Do you praise him for being himself? Do you regularly express your gratitude for his marvelous gifts? These are some questions you should answer for yourself if you are contemplating mission work.

If you lean on him heavily now, the mission experience will send you to his throne even more often. You must, especially on the field, jealously guard your time with him and counsel all of those who hear you to do the same.

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORD

The message you will be announcing will come from the Bible. Have you read it? Have you read **all** of it? Make no mistake: the forces of evil that you will meet on the field will be versed in the Scriptures, will often arise from the very ranks of the “religious,” armed to the teeth with “doctrines of demons” fabricated by clever misrepresentations of the same Scriptures you love and teach.<sup>3</sup> To my mind, the greatest threat to the Church world-wide is not the absence of religion, but the presence of false religion; not the spectre of God-rejecting evil, but that of God-shouting hypocrites, whose twisting of the simple truth is often the cause for which non-believers speak evil of the Way (II Peter 2:2).

Except in rare cases, other religious groups will have

### *Qualifications for Mission Work*

preceded you on the field. Your teaching will be challenged if it does not accord with their doctrines. You will be called upon to "give an answer" (I Peter 3:15) to your detractors, who may be numerous. Do you know what you believe **and why you believe it**? Are you capable of defending the truth of your teachings?

Many of those you convert will come from backgrounds in other religious groups. Their previous experiences will have left them with many questions, some valid, some not. Do you know how you would answer the following questions?

1. What is the identity of the beast (or the false prophet, or the two witnesses, etc.) in Revelation?
2. What does the dream of Daniel 7 mean?
3. Is Satan a fallen angel?
4. How was the Bible constituted?
5. Can Paul really be considered an apostle?
6. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church today?
7. Doesn't the Bible guarantee a restoration of the nation of Israel?
8. Do you believe in the millennium?
9. Can you prove that Jesus is deity?
10. Why are there two accounts of creation in Genesis?

This is, of course, only a small representation of the kind of questions that missionaries must answer (most often



## *The Missionary Myth*

in a foreign language, at that). What would be your response to them today? Tomorrow you will have to answer them, and many others.

There is no shortcut to a knowledge of the Bible. It requires time and systematic study. Rightly dividing the word of truth can be accomplished only by those who are deeply familiar with all of its parts. You should know the major movements of both testaments, as well as the principal thrust of each book of the Bible. And, even if you are already versed in the beloved Scriptures, remember that if you are entering a new language area, all of your memory of favorite passages will be useless until you are able to express them in the language of your hearers. In other words, as far as quoting the Bible goes, you will be starting over from scratch.

Your Bible study habits will need to be strengthened and deepened, in order to respond to the mission call. Whatever other books you find you must leave behind as you leave for mission work, do take every volume of Bible helps (commentaries, concordances, etc.) with you to the field. Your Bible knowledge will frequently be put to the test there. Do not be ashamed to say, "I don't know." But be able to say, "I'll find out."

Many times the only reference your hearers will have to the power of God's word will be through the message you bring to them. Your responsibility will be great. Remember what James said: "Those who teach will be judged more severely than those who do not" (James 3:1). Think about it.

## *Qualifications for Mission Work*

### CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Under this heading, we will be talking about four necessary character traits of the missionary: love, humility, reliability, and adaptability. Others could be examined, of course. But these four seem to me to sum up the essential qualities missionaries (and all Christians) need.

### LOVE

Paul said (I am paraphrasing), "Your message may be as beautiful as that spoken by the most eloquent of men, or even by the angels themselves; if it does not spring from love, it is, in the end, just a lot of noise" (I Corinthians 13:1). As a missionary, love will be your primary motivation. You love God, and so will want to honor and serve him. You love his creatures and so will want to see them reconciled to him. You will love **all men**, not just those who are nice or who are of your own race. In particular, you will love those among whom you serve. So many of those to whom you preach will be unloving and unloveable. But you must love them. Did not the Lord do the same for you? And even when you have established a growing, thriving congregation of believers, you will often be surprised at the unloving way they can sometimes treat each other, and you as well.

You will have prayed with them, wept with them, sweated and struggled in ways they can never know about, and they will still cut you with their criticisms, wounding your heart with their hasty and immature judgments. They will often find ways to make you responsible for their miseries, their weakness, their selfishness. Your only hope

## *The Missionary Myth*

in such dark moments, when you feel the ones you have given your life to have betrayed you, will be your unfailing love for them.

LOVE IS PATIENT AND KIND; LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS OR BOASTFUL; IT IS NOT ARROGANT OR RUDE. LOVE DOES NOT INSIST ON ITS OWN WAY; IT IS NOT IRRITABLE OR RESENTFUL; IT DOES NOT REJOICE AT WRONG, BUT REJOICES IN THE RIGHT. LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

These truths you will be teaching. Will you also be living them?

### HUMILITY

By his very nature, the missionary is a go-getter. And a go-getter sometimes has problems with humility. There are a large number of books written in Christian circles concerning the **servi**ng nature of the Christian walk. If any child of God should exhibit this Christ-like quality, it should be the missionary.

It requires strength of character to leave one's homeland, to brave loneliness and uncertain circumstances of all kinds in order to preach the gospel to a dying world. How easy it is to want to assert this very real strength in our relationships with those whom we teach ("Am I not the teacher, the leader, the pioneer, the guide?"). You must be

## *Qualifications for Mission Work*

strong, of course. And those whom you will teach will see you as a light to follow. But you must not teach only the Lord's sound doctrine; you must also teach and live the Lord's loving humility.

In the upper room, when Jesus washed the apostle's feet, he demonstrated the reality of his teaching: "He who is greatest among you shall be the servant of all" (John 13: 1-17; Matthew 20:27). It seems to me that Jesus was trying to get a message across that few have ever understood, even in his Church today: that God alone lifts up and that the way to true oneness with Christ is the way of service. Jesus was, after all, the Son of God, with all of the rights his position entailed. But he who revealed the Father (John 1:18), revealed him as a server, as being humble. We are to imitate Jesus who imitated his Father. How then can we avoid seeking humility, a prime trait of our God?

God humble? God a servant? Of course! Why would he need to be anything else? Pride is for the vain, the weak, the empty, and the incomplete who wish to veil their shortcomings. There is no flaw in God. Who else could therefore be so completely and genuinely humble and serving as he? "When he served," observes Jim McGuigan,<sup>4</sup> "he was doing what came **naturally.**" McGuigan goes on to say:

**Of course** God can crush and punish and coerce. He has the might to do so. But is that his purpose? Had he wanted to, God could have cancelled Adam just as we cancel a check. He could have wiped him away as we wipe a chalkmark from a blackboard. No! God longed

## *The Missionary Myth*

to help humanity and one cannot power one's way into a heart. But that only puts the question back another step. Why would God wish to help mankind? **Because that is how he is!** **This is the only God; the true and living God!**<sup>5</sup>

And we must learn to be like him. The more we realize his holiness, the more we are humbled in his presence (Isaiah 6:1-6), the more we lay hold on life, realizing the depth of the pit into which he descended (and from what heights!) in order to procure it for us. As we grasp his holiness, we will also embody his desire to serve. It is inevitable, and it is necessary.

Do you want to do mission work? Do you want to serve? Can it be said of you that you are humble? Can you be gentle, unselfish, and kind, even in adverse circumstances (I Peter 2:23-24)? The Lord who showed the way calls for you to follow him.

### RELIABILITY

A Christian's word carries the seal of his Master. If he fails to live up to his word, not only will he be judged in default, his Master will also be scorned. Of the two, this latter is the greater scandal. It makes me wonder why the Lord allows his holiness to be tied to our work, as unsteady as it is. But he does, and that is that.

Our responsibility is thus clearly defined. The weight of truth must lie on every word we utter, on every act we accomplish. We must be painstakingly and scrupulously dependable in every aspect of our existence.

## *Qualifications for Mission Work*

So much will depend on you in the mission field. Are you up to it? Are you a leaner, or can you be leaned on? Prepare to be leaned on. Elders will expect dependable work habits; nationals will expect a consistent life style and dependability in action; fellow-workers will need to be able to depend on your team spirit and acceptance of responsibility; your family will need you; the young members will need your teaching, the older ones your advice. In all of this, you will need to draw on your own reserves. You will be a person with a definite, realizable goal. And you must not allow adverse circumstances to alter that goal, "unless these circumstances clearly point to God's directing otherwise," as Houghton correctly states.<sup>6</sup> Reliability must exude from your pores.

Your strength will not be drawn completely from your own reserves, of course. Your force will come from God, who gives strength as eagles to those who wait on him (Isaiah 40:31). There will still be times when, as a person whose life is dedicated to serving others, your emotional strength will wane; you will feel the need to withdraw, for a time, to recharge your batteries. There is no shame in this. You will learn to recognize these moments and to take the necessary action.

**Perseverance** is similar to reliability. Perseverance is the ability to see a task through in spite of difficulties. Mission work is a long-term affair. Prepare to tackle your task with gusto and to see it through. Is it worth beginning? Then it is worth finishing. The old saying is still true: "Winners don't quit and quitters don't win."

## *The Missionary Myth*

### ADAPTABILITY

Adaptability is more than simple culture shock. We will have to call it "Change Shock." Mission work is change, constant change, involving a transfer into previously unknown situations, some of which will astonish you with their capacity to destroy your well-cultivated determination, your equilibrium, your calm.

The changes will hit you from every side. First, the distance. Suddenly, family and friends will be lands away. Unless you have an astronomical working fund, you will not be able to call Mom and Dad every weekend (or they you, for that matter). Can you handle that? Can you handle the thought of being slowly forgotten by those you count as your closest friends? How do you feel about losing contact with the close circle of colleagues and co-workers you work with now? Are you saying to yourself: "This cannot happen?" Don't be naive. It can and it will.

But distance from family and friends is only a part of the problem. Are you ready to let a foreign dentist work on your fillings? How will you handle the question of hospitalization insurances, extremely difficult to regulate by long distance? Do you take certain medicines regularly? How will you procure them on the field? Do not plan to bring a three-year supply. You could get into a "heap" of trouble at the border. Are you willing to be treated for your medical needs by doctors on the field? Distance can complicate incredibly all of these areas, and many others, including income taxes, retirement programs, etc.

The next change is the physical surroundings. You

### *Qualifications for Mission Work*

are likely to be moving from a hot, dry climate to a cool, wet one (if not the reverse!). Are you tied to your present climate? Are you ready for the new bugs (insects and germs) you will encounter? Can you eat foods and drink drinks to which you have not been accustomed? Can you live at a physical and social level inferior to that to which you are accustomed?

Now, consider the change represented by the loss of your spiritual circle, in which you recognized a leader and were perhaps yourself a leader. You have had multitudinous opportunities to appreciate others and to be appreciated in a tightly woven context of live and warm support. You have had opportunities to share your faith and perhaps have developed considerable skills in public speaking. Perhaps you have even led some others to the Lord. Now, imagine yourself stammering and stuttering like an idiot, sounding more like a retarded child than an intelligent adult. Imagine yourself jealous of the children around you who express themselves clearly in the foreign language you are struggling so hard to grasp. Imagine yourself wanting to cry out: "I really am very intelligent! I'm really not as dumb as I sound (or as I feel). Please appreciate the effort I am making; please don't laugh too hard. I really am spiritually mature, even if I can't say 'Jesus loves me' in your language without butchering it horribly." Some of your darkest days will be those of your language learning. The frustrations which will come from this forced learning will teach you patience and humility. You can reduce the damage if you are prepared. If you are not, this trial could cost you your emotional stability. You must approach this



### *The Missionary Myth*

necessary difficulty with secure confidence. If you already have a good opinion of yourself and confidence in the Lord, you are almost sure to succeed swimmingly. If you are prone to self-pity and to boxing up your feelings, you may be headed for a mental breakdown and even a loss of your faith. If I seem to be overstating my case, be assured that such is not the case. These things do indeed happen.

One crippling feeling that will trouble you as you go through change shock, and indeed throughout your entire mission experience, will be the impression that those back "home" just do not understand, could not possibly understand what you are experiencing. And it is true. They do not, cannot know what you are feeling, simply because they have never "walked a mile in your shoes," they have never been where you are, with the responsibilities and pressures you have. Their encouragements (when they offer them) will sound hollow, their criticism will seem unjustified. This will add to the weight of your loneliness.

Adaptability also involves your relationships with family members, of course. For the head of a household moving to another culture, much maturity and love will be necessary as he fills his family's needs and maintains, at the same time, his own equilibrium. Wives and children will see their whole familiar time-and-place structure disembodied. Another must be erected in its place. We will be talking about these changes in another chapter.

New working relations and time-schedules will have to be established on the field. One of the greatest stress-factors contributing to disorientation for the human organism is moving. Imagine how it must be multiplied when you

## *Qualifications for Mission Work*

move, not just to a new city or state, but to a new country, where culture and language are new (you do not even know how to buy a postage stamp), where the sense of time is different, where the food, the climate, the architecture, the mentality in general – everything is altered. And, on top of all of that, you must learn to function in a kind of work you have doubtlessly never done before. It takes time to adjust but those who are ready can function well eventually. Those who are not ready, fold.

Two remarks before I close this chapter. The first is that the signs indicating that you are perhaps going through change shock are classic: lethargy and even dizziness and fainting spells. Some of this (some, I say) is normal toward the beginning of your time on the field. If after the first year you are still experiencing such phenomena, perhaps you had better consider that you are not cut out for the work you are trying to do. If, after rest and time away from your responsibilities, you remain fatigued and lethargic, seek the advice of fellow missionaries and consider that God is telling you that you do not belong where you are.

The second remark concerns something that seems a contradiction to me but that I hear all the time among fellow missionaries. So often, even after ten, twelve, and more years of service on the field, still they refer to their country of origin as “home.” It seems to me only logical that the sooner we consider our new “home” home indeed, the sooner we will be on the road to complete adjustment to our adoptive culture. When a missionary gets into the culture to the point of feeling at home in it and away from home when he visits his supporters, he has hurdled the first

## *The Missionary Myth*

and largest obstacle to adjustment on the field.

The disciplines which pre-dispose a Christian to mission work are arduous and hard to come by. Some persons seem to develop them naturally, while others need to work harder on them. The essential is that you depend on the Lord for strength and that you capitalize on the gifts he has given you.

To close this chapter, I submit a list of the types of people **not needed** on the field, according to a long-time missionary, who knows of what he speaks:

1. Persons not sound in the faith.
2. Persons with pre-existing family problems.
3. Persons not able to get along with others.
4. Persons whose first desire is to make a name for themselves.
5. Persons who can only work by destroying the work of others.
6. Persons whose primary desire is to be directors, dictators, agitators.
7. Persons who do not love the local people.
8. Persons not able to adjust.
9. Persons not physically fit.
10. Persons who cannot handle money wisely.<sup>7</sup>

To this list, I would add:

11. Persons who cannot take criticism.
12. Persons who do mission work to soothe their consciences.

## *Qualifications for Mission Work*

Do you see yourself in this list? To be honest, every conscientious missionary must recognize that he has exhibited, at one time or another, some of these traits. But it is obvious to all working with any given missionary if he is simply not cut out for his work, either by temperament, by preparation, or both. The time to examine your preparedness for this kind of work is BEFORE you come. After may be too late.

---

<sup>1</sup> A. T. Houghton, *Preparing to be a Missionary* (London: Inter Varsity Fellowship, 1956), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> See James W. Sire's *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 1980) for some excellent insights on this subject.

<sup>4</sup> Jim McGuiggan, *The God of the Towel* (Lubbock, Montex Publishing Company, 1984), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> Houghton, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> J. C. Choate, *A Missionary Speaks* (Winona, Mississippi, J. C. Choate Publications, 1983), pp. 149-151.

## CHAPTER 3

### MISSION PHILOSOPHIES

Ah, this is a delicate subject! Feelings run so deep, methods are so dear. I will write what I feel about the subject, and I shall be brief; take it for what it is worth. If I am wrong, I pray that the Lord will forgive and instruct me. I only want to please him.

We are a people of convictions, and that is good. In missions, these convictions lead some to remain on the American continent, others to go to the inner-city, others to go only or primarily to third-world peoples. There are seemingly good reasons for these particular thrusts: "We want to evangelize our neighbors before going to others," "We must go where the people are," "We must go where receptivity is high."

However, nowhere in the Bible do I read the Lord's wishing we would convert one kind of people over another, or people in one particular place, to the exclusion of others, or even one people before another. The gospel message was to be preached to the ends of the earth. May the Lord preserve us from any "philosophy" that would take us to any one kind of people to the exclusion of all of the rest. The method that says that we should be going only where we can make the most converts, for example, is nothing less than unscriptural. We **should** be going to where we can make the most converts. We should also be going to where we can make the least. The point is that we should be going **everywhere**. Jesus said to go into **all** the world.

### *Mission Philosophies*

American Christians have often tied their mission feelings to their culture and have visualized the Church's mission effort as an investment-return project. But no price can ever be placed on a human soul. I simply cannot agree with a method that chooses one field over another simply because it produces more results. Let us send our workers to **every field where the results are high**. Let us also send them to **every field where the results are low**. Let us, then, send our workers to **every field**. Because the injunction "into all the world" means exactly that, regardless of the return for our investment.

I once made these points in a paper for a course at a mission seminar. The course instructor made the following remark in the margin: "What criteria for distribution of personnel are you arguing for? If for ALL political nations, should the next 100 miss. [sic] including you go indiscriminately to those not now having 1 ch of x [sic] missionary? Are there no priorities? The conclusion of your argument would seem to be ALL places need someone, there are no priorities, so wherever we are working or may decide to work is O. K. Emphasizing ALL works simply ducks responsibility for deciding **which** are not going to be done now, this year. A 'cop out' to the question."

To those remarks I answer: Until the first priority ("Go into all the world") is attained, there is indeed no other priority. This is not a cop out; this is obeying our Lord. Until we have preached the gospel to every creature under heaven, the problem of which nation we will go to is a false problem. We must go to **all of them**. I realize that every individual congregation sending out missionaries

### *The Missionary Myth*

must choose where it will send them, according to its conscience and goals. But I am not speaking here of a local situation, but rather of a Church-wide problem. Until the Church universal reaches the goal set by its Master, local congregations bickering about which nation should receive the next 100 missionaries is like wondering which of our children will most appreciate the next piece of food before they have all been fed! We should be going into every nation of the world **this year**. Only then could we permit ourselves the luxury of wondering where the next 100 missionaries can best be used.

A brother once told me that the people in the city where my wife and I had worked for five years (two people among 400,000) had "had its chance" and that we should shake the dust from our shoes and move on. I wonder when the Church will move out of his Bible-belt city of a few tens of thousands because the majority of the population are not Christians. They have been preached to for almost 200 years! There is a contradiction there somewhere.

Those of us who have chosen to work in Europe spend a lot of our time defending our work before brethren who discourage a bit too easily when the "results" are not what they would like for their investment. Reports come back to them from their European missionaries, telling of slow progress over periods of years in areas where two or three decades are necessary to constitute even a small, struggling group. When they hear that in other countries of the world the converts are being made by the hundreds and even the thousands, something clicks in their minds.

### *Mission Philosophies*

A little math, mixed with the American investment-return obsession, convinces them that it is better stewardship of the Lord's money to send it where the converts are being made than where growth is slow. If the Lord's Church were entirely a "business" affair, the idea would be magnificent. But it is not, and the idea misses the mark.

When discouragement sets in among the brethren, the worker in Europe begins to see ominous signs in his correspondence with supporters. Here are some examples from a letter I once received:

[We are] concerned about the small number of converts for the length of time the work has been carried on . . . . Sometimes practical matters force us to re-evaluate our situation . . . . Some re-evaluating needs to be done.

The "practical matters" that "force us to re-evaluate our situation" are nothing other than investment-return considerations. When such remarks begin to appear in letters to missionaries, they announce the approaching end of his support. Make no mistake about it.

No work should be begun or maintained at the expense of another. If it is true that the Church has spread herself too thin in some areas, the response to the problem is not to eliminate the "thin" areas entirely and congregate workers only in high-receptivity localities. What we need is not more picking and choosing, but **more workers everywhere**, in small teams, in large teams, as families and



## *The Missionary Myth*

individuals, etc. The problem is not that we have used one method or another, but that we have used no method enough, that we have not sent out enough people overall. If, to correct that situation, we must withdraw funding from established works and force missionaries to quit, instead of sending more into the fields, then the Church has a commitment problem. Methods are not the sticky-wicket we make them out to be. The real sticker is that we simply do not love the Lord enough to get out and preach to the lost, all of the lost.

Missionaries in Asia, Africa, and South America do not need to abandon their works and come to Europe. Neither should European workers drop their struggling groups to go to "ripe" fields. Until we are in the **whole** world, there is no room for mission "philosophies" at all. There is only one objective: to reach the whole world in this generation. Till then, to go to some areas instead of others on the basis of receptivity is to turn the problem around and look at it from an impossible and unacceptable angle.

Some of our brethren quote, without blinking an eye, missiologists who suggest that studying a group's potential receptivity to the gospel "is basic to determining how or even if it ought to be approached with the gospel (emphasis mine - CW).<sup>1</sup>

Or even if? How can this kind of teaching ever come out of anyone who ever seriously considered the Lord's order to His apostles? Is "all the world" all the world, or is it only that part of the world that is the most receptive? The shame that such declarations inspire is exceeded only

### *Mission Philosophies*

by the guilt we should feel if we believe them.

Obviously, some nations will be more receptive than others. But the nation's receptivity is not the key. Our obedience is – our obedience to the Lord's command. And the commandment says: "ALL the world." There are plenty of nations out there that have not been touched by the gospel:

Among the totally unevangelized nations are Kuwait, Western Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Luxembourg, Senegal, Sikkim, Mali, Sudan, Libya, Maldives, Monaco, Suroa, Mauritania, Tunisia, the USSR, Oman, Yemen, Rwanda, Upper Volta, Cauru, Burundi, North Korea, Iraq, Brunei, Bhuttan, Iran, Guinea, Bahrain, Gabon, United Arab Emirates, Equatorial Guinea, Algeria, Albania, Dijboat, Central Republic of Africa, China, Anglia, Chad, Cambodia and Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

For the moment, some of these are completely closed by law to messengers of the Good News. We are not even permitted to enter. But are we praying for the day when we may? In the meantime, some borders are open. Are any currently preparing to enter them? Let us go to the inner cities and to the outer cities, to the in-parts and out-parts, to the poor and to the rich, to countries which welcome us with open arms and to those where our arrival and our teaching are met with the most arrogant indifference.

Does the Church get discouraged? Of course. But

### *The Missionary Myth*

she should carry on in spite of the obstacles, in imitation of her glorious Head.

Let me hasten to say, in conclusion, that any method based on better understanding of how people hear and respond to the gospel can only be good. But when the goal is forgotten in view of the method, we are all in trouble. Whatever may be our convictions in this whole matter, we need to bow before the Father and ask forgiveness for our hard-headedness and our slowness at accomplishing the mission he has given us.

. . . Do I hear at least one "Amen?"

---

<sup>1</sup>Carley H. Dodd, "The Receptivity Scale: A Pilot Study to Develop an Empirical Receptivity Index," *Mission Strategy Bulletin*, April-June, 1985, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Reuel Lemmons, "The Restoration Movement in Evangelism," *Image*, January 1, 1984, p. 4.

## FUND-RAISING

I heard it again just this morning from a fellow-worker: "I hate to raise money." Generally speaking, there is probably nothing the missionary dreads more. Why is that? Aside from the fact that raising funds does not come easily for most of us, why is it that most missionaries not only do not like it, but actually hate it? Perhaps the following will help us to understand.

The more the missionary grows spiritually, the more he sees that having to "pound the pavement" to raise money for mission efforts is a supreme contradiction. If the Church were truly convicted of the lost state of all men without Christ, if she were truly concerned for dying souls, then never would a missionary have to look for contributors and sponsors for his work. The Church would constantly seek out those among her ranks who are willing to go and would provide for their support in the field. It is, to my mind, a grave shame that the institution seeking to be the pillar and ground of the truth, the salt and light of the world, should force those of its members who wish to spread the Good News abroad to hit the road for weeks, months, even years at a time gathering the funds necessary to obey the Lord's great commission. Men should never have to seek churches to support them; churches should always be seeking out men to send. The fact that this is not generally true is one of the greatest indictments against the Church of our Lord today.

## *The Missionary Myth*

Another fellow-worker once said, "I don't enjoy raising money either, but that is the system, and we have to go with the system." "The system?" I thought. "Can we be so pragmatic?" But, after at first judging my brother, I admired him for his true motives. He intends to do his work **despite** the faults in the system.

But that does not prevent the system from being quite unbiblical. Let me be even clearer: It is wrong.

Must missionaries be beggars? After asking this question, Ed Matthews<sup>1</sup> points out that missionaries are in fact partners in the business of reaching the lost with the gospel: "We are on the same team, engaged in the same task, commissioned by the same God to use our combined efforts for the sake of world evangelism . . . Since some are called by God to become missionaries, should not the rest of us be responsible to provide the means by which they go out?"

Apparently not, to judge by the general reaction to such pertinent statements. Missionaries are indeed beggars. "It's a foregone conclusion," says Joe Cannon. "It's in the woof and warp of things. The only thing not settled is what kind of beggar you are going to be."<sup>2</sup> Cannon goes on to call the beggar system "revolting." Indeed it is. And you can be sure that the first to be revolted is the Lord himself.

Our mission effort would be much more expanded in the world if we did not require that our missionaries become professional beggars. Though they will most often not complain, all feel the nasty sting. Is the Lord's work to be done only by those whose skin is so hard they can take the "system," or by those whose attractive personalities make them easy winners in a game of trumpet-blowing,

## *Fund-Raising*

boot-shining oratory? Or will churches take the initiative that is rightly theirs, dig into their riches, and look for men to send?

Fortunately, there are many congregations which actually do seek out families to send to the fields. They are to be commended for their vision and conviction. Most of these are large assemblies. But to object that only large groups can do such a thing is making excuses. Even smaller congregations can contribute to mission efforts by combining funds with those of other smaller assemblies **and looking for families to send to the world**. Why do churches with the money to do mission work often wait for missionaries to come their way, then make them beg, while they set themselves up as the much-solicited "benefactors," when in fact they are co-workers? Is there any real reason to be proud of such a system? Missionaries are not, that is certain.

Money-raising problems are not by any means over once the missionary reaches the field. In fact, they are usually just beginning. Missionaries can tell some frightening stories. And, unlike fishing tales, they are TRUE. The classic is the letter informing the missionary that his monthly support will be terminated as of last month. You see, it does not take long to lose support. Just about as long as it takes to read a letter. How many of you reading these lines have had that experience while living thousands of miles from family and homeland? Few supporters can understand the feeling that pierces the missionary's stomach when he receives one of these "Dear [former] missionary" letters. It is not fear, or even anger; it is only a very

### *The Missionary Myth*

sickening sense of sadness and frustration. There is no feeling quite like it. And no one who has not "been there" can understand it. It means that money-raising time has come again, and you already know how he feels about that.

If at all possible, the sponsoring congregation should do its part to preserve the man on the field from such traumas. If money falls off, and it will, the sponsor should see that it is replaced. Is this asking too much of a sponsoring church? Raising funds from the field is infinitely more difficult for the missionary than it is for the sponsors in the homeland.

Time and efficiency should be considered. The demands on the time of a mission worker are numerous and often overwhelming. To discontinue partially or totally his work on the field in order to consecrate himself to fund-raising is a poor use of his time. Was he sent to the field to evangelize or to raise money? If the sponsoring congregation, then, will assign itself this responsibility and fulfill it, a large load will be taken from the shoulders of a very grateful man on the field.

If the loss of funds involves a major portion or the entirety of the support, the sponsor usually has no choice but to call the man to return to the homeland for fund-raising. I need not tell you what a disaster this represents for every aspect of his work. He is separated from his family; precious contacts who were reaching the point of conversion may be lost; young Christians needing the experience and advice of a qualified worker may falter or even fall away; multitudinous opportunities for good slip forever away — all of this because of a situation that need

## *Fund-Raising*

not exist among a people serious about lost souls.

Along this line, it seems to me that a part of the sponsoring congregation's responsibility in this area could be considerably lightened if contributors terminating their support would assume the responsibility for replacing it. This seems only fair and right, unless, of course, the contributor could not do so for reasons of conscience (termination for doctrinal questions, etc.).

But few indeed accept this responsibility. Most "termination" letters contain vague references to "sincere regret" and the hope "that you will be able to find funds elsewhere" to replace the loss. (Curiously, it is also at about this time that classes and other groups in the congregation begin sending "God bless you" cards). If indeed the regret is sincere, and it always is, of course, the least the terminating congregation could do would be to seek out others to replace the lost funds. On more than one occasion, I have personally requested this of groups terminating their support to my work. My request has never even been acknowledged, much less responded to favorably.

May I take a moment here to thank the Lord with lifted hands and heart for sponsors and supporters who understand all of these things and make it their business to take as much of this weight off the missionary's shoulders as possible. Some of our assemblies are indeed realizing the **team-work** aspect of the missionary endeavor. May God bless them, and may he help the rest of us to follow their example!

One of the most formidable problems of mission funding is the thorny dollar-exchange issue. Many



## *The Missionary Myth*

Americans, including, unfortunately, many elderships and mission committees, are completely uninformed about the first principles of international money transfers, and even more so about the devastating effect this mysterious exchange system can have on a missionary's available funds.

A missionary never knows how much his salary will be from month to month. All depends on the exchange rate **on the day his check arrives**. The total can vary enormously; once, the dollar dropped in France by 20 percent of its value **in a single day**. And so did the salary of every missionary worker in France. All in one fell swoop. The exchange rate determines all.

Even under less drastic conditions, a missionary's salary can still easily vary from 6 percent to 10 percent in a single month. Suppose you have a monthly salary of \$1500: one month you could receive the full \$1500; another only \$1300; another \$1350; another \$1600; and another \$1280, and so on (all in the local currency, of course). Would you like to live like that? Could you live like that? Missionaries do.

As I write this, in France, the dollar has lost one-third of its value against the French franc over the past twelve months. For a missionary whose salary has not been proportionately adjusted during the same time period, that means a corresponding cut in his salary. One third. And yet, missionaries in this country and several countries around are humbly cutting back on necessities, in order to survive.

If we look at the problem from the supporters' viewpoint, it is equally appalling. Raise a missionary's salary by

### *Fund-Raising*

one-third or one-half in a single year? Unthinkable! Yet, if such were indeed to be done, under the circumstances described above, the missionary's salary would, in fact, not be raised by one penny. It would merely be kept right where it was one year ago, which leaves him still behind, because of inflation.

You noticed above that I showed a missionary's salary occasionally going over the regular amount. One learns not to count on that, for the matter of inflation, which we will now look at, is a formidable adversary.

Consider this example: A missionary working in a European country receives no increase in his salary during a three-year term of service. During this time, the dollar falls in the exchange against the local currency by 20 percent. (We have seen how this drop can affect the salary). At the same time, the inflation in the country of his work reaches 35 percent for the three-year period. Two seconds of calculation will show that the missionary's available funds have been cut over the three-year period by a total of not less than 50 percent! This is a true example. Would you accept it? Why do we let it happen to our missionaries?

Last month, in this country, some workers went on strike because they had lost 3 percent of their purchasing power. And yet, during the past year, missionaries the world over have lost 20 percent, 30 percent, even 50 percent and more of their salaries without a word of complaint. I cannot help wondering what would be the clamor, should such a thing befall the located preacher in the States.

We often complain that we haven't enough mission-minded souls in the Lord's church. Is it any wonder, really?

## *The Missionary Myth*

When the church learns to love the Lord with all of her heart, soul, strength, and mind, lots of things will change, including, necessarily, the way we treat those sent out from among us to preach the message world-wide. And there will be a lot more of them to treat better, as well!

How can the church remedy this dollar-exchange problem? One way would be for the sponsoring church to assume the fluctuations of the dollar. It could guarantee a fixed monthly salary to the missionary **in the local currency**. Some churches do this, but not many. I know of at least one case in which a sponsor that had gone to this system finally gave it up, considering that the monthly increases and uncertainties were too hard to handle. So they handed the financial loss back to their man on the field.

And yet, even adopting this method is not sufficient. Missionaries need to be kept ahead of inflation, which can reach astronomical proportions, sometimes as much as 200 percent or 300 percent or more in one year in some countries. Elderships (and prospective missionaries) need to seriously consider these things before taking on a work and hanging a missionary on a hook without support because of galloping inflation.

In recent years, the special-contribution method of money-raising has come into considerable favor with American churches. Weeks, sometimes months, of preparation often go into these efforts, which involve, ideally, a participation by **every member** of the local assembly. This seems to be an excellent fund-raising method, particularly suited to the dynamism and wealth of the American culture.

## *Fund-Raising*

Some such efforts are designed to support local efforts. This is good. Some, I am grateful to say, are designed solely to raise money for missions.

**WHY IS IT, THOUGH, THAT MISSION CONTRIBUTIONS RISE ONLY TO THE TENS OF THOUSANDS, WHILE COLLECTIONS FOR LOCAL WORK RISE TO THE MILLIONS?**

Now, there is obviously nothing wrong with raising millions for local work. But when such millions are being used to preach to 5 percent of the world's population, while only a few tens of thousands are offered to reach the other 95 percent of the world's citizens, forgive me, brethren, but something is **wrong**.

Studies done by Carl Mitchell in 1985 indicate that the average member of the American churches of Christ spends \$20 per year on foreign missions, and that churches of Christ in general spend 94.5 percent of their budgets on local work and only 5.5 percent on missions.<sup>3</sup>

I have before me an article describing a special contribution of several million dollars by an American church. Here is the list of uses to which these monies were to be applied: ". . . a housing project for the elderly, a center for counseling, a day-care center, a benevolent center, classroom facilities, and an auditorium." The article goes on to say that all of this is to be done "without incurring a debt or paying interest to loan institutions."

I would like to make three remarks concerning this information. The first is that all of the facilities described above are excellent, even necessary, to out-reach in a local community. And there is certainly a lot to be said about

### *The Missionary Myth*

wisely handling the money such improvements require. The second remark is that, however good these projects and however wise our handling of money must be, the emphasis seems nevertheless on doing nothing until ALL the money is in the bank. What I am wondering is this: where is the FAITH in all of this? Will we not launch out on any worthwhile endeavor until we have the money in the bank?

The third remark is this: WHERE IS THE MISSION WORK IN THIS LIST OF PROJECTS? Photos in church papers of elderships congratulating each other and thanking the Lord for the millions raised in order to strengthen the local church have a bitter-sweet taste to the missionary. He is SO glad to see local churches giving, working in their communities and SO sorry to see the emphasis in American churches turn inward, to the neglecting of mission outreach.

The Church needs facilities, of course; it must see to the evangelizing of its neighbors. But "the Father's business" is taking the message of salvation to a dying WORLD, not just a dying neighborhood. It just does not do to say that we will first concentrate on our neighborhoods before turning our eyes to the world. If there is no room for missions in today's budget, there most likely will not be any in tomorrow's.

**THE CHURCH NEEDS MILLIONS FOR ITS LOCAL WORK. IT ALSO NEEDS MILLIONS FOR ITS MISSION EFFORT. THE FACT THAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF THE FORMER PROVES THAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF THE LATTER.** How long will we offer steak to our local works while throwing crumbs to missions?

When I see articles about the millions raised for local

## *Fund-Raising*

works, I cannot help wondering when such time and effort will finally go into the raising of equivalent sums for missions. Do we realize how much mission work 6 or 8 million dollars would do?<sup>4</sup>

Some churches occasionally organize a day of prayer for missionaries world-wide and go to a lot of trouble to obtain information about as many of them as they can. This is GOOD, and is to be encouraged. Perhaps if we prayed more for our missionaries and their work, we would also be more inclined to support them more adequately. Only good can come from an assembly gathered in prayer. But the church needs to listen to herself praying, to hear herself expressing her love for the lost. The Christians in the world's richest nation must be struck, at last, by the terrible responsibility that having such riches entails.

Some of the church's riches are stored in the bank. One informed correspondent once told me that, among the churches in his area, there was approximately \$200,000 stashed away in banks in **savings**, earmarked for nothing! Now, I ask you, what does a church have to save money for? Consider these words of wisdom:

How many churches are there among us that exist in limbo year after year, filled with precious brothers and sisters who wonder why they aren't growing, convinced their budget is tight, but while thousands are tucked away in their bank accounts, designated for no specific purpose? How many churches could support whole missionary families for years on

### *The Missionary Myth*

what they have in savings, but don't?

.....  
It is not Christian to preach faith, insisting it is 'assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen,' when the congregation knows you [elders and spiritual leaders] have tucked away the money given to the Lord in a hoarded savings account often controlled by no more than two or three.

.....  
I move we pull our missionaries off the road, send them on to the mission fields, assume Christian integrity and keep our word! I move that we get more radio programs on the air, TV spots, newspaper ads and spend the money God's people have given for the purpose they have given it! . . . I move that we spend our church's savings account looking for and cultivating missionaries instead of waiting for them to come beg from us . . . .<sup>5</sup>

I know that hoarding money that could be spent in missions is not the general tendency. Or is it? I know that those who do this are, at least in their limited way, doing what they **think** the Lord would want. Let us not doubt their sincerity. But let us also thank the Lord that there are concerned brethren who prefer to see the Lord's money used instead of hidden. May he raise up more of them and place them in places of leadership in His church. Mission work would profit from this change. But so would every

## *Fund-Raising*

other phase of the church's mission.

We must not be naive. Mission work costs money -- lots of money. When we want to do something enough, we always find a way; we always find the money, which is why we are not doing much in missions. We simply do not want to. And that attitude, my beloved brethren, the Lord will judge.

If we truly want to change the present situation, we will. If we do not, we will not. It is as simple as that. But if we do not start changing our attitudes about this present state of affairs, we are all due some severe correction from the Lord.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Mission Strategy Bulletin*, July-September, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Cannon, *For Missionaries Only* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *The Christian Chronicle*, November 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Since these lines were written, one American church has twice exceeded the million dollar mark in special contributions for its missions efforts.

<sup>5</sup> Larry West, "Churches, It's Time to Spend Our Church's Savings Accounts," *World Radio News*, January, 1984.



## CHAPTER 5

### MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY

While no missionary would tell you that his original decision to do mission work was inspired primarily by his own spiritual depth, every missionary will tell you that the experience has indeed expanded his spiritual dimensions. The daily putting of his faith on the line, the repeated defending of his convictions against sizeable opposing forces, the constant emotional, social (and geographical) isolation from his committed supporters – all of this in a foreign cultural setting – leaves little choice: blossom or wilt.

New missionaries discover quickly that they are not as mature as they thought before coming. Some find the going too rough. Most, however, when confronted by the hard reality of mission life, place their hearts in the Lord's hands, lean full on him, and learn the hard lesson of humility and trust, often with spectacular results, both in their lives and in their work.

Brethren tend to overdo the images they project of mission workers to the point of triteness. They see the missionary as a "soldier of the cross," as an "embattled warrior" for the Lord; they consider him a tireless worker, a master thinker, often an accomplished orator, always a profoundly spiritual person, one whose every attitude is to be imitated, whose every word is to be weighed as rising from the depths of a heart steeped in wisdom.

There is a certain amount of truth in all of this. But images, even those constructed on truth, can soon turn to

### *Missionary Spirituality*

caricature. The definite tendency is to **idealize** the missionary, to see him not as he really is, but as he is imagined. Is this because of the spiritual commitment that leads him to place his life in the hands of God for the expansion of his kingdom? Is it because of the financial sacrifice he bears in order to preach the gospel? Those who exhibit such qualities certainly deserve our respect and esteem. They do not deserve, nor do they want, to be idealized. For in truth every Christian is called to do the things I have just mentioned. The missionary is nothing more than a "normal" Christian doing what a normal Christian should do, with the exception that he does it in a foreign culture, with all of the challenges and dangers that such supposes. He could well do without the "image" he bears and the enormous public relations aspect the brethren have imposed on his work. If he could only get on with the task of teaching the lost, without all of the fuss and bother, he would feel so much better about it all. Instead, he must advertise, convince, pitch, and sell in order to keep himself and his work afloat. The brethren seem to need all of this fanfare. Indeed they even require it.

I suspect that underlying our idealizing of mission workers is an undercurrent, if not of shame, at least of disappointment at one's not having directly participated in a mission effort of one kind or another. This shame/disappointment factor seems to play a role in the way brethren view those who actually do go. They often look at them with wonder and awe, even with envy. I have heard good people who need not feel guilty about not being foreign missionaries declare: "If only I could have been a

### *The Missionary Myth*

missionary! Some day, I'll come over there and join you on the field!" They know good and well they will never be able to do that; but they wish they had been able, and the impossibility of it all gnaws at them needlessly. And what is it they secretly seek? Probably to be admired as missionaries are admired.

Let me say here, parenthetically, that this admiration of missionaries has another, less pleasant, side, for it is coupled with a dangerous and perplexing (for the missionary: the brethren do not seem to notice this) reluctance to commit funds to their work for any length of time, with the resulting paradox that admired, adulated workers are forced to beg and plead to find and keep adequate funding for their work. This is an interesting situation indeed. Could it be that real appreciation of the mission worker stems from a respect for his willingness to submit to financial sacrifice? Could this, then, be the reason why, when the missionary is obviously hurting financially, supporters remain strangely unmoved? "After all," the thinking seems to be, "that's part of being a missionary, isn't it?" Let me put it another way: You who are reading this, could you still admire and appreciate a man who, while doing mission work, is not only not having to face financial deprivation but indeed is living well, financially (like most of his located colleagues in the States)? Think about it.

On the basis of their lives and work, missionaries are indeed deserving of a special hearing from their brethren; they should be respected for the Lord who dwells in them and for the way they have allowed him to use them to his glory. But the image most brethren have of the missionary's

### *Missionary Spirituality*

spirituality is a false one. Real missionary spiritual depth is not necessarily demonstrated by eloquent prayers, impressive preaching, or masterful money-raising, but is rather of a nature that no worker ever really expects to find, the kind that is, in the end, more profound, more meaningful than he could ever have imagined before entering the field. At the same time, this deep growth toward God leads him along a road of suffering that few Christians experience:

Could I have known the path ahead,  
Could I have seen that I'd be led  
To mountains such as these,  
Forgive me, Lord: I would have fled,

Could I have known the weariness,  
Could I have seen the tearful stress  
Of climbing to this height . . .  
Forgive me, Lord, my stubbornness.

But now I stand upon the crest,  
And now I view the Holiest  
To which, by pain, I'm led.  
O thank you, Lord: your way is best.

How shall I describe this kind of growth? It consists of two very common factors – Bible study and prayer – whose riches are vastly multiplied by a third element: spiritual isolation, already mentioned. This isolation is the catalyst that brings out the best – or the worst – in the mission worker. The potential for good in the mission

## *The Missionary Myth*

setting is equalled only by the danger of shipwreck; this is why serious self-examination must precede the precious, life-changing decision to be a missionary.

Let us see how these three factors – Bible study, prayer and spiritual isolation – co-exist on the mission field.

The missionary arrives on the field knowing what he believes and is going to teach. Or does he? Does he know what he believes or what he has always been taught to believe? <sup>1</sup> Development of true spirituality begins with putting into question your religious views. You will note that I do not say “questioning,” but “putting into question.” By this I mean examining them **outside of their normal context**.

In the homeland you are surrounded by any number of sympathetic brothers and sisters who feel as you feel, who believe as you believe, who comfort and support you in your doctrinal stances and overall perspective of the Lord's will. When you get to the field, all of that emotional and doctrinal support disappears. It is not that the brethren no longer care but that they simply are **no longer present**. On the other hand, people who have doctrinal positions diametrically opposed to those you teach are **very present** and anxious to undo your confidence in the Master's will for men's lives. They belong to groups established years before your arrival. Because your teaching of the restoration of simple New Testament Christianity is so different from what they have been teaching for so long, you will become the upstart, the divider, the insolent fundamentalist. This is a bitter pill to swallow.

It would be nice to be able to say that the simplicity

### *Missionary Spirituality*

of the gospel we teach will attract people immediately. But this is not often the case. And it simply does not do any good to tell people that there are two or three million believers in America who are living the pattern you teach, when there are only ten or five or two meeting with you on Sunday. The question often comes: "If you are the Church, **where are the people?**" And how will you answer it?

It is precisely at this point, when we find ourselves outside of the protective cover of brethren of "like precious faith," that we make a very important discovery: that truth is not dependent on all of those people back "home" who share our beliefs and are pulling for us in our mission efforts. Nor does it depend on all of those **not** responding to our teaching on the field. Truth is truth. It lives and thrives apart from what any man thinks or does (even you!). Of course, every missionary knows this **intellectually** before going to the field. But intellectual knowledge and stark reality are not always the same "critter."

I well remember the puzzled question put to me by one of my colleagues as he and I came out of a rather difficult Bible study, one of our first on the field. He said, pensively, "Do you ever wonder if we are right?" It was the first indication I had that he was struggling with his basic views of God and his Word. He eventually lost the battle against his doubt. And he lost it because his faith depended on the presence and support of brethren who were no longer around to hold him up.

This lack of doctrinal support leads to a sense of emotional loss, and for the same reason: the absence of supportive brethren to recognize your good work, to pat you

### *The Missionary Myth*

on the back, to tell you what a good job you are doing, to do all of the hundred and one things that loving brethren do for each other when they are together.

One evening, years ago, I was keenly feeling this absence of emotional support. For months I had felt unappreciated, unrecognized, even unloved. I had gone to the window of our apartment and was looking out at the lights outside, praying about these feelings. While I was praying aloud and hurting inside, I remembered that I had received that day a tape from my parents in the States. I had not yet listened to the tape, so I went into the living room and put it on. The first thing my father said was that, as he was beginning the tape, he had been visited by two young Christian ladies who said they had a message for me, a message in song. Then I heard them begin to sing:

Go, labor on: spend and be spent –  
Thy joy to do the Father's will;  
It is the way the Master went:  
Should not the servant tread it still?

Go, labor on: 'tis not for nought;  
Thy earthly loss is heav'n'ly gain;  
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;  
The Master praises: what are men?

Toil on, faint not, keep watch and pray;  
Be wise the erring soul to win;  
Go forth into the world's highway,  
Compel the wand'rer to come in.

### *Missionary Spirituality*

Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice;  
For work comes rest, for exile home;  
Soon shalt thou hear the Bridegroom's voice,  
The midnight peal, "Behold, I come."

As I listened in pained silence, suddenly the pettiness of my desire for human recognition weighed on me. And there in the darkness, surrounded not by my brethren but by the Lord himself, who thus comforted and exhorted me, I was ashamed and wept.

Now, having tried to describe the catalyst of spiritual isolation in a foreign atmosphere, I will briefly attempt to show its effects on the worker's Bible study and prayer.

I have said elsewhere in this book that a missionary needs to know the Scriptures well. This is fundamental, of course. You cannot share what you do not already know. But, though you should already know your Bible very well before entering the field, the spiritual isolation I have described will **drive** you to it for the courage and comfort you are used to receiving from the brethren. For, I am not suggesting that we must do without these things, only that we must learn where our real source of strength lies. Missionaries do indeed need comfort and loving care – everybody does. But the sooner he (and every Christian) learns that his strength is in the Lord, and not in his brethren, the better. On top of that, the missionary quickly learns that his brethren are not always trustworthy. It is said that mission work helps a man lean more on his Lord because he learns not to lean on his supporters. This is true, I am sorry to say (for the supporters part). But that is another subject!



## *The Missionary Myth*

Not only must the missionary go to the Word for strength, but also in order to work with those he teaches. He will normally be approaching people with varying degrees of Biblical knowledge. And he has to meet each one where he is and begin there to teach him. A simple "hear/believe/repent/confess/be baptized" rarely appeals to an intelligent contact. Before teaching him, often a lot of **unteaching** will need to be done. Few persons we meet on the field will be as well-prepared as the Ethiopian eunuch for the pure message of the gospel. Before good seed can be planted, weeds have to be pulled, ground has to be cleared. All of this involves extensive Bible study for the mission worker. Indeed it also involves intensive Bible **living**.

Many of our conversions involve people with extended religious training in various denominations. There will therefore be some pruning and transplanting to do. Converts coming from such movements usually arrive with diverse items of erroneous "baggage." All of this must be dealt with succinctly and directly by the missionary.

And it must be dealt with from the Word. This is why he carries such a solemn responsibility to be versed in the Scriptures, to make them his meditation day and night, not only in order to lighten the path he travels personally, but also in order to help others out of darkness.

Extensive Bible study is also necessary for helping the converted grow. Although the major amount of the missionary's Biblical presentations will concern "first principles," at least in the first years of his work, the deepening effect of this kind of study on his own spiritual life can be appreciable. It is often said that one must not neglect

## *Missionary Spirituality*

personal study of the Bible in favor of study designed to prepare for teaching others. This warning is only partially valid. New insights that jump out at me in my own study and experience with the Word of God, deeper convictions borne of a better understanding of vital truths have fed my sermon and class preparation for years. I know of no better way to supply nurture to growing Christians than the fruits of one's own daily walk with the Lord. In addition, as every teacher knows, the person who prepares and develops lesson materials in order to teach others, no matter what the subject, is the one who learns the most. This is no less true in Biblical study than elsewhere. While it is true that every servant of the Lord needs daily contact with the word for his own personal growth, it is also true that preparing to teach others is one of the best ways to strengthen and develop one's own spiritual dimensions.

Whatever the reason for the study, all teaching must come from the Word. In the field as in the homeland, tangential teaching produces tangential Christians who can have trouble centering on Christ.

I confess that the Lord's Word, though I studied it regularly and deeply, never spoke to my soul when I was surrounded by loving brethren as it has since I have been far from them, leaning weakly on the Savior's breast and responsible for the spiritual feeding of those around me.

There remains the element of prayer, also immensely improved by the particular difficulties (and joys) of mission work. Does it need to be said, for example, that mission work lends itself to the cultivating of the desire to be with the Lord? Who can know better than the mission worker

### *The Missionary Myth*

the hollow feeling in the pit of the stomach upon contemplating the simple fact of his "sojourn" in a strange land, while waiting for the "better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:13)? Who can lean on the Father with more earnestness than those who are far away from family and friends, yearning for the day when "all of God's chil-luns comes home?"

The mission worker's prayers become a well of hope and joy springing up within him and drawing him to drink more deeply every day of the Redeemer's wonderful strength. Elders are far away, family and friends distant, spiritual counsellors unavailable. The stranger in a strange land learns to depend on the One who has sent him. It is no wonder the lives of all of God's great men are studded with magnificent accounts of prayerful communion.

It is not always easy communion, either. There are questions, struggles, doubts, fears, and pains. There are also joys, triumphs, gains, and victories. I would go so far as to suggest that those who have not known the former cannot experience the latter.

Though supporters cannot be physically present in the missionary's daily battles with discouragement, there is something magnificent they can do: they can make a pact to pray for him every day. (Do you pray for your missionaries every day?) In this way, they can hold up his hands in marvelous ways, in ways they could hardly imagine or expect (Ephesians 3:20-21). What more in the entire universe can one human being do for another than to speak his name before the throne of the King in intercession?

### *Missionary Spirituality*

Because you prayed,  
God touched our weary bodies with his power  
And gave us strength for many a trying hour,  
In which we might have faltered, had not you,  
Our intercessors, faithful been and true.

Because you prayed,  
God touched our lips with coals from altar fire,  
Gave spirit fullness and did so inspire  
That when we spoke, sin-blinded souls did see,  
Sin-chains were broken, captives made free.

Because you prayed,  
The dwellers in the dark have found the Light,  
The glad good news has banished heathen night,  
The message of the cross, so long delayed,  
Has brought them life at last,  
Because you prayed!

(author unknown)

The missionary needs prayers **before anything else**. When he knows that his supporters sincerely and regularly speak his name in earnest intercession before the Father, he knows also that all his other needs will be met. Conversely, when his needs on the field are not being met, he is sure that prayers on his behalf are either non-existent or completely insincere.

In this chapter, I have essentially limited the missionary's spiritual growth to Bible study and prayer, combined with the particular context of his experience of spiritual

### *The Missionary Myth*

isolation. Other factors also play important roles, factors such as the indescribable joy of leading another soul to Christ, or the unfathomable pain of seeing souls for which one has done all he can flounder and fall away; factors such as the uncertainty of financial support or the experience of "growing into" a foreign culture, etc. But it seems to me that all of these can be resumed in the elements I have described. Bible study and prayer are available – and essential – to all Christians. Bible study and prayer in cross-cultural evangelism take on a new dimension altogether, with a powerful potential for spiritual deepening.

In conclusion, let me suggest that supporting brethren can contribute to the foreign worker's spiritual growth not only by partnership in prayer and caring support of all kinds, as I have suggested, but also by keeping him supplied with quality books, magazines, sermon tapes, and other materials which can serve as tools for development. So often his cup is low, or even empty. So seldom does he have the occasion to listen to someone else's mature, challenging treatment of the Word. He feeds others daily. Please help see that he is himself also fed with the bread of heaven.

---

<sup>1</sup>When I was raising support to come to the field, one eldership of dozens I met with enquired about my doctrinal stance on certain areas. According financial support to a worker presumes agreement with all that he will be teaching. A few questions are indeed in order, it seems to me, before funds are granted.

**FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS ON THE FIELD**

AS A MISSIONARY IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY, YOUR FIRST SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY IS NOT TO THE LOST, NOT TO YOUR SUPPORTERS, NOT EVEN TO YOUR ELDERS, BUT TO YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN. After the Lord comes your wife. After your wife come your children. After the children come all of the others. Any other order will sink your ship – in a hurry!

**HUSBAND-WIFE**

Mission work has destroyed more than one marriage. Or, put another way, many marriages have not been able to stand up to the enormous pressure of mission work. Why is this? Several reasons could be given. Perhaps the spouses were not prepared for mission pressure. Perhaps the husband (or the wife, or both) felt he must “prove” himself in his new work, thus abandoning his family responsibilities for long periods of time. Perhaps simple immaturity played a part. Perhaps it was a combination of all of the above. At any rate, something needs to be said about avoiding the pitfalls of married life on the mission field.

When a couple, with or without children, moves from one culture to another, things happen, to say the very least. We usually speak of the first of these happenings as culture shock, a phenomenon which has been described in various ways. Generally stated, it consists of an individual's more-or-less painful adaptation to a set of social and cultural rules

## *The Missionary Myth*

that are different from those to which he is accustomed. In the case of a missionary couple, each partner experiences individually this adjustment, which in some ways never terminates. But because this individual adjustment is markedly influenced by the interaction of the couple in their marriage relationship, there occurs another phenomenon which we will call "cultural couple-shock."

The exact expression of this phenomenon is probably as difficult to describe as is the separate personality of each married couple on the field, for it depends on several factors unique to the couple in question: (1) the age, intelligence and individual personality of each partner, (2) the personality of the couple as a unit, (3) the nature of the couple's home culture, with all of its particularities and qualities, (4) the couple's particular method of functioning as a pair in their home culture (roles developed by each for the special needs of the couple's spiritual, social, educational situation, etc.), (5) the nature of the particular culture into which the couple is moving, including all the special needs and stresses it creates for them, (6) the couple's preparedness in general for changing cultures, and in particular for adapting to the culture they have selected, and (7) the number and ages of children in the family.

We will mention here two major hazards that we believe are encountered by most every missionary couple, each of which must be prepared for and dealt with decisively.

**Hazard One: Role-Reversal.** This could also be called "role-juggling." Often one partner has considerably more training in the target language than the other. This partner will therefore in the beginning necessarily need to take on

### *Family Relationships on the Field*

the major part of the transactions that involve using the language (in other words, all of them). During this period, the less-trained partner must fight the tendency to feel inadequate, and the more trained must resist a tendency to criticize. If the wife is the more trained of the two, the situation can lead to major role-upsetting for the couple. The one who usually follows is forced (there is no other word for it) to lead, while the leader is obliged to follow. A weak or faltering marriage may not hold up under such strain. Mutual understanding and love are very vital at this point. If the husband has more training, he can become extremely irritable in the company of a wife who can no longer take care of even the smallest details, such as cashing a check or talking to the children's teacher. All of this makes the poor wife, who is already feeling inferior, plunge even further into feelings of despair. Happily, most couples are able to restore the missing equilibrium as language growth occurs. But be forewarned: some are not able to cope. Think about it **before** you come.

**Hazard Two: Pressure.** Some call this hazard simply "tension" or "adjustment." It is an outgrowth of the first hazard in some ways, yet is also influenced by many other factors. I feel that "pressure" is really the best word for it. Every missionary couple knows the meaning of that word, perhaps more acutely than any Christian couple that has not been in the mission situation. The pressure of mission work is constant and unyielding. When it does not come from without (elders, mission committees, sponsoring congregations, supporting congregations, public opinion), it most assuredly comes from within, from a conscience



### *The Missionary Myth*

tuned to the will of God, to a love for souls and a desire to do a good job in his service. There is no other pressure quite like it in all of the Christian experience. Ask any missionary. If you are contemplating mission work and cannot take pressure, plan to do something else. This pressure, wrongly handled, can make mission work unbearably uncomfortable. And this, when it occurs between a couple, can be devastating to even the best of relationships, if the couple is not prepared to handle and conquer it. Failing to handle pressure can produce numerous disastrous results, from irritability and depression to personality change and outright denial of the faith.

In the face of such hazards, the Christian couple is not without weapons. They must claim the Spirit of Christ who dwells within them as a strength against such difficulties. They must depend on the power and the joy they have found in the Lord to deal forthrightly and faithfully with all hardships. They must work together, conscious of the dangers they are encountering and conscious as well of their ability to overcome if they will depend on each other and the Lord. The following are some suggestions on how a missionary couple can be supportive of each other in the mission situation.

**ONENESS.** Always remember that you are one. Nothing happens to one that does not happen to the other. Neither partner has the right to close up and make the other find out what is bothering him. If ever you needed to communicate, it will be on the field. There is already so much possibility for misunderstanding because of the working situation that you cannot afford to create others

### *Family Relationships on the Field*

by your own pettiness. You have left father and mother to cling to each other. That will now be true to an even greater extent, since father and mother will be thousands of miles away. Now you will have each other; now you will need each other more than ever. Be one. Let no one or anything come between you, for you must work as a team. Nothing less will do. Divided, you will only wreak havoc, both in your relationship and in the work you have come to do. United, you will be a tremendous force for good.

**AVAILABILITY.** Husband, your wife will have left her best friends back in the fatherland. She will often be spending major portions of every day either alone or with the children, in what is for a time to be a completely new culture. She will want to talk to you when you are home. Be available, be open, be willing to listen and share her burdens. She has always wanted to talk to you, but she has also always had those other outlets of friends and family, which are no longer available. You will be many times the only adult she can talk to openly. Be ready, be anxious to listen.

Wife, your husband will be trying to trace for himself a pattern of work in which he can be comfortable and feel that he is accomplishing something worthwhile. Be sympathetic to his failures, easy on his faults. He will sometimes be irritable without realizing why (pressure!), and his confusion at his attitude will be as great as yours. Comfort him, be gentle and give him the understanding that only you can give him.

**DEVOTIONS.** The husband is the spiritual leader of the family. It is his responsibility to accept and handle this

### *The Missionary Myth*

role. This does not apply uniquely to the family with children, but also to the couple without children. On the mission field, opportunities for devotional periods with other mature Christians are severely limited. It is at this time that the husband and wife need to develop a regular time for devotional reading and prayer, if this is not already their custom. At times this is extremely hard to do, given the variety of demands on a mission couple's time and the total absence of anything that could be called a daily routine. I remain convinced that regular devotional periods are necessary and vital to the relationship. Often the husband receives little or no spiritual guidance himself, since he is the one who must do all the teaching in the local church, whereas the wife may often be called on to teach little ones during her husband's sermons on Sunday, so neither really benefits from someone else's teaching. This can create a real vacuum. Aside from recommending that you arrange before coming for a congregation somewhere to supply you regularly with sermon tapes and messages of edification, I also suggest that you plan to spend some valuable time together regularly to enrich each other's spiritual lives in prayer and study. You will be tempted to say, "We don't have time." My suggestion is that you don't have time **not** to.

COMPANY. Couples isolated from their homeland feel a real need to relate to someone whose cultural base is the same. This is normal and natural. On the field you will want to take advantage of opportunities provided to spend time with other couples in the same situation as you and who can understand your particular problems and give you

### *Family Relationships on the Field*

advice about handling them. Your relationship as a couple will be better for it, and your relationship with the local church will also benefit from your adjustment in this manner.

However, a word of warning is necessary here. Foreign couples on the field should studiously avoid creating a couple-community that excludes the native Christians and causes resentment or criticism. Your desire for the company of others of your culture, as real and as valid as it is, must not and cannot override your attention to the needs of the congregation with which you will be working. Extreme prudence is called for in this matter.

The important thing is to be **ready**. A human philosopher has said, "Forewarned is forearmed." Jesus said that you just do not build a tower without first sitting down and counting the cost. If you are a couple considering mission work, I invite you to consider gravely the cost of such a commitment, and I hope that these few words of advice will be of some help. May the Lord bless you in your decision!

#### PROVERBS 31:10-31 – FOR MISSIONARY WIVES (With apologies to Lemuel, king of Massa):

Who can find a worthy missionary wife?  
She is more precious than jewels.  
The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
And he will have no lack of joy.  
She encourages him continually.  
With her own hands, she makes materials for Bible

## *The Missionary Myth*

classes.

She sees to it that her family is taken care of.

She rises early in the morning to feed her family and a multitude of house guests; she does the work of a staff of seven, all by herself.

She is frugal in her purchases, realizing that money is scarce.

She is strong with the Lord's strength, constant with the Lord's fidelity.

Though her work goes largely unnoticed back "home," she knows she is esteemed by her family; this assurance gives her courage for working long hours.

She is indeed a hard worker, given to long efforts with little time to rest.

She is hospitable and generous, opening her house to many she does not know.

She is not afraid of the hard times a missionary family knows, for she is confident in her Lord and in her family.

Clothing is so expensive; she works to clothe herself. She is her husband's glory as he works with fellow workers.

For she is ever working for the benefit of her family.

She is strong and worthy, faithful and loyal.

When she speaks, missionaries listen; when she offers advice, it is heard with pleasure.

Relatives and dear friends are far away; but she does not despair. She sees to the needs of her household, knowing they too suffer the same isolation.

### *Family Relationships on the Field*

She is a real worker.

To her children, she is the greatest woman on earth;  
to her husband, a treasured help-meet. They  
could not be in the mission field without her.

Many missionary wives have done well. You have  
done better than them all.

You have charm, but you do not use it abusively.  
You have beauty, but you do not base your  
life on it.

A real woman who truly fears the Lord and who is  
really capable of joyously leaving all that is dear  
to follow her husband to the ends of the earth  
to preach the Word, that is a woman worthy of  
praise.

Give her the reward that she deserves.

Do not hesitate to praise her for her works' sake.

Who can say enough about the missionary wife's dedication, about her love and devotion? I would like here to praise, in print, the one who chose, 22 years ago, to share her life with me, and who, 12 years ago, did not hesitate one minute when I suggested the time had come for our move to the mission field. She is the backbone of my work; I could not do it without her. The Lord knew what He was doing when He gave this dear, sweet, tough girl to me. I am not worthy of her love. But I sure am happy to have it!

### CHILDREN

Sometimes I look at my children and wonder what I have done to them. There they sit, alone by their mother

### *The Missionary Myth*

as I preach on a Sunday morning. I see them as through a mist, for I am concentrating on the thoughts I want to express. But through these thoughts, their image pierces – and weighs – on my mind. When I was their age, I was surrounded on Sunday mornings by two dozen youngsters of my age and over a hundred adults, all sharing and enjoying the same faith. My children will never know the warmth of that kind of “Christian atmosphere.” They will not know the Bible bowls, area-wide youth rallies, Saturday night devotionals at the youth minister’s house, Mother-Daughter (or Father-Son) banquets, Senior Honor Sundays, Teens Take America, Encounter Park Fellowships, Adolescent Symposiums, etc. They will not enjoy the good influence of other Christian families and the experience of growing up with their children. Except in occasional, exceptional circumstances, none of that exists on the mission field. In a beginning work or in a small congregation, there are usually no such programs, no teachers, no children of the same age.

My children’s “church” world is poles away from what I knew and what I now cherish as the vital formative element of my early years. What would I have been without it? Would I be the same person, had I not known such influential Christian surroundings as a child? Lacking this, what will my children be like? Do they even realize what they are missing? No, of course not. But this only hurts me more, for them. When we visit a large congregation in the States, I thrill at the wonderful singing and hurt for my children who do not grow up with such wonders. I look at them and ache; I ache in the knowledge of

### *Family Relationships on the Field*

what they do not have, cannot have, because I, who had it, have decided otherwise.

Prospective missionary, weigh this reality carefully. I guarantee you this can be a terrible burden. I confess that I was not ready for it on entry to the field. I confess, further, that I have not always handled it well while here. For it is the father's responsibility to see to the spiritual guidance of the family's children. If he is to be the "head" of the family, and if he is to bring up his children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), he must of necessity assume his responsibilities. In the States, many fathers have surrendered their responsibilities to the local church's teaching program. Though this is not an acceptable solution, many such programs are so nearly complete that the children thus receive a solid Christian education. On the field, and for the reasons described above, such a transfer of tasks is rarely possible. If the children are not trained at home, they will not be trained at all. In your work on the field, not only will there be little or no structured Biblical training for the children outside the home, but there will be a definite negative influence in its place. No "Christian academies" here! Though most of your children's friends and teachers will probably come from backgrounds that are basically morally good, there is still a striking difference in standards of conduct and belief. You will have to counteract the influence that says that God does not exist, or that he has abandoned his creation, or that he did not create it at all, and all of this without the outside help and influence of an organized and visible church Bible program!



## *The Missionary Myth*

The importance of this task cannot be over-emphasized. The Lord will help, but the responsibility will be on you to provide positive training and influence to help your youngsters face and conquer a non-believing world. Do not forget also that even among those who consider themselves believers, your children will be considered marginal -- classed as members of some weird cult -- since the call to New Testament Christianity is so little known in most parts of the world. Other children will not hesitate to persecute your children for this. If you are not ready for these problems on the field, get ready before you come. The eternal destiny of your children depends on it. When you plan to do mission work, you plan it for the highest of motives: the saving of the lost. In doing so, be sure to give every attention to the ever-present danger of losing the saved. Our children are a treasure from the Lord, born in sinlessness and given to our care. How terrible it would be to see them lost to him because of lack of planning to teach and guide them through a period of more-than-usual spiritual difficulty and adjustment.

Properly taught and led, your children will be happy on the mission field. If you take your responsibility toward them seriously, they will, in the long run, probably be even stronger Christians because of this special experience. There will obviously be periods of stress brought on by their spiritual isolation, but they will weather this well and will teach you a lot of patience, joy, and love. For the children will, indeed, be your teachers in many areas. They will normally make the needed cultural adjustments, including language learning, easier than the parents will. The general

## *Family Relationships on the Field*

experience is that the younger the child on entry, the more smoothly his adjustments will go. Of course, a positive attitude about the move and the exciting opportunities it will present are important for a child of any age and are best communicated by parents sensitive to their children's particular needs.

### GRANDPARENTS

To close this chapter, I would like to say a word about grandparents, the gentle, loving martyrs of mission work. How can anyone understand, who has not experienced it, the feeling of watching one's children head off to make their lives in a country on the other side of the world? How can we know the ache the grandparents feel when they get the news that the first grandchild has been born, and they will not see him until he is three or four years old? How their hearts must weep to have their loved ones so far away, so irremediably far away, not to hear their voices very often, not to see the little ones as they say their first words, take their first steps, begin to say "God," and "I love Jesus." And yet, though they must suffer intolerably, though their lives are filled with pain and a kind of chasm that can never be filled, grandparents nonetheless say with firm conviction and gentle love: "We're proud of you, we know you are doing the Lord's will, and we will do anything we can to help you toward that end."

Is there an award somewhere for Christian parents who watch their children and grandchildren go off to an inaccessible land far away and who yet bless the Lord for his love and the peace he gives them? Men do not have

### *The Missionary Myth*

one, but I know Someone Who does. I am firmly convinced that a special place in heaven is reserved for those who exercise such selfless love, such committed faith. May the Lord bless the missionary's parents, the grandparents of the missionary's children. Not enough good can be said about them. They are SPECIAL.

### APPRENTICES

Several programs currently in existence permit young persons to "try their wings" on the mission field, generally for a period of two years, under the supervision of pre-selected and experienced missionaries, whose job consists of guiding the young apprentices through their short term of service, which then becomes a valid basis for an individual decision concerning a future, long-term commitment. My experience in this area includes working as a member of a mission committee overseeing one such program, as well as working as a supervisor with apprentices on the mission field. The following is respectfully offered, based on that experience.

As soon as you are selected to be an apprentice in a foreign mission, the first thing you should do is **PRAY**. It is to be hoped that you have not gotten to that point without considerable prayer already. No spiritual enterprise can succeed without this necessary element. Pray that the Lord will guide you in your preparation and in your attitude-forming; pray that his will may be accomplished in your life, **even if that includes not finding the necessary funds and having to give up all of your plans for mission work**. One of the Lord's methods of not allowing a person he does not want on the field to go there is simply not letting him find the necessary funds. This does not mean that inability to raise the funds is a sure sign that the Lord does not want you on the field, any more than it means

## *The Missionary Myth*

that your finding them automatically assures you of his approval. It means, rather, that from the moment you decide you want to do mission work, you must imperatively place the ultimate decision in the Lord's hands; and you must submit to his decision, whatever it may turn out to be.

Second, **KEEP ON PRAYING**. We cannot expect God to take care of our needs because we prayed yesterday, or last week, or the month before. Prayer and faith are daily decisions. Remain in constant touch with your Source. You will find that the more time you spend with him, the more you want and need to be in his presence in prayer.

Third, sit down and **WRITE DOWN YOUR REASONS FOR WANTING TO DO MISSION WORK**. Then, look carefully at the reasons you have given yourself. Are they general and vague or specific and detailed? Have you written such things as "The world is lost without Jesus," or "The fields are white unto harvest," or "The mission of the church is to go into all of the world and preach the gospel?" Now, all of these things are absolutely true. We live by these truths, which form the basis for any mission effort anywhere in the world. But, if you cannot think of any more specific reasons why you feel called to mission work, I suggest you do some re-thinking. Here are some more concrete examples of reasons for seeking to do apprentice mission work, remembering, of course, the general reasons already mentioned:

1. I want to make a personal contribution to the

## *Apprentices*

- mission effort of the Lord's church.
2. I want to use the talents the Lord has given me while learning to serve him even better.
  3. I feel responsible to the people in the nation where I feel called to go, responsible for their lost souls, responsible for the knowledge that I have of the gospel and that I hope to share with them.
  4. I want to spend a short time living and working in another culture, in order to determine if, later on, I might be able to commit myself for a longer period of service (like a lifetime!)
  5. I want to know mission work from the inside, instead of guessing at it from the outside.
  6. I want to work with people who have given themselves to a lifetime of mission work, so that I can be exposed to the deep Christian commitment that will help me in my Christian walk, whether or not I choose to become a full-time missionary later in my life.

### Fourth, TALK SERIOUSLY WITH YOUR FAMILY.

If there is any major objection to your plans on the part of your parents, to whom you owe respect and obedience (even if they are not Christians), I would advise you to renounce your project. Being separated from one's family for a period of years is difficult enough without the added burden of guilt that you would feel (and should feel), if you opt against your parents in such a matter.

### Fifth, LOOK OBJECTIVELY AT YOUR CURRENT

### *The Missionary Myth*

“CHRISTIAN SUPPORT” SYSTEM. If your social surrounding includes a large number of strong Christians, understand as soon as you can that this support group will not likely exist on the field. If you depend on such support for happiness, you will be wretchedly miserable within weeks of your arrival on the field. If you need it in order to function as a Christian, your motors will break down in a hurry. If your spirituality is anchored in it, your shallowness will only compound your problems. I have seen more than one apprentice fold under the combined pressure of culture shock and loss of this Christian support structure.

Apprentices from Christian universities and colleges are most vulnerable to this danger. In these contexts, numerous opportunities for Christian “glow” are available – situations in which even weak Christians can be admired, appreciated, lauded, and applauded. Be forewarned: If such artificial nurturing is the central food of your Christian walk, you will most probably starve to death on the mission field.

But getting this message across to people heading for the field is indeed difficult. They are often not able to separate their present situation from what they imagine will be theirs in the mission setting. This is partly the fault of the American church, which, in spite of itself, tends to glorify foreign mission work (except when it comes to supporting it!). The young student imagines himself a super soul-saver, wresting lost souls from the “darkness of sin” (we even have our pat phrases) and ushering them into the “light of the gospel” (see what I mean?).

This is, in fact, exactly what a missionary does. But,

## *Apprentices*

he does not do it in the way our young hopefuls imagine. It is done in much less glamorous ways, in ways that involve the kind of effort that not many young people are capable of sustaining for very long.

Let us be honest about this. Two or three years is a long time to be separated from your most cherished social setting, if that setting is the most important thing to your Christian life. It is a long time to work in difficult circumstances, without those continuous pats on the back, without those ever-present encouraging words, "You did a good job, brother," "You are an encouragement to me," etc. Think about these things **before** you arrive on the field. After your arrival will be too late to change your mind, at least too late to change it honorably.

Sixth, **CONSIDER YOUR SCHOOLING PLANS.** Some will approach the mission apprentice project between high school and college. To my mind, this is a sad mistake, for the simple reason that a young person directly out of high school is hardly equipped, emotionally or intellectually, to appreciate a foreign cultural experience in a mission context.

Those who come to a mission apprenticeship after two years of college are in a better position, but also in a more delicate one. They must decide whether they will discontinue their education for a period of two years or more, with all of the complications – financial, emotional, and otherwise – that this decision entails. I must say in all candor that, when I was a sophomore in college, I would not have considered interrupting my schooling to spend two years on the mission field. I was, at the time, mostly



### *The Missionary Myth*

concerned about finishing my baccalaureate studies. However, I have seen many successful apprentices take up their studies after two years away, with no apparent difficulties.

Some become apprentices after four years of college. The obvious advantage here is that the educational commitment is satisfied. The equally obvious disadvantage is the emotional makeup of the recent college graduate, which does not often predispose him to humble service, especially of the kind I will be describing further on, service often considered distressingly degrading by one so recently honored.

Seventh, **SEEK THE COUNSEL OF TRUSTED ADVISORS**, whether they be teachers, elders, ministers, friends, or others. Listen objectively to the advice they give you, remembering that what you are asking for is just that: advice. Your advisors cannot and must not be expected to make the decision for you.

After obtaining the approval of your parents (and qualifying for your service according to the rules of the program in which you are enrolled), the decision is yours alone to make, as you interpret the will of God for you.

Eighth, **WRITE TO YOUR PROSPECTIVE SUPERVISOR - IMMEDIATELY!** It is possible that he is not aware of your plans. Tell him about yourself, about your life, about your interest in mission work, about the reasons why you feel you can be of help on the field. Ask him the questions that are on your heart, but make them specific. Ask him, for example, "What will I be expected to do?" "What attitudes will I need to develop in order to succeed in the field where you work?" "Are there special conditions

## *Apprentices*

that I need to know about in order to help facilitate my adjustment?" "Are there books that I need to read that would help me in your field?" "Are there people I need to talk to who could help me understand the culture where you work?" etc. Do not be simply curious: missionaries have little time for curiosity seekers. Your supervisor will want to answer your sincere questions. If you truly seek his advice, he will be glad to take the time to inform you.

Now, do not be surprised if, in his responses, your supervisor does not always seem to detail your "job description" as much as you would like. From the beginning, you must understand and accept the concept of "any and all" service.

Here is what I tell apprentices interested in working in Europe: Do not come with a mental list of tasks you expect to do while expecting at the same time to be disappointed if you do not. Prepare yourself to do what has to be done, **whatever has to be done.**

And "whatever" means exactly that. You will be asked to do things that have, at least on the surface, no visible connection with mission work, not the remotest link with the direct conversion of unbelievers. If you are not ready for this, you may find yourself spiraling into depression, asking yourself continually, "Why am I doing this?"

The reason you are doing **this** is that **anything** you can do to make the missionary's task easier or to free him from menial tasks so that he can be more available for major ones is a definite, concrete contribution to mission work. No job is too mundane nor too far beneath your

## *The Missionary Myth*

dignity to be considered a constructive addition to the work. You see, mission work does not consist entirely of teaching and saving the lost. These activities are the end-patterns of a complicated and necessarily organized pre-game. Much preparatory work must be done around every person ever converted in a mission effort. This preparatory work is the scaffolding around the mission edifice. And it can easily involve daily, routine jobs. A missionary has to cut his grass, unplug the sink, sweep the floors, walk the dog, take out the garbage, etc. If you picture him continually converting souls (which he does, of course, and which is the ultimate reason for his life on the field), you must also understand that this ultimate is accomplished at the expense of much background activity.

And it is often precisely this background activity that you will be asked to do the most, at least in the beginning of your apprenticeship. In time, as your competence in the language and culture increases, you will be used much more in direct evangelism. Be prepared: not only will you not be doing much direct evangelism at first, you will probably **not ever** do as much of it as you imagine yourself doing before coming to the field.

You will be an apprentice, not a master worker. And your task will be to serve wherever your supervisor places you – with love, joy, zeal, and submission. I can guarantee you that, if you will accept this role with an open, glad heart **before** you come, you will find satisfying service on the field.

Once you have written to your supervisor and established a regular correspondence with him, look carefully at

## *Apprentices*

what he says. Pay particular attention to the advice he gives you. Remember, you will be serving under this man for many months. Answer his questions without feeling ruffled or defensive. As it is important that you know about him and the work in his field, it is also important that he understand and evaluate your qualities and your decision to serve in missions. Do not forget that after only a short time of work with him, you will return to your home, while he will continue to work on the field with the people and in the situations you will know only briefly. He needs to know what you will leave behind you on your departure.

There are really many questions a prospective supervisor has a right to ask you before you join him in his work. Here is a **sample** list. How you answer them could indicate to him your preparedness for mission work.

1. Are you satisfied with your spiritual life?
2. Are Bible study and prayer **daily** habits for you?
3. What has been your relationship with the church where you have worshiped during the past two years?
4. Do you feel you are a responsible person?
5. Are you independent?
6. Can you follow instructions?
7. Can you follow **detailed** instructions?
8. Are you able to ask for advice when you need it?
9. Are you easy to get along with?
10. What is your reaction to being contradicted

### *The Missionary Myth*

- by a superior? to being corrected?
11. Are you able to submit to a superior with whom you do not agree?
  12. Do you like children?
  13. How do you feel about being alone for long periods?
  14. How do you handle disappointment?
  15. How do you handle anger?
  16. What do you see as your role in the mission field?
  17. What service do you most wish to accomplish on the field?
  18. Are you in good physical health?
  19. Do emotional upsets tend to make you physically sick?
  20. Are you a self-starter?
- ETC.

Ninth, and last, **CONSIDER THE COMMITMENT YOU ARE MAKING.** Most organized apprenticeship programs make allowance for apprentice disorientation during some period of their service on the field. Authority is invested in the supervisor to stabilize and direct the apprentice's work.

Consider how important this stability and direction will be for you. There will most likely come a time when, weakened by the pressures of all of the changes you will be experiencing, you may find your supervisor's advice or his instructions hard to take. If your priorities are right, these difficult times will be easier for you. If they are not right,

## *Apprentices*

you will be surprised at how difficult and upsetting even simple decisions can be, if they involve the authority of your supervisor.

Attitude is **everything** on the mission field. A supervisor worth his salt will burrow tunnels in mountains in order to help an apprentice, even a "one-talent" one, **who has a positive, submissive attitude about his work.** The same worthy supervisor will eventually throw up his hands in frustration and give up on an apprentice, even a "five-talent" one, who posts an attitude of pride and selfishness.

Now, a word to apprentice-program directors. When there are problems between supervisors and apprentices, decisions have to be made, and quickly. The directors of the apprentice programs in question will need to have a part in these decisions. The elderships overseeing the apprentices must also be involved. **But the ultimate authority for determining the continuation or termination of an apprentice's term should always lie with the supervisor himself.** Program directors and elderships (and apprentices) should realize this fact.

If program directors and elderships do not feel that the man on the field is capable of objective handling of difficult situations, of acting in the best interest of the apprentice **and the local work**, they should not send apprentices to him in the first place.

Consider this: As valid as the one-year or two-year experience will be for the apprentice himself, it is still an experience of only one or two years, in the context of a local work of possibly many years in length. I have already mentioned the fact that the supervisor is in place when the

### *The Missionary Myth*

apprentice arrives and is in place when the apprentice leaves. The **temporary** nature of the apprentice's work must, therefore, necessarily be subjugated to the more **permanent** nature of the whole work. When the temporary situation threatens the permanent one, the supervisor must act with full and complete authority. When the stability of the work is endangered by an immature apprentice, vague platitudes from program directors ("I trust that . . . the Lord has brought forgiveness, wisdom, peace, and joy to the situation.") can have no practical meaning at all. Not that we should chop off the offending hand at the first mistake. I am referring to crisis situations that are good neither for the local church nor for the apprentice. The supervisor's hands must not be tied by recalcitrant committees lands away in such circumstances.

All of this does not answer the question of what to do when the supervisor is the problem. This happens, of course. And it is difficult to know what advice to give to an apprentice dealing with this disagreeable set of circumstances. For, what I have said above remains true: the supervisor's relation to the work as a whole takes precedence. Therefore, all in-fighting involving the apprentice, even though he may not be at fault, will prejudice the work he is able to accomplish during his short time of service and the work he will leave behind at his departure.

Apprentices, I would advise, in such a circumstance, that you swallow your pride and make your two years of service a project in loving and serving a difficult person (You might try reading Joyce Landorf's *Irregular People*). You may not realize the other lovely goals you have set

### *Apprentices*

for yourself, but you will experience a satisfying, enriching period of growth in Christian love and grace. And you will develop deep and necessary Christian habits for future service in the Lord's kingdom. Read I Timothy 6:1-2 and see whether this passage does not apply to this situation.

A mission apprenticeship can be the best — or the worst — thing that will ever happen to you. It is all in the preparation. Do not be surprised by the hardships of mission work. **Be ready, and you will be right!**



## CHAPTER 8

### RELATIONS WITH SUPPORTERS

Long periods of separation from those whose prayers and financial gifts permit him to do his work make it necessary for the missionary to stay as much in touch with his supporters as he can. His principal tool in this area will normally be the regular newsletter. I have spoken of this means of communication in another chapter (see *REPORTS AND REPORTING*). Suffice it to say here that this instrument, in the hands of a conscientious and efficient mission worker, can be of eminent service in keeping the lines of communication open and keeping supporters aware of the progression of his work.

The newsletter aside, other sorts of contacts with supporters can prove helpful. These contacts will take several different forms, some of which I would like to examine here.

#### PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE

You will arrive on the field accompanied by the prayers and thoughts of many brethren. And you will soon find out how quickly things can change. In the beginning, your mailbox will be full of letters, even from brethren you do not know, who have heard about your work and want to encourage you.

After a time, perhaps even as soon as your second year (or before), the letters will begin to fall off. And soon, letters from concerned brethren will be rare. Christmas

### *Relations With Supporters*

time is a good gauge of this pattern. Count the cards you receive the first Christmas, then the second, then the third, etc. You will notice a marked decrease.

Now, I personally find this entirely normal. When a mission effort is beginning, people are intensely involved in launching it. As time goes by, other things demand their immediate thinking and, little by little, before they realize it, they have not thought about you for quite a while. Absence, especially in mission work, does not make the heart grow fonder. It would be impossible, at any rate, to expect to keep a large number of people at a fever pitch of interest over a number of years. A decline in burning interest is, therefore, natural. That is just the way people are. You are far away; they cannot think about you every minute, and other, more immediate considerations demand their attention.

The mission worker needs to be prepared in advance for this burnout. If he depends on constant written encouragement from the homeland, his working capacity and efficiency will diminish in direct proportion to the number of letters he finds in his box each week. I have seen cloudy discouragement set in among young workers whose mailbox was not heavy enough to suit them. Each day began with the vague hope that they would receive a letter from "X" and ended with the pathetic hope that they would perhaps receive something from "X" tomorrow. Each fruitless trip to that gloomy, empty box brought them down another humiliating notch, until soon they were unable to function at all. The mail had become their principal source of energy. Without it, they were nothing.

## *The Missionary Myth*

Of course, everyone likes to receive mail, and missionaries are no exception. It is indeed bolstering to receive an encouraging letter from someone far away who cares about you. But the minute you begin to depend on mail for your emotional stability and working capacity, you will have plunged headlong into a dangerous impasse.

You must avoid this danger. Appreciate every letter sent to you, but learn not to depend on the mail for your well-being.

Before coming to the field, I determined that I would spend one day a week uniquely on correspondence. I quickly learned that spending an entire day during the week on writing letters is not possible. I could, in fact, spend that much time every week on letters and not keep up with the correspondence on my desk. Some missionaries make a point to write at least one letter every day. Some take two or three days from time to time to work through their correspondence, over and above the regular writing they do to sponsors and families. Every missionary has to work out for himself the solution to this thorny problem.

Though the regular newsletter is designed to provide a means of informing supporters of the work without having to spend all of one's time writing to each one individually, it is always a good idea to plan for periodic notes of appreciation to everyone contributing financially to any given work. There are two reasons for this: the first is that it is only Christian to express appreciation to those who help in **anything**, and especially in mission work; the second is that if this is not done, the missionary is likely to lose the support of those contributors (no cynicism here;

### *Relations With Supporters*

this is merely the truth). Some will be irritated if too long a period passes between thank-you notes. Some (bless them!) hardly think about being thanked and indeed do not give their money for that purpose. But all will sincerely appreciate an occasional warm word of thanks, and, as I have said, Christian grace would dictate that this be done periodically.

It is my opinion that written (handwritten, if possible) thanks should be expressed for every special financial gift over and above the missionary's normal salary and working fund. To this end, sponsoring churches should notify their missionary **immediately** when someone sends such "extra" funds. It does no one any good if (1) such money is not sent promptly to the worker, and (2) the worker is not notified of the donor and the amount, so that he can adequately express his appreciation. These are details that have to be worked out between each worker and his sponsor.

Most missionaries receive numerous requests for information about one aspect or another of their work. These requests come from individuals planning trips, from elderships considering eventual contributions, from mission apprentices as they prepare for foreign work, from students in classes (young and old, singles and couples, etc.). Sometimes letters from such classes contain forty-nine questions about how you live: what the climate and geography are like, what the names and ages of your children are, what their schools are like, whether they like their teachers, what the church is like (number of members, names, ages, etc.), and so on and on – and expecting a detailed response in the

### *The Missionary Myth*

week that follows. Each worker has to decide for himself how much time to devote to answering such questionnaires. One must not feel bad if he cannot answer them all, though some (a ladies' class in my case) will be offended if you cannot.

But this can work two ways. A youth class in a large urban church once wrote to us asking for birth dates, anniversaries, hobbies -- everything -- so that they could "adopt" us as their missionary family and remember us with prayers, gifts, cards and letters at special times. I immediately sent them the information they requested, along with a letter of sincere thanks -- and never heard from them again.

When it comes to letters from young people, I always remember that if I am working on the mission field today, it is largely because a missionary was interested enough to answer my questions when I was twelve. So when young people, especially classes, write to encourage us, I make a special effort to answer, carefully and completely, all of their questions. This can only stimulate the interest of these young people, who may one day be working beside me in this and other fields.

Some adult correspondents make a point to say they are not seeking a response to their letters, but wish only to encourage the missionary. Some who say this really mean it; some do not and will be offended if they do not receive an answer. A little discernment precludes many petty problems.

Many large churches develop entire programs designed to encourage missionaries through letter-writing. This is well and good, and much appreciated, of course. But if

### *Relations With Supporters*

every individual letter sent by a group of twenty requires a response (and most correspondents from whom I have received notes did, implicitly or explicitly, express the desire for a response), the result is not encouragement, but more work for the missionary. Figure it out: when members of a class of fifteen (we will reduce it) each write a letter to a missionary, each one expecting a response, each has written only one letter, but the missionary is expected to write fifteen! The encouragement in this practice is minimal indeed. A missionary whom I respect said to me this afternoon that he enjoys receiving letters from the States "as long as I don't have to answer them." He was not being facetious. Nor is he one to avoid responsibility. He was simply saying that many times the correspondence he receives from the States is more of a burden than an encouragement, for the reasons I have described.

Let me say, parenthetically, that it seems to me that a young adult singles group could, with the money usually available to it, make a much more valid contribution to mission work than writing a few letters per month. With the money such singles spend on a single meal, they could subscribe the missionary to a good magazine for a whole year. They could buy and send good books, cassette tapes, or lesson materials. They could send our wives back issues of current magazines. With a little imagination, they could do a lot of things that would take about as much time, but would cost them some money. Perhaps that is why they generally prefer to borrow a piece of paper and spend ten minutes writing a few banalities to a missionary on a Sunday evening after church, when they had to meet with the

## *The Missionary Myth*

group anyway, their careless handwriting betraying their boredom with it all.

There are noteworthy exceptions to this pattern. I refer to the really concerned, the truly interested, who write from their hearts and their convictions. Their motives are immediately discernible and much appreciated by the missionary, who can tell them right away from those who do not care. God bless the former; God help the latter!

### FURLOUGH VISITS

A second major means of contact with supporters is the furlough. I have dealt with the particular difficulties of the furlough in another chapter (see *THE FURLOUGH*). The missionary who is entirely supported by one congregation has a considerable advantage here, in that he can spend all of his time in one place and thus effectively strengthen ties with his supporters. Those whose base of contributors is large and spread out (most missionaries fall into this category) must make extended trips and therefore cannot spend much time in any one location. Most missionary families know the stress of traveling drastic distances in the day, while pretending to feel fresh for late-night and early-morning meetings, followed by more travel, more meetings, more travel, etc. – all the while trying to care for and comfort small children who have not the slightest idea why the world is going by at such a dizzy pace.

Missionaries talk to elderships and mission committees in the most diverse of circumstances: from the side of narrow country roads, to sparsely-furnished classrooms in the church basement, to paneled conference rooms worthy

### *Relations With Supporters*

of international corporate businesses, complete with oval oaken table and leather-bound, highback chairs. The elders with whom you meet will themselves be extremely different (this, by the way, is one of the strengths and glories of the Lord's church): humble or rich, simple laborer or bank president, bluntly direct in conversation or diplomatically delicate – each one carrying a tremendous, almost unbearable burden on his shoulders. The missionary owes respect and honor to every one, if only for the charge he carries in the Body.

For some elderships, the missionary's visit will represent a threat, in that it risks taking funds from their pet project; for others, his passage will be a pleasure. Some will want to see the work in terms of figures, numbers, sales, closings, additions, subtractions, restorations, investments, returns, price per convert, etc. Others will be concerned for people, for souls, for the well-being of the worker and his family, for his life and work. All of these differences and shades of personalities and working patterns will have to be dealt with calmly, with trust in the Lord. One missionary comes back from furlough saying that the subject of his support was not brought up by one single eldership he visited; another comes back exhausted from the constant threats (implicit and explicit) he received of support cuts if more "results" were not forthcoming. Each missionary will find himself confronted, sooner or later, with unusual circumstances of one sort or another.

Let me illustrate: On one occasion, a supporting church notified me of its intention to terminate financial support. Notice was given me a year-and-a-half in advance,



### *The Missionary Myth*

for which I was especially appreciative. Although they did not feel responsible for helping me find a church to replace the funds they were withdrawing (as I had requested), the fact that they gave me such an extended advance notice made replacing the monies easier.

But the most interesting quirk came at the moment the funds were actually terminated; that is, during our next furlough visit. My wife and I were sitting at the elders' table in the mission room, talking with the mission committee about their plans for the money they had been giving to us. They were reinvesting it in another foreign work, which was better in my mind than putting it into a parking lot or into buying new windows, or an air-conditioner or some other such thing. And I said so. In the course of the conversation, one elder quietly requested that I say nothing to any of the local brethren about my support being dropped. The reason given was that: "They aren't yet ready for that information."

I was shocked (to say the least). Here was an elder-ship that had planned for 18 months to drop the support of one of its missionaries without informing the membership. But there were more surprises to come. Following that meeting, and after evening worship, there was a reception given in our honor in the church fellowship hall. Remember that I could tell no one this would be the last time we would be with them as supported missionaries. At the beginning of the reception, my wife and I were called to the front of the room, whereupon one of the mission committee members commenced a glowing, praise-filled elocution about us and our work. He spoke of the

## *Relations With Supporters*

difficulties we face, of our faith, of our perseverance, etc.

Now, all such situations embarrass me. I am not at all keen on listening to someone count off my real or imagined merits before a crowd. But I can tell you that this particular situation rankled me much more than most, for the people hearing this drawn-out diatribe thought they were hearing praise of their supported missionaries, when, in fact, the opposite was true. But the word from the elder's mouth had been formal: they were not to be told. I leave the appreciation of the Christian ethics of the situation entirely up to my readers.

I have related this true incident as an illustration of the fact that relationships with supporters (or former supporters, as in this case) can be incredibly delicate at times. Eldershops are not always as honest as you would naturally expect them to be. Some are capable of being inconsiderate and roughshod. It is when they begin to work as an executive committee and not as shepherds of the flock that this danger becomes imminent.

### **SPONSORS (see also *THE SPONSORING CHURCH*)**

We can hardly talk of relationships with supporters without looking into the sponsor/missionary situation. The responsibility of the sponsoring congregation to the man on the field includes not only seeing that his funds are sent promptly but also keeping abreast of his work and his spiritual needs. For most elderships, this will necessitate a sustained correspondence with him. For some it will also include regular visits to the field. I would recommend that, when possible, a visit be made by an elder or representative

### *The Missionary Myth*

of the congregation **once per year**. However, I would advise caution for any person visiting the mission field for the purpose of obtaining facts for reporting back to the brethren. Efficient evaluation of a mission effort is most difficult without sustained, on-the-field examination. However, most elderships, even those who send an elder regularly to evaluate a work, can little judge what is actually being accomplished because of (1) language and cultural limitations, (2) the necessary brevity and infrequency of visits. Their whole appreciation of a work must necessarily stand on the dependability and honesty of the missionary in place. Therefore, since the missionary is in such a position of influence, successful evaluation can be obtained only by a completely open and trusting relationship between him and his eldership. In my opinion, if the missionary is completely honest and trustworthy, he is himself the one most capable of evaluating the mission effort, being the only person completely involved in all of its aspects. It all boils down to the question: Do we have confidence in our man on the field? If so, we should let him develop his work with as much freedom as we can possibly give him. If not, we should discontinue our support of his work. It is as simple as that.

This should certainly not be interpreted to mean that I discourage elderships from visiting a work. Such visits are to be encouraged and should be made as regularly as possible. I only wish to state that the visitor must objectively recognize his own limitations. A solid evaluation of a mission effort takes a long time. While the visitor departs to make his report to the church based on a few days' visit,

## *Relations With Supporters*

the missionary stays and deals in a time-frame of years of constant effort. A wise eldership will understand this fact.

This writer has experienced the loss of a sponsoring congregation because the elders of that congregation felt in all good conscience that, because they were not able to visit the work regularly, they were not fulfilling their spiritual responsibility to oversee the work. It seemed to me then, and it seems to me now, that this need not constitute a reason for terminating sponsorship if the eldership has confidence in its man on the field. Indeed, the only eldership truly qualified in itself to oversee a mission effort to the extent desired by these brethren, whose love and commitment I underline, is one that has had experience in the foreign culture involved, speaks the language of the target country, and can thus judge the work from the **inside**. This rarely being the case, ultimate confidence must be given to the missionary. And if this confidence cannot be granted, as I said above, sponsorship should be withdrawn. Mutual confidence is extremely necessary in the mission worker-sponsoring congregation relationship.

### TRAVELING CHRISTIANS

Another source of contact with supporters is visits from them as they travel. It goes without saying that these friends and loved ones are always welcome in the missionary's home.

But first a word about visitors the missionary does not know. Workers living in beautiful and therefore much-visited cities are often expected by visiting Christians to transform themselves into tour guides, travel agencies,

## *The Missionary Myth*

change agents, hotel managers, and other travel-related geniuses, at the drop of a hat. Some workers have been so often taken-advantage-of, criticized and openly ridiculed when they did not live up to the exaggerated expectations of their surprisingly inconsiderate visitors, that they have henceforth refused altogether to have anything to do with such travelers. Traveling Christians are capable of incredibly rude behavior.

Some such voyagers are on "Christian" tours. Now, that Christians should travel is nothing unusual. That they should travel together is even less exceptional. It is to be expected that Christian company is more to be desired than the alternative (though sometimes, I am not so sure). And that Christians should desire to travel in luxury, though regrettable, is still understandable. But when Christians wish to label such luxurious packages as "mission work," while taking advantage of the local worker on top of it all, the absolute limit has been reached. Under the cover of "mission work," many a Christian has soothed his guilty conscience by convincing himself of his active participation in world evangelism when, in fact, he has done nothing more than indulge his taste for first-class accommodations (ask any Christian tour-leader) and expensive souvenirs. Effective mission work can hardly be done from the deck of luxury cruisers and from five-star hotels.

On the other hand, many travelers have brought a breath of fresh air and warm sunshine into a mission setting simply by arriving, in all simplicity, with the expressed desire to contribute, during the time of their visit, to the best possible on-going of the local work. They have come to

### *Relations With Supporters*

serve, not to be served; to learn, not to teach. How the missionary appreciates visitors like that!

Even family and friends, as welcome as they always are in the missionary's home, must be willing to acknowledge the financial constraints with which he must work. Most such visitors realize these things for having been in close contact with the mission worker and make arrangements not to burden him needlessly. Bless them!

Here are some items for all categories of visitors to remember:

1. Distances in Europe are shorter, but travel is made much more expensive by the price of gasoline (currently three times the American price).
2. Gas, electricity, and postal rates are often high in the country you are visiting: this should exclude half-hour, three-towel showers, heating to American comfort levels, and other such extravagances which cannot be permitted in the local context.
3. You may be the fourth group to visit in the missionary's home in the past month. Try to respect the family's privacy and understand when they need time to be alone.
4. You may be arriving at a time when the missionary cannot take time off to be with you. Respect the obligations of his busy schedule.
5. Refrain from making judgments, audibly or

### *The Missionary Myth*

internally, about the local work, based on your short visit. An empty worship room for two Sundays in a row (or four) may only mean it is vacation time.

6. In public, respect your host and the culture in which he works; do not speak too loudly (Americans are known for it) or require that your American tastes always be satisfied. Learn to appreciate the local culture with grace and good will.
7. **PITCH IN.** A "helping" guest is much more appreciated by his busy hosts than one who does nothing but sit and soak up hospitality. If in doubt about what to do, a simple "Can I help?" will situate you in a hurry!

A wise missionary knows when to say NO, when to call a local hotel to make arrangements there for his guests, when even to refuse to cut short a needed time away, even to receive the visit of an "influential" visitor. I remember once when one such person called to see when he could visit us. I had been notified that I needed to "cultivate" my relationship with this important person if I wanted to keep my support with a certain congregation. It happened that he would be coming through during a vacation time that we were sorely needing. I deliberately resisted his efforts on the telephone to get me to cut short our vacation in order to receive him. I heard it said later that I "did not want to tell him where I would be when he came through." Perhaps that was true. At any rate, I did not want to cut

### *Relations With Supporters*

short a needed rest for my wife, for my family, and for me just because it involved money. And it did indeed involve money: shortly after that, we lost the support of that congregation.

Let us be hospitable, as is the Christian's charge and privilege. But allowing our house to become Grand Central Station in the name of this hospitality or money considerations is a mistake with dire consequences. We must not destroy our family's serenity in order to satisfy the exaggerated expectations of ill-informed travelers, be they members of the Lord's church.

To terminate this chapter, I would offer the following advice, which I would apply to all areas of relationships with supporters, from correspondence to personal contact, either on the field or during furloughs:

**Be yourself.** While there is a lot to be said for developing and refining your manner with people, there is no need to betray yourself by trying to be something you are not, or by adopting a style that does not conform to your personality. The people you would impress by honoring your "big preacher" act are not the kind of supporters you need. And you would be fooling yourself as well as them. Most people appreciate a sincere, direct presentation of yourself and your projects, without facades or attractions. As is always the case, you will find a certain electricity between you and some people and a total lack of it with others. This is normal. We cannot expect to be on everybody's wave length. Just do your best at being you, with all the strengths (capitalize on them) and the weaknesses (work on them) that entails. The rest is in the Lord's hands.



## *The Missionary Myth*

**Be true.** We are not politicians. In answer to brethren's questions, be conscious of a tendency to exaggerate, to pad, to embellish. To an honest question (or a dishonest one!), give an honest answer. Be prepared to share your failures as well as your successes. No intelligent brother will believe that you have only blazing victories in your work. Brethren soon learn to doubt the word of the worker whose newsletters and reports always drip with syrupy success. And even when we do succeed, we must remember that the glory is the Lord's, not ours. When we have done his will and when he has blessed our efforts to bear fruit to his name, we are still only unprofitable servants, spreading with joy the word of the Master who has served us.

**Be careful.** Neither should you spend all of your time complaining. Admittedly, there will be dark moments, and you will need to share them. But you need not dwell on them morbidly. In the first place, the brethren most probably will not often understand your predicament. In the second place, they will not appreciate your vivid descriptions. They make them feel guilty. You must find the balance.

Along this line, it is also my opinion that you should avoid supplying a multitude of details beyond what the brethren ask, for doing so can complicate your communication with them and pile up information into the ring that will either confuse them or have little significance to them. Avoid doing this, **unless**, of course, their questions are based on a misunderstanding, which your answer, based on additional facts, can clear up. This will especially be true in financial questions, given the lack of understanding often

### *Relations With Supporters*

exhibited by the brethren for the complexities of international money exchanges, etc.

**Be calm.** One of the most common emotions the missionary feels toward his supporting brethren is just plain exasperation. He is sometimes amazed at how slowly the wheels of decision-making can turn in his sponsoring church, how plodding the Lord's people can be in their entire mission effort. At times their questions can shine bright with sheer ignorance of the true value of his work, as he sees it. And often they do not even seem to hear the answers he gives. It is as if they see and hear through a veil they cannot penetrate and which separates his experience from theirs.

The brethren are nonetheless sincere (for the most part) and deserve to be treated with respect and love. They also deserve to be shaken up a bit periodically. You will come to know when the time is right.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE SPONSORING CHURCH

Thank the Lord for sponsoring churches! They courageously accept the awful responsibility of church-planting and nurturing in foreign lands with all this supposes in headaches, commitment, long distance communication, constant concern, care, and supervision. They step out into the unknown, confidently launching an enterprise whose end they cannot see, whose benefits and pains they cannot measure in advance. The love of God for the lost burns in their hearts. Wanting more than anything else to serve him and to do what it takes to find and teach those who do not know about his saving grace, they humbly take the risk of being misunderstood, unthanked, unacknowledged, and unappreciated. The road they choose is long and arduous, full of potholes and dangerous turns. But they are not hearers only; they are also **doers** of the Word, pioneers of the faith, **co-workers** with every man and his family they send to the field, **faithful companions** in the wonderful mission of sharing the gospel with the lost.

Initiating the process of targeting a field, selecting a man and his family to send, upholding him in the ups and downs of his work over years and even decades of time — this is work for bold adventurers of the faith whose vision stretches far beyond their reach. May the God of heaven richly bless every assembly accepting this weighty task and grant everyone to be filled with the joy of the Lord himself, in recompense for their participation with him

## *The Sponsoring Church*

in announcing his marvelous light to a world sheathed in darkness.

The responsibilities of sponsoring churches to the workers they send out are "supportive" in nature. They can be grouped into two categories: financial support and emotional support.

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Sometimes the sponsoring congregation provides the totality of the missionary's financial support. When this is possible, it represents a magnificent advantage for everyone concerned, not the least of whom is the missionary himself. For him it means that his visits to the homeland need not necessarily be exercises in wearisome criss-crossing of the country in order to visit every contributor. With one main funder, his visits are geographically simplified and spiritually deepened, since he is freer to consecrate more of his time to developing his relationship with members of his sponsoring church. For the sponsor, the advantage is reciprocal. Members spend more quality time with their visiting worker.

Another advantage is felt in the area of bookkeeping. When one church is the sole funder of a work, exact records must be kept, but they are of a less complicated nature than when other contributors are regularly involved. For monthly sending of others' funds means seeing that the others' funds are there to send. Receiving monies from contributors and channeling them to the missionary involves keeping extremely precise records of sums received and paid out, writing prompt thank-you's for special or one-time gifts, finding new contributors when old ones fall off

## *The Missionary Myth*

and reminding recalcitrant funders of their duties. Every sponsor knows contributors whose lax book work makes it necessary to remind them occasionally that they have missed a "payment." Unfortunately, brethren are sometimes more ready to "commit" than to "remit." An efficient reminder system will keep these absent-minded givers alert.

When special gifts are received, that is, when contributors send monetary gifts not included in regular monthly commitments, sponsor and workers need to have worked out in advance what will be done with them. Will they be placed into an emergency fund or sent directly to the missionary, or some of both, according to a percentage basis? There may be times when, because of financial straits on the field, all such funds should be sent on. At other times, they can be kept in the emergency fund. The essential is that both parties know exactly what is being done with the funds, so that no guessing is necessary (and therefore no misunderstandings arise).

When such one-time funds are received, whatever is done with them, the worker needs to be notified (name and address of donor, amount contributed, date received, etc.), so that he can personally thank the contributor. **The contributor should receive a thank-you note from both the sponsor and the worker.** This is an effective means of showing the genuine gratitude felt by both for such financial help.

When extra funds are sent on to the field, the worker needs to know when the money was deposited, so that when he receives a check that is higher than normal, he will

## *The Sponsoring Church*

know exactly to what he can attribute it in his personal bookkeeping.

Some sponsors send their monthly funds in the form of a cashier's check addressed directly to the missionary, so that he can deposit it himself in his local bank. This has the obvious advantage of allowing the missionary to "play the exchange" (You did not know missionaries do that, did you?) for a day or two if the dollar is rising. Two or three days, it must be remembered, can make a difference of tens and occasionally of **hundreds** of dollars on the exchange. But the dollar is also quite capable of falling; something it does very well when it puts its mind to it — and this is the obvious disadvantage. Missionaries have enough worries without having to think about choosing exactly the right time to deposit a check. We are not (usually) as well-informed as professional exchange agents.

Other sponsors have the bank send a check directly to the missionary's account for deposit. This avoids hassles involving handling of the check, but the rate exchange on the day the check arrives is the rate exchange you get, period. Cashier's checks arriving for deposit from a foreign country for deposit in a local bank can be subject to legal and administrative red tape, depending on the type of system involved. Since I have no idea how these things are handled in other countries, I will not attempt to generalize. In France, the simplest method is the second of the two I have described. This avoids speculation on the dollar and a lot of headaches for the missionary.

The sponsor must see, then, that the worker on the field receives his monthly funds, whether they come

### *The Missionary Myth*

entirely from the sponsor himself or are amassed from other sources and sent on. **It is important that a definite date be fixed for sending each month's check.** If the "assumed" time is "around" the middle of the month, the missionary will only know that his check "should" come "somewhere around" the end of the month. Such imprecision is unacceptable and unworthy of the Church. A little inattention on the part of the person responsible for sending the check, or an innocent change in personnel, and the check could arrive a week later, or "around" the first of the next month. A little more laxness and the check comes "toward" the middle of the next month, and so the missionary is soon a month or more behind. Why is being late so easy for the Lord's people, especially when it concerns their missions and their missionaries? Do we forget that missionaries have bills to pay, and that his creditors care not one jot or one tittle that his check will come in "pretty soon?" In such a situation, the sponsor places its man abroad in an embarrassing and compromising position, one which reflects on his honesty, while it is really the sponsor whose honesty is faulty. Mission work is already fraught with unavoidable financial freight of all kinds. Why burden it further with uselessly avoidable ones? A conscientious sponsor will assure its workers that every check will be expedited on time, every time. And then it will keep its word. The missionary will be ever-so-thankful for such assurance.

Generally speaking, sponsors have little or no real idea of the functionings of foreign banks or of the complexity of the dollar-exchange and how it can affect the missionary's available funds (see *FUND-RAISING*). This is

## *The Sponsoring Church*

not really their fault, since few have had the opportunity to experience this first-hand. **But they need to make it their business**, if they intend to deal directly and seriously with a worker who must handle this exchange. The missionary should keep his sponsors informed about the workings of this system, and the sponsor should be open to learning and utilizing this information.

In this area, a phenomenon that hardly touches the sponsor is of daily concern for the worker on the field. **Overseers must understand that talking about the problem is not sufficient.** When major proportions of the missionary's salary are cut because of a diving exchange rate, something must be done, and within a relatively short period of time, or the worker can sink financially. The sponsor should stay abreast of the missionary on this point and should be willing to work with the problem, even to stay ahead of it if budgets permit. If it cannot, I suggest the sponsor either have another look at its capacity to serve as a sponsor or find the needed funds.

Before leaving the subject of the monthly sending of funds, let me suggest that regular raises should be scheduled for missionaries, as they are for local evangelists. These raises should take into account inflation and growing family needs. **They should also take into account the dollar exchange** (again!). The only advantage of a raise that does not is that it limits the damage somewhat. No real raise is granted. How much the raise will be and how the dollar-exchange will be considered is material for deep conversation between worker and overseers before the work is begun.



## *The Missionary Myth*

How much should a missionary's salary be? I would be foolish to try to answer that one. I do know this: (1) the worker is worthy of his hire, (2) financial compensation for difficult or foreign work is standard, and (3) financial needs must be determined within the context of the local economy. In these areas, the Church has a lot to learn from international corporations. In France, for example, a salary of \$2000 per month represents at the moment probably no more than \$1500 in the American economy, while prices are often as much as twice as high for most items. Think about that for a while. These and other facts must be looked at seriously when fixing salaries.

The financial responsibility of the sponsor also involves seeing to the gathering of travel funds for the missionary's regular visits to the homeland. When the missionary comes back to visit and report, a good sponsor will provide his travel funding. And a two-month visit from a foreign country by a family of five or six can run quickly into several thousands of dollars. Once back in the homeland, apart from airline expenses between far-flung destinations, there are local expenses to be considered, including car-rental, food, and lodging. The major amount of the missionary's actual spending while in the homeland will probably be for the acquisition of books and other materials for his work, as well as for items not available or prohibitively expensive in his country of work.

I remember well when, arriving at my sponsoring congregation during our last visit to the States, an elder drove up in a rented car, stepped out and handed me the keys and money for gas. "This ought to do," he said, and it did,

## *The Sponsoring Church*

largely! I felt cared for and taken care of. And that's the way it ought to be.

On the other hand, a missionary need not be treated as an indigent when he is in the homeland and therefore not permitted to buy anything for himself or to treat others when he wants and is able. He is, after all, a salaried worker, who needs, like anyone else, to feel he can use what money he has to do things for others.

In addition, the sponsor should take a direct interest in the missionary's insurance and retirement programs. Some take it upon themselves to provide these necessary programs for their missionaries; others provide funds and allow the missionary to provide his own protection in these areas. There is, unfortunately, a third very large category: sponsoring churches that forget to think about the question at all. In fairness to sponsoring groups, it must be said that insurance is often not neglected. The real neglect occurs in the area of retirement.

Companies that hire workers for a specific task over a long period of time provide retirement coverage for them. The Church does it only too rarely for its ministers. Yet a missionary is a hired worker, one who, when reaching the limit of his working capacities because of age, will need retirement coverage as much as anyone else. The existence of elderly missionaries and other ministers of the Word completely without resources in their declining years is a somber mark on the Church's integrity.

However, some sponsors are quite incapable, financially, of providing this kind of help for the missionary. It would be well to take up this subject between worker and

### *The Missionary Myth*

overseers well before the foreign work is begun. A missionary cannot expect too much of a small congregation in this regard, though many small congregations could do much more for their missionaries than they think, if only they **wanted** to.

I would like to suggest here, for the attention of smaller (and even larger) congregations serving as sponsors, that a good way to see to the missionary's salary and insurance/retirement needs might be the "special contribution" method. What would prevent a local church from setting aside one or two Sundays per year and designating them for special contributions destined to the financial needs of their missionaries? Some congregations already do this, and with considerable success. Immense preparation of the brethren is necessary, of course. But when the brethren are informed, excited, and enthused, there is no reason why they will not give as generously to the mission effort as to a local building program. If not, why not?

The real weight of responsibility in such matters lies with the Church leaders. I have lamented elsewhere in this book the practice of special contributions limited to local needs. If the brethren contribute millions to the local work while giving only thousands to missions, the fault is with the leaders. Let the shepherds think missions, and the Church will follow. The special contribution could then be of definite and lasting value to a local church in the question of its financial support (salary and benefits) to sponsored missionaries.

## *The Sponsoring Church*

### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Whereas a sponsor has a right to know that its man "on the turf" is doing his job (we will talk about that farther on), the worker needs to know that his sponsor is always behind him, pulling for him in every circumstance. The cement that will guarantee that both sides hold up their part of the arrangement is simple, direct communication, coupled with mutual respect. Without these two ingredients, the smallest problem can blow all out of proportion into a major misunderstanding.

The missionary needs and deserves much more from the sponsor than a monthly check. No company sends a man to a foreign post and then forgets him, outside of his regular remuneration. The sponsor can and should provide a fundamental moral support system for its worker abroad. This will mean regular correspondence with him, prompt remembrances of birthdays and anniversaries and special considerations during holiday seasons. Though no missionary I know would complain about not being remembered on his birthday, it does help to be remembered and thus to know that people have not forgotten you. Perhaps the most special of gift-giving times is Christmas. How wonderful it is to receive boxes of goodies, canned goods, magazines, books, etc. from concerned and loving brethren! (Sponsors, remember that if you are sending your boxes to the other side of the world, you must send them two to four months in advance if you want them to arrive by Christmas.) For most people, Christmas is a family time. It is therefore the time when the worker probably misses his family the most. "Care packages" sent at this

## *The Missionary Myth*

special period are one way of saying that the mission family is loved and appreciated and that their sacrifice, far from family and friends, is remembered. This is wonderful encouragement for people missing the warmth and presence of family at such a time of the year.

But, then, does one really need a special reason to remember someone who is serving the Lord far away? Cards, letters, books, remembrances of any and every kind and in every season are always sincerely appreciated. Let the sponsoring congregation use its imagination for finding ways to let its workers know of their love.

Mature workers, though genuinely thankful for all such gestures, learn that **they must not depend on such support**, even from the sponsor, for emotional stability, for it is all too often lacking. But when it is present, and it ought always to be, it can provide rich moments for him and his family. **Everybody**, you see, appreciates being remembered.

The person who coordinates all communication with the missionary is generally called the "correspondent," for obvious reasons. The worker needs to hear from this correspondent at least once per month. Sponsors usually want to hear from their workers that often, which is altogether normal; it seems to me that the workers could expect to hear from the sponsor just as often.

Correspondence with the missionary, then, should be regular and nourishing. Since it needs to deal directly with the missionary's needs, **a high priority should be placed on answering the missionary's questions**. So often the worker asks important questions about financial matters

## *The Sponsoring Church*

or requests information needed for various aspects of his work and waits in vain for a response. Or he waits three weeks (or three months!) for urgent information, only to receive it too late to do him any good.

All members of the sponsoring assembly should be encouraged to write to their missionaries. Some churches provide pre-addressed aerograms for their members, available in the foyer of the meeting place. This is a good idea, considered from one angle. From another, it seems a shame that in order to get our members to write to missionaries, it is necessary to provide paper and postage. Should we next set out "missionary-pens" for members to take and use to write these letters?

On occasion the worker on the field needs official letters from his elders typed on the church stationery for various administrative and legal matters concerning his status abroad or his lodging arrangements. When he requests these from the sponsor, he needs to know he will not still be waiting for them twelve months hence. Foreign government administrations do not admit such considerations as the slow turning of American Church wheels.

The sponsors must know their worker well, for they are the overseers of his work. They are spiritually and morally responsible for the teaching being done by their man far away. This requires that they remain in constant touch with his growth in the Word and that the relationship between them and him be continually deepened.

In order to know their worker well in the beginning, some congregations, when taking on sponsorship, require that he spend time with them before going out. This

### *The Missionary Myth*

“getting to know you” period can last from three months to two years. This is fine for a man seeking his first sponsor (sponsors come and go, as do missionaries, sad to say); it is obviously another question altogether for the established worker seeking a new sponsor. In his case, leaving his work for such periods can only spell disaster, for his work, for his family, for the entire context in which he works. Some kind of alternative solution must be found in such cases (one or two summers, for example).

Another way to know the missionary is to **visit him regularly** on the field. Seeing the man in the setting in which he works, with all the differences that are evident between his context and that from which his visitor comes, can do a world of good for a visiting elder. A relationship needs to exist that allows the missionary and his visitor to sit down to talk about spiritual and financial matters, as well as a broad range of subjects touching every aspect of the work. This time together during an annual visit to the field can do more for relations (and thus for the work) than all of the written reports sent in the meantime.

The overseeing eldership can contribute to the missionary's spiritual growth by seeing that he receives good sermon tapes and Bible-related reading materials and books. The missionary needs to be taught, just as every Christian does, and on the field the only teaching he hears is often his own. Good teaching materials can keep him in touch with the teaching being done in the sponsoring congregation. It can also provide him some excellent sources for his own sermon and Bible study preparation.

## *The Sponsoring Church*

But we must not think that the sponsor is the only one with responsibilities. The worker too has certain duties to perform. We will place them in three categories: (1) commitment, (2) methods, and (3) reporting. Let us look at them in this order:

### COMMITMENT

The missionary's first responsibility to the sponsor is his spiritual commitment to love the Lord with all his "heart, soul, strength, and mind." The best assurance that a worker will fulfill his duties to those who send him is indeed the extent to which he is bent on serving the Lord and not men. Such a worker will see to his own spiritual growth; he will jealously guard the wholesome spiritual atmosphere of his own family; and he will **PREACH THE WORD**, not only with his mouth but with his whole life. His labors will thus bear fruit – always – regardless of the local response to the message he announces.

This worker will be committed to the very core, alive to the presence of the Lord in him and constantly on the lookout for better ways to reach those around him. His teaching will be from the heart, whether or not he is himself a "dynamic" person, and this teaching will have its effect, for the power of the Word of God is beyond measuring, regardless of who teaches it.

When the worker needs spiritual advice, he should ask it from his overseeing elders. These elders should know that their man on the field will not make major decisions without consulting them. Though he is more "in touch" with the work in all its aspects, he needs humbly to



## *The Missionary Myth*

recognize their role as guides and overseers. If each party will simply recognize his limitations and insist on respect and brotherly love **in every situation**, all will go well.

### METHODS

There must be full and complete agreement in this area before the worker leaves for the field. That is, there must be an agreement on general philosophy. As much as possible, and for reasons outlined elsewhere in this book, the missionary should have a free hand in the daily affairs of his work. In this area, more than in most others, the missionary is much better qualified than his overseers to make such decisions, because of his presence on the field, his knowledge of the language and culture, the local church situation, etc. If for any reason the missionary feels he should make major changes in the **general methodology** of his work, he owes it to his sponsors to ask their advice first and to follow it. Again, a wise eldership, if it can have confidence in the man himself, will do well to give him as much rein as possible.

### REPORTING

The missionary must not forget that he is sent on a mission of evangelism, and that the brethren who support him in this undertaking have a right (and a responsibility) to keep solidly abreast of all events taking place in the field. Thus the importance of reporting. To this end he will want to inform them regularly and succinctly, while responding favorably to their occasional requests for special reports and other information.

## *The Sponsoring Church*

A monthly newsletter is a magnificent tool for informing the sponsoring church of activities in the field. In the chapter on reporting, I have listed what seem to be important items to include in this report. Though the newsletter is primarily directed to all supporters in general, the sponsor will also appreciate the news it contains.

But the newsletter will not suffice for sharing news with sponsors. The latter deserve more than this. Logic alone dictates that the missionary will need to go more into detail with his overseers than he normally does in his general newsletter. For example, what could acceptably be labeled "minor surgery" in a newsletter could and probably should be described more in detail in communication with sponsors. By the same token, a member described as "vindictive, critical, hateful, and unloving" to sponsors might be softened to "needing to grow" in the newsletter. In addition, the missionary's financial difficulties or his needs for specific equipment are not necessarily matters for the newsletter, unless his elders so designate them; they are indeed matters for his communications with the sponsor.

I am advocating no duality here, no half-truths in newsletters. There are simply some things which, by their very nature, do not merit full detailing in a general letter. But regular correspondence with overseers should contain sufficient detailing to permit the latter to stay informed of every aspect of the work and thus to perform their duty of oversight.

Regular correspondence with sponsors should be scheduled, it seems to me, once per month and perhaps even

### *The Missionary Myth*

more often. (The "correspondent" assigned to take care of relations with the missionary needs to be sure to faithfully transmit all communications to elders and mission committees.) The missionary should respond promptly and with candor to all questions and requests for information or special reports. Though a good sponsor will not expect the missionary to spend all of his time reporting, it will require enough reporting to know exactly what is being accomplished at all times. Occasional "special reports" may be required and often pictures, tapes, and other documents can be requested, so that communications between worker and supporters can be kept at a maximum.

An annual report is also helpful. In it, the missionary should not merely resume his 12 monthly newsletters, but present his **evaluation** of the work accomplished over the past year. He can also outline his plans and dreams for the coming year and make specific requests to his sponsors concerning their help with specific projects. He should be willing, in such a report, to enumerate his failures and to request advice concerning them. There is also room in such a report for requests for ideas and criticisms of the work. The sponsoring elderships should respond specifically and graciously to these candid requests, knowing that their man on the field will be helped by their reactions. Such a report should be read **by every member** of the sponsoring congregation, if at all possible. Too often, monthly letters and other reports sit around in someone's desk and are eventually perused by only two or three people.

Finally, the whole area of missionary/sponsor

### *The Sponsoring Church*

relationships, as much as any Christian context, requires steadfast application of the words of Paul to the Romans: "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Romans 12:9-12).

## CHAPTER 10

### REPORTS AND REPORTING

Most missionaries write a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter. Newsletters take a considerable time to put together – much more than most brethren realize. They are looked upon as a privilege and a task at the same time: a privilege because keeping concerned brethren informed about the work on the field is important to each mission worker; a task because it is not always easy to take the time to be thorough with a regular report, especially if it is a monthly one. In addition, there are times when it seems there is hardly enough “newsy” news to construct a monthly letter from. But I still think the once-monthly report is the best system. When the brethren can depend on the missionary to inform them twelve times a year on the progress of his work, they have a larger base upon which to found a consideration of him and his efforts.

Writing a good, honest newsletter is a difficult thing for a conscientious missionary. On the one hand, he wants to emphasize the positive aspects of what may be at times a very problem-laden work. On the other, he feels considerable pressure from those supporting him – pressure to produce results. For, in spite of themselves (we will give them the benefit of the doubt), the brethren seek numbers, exciting situations, fascinating conversations, thrilling successes – just the stuff, in other words, of which most mission work is not often made, at least in the European field.

## *Reports and Reporting*

But our aim is not to please everyone in order to keep the money coming. Who is upholding whom? Joe Cannon courageously writes: "Is the missionary to hold up the hands of the 200 Christians that are supporting him or are the 200 Christians to hold up the hands of the missionary? The odds are against one man satisfying 200 people, but in favor of 200 satisfying one."<sup>1</sup>

Let the missionary face the situation as it is, work in it and report on it, truthfully and objectively. Let him tell the good and the bad, with confidence in the Lord that the work done in his name will bear fruit. **And let the readers read, not to be upheld in their faith, but rather in order to learn more about how to uphold the missionary in his lone outpost.**

What should the newsletter contain?

(1) **News about the work.** All events and activities of the local church, as well as all area-wide or nationwide meetings (lectureships, etc.), should be mentioned. Work with particular contacts should have a place in the text. Baptisms and special spiritual achievements among members will be refreshing news to readers. Do not be afraid to note discouragements, failures, and disappointments, too, **without emphasizing them.** Express faith and confidence in the Lord, not with bellicose wordiness, but with simple conviction. Remember that brethren are anxious to have your personal analysis of all of these situations as they affect you and touch your life specifically.

(2) **Personal and family notes.** Supporters are sincerely interested in hearing about the family's health,

### *The Missionary Myth*

about how the children are doing in school, about special family activities, etc. Over the years, supporters will follow the growth and development of the missionary's family as they live in the local culture.

(3) **The national situation.** As social and political events affect the work of the mission family, they will make interesting news for the concerned reader. In addition, this will help supporters gauge the cultural difference with which the missionary must work.

(4) **Spiritual ideas.** You need not hesitate to include spiritual observations, scriptures, personal references to growth in specific areas. The mission experience provides many insights that can be profitably shared with supporting brethren. Those who regularly read the letter through will be the most susceptible to such spiritual reminders.

A good newsletter should be concise, informative, sincere, and honest. A little humor is also useful. Take the time to write a good one. Your supporters will appreciate you for it.

Some workers send their letters out themselves. Others send their letter to the sponsoring Church, which sees to the printing and mailing to a list of supporters and interested persons. In this latter case, a considerable delay between writing and delivery to readers is possible, even probable, because of necessary church secretarial constraints and the slow delivery of bulk mail. If you want your supporters to have February's letter by the Ides of March, do **not** choose this method. Other combinations are possible. Sponsors and their workers need to carefully establish

## *Reports and Reporting*

methods and frequency of reporting before the missionary leaves for the field.

The purpose of the newsletter is simply to allow the missionary to inform the largest number of people in the most efficient way. It is usually sent out in a mimeographed or photocopied form, in order to prevent the necessity of writing separate letters to every supporter each month, something that would not be a wise use of the missionary's time.

Most supporters understand this as being logical and normal. However, you probably will not be on the field long before you receive a request like this: "Dear Missionary: We are asking that you henceforth write us a brief, concise report each month. Please have it in by no later than the third week of each month, since it is to be printed together with other missionaries' reports to form a one-page mission news bulletin." (I sent that monthly report for eight years and never once saw it or any other article printed in a special mission bulletin.)

Others will be more requiring:

"Would you please plan to drop [us] a note at the end of each month and bring [us] up to date on your work. In addition, would you please answer the following questions:

1. How many times did you speak during that month?
2. How many Bible studies did you conduct?
3. How many baptisms occurred during this period?
4. How many restorations occurred during this



### *The Missionary Myth*

- period?
5. What other special effects and benefits occurred?
  6. What other matters should [we] be made aware of?"

I answered this request by saying that (1) my work schedule would not permit me to send individual reports to supporting congregations on a monthly basis, and that this was the role of the monthly general newsletter, (2) my distaste for an enumerating of "How many's" as an evaluation of the validity of mission efforts prevented me from complying. I had no illusions as to how such a response would affect the future of my relationship with that congregation. I was, indeed, "terminated" by them shortly afterward.

I might add here, parenthetically, that every supporting church that has ever asked me to provide a monthly report just for them, in addition to the regular monthly newsletter, has eventually dropped its support of our work. Perhaps this is simply because I resisted, but I think there is at least one other possible reason, and that is that the supporters who do not already understand the demands made on a missionary's time are not likely to be perceptive in other, even more important areas, and thus chances for an eventual rupture are multiplied.

Please do not understand that I am against ever writing to a supporting congregation or individual outside of the general newsletter. Nothing could be farther from the truth. What I am objecting to here is that congregations permit themselves to expect a missionary who already

## *Reports and Reporting*

makes a determined effort to keep everyone informed monthly to write a special note (even a full-fledged report) to them and them alone every month. If every supporter asked that, the missionary would do nothing but write reports. And what would he write about? Since all of his time would be taken by letter-writing, there would be exactly nothing to report.

Occasionally, supporters will write indicating that the period of their financial commitment to your work is nearing an end. Then there often follows a statement something like this: "We want to know more about your work. Communicating with us about it on a regular basis could mean the difference between the continuing of our support or its termination." Now, my friends, with respect to whom respect is due, my personal opinion is that what we have here is a kind of gentle blackmail. What is being said here is this: "Your monthly newsletters do not suffice, nor do the occasional letters you send, in addition. If you do not write to us individually on a regular (usually monthly) basis, you can expect to lose our support." This is unworthy of the Lord's Church and indicates a grim lack of understanding of the nature of the missionary's task.

Having said the above, I will say and repeat that I feel a missionary should indeed communicate with each supporter as much as possible outside of the regular letter. It is important to maintain a personal, individual contact with each one. How often this requires writing will be a matter of judgment for each missionary. But, as I said before, he must not allow his reporting duties to outweigh

## *The Missionary Myth*

his working duties. Otherwise, there will indeed be nothing to report, except that he has been quite busy – reporting!

From time to time, congregations arriving at critical junctures in their financial planning request special reports from their missionaries for reference and in order to evaluate their efforts. It would always be a good idea to consult existing files before doing so, in order to avoid asking the missionary to provide the same information he sent to someone else in the same congregation just a few months before. Since many churches regularly change the chairman or responsible person of the mission committee, it is common for each new chairman to write all the missionaries, asking for the same information the previous chairman had requested not so long before. This is repetitive and wasteful, not to mention that it also represents an alarming lack of continuity in the handling of the mission affairs of the Lord's Church.

I have in my files a list of correspondence from one supporting church from which I received, in the space of 18 months, no less than four requests, from three different persons, for special reports (evaluations of the work, plans and goals for the future, etc.). I responded as desired to the first and second request. The third and fourth were referred to the previous two and to my newsletter. For me, seeing that particular letterhead in my mailbox came to mean more requests to spend time away from the work reporting about things I did not have time to do because of spending so much time reporting. My negative response, quite frankly, got me in trouble with that congregation. But I had to insist that I must not spend all of my time

## *Reports and Reporting*

reporting.

Please understand me. Every missionary is grateful, utterly and sincerely grateful, for every amount of financial support he receives from congregations and individuals willing to help him. He should not, however, be made on this basis to feel responsible to spend major amounts of his precious time writing and editing reports for congregations that will turn around and ask him to do it again six months later. Time is so precious; it can be put to so much better use.

Every missionary worth his salt and pepper will keep his contributors informed as much as he possibly can. And he will be willing to do more for those congregations that require it. But there is a limit, and the man on the field should be able to set that limit without fearing for his support. The fact that I am obliged to say that in those terms indicates that such is not generally the case.

It goes without saying that the sponsoring congregation, in its capacity as overseer of the work, is deserving of regular special reports, treating pre-established subjects at pre-established intervals. This subject is examined in the chapter entitled "The Sponsoring Church."

Misunderstandings between missionaries and supporters concerning the frequency and procedure in reporting can be prevented by some simple, straightforward communication before the missionaries leave for the field.

Let me suggest, finally, that reporting need not be restricted to letter-writing. The brethren always appreciate recorded audio tapes (most missionaries don't have VCR yet; don't expect video) and photos. In another

### *The Missionary Myth*

chapter, I have encouraged supporters to use their imaginations in communicating with missionaries. There is no reason why the reverse should not be true. Missionaries, a little innovation can lighten the whole lump!

---

<sup>1</sup>Joseph L. Cannon, *For Missionaries Only* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1969), p. 43.

### THE FURLOUGH

Every missionary family leaves the field periodically for what is commonly called "leave of absence," or "furlough." There are four main reasons for this break:

1. Reporting to sponsor and supporters.
2. Evaluating the work with sponsoring elders.
3. Maintaining and raising financial support.
4. Family visits and rest.

The reporting aspect of the furlough is only logical. Each missionary wants to share personally with as many supporters as possible the joys and trials of his work. He wants also to express to them his gratitude for their prayerful support, spiritual and financial.

Careful evaluation of the work actually accomplished during the preceding tour of service is a vital aspect of reporting to the missionary's own sponsoring congregation. Meetings in which the missionary and overseeing elders examine together, prayerfully and in detail, every facet of the work, are worth more than all the correspondence imaginable from the field. The too-short time when co-workers ("sent" and "senders") are together must be avidly seized and wisely used.

To say that maintaining and raising financial support is an essential part of the furlough is only being realistic. On the last of my furlough visits to the States, I decided I

## *The Missionary Myth*

would not appeal for funds, even though we badly needed to do just that. My feeling was that if I appealed to the commitment of Christians to the Lord and his cause, I could perhaps dispense with appeals for money. It was folly. After that summer of calling for personal commitment instead of financial support, we returned to the work in worse financial condition than before we left.

In spite of the importance of these first three reasons for the furlough, I persist in thinking that they do not constitute its essential purpose. The fourth reason listed merits more attention than it usually gets.

It is, in fact, too easy to forget that the missionary returns from the field emotionally and physically tired, wanting and needing time to rest from his responsibilities in the field. This kind of rest is characterized by **periods of time during which he has no speaking, preaching, or reporting duties.** Too often the furlough is top-heavy, or at least one-sided: too many hats to wear, not enough time to relax.

I repeat that every missionary wants to see as many of his supporters as he possibly can. And most are willing to travel themselves "silly" in order to accomplish this. And therein lies the danger. The brethren unwittingly (they would not do this on purpose, would they?) take advantage of this general good humor, expecting the missionary to criss-cross the entire country visiting every person or congregation that has ever contributed the smallest amount to his support. And how will he travel? By car or plane? At whose expense? Many supporting churches cannot afford such cross-country rambles. Most missionaries

## *The Furlough*

will never be able to afford it. This financial burden must be considered, along with the obvious fatigue connected to such desperate moving about. All of this is not only illogical, but it can also even be cruel. But since it occurs, missionaries often return from their furloughs in bad shape financially and much in need of rest (only to have nationals ask how the "two-month vacation" went).

This is a delicate subject, I suppose. No missionary desires to offend anyone. It is very difficult for him to say no to anyone who really wants him to come to visit during his furlough. But someone, somewhere, most probably the sponsoring congregation, needs to keep an eye on his projected schedule during this hectic time. And far-flung individuals and congregations, whom to visit would represent a particular hardship on the missionary, need to be prepared to receive, without offense, a word indicating that he is not able to visit them, at least not on every trip.

How often should a furlough be taken? Some prefer to break every two years; some every third year; others just whenever they get the feeling they need some time away. Those with children rarely have a choice of what period of the year to choose: summer. Factors regulating time between furloughs will differ with varying cultures and works.

Our first three-year term seemed very long to me. On our first return, I shared this assessment with my sponsoring eldership and expressed my feeling that we should perhaps consider returning every second year. Hearing this, a former missionary present advised me to consider that our first term had seemed long because we were beginning a new work and that, henceforth, not only would two years be



### *The Missionary Myth*

too short a time between furloughs, but even three years might not seem long enough.

I found this advice to be absolutely correct. After our next three-year term, we felt less emotional need for a return to family and homeland; in addition, the work having taken on some momentum, it would have been folly to leave it again after only two years.

And how long should the furlough itself be? Most families stay two or three months. Others have personal and family reasons for a much longer stay, such as six months to even a year or more. Each missionary must work out these plans with his overseeing eldership.

It is with some dread, in one sense, that missionaries prepare for furloughs, partly because of the formidable nature of the upcoming demand on their energies, partly because of the immense amount of time it takes to prepare for such a trip. For, let it be understood, the missionary does not arrive from the field with the kind of reporting program (slides, maps, brochures, graphs, etc.) that impresses the brethren without having spent hours, days, and weeks working at it before his departure.

Neither does he arrive with the messages he wishes to deliver without having labored over them before coming. Often he has little occasion to preach in English on the foreign field. Preparing several well-honed English sermons to be preached to hard-to-excite American brethren, and this while trying to keep up with his last-minute work on the field, is a feat. It is not unusual to see a missionary spend the larger part of the last month before his furlough departure in the preparation of these "details." This is not

## *The Furlough*

to mention the travel arrangements, which must necessarily be made several months in advance and can be quite complicated. During this period of preparation, the work on the field goes on, and the missionary must obviously stay on top of it. This is at least one reason why, when he gets to the homeland, he needs rest, not more unexpected work to do.

I would suggest the following as a reasonable schedule for a two-month furlough:

One week of rest and adaptation to the time change.

One week to ten days with sponsoring congregation.

Three to four weeks traveling and visiting supporters.

Three weeks of rest with families (no reporting responsibilities).

I would also offer a few practical suggestions for congregations and/or families receiving mission workers during furloughs:

(1) Sponsoring elderships have been known to advise missionaries on the eve of the furlough (when all sermon and materials preparation have been completed) that they are expected to address specific topics or issues in their preaching in the States. If a sponsor must absolutely impose subjects or current issues (about which those of us on the field often know very little – fortunately!), let

### *The Missionary Myth*

this desire be communicated well in advance of the furlough. It makes a lot of difference to the missionary.

(2) Do get the most you can out of your visiting missionary during the time he is with you. But do not sap him. Remember that he most probably comes to you from a dozen speaking appointments in the week preceding and that he leaves you to go to another dozen. Try not to squeeze him too tightly. If he is with you for a whole weekend, for example, please do not expect him to speak at the Friday evening young marrieds' devotional, the Saturday morning Timothy classes, the Saturday afternoon Tabitha classes, the Saturday evening youth group, the Sunday morning early worship, the Sunday morning adult Bible class, the Sunday morning late worship, the Sunday noon potluck fellowship, the Sunday afternoon singing fellowship, and both Sunday evening services (not to mention, of course, the Sunday evening devotional at elder X's house). I sincerely do not know a single missionary who would refuse such a schedule, as desirous as they all are to please their brethren and as much as they recognize the worth of all of these activities. But it must be understood that a man is a man and that a man (be he a missionary) has his limits.

(3) Too many missionaries are stuffed sodden by well-intentioned brethren. Oh, missionaries like to eat (who doesn't?). But they cannot be expected to digest extra-large doses of delicious delectables three times each day for a period of one or two months without disastrous results. It is not unusual to see missionaries return to the field after a furlough having gained ten or fifteen pounds,

## *The Furlough*

simply because they were almost literally stuffed by the brethren who received him. Now, it is commendable and right that brethren who receive traveling evangelists should want to host them in a way worthy of the best Christian hospitality. It is less commendable, on the other hand, to encourage our guests under the guise of hospitality, to commit the sin of gluttony. Along this line: Christians who talk naively of "pigging out" are taking a grievous sin much too lightly. Think rather about preparing something light, something nutritious, something easy to digest, something that will not leave your visitor feeling heavy and dull. And, I guarantee you, you will be blessed, not only by our Father in heaven, but also by a very grateful traveler and his family.

(4) Consider the impact the furlough can have on the missionary's small children. They will have difficulty understanding why they must sleep in a different bed every night for four or five weeks running, why they must always be on their best behavior, despite the fact they have not had a decent night's sleep since it all began, that they have been dragged in and out of cars, buses, and airplanes for so long that they do not remember when it all started. They just want it to end. As they grow a little older, they learn that it is "for the Lord," but cannot for the life of them figure out what all of this frantic moving about has to do with the Lord's work. If the experience is too painful, they risk unconsciously connecting the pain with the fact that it is the Lord's work and want to shy away from this kind of existence when they are older.

## *The Missionary Myth*

In all of the traveling, it is generally the wife who must care for the children, while her husband is constantly on call. She must not let the children get on his nerves too much as they travel to the fifteenth or twentieth or thirtieth location, so that he can do a good job in his sermon (slide presentation, etc.) and be refreshed and enthusiastic in his talk with elderships and mission committees afterwards (while she keeps the children, all alone, in a quiet, deserted classroom). The children will be exhausted. Constantly. So will their mother. So will their father.

I would suggest that, as far as this is possible, the children profit from the chance to be with their grandparents while the parents do this traveling around. It will be better for everyone, in the long run.

Consider now the older children. Remember that they are growing up in a foreign culture and that they generally return to the States only during furlough periods. During these times, they watch as their family is fed like kings, treated like monarchs, adulated, lauded, and praised. (I would personally take a lot less praise and a lot more concern for financial support, but be that as it may!). And missionaries certainly enjoy being treated well. But the impression that it can leave on our children is that when they return to the States, they return to a kind of earthly paradise. Everything is bigger, better, "richer, fuller, deeper" there. To the extent that when the children go back to their homeland (the foreign culture), they can actually feel deprived and cut off from all of the good things they have experienced during their time away.

It goes without saying that the parents must stay in

## *The Furlough*

touch with their youngsters, so as to confront this false idea and teach them where the true values are. But some of these reactions occur at a subconscious level and are therefore not always expressed. Parents are often not aware they are happening. This impression of the home country can cause problems later on in life when these same young people grow into adults and return to the home country for schooling and/or marriage. More than one missionary's child has had a difficult time adjusting to life in the States because of the false impression they had of it while they lived with their parents outside of the country. When one discovers the weaknesses and faults of the country and its system, he sometimes finds it a difficult truth to handle.

What strikes the visiting missionary most about the current American culture? The most flagrant, I think, is the materialism. A veteran missionary once said: "When I return to the States, the brethren seem to want to do one thing first: show me their latest acquisition. They want me to see their newest car, their new boat, their new house, their latest investment successes, their collection of this or that."

I have personally found this to be true. It would be impertinent to suggest here that struggling with difficult financial situations on the mission field automatically develops a sacrificial spirituality beyond that of those who have few such struggles. But I am certainly safe in saying that rampant material can indeed create rampant materialism, even among the most godly people.

A Frenchman once shared with me his mixed feelings about American citizens. They are at the same time, he

### *The Missionary Myth*

said, so good-hearted and so materialistic. I could only agree. Even among American Christians, I conceded, this is a constant danger. It is not that they always willingly search after riches, but that so often the riches are simply there, something that a European can hardly understand. And the American Christian, in turn, can hardly understand the struggles of those who do not have his riches.

At any rate, it is an intense temptation for the mission worker on furlough to feel that he is walking among people who are shallow and immature in their Christian experience, mostly because they live in such "luxury," as compared to the way of life known in most other countries.

In an article by Lela Merritt in the *Mission Strategy Bulletin*, Miss Merritt describes this feeling as the "Elijah Complex," and presents it primarily as a difficulty which the visiting missionary must overcome. It is normal, says she, for the visiting missionary (missionary's "kid" in her text) to feel lonely and superior, somewhat in the same way that Elijah did when he believed he was the only one serving the Lord in Israel. The Lord reminded him, Miss Merritt points out, that not only was he not alone, but that there were also 7,000 others with him. She encourages us to have, instead, Jesus' mentality: "Jesus fed the five thousand and they were extremely grateful. In fact, they were going to make him king until he told them that they really wanted the free lunches they could provide, so they left him. Do you think it might have crossed his mind that they were shallow? Do you think that when the Jews said that they did not need freedom from sin because they were Abraham's descendants that Jesus might have questioned

## *The Furlough*

the width of their world view? When they accused him of casting out demons by Satan, do you think that he knew that their hearts were impure? Jesus knows what it is like to be rejected by his own (John 1:11).”<sup>1</sup>

The missionary does indeed need to recall these situations in the Lord's life and to look at how he reacted to them. Elijah's example, at least in this case, is not a good one.

Another element of the American culture that strikes the visiting missionary is the pace. People seem to be in such a hurry to get nowhere, and they have so little time to really be together. The missionary might even have difficulty getting some elderships to talk with him, taken as they are with their multitudinous occupations, even though he has communicated the dates of his visit months before. But this “silent treatment” can be an indicator of more than the pace of American life; it can also mean dwindling interest.

Even sponsoring congregations can be guilty of letting “pace” emphasize a loss of interest. One missionary tells of a memorable gathering with his elders and mission committee after three years of absence. They met for breakfast, the morning having been set aside for discussion about the work. At about 10:30, one person after another began to leave, citing other meetings or responsibilities. The missionary was shocked that those who had the direct oversight of his work could not block out an entire morning after three years to consecrate to an overall examination of the work they were engaged in together.

Another thing that strikes one is the number of



### *The Missionary Myth*

consumer products available. I marvel as I contemplate the extreme variety of products on the American market place. There is **so much of everything**, of everything imaginable and things one could never have imagined. The visiting missionary sees, perhaps easier than those who have never left their country, (1) that America is indeed the world's richest nation, and (2) that Americans move about amidst all of this abundance with considerable non-chalance, as if untouched by the wonder of the riches around them.

Finally, many missionaries are struck by the ignorance of their supporters concerning the works to which they contribute. It does not do a missionary any good to send reports regularly each month to a congregation, only to visit them on furlough and hear himself announced as working in France or Japan when, in fact, he works in Germany or Argentina. But this is only a light form of the ignorance of which I am speaking. Contributors do not always seem to realize the commitment the missionary has made to his work, or the extent to which he is steeped in his life on the field. Questions such as "When are you coming back home?" or "How much longer do you intend to work in XXX?" reveal to what extent long-term commitment is unknown or misunderstood. In addition, such questions seem to indicate that contributors think that picking up and leaving a work would be like picking up ones marbles and tripping home after a good game with the boys. They often do not consider the intricate web of involvement in language and culture created by years of living and working in a foreign country, rearing and educating children there, etc. But, ah well, all of this is forgivable,

## *The Furlough*

of course. Missionaries just wish, sometimes, that people would take the reality of their life and work in the foreign field more seriously.

The returning missionary is happy to see those whose prayers and financial support enable him to carry on his work. But the furlough period can be very trying for him. It is part of his job, I know. But this particular part of his job can be made especially pleasurable for him by supporters who are sufficiently forewarned to understand how the furlough period can affect him and his family. Perhaps the preceding will help us all to welcome our visiting missionaries with special care and compassion.

\*\*\*\*\*

### NOTES ON A SUMMER FURLOUGH

\*\*\*\*\*

On the plane: Between two worlds, leaving home, going to a foreign country -- a country so different.

Arrive in States: Indeed a foreign country, but I speak the language.

All the people! Where are they all going?

Airport: familiar, beloved faces.

Baby throws up.

Battle for luggage.

## *The Missionary Myth*

Long drive to house.

Heat, fatigue, calls to loved ones.

In limbo – relax, or work?

Shops, luxury.

So many things to eat!

Abundance.

Tears at embracing parents.

“Welcome Home” signs.

Meetings, meetings, meals, more meetings.

Meetings with one mission committee to thank for support (which ends as of this month; but **that** was not mentioned).

Racketball, Jakusi, **wonderful!**

Mexican food.

Sunday morning worship (**ALL THE PEOPLE!**).

Meeting with another mission committee. Not long enough (Support never mentioned).

Man who said: “You must have a lot of money to raise,” then disappeared.

Introduced to congregation by preacher, who did not even know where we were from.

Seeing old friends: 20 years have changed us all.

## *The Furlough*

Little in common any more, except our faith.

Airports, airports.

Near-missed landing. Scary!

Baby's finger in electric socket at loading ramp.

More old friends, troubled lives, needing counseling.

Gestures of love, warmth, comfort. People are so  
good to us!

Old home town: prosperity, space, calm, peace.

Tempted to want to stay.

So good to be among so many good people.

Simple, gentle farm couple. What generosity, what  
hospitality!

Reports, meetings, more reports, more meetings.

Combined report and sermon – difficult.

Slide program well-received by all.

Visit with elder. Never once asked about our work.

Perhaps he thought I would ask for money. He  
is worth millions. Told me: "We are all poor  
around here."

Am I seeing my grandmother for the last time?

Gracious hosts, disciplined family, recently tried by

## *The Missionary Myth*

cancer.

Receptions, luncheons, delicious meals.  
Godly men and women, caring, anxious to serve.

Small church buildings, large church buildings.  
Some large buildings largely empty.

Overheard one elder say of me: "He has matured."

High pressure salesman: "Have you a copy of the  
new XXX Bible?" "No." "I'll be right back  
with one for you." Never saw him again.

Final responsibilities, a full Sunday.  
Reports and sermons well-received.

Long talk with former missionary: No one under-  
stands as well as he what we are all going through.

Now, trying to rest before going HOME!

---

<sup>1</sup> Lela Merritt, "So You Are Going Home," *Mission Strategy Bulletin*, October - December 1983, p. 2.

## THE MISSIONARY AND HIS TIME

Elderships and individuals often ask me to describe a "typical" day or week in my work. Such requests, though somewhat amusing, are nonetheless perfectly understandable. Missionaries are far away. This distance prevents the brethren from getting a first-hand look at their regular activities. And there is perhaps another reason: generally speaking, our brethren are not always well-informed about the work habits of their own local ministers (right, preachers?). Why is this? I am not sure. But the answer to that question is not vital to our study here. So we will go on.

What kind of schedule does a missionary keep? I cannot speak for all, obviously, but I know that in my own case and in that of most of the brethren working around me, a daily, minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour routine is perfectly and ridiculously impossible to establish and maintain. Too many items in a tightly scheduled day are subject to sudden and drastic change. No one day will, therefore, be standard.

On the whole, mission work is a marathon. Yet some days will be breathless sprints. On rare occasions, I have jogged in the morning, spent quality time in personal Bible study and prayer, studied the Bible with contacts, distributed tracts, graded correspondence courses, written a newsletter, done some personal witnessing of my faith in Jesus to a stranger and taught a class of Christians – ALL IN ONE DAY. It is tempting, at the conclusion of such a

## *The Missionary Myth*

day, to want to repeat it on the morrow. But such days are rather the exception than the rule. When they occur, we must enjoy them and thank the Lord for the good that is accomplished, but not expect it to happen again any time soon. Our poor bodies could not stand it anyway!

There are other days when it seems that every project, every plan, every good intention is frustrated and defeated. Nothing goes right, everything falls in the water. A study is missed because of a car breakdown, an important call is canceled because your youngster missed his bus and needs a ride to school; your study time for Sunday's sermon is cut short by an unexpected phone call, etc. On the field as in life in general, we must learn to be patient and to "wait on the Lord," who often has other things in mind than those we had planned for the day.

I am not advising that we let ourselves fall into a haphazardness in which there is no apparent direction. I am merely trying to explain that even the best schedules can be destroyed in "one fell swoop," especially on the mission field. But when the Christian is in tune with the Lord and his will, he can still make every minute count, whether it counts for what he **originally** intended or not. The secret, you see, is in the long haul.

One of the most difficult adaptations the missionary has to make is that of learning to work with loose ends, to wear many caps, to constantly have twelve, if not twenty, lines in the water. For some of you reading this, that may present no particular difficulty. If so, more power to you. But for most, it can be a thorny problem.

Let me illustrate what I mean: One church I know

## *The Missionary and His Time*

has a minister, an associate minister, an involvement minister, an evangelism minister, a personal evangelism minister, a tape minister, a children's education minister, a youth minister, a singles minister, an adult education minister, and a language-group minister. Now, look carefully at this list. In most foreign mission contexts, the missionary, who often works alone, is expected to fill ALL OF THESE ROLES AT ONCE. Indeed, he cannot do otherwise, whether he is expected to or not. It is he who prepares and delivers the sermons on Sunday, who prepares and teaches classes during the week for the gathered church, who prepares and studies personally with several contacts every week, who prepares and organizes publicity for special meetings, who prints, publishes, distributes materials generated by the work in his area, who is marriage counselor to the troubled homes with which he comes in contact, who exhorts the brethren to involvement. It is he, in short, upon whom all major responsibilities, of all kinds, fall.<sup>1</sup> In addition to service in all of these areas, the missionary is expected to be a linguist, a Bible scholar, a plumber, a machinist, an electrician, a tour guide, a writer, an avid reader, a public relations man, and a fund-raiser, not to mention that he must be, for the nationals around him, a representative of a foreign nation whose history and government he is expected to know in the minutest detail.

In such a hectic context, the finished task, it goes without saying, is often hard to come by. One is obliged to work every day with the parts of an as-yet unassembled puzzle. The completed project is months, even years, in the making. Some things, of course, you will never finish.



### *The Missionary Myth*

But all of this is as it is in life in general, with one large exception. The homeland brethren do not always see the careful construction of a work and its rewards. Their interest is in calculable results.

The complexity of this situation calls upon the mission worker to deepen his faith and to look, as did Abraham, to the time when dreams will be realized. It also forces him to re-evaluate the ownership of his time, for one of the great lessons of submission to the direction and guiding of the Lord is that of ceasing to consider that our time is our own. The mission experience underlines and encourages the learning of this important principle.

Now, lest I leave you with the impression that a missionary runs around every day in circles, bent under his load and not knowing what he is going to do or say next, let me hasten to add that lack of routine is not a synonym for lack of organization. Organization is indeed necessary if one is going to survive in such a caldron. Every missionary constructs his schedule according to his own particular disposition and set of circumstances. Many things will determine his plan of action: his personal capacities, his family's needs (age and school schedule of children, for example), his pre-set goals, the physical conditions in which he works, the number of people in the congregation, the number of his co-workers, the availability of study materials, the location of his office (at home or in town), etc. Whereas a local minister can be observed as he works in a home church, the missionary is usually thousands of miles away, on his own and under no direct eye of supervision. He is responsible for his own daily tasks, his

## *The Missionary and His Time*

personal schedule, with no one to observe or oversee. This is all the more reason why **the foreign missionary must enjoy the complete trust of his sponsoring congregation.** I would therefore say this to all sponsoring churches: If your missionary cannot be trusted to construct a solid and productive schedule and to carry it out with efficiency and verve, then he should not be sent to the field in the first place.

Missionaries have 24 hours in every day, just like everyone else. This is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage, you see – just a simple fact. Some missionaries accomplish more in those 24 hours than others. This is true in every line of work. Some people just seem to work faster than others. In addition, I have learned from observation (Didn't Yogi Berra always say: "You can see a lot, just by looking?") that fast workers rarely slow down and slow workers rarely speed up. It seems to be a question, all other things being equal, of metabolism.

Speed is not the question, then. Quality is. And in order to do quality work, there are several guidelines I feel should be applied to the missionary's life:

(1) Your first "time-priority" is to your own spiritual development. It is evident that you cannot lead others to Christ and help them to grow if your own spirituality is failing. Spiritual growth for the missionary is never automatic. It has to be set as a goal and worked toward. And working toward spiritual maturity is a **daily** struggle. How will we lead others to the Lord if we are not ourselves submitted to him in every thing? How will we submit if our

## *The Missionary Myth*

every interest is not an exercise in giving ourselves over to his will? And how will we learn to love his will without a steady diet of earnest prayer and methodical examination of the revealed Word? I have often said that anyone who is too busy in any given day to open his Bible and to study the Word is just too busy. And I have, of course, hung myself on my own warning. Does a missionary ever go for a whole 24 hours without studying his Bible and praying? Would I shock you if I said yes? And yet it happens in his life, as in that of every Christian, sad to say.

(2) Remember your family. Most missionaries are not alone on the field. There are wives and husbands to think of, children to be taken into consideration. The other members of your family are as much a part of your "team" as you, and are making their own special contribution to your work. Their needs must be kept at the forefront of your working considerations. I have said more about this in another chapter (see *FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS ON THE FIELD*). The missionary who does not weigh the effect of his working schedule on his family is inviting emotional estrangements which can be incredibly harmful to those he loves the most. When a man goes half-way around the world to save the lost, he must take a hard look at the well-being of those who accompany him and participate with him in his God-given enterprise. To do otherwise is not only foolish, but condemnable.

(3) Leave workaholism to the world. The Lord himself, speaking to the men whose job would be to

## *The Missionary and His Time*

evangelize the entire world, invited them to isolate themselves betimes for rest (Mark 6:32). Mission work is, by its very nature, exhausting and draining. The missionary does no one, especially those for whose salvation he is working, any good by insisting on never taking advantage of periods of rest. He must not be ashamed to rest. Earthen vessels are not unbreakable, even when filled with a heavenly treasure. Are we afraid some will criticize us for resting? Indeed, some will. I am not suggesting that a missionary should be lazy under the pretext that his work is difficult. But here, I think, there is little danger of being misunderstood. Most missionaries I know are hard workers who have no need to be reminded to work. The danger is entirely on the other side. Some need to be reminded to rest. Too often, when we do not make our bodies rest, our bodies themselves rebel, and then we have to take a **long** rest.

What, then, is a missionary's schedule like? Working paces and individual dispositions differ. In my own case, under normal circumstances, I must rise every morning at 5:00 A. M. Now, the world seems generally to admire early risers. However, I would clarify that, whereas for some rising early might indeed be a matter of merit, in my case no merit is involved. You noticed that I said I "must" rise early. The only reason I would ever drag myself out of a warm bed at that time of day is that I have to; if I do not, I cannot hope to accomplish the work I have to do. (No, I have not forgotten my advice of the last section. I take regular rests).

## *The Missionary Myth*

Now, it would be foolish of me to proceed from this point and recommend that every truly spiritual person should rise at 5:00 A. M. (I have actually seen this done, in print). There is no need to send anyone on a guilt trip. Rising early works for me, and indeed it has lovely advantages. It may not work for you. Do not feel obliged. What is important is that each one organize his time according to his particular context. I know missionaries who rise early and some who rise late. And I cannot say that one or the other habit has a particular impact on the quality of the work accomplished (though it does seem to affect its volume).

Every day in a missionary's life will necessarily contain prayer, study of the Word, and some kind of sharing. Perhaps one will also have the opportunity to set aside regular periods for writing and preparing for studies and sermons. Office work will need to be regularly scheduled.

But, any way you look at it, the missionary is necessarily someone who is a **self-starter**. The mission field is no place for people who have trouble getting out of bed in the morning or, for that matter, for people who have not the good sense to go to bed at night. Pace is extremely important.

How many hours a week should a missionary work? Should he quit at forty hours, or work only thirty-eight or thirty-five, considering the stress he deals with? Should he count the hours at all? These are questions that call for a personal decision. It is not uncommon to see a mission worker regularly put in fifty to eighty hours per week

## *The Missionary and His Time*

(which is why periods of rest are so important). Indeed, in most works, this amount of work is almost necessary. One recent study by *Minister's Life* concluded that the average work week of a minister (in the United States) is fifty-three to fifty-seven hours, just two hours less than that of the chief executives of the 500 largest corporations in the USA (whose salaries, by the way, top the \$200,000/year mark). I would suggest that, on the mission field, a fifty-three to fifty-seven hour work week would almost be a rest.

One thing that I have found helpful in a hectic schedule is to take **one full day** of rest from my work each week. I have often had to fight to keep the day free from studies or other "religious" responsibilities, but it has been worth it in time away from heavy responsibilities and with my family. They know they can count on my presence all day on that day. Except for emergencies, such a day should be kept inviolable. Missionary families could even establish family traditions on such a day, such as eating breakfast out together or having a regular entertainment outing.

The mission family will occasionally need to take one or two days off to get away from the mission setting and its pressures. How often you will do this depends on your own emotional and physical makeup. Remember that you must not be afraid to take such a break when it is needed for your own health and that of your family members.

For the same reasons, an annual vacation of sufficient length to provide relief from responsibilities should be a high priority. It is important that for a fixed time each year the missionary be completely away from his responsibilities

### *The Missionary Myth*

not his Christian responsibilities, but his duties as leader and guide. This break from the "weight" is indispensable to his own equilibrium. It must be a time of renewal, of refilling his own cup. In France workers are given five weeks of paid vacation per year (and 13 months of salary!). That figure is almost scandalous to the American mind; but, although American missionaries could hardly justify that much time off, they do need more than the traditional two weeks so common in their homeland. This is a matter to be worked out between each worker and his overseeing elders. But keeping a man fit and rested for his work counts much for the quality of work he later turns out.

What place is there for sporting activities in a missionary's life? Of those missionaries I know personally, I can safely say that not enough of them are inclined to set up and follow a plan of regular physical exercise. How important it is to the missionary to maintain his body in good physical condition! Regular physical exercise contributes immensely to the kind of stamina necessary to carry on the work. If you participate regularly in some sporting activity, do plan to continue it on the field, if the facilities are available. If they are not, take up a new sport, but do not plan to give up intense exercise, even under the excellent pretext that you will have little time for it. The time you have for it will be the time you make for it, time which will contribute to your general well-being and, indeed, to the quality of your work in general.

I once asked a veteran missionary how he managed to find time in his busy schedule for regular sporting activity.

### *The Missionary and His Time*

He replied: "I schedule it in, just like a Bible study." He went on to explain that his regular time for exercise was inviolable and that he did not interrupt it, even for personal work. It was a time blocked for exercise, not to be considered for anything else. Does that shock you? It should not. In the same way that I have refused Bible studies on my day "off," in the interest of my own and my family's well-being, I can also refuse all interruption of a specific time set aside for exercise. Schedule it if you must; join a club and hold to your resolution. Your health, and therefore your work, may depend on it.

You may, however, want to be careful about describing your physical activities in your reports to the brethren, who do not always understand what I have just explained. It was once pointed out to me that one of my supporting brethren, after reading of my tennis activities in my newsletter, asked aloud: "What does he do over there besides play tennis?" It is really a shame that workers must be suspected of laxness because they take time out to keep their bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit, in good physical shape. And yet it happens. Many mission workers leave exercise out of their schedules for this very reason: They do not want to incur the wrath of their supporters. This is unfortunate, indeed.

We have been talking about the missionary's time. But his time is not his own, of course. I remember once asking a veteran missionary the question: "How is the work going in XXX?" His answer reflected his many years' experience and the fact that he had often been asked the same question, perhaps by persons who were not able



### *The Missionary Myth*

to understand the answer. He replied, simply: "It's the Lord's work." And it is. To a person who is open to the leading of the Master and who is a willing and able worker, a setter of goals, an energetic participator in the organized activities of a daily plan, the work is the Lord's work, not his. Successes will be attributed to the Lord, glory to no one but him. The Lord's work consists of teaching the lost, loving the unloved (and the unloveable) and announcing peace to a harried world.

But is it surprising that it also involves mowing the lawn, cleaning the garage, washing the car? These are necessary occupations for every homeowner. But in the mission field, they take on special significance, for the establishment and maintenance of the house and home are essential ingredients in the smooth running of the work. Aside from the fact that missionaries, like any gospel preacher, are likely to be doing housework at odd times of the day or week compared to their neighbors because of the strange schedules they keep, it is to be remembered that even when the missionary is digging in his yard, he is contributing, in some way, to the on-going of his work. He must live and function as a homeowner, husband-father-brother, just as anyone would, but to the end that he be able to preach the gospel. Everything he does, then, contributes directly or indirectly to that goal, the goal for which he left his homeland, houses, and families for the sake of the Lord. The daily details are the scaffolding on which the worker stands while he does the work for which he is sent. No scaffolding, no work done.

Here is some advice I picked up somewhere and that

## *The Missionary and His Time*

I have found helpful. I carry a copy in my briefcase. Perhaps it will help you, too.

### HOW TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE IN A TURBULENT ENVIRONMENT

1. **Take time for ritual and tradition** – regular walks in the woods; visits to the park, museums, zoos; reading fine books and listening to fine music.

2. **Leave details for someone else**, especially when you are feeling too busy.

3. **Take time to enjoy the beauty in your environment**; move through your day s-l-o-w-l-y. LET THE SUNSHINE IN!

4. **Learn to live with unfinished tasks and loose ends**. Only a corpse is completely finished.

5. **Leave enough time between activities to minimize overlap**. Allow for leadtime and afterburn.

6. **Allow time in your schedule for the unexpected**; this often means scheduling fewer tasks each day that you reasonably expect to finish without pressure.

7. **Leave early enough** so you need not rush to get where you are going, even if this means rising twenty minutes earlier in the morning.

8. **Practice saying NO** to new responsibilities or opportunities which would overload or rush your day or cut into your planned leisure time.

9. **Know your values, priorities and limits**; practice being CENTERED.

10. **Find a work organization** that is not chronically

## *The Missionary Myth*

high-pressured or harried.

11. **SLOW your pace** of talking, walking, eating, breathing.

12. **Avoid doing more than one thing at a time.**

13. **Find time each day to relax, meditate, exercise and have fun.** Commit yourself to the value of scheduling leisure time for both you and your spouse.

14. **Become more aware of the nature of the stressors in your daily life.** Advance knowledge and understanding can help prevent and reduce harmful impacts.

15. **Take personal responsibility for your pace of life;** the choice of major life changes (e. g., marriage, home mortgage, return to school); and for the way you consciously and unconsciously choose to respond to the stressors in your life.

16. **Know your comfort zone,** i. e., the range and intensity of stimulation that is comfortable, healthy, and productive of growth.

17. **Find a good fit** between your own personal needs and the demands of your environment (e. g., family, household duties, friends, work, neighbors, etc.).

18. **Select activities and challenges** that are meaningful to you and avoid meaningless time-energy consumers.

19. **Micro-engineer your time and energy.** Manage how you spend your daily time and energy actively and consciously.

20. **Take reasonable risks** – enough risk so you are challenged, but not so many that you are overloaded or unprotected.

**CONSERVE YOURSELF – YOUR TIME, YOUR**

*The Missionary and His Time*

**ENERGY, ALL YOUR RESOURCES – FOR WHAT REALLY MATTERS!**

**IDENTIFYING STRESS/BURNOUT SYMPTOMS**

**Early warning signals**

Feeling pushed; not enough time to do what is required or too much to do in the available time. Being spread too thin, being at the breaking point.

Difficulty in seeing all aspects of a problem.

Rigidity of views; prejudice.

Misdirected or out-of-place aggression; irritability.

Withdrawal from relationships.

Inability to relax.

**Later Stages**

Marked changes in personal sleep, dietary, exercise, or sexual habits.

Marked disorder in the work and/or home environment; messes.

Notable anger at most aspects of work; consistent displeasure and very little joy.

Escapist fantasy.

Repetitious feelings of anxiety, then frustration, followed by anger and, last, depression.

Apathy and/or boredom with activity, job, friends, family, life in general.

Reports of too many top priority tasks to do and the feeling that you are the only one who can do them.

### *The Missionary Myth*

Excessive time organization, overplanning.

Absentmindedness or excessive daydreaming or being "spaced."

Deterioration of intimate relationships to such a degree that many of the aspects of the relationship once present are now lost or nearly irreconcilable.

(source unknown)

---

<sup>1</sup>It is not my purpose here to examine the rightness or wrongness of these facts. Obviously, every missionary prepares others to take on some of these responsibilities. But the fact is that delegating responsibility and training workers is a process that takes time, sometimes much time, and during the time of such training, tremendous weight is upon the missionary's shoulders – and on his alone.

## WHEN MISSIONARIES GO HOME

It is a fact that there are more "former" missionaries today in Churches of Christ than "current" ones. Most sources indicate that since 1950, about 2000 have gone to the field from the U. S. and have returned home.<sup>1</sup> And it goes without saying that those leaving are not being replaced. All of this spells one word: DANGER!

When the Lord's Church begins to withdraw its troops from the world, there is cause for alarm. I will not deal here with the need for workers in all fields of the world (see *MISSION PHILOSOPHIES*), but rather with the precise phenomenon of missionary fall-off. What causes them to leave works half-finished or partially completed, works begun and continued at great expense, not only in money but also in "blood, sweat, and tears?"

I would suggest here, before even approaching a response to this question, that NO ONE who has not worked in a missionary's shoes is entirely qualified to judge his motives as he returns. Some reasons for leaving the field are valid; some are not. Just as some reasons for going are valid and some are not. But before condemning anyone having served on the field for his decision to leave it, one has to have been where he has been. May the missionary who wishes to stay on the field be blessed as he continues his work. And may the missionary who wishes to return be blessed for the work he has done.

Why, then, do missionaries go home? I will suggest

## *The Missionary Myth*

several reasons:

**Expired terms.** Some workers envision, from the start, a fixed term of service as their contribution to mission work. In another part of this book, I have expressed my clear preference for a lifetime commitment. We must, however, recognize and sincerely appreciate those who can only commit themselves for a shorter, pre-determined period. Barring severe problems while on the field, their contribution is a valid one and is thus to be commended. Would they could stay longer. But, failing this, that they can come at all is good. Two, three, or five years is usually better than none at all; and it is certainly two, three, or five years more than the vast majority of Christians give out of their lives to mission work.

In this category, I must mention apprentice workers, whose term of service is generally pre-set at two years. Here is an example of a deliberately short-term mission effort that can have long-term results. Many apprentices are so "taken" by their work on the field that they eventually decide to make it a life work. This is one of the goals of such apprenticeship programs and one of their best reasons for existing.

**Marital problems.** The marriage state, even under normal circumstances, is subject to enormous tensions. Every married person knows that. Unfortunately, not every married Christian contemplating mission work realizes to what extent the mission setting can multiply those tensions. Arriving on the field unprepared for the extra pressure the work will impose on the marriage bond is inviting trouble. I have dealt more in detail with this problem in

## *When Missionaries Go Home*

another chapter (see *FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS ON THE FIELD*). Some couples succeed in handling the mission context; others do not. **Preparation** is a key factor. When a couple cannot resolve their work-related differences, they need absolutely to leave. Between having a miserable marriage on the field and a successful one back "home," the second solution is obviously better. In fact, even if it will also be miserable back home, it is better to be miserable in your home culture than in a foreign one. At any rate, if circumstances require one to make a choice between the family ties or his work, the missionary cannot do wrong by choosing to protect the former.

It is too bad when things come to this; but when they do, and a hard choice must be made, let it be made on the side of the family, and let no one judge the man who has had to make this painful decision.

**Personal problems.** In this category, I would place difficulties with language learning, personality conflicts, adjustment anomalies of all types. Some people just are not meant to do this kind of work. Sometimes they discover it before entering the field; sometimes after. The sooner the better in any case.

Some just cannot seem to grasp the language. Others learn it rapidly and well, yet cannot get along with co-workers. Others handle language, culture, and personal relations well, yet cannot function in the team context or perhaps never adjust to being so far from loved ones. Some feel right at home in the foreign culture but cannot learn to share their faith with the nationals. Some discover that their coming was motivated by wrong motives or



## *The Missionary Myth*

mistaken ideals. There are dozens of personal reasons for leaving the mission field. I would say that there are almost as many as there are missionaries. Every missionary has personal reasons for leaving the field. Some must put their reason to action and actually leave. The others simply put up with their problem and deal with it as well as they can.

When these problems make leaving necessary, there is no shame in accepting the obvious, especially when the obvious is as imposing as it can be on the field. Indeed, there is more merit in recognizing an irreconcilable problem and renouncing than in trying to disguise it in order to continue. The only person fooled by such a disguise is the missionary himself.

**Unavoidable circumstances.** Life-threatening political situations, wars, and population uprisings, etc., can make mission work practically impossible for a time. While a single man might decide to stay and serve as best he can, a man with a family needs to take them out of such a context.

Terminal illness or death in the worker's immediate family can also cause a return. Many missionaries have thus returned to be with ailing parents who would be all alone otherwise. When death strikes, the missionary's decisions are complicated by the distance between him and his homeland family. But this is a fact which he accepted upon entering the field and with which he is usually prepared to deal when the time comes.

**Support problems.** This is by far the most common reason for missionary withdrawal. Some do not reach the

## *When Missionaries Go Home*

field with adequate support in the first place; after a year or two, they realize the predicament they are in and call on their supporters for extra help. When the help they need is slow in coming or even non-existent, despondency sets in. The new workers must renounce before they really get started. This is traumatic and unfortunate. Most who return under these circumstances do so with feelings of extreme frustration and even bitterness.

Others lose financial support after many years of faithful service far from family and friends. What are the reasons most often offered for this state of affairs? Most often, **churches simply lose interest.** While they are eagerly jumping into loan programs stretching two or three decades into the future, they haven't enough faith and vision to reach nearly that far into the future for missions. Commitment to a given work is only given in bits and pieces – for one, three, or five years at a time. This is not faith – it is short-sightedness and even cruelty. To the man on the field, it means that his financial support is never sure, that he must live in ceaseless uncertainty concerning his future, dreading the day when he will find himself with half or one-third (or none!) of his support, knowing in his heart (and by experience) that this day will indeed come, sooner or later. Of course, when financial interest in a work declines, so does the fraternal and emotional support that accompanies it. The brethren seem no longer to care, no longer to be interested in what is going on with the missionary's life, his family, his work. And the simple reason for this is, that they **aren't.**

Years ago, a brother wrote to invite me to leave a

## *The Missionary Myth*

struggling work, citing as a reason that “many of these [small] groups are going to end up abandoned anyway down the road . . . Supporting churches do get discouraged and sometimes, unfortunately, works have to be abandoned before they are mature for that reason.” I responded with indignation that “when the American Church wakes up and decides that its ‘discouragement’ is not sufficient reason to terminate mission efforts, perhaps we will get somewhere in our world mission effort.”

Whether this discouragement constitutes sufficient “reason” or not, my brother was right: Churches do get discouraged, and they do drop mission works because of it. It’s a pill that every missionary, at one time or another, has had to swallow. And, let me tell you, it leaves a bitter taste.

When a missionary on the field throws in the towel and goes home, it is most often because his supporters gave up and went home long ago. Try to imagine what a missionary must feel when he loses his financial support, all at once or bits at a time, for reasons such as the following:

- to build a parking lot
- to build extra classrooms
- to build a new auditorium
- to evangelize close to home
- to hire a new local evangelist
- to install new air-conditioning

Taken individually, these needs are doubtless important (with the possible exception of the air-conditioning!), but the question is this: Are they more important than the

### *When Missionaries Go Home*

Church's mission effort? When projects such as the above are realized at the expense of a congregation's mission work, the Church is turning inward, and this can only mean trouble. When the Church starts to spend more money preaching to itself than to the lost, **everyone** is slighted in the long run -- not just the lost, not just the missionaries, but also those whose time is spent "sittin" and "listenin" instead of "goin" and "doin." The former can only grow in. The latter can grow up and out.

I will not go so far as to say, as one missionary did, that "some churches are like fickle teenage girls changing boyfriends." But I will say, with all the love and respect that every missionary owes to every autonomous assembly of the Lord's Church, that for too long the missionary enterprise, and therefore individual missionaries, have been subjugated to treatment much less justifiable, financially and **morally**, than anything that an honest international business corporation would ever do to its employees abroad. When an international company sends qualified men to a foreign setting, it sees to their needs, provides benefits for the sacrifices they undergo, plans special retirement and insurance programs, given the foreign context. When the Church of our Lord sends workers abroad, it very often does so without adequate planning or commitment, and certainly without sufficient care, with the inevitable result that the missionary experience of some of the Church's most capable workers (and therefore the potential they represent for reaching the lost) is a complete, dramatic failure. This is more than a defeat for the workers involved; it is a condemning mark on the Church as a body. Workers

### *The Missionary Myth*

subjected to the kind of treatment I have described often lose not only their confidence in God's people, but their trust in God himself. Few can stand up under such treatment. Those who do, deserve a reward that the "discouraged" Church is not worthy to give them.

**Loss of faith.** I have mentioned that some workers have lost their faith as a result of discouragement. This is perhaps difficult to believe, but still true. Some missionaries do indeed quit because they have lost their faith in God and in his people. This is tragic. That those who accept the call to tell the Good News to peoples of other nations should end up renouncing their faith is reason for grave concern.

Every missionary does, in fact, expose himself to attacks on his faith. And when they come, few other Christians are likely to be around to help him fight the battle. If at this strategic time in his work the missionary is also having to fight tooth and nail to keep his financial support and the interest of his brethren in the States, devastation can be the result.

The responsibility for such terrible discouragement must often be placed on the shoulders of the supporting brethren, whose reluctance to uphold their missionary with adequate financial and emotional support can have dire consequences. Who can measure the destructive effect of working continually alone, year after year, without adequate funding, without adequate concern from brethren far away? The final responsibility lies, of course, on the worker. I am only saying here that the Church has often had a very large and negative role to play in this whole

## *When Missionaries Go Home*

matter.

It is imperative that any man having problems with his faith on the field be immediately recalled. I have seen at least one case in which a missionary who was losing his faith continue to work (if that is what it can be called) with a local church. The negative attitudes he was able to communicate to native brethren during that time poisoned them definitely, preparing their eventual departure from the body.

There are other reasons why missionaries leave their posts. But these are the most common. Among these, let it be noted again, the "bear" is the dwindling of support. Responsibility for this should be placed squarely on the shoulders of those who do not have enough faith to uphold their hard-working man on the field.

Two remarks to terminate this chapter: First, what is a returned missionary to do? How is he to live? It takes successful planning to negotiate a re-entry to the home culture, just as it took careful planning to enter the field in the first place.

As I suggested earlier, the person who returns to his home culture is not the same person who left. "Vocational re-connection" can be a troubling experience, complicated by the feelings of frustration, fear, and even guilt that many returnees feel. We must not assume that because a missionary has worked for ten years in a foreign field he is automatically suited to assume a pulpit position in the States. He may not even desire to "preach" in his homeland. And even if he does, his preaching experience, as local and as specialized as it has been (foreign language

## *The Missionary Myth*

and culture, etc.), may not qualify him for pulpit work, especially as it is currently practiced in the States.

Studies are beginning to be published among Churches of Christ concerning missionary re-entry. You might consult *Cross-Cultural Re-entry: An Annotated Bibliography*, by Clyde Austin (Abilene University Press, 1984) and its sequel, *Cross-Cultural Re-entry: A Book of Readings*, by the same author.<sup>2</sup>

Returning to a culture that has evolved during a long absence is difficult for anyone, and perhaps especially for the missionary. He suffers most, undoubtedly, from the lack of understanding of his brethren as to the situation he finds himself in. But that is another subject.

Finally, let me say that "former" missionaries should realize what a formidable force for good they can be, once returned to their homeland. The very nature of mission work changes a person to the core of his being. His eyes are opened to new visions, his heart and conscience to deeper needs and calls. He **understands** what his brethren are facing on the field from having been there. And, brethren, the workers on the field need just that: the cooperation of brethren who know what mission work is like.

That is why we need former missionaries in key posts in the church: on mission committees, in elderships, among deacons and correspondents. There is a tremendous influence to be exercised in favor of the Lord's work in foreign lands. Who can better exercise it than the former missionary? Accordingly, many former missionaries are already laboring mightily for the Lord's cause abroad. Others, sad to say, seem to want to fade into the woodwork.

### *When Missionaries Go Home*

Former missionaries, arise! There is still a place for you in foreign mission work, a unique place indeed. You can achieve a task of which no one else is capable: using your hard-earned experience to uphold and strengthen the hands of the current workers on the field. Will you not seize the golden opportunity?

---

<sup>1</sup> Otis Gatewood, *Contact*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, 1981, for example.

<sup>2</sup> Published in 1986. Drs. Tom and Dottie Schulz, of York, Nebraska, have also done extensive research in this area for their doctoral dissertations.