

# THE MISSIONARY-RECRUITING CHURCH

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The Church of Jesus Christ, since the dawn of modern missions, has been planting the banner of the cross in many lands. It can be found on the banks of the Amazon, in the metropolises of modern Japan, in the foothills of the Himalayas, in the remote villages of Africa and in the charming towns and cities of Europe.

The message permitting this planting has been proclaimed over the years by members of individual local churches. What kind of churches were these which were able to produce people, enough in love with Christ to leave home, loved ones and friends to follow the Lord's call to a foreign country?

The first thought which comes to mind is that these missionary-recruiting churches must have conformed in many respects to the pattern of the churches of the first century. If ever there was a missionary-minded church, it was the church of New Testament times. The New Testament does not systematically outline the missionary program of the individual churches, but the general tenor of its various books, beginning with the Book of Acts, shows plainly that they followed the spirit of Peter's statement, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

The thriving early churches were thrilled with the prospect of preaching Christ. This was their "meat to eat." This was their life. Even when the first persecutors attempted to discourage the Jerusalem believers in their efforts and caused them to be scattered, they "went everywhere preaching the Word" (Acts 8:1, 4). The "body of Christ" of apostolic days throbbed with a passion for leading men to the Savior.

By the end of the first century, the Gospel had been taken to every major part of the Roman Empire, from Babylon to Spain, and from Alexandria to Rome. In less than seventy years, the estimated 120 men and women of the upper room (Acts 1:15) had grown to nearly a half million.

Wherein lies the secret of such an enviable record? The Book of Acts, the condensed history of apostolic missions, tells the exciting story. And this story presents the characteristics of a missionary-recruiting church.

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## ACCEPTANCE OF THE DIVINE COMMISSION

The last recorded words of the Savior, before His ascension, were those generally termed "the Great Commission." By the disciples who heard them, they were considered as binding. There was no choice. Those men wanted none. Disobedience was unthought of. They knew that "missions is not a side line; it is the lifeline of the Church."<sup>1</sup> In this they followed the proper theology of missions.

Today, believers whom Christ continues to maintain as members of His body have as their commission the communication of the message of salvation to the entire world. Missions must be considered as fundamental and not as supplemental. If the Church does not take this attitude and accomplish the task, then who will? Obviously, no one! No other group of people has the key to unlock the door of hope. No other knows the secret of blessing. No other has been taught the proper philosophy of life.

The body of regenerated believers, to whom the commission has been given, and which constitutes the universal Church, is necessarily broken down into local congregations. The picture is clear. If the Church is to evangelize the world in its own generation, then each individual congregation must become involved in the work of world-wide evangelization. All churches ought to be concerned with this work all the time.

## ATTACHMENT TO THE MESSAGE

The faithful and persistent attachment by the early church Christians to the unique plan and message of salvation sparked the missionary endeavor (see Acts 4:12). Their fidelity brought about the dedication of themselves to the proclamation of this truth.

One main reason for the waning of missionary emphasis in many congregations has been a departure from the fundamentals of the faith. But one must say more. In some evangelical churches, to which this present article is directed, certain people conduct themselves as if Acts 4:12 were no longer true. The plan of salvation has not been modified, but many do not take it seriously, and do not proclaim it with the same urgency and fervor as did the early church.

How can Christian young people be invited and incited to offer their lives for missionary service, unless the local church continues to proclaim the message of salvation and acts as if it believes it with all its heart?

## AWAKE TO THE WORLD'S NEED

Paul, like Christ, pressed on to the next city or town so as to have an opportunity to present the life-giving story. His missionary journeys are too well-known to need repeating here, but the important remark to make is that he traveled from place to place feeling that if he did not tell them of the Lord Jesus, then perhaps no one would.

The crying need in this world today is that the Church recruit its youth and send them out into the world to preach Christ. The sound of this cry is steadily increasing in intensity, for in the last five years, the population of our globe has increased by 500 million to a total of at least 3.3 billion. The cross of Christ remains the world's only hope of redemption. It is high time that true Christians accept the marching orders of the Lord and bar the road to a Christ-less eternity on which most of these billions are traveling.

#### ASSOCIATION WITH THEIR SAVIOR

The strong association with the Lord of the believers at Antioch gave rise to a new name for them: "Christians." They had been recognized as those having been with Christ by faith. Following their evangelization and acceptance of the Savior, they manifested His virtues to such an extent that they were designated thusly.

It was to such a people that the Holy Spirit addressed an appeal for the sending forth of His witnesses on the greatest missionary voyages ever known. The call came to the church as well as to Paul and Barnabas, who were at that time ministering in that local church. The Antioch Church can thus be cited as the prototype of all Christian Churches.

The local church is the divinely-appointed unit for carrying forward the missionary program. How can it do this without sending some of its own youth to the foreign field? Every truly Christ-associated local church (there are some which are not) ought to send at least one person to a foreign field. And it seems to me that that should be considered as only a good beginning.

The Church which does not have young people going out into the service of God in the foreign and home ministries is a church with a vital defect in its outreach. The failure of a church to propagate itself in personnel generally means that the church is not spiritually alert and is probably in a backslidden condition.<sup>2</sup>

#### AVERSION TO MATERIALISM

Even in the first century, the Church was not universally victor over materialism as Chapters 5 and 6 of the Book of Acts attest. But materialism was not master as it is in so many twentieth century churches, homes and hearts. The church which is a victim of this pitfall cannot expect to inspire its youth to turn its back on what the adults show to be their first love.

Jesus said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). It is evident that many modern-day Christians have removed this concept from their philosophy.

#### AVOIDANCE OF COMPROMISE

One of the most sinister aims of Satan is to lead the Christian into a position of com-

promise. Knowing this, the early Christians fought it continually. (See Acts 4:19-20; 5:29; chapter 15).

The twentieth century has become the age when compromise is the popular and expected thing. In Christendom, the Ecumenical Movement, nurtured by a spirit of compromise, is one of the deadliest enemies of evangelism. Ecumenicity and evangelism are strictly incompatible. Rare will be the church, which after having flirted with the Ecumenical Movement, will send missionaries to foreign fields to proclaim that men are lost and need to be born again. And rare will be the compromising church in any realm and on any level which will see its youth dedicate itself to the work of missions.

### ACTIVE IN A MISSIONARY PROGRAM

It was stated earlier that the New Testament does not give a detailed outline of the missionary program of individual first-century churches. But one thing is sure; they accomplished the task. In the absence of a precise model plan, each congregation must set up a divinely-guided missions program which is practical in its own local situation. Programs do not work magic, but a positive program upon a sound basis, carried forward under the Holy Spirit's direction will do more for the local church and its entire ministry than any other single thing.

#### The Place of the Pastor--the Key Man

The pastor has a role to play which no one else in the congregation can. It has often been said that a church cannot rise above the spiritual level of its pastor. Rare is the church which can recruit missionaries when the pastor is not "sold" on missions.

The pastor is the key agent . . . he is the essential force reaching the people of his church who in turn will make possible the accomplishment of the program he places before them. He is the go-between through whose ministry the lives of men will be challenged to accomplish what the Church has in view for missions.<sup>3</sup>

And it must be solemnly added: it is the pastor who is directly responsible to God for the missionary program in his particular congregation, and will have to give account to Christ at the Bema Seat.

Among other things, it is his responsibility to:

- 1) Have a vision, a love, and a warm heart for world-wide missions.
- 2) Provide the leadership. The vitality of the program depends largely on leadership and the pastor should be that leader.
- 3) Preach messages and teach frequently on missionary subjects. Sunday School classes, Bible classes, teacher-training classes, and new convert classes are all popular. Why not

have missions classes in the church? These could have as a definite goal, the placing of the proper stress on the subject and aiding prospective missionary candidates to get the proper perspective of missions as a vocation. "Not all the training of missionary candidates is carried on by Bible Institutes, Seminaries and other missionary schools. The local church does its part."<sup>4</sup>

4) Challenge young people to enter missionary service. Young people everywhere are searching for a worthwhile cause to which they can wholly commit themselves. The missionary-minded pastor will have little difficulty in helping them find what they are searching for.

5) Supply pertinent and up-to-date information to the members. This can be most effectively accomplished by direct and sustained contact with foreign fields. "Psychologically, the will cannot be moved until the heart has first been moved. And the heart is moved by information . . . and when the knowledge has touched the heart, it will lead to action."<sup>5</sup>

6) Secure prayer support at all costs. It is not general, half-hearted prayer which will reap results, but rather as one missions executive has stated: "Every member of the Church should be praying for specific missionary needs and opportunities."<sup>6</sup>

7) Inaugurate a precise plan for purposeful giving. The "faith-promise plan" has been effectively used in many church groups. It provides the possibility of making a personal promise to the Lord to give on the basis of faith. Some may feel that this is a regimentation of giving, but such is not the case. We are living in a world where challenges are constantly given and goals are set in every realm. These modern methods can also be used for the Lord's glory.

An interesting example of missionary giving is that of a church in San Luis Obispo, California. The first Sunday of the month, all offerings go to the pastor. The second Sunday, they are used for local needs. The remainder of the month, all offerings go to missions.

#### The Participation of the Local Church

Expansion of the local church in its immediate surroundings and to the "uttermost parts" should be its natural, spontaneous, well-programmed action. The missionary emphasis should not be separate from the rest of the church program, but a necessary, normal and integral part of all planning and thrust. "Missions can never be just a private affair. It always involves the church."<sup>7</sup>

Now, what leads to this active participation?

1) Submitting to Christ.

It is a church in which each member is surrendered to Christ and willing to go, if God were to call, that is the most likely to produce missionaries. Not every volunteer or interested

person will land in some foreign country to undertake the task of soul-winning for Christ. Some will be ruled out for one reason or another, but "still it is the ones who have such a willing heart that Christ can use in every kind of Christian work."<sup>8</sup>

2) Witnessing to its own constituency.

As a general rule, the local church, which is interested in carrying on a positive testimony for Christ in its own town, will also become interested in people in foreign lands.

3) Fostering missionary interest in the homes of the members.

I have heard a number of testimonies to the effect that the presence of missionaries and other servants of the Lord in the home has been used of God to stimulate the youth of these homes to offer themselves for specialized Christian service. One of the greatest ways a parent can help in the missionary cause is to be willing for his child to become a Christian worker, talk with him about it and then pray that he, himself, be the privileged parent of a young person with this high-calling.

4) Enlisting the youth.

There has been notorious failure in many churches to get young people involved in evangelism where they are, and then inspire them to enter missionary service. That is why the matter is being mentioned several times in this article. "Until the spirit of happy obedience lays its hand upon God-called and God-directed and God-equipped young men and women for missionary service, the local church remains, whatever else may be said about it, not fully pleasing to God" (emphasis mine).<sup>9</sup>

5) Organizing missionary conferences.

Any church can hold a dynamic and successful missionary convention, and it should become the outstanding event of the year. In fact, the missionary program could include several during the year. A possible substitute for a good conference is a year-round church missions program. This takes considerable determination and perseverance, but it can be done. Recently one pastor informed me that he never has a missionary conference as such, but emphasizes missions every Sunday. It is interesting to note that his congregation's missionary offering saw an increase of 65% in 1965 over that of 1964.

6) Setting definite goals.

In my experience of furlough deputation after three terms of service in a foreign land, one of the greatest weaknesses I have noticed is the lack of definite goals in missions on the part of the church as a whole and during the missionary conference in particular. So much depends upon having goals. And the exercise of faith is a necessary prerequisite to the setting of goals. Is that perhaps the reason so few are set?

## ASSISTED BY THE MISSIONARY

This, now, is the church's point of view. During their ministry in the Church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas "sought to help these people establish a vital, dynamic relationship to God through Christ so that He could guide them in the further development of the church."<sup>10</sup> And when the journey was completed, they returned to the home base and "rehearsed all that God had done with them . . ." (Acts 14:26-28). The missionary, though often absent, can help considerably in the recruitment of personnel.

After this brief consideration of some of the characteristics of the early Church which made it a missionary-recruiting church, and attempt to make comparisons and practical applications for our own day of what is found in the New Testament, it is fitting to add the following words of A. T. Pierson. Though written over a half century ago, they are still appropriate.

Could the whole Church just now determine in God's strength to allow no retrenchment, surrender no station, withdraw no workmen, but rather multiply her laborers, enlarge her gifts and at once vigorously push for the regions beyond . . . there would come as we solemnly and confidently believe a new era of blessing . . .<sup>11</sup>

## DOCUMENTATION

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