

## **THE NATURE, PRACTICE, AND IMPORTANCE OF MISSION**

### ***1. Introduction: The Meaning of Mission***

The word 'mission' comes from the Latin, 'missio', i.e. 'to send'. So the idea of mission is sending, to be sent, to go because sent. The word has gathered wider connotation. It includes the whole operation of evangelism<sup>1</sup>, churches being born, and the growth and nurture of those churches. But in general we understand Christian mission as the taking of the Gospel to places where it has not been proclaimed, and so there, proclaiming it with the results of some acceptance and some rejection. So Christ can speak of being sent into the world and of sending his disciples into the world also. Strictly speaking evangelism and mission are not identical. Evangelism subserves the missionary task, and in fact also supports it even after churches are formed.

The word mission can also be used by other religions and faiths. They may feel the urgency to tell their ideas to others and to gain adherents. The question is whether God has commanded them<sup>2</sup> to do this, and whether the result of their labours will be to redeem man and bring him to peace, and ultimately, to restore him into the full image of God. Christians see the Biblical faith as unique, and as the only truth, the one which can alone save lost man. Hence they see mission in the deepest sense as unique to Christianity.

### ***2. Mission and Commission***

Before we launch into the theology and practice of mission we need to see whether in fact Christianity and the Gospel involves mission. Since most faiths seem to wish to propagate themselves, is the idea of mission then phenomenological to all religions, and so is there nothing unique about the fact of Christian mission?

The founder of Christianity as a faith was Jesus Christ. He spoke of himself as being uniquely the way to God as Father (John 14:6). He then commissioned his followers to go into all the world and preach the good news or gospel of the Kingdom, and lead men to belief in him, and salvation from

---

<sup>1</sup> Evangelism. This word is not used as a noun in the N.T. any more than is the word "mission" used, as such. It is to be doubted whether there was strictly speaking such a thing in the minds of the N.T. writers, or the church.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Rom. 10:15. Only they must go who are sent. If sent then their message must be heard and obeyed – otherwise not'

sin and death. His commands as given can be found in Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-20, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23 and Acts 1:8. We will attempt a statement which covers the content of these commands.

### **(i) Matthew 28:18-20**

- (a) The basis of the command to go was that Christ had been given all authority in heaven and earth. This is Lordship, the prerogative of Messiah.
- (b) The disciples (apostles, church, people of God) must go; that is the church must not exist within itself, its own social, spiritual life.
- (c) It must make disciples, or learners, or followers of all nations. It must make nations into disciples.
- (d) The disciples must be baptised into the Triune Name, i.e. into the authority and nature of God.
- (e) As they do these things Messiah will be with them, since all history will be moving towards 'the consummation of the age', i.e. the fulfilment of all things.

### **(ii) Mark 16:15-20**

Whilst this section is not found in many ancient MSS, or alternative versions are written, nevertheless it certainly represents the mind and understanding of the early church.

- (a) The disciples are to go into all the world.
- (b) They are to preach the gospel to all creation. ('Preach' here is to 'proclaim'.)
- (c) They are to baptise those who believe, and these will be saved.
- (d) Attestive signs will accompany those who believe, such as speaking in new tongues, picking up snakes, not being destroyed by deadly poison, and having the ability to heal the sick.
- (e) In this they were assisted by the power of Christ, who worked with them from the place of authority at the right hand of God.

### **(iii) Luke 24:44-49**

- (a) Whilst no direct command is given, it is shown that the preaching of repentance and the remission of sins is based prophetically in the O.T.
- (b) It is to be based 'upon his name', i.e. the name of Jesus, i.e. his authority.
- (c) It is to be preached to all nations, commencing at Jerusalem. This also is according to prophecy.
- (d) The apostles are not to commence such ministry without the prior endowment of the Holy Spirit. This is called 'the promise of the Father'.

### **(iv) John 20:19-23**

- (a) The background of the commission is the risen Christ. His cross-resurrection triumph is clearly seen and understood. It is the basis for the proclamation.

- (b) Being sent is not a new, novel departure from precedent. The precedent is that God has sent His Son. Now the Son sends them.
- (c) They are sent into the world.
- (d) They are equipped for the going by the affusion of the Holy Spirit.
- (e) They will forgive or retain sins. This seems to be the equivalent of proclaiming repentance and remission of sins.

### **(v) Acts 1:8**

In the light of the preceding verses this is really a statement that

- (a) The apostles will be baptised in the Spirit, and
- (b) Receive power, and
- (c) Be witnesses to Christ.
- (d) This will relate to the outworking of the Kingdom of God.

(Note that in Acts 10:42 Peter speaks of a further command of Jesus, 'He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead'.)

### **Conclusion**

We should notice the way in which the commission is couched. In Matthew there is no imperative to go, but rather 'going, do such and such'. The command or direction follows the going, which is presupposed. Likewise in Mark's passage. In Luke it is simply a statement of what the prophets said would happen. In verse 48 it is applied to them – 'You are witnesses of these things'. In John there is a command, but couched as the continuum of the sending of the Son, 'As the Father has sent me, so send I you'. In Acts 1:8 it is stated that they will receive power and will witness. The point of these observations is that whilst the element of command is not absent, it is not primary. In all there is the presupposition that the disciples will want to go. In fact they are told to wait until the Spirit comes.'

## ***3. The Theology of Mission***

By 'theology of mission' we mean the Biblical elements which determine that Christ's people are involved in mission, and that this is God's plan and purpose. This theology has very wide connotation in the Scriptures and must be viewed from various angles, and seen in many aspects. For example mission may be approached from the following angles or doctrines:—creation, salvation history, prophetic fulfilment, the people of God, covenant, the kingdom of God, the conflict between God and Satan. It will involve the doctrines of creation, redemption and the restitution of all things. It will concern the regeneration of man and creation. These are some of the elements which make mission a powerful subject, and demand a clear theology.

### **(A) Creation and Mission**

I Peter 4:19 says, 'God is a faithful Creator'. This must mean that

His creation is perfect and complete (cf. Gen. 1:31, Eccles. 3:11a). Hence when He sees ‘it is very good’, then the initial work can be said to be good, and an essential unity. However He is not a faithful Creator if (a) The nature of that creation is impaired, and He is shown to be unequal to the task of carrying it through, and maintaining its essential unity and goodness. (b) If other forces – say Satan and his powers – can destroy this creation or leave it permanently impaired. (c) If the intended goal is not fulfilled, and that creation, in the ultimate, prove to be deficient. Add to this the fact that creation is also the revelation of its Creator. Presumably a deficient creation would reflect a deficient Creator.

What then is the goal of creation? The Scriptures make it clear that its goal is ‘a new heavens and a new earth’ (Isaiah 65:17f., 66:22f., cf. Isaiah ch. 11). We see this (prophetically) fulfilled at the end of the age (Rev. 21:1–5, 22:5, II Peter 3:10ff., etc.). Other Scriptures prophesy that that end will only be complete when evil is destroyed and the elect of God – His people – are glorified (cf. Romans 8:18–30).

If what we say is true, then God must act within His creation to vindicate Himself. We do not mean God must stir Himself and ‘do something about it’. We mean that He must have planned, before creation, its perfect consummation. We find this is exactly what He did. Numerous Scriptures tell us that He planned the new heavens and the new earth, and the glorification of elect humanity (cf. II Tim. 1:9, I Cor. 2:6–10, Ephes. 1:4–14). Moreover the N.T. tells us that the Son (or, the Word) created all things. That is he mediated the creation initiated by the Father. (See John 1:1–4, Col.1:15–17, Heb. 1:2–3, I Cor. 8:6). For him to be true Mediator he must also mediate the renewal of the creation which has been attacked by Satan and his powers.

The present evidence of disharmony through the rebellion of Satan, and then the rebellion of man (cf. Rev. 12:1–10, Gen. 3:16, Rom. 1:18–32) seems to point to a defeat of God, if not the defeat of God. We have nothing but prophecy to indicate that that defeat is not ultimate. However we do have that prophecy, and going on the history of prophecy we have firm evidence that the end will show a perfect creation. It can be seen, nevertheless, that God must move in His creation in redemptive power and defeat the powers of evil in a moral way. Mere metaphysical power – ‘the quelling of evil’ – will not be enough. Something has to (a) Win the voluntary submission of rebellious man, and (b) Destroy the innate power of evil. This is done through the Cross and Resurrection. At this point we will not indicate how that is done, but later we will examine it. Assuming, then, that it has defeated evil, and man can be redeemed, and the world renewed, then mission must be seen as indispensable.

It is indispensable on the following grounds:

- (a) It effects in a working-out process what the atonement had already won on the Cross.
- (b) It draws all things to a final conclusion, a denouement in which the nature of God, through redemption, is shown to be that of a faithful Creator.
- (c) It rehabilitates the ‘all things’ which Christ has created, and unifies them in eternal and harmonious glory.

In order to understand the working of mission we must look at the work which Christ is now doing to complete the original purposes of creation.

- (d) He is working the ultimate defeat of evil. This can be seen from Scriptures such as I Cor. 15:24–28, Rev. 11:15, Hebrews 10:12–13, Rev. 19:11 – 20:15, 21:8.
- (e) He is working to draw in his elect, and to bring them, stage by stage, into ultimate glorification. See Romans 8:28ff., II Cor. 3:18, 4:16f., Rev. 21:1–7, cf. I Cor. 2:6–10, Rom. 8:18–25, Phil. 3:21.

God's plan to (a) Unite (unify) all things in Christ (Ephes. 1:9–10), (b) To reconcile all things through him (Col. 1:20–21), (c) To fill up all things (Ephes. 1:21–23, cf. 4:10) is based on the work of the Cross, but also the outworking of that Cross in the processes of history. This is seen from Revelation 5:1–5, 6:1ff.

This work which Christ is doing is through his people, the church. It is by means of mission. This, as we have said, indicates the indispensability of mission.

### **(B) Salvation History and Mission**

Without doubt the Bible is the history of salvation<sup>3</sup>. By this we mean that it has a thesis or proposition which is this:

God created. Satan and man rebelled. God has structured history in such a way as to redeem man. He also has planned to save His creation. This history cannot be understood without the accounts of the creation of man, his fall, and the judgement of the Flood. Such accounts give us the nature of God, so that we can understand the nature of man who is in His image. It tells of the temptation of man by the serpent, the fall of man, and the consequent evil and violence which brought the judgement of the Flood. Man's attempt to evade the command of God to have dominion over the earth is typified by the building of the tower of Babel.

These elements lead us to see the setting in which the promise of the Covenant was given to Abraham. This covenant related to universal blessing, and universal judgement (Genesis 12:1f.). The working out of that covenant then becomes a history—wide process. The patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are the founding fathers of the agreement. Jacob's children form the nation of Israel, which itself is given a temporary covenant of law. This is a sub-section of the wider Abrahamic covenant and it leads to the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31–34). Christ is the head or mediator of this covenant which is a covenant of grace.

In order to establish this covenant Christ (Messiah) not only proclaims the message of his coming Kingdom, the kingdom of God, but he also prepares to do battle with the powers of darkness (Luke 11:21f., John 12:31, 14:30–31, Luke 22:53, Heb. 2:14–15, Col. 2:14–15) by means of the Cross. At that Cross he bears the sins of the world, becoming sin for man, bearing the curse of the law, and being subject to the death that man must die for sin (cf. I Peter 2:24, II Cor. 5:14, 21, Rom. 6:10). By taking the guilt of man he destroys the power of evil over man. He dies not only for the sins of man but also rises for their justification (Rom. 4:25).

---

<sup>3</sup> A study of Salvation History is available from N.C.P.I. Cassettes also accompany these notes.

The effective work of dying for man, and rising again is followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit of life who effects the work of the Cross in man (Rom. 8:1–3, II Cor. 3:6). He is also the Spirit of the Kingdom as Christ is Lord (Messiah) of the Kingdom. That Kingdom goes on in power (I Cor. 4:20) and ultimately evil is defeated forever in history. Glorified man now reigns with Christ under the aegis of the Father (Rev. 5:10, 22:5, cf. 2:26, 3:21f.).

This salvation history is not merely the chronicled events from Adam to the end, but is the action of God within all the affairs of time. It is unintelligible apart from prophecy, and we shall look at this factor which is important because it is determinative of the processes of history.

### **Prophecy and Salvation History**

Prophecy<sup>4</sup> is really the key to salvation history. The history of the world, if it is simply the chronicling of its events, by no means appears as salvation history. It is the Bible which gives the rationale of history, even though it does not describe details of man's history. It is history couched with a view to the theme of salvation. If however we look at the history of man, and more hopefully at the history of God's people – Israel then we look in vain to see an ascending graph of success. Generally it is to the contrary. If we look for an ascending graph of success of the church, the Body of Christ we will also not see it as such.

Prophecy is the key to give us understanding. From Genesis 3:15 where the defeat of evil is prophesied, to Revelation 22:17 where it is written, 'Let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take of the water of life without price', it is prophecy which tells us what God is about. Hence in I Peter 1:11 we read of 'the Spirit of Christ' who was in the prophets, telling them, and through them, of the sufferings of Christ and the glory which was to follow. In Rev. 19:10 we read that 'the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy'. Briefly put it is this:– God is working out His purposes (cf. Ephes. 1:11, 3:11) through His people, through Christ, and through the church, indeed through every agency He chooses to involve. It is prophecy which tells us what will happen. Much, if not most of what was to happen has happened, thereby vindicating the principle of prophecy. Prophecy, however, is not the word, merely, of inevitability, but of the things which are indispensable to the outworking of true (salvation) history. Hence we saw in Luke 24:44–47 that it was prophesied that Christ would 'suffer and rise from the dead, and that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in his name amongst all nations beginning at Jerusalem'. The word used is 'must' (cf. Luke 24:26–27), that is it is necessary. Hence prophecy gives us the key to salvation history. At the same time it includes mission.

Mission is therefore the outworking of prophecy in this age as that out-working pertains to salvation history, its foundation) its processes and its consummation.

At this point it is sufficient to say that salvation history is still in its processes, that prophecy assures us of its ultimate successful completion, and that mission is indispensable to its full outworking.

---

<sup>4</sup> For a wider understanding of the subject, see Living Faith Study No. 7, "Prophecy: Its Meaning, Scope and Significance".

### **(C) The Kingdom of God and Mission**

The Kingdom of God<sup>5</sup> is simply ‘the reign and rule of God’. His reign and rule extends over all His creation, so that creation is His Kingdom. He has this right, seeing He has created it. If anything redemption adds to that ‘right’. Again, since God is rehabilitating, or re-constituting His creation His reign and rule is seen to be one of holy love.

The Kingdom presupposes the King, God Himself. This Kingship is the theme not only of the New Testament, but also of the Old Testament which in many places highly extols God and His reign. More particularly He is King in Israel, and Israel is His special Kingdom (Exodus 19:5–6). This Kingdom is a theocracy, and even when God permits Israel to have an earthly king, he is under the True King, God.

The universal Kingship is never lost sight of even whilst God rules Israel. In fact Israel is secure in the knowledge that He – King over all the earth – is in a special way King of Israel. He can handle the nations, and does, to the profit of Israel. Even so, the kingdom of Israel has its hard times. The people released from Egypt to Canaan in conformity with the covenantal promise to Abraham, very gradually shape up into a kingdom in Israel. In the time of David and Solomon they take their place amongst the nations, but internal strife, and the coming of heavy idolatry brings both kingdoms down to destruction. The reformed nation, after the Exile never regains its Solomonic glory. In any case this does not appear to be the plan of God.

In the N.T. we meet a people who are alive to the hope of the coming Kingdom. From the prophetic Scriptures they anticipate a glorious renewal of the Israelite Kingdom. Messiah will come and institute a glorious reign. It will even be universal. Gentiles, too, will benefit from it. Hence when John the Baptist appears and announces the Kingdom they respond. The coming of Jesus as Messiah is indicated by John, but not accepted by the ruling powers, either Jewish or Gentile. Jesus teaches about the Kingdom, and actually demonstrates it by his powerful acts of exorcisms, healings and miracles (Matt. 12:28, cf. Luke 4:18, Acts 10:38). Because he claims to be ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God’ he is indicted for blasphemy and killed. Pilate, his judge, asks him concerning his Kingdom, and he replies, ‘My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight...but my kingship is not from this world’. He maintained he was a king. ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into this world, to bear witness to the truth’.

Prior to his ascension he spoke during the post-resurrection period (of forty days) on the things relating to the Kingdom. He also told his disciples they would be shortly baptised in the Spirit. In the O.T. every promise of the outpouring of the Spirit is associated with the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (e.g. Ezekiel 36, Joel 2, etc.) and the disciples concluded the Kingdom was about to be restored to Israel. He indicated that ‘the times and the seasons’ were not for them to know. Their business was witnessing by the power of the Spirit to Messiah in Jerusalem and Judea (Jewry), Samaria (the Samaritans were a Jewish-Gentile people), and ‘to the uttermost part’, i.e. the nations, as promised to the Son in Psalm Two. Hence the Kingdom was not to be limited to Israel.

---

<sup>5</sup> For a wider treatment of the subject, see Living Faith No 14, ‘The King: The Kingdom of God: The Kingship.’

In pursuance of this Kingdom and its outworking and consummation, the Gospel of the Kingdom is preached (e.g. Acts 8:12, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23–30, cf. I Cor. 4:20). This preaching is very costly (II Thess. 1:4–5). Those working and preaching are conscious that with much tribulation they will enter that Kingdom (Acts 14:22) although they are already in it (Col. 1:13–14). They must be unassuming concerning it, and thoughtful concerning their final inheriting of it (I Cor. 6:9, Ephes. 5:5, etc.).

The Kingdom will come ultimately. This is the 'eschatological' petition of the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come'. In Rev. 11:15 the Kingdom has come. This equates with I Cor. 15:24–28 where Christ ultimately subdues all the nations, and gives the Kingdom to the Father that God may be all in all (cf. Phil. 2:9–11). All of this shows us that the Kingdom which has always been, and which from Satan's insurrection and man's fall has had rebels within it, will ultimately exclude all dissident elements. The victory of the Cross ensures this. However that victory has to be outworked; and it is outworked through Christ and his church. The church is not the Kingdom of God, but it relates to it. It is 'the servant' of the Kingdom. It does not extend the Kingdom, but works in pursuance of the final goals of the Kingdom. That working is mission.

The mission of the church is to declare the Gospel of the Kingdom. When this Gospel has been preached to all nations 'then shall the end come', i.e. the Kingdom will be consummated, and the King shall say, 'Come you blessed of my Father, enter into the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'. (Matt. 25:34). From what we have said, then, the church and its declaration, its 'good news' (Acts 13:32) have been made to be indispensable to the fulfilment of God's Kingdom plan.

### **(D) The People of God and Mission**

The theme 'the people of God'<sup>6</sup> is seen in the first chapters of Genesis where deep interest is shown in genealogies, before and after the Flood. These lead up to Abraham, but also show the families which have diverged from God. Great promises are given concerning the peoples or families of the earth. All these families will be judged or blessed according to their relationship with Israel. (See Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 28:14, 32:12, 35:11, 46:3, Zech. 8:13). The history of Israel is what brings us into contact with, and knowledge of, other nations.

One of God's great promises to Israel is, 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people'. (Jer. 31:33, 32:38, 24:7, Ezek. 37:27, Hebrews 8:10, cf. Rev. 21:3). That God has a people is a remarkable fact: it is a grace fact. In Exodus 19:5–6 God makes Israel His special people (cf. Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1, Deut. 14:1, etc.).

The coming of Messiah is heralded by Simeon. He sees Jesus as 'a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of Thy people Israel'. Jesus himself only goes to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel'. However he brings a very disturbing message which is really the continuation of a statement of John the Baptist. John sees no great merit in being of blood descent from Abraham. Without repentance baptism for the coming Kingdom is

---

<sup>6</sup> A fuller treatment of 'The People of God' is given in the notes and cassettes of the Living Faith Series No.34 'The People of God: The True Community'.

useless. Moreover the Spirit will come with fire and burn up the dross, whilst at the same time cleansing the true people of God (Matt. 3:1ff.). Jesus likewise sees no merit in blood descent from Abraham unless the people do 'the works of Abraham'. (John 8:31–36). He pictures the Gentiles coming from 'east and west' and sitting with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven 'while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness: there men will weep and gnash their teeth'. (Matt. 8:11–12).

The Cross is with a view to the new people of God. This is seen in John 11:51 where Jesus is to die, 'not only for the nation, but that all the children of God scattered abroad should be gathered together in one (family)'. The coming of the Spirit of God brings this new people to birth. The Book of Acts shows these people as being Jew, Samaritan and Gentile, and they are 'all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28) by incorporation into Christ. To Paul they are 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16), and to Peter the renewal of the people of Exodus 19:5–6, for he writes this way in I Peter 2:9–10.

In the Book of the Revelation this people of God is seen to be those amongst whom God has promised to dwell. In Ephesians 2:11–22 Paul shows the division between the two humanities – those of Jew and Gentile – and how that division was healed at the Cross. Now the innate enmity of man against man (Jew against Gentile) has been reversed and all are no longer strangers, but members of the family (people) of God. In fact Jew and Gentile are being built together for that dwelling place of God, which we see in Revelation 21:3. In this new Holy City we find the nations are coming as the families of men, and so becoming part of the family of God. The trees on the sides of the river of God are for the 'healing of the nations (peoples)' (see Rev. 21:22, 22:2).

The significance of this for mission is very strong. When Jesus says, 'Go and make disciples of all nations (peoples)', he means not simply single disciples from a nation or nations, but make the very nations disciples, i.e. learners and followers. Hence mission must be orientated towards nations, and have its sights set to this height. It must realise that its function is to forward the processes by which the people of God, the elect children of the family, are drawn to salvation, and their final sharing in the Fatherhood of God. Hence the good news is of the Covenant Father (cf. Mal. 2:10) who is drawing His people, uniting them in Christ, through the Cross, and bringing them to be His dwelling place. The doctrine of 'the people of God' is part of the true theology of mission. It is inescapably of the 'Divine imperative of mission'. It is what mission is all about – its *raison d'être*, its process and its goal.

### **(E) The Nature of God, and Mission**

This is of course where we should have commenced our section on the theology of mission. We did in fact indicate God as being Creator and Redeemer, and see His vindication in and by the final renewal of all things. We hasten to state that God does not need to be vindicated, and certainly not defended. We simply point out that the accusation that God has failed and will fail is not the case. In addition the discussion of creation, salvation, the Kingdom of God and the people of God is all a theology of the Triune God. Nevertheless we need to outline the great facts which make mission so imperative.

Man is created by God to fulfil His purposes (Gen. 1:28ff., cf. 9:1ff.). The purpose is primarily creational, but also redemptional and (so) restitutorial. God is the God of creation in making man. He is the God of

grace in redeeming him. He is the God of eternal grace in glorifying man. Hence when we come to see the nature of God it is not in the context of abstract attributes, but of dynamic action consistent with His living attributes.<sup>7</sup> By this we mean that the nature of God is such that He cannot (and will not) create without being faithful to His creation. He is by eternal nature Father, Creator and King. Hence He wills to express Himself along these lines. The outcome is that His love, goodness, holiness, righteousness and truth must find living expression in that which He creates, as also these attributes must triumph in the ultimate. This is in fact what He has done, is doing, and will do in the history of time and space.

Let us see what He is doing. As Creator He is ensuring His creation will be glorified (eternalised in holiness). As Father He is ensuring that He will create, redeem and glorify His family. As King He is ensuring that He will reign over all the earth. In this work the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit work as Initiator, Mediator and Agent, respectively. God not only intends to redeem His elect people and glorify them but He also intends to purge, utterly, His created universe. This means the defeat of evil, and its effected inability ever to intrude into the new heavens and new earth. Hence the pictures in Revelation chs. 20 and 21 of the judgement of evil. At the same time God vindicates His Being as holy, loving and righteous by bringing judgement to all evil that has ever been. Nothing in all history will have gone unrequited.

In order to effect this the Son became incarnate. As such he revealed the nature of the first Person of the Godhead as Creator, Father and King. He effected the work of the Cross and Resurrection by which evil was crushed and the elect redeemed, and the course of history determined. Revelation 5:1ff. should be studied closely since it is ‘the Lamb—as-it-had-been-slain’ which now controls history.

God in preparing a body for His Son has formed the church, and the church is the vehicle of the work of the Son. God is working within her ‘both to will and to do of His good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:12–13, cf. Ephes. 3: 9–11). God is now working out through the church ‘the eternal purpose which he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord’.

This makes it very clear that as God's nature determines that man whom He has created should be redeemed, and celestial powers which have rebelled be brought to justice, so that same nature has determined to make man a participator in the triumph of both creation and redemption. Man, then, with God, is on mission! That is, man cannot be the image of God and be static, What we will see is that God has ever been on mission. For this reason His people must ever be on mission.

### **The Trinitarian Action**

There is no action of God which is not at once, and wholly, Trinitarian. The three great works of creation, redemption and glorification (the final restitution of all things) are the works done simultaneously, unitedly by the three Persons. When God works as Father, the Family is in sight. When He works as King, the Kingdom is in view. When He works as Creator, then

---

<sup>7</sup> For an amplified treatment of the whole subject, see the N.C.T.M. Bible School Notes (1977) on ‘The Knowledge of God’, and in particular the chapter on ‘The Living God’.

His redemptive powers envisage the purifying of His universe. Likewise with the Son. As Son he does the Father's will. As Mediator he works for man's redemption. As Lord he rules and protects the people of God. Similarly the Spirit being the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20) and of the Son (Gal. 4:6), and the Spirit of the Lord, works with Both in order to achieve the plan of the Godhead.

Mission, then, will spring from the activity of God. It will never be a methodology determined by man to be done for God. Man is permitted to be a fellow-labourer with God (I Cor. 3:9), but he is subject to the leading of the Spirit (Rom. 8:14f.) and the Lordship of Christ (II Cor. 4:5, I Cor. 12: 3), as he is also to obey the Father (Gal. 4:6 cf. Mark 14:36). In this context he will know that mission is his primary life and work. He will be with God in all that He does according to His own nature.

### **(F) The Church and Mission**

Ecclesiology, the theology of the church, is a comprehensive one, with many facets. Its issues are strongly debated. The two wings of the 'either-or' debate were that the church was simply the people of God, living together for their own development and internal operations of worship and fellowship, or that the church was the church militant, the Lord's arm of evangelism in the world<sup>8</sup>. Its internal life and fellowship, whilst being recognised, is simply the launching pad from which its operations can be effected. The truth must surely be that there is no 'either –or'. Both are complementary parts of the whole.

Certain things stand out clearly in the N.T. and we have already seen some of them. The plan of God for His people, His family, His Kingdom, His creation and the ultimate glorification of all things is such that necessarily the church which is the body of Christ, his 'helpmeet' bride, must share in the outworking. This just about covers all things. The church was eschatologically oriented. They believed in the final judgement. They believed they were commanded to go and preach the Gospel in all the world. They believed men were lost and needed to be found, were under condemnation and needed to be freed from guilt and the oppression of evil. They believed the power of the Kingdom was present in the person of the Holy Spirit, and the over-arching Lordship of Christ was there to direct, protect, enable and intercede for them.

The practical way in which they went about their task (see below under 'The Practice of Mission') convinces us that the church was very sensitive to the mandate given to it and did not debate that this was its function to proclaim Christ. When there is added to this the structure of the church itself with its hierarchy of ministry gifts, and operational gifts it can be seen that the church was equipped with apostles, evangelists and prophets, as also pastor-teachers, and the other gifts which enabled it to be strong internally, and dynamic externally as it faced and penetrated the world. If even further is added to this the fact that it had 'spiritual weapons' to pull down strongholds of opposition (cf. II Cor. 10:3f., Ephes. 6:10f., Phil. 1:27) then it can be seen that the nature of the church presupposes it

---

<sup>8</sup> Note in John 17 that the church is the church militant (vs.11–19), the church in mutual love (vs. 20–23) and the church glorified (vs. 24–26). This combines the two elements and in fact makes them one.

is on mission, and is God's special agent for that work. There is no reason to think that what it was then is not the way it should be today. The needs of today are no less demanding'

### **(F) Summary of The Theology of Mission**

Briefly we can conclude that the nature of God, man, and creation relating as they do to the rebellion of Satan and the fall of man constitute the basic need for mission. Scripture tells us that God was 'on mission' even before the world began in that He planned to reveal His grace in history (Ephes. 1:5–7) and eternity (Ephes. 2:7). It was not simply that He looked into history and saw what would happen and created corrective treatments for its aberrations, but rather that He planned His final acts out of grace and love, so as to effect the best possible for His creation.

When we come to the more immediate issues, that is as we as humans see them, we see the fall of man does not have to be rectified by the holy and righteous God, but that He out of His grace makes provision for this. If we see the distressing state of man in rebellion, and understand his anguish then we see the heights and depths of the mercy and love of God in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. However, such availability of grace needs to be matched by its proclamation. Hence the passage of Romans 10:14ff. is of deepest significance.

Another way of saying this is that nothing can effectively meet the need of lost man as does the Gospel. P. T. Forsyth once said, 'That which goes deepest to the conscience goes widest to the world'. He meant that only the Gospel can meet the need of man. To say it another way: 'Nothing can quiet the conscience and let man off its hook except conscience sees by revelation of the Spirit that man's judgement has already taken place upon the Cross, and this, effectively.'

Then of course we see that the Gospel redeems man. It liberates him from the oppression of Satan, the world, the law, the wrath of God, the consciousness of guilt and impending judgement. On this fact alone redeemed man is immediately responsible to share the message with unredeemed man. Add to this the further fact that no religion in the world can do what the Gospel can do and the universal nature of the Gospel is immediately seen. It is imperative that man's wrong views of God, and his deficient knowledge of Him be rectified, and that man be brought into rich and sweet fellowship with God, for in no other way can fallen man become true man, and live life richly.

We must, then, conclude this summary by a simple statement. 'All true theology is theology of mission. Theology which is not in the service of mission cannot be whole and authentic. When God is ever on mission, all theology must pertain to that mission'.

## ***4. The Practice of Mission***

### **(A) Mission In History**

As we have seen, God is the true missionary. His Son demonstrated this by becoming man, and living where we live, and working for us, and redeeming us. Likewise the Holy Spirit lives where we live, and even the Father Himself. (John 14:15–23). The practice of mission, then, commences

with creation and completes its work in the new creation. We would expect therefore to find mission in the O.T. but not, nevertheless, in the way we see it in the N.T. Let us look at both.

### **(i) Mission in the Old Testament**

We have already seen that prophecy firmly indicates coming salvation. Undoubtedly we can conclude from Hebrews 11 and other references to Abraham and the children of faith (e.g. Gal. 4:28, 3:6–9, Rom. 4:1–8, Gen. 15:6) that men and women who had faith in God were saved in O.T. times. Without doubt the sacrifices, and their offering in faith was accepted by God, and believers were justified. Doubtless too, this acceptance was on the basis of the (coming) Cross. Yet, even so, we have little, if anything, in the O.T. which approximates to the evangelism and mission of the N.T.

We have to see that redemption was ‘in the making’. Salvation history in its preparatory elements stretched from Creation to the Cross. Hence the message was being prepared, so that every element in the O.T. is related to it, whilst none is actually it. We should not be surprised, then, that the Gospel is not preached in any great way in the O.T. It is true that ‘... the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, ‘In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’ Hence Jesus could say, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.’ Nevertheless we see little or no evangelistic action in the O.T.

We do have the story of Nineveh, and Jonah's going to proclaim God's judgement. It can scarcely be said that Jonah was anxious to do this. He was actually afraid that the preaching would be successful, and that Nineveh would repent! Being Israel's enemy he longed for God to destroy it. Noah, too, was a preacher of righteousness, but with little positive effect. He was really a preacher of judgement, since they would not have it to be redemption. Apart from these two, we find little proclamation in the O.T.

What we do find is the witness of Israel. Had other nations related to the Abrahamic promise (Gen. 12:3) and come to Israel they would have had a clear witness to God, for to Israel were committed the oracles of God (cf. Rom. 3:1–2, 9:4). In Exodus 19:5–6 God tells Israel that they shall be His own possession ‘among all peoples: for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’<sup>9</sup> Some see this as meaning ‘a priest nation among all the nations’, i.e. Israel was a priest–nation among all the nations of the earth, and she was to bear them up before God, and bring God before them. Certainly Israel was a witness to God, had others looked to her. Sadly enough that witness became tarnished and dulled.

We have to come to this conclusion that the time for the proclamation of redemption had not yet come. Its ingredients were being put together. The day would come when it would be ready. Meanwhile God was working, and events were leading to the day of redemption, the victory of the Man on the Cross. All the elements of the Gospel – the Kerugma – were there in the O.T. prophetically. They were yet to be put together. Then and only then could they be fully proclaimed.

<sup>9</sup> NB. Exodus 19:5–6 is fulfilled in the new people of God the Church, See I Peter 2:9–10.

## **(ii) Mission in the New Testament**

The preparatory events of this commence with John the Baptist and are followed by those of Jesus. The Kingdom is on the doorstep. Men and women must repent be baptised and prepare for the Kingdom. Jesus himself proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom and sends out his disciples to cover the ground prior to his coming and even ground where he may not personally come. However something has to happen to crystallise redemption and it is the events of Golgotha and the Grave.

We have already seen that Jesus, following the Resurrection, gave the mission–mandate to his followers. It was spoken to the disciples. It could even have been spoken to the five hundred (cf. Matt. 28:16f, with I Cor. 15:6 ‘some doubted’ seems to refer to more than the eleven and could have been the five hundred), but the inference is that it is the whole message for the whole world for all time. He had already said, ‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then will the end come’. (Matt. 24:14).

From Pentecost onwards the servants of God proclaim the Gospel. They clearly have a dynamic, and so they do not hesitate to testify. It may mean fierce opposition, persecution, and even death, but they will not desist. They believe there is no other name given under heaven whereby men may be saved, and they cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard (Acts 4:12, 19–20). Nor is this just in the apostolic period. As late into the first century as the Revelation is supposed to have been written, there are those who like John are persecuted for ‘the testimony of Jesus’. This bearing of the ‘testimony of Jesus’ causes Satan to attack, most fiercely, the true witnesses of God (cf. Rev. 12:10ff.).

What is most impressive is the actual proclamation and its results as we read the account of the Book of Acts. First Peter and John with the other disciples, then Stephen and Philip, and later Paul and the members of his teams all combine to fulfil the command to begin at Jerusalem and to stretch out to the uttermost parts of the earth. In fact the operation is definable in those terms, Jerusalem to Samaria, Samaria to Caesarea; Antioch to Asia, Asia to Europe. We find believers in Rome before Paul reaches there. Others of the disciples must also have moved out to the uttermost parts. The Book of the Revelation indicates prophetically that there will be missionary action right up to the time of the last events.

## **(iii) Mission in Post–New Testament History**

This is a deep, complex and most detailed subject. A history of missions should be studied in order to cover it. Let us say here, briefly, that from time to time the missionary vision and thrust seems to have been almost lost, if not in the doldrums. When certain factors have obtained, then there has been a resurgence of missionary activity, some of it quite remarkable.<sup>10</sup> The modes and methods also have changed from time to time. On some occasions

---

<sup>10</sup> For example, the Reformation brought renewal in Europe. The growth of Pietism and Puritan teaching unlocked the dynamic of the Gospel – the Word and the Spirit. Likewise the Evangelical Revival, the Wesleyan renewal, and 19th century revival movements sent waves of missionary activity across the world.

the apostolic message has been exchanged for one more like the life–thinking and life–style of the generation which has been addressed. As we will see, there are certain motivations to mission which are indispensable to the true preaching of the Gospel. Of course we should not forget that the early church was attacked from many angles, and suffered most of the problems with which we are faced today. A reading of the epistles, and especially the letters to the seven churches in Asia will confirm this (See Rev. chs. 2 and 3).

## **(B) Modes of Mission**

### **(i) Introduction**

The modes or practice of mission involves (a) The goal of mission (b) The content of the message (c) Method of mission. We will proceed along these lines.

### **(ii) The Goal of Mission**

We have already seen that it is to evangelise the world, to bring the gospel to every person, to seek to make disciples of the nations which involves the conversion of persons. The ultimate is to complete the family of God, to fulfil the Fatherhood of the Father and the Lordship of Christ, that is, to bring in the new order of the people of God. It is to defeat the powers of darkness, and lead to the ultimate judgement and the new creation. Whilst all of this is God's sovereign work, yet the church is on mission with God to complete His plan.

Paul sums it up in Romans 1:5, 15:18 and 16:26 (cf. II Thess. 1:8, Rom. 10:16, Acts 6:7) as 'bringing the nations (Gentiles) to the obedience of faith', that is, reversing the order of man's rebellion against God (Rom. 1: 18–32), and bringing him, in obedience, to the feet of His Creator-Father-Redeemer. As we have observed, this involves persons and peoples.

### **(iii) The Content of the Message**

The Gospel, or the proclamation has for its content the following elements:

- (a) The prophecies proclaim the coming of Messiah and the Kingdom. With the Kingdom is the new covenant, the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises.
- (b) John the Baptist is the forerunner of the Kingdom coming and the Messiah appearing. John attested to Jesus being the true Messiah.
- (c) Jesus is attested by God as being His Son, and is anointed with the Holy Spirit as Messiah.
- (d) Messiah was to suffer according to the prophecies and he did, dying at the hands of the Jewish (and Gentile) leaders.
- (e) In accordance with the Scriptures he was raised from the dead, became Lord and Messiah, being seated at the right hand of God.
- (f) To believe in him as Lord, because of the resurrection, is to be saved.

- (g) Such salvation requires repentance and faith, and results in the forgiveness of sins, entrance into God's kingdom, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. With this comes justification, sanctification and adoption (sonship).
- (h) The Kingdom will come and Jesus, the Son of Man will judge the nations, on his final returning.

#### **(iv) The Modes of Operation**

##### Missionary Modes in the N.T.

The church came into being at Pentecost although it is not called the church until the fifth chapter (Acts 5:11). It was simply the people of God fellowshiping together, and proclaiming the Gospel. They continue their proclamation daily. Then the Sanhedrin (Jewish parliament) examines them and forbids them to preach. They decline to cease preaching (Acts 4:12, 19–20). When Stephen is martyred the Christians are subject to heavy persecution and move out, many of them, from Jerusalem. Philip the evangelist goes to Samaria and preaches. Other Jews go to Antioch in Syria and preach and a church is formed. The Holy Spirit guides Peter to preach to the Gentiles at Caesarea. The church at Antioch which is composed of Jews and Gentiles then sends out Paul and Barnabas who have a journey into Asia Minor. Later Paul returns to Asia Minor, and then moves on into Europe.

It is clear that the Holy Spirit is in charge and control of mission. This principle is inherent in Acts 1:8 (cf. 10:38). A study of the occasions in which the disciples were filled with the Spirit, and the events consequent upon that reveals his personal and effective presence. In this sense we look in vain in the Acts for 'methods' as such. The best we can do is examine the book to see whether the Spirit had methods. It seems that the mind of the Spirit is not easy to copy, or to rationalise into a methodology.

What we do know is that where the Word was preached, through the Spirit, it had power to polarise the hearers so that they either responded and were saved or they became opposed to the Gospel, even becoming violent against the evangelists. Also we quite often see the fulfilment of Mark 16:17–18. Hence it is valuable to see Paul describe his own mode of preaching. In Romans 15:17–20 he says, 'In Christ Jesus I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles (nations) by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ'.

When we examine this we see:

- (a) The goal was the obedience of the Gentiles (by faith).
- (b) The Word and the Spirit accomplished effective proclamation.
- (c) The attestation and effective operation was through signs and wonders.
- (d) This constituted fully preaching the Gospel. Paul could have meant that he fully preached in the sense that he covered a certain geographical area, but primarily it seems to mean his modes, i.e. he made a full proclamation in full power.

When we examine his journeys we discover that in fact Paul never sought to cover a whole area. Rather he worked at certain central points and the gospel ‘fanned out’ from them. This can be seen in I Thess. 1:6–10 where Paul says in essence, ‘You sounded out the Gospel so that it reached not only all Achaia and Macedonia, but in fact your faith has gone everywhere so that I do not need to say anything’. It seems probable that the other six churches in the Lychnus Valley to which the letters are written in Revelation chapters two and three, sprang from the central church at Ephesus and from the concentrated teaching there by Paul.

We probably cannot fully understand this seemingly haphazard way of spreading the Gospel, unless we remember it was like fire to those who received it. Below, under ‘Motivation for Mission’ we will see the powerful thrust of love in spreading the good news. We must also see that this love had its immediate effects since it was so different from anything a pagan and even a Jewish world had known.

In I Thess. chs. 1 and 2 Paul speaks of the way in which the apostolic team had conducted themselves with the converts. They had been like a nurse. They had been strong but tender. Hence they had won the hearts of the converts. Likewise in the Epistle to the Ephesians Paul makes it clear that the converts had been trained to leave pagan ways, and that they had a new moral sensitivity. All of these elements must be taken into consideration for their witness-effects must have been dynamic in the local community. Hence we can say that Paul ‘fully preached’ not only the text of the Gospel, but also in the sense that he sent runners of fire spreading across the areas through which he had passed.<sup>11</sup>

We have not dealt with the ministries of other apostles, but we know they all moved out into areas, evangelising where others had not been (cf. Romans 15:20), and we conclude that they too followed the Spirit and his strategy. They certainly covered a vast area of the then known world.

To sum up:– The modes of the early church were to find the mind of the Spirit and act accordingly. This was no hit-or-miss pattern, because the worship-life, and the operation of the gifts in the fellowship of the church assisted them, speedily, to know the mind of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> The freshness of their witness, and the radical nature of their morality, when linked with their powerful motivation for service, all combined to make a deep missionary impact.

#### **(v) Motivation for the Task**

The N.T. is very clear that motivation for obedience and ministry is love. Paul speaks of ‘the aim of our charge that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith’. Jesus said, ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments’. John says ‘We love because he first loved us’. Paul says, ‘The love of Christ constrains (controls, holds, directs) me’. We mean of course that this is the love seen at the Cross (Rom. 5:5–10, I John 4:9–10) and responded to, by the Spirit. Man is so grateful when

<sup>11</sup> Note: For a fuller treatment of modes of mission see Roland Allen's two volumes – ‘St. Paul's Missionary Methods or Ours?’, and ‘The Spontaneous Expansion of the Christian Church’

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller treatment see E. Kasemann ‘Essays on N.T. Themes’ in the chapter ‘Ministry and Community in the N.T.’ pp. 63–94.

he sees his salvation to be all of grace (Ephes. 2:8–10), so that he recognises God's love to be total. Hence Peter can say, 'Jesus Christ, whom not having seen you love, whom seeing not you believe and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory'.

(a) **The indication then is that Love motivates obedience.** Love itself is commanded (John 13:34, 15:12–14, I John 2:7f.). Hence to love man, not in 'thought and word', but in 'deed' (I John 3:16f.) is to tell him the news of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Again love is obedience itself (I John 5:3), 'For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments'. In any case it seems incredible that a man could know the sweet saving grace of God and not share it with others. To whom much is given, from him much is expected. It could only be a refusal to see the extent of the grace of God in one's life which would paralyse love-motivated ministry (cf. II Peter 1:910). In Rev. 2:1–7 the Ephesian church is chided for having lost this love. It is to repent and do the first works, i.e. the works which come from the first love.

(b) **Holy fear, also motivates obedience.** In II Cor. 5:11–13 Paul is saying that 'knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men'. He could mean the terrible fear that comes with the knowledge of judgement, in which case he is persuading men who are in fear or who should fear, to come to Christ. He may also mean that he fears to disobey the Lord. Whichever way it is Paul is motivated by holy fear. Psalm 130:4 says, 'There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared'. It is this kind of fear which is the beginning of wisdom. He who will not obey God does not fear Him in the way, i.e. the way he should. In I Cor. 9:16 Paul says, 'Not that I boast of preaching the Gospel, since it is a duty which has been laid upon me: I should be punished if I did not preach it' (Jerusalem Bible). In any case there are parables in the Gospels which tell us about using our talents and even of punishment where there is sloth. In Acts 20:26–27 Paul says to the elders of the Ephesian church, 'I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God'. He is quoting from Ezekiel 3:16–21 where the prophet will be guilty of the blood of those whom he does not warn to turn from wickedness. Paul feels this guilt would be his if he did not warn them.

(c) **The goal and purpose of God also motivates obedience.** As we have seen, the early church knew what God was about; who Messiah was, the nature and coming of the Kingdom, the people of God, the glorification to come. All of these elements inspired the mission of the early church. The current inability to obey orders or receive commands or to be under authority did not generally characterise those who had come to Christ. They were glad to be in the plan of God, and to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit as he led the people of God towards the goals of God.

**They were motivated by the indwelling of God.** How could the Spirit, the Son and the Father dwell in them, and they not be motivated? How, indeed? John 14:15–23 shows us that the Godhead does dwell in redeemed man. Many other N.T. Scriptures confirm this. Not only is God in them, but they also are in God, hence the power and thrust with which they preached the Gospel, founded churches, and fought the powers of darkness. We need not dwell overmuch on the fact that as sons of God they would see all men as their brethren, even if these were not all in Christ, and out of that relationship seek to win them to the family of God. As those submitted to the Lordship of Christ, and because he had liberated them; they too would be gladly obedient to him in his church, and seek to bring others to the obedience of faith. As those born of the Spirit they would seek to bring others to the marvel and mystery of new birth.

We can sum up by saying that mission was not to them a kind of spiritual upper echelon pursuit, a sort of higher social strata of the spiritual constituency, but the work of men deeply gripped by the love of God, and intensely grateful for their own redemption. They were those completely under the Lordship of Christ and who had a holy fear of God as well as pity, compassion and active love for lost mankind.

### **Modern Missionary Modes**

As we have suggested, to cover missionary action today would require volumes of writing. We will not attempt that. Let us observe that we do not expect missionary activity today to merely imitate that of the New Testament Church. We are aware from the letters to the seven churches in the Revelation that there was much sadly amiss with that church towards the end of the first century. Nevertheless history also reveals that it was a time of great power, as it began to penetrate society. Probably there was no thought of blanket evangelism, or some of the methodologies we have used today. That does not matter.

What we need to recover is the passion for proclamation which marked the church of that day. Perhaps we have it in many parts of our globe. However this may be, we need to see that the task is as yet unfinished. We do not need to debate too much the various modes being used. Where they can be corrected let them be, but men and women gripped by the love and holy fear of God will penetrate not only the lonely jungles of vast continents, but what have been described as the ‘concrete jungles’ of our industrialised cities. They will break through not only into basic cultures but also counter cultures. Everywhere is a mission field, so that everywhere we should all be on mission.<sup>13</sup> God's mission will not finish until the Gospel has been preached as a testimony to all nations. Only then will the end come.

### **(C) Consolidation of Mission**

If we gather the idea that the early missionaries itinerated according to impulse and desire, scattering the Word as they went and trusting God for the outcome, then we have an incorrect idea. Missionaries did not move out unless they were sent by the church or were caught up in persecution and had to move on. Even then it was usually in the context of the local church or the itinerant fellowship<sup>14</sup> that they proclaimed, and when proclamation was completed they helped to establish churches. Acts 13 and 14 show us the apostles remaining where needed, as long as possible, so that they might teach. After teaching they ordained elders, and so stabilised the group of new believers. The commission of Matt. 28:18–20 had required that they teach what Christ had commanded. Paul calls this ‘the whole counsel of God’.

What consolidated (and consolidates) mission was the flowing out of the evangel (John 7:37–39). By this we mean that the new churches themselves undertook to share the message with others. This we saw graphically in the first chapter of I Thessalonians. It is also seen in Acts 11 where

<sup>13</sup> Bishop Stephen Neill once said, ‘When everything is mission, nothing is mission’. We need to be aware, consciously, that we are truly on mission no matter where we are.

<sup>14</sup> By ‘itinerant fellowship’ we mean the team which was preaching the Gospel. Its whole life–style, as also its love would be an integral part of the proclamation.

the Jews, scattered by the persecution of Stephen ‘gossiped the Gospel’. The new units of believers with their new life–style also both repelled and attracted those outside. ‘Repelled’ because of the demands of the Gospel and ‘attracted’ for the very same reason.

For consolidation of mission today we need a very clear ecclesiology. We need to know what is the nature of the church, the function of the church, its equipment for its internal life of worship, ministry to the members, its life of prayer and intercession, especially as it relates to internal relationships and external proclamation. We need to examine the nature, purpose and functional operations of the gifts, and to see the purpose and operations of the hierarchy of elders and the service of deacons. We must never imagine the church was a haphazard coming together of believers. Rather it was a well–structured fellowship with an hierarchy of leaders.

More than anything this ecclesiology must relate to, and be understood in the light of, the message of the Gospel. From this springs true motivation. ‘It is the power of God’ (Rom. 1:16–17, I Cor. 1:18, cf. I Cor. 2: 5–6, I Thess. 1:9). Ecclesiastical operations seem to have a way of continuing even when the thrust of love has virtually disappeared (cf. Rev. 2:1–7). For this reason we should not be surprised or dismayed if our theology is shown to be defective. Our understanding of the Gospel, we repeat, is the mainspring of our actions of obedience, proclamation, and love and worship within the church (II Cor. 5:14, John 14:15). Hence to consolidate the ministry of mission we need primarily not to devise new techniques and methodologies for recruiting missionaries (dreadful term), but to return to the dynamic of the Gospel.

#### **(D) Who and What Is A Missionary?**

There can be no true practice of mission unless we understand the function of those who are missionaries. Without doubt every believer is intended to be a missionary, or, to put it in a slightly different way, to be on mission. Today the word ‘missionary’ is a specialist word. It denotes someone, generally speaking, who joins a missionary society and goes into another culture and land than that of his own. There he primarily does what is called ‘missionary work’.

This specialist use can be misleading. Some Christian workers go into another culture even in their own country, say a worker into the slums of Harlem where he meets a culture very different from his own. Others may work in a different ethnic group. They too must be called missionaries. The earliest missionaries were never given that name, as such. Apostles, being ‘sent–ones’ approximates most to our idea of a modern missionary, but modern missionaries often do not even approximate to the apostles. For the most part it would be better to call them ‘Christian workers, overseas’. Here and there a person or group penetrates a new culture, a new geographical region, and they may warrant the exalted name of missionary.

The good connotation of the word ‘missionary’ is the idea of a strong thrust of love and obedience prompting to take up a task of proclamation not ordinarily contemplated by that person. However, again, this may not even cover the true task of the missionary. Being a doctor in a ‘mission’ hospital may simply be a job transferred from one culture to another. The doctor may not proclaim, even at home, let alone in his new environment. To speak of ‘example’ as effective witness, fine as it may be, is not good enough.

**What then, is a missionary?** The answer is ‘one who is on mission’. It does not matter where. It does not matter how. Provided, within the context of the body of Christ he is exercising through love, gifts, and the power of the Spirit and the Gospel, that ministry or service which extends the fulfilment of God's mission, the very one we saw under ‘The Theology of Mission’. We need not cavil at the specialist use of the word missionary, but we must not apply it only to that specified situation. The fact is that the whole task for the whole world has been given to the whole church.

It has been pointed out, many times, that missionary societies as such are, in some ways, an anomaly. For that matter so are denominations. There is one church, and within the local churches of that church the day-to-day operations must be evangelistic and pastoral. Out of such, and the gifts given to the body, comes the conviction that any church should send from its members, those who are gifted and called to minister in other places. To determine this the church must hear the voice of the Spirit. In this way the Gospel is propagated and churches will be born and grow.

This then involves the matter of ‘the missionary call’. Divorced of its current romantic associations which relate to a call to some exotic situation, the missionary call is simply a person finding his place and manner of operation within the mission of God in this world. The local church helps him to understand that call. The call of course is this person's particular leading within the wider command to the whole church to preach the Gospel, and so save men and women to God.

The whole question of guidance has been confused, in some areas, by our individualistic and pietistic habit of thinking of ourselves, before God, as single persons, or, as we often say, wrongly, individuals. We are members of the body of Christ, and are in a corporate work of evangelism and pastoral ministry. Hence guidance has become highly complex. It seems to consist of working out endless ‘pros’ and ‘cons’. Circumstances are eagerly scanned for some indication of what God requires, and often the Scriptures are also scanned to see some special word. Whilst much of this may prove helpful the primary principle is simply to see that we live in conformity with what the Scriptures tell us in their objective way. ‘As we know, we go, and as we go we know’ is a living principle. Obedience in the simple day-to-day details of life will give us an understanding of the more defined issues within guidance. It is the body of Christ which has the mind of Christ and hears the local commands of Christ, and confirms them to the heart of each member. For this reason we need to be involved, livingly, in the fellowship of the church. Hence we conclude that command and call are closely related, and both come within the context, normally speaking, of the church.

### **(E) What Are The Missionary Resources?**

When men, even Christian men, look at the needs of the world, they could easily be thrown into great panic. If the sovereignty of God does not undergird the mind of the believer, then he would think that the resources available can never meet the needs. By resources we mean money, gifts of personal being, equipment for the task, the number of personnel, the organisational abilities, the strategists needed to shape up the personnel and plans, and other resources required for the task.

It is simpler. God's wisdom is not ours. What grips us in sentiment does not motivate God in action. What appeals to our intellects is not always His wisdom. Whilst His sovereignty must be no excuse for complacency, it must be the basis upon which we work. We have seen in Ephesians 3:8–11

that the principalities and powers look to the activities of the church to know the true wisdom of God. He alone gives, and He alone marshals, the resources. At the same time He commands, and we must obey. We know that there is no power lacking, within the Gospel to redeem men. The Holy Spirit is the great Applier and Communicator of the work of Christ. We know that Christ gives gifts to his body, and the Holy Spirit distributes them in his sovereign way. Christ, the Cosmocrator directs the action from the place of authority at the right hand of the throne of God, and in parallel operation the Spirit leads the church. All the resources of the universe belong to God, even though many of them are in the hands of evil men and evil powers. Even here also God can use them.

As to weapons, Paul says ours are not carnal, nor worldly. They are spiritual. They are mighty to the pulling down of many strongholds (of Satan). Hence we should not be depressed at the seeming lack of resources. What we are bound to do is to marshal those we have, and where we begin first is within the perimeter of our own persons and family, then within the orbit of our local church, and out beyond even this. We repeat, there is no limit to the power of God. Our faith and obedience may be limited, and this may seem to limit the use of resources – and it does' – but God will fulfil His plan whatever, and so for this reason we must, through grace and love (not legalistic straining and striving) use what He has given, and as He directs.

If this seems to talk in principles and not direct methods, then let us make that transference within the operations of our churches. Let us use the methods which develop from our local situations, and not seek to transplant these from other situations. This is where the mind of the Spirit works, for He has endless variety within His churches, and does not homogenise us into one pattern of uniform operation.

The primary question is personal. Are my resources, given to me by God, at His disposal, and do I hear His voice, in the fellowship of His church, and am I obedient to that Voice?

## ***5. Conclusion As To The Meaning, Practice and Importance of Mission***

We can draw our threads together, and form our conclusion. In fact this conclusion is really a summary of what we have already seen:

- (i) *Mission is what God has been about.* That is to create and redeem man since such is the purpose and goal of creation, as also redemption. Full redemption of man means the glorification of all creation, including man. (Cf. Romans 8:18–30.) By this is God glorified, i.e. shown in His true Being, as the God of grace, peace and love. The ultimate goal includes the subsidiary goals of the Kingdom of God and the people of God. He will glorify Himself as King, and as the Father of His people. Serving in this ministry are those two other Missionaries, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- (ii) *Mission is the expression of the love of God and the love of His people.* As God has loved man, had compassion on him and redeemed him, so redeemed man loves God and loves his fellow–man, and this fully enough to go out to redeem, and see him incorporated into the people of God and the Kingdom of the Father.

- (iii) *Mission is the incorporation of the 'no people' into the people of God.* Exodus 19:5–6 is now paralleled and even transcended by I Peter 2:9–10. The new people of God must 'show forth the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light'. (See also Hosea 1:8–10, Rom. 9:26, II Cor. 6:14ff.)
- (iv) Its natural mode or outworking will approximate to that seen in the N.T., i.e. love, and love's obedience ('in the fear of the Lord') will cause that spill-over of the lips which is from the abundance of the heart (i.e. the grace of God). The actual patterns may differ from those of N.T. days, but their motivation and thrust will be the same.
- (v) Consolidation of mission will mean that the new units of churches will be first taught, and then left to develop their own ministries under the gifts of the Spirit and the power he supplies.
- (vi) Mission will demand use of all the resources God has given. It will not be directed wholly by the need of the world, and the apparent availability of resources, but by the obedience of the people of God who 'hold (bear) the testimony of Jesus' and know their wills, both personally, and corporately to be subject to the Lord of glory and the Father of the Family.

\* \* \* \* \*