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Missionaries as Educators

I

Christianity is a religion of concepts and not merely the recitation of a cult or the observance of pious practices; in this it resembles the Judaism from which it sprang and the Islam that succeeded both in the early medieval Near East, whilst at the same time differing widely from the polytheistic religion of the Graeco-Roman world. The ideas that are involved focus on the meaning of the Godhead and his purposes, and as a consequence on the implications of theology for human behavior in the whole of its range. We can say that the Christian faith is at once prophetic and ethical. Its foundations are in a tradition that is biblical and therefore literary. Jesus, like his apostolic successors, presupposed the importance of the Hebrew scriptures; Origen and St. Augustine and the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages all presupposed the Christian Bible. And that remains true to this day.

An inevitable result of this is the impetus given to literacy and learning, and therefore to education. An educational enterprise is built into the primal stuff of such a faith — God's human representative was a teacher from an obscure province; and his succeeding representatives have always been likewise teachers as well as pastors. Hence a Christian missionary is bound to be at least a part-time educator.

II

In the ancient Catholic Church schools soon appeared alongside the official Roman colleges and schools — at Alexandria, Antioch, Nisibis, Odessa, for example. Later, after the collapse of the Western Empire education was maintained within the monasteries; secular classics as well as sacred books were copied and studied. It would take too long to speak of the signi-

ficance of the Catechetical Schools in great sees like Jerusalem under bishop Cyril, and of the contribution of leading scholars like Origen of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil of Caesarea, and St. Augustine of Hippo, but one should remember the Benedictine motto, "ora et labora" ("pray and work"), as an ideal for monks. That has given color and direction ever since to Catholic education.

When we come to the Renaissance-Reformation period, we find that church and school in each parish was a Reformed ideal, e. g., in John Knox's Scotland; but mission beyond Europe was not seriously regarded by this branch of the Church until 1700. It was Roman Catholics who took the faith to China and Japan (St. Francis Xavier), to Spanish America, to Portuguese Africa and India, to Huronia and Kébec (Fr. Brébeuf and his Jesuit companions). They did not in every case make education a primary feature of their efforts, but they did not neglect teaching. Sometimes, however, Catholic missions seem to be more cultic than educational, and less interested in producing an intellectually mature, alert and critical laity.

III

The modern missionary movement began about 1700 with the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.), a corresponding Scots society, a Danish Lutheran missionary society, and Moravian work overseas. A hundred years later came the Bible Societies to provide books and tracts and thus to increase the demand for literacy. We have not seen the end of this process yet, though the Japanese and the Soviet Governments, and to some extent those of India and other recently "liberated" nations, have been even more successful than the Churches in teaching people to read and write. In our own time the outstanding name in the Christian literacy movement is that of Dr. Frank Laubach, whose slogan was "Each one teach one."

Since 1820 or thereabouts, mission activities have flourished through the work of the American Board of Foreign Missions, the National Church of Scotland, as a Church, the S.P.G. and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) and the Church Missionary Society within the Church of England and the Anglican Communion throughout the British Commonwealth, as well as corresponding Societies, agencies and churches of the European Reformed Churches (Lutheran and Evangelical), to say nothing of a vast number of in-

dependent Mission Organizations (Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelistic, the Salvation Army, the Quakers, and so on). Missionaries have competed for 150 years in India, Burma, Ceylon, Africa (central, south, east and west), China, Korea, Japan, the East Indies and the Philippines — with the result that a Church* of some kind exists everywhere in the world, except possibly Sikkim, Nepal and Tibet. As a part of this remarkable effort, education has played a most important role. In brief, missionaries have been the pioneers of education.

One name to conjure with is that of Alexander Duff who began his career in 1831 under explicit instructions from the Church of Scotland “to impart a Christian education to the youth of India.” It was done along Western lines, because that was the policy accepted by the East India Company at the urging of the great Macaulay, and of course continued by the British Raj until 1947. Children learned to read, write and do arithmetic in English, the language of the conquerors. Girls too were taken into the Christian schools. Colleges and Universities were established — Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Serampore — with many affiliated Theological Seminaries all over India (and Pakistan). It was 19th century education provided by 19th century men and women, not all of them qualified teachers. The top graduates from India went to the United Kingdom, continental Europe, and the U.S.A. for further study and training and many became leading citizens in their own states on their return.

Precisely the same sort of thing took place in China (including Manchuria) until the advent of Mao Tse Tung in 1948; in Korea, Japan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and even in Turkey, Syria, Palestine and Egypt, as well as Iran and other Muslim areas.

IV

The competitive nature of the enterprise came home to the Western Churches a century ago, and this led (amongst other factors) to the modern Ecumenical Movement. We can punctuate its progress on the missionary side with great World Conferences — the Third was in 1910, held in the capital of Scotland; then came Jerusalem 1928; Tambaram 1938; Whitby (Canada) 1947; Willingen (Germany) 1952; Ghana 1958 and finally its incorporation into the World Council of Churches at New Delhi in 1961. Today the W.C.C. has a Division of Education with headquarters in Geneva.

*“Church” in this context is used to mean a formal Christian Community.

Edinburgh 1910 was a turning-point. Its Commission III reported on "Education in relation to The Christianisation of National Life" (the report debated June 17th). More than 200 people from all over the world reported on the aims of missionary education and its results, its weaknesses and special problems, and they suggested various remedies and changes.

The *aims* were *evangelistic* (i.e., seeking the conversion of children and youth, and so families); *edificatory* (i.e., educating and building up the indigenous churches and training their native leadership); and *leavening* (i.e., seeking to diffuse as widely as possible Christian influences and ideals). To these three might be added: manifesting the spirit of *philanthropy* and *charity* which is supposed to be a dominant character trait in Christians; and, providing *technical training* (in carpentry, house building, farming, engineering, and so on), in order that students might go out and make a living.

The results were impressive, especially in China and Japan; less so in India; notable in Uganda, Nyasaland, Rhodesia and the Gold Coast. Noteworthy was the opening of schools to girls and women in every area, including the Muslim lands. And one could point then, as indeed today, to many thousands of civil servants, politicians, teachers, lawyers and doctors, nurses, accountants and farmers, and shopkeepers, who had received their basic education in mission schools and were more or less grateful.

But in 1910, these representatives of so many Churches and Missionary Boards were by no means complacent and uncritical. One is impressed by their honest assessments and their lists of frank criticisms as they acknowledged the shortcomings of missionaries as educators:

(1) The *form of Christianity* presented was too Western and unwilling to accommodate itself to Oriental and African traditions, customs and needs. Architecture would be Gothic, German or American. The liturgy was Western Protestant. The very hymns and their music were Western. And each group perpetuated the theological point of view, the ecclesiastical divisions, and the intolerable denominationalism that had emerged in Europe, America, and the British Empire since 1500. Catholic missions were less open to some of these charges, but even here new Christians had to hear Mass in ancient Latin and subscribe to the traditions and doctrines of the Medieval Latin faith and the special teaching of the 17th century Counter-Reformation enunciated by St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Catherine of Siena, and the Baroque Popes.

No wonder India described Christianity as the religion of the conqueror; China and Japan called it the religion of the foreign devils. And they saw the Christian nations constantly at war, constantly seeking selfish wealth and glory, constantly refusing to show charity and philanthropy to one another. You will find a memorable example of this in Alan Moorehead's *The White Nile* (pp. 291-3), describing the confrontation of a French White Father, Père Lourdel, and Alexander Mackay of the C.M.S., at the court of Mutesa in Buganda about 1877 — and the scene between them both and the Arab slave traders who argued the case for Islam.

(2) In some countries like China before 1914 the mission schools were *inferior* to the secular institutions operated by the State.

(3) The instruction meant *giving information* to be memorized and repeated; it was individualist; it did not really educate students for life.

(4) The missionaries were too slow in making the administration and leadership indigenous.

(5) Above all, every missionary educational effort *tended to de-nationalize* the converts and the native Christians. Like Trinidadians, they learned to speak flawless, beautiful English-English. Their own native languages, literature, arts and culture were neglected if not denigrated altogether. In all this, of course, certain missionaries fared better than others; Catholics often better than Protestants.

Accordingly, the 1910 Conference recommended an urgent reassessment and a reconsideration of teaching methods and educational goals. It was considered that one very desirable result would be the formation of ecumenical agencies, and that, in fact, happened right here in Montreal with the creation of the Joint Board of Theological Colleges in 1912.

V

In the more than sixty years since Edinburgh 1910, many changes have taken place. Missionaries are no longer allowed into China. Important Churches have emerged: the Kyodan in Japan; the Church of South India; the Church of North India; and the Church of Sri Lanka, all United Churches. The Roman Church since 1962-5 has reformed the Mass, largely abandoned Latin, and entered into rich partnership with the Protestant Bible Societies, with agencies of the World Council of Churches and with many other Christian groups. Moreover, teaching missionaries now go to India, Africa, Japan,

Korea, and Latin America only by invitation of the indigenous churches and only if they possess the necessary scholarly qualifications. Evangelism seems to be taking a second place to edification and humanitarian service. Mission organizations have had to become more sensitive to the currents of thought, belief, and custom in the lands that invite them to enter.

But, when all is said and done, it would be grossly untrue and unfair not to recognize the tremendous contribution that has been made since the first century by missionaries to the instruction of children, youth and adults in schools, colleges, and universities. They have had a concern for truth that is valid and essential to this day. They have honestly sought to mould Christian virtues, and in a remarkable number of cases they have exemplified and embodied those virtues — humility, kindness, unselfishness, integrity, loyalty, service to the neighbor and especially to the poor and the weak, to those who are discriminated against and oppressed.

They were and are missionaries, i.e., they openly fulfill an educational ministry as the representatives of Jesus Christ and his Church. True, they are mortal, fallible, apt to err and sometimes unworthy of their calling. But they include saints, heroes and martyrs. They love the children and the people. We do well to acknowledge and respect the contribution they have made to the education of humanity.