

Implications of the New Concepts For “Closed Countries” and Areas Where Extreme Nationalism Impedes Christian Missions

*Calvin H. Reber, Jr.
United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio*

To understand any view, it is necessary to know the point of viewing. This is needful for each view, whether or not others have stood at the same place. Only as it is clear where the viewer stands can judgment be made concerning the accuracy of his description of what he claims to see. Only with this knowledge can other observers determine fairly whether the view is best seen from the position taken. So, in approaching the assignment of this paper, it seems desirable at the outset to state the writer's understanding of the general theme with which we all are working.

I. THE REALITY BEYOND THE WORD

This necessity in particular centers in the attention we are giving to what we are calling “the de-emphasis of the words ‘missions’ and ‘missionary.’” In dealing with this theme, we are facing a widely current trend in the Church. It is urgent that we face this prevalent mood and all the issues produced by it. At the same time, we must face the meaning of the mood itself and not simply take it as good.

If we look at the expression of this mood, as well caught up in our common theme, there is something very disturbing about it. Even on the face of it, there seems to be too plainly a negation of an essential emphasis and an exciting heritage. When one thinks more deeply one wonders

THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY

whether the expression is not only negative but superficial. That is, we must ask whether de-emphasis represents cause, symptom, or treatment.

If it is treatment, one must ask further whether it is adequate for the sickness it hopes to heal. It has been assumed generally that the words “missions” and “missionary” represent a wrong kind of relationship, which can be healed by finding new words to replace them. This seems to be a rather superficial understanding of the real situation for two reasons. It detracts from the endeavor to understand the reality, which has brought these time-honored words into disrepute. It also seems to assume that a relationship can be changed by a change in vocabulary. The importance of words and their effect on human relationships must not be denied. Yet, it is essential to ask what has happened to make words that once seemed sweet turn sour.

If as this writer believes, the mood of de-emphasis is symptom rather than cause and cure, we must first diagnose causes and then judge de-emphasis itself on its ability to assist cure.

Of course, this figure from health and medical practice is more vivid than accurate. Its vividness can be excused only because the writer has recently discovered in full force what others may have known before—that a large part of our problem is that we are talking about de-emphasizing words when we need to be asking the more urgent question of how the world-wide Christian witness can be given best in a radically new time.

We are living at the end of one era and at the beginning of another. In the former period, the structures of what we knew as the modern missionary movement were used with great effectiveness. Now the situation has changed and the heart of the problem lies in what Hendrick Kraemer has well called “the end of Western colonialism and the collapse of Western Christendom.”¹ In this new period, there is concern for the mission of the Church, lest having depended on the prestige and expansion of the West it now is inadequate for the new time. Thus Korula Jacob declared at the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, “In Asia and Africa many people who regard the missionary enterprise as

1 Hendrick Kraemer, “The Missionary Implications of the End of Western Colonialism and the Collapse of Western Christendom,” in *History’s Lessons from Tomorrow’s Mission* [Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, 1960], p. 195.

an arm of colonialism believe that the rapid extinction of colonialism in these continents will bring with it the end of missions.”²

Latourette has shown us in his large grasp of Christian history that Christianity has always spread through possibilities afforded by the social and political structures of the time, This is not to be considered with shame because it simply means that the Church has used the ways of witness which were available to it. It must be confessed that there may have been too close identification of the Church with these structures at times but this was the peril and price of relevance. However, when those structures were no longer helpful, it was necessary to separate from them. This has always been achieved in the history of Christianity, but it was not achieved either by merely negative separation, or by name changing, but by the conquest of the new cultural structures provided by the new time.³

The danger of mere negation is well pointed out by an illustration provided by Hogg. In seeking to explain the absence of concern among the reformers, he attributes this in part to a threefold rejection in Protestantism—a rejection of the papacy, of monasticism, and of the Anabaptists. In repudiating these without providing new and dynamic ways of missionary expression, a lack of missionary concern resulted.⁴

One must therefore ask whether a similar rejection of “missions” and “missionary” without provision of dynamic new emphases and structures will not endanger the outreach of the Church in the new era. Equally it must be asked whether the tendency in some quarters of the Church to use the old measurements of concern by counting missionaries is not also completely inadequate. What is rather required is a determination of what the new day demands of us in our missionary witness.

This rather extended statement of a point of viewing seems required by the topic assigned for this paper. For every part of the world is affected by this radically changed situation, and the most extreme manifestations are found in the “closed” countries. Here the West has been repudiated so thoroughly that contact with it has been broken completely. In such areas,

2 Korula Jacobs, “The Task Ahead,” *International Review of Missions*, LI (January 1962), p. 15.

3 Cf. K. S. Latourette, *The Unquenchable Light* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1941), *passim*.

4 William Richey Hogg, “The Rise of Protestant Missionary Concern,” in Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), pp. 7.

it then becomes most urgent that new ways of Christian witness be found which will be effective in the new era.

II. CLOSED AND CLOSING COUNTRIES

When we think of “closed” countries, we (at least editorially, if not inclusively) think of China. Here the land, which once engaged the largest missionary force of any single country, now has no missionaries functioning at all. China is the clearest case because it is probably the most significant and complete example. Perhaps there are other examples as early and complete of which this writer is unaware. If there are, we should seek to learn from them also.

However, our topic and common sense requires that we consider something more than what happened in China. We are not concerned with adding one more post-mortem on events there. Rather our responsibility is to consider a possible kind of situation, which may exist in other places and seek a strategy for it, based on a realistic view of the world and the mission.

Moreover, our topic requires that we consider not only the extreme of the completely closed country but the wider spectrum of situations where extreme nationalism impedes Christian missions. This is a wide and changing spectrum which might include at times such areas as Egypt and other Arab lands, Ceylon, Burma, South Africa, and now, for some, Cuba.⁵ The components to the situation vary, but in all of these, there has been restriction on missionary activity associated with strong nationalism.

As the components vary, so does the degree of closedness. The extreme of closedness, of course, is as apparent as a closed door. However, an open country may be closing and, we trust, a completely closed country may be opening. Thus, we should think of the broad span of alienation in terms of a common situation with variations of development. Judging from what we have seen in China and elsewhere, it might be helpful to regard the variations in terms of four stages or degrees. There is, first, political deterioration in which there are uneasy political relations between the Western and non-Western nation. In this stage or degree, missionaries and national Christians are likely to assert loudly that relations between their governments do not affect their fellowship in Christ, but their protests do not overcome the fact that national origins are raising barriers of doubt.

5 See R. Pierce Beaver, “Missions and the New Nationalism,” *Occasional Bulletin*, XII, 1 (Jan. 15, 1961), p. 7.

In the second stage or degree the foreigner, including the missionary, is increasingly restricted and separated until his usefulness is severely limited. In the third stage, communication, in the normal use of the term, is broken and the Church has its foreign connections completely severed. In the fourth stage, there is a feeling out by Churches within and without the country for a basis upon which communication may be restored.

As we look at this wide spectrum of possibilities, what can be done in any particular situation or at any particular stage can be determined only by the persons involved. So, it may be most useful to treat the general situation and to determine what most needs to be done. Then as seems possible there may be added some spot guidance aimed at particular stages or situations.

When we thus consider the overall pattern of alienation caused by the decline of Western prestige and the rise of national sensitivity we discover at once that the new situation creates a whole new body of possibilities and perils for the advance of the Gospel.

Among the possibilities for which we should be grateful, we might name first, the possibility of the Church achieving a Christian autonomy. It could be argued that no mission-founded Church is likely to find itself until there comes some period of sharp break with its parent, which allows it to achieve selfhood. There is a beneficial effect provided to a Church that cannot be achieved so well in any other way when neither funds nor advice can be given to it.

Such sharp breaking of ties pushes the Church to discover itself and its relationship with its own environment. For when the foreign association is broken, and this extraneous aspect is removed, the Church can understand better what is truly distinctive about Christianity and what the Church must be to be true to its faith where it lives. In this connection, there is likely to be at least one aspect of missions, which will be de-emphasized quickly. This is the over-activity, which has been too synonymous with Western missions. To people among whom being is more important than doing, it may come as great relief to be freed from pushing programs painfully associated with so-called "Kingdom building."

A second possibility in a time of severing relationships with the West is that the Church may be able to associate itself more adequately with the hopes of the nation in which it is set. The record can be cleared of too great identification with the previous colonial powers, and there can be a greater understanding of the peculiar aspirations of the people to whom the Church must speak the Word of God. The danger of too

great identification is not to be ignored, but such risk must be taken if the Church is to properly fulfill its prophetic role in sympathy and true understanding.

A third possibility is provided particularly in the time of severing, for representatives of the Christian West to hear for once the truth about themselves and their service. This possibility is decreased by the likelihood that the circumstances under which the truth is told may be used to discount its accuracy. If, however, there is sensitivity, there is a chance to hear things which appreciative and polite national co-workers are not likely to say in calmer times.

A fourth possibility is provided for understanding anew the precarious nature of the Church in any land. Too frequently, has the Church overestimated its influence because of a number of highly placed Christians or because of the wide freedom allowed to meet opportunities. The discovery of how soon doors can be closed should remind the Church everywhere that it exists as a minority in the world and has no guaranteed future save that provided by the assurance of the ultimate victory of God.

Having acknowledged these possibilities, which actually may advance the Gospel when a time of closing is at hand, it is equally necessary to point out the perils.

The first of these is the totalitarian control by the state of all aspects of life. Wherever extreme nationalism exists, there is an excessive desire on the part of the state to want to manage the whole life of its citizenry. There is no real place for other witnesses or ministries. The tendency at once is for the state to want to control all media that shape either adult opinion or the education of the young. The issue becomes not so much whether state-supported education should not be for state-supported ends as it is whether any other form of education should be allowed to exist. Hospitals and other caring ministries soon find similar difficulties. The omni-competent state wants its people to believe that it alone can provide for all needs. The works of mercy by individuals or groups seem to be a denial of this and cannot be allowed. So also, any undigested minority within the country appears a threat to unity and must be brought under control. In all these ways the Church is bound to have its area of witness and ministry curtailed and hence its Gospel truncated.

A second peril is the nationalization of the Church. Not only does the state desire to curtail the activities of the Church in education and ministry but also it finds it necessary to control the voice of the Church. At the time when the Communist domination of China was taking place,

a wise leader of the Church in China explained the Communist attitude by saying "The Communists are afraid of any leadership or potential leadership they can't control." This comment is relevant of many similar situations. Wherever a state exists which seeks complete control of the people, the Church is bound to be suspect. For the genius of the Church is to produce men whom only God rules and such leadership or potential leadership is a threat to the totalitarian state.

A third peril in a time of severance is the destruction of the ecumenical manifestation of the Church. Protestants at times have wrongfully neglected to understand one very bad reason for less virulence being shown them than Roman Catholics in situations of extreme nationalism. This reason is that it is simply much easier to nationalize the Protestant Church than the Roman Catholic Church. For both good and ill, the Roman Catholic hierarchical structure is international in nature. It is a clear and present reminder that the Church cannot be confined within the bounds of one country. By its origins and history Protestant denominations have been more limited to geographical areas. It is quite easy for Protestants to understand that a Church should be a geographical unit within the boundaries of a nation. All the united churches have been established on these assumptions, and it may be suggested that the truth behind the unfortunate growth of worldwide confessionalism lies in the fact that the Church cannot be so limited.

Thus in a time of extreme nationalism Protestant Christians may find it not only required by the state but a little too easy to sever its worldwide relationships.

III. THE MISSIONARY'S INVOLVEMENT

In considering the involvement of the missionary in this alienation of the nation and the West, it is easy to see him as a liability. The actual situation is somewhat more complex. There can be no denying that the missionary's ties with the West causes him to suffer for that connection. However, some other considerations must be taken into account.

One need for further consideration is presented by the nature and functioning of worldwide Communism. Not only do Communists serve as a dedicated minority of foreigners in lands exulting in their nationalism, but there is also no significant difference in the treatment of the Church in areas where there are no missionaries. The Church in Communist Europe does not appear to be receiving any better treatment than the Church in

Communist China because the former had no appreciable missionary corps and the latter did.

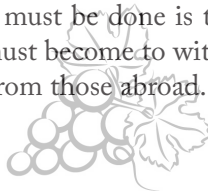
Further consideration is required also by the esteem with which missionaries are still regarded. Two illustrations may not prove anything but they suggest a neglected word of witness. A reporter for the *Christian Century* at a UNESCO conference on Africa was concerned about the little reference to missionaries in a discussion of the image Africans have of Americans; until an African declared to him that, “he had not thought of missionaries as primarily Americans but as Christians.”⁶ When Miss Gwyneth Hubble, of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the W.C.C. spoke to our Midwest Fellowship of Professors of Missions, she underlined the fact that the leaders of Asian and African churches want missionaries who will stay with them and, if possible, “bury their bones” with them. If one takes seriously either of these declarations, one must ask whether the missionary is so unwanted as is sometimes suggested.

Moreover, if the handicap of the missionary is his Western connection, one would suppose the fraternal worker sent by one Asian Church to another would be much more welcome in the land to which he is sent. Yet Pierce Beaver has said in his paper on “Missions and the New Nationalism” that, “There has been no evidence that it is easier to secure a visa and residence permit for an Asian than for a Western.”⁷

The consideration of these various facts suggests that the real reason for the denunciation and limitation of missionaries is not so much their involvement in the West as the effort to use this undeniable fact to separate the Church from any outside connection as an aid toward its nationalization.

IV. PREPARING THE CHURCH TO STAND

The situation we then face in respect to closed and closing countries is one in which the Church is faced by forces beyond its control. No slight modification of names and relationships can halt the developments, which are taking place. What can and must be done is to help a Church beset by nationalism become what it must become to witness in a time when its members are physically severed from those abroad.



6 Donald L. Ellis, “UNESCO on Africa,” *Christian Century*, LXXVIII (Dec. 13, 1961), p. 1504f.

7 Beaver, *op. cit.*, p. 8. THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY

This suggests four major emphases that should be made in whatever way possible in whatever stage of closing a country may be.

A. Strengthening Its Integrity

First, the Church must be strengthened in its integrity. The Church in a closed country faces unusual pressures for which it is often unprepared. Preparation for facing these does not consist of either increase of institutional facilities, which may be taken away easily, or of inflation of size which may be deflated as readily. It consists of creating within the Church, especially within its leadership, a sense of deep inner confidence and integrity. Students of the modern methods of persuasion point out that the most persuadable persons are those with low self-esteem. Persons who have no strong confidence in themselves and their own integrity are readily moved into whatever direction the persuader desires.

Even before the writer saw this principle enunciated in an exposition of the ways of persuasion, he heard a fellow-missionary in China apply it to a current development. Commenting on the accusations of missionaries by Chinese Christian leaders, this discerning colleague remarked that the Communists seemed determined to make them so thoroughly ashamed of themselves that they would have no strength to stand under the new regime. Looking at the same situation from another side it appeared also that those who had been most dependent on Western colleagues found it necessary to denounce them most strongly. The dynamics of personal reaction are too complicated to be comprehended by these observations. Nevertheless, they both underline the urgency of developing leaders with such integrity and confidence that they need not be ashamed of their position either as Christians or as citizens.

Awareness of this persuadability principle gives us an important guide for evaluating past approaches and determining new ones. On the cautionary side, it reminds us that anything, which decreases the basic sense of integrity within the Church, will decrease its ability to stand in the storm. On the positive side, it declares that the most important contribution that can be made to a Church is that which assists it to such deep inner integrity that it can face even the necessities of compromise unafraid.

Since this strengthening of the integrity of the Church must be done in specific ways, it is necessary to describe some of them.

For one, it is this strengthening of the integrity of the Church which requires the reorientation of relationships about which we are speaking these days. Bishop Michael Hollis has correctly observed that you cannot deal with independent nations through a colonially subordinated Church.⁸ Bishop Hollis would probably be the first to declare that this is not merely a matter of structure or nomenclature, even though these must reflect reality. This is a matter of personal integrity. To witness in self-confident new nations churchmen must be able to stand with confidence. They *need*, as much as they deserve, the self-confidence, which can be provided by treatment as equals. The imposed missionary, the unilateral grant of funds, and all the related vocabulary of Western superiority weakens the self-respect the Church requires in its hour of peril. Conversely, joint participation as equals in a worldwide fellowship of common sharing, and the sense of being under Christ rather than under a mission, strengthen the integrity of the Church.

In addition to the reorientation of relationships there should be efforts directly aimed at strengthening the self-image of the Christian leader. For this purpose, there is value in the use of the new nomenclature about fraternal workers. By such use, the Church leader may see himself as a colleague and not merely a subordinate to the foreigner working with him.

Although such usage meets a real need, it does not meet it fully. The national Church leader must not only feel himself equal to the missionary, but he must also feel himself equal to his responsibility. This requires more than a change in names. It requires educational opportunities to equip him, and the undergirding confidence of those who believe in him. This deeper need may explain why there is a plea for missionaries who will give their lives to the land of their witness. Often a much better job of developing strong leaders was done by the sensitive old-style missionary than by the young aggressive fraternal worker, overanxious to prove his fraternity and his special competence. The art of friendship cannot be taught in an orientation course, and the deepest understandings are purchased by years of toil in a common task. So if our friend Herbert Jackson were preparing again his fine address on "Some Old Patterns for New in Missions," we might suggest that he include a place for the old type of understanding missionary to replace the new specialist! The one persistent demand uttered by the churchmen of Asia and Africa was spoken by Bishop Azariah at Edinburgh: "Give us friends." For in any

8 *Bulletin of the Division of Studies*, W.C.C., VII, No. 2, P. 16.

9 Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (Edinburg House Press, 1959), p. 68.

age and time nothing strengthens the confidence of a man in himself so much as the confidence of one he admires.

The integrity of the Church can also be strengthened by the cultivation of a deepening understanding of its own nature. Persons and churches must understand who they really are. This seems especially necessary for churches which make up only a small percentage of the population in an essentially hostile environment. It is easy for such a Church to be convinced of its uselessness, especially if its earlier prestige consisted too largely of its foreign associations. Hence those who knew the Church in China feel it could have been helped greatly by greater strength in theology, fellowship, and concern for social righteousness.¹⁰ Through theology, the Church knows the truth by which it lives and it understands aright both its limitations and its undefeatable strength. Through fellowship, the members of the Church are given strength to stand even in their moments of aloneness by the prayers and concern of others. Through concern for social righteousness, the Church knows the relevance of its message even for a nation, which would repudiate it.

Closely related to this need to know one's own nature is the contrasting need to feel one merits the respect of one's peers. It is difficult for a Church to maintain its self-respect when it feels too culturally alien to the land in which it lives. Yet Pierce Beaver again reminds us, “Strangely, the nationalist sentiment within the churches is not fostering and speeding indigenization as much as one might expect. There is lip-service to the ideal, but imported foreign forms are still identified with the Gospel.” Then he goes on to speak of developing tension as youth denounces “the older missionaries, the founding fathers, and the present leadership for depriving them of the cultural heritage that they should be sharing with their fellow citizens.”¹¹

There may be other ways to strengthen the integrity of the Church, but these seem essential if the Church and its leadership shall have the power to stand in its hour of aloneness.

B. Creating Christian Citizenship

The second major emphasis, which seems required to assist a church in a closed or closing country, is the creation of an understanding of individual and corporate Christian responsibility toward the state. Since

10 Cf. Victor E. Hayward, *Ears to Hear* (Edinburg House Press, 1955), *passim*.

11 Beaver, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

the rise of national states in the whole world is a new fact replacing the old patterns of western dominance, it is urgent that the Church and individual Christians understand the new responsibility thus imposed.

Often this lack of understanding has been one of the greatest weaknesses of the Church. There are quite understandable reasons for this. For one, the pietistic impulse in the Christian mission was more likely to stress individual responsibility in ways inclined to neglect the Christian's duty toward social structure of any kind. Nor should this be entirely regretted, since personally committed persons must ever make up the first line of Christian attack and defense. However, the general failure to think through Christian responsibility toward the State has opened the Church to heretical actions of one sort or another.

By the nature of the missionary association with colonialism, it was also difficult for the missionary to assist development of Christian understanding of the State. His own nationality, the colonial power in control, and the aspirations of the people, often represented three different centers of political loyalty. So even when he responded to the aspirations of the people to whom he ministered, they were not his native sentiments, and practical realities required care in his relationship to the power in control.

Moreover, there have been such wide differences among Protestants in their interpretation of Christian responsibility toward the State that there seemed little point in making much of what seemed secondary.

However, the rise of the new states no longer allows this to be considered secondary. Any conversation with Christians of newly independent countries reveals a passionate love toward their own land, which needs the blessing, guidance, and judgment of Christ. This can only be attained as, at whatever stage the nation is in its relationships to the West, the Church grapples with its Christian responsibility toward the State. In this grappling, it is neither necessary nor possible that all Christians have the same interpretation of the will of God concerning this responsibility. What is important is that efforts be made to understand and discharge the duties disclosed.

This is neither the person nor the place to attempt a detailed blueprint of what this emphasis requires in any specific situation. It must suffice to suggest as two guiding words "determination" and "dialogue."

There will need to be a determination of the basic Christian stance toward the issues of national life. This consideration will have to include

awareness of nationhood as one of God’s gifts to man. Such a discerning critic of nationalism as Barbara Ward has declared that “The nation...is a normal, possibly the normal personality for human groups in the post-tribal stage.”¹² She further points out the value of nationalism in its ability to “be powerfully mobilized to achieve great communal tasks,”¹³ and in being “a manifestation of the Western search for freedom under law as the organizing principle of human society.”¹⁴ These values cannot be ignored, and the Christian should not be guilty of a new kind of Docetism in denial of the body politic.

Out of this acceptance of the value of the nation, the Christian then seeks the good of his neighbor through the political structures. The specific possibilities will vary according to the individual situation. There may be a time for witness to the dangers of nationalism, the need for religious liberty, the importance of separation of Church and State or the perils of particular parties or ideologies. There may be other times when individual Christians and churches may be limited severely by a totalitarian state. Even, then, as John Bennett so well suggests, the Christian citizen may find he can do three things: say “No” at the right time, bear Christian witness in personal relations, and preserve through the Church for his children a vision of a society with greater justice and freedom.¹⁵

When the Christian and the Church have determined the basic Christian stance required of them, they are prepared for dialogue. By this is meant an approach to the issues of political life not unlike the new approach to the non-Christian religions urged by Kenneth Cragg, Stephen Neill, and others.¹⁶ In such dialogue, there is an effort to listen for every word of truth in the other’s position and then to speak the word of Christ to the person with understanding and a humility willing to accept correction. Even the stalwart Luther knew there was both a time for standing and a time to invite discussion. If love for country is a gift of God there ought to be greater possibility for conversation with even the most ardent nationalist than is generally assumed. Such dialogue is not without its dangers when the representatives of the State seem strong and Christians seem so weak

12 Barbara Ward, *Five Ideas that Changed the World* (New York: Norton, 1959), pp. 29-30.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

15 John C. Bennett, *The Christian as Citizen* (New York: Association Press, 1955), pp. 64-65. This concise and clear book in the *World Christian Books* series would be an excellent beginning for the preparation here proposed.

16 See especially Stephen C. Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).⁵⁵

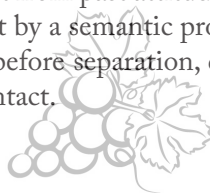
even in faith. Yet the State cannot be ignored, and only by communication can Christians truly know either their responsibilities or the perils.

In all these efforts to determine its Christian responsibility to the state, the Church or individual Christian in a closed or closing country may at times make decisions which missionaries from other lands may find hard to understand. Such missionaries must then show the same charity, which has been required in other aspects of adaptation. For Christians in each land must determine for themselves, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, their responsibility to their nation. The most any outsider can do is to urge the Church to consider the importance of this responsibility, encourage concerned national church leaders, and commend them to the Spirit of God.

C. Developing Mutual Trust

The third major emphasis that must be made to assist the Church in a closed or closing country is the development of mutual trust between the Church within the country and the Church without it. The enemies of the Church want it to feel alone and abandoned. Nothing weakens the Christian witness so much as misunderstanding among Christians. Yet, the difficulty is that when such understanding is most greatly needed it is hardest to maintain.

The roots of this failure of trust always exist in the period before contact is broken. Paul Verghese probably reflected the thinking of other Asian Christians when he wrote, "The only criticism of the Whitby formula, 'partners in obedience,' is that it smacks of a certain concept of the indispensability of the wealthy churches in the task of missions."¹⁷ That he should feel that way should not be surprising, but it is no less disturbing. The phrase itself has no such content and is as demanding of Western churches as of Asian ones. He was actually interpreting not the formula but what it meant to him and what he believed it meant to the West. This interpretation is disturbing because it suggests that statements of common commitment cannot be seen apart from past attitudes and present feelings. Thus, once again we are faced not by a semantic problem but a heritage of misunderstanding, which exists before separation, deepens the alienation, and increases the difficulty of contact.



First Fruits

17 Paul Verghese, "Interchurch Relationships," in Blaise Levai, ed., *Revolution in Missions* (Vellore: Popular Press, 1959), p. 180.

The basic question we must raise here is, “How is trust built?” How do people come to so believe in each other that no separation or enemy propaganda can really alienate them from each other? This question alone would merit a separate discussion but it might be suggested that trust comes in part through confession, understanding, and prayer. Since our Western churches are both older and more guilty, it is proper that we confess to the non-Western churches our failures in understanding and our involvement in Western sins against the rest of the world. If we did this, we might break the jam of mutual recrimination, which has hurt us all and has prevented our real moving into more adequate relationships between churches of West and non-West.¹⁸ The turning from old words may represent our effort toward such confession and a new basis of relationship. They may also appear to be only a grudging admission that there were a few small things wrong with us, which we are ready to change. If they are so understood, they may prevent the franker and deeper facing of our common sin that must become both mutual and surgical.

Beyond confession, there must be understanding, for without understanding there may be always awareness that much that is seen as sin in another is actually the earnest grappling and the best solution to a difficult circumstance.

Perhaps most crucial is prayer, for prayer both chastens the attitude of the one praying and provides resources for the object of intercession. In an unusually sensitive article concerned primarily with the understanding support of missionaries, Max Warren concluded with a plea that similar support be given to the rising leaders of the overseas churches. He asked, “What steps are being taken to ensure that ‘nationals’, not in positions of great responsibility, with the loneliness that responsibility must always involve, have a similar ‘Shielding’ of praying partners?”¹⁹ This plea should be made especially for Church leaders who find every contact with the West embarrassing, so that both they and we may know that undergirding all our weakness is the strength of God.

D. Enlarging Responsibility for Mission

A fourth major emphasis we must make if we would assist a Church in a closed or closing country is the enlargement of a sense of responsibility. A person or a Church is given strength by awareness not

18 Cf. Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension*, pp. 69ff.

19 Max Warren, “Pastoral Care for the Foreign Missionary,” *International Review of Missions*, LI (January 1962), p. 25.

only of what one must be but also of what one must do. In the context of our considerations, the Church must be made to understand its mission.

Such understanding cannot be created by de-emphasis on “missions.” What such de-emphasis says at best is only that the Church ought not depend upon the foreigner to carry on the mission. At worst it may assist the undermining of the sense of mission by denigrating the example of those who personally best represented compassionate caring. Nor can such awareness be created by emphasis on self-support, self-government, and self-propagation. The dominant note in all three of these emphases is that of self, and self-centeredness has never yet produced a sense of mission. Nor can concern for mission be created by our current concern for interchurch aid. For here again there is an introversion, with the world Church now becoming the in-group.

There can be no alternative to the giving of direct attention to nurturing within the Church its sense of responsibility for mission. This has been done to varied degrees in various times and places. The history of missions is made exciting by the stories of persons witnessing to hostile family members and enemy tribes. It must be confessed, however, that there is also a disturbing record of situations in which the Gospel was kept a hidden treasure and the Church became an encysted minority.

In this regard, once more, Pierce Beaver helps us by showing our Western responsibility for the lack of mission in churches we helped found. He points out that we passed along both the territorial idea of the Church and the idea that witnessing is one of the many functions of the Church but not the primary one.²⁰

Whatever may be the reasons for failure in witnessing—and there are others beyond those Beaver names—it would seem that a Church can be led best to a sense of mission by emphasizing the truth of mission and by providing opportunity for its exercise of mission.

In this regard, the substitution of the fraternal worker idea for the word “missionary” has the unfortunate effect of downgrading the truth of mission. For whatever were the limitations of the missionary personally, by name and incarnation the missionary represented the truth of mission.

Even the cartoonist and the joker recognized this supreme quality in the missionary. So despite all good reasons for a change, it is necessary to recognize that we are also capitulating to the relativists within and

20 Beaver, *Ibid.*

without the Church who denounce the caricature because they also deny the truth of mission.

If the new emphasis is in danger of undermining the truth of mission, it must also be admitted that the older one neglected relevant practice. This may seem a surprising assertion in light of the considerable talk about evangelistic missions. However, it does not seem unfair to point out that these missions depend largely on the use of Western methods without giving enough attention to the ways of communicating the Gospel to people of quite different culture. Coming from the West, the missionary felt quite at home with Western methods. Moreover, because they had value and had compassion, they were effective. However, the national Church leaders never felt at home with them. So, the missionary chafed and lamented lack of evangelistic concern. In more recent time, we have repeated the old take with the same effect. We have sent evangelistic specialists to these lands to teach our methods of evangelism. Some return with rejoicing over the results they had; others returned in sadness because the native pastors did not have similar zeal. Neither came back with the needful understanding that evangelism may require an altogether different manifestation in a different culture. For this they could hardly be blamed because their time or training were not to prepare them to see otherwise. Nevertheless, the unfortunate fact is that the leaders of the young churches are not being prepared to perform their own distinctive kind of witness, which could persist even if borders were closed, and obstacles were increased.

On the more positive side, the serious training of the Church in partnership in obedience instead of in self-rule can more adequately prepare the whole Church for its responsibility. That all churches are under obligation to mission can put the idea of mission in its proper context free from the associations of colonialism and can give the younger churches the true equality of sharing in a common task, which has always assisted in the development of unity.

In this direction there are two specific efforts now being made which are assisting churches to greater responsibility in mission—the sending of missionaries from younger churches and the accent on the witness of laymen wherever they are.²¹ These factors should help countries that may close in the future to be more aware of their responsibility in mission than those which closed earlier.

21 Cf. John Howard Yoder, “After Foreign Missions—What?” *Christianity Today*, VI (March 30, 1962), pp. 620f.

It has been argued in this paper that the essential task of missions in relationship to a closed or closing country is to prepare the Church for the situation it will face. This must be done by strengthening its integrity, creating a sense of Christian citizenship, developing mutual trust of the Church within and without, and enlarging a sense of responsibility in mission.

These things must be done at whatever stage the Church finds itself. Greater emphasis has been placed on the pre-closing period because here the greatest possibilities exist. During the time, a country is closed and connections are severed, little can be done from the outside. The Church must live by the resources of God and in accord with the heritage it has received.

As one hopes for an opening again, there is little specifically that can be done beside seeking whatever opportunities which may open for developing mutual trust. Ballou has urged in regard to China that "Despite the possibility of embarrassments...the first step must be renewal of contact, of direct communication."²² At the same time, he admits the difficulty of this in reporting the judgment of a British church leader who would be predisposed to cultivation of contacts. This churchman expressed doubts as to whether further visits of the Church in China are likely to be attempted. He saw three difficulties: (1) the fact that it is almost impossible to talk to individual Church leaders in private (2) the questionable reliability of replies; and (3) the problem of reporting. If the thesis of this paper is correct, it would seem that the desirability of such contacts should be determined by what they do to strengthen the Church in its nature and mission and in mutual trust. The British churchman's reply suggests that contacts may not necessarily do that and should not be sought unless they do.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS OF MISSIONS

Before concluding this too discursive journey through our topic, it is necessary to apply what we have discussed to our teaching responsibility.

One requirement is the development of a strategy of Christian witness for a time of closed and closing countries. Much of past strategy has been based on the assumption that lands now open will be open indefinitely and if they suddenly close this is most unfortunate. As

22 Earle H. Ballou, "The Protestant Church in Red China," *Christianity and Crisis*, XX, (July 11, 1960), pp. 107.

suggested in the main emphasis of this paper, we will operate somewhat differently if we see the urgency of developing a church, which can survive with its outside connections severed. There is one body of resources, which could be helpful, which was not used in this paper because it calls for a series of depth studies not possible in the present assignment. This is to determine what can be learned from the experiences of churches in history which had their outside relationships broken. There have been some beginning studies made in this direction; for example, by Leonard Outerbridge in *The Lost Churches of China*, or more broadly and briefly by Frank Keay in "Vanished Churches." For real helpfulness much more needs to be done to teach us both how severed churches can survive best and how contact may be renewed. We may owe it to ourselves and to the Christian mission to make some such studies.

A second requirement imposed upon us teachers of missions is the developing of teaching emphases, which contribute to the strengthening of the Church. Insofar as we influence missionaries and nationals in lands, which may close, we ought to be developing attitudes, which will give the Church integrity and a sense of responsible mission. One specific way in which we might assist this, beyond ways mentioned earlier, is to give a larger place than we have to the lives of national Church leaders in Christian history and biography. It would greatly strengthen the self-respect of a Church to be aware that its history was shaped by the heroic witness of native Christians. Conversely, continuing to emphasize the contribution is likely to increase the feeling that the whole religion is foreign.

A third requirement is imposed upon us as teachers of missions by our responsibility for developing more adequate understanding in our home churches. Here we must work forever at helping young ministers and those they influence to stop suggesting that where there are no missionaries there can hardly be a Church. We must communicate an understanding of the nature of the Church and of the power of the Spirit so that Western Christians will know that no land is really closed to Christ. In the face of much misleading we must give such information and intervention that Western churches will believe in and pray for their brethren in closed lands.

VI. CONCLUSION

Since the argument of this paper has led through meandering ways it may be fitting and necessary to conclude with a summary of it that takes us across the fields and directly home: the situation in the world mission especially as disclosed by closed and closing countries suggests that we are at the beginning of a new era calling for new approaches. We must not

prejudge the requirements of the new period by assuming that the de-emphasis on “missions” and “missionary” is an adequate response. Rather we must look at the new situation and see what it demands. In the closed or closing countries, this is the task of the strengthening of the Church. To do this it seems necessary to strengthen the integrity of the Church, create Christian citizenship, assist the development of mutual trust, and enlarge the sense of responsibility. The de-emphasis on “missions” and “missionary” must be considered as they help or hinder these things, but the constant goal must be the strengthening of the Church. To this we must all give ourselves wherever we serve the mission of the Church.



First Fruits
THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY