

THE ROLE OF MISSION STUDIES IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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Last year at the meeting of the Association of Professors of Missions, three papers were presented which set the stage for a discussion of the role of mission studies. One was a background paper by Pierce Beaver tracing the history of the teaching of missions in American seminaries. The second was a report by Walter Cason on the present situation and recent developments in mission studies in graduate Protestant seminaries of this country using material from a questionnaire circulated by William Danker. Finally there was a statement of the rationale for Christian mission in theological education presented by Roland Scott. The present paper is an attempt to carry further the discussion that was stimulated by those three presentations.

The first step that has seemed to be called for has been to expand somewhat the coverage of the questionnaire that was used last year. Seventy-four graduate Protestant theological seminaries responded to that questionnaire, which, while not a fully satisfactory number given the fact that there are one hundred and thirty-seven such schools in the American Association of Theological Schools, was still a large enough group to give some impression of what is happening to mission studies in institutions of that type. The seminaries presented a number of whimsies and anomalies in their answers to the questionnaire, as readers of Walter Cason's paper will remember. Nevertheless the over-all picture which they painted was one of wide-spread and well staffed programs of mission studies. Fifty-seven percent of the schools responding had full-time teachers and most of the remainder had part-time teachers in the area of missions. Presumably this can be taken as fairly indicative of the situation in the Protestant seminaries as a whole, though Walter Cason's warning, that the schools which are doing more may be the ones that are most interested in reporting their work, needs to be kept in mind.

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If there was a weakness in the previous questionnaire it lay not so much in its coverage of the Protestant seminaries as in its neglect of other types of theological education. One such type is the Bible school and Bible college. Some Bible colleges are liberal arts institutions with a strong Christian emphasis, but most of them, like the Bible schools, represent really a form of theological education like that of the theological seminaries though not at the graduate level. Therefore they need to be kept in view when considering the role of missions in theological education. Only twenty such institutions were included in last year's survey. A further questionnaire was therefore sent out to nearly a hundred Bible schools and colleges listed in the study made by S. A. Witmer, *The Bible College Story* (Channel Press, 1962). The schools selected were the ones which had an announced specialty in missions or a relatively large student body which would make it possible for them to provide missions courses.

One unexpected discovery in this process was the high rate of mortality among such schools. Even though these were the larger and therefore presumably better established institutions, over twenty percent of them had closed down during the twelve years since that study was published. However, forty-one schools filled out their questionnaires, a good level of response indicating either a very high interest in missions or a very conscientious set of administrators.

These responses combined with the twenty Bible colleges in last year's survey present a picture of vigorous activity and strong commitment in mission studies. Of the sixty-one Bible schools and colleges, forty-three have either full-time missions teachers or several part-time persons who would be the equivalent of full-time staffing. Some have as many as five or six full-time appointments or of the remaining eighteen, all but two have part-time teachers assigned to missions. A few teach only one or two courses in the field, but most of them offer a considerable range of courses dealing with practical, historical and theoretical issues related to missions.

A new resource for information has appeared since these questionnaires were sent out. It is the book by Glenn Schwartz entitled *An American Directory of Schools and Colleges Offering Missionary Courses* (Wm. Carey Library, 1973). Schwartz cuts across the classifications we have made here and lists together colleges, Bible schools and theological seminaries where there is some teaching of missions. He reports on two hundred and eighteen such institutions. The course offerings are impressive. Some schools have thirty or forty courses in missions; most of them have between five and fifteen. There are some odd omissions of important schools and there is no information on the number of teachers or the prospective developments, but the work certainly provides the most complete survey available of the courses being offered in this field.

One group which was neglected both in Schwartz's book and in last year's survey was the whole body of Roman Catholic theological schools. Only

one Roman Catholic institution was heard from last year. Consequently the questionnaire was sent to all the Roman Catholic institutions that are members of the American Association of Theological Schools, fifty-seven in number. Twenty-nine, or over half, replied. Of these only *five* had any teachers of missions or courses in missions. (Two of the five were the Maryknoll Seminary, which is dedicated entirely to the training of missionaries, and the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, which was the one school contacted last year. Of the remaining three, two have part-time men in missions and only one has a full-time man.) The other twenty-two schools replying had no one teaching missions and no courses in missions being taught. In fact one school, though a full-fledged M.Div. institution, returned the questionnaire with the query as to whether some mistake had been made in addressing such questions to them. Given the fact that over 80% of the schools replying had nothing to offer, it seems altogether likely that the thirty-two schools which failed to reply are equally barren in this field. The tendency of those who have something to report to do the reporting would support this assumption. Of course it should be recognized that many of these schools may pay some attention to missions in courses dealing with other subjects and some of the responses pointed out that they did this. And it should also be recognized that there has been a small increase in the total number of Roman Catholic missions teachers during the past ten years. But even so, the situation of mission studies in Roman Catholic schools is far, far weaker than in Protestant seminaries and also far weaker than in the Bible schools and colleges. Evidently the pious admonitions of Vatican II regarding the importance of missionary understanding in the seminaries have had little effect thus far. The failure of that same Council to advocate the provision of specific courses and teaching posts in this field has resulted in a minimal advance.

We have no comparable questionnaire or survey to reveal the situation outside this country. O. G. Myklebust made his extensive survey over twenty years ago and the situation has changed considerably since then. It may be well, however, to recall his findings. At that time there were no professorships of missions in England except for one at the Selly Oak Colleges near Birmingham, a cluster of schools largely dedicated to training missionaries. Scotland seemed to have reverted to the teaching of missions by professors in the broader field of practical theology. Germany had professorships of missions in Tubingen, Hamburg, Mainz and Halle while elsewhere there were lectureships or professorships in which missions were joined with other subjects. Berlin, Heidelberg and Jena had nothing in this field. French Protestant seminaries had no chairs in missions and in Holland only the Free University and the theological college at Kampen were provided with a joint appointment between them in the field while the other universities presented courses in missions taught by men with wider responsibilities. In Scandinavia, Oslo and Uppsala had professorships in the field while Copenhagen and Lund had lectureships and Aarhus was considering

one. In Switzerland both Basel and Bern had lectureships in missions, while other places like Zurich contented themselves with occasional lectures as the German universities did a hundred years ago.

There have been many improvements in the twenty years since this survey was made. For example Heidelberg has made a full time appointment and Aarhus has decided affirmatively for the position it was considering and now has an Institute for Ecumenical and Missions Theology. Other such institutes are found in Germany, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain and the United States. In Scotland, Aberdeen has developed an important center for mission studies, particularly African studies, and St. Andrews has made a full-time appointment. Most surprising of all, the University of Birmingham has finally broken with the English universities' eschewal of mission professorships and has, in cooperation with Selly Oak, created such a position. In Asia and Africa, too, there have been advances in the recognition of mission studies and some appointments in the field, and recently in Japan the Union Theological Seminary has inaugurated a center for the study and teaching of mission. The old and damaging assumption that mission was a responsibility of only the European and American churches is gradually beginning to crack.

Along with these increasing positions for the teaching of missions there has grown a strong development of associations for the furtherance of this work. A number of national associations including the newly formed American Society of Missiology and the long established *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Missionswissenschaft* are active. Four years ago there took place the inauguration of the International Association for Mission Studies, an event which may be taken as marking the full flowering of this line of endeavor. The Association reported at its last meeting 191 members coming from all the continents. Europeans and Americans, as might be expected, make up the great majority of the membership, but Africa has 13 members and Asia eight. Australia and New Zealand on the other hand have only two and neither holds an appointment in mission studies, for the field has not really been recognized in that part of the world.

From these various developments it would appear that at least in Europe and America mission studies are in an exceedingly strong position and are more firmly established than ever before. Most of the replies to questionnaires from the American schools would support that conclusion. A majority of the graduate Protestant theological seminaries report that mission studies have a secure place in their curriculum and that they expect the present faculty to be replaced upon retirement. The few Roman Catholic schools which have teachers in the field expect to continue to have them and both they and all those who deal with mission in connection with other courses regard the field as holding a secure place even though a small one in future Catholic institutions. Catholic students

in a proportion of three to one are seen as having a positive attitude toward mission though this is usually because of a general interest in “third world” problems. It should be recognized, moreover, that only half the Catholic schools replying have any student attitude to report at all. When it comes to the Bible Schools the positive response is overwhelming. Nearly all see mission studies as attracting the same or even greater interest than they have in the past and feel that they are sure to continue their faculty appointments.

Nevertheless, there is a subordinate strain of malaise and uncertainty which needs to be recognized. In a small group of theological seminaries statements are made that the current faculty in this field will not be replaced upon retirement or that the subject is not secure in the curriculum. There are half a dozen Protestant schools replying in this vein to the questionnaire, quite apart from those which have never recognized the subject. A larger number of schools indicate that the status of the field has declined over the past ten years. Most disturbing is the report on student attitudes. Half the graduate seminaries replying state that current student attitudes toward the subject are negative or indifferent. Words like “apathy” or “reluctance” occur frequently in the reports.

These indications of disquiet need to be taken with much seriousness. The schools from which they come include some of the most important theological institutions in this country, institutions which a dozen years ago were among the liveliest centers of missiological thought. A prospective loss of even a small number of teaching posts is troublesome for a field which has never dealt in large numbers. The negative attitude among students is particularly disturbing when it is remembered that missiology won its way into American seminaries largely as a result of student interest and activity. During the nineteenth century mission studies were what might be called a “peoples’ movement”, carried on chiefly by students and for students on their own initiative. Professors of missions in theological schools are, with the exception of two in Europe and two or three in this country, a strictly twentieth century phenomenon, resulting from the student interest developed in the previous period. A negative attitude among students now can well threaten this growth. Given these facts it is evident that we need to consider seriously the reasons for the present uncertainty and what may be done about it.

The most obvious reason for it, seemingly, would be the uncertainty about many traditional Christian beliefs that exists in the churches today. The recent debates about “Salvation Today” revealed some of that uncertainty among older Christians and the great interest in Oriental mysticism reveals it among the youth. It would seem reasonable to expect that where there is uncertainty about beliefs there will be less interest in making beliefs known and hence less readiness to consider missions. This is supported by the fact that the Bible schools and colleges which represent on the whole a greater degree of assurance

regarding traditional beliefs also represent in their reports a more secure place for the study of missions and a clearer determination to maintain the subject in the future. The insecurity prevails chiefly in the graduate Protestant theological seminaries where there is usually more questioning of beliefs.

Yet though the assurance in Christian beliefs doubtless has some relation to the assurance about interest in missions, it cannot be claimed that there is a complete correlation at this point. Uncertainties can be a reason for interest in and a desire to study a field rather than a reason to ignore it. Strong Christian beliefs can even militate against missions and the study of missions as they did for example among the strict Calvinists of two centuries ago who were exceedingly strong in their Christian convictions but stoutly opposed to missions. In recent years the Roman Catholic schools have shown a slight increase in their attention to missions although they have experienced the greatest onslaught on their traditional beliefs of any Christian group. Far more directly and thoroughly than among Protestants, the traditional beliefs about other religions and their relation to salvation are being challenged by Roman Catholic writers. No outstanding Protestant theologians have written as radically and directly on this matter as Hans Küng and Karl Rahner. The results may have been devastating for many Catholic missions, as Prudencio Damboriena claims,¹ but they have not devastated Catholic mission studies. In fact they have led to a considerable amount of fresh Catholic study and debate.²

As missions and mission studies developed among Protestants in this country they at times grew most vigorously in situations of religious uncertainty. One thinks of the vigorous advance of Congregational missions during the 1880's at the very time when their mission board was being shaken by a dispute over whether all missionaries should be required to subscribe to a belief in the eternal punishment of the unconverted.³ The early years of the twentieth century which saw the rapid growth of mission studies and of professorships in missions in America, were not a time of great religious certainty but of flux and turmoil. New views on missions were being proposed, as in James S. Dennis' famous three volume study on *Christian Missions and Social Progress* (1897-1906). Robert A. Hume, the well known American missionary in India, wrote his *Missions from the Modern View* (1905) proposing that the aim of missions should be "that men in non-Christian lands shall make the same assumptions which men in

1 P. Damboriena, "Aspects of the Missionary Crisis in Roman Roman Catholicism", in *The Future of the Christian World Mission* edited by William J. Danker and Wi Jo Kang. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, pp. 73-74, 78-79.

2 Cf. for example *Foundations of Mission Theology* edited by SEDOS. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1972.

3 Lyman Abbott, *Reminiscences*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915. p. 173. The Reports of the Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners 1880-1889 show a generally increasing number of new missionaries being sent.

Christian lands now make ... whether men join the Christian church or not."⁴ In like vein the noted minister and editor, Lyman Abbott, claimed in 1910 that the new enthusiasm for missions was due,

to the fact that the missionary movement had been freed from the 'grim doctrine of an endless hell for the un-reclaimed heathen' and was now devoting itself to the introduction of a humane social order.⁵

Clearly this was a time when traditional beliefs were being questioned and yet mission studies were flourishing.

These facts suggest that the present problems of mission studies are not to be explained primarily in terms of the strength or weakness of religious convictions. We need to look further for an adequate understanding of the situation.

The most important source of present doubts lies, in my opinion, in the vigorous reaction against Western domination and Western initiatives that has come from the peoples of the Third World and more particularly from the Christians of the Third World and that has had an enormous impact upon the thought and attitudes of Christians in Europe and America. The feeling has become widespread that missions are now outmoded. The supersession of the mission era by the ecumenical era is heralded and missions are seen as a form of colonialism which we must leave behind. For a generation or two now the theological schools of this country have been receiving students from the Third World in considerable numbers. These men and women have often expressed dissatisfaction with the way western missions have operated in their homelands and American theological schools have absorbed many of their dissatisfactions. The experience has doubtless been a healthy one for the schools but it also doubtless has much to do with the negative attitude toward missions and mission studies.

The recent proposal for a moratorium on missionary personnel and funds emanating from some African and Asian churches has been the latest expression of this reaction to Western initiatives and the wide discussion of that proposal has probably added one more layer to the accumulation of hesitations regarding mission studies. At the same time many American churches have been awakened by the social turmoil in their immediate environment to the great needs that lie at their doorsteps and they have embarked on larger efforts in their

4 Robert A. Hume, *Missions from the Modern View*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1905, pp. 32-33.

5 Paul A. Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats*. The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952. Princeton University Press, 1958, p. 68.

own communities. This has meant that they could give less to world missions and there has been a consequent decline in the resources of some of the mission sending agencies, or at least a failure of resources to keep up with rising costs. As a result fewer missionaries are being sent out today and the feeling increases that missions are a thing of the past. It is hardly surprising in the light of all this that large numbers of students have become indifferent or antagonistic to missions and that some theological schools regard mission studies as dispensable.

The problems arise, however, only when mission studies are seen as inextricably linked to the traditional pattern of western activity in the non-western world. This link has been the common assumption in the mind of students, and probably of most theological educators, when they have considered mission courses and mission appointments. It is evidently high time now to raise strong questions about this link. Certainly mission studies took their start and their major development in connection with that western-dominated view of missions. That is the base on which they have grown. But it is too narrow a base for their long term development. Missions themselves have been trying to break with that conception and mission studies should likewise be emancipated from it. At the Mexico City meeting of the World Council's Division of World Mission and Evangelism a decade ago, the six-continent approach to mission was proclaimed and over a decade before that at Whitby the concept of partnership in obedience between the older and younger churches was adopted. The maldistribution of resources which plagues both the world and the Church has kept the partnership from being an equal one and has made the six-continent approach a rather chimerical ideal. But the break with the old outlook has been clearly demanded.

Mission studies, for those who have been following them, have been moving in the same way, though apparently theological education as a whole has not really awakened to this fact. There has been an abundance of attacks from among the missiologists directed against the whole western-based idea of missions and the "salt water" ethos with which they have operated. Books such as *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God* by David Paton (SCM Press, 1953), *Paternalism and the Church* by Michael Hollis (Oxford, 1962) and *Missionary, Go Home* by James Scherer (Prentice-Hall, 1964) have exposed the damage that is done when the western missionary is regarded, by himself or others, as the center of the mission. The important series of volumes entitled "World Studies of Churches in Mission" has examined missionary operations on almost every continent and has treated every area as an area for mission. The School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary has been showing a strong interest in the missionaries sent out by Third World churches.

It is now generally accepted in mission thinking that there are in the Christian understanding of the situation no churches which ought to be

regarded only as mission-sending churches and none that are purely mission-receiving churches, but that the whole church is called to missionary action. The church is to be an outward looking community expressing God's love for the world. Titles of recent studies such as *The Church for Others and the Church for the World* (World Council of Churches, 1967) or *The Church Inside Out* (by J. C. Hoekendijk, Westminster Press, 1966), express the sense of the church's life which has dominated mission studies.

The more that mission studies can emphasize this wider range of concern the more prospect there will be of counteracting the present sense of uncertainty. A wider approach does not mean any loss of interest in missions in, say, Asia or Africa, but it means that those missions will be set in a proper context. The only kind of mission which is appropriate for a body constituted as the church is, is a world mission. This includes west-to-east and also east-to-west missions, international, national and local missions. In this context the "salt water" ethos has a proper place. What is inadmissible is a mission which is exclusively international in its sense of the missionary calling, or, for that matter, one which is exclusively local, glorifying the local situation as the one in which Christians are really called to serve. Both local and international missions are indubitably needed but only if they are seen as part of a world-wide effort and their validity and importance judged in the light of the world context.

Given this view of mission studies it is clear that they must bear important responsibilities in theological education in this country. They are to make parochial American Christians into true members of the ecumenical church with its world-wide missionary calling. They are to open these Christians up to living with, rubbing shoulders with, the plurality of faiths in the world and learning what it means to express the Gospel in relation to such faiths, what styles of missions can be adopted – proclamation, dialogue, service, etc. – and the relations between these styles. They are to challenge the affluent, wasteful life-style of American churches and Christians in light of the world's needs, and to learn what it means to live in solidarity with the poor of this world. (A recent comparison of welfare payments in Connecticut with world income levels revealed that these assuredly hard-pressed welfare recipients had incomes among the top fifteen percent of the world's people.) They are to keep American people informed of the ways in which our national and business policies affect the rest of the world and what may be done about those policies. They are to analyze and report on the world-wide missionary work and the forms that work can and should take in an ecumenical age of partnership rather than domination.

In this last responsibility, that of analyzing and reporting on the mission operation, it should be recognized that when it comes to the analysis of mission in America there are many colleagues who are specialists in that field and who may be able to handle it better than can the person who is looking at the world as

a whole. There are specialists working in urban training centers, action training centers, institutional chaplaincies and other such programs. There are experts in community organization, suburban church growth, Black studies and the like. In other words, when it comes to the American scene there are many people in American theological education better qualified than those strictly in missiology to handle the material. They should be regarded as colleagues in the common effort. Their work does not remove the need for the wider task of mission studies which has been described but supplements it in one crucial area. The missiologist may also offer courses dealing with particular areas of the church's mission, some with which he has a special familiarity, but these likewise do not cancel the need for his more all-embracing work.

The suspicion may be dawning by now that this approach to the place of mission studies puts little emphasis on the task of training persons for cross-cultural mission work, and that suspicion is well founded. The emphasis here is upon that role of mission studies which is relevant for all Christians, in fact really essential for all Christians in our present interdependent world. This is the important role for mission studies in theological education. Those students who are themselves planning to work in some mission operation beyond the confines of their own culture need this type of training just as much or more than any other Christians. They will also need beyond this some specialized skills, such as language skills or applied anthropology, and special bodies of knowledge, such as the religion and culture of the area in which they will be working. If a theological school has a good number of candidates for cross-cultural work and a large teaching staff it will be able to provide for these further specialized studies as well as the more basic ones. (In the appendix two proposals for course offerings are set forth, - one limited to the more basic materials and the other going on to the training of cross-cultural workers.)

But, whatever may be possible in special developments, it is clear that mission studies have an essential role to play if theological education is going to produce the kind of Christians and church workers who are needed for the "global village" in which we now reside. Let us pray that we who are engaged in the field may be equal to the task.



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APPENDIX

PROPOSALS FOR COURSE OFFERINGS IN MISSION STUDIES

At a Symposium held at Milligan College in April 1974 a committee was appointed to draw up guidelines for a curriculum for the training of missionaries in cross-cultural situations. The following subjects were proposed by this committee with the possibility that each of them could be covered in a single course or broken up into two or three courses depending on the number of teachers available.

1. History of Missions
2. Theology of Mission
3. Principles and Practice
4. Cultural Anthropology
5. Comparative Religion
6. Applied Anthropology
7. Traditional Religions
8. Church Growth Case Studies
9. Language Learning
10. Missionary Internship
11. Global awareness and World affairs
12. Spiritual formation and growth of the Missionary

The approach to mission studies suggested in the present paper corresponds in general to the first four subjects in the Milligan committee's proposal but omits the others since they are more specifically for the person going into cross-cultural mission rather than for the general student (or, in the case of no. 12, part of the whole work of theological education rather than limited to mission studies). A series of courses following the approach suggested here would look something like the following, allowing again for combining or dividing topics in accordance with the number of teachers and students.

1. History of Missions
2. The missionary calling of the Church.) (Corresponding to no. 2 above.)
3. The Gospel and the Religions.
4. Social, Economic and Political issues facing the World Church. (Corresponding to No. 11 above.)
5. Issues of cultural diversity facing the World Church. (Corresponding to No. 4 above.)
6. Styles of mission work and their interrelation. E.g. the relation between proclamation and church growth or between social service and conscientization. (Corresponding to No. 3 above.)
7. Mission structure and indigenous church life in an ecumenical setting. (Corresponding to No. 3 above.)
8. Area studies as possible.



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