

# The Laity in Missions

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## The Layman as a Non-professional Missionary

By the "non-professional" missionary or "vocational" or self-supporting missionary, I mean one who does not receive a salary from a mission board or Church and therefore is not subject to their discipline. He is one who travels abroad to aid in the mission of the Church but one who supports himself. He might be called a "tent-making" missionary.<sup>1)</sup>

There are certain advantages that a layman has as a foreign missionary that are unique to him as a "non-professional." Because he is self-supporting, he is not a financial burden to any Church. Fife and Glasser point out that the bill for Protestant missions in 1959 amounted to 170 million dollars.<sup>2)</sup>

Another advantage that the non-professional missionary has is that he can answer those who say, "You preach because you are paid to preach." Many nationals never have the opportunity to see foreign Christians who are not paid to preach. In a day of much professionalism this type of witness is refreshing. Wilmot says that there is a special novelty and appeal in the words of a man who is not paid to preach.<sup>3)</sup>

Also, in his work the non-professional often contacts a different class of people than the professional missionary ordinarily would. This class is the often neglected and very influential class composed of government and professional workers. In his work, the non-professional is exposed to the cross-currents of society, and, say Fife and Glasser, "Often will be more sensitive to political, cultural, and economic trends than some missionaries (buried in bush or embedded in a mission compound.)"<sup>4)</sup>

1) See *The Tent-making Ministry*, WCC Report, 1962.

2) Eric S. Fife and Arthur F. Glasser, *Missions in Crisis* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), p. 167.

3) A. Tony de B. Wilmot, "Secular Work Overseas," *His Magazine*, Vol. 20, Number 6 (March, 1960), p. 15.

4) Fife and Glasser, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

The non-professional can often gain entrance into countries where professional missionaries cannot enter. Teachers, engineers, and medical workers are often welcome where a professional missionary would not be appreciated or even allowed. This has been the case in India and some of the Moslem countries (Such as Near-Eastern countries) today.

The layman is in a better position to understand the problems of the secular world because his daily work is there.<sup>5)</sup>

Often the nonprofessional missionary has some technical or specialized skill which can be used to help the professional missionary in some way. Examples of such skills would be building, engineering, business, accounting, and medicine.

There are also some disadvantages to working as a nonprofessional foreign missionary. Perhaps the greatest frustration would be the lack of a knowledge of the language for the purposes of communication. The professional missionary spends the first few years on the field studying the language with few other responsibilities. The nonprofessional cannot do this. Therefore unless he is linguistically talented, or unless he is in a land which uses his native tongue, he may soon become discouraged and find the situation almost impossible as far as any verbal communication is concerned.<sup>6)</sup> Although an interpreter could perhaps be used, this method has never proven very effective.

At times nonprofessional missionaries have gone into countries that would not accept professional missionaries only to find that the government would not allow them to "proselytize." Their hands were tied as far as any active verbal witness was concerned. This is true in Saudi Arabia and other Moslem countries in the Near East today. Although they were able to reveal Christ by their lives, they could not verbally communicate the kerygma.<sup>7)</sup>

Due to the fact that the regular working hours of the nonprofessional are all taken up with his secular work, his available time and energy for an active outside witness naturally limited. "The primary responsibility of the 'nonprofessional' missionary will be to perform his daily duties in a manner that will glorify the Lord."<sup>8)</sup>

A transfer of the nonprofessional missionary by his company or agency from one place to another could mean that his mission work in the first area would be discontinued if no one was left to continue it.

Perhaps the most serious danger of the nonprofessional missionary is that of becoming spi-

ritually disoriented. The world's standard of morality does not always measure up to the Biblical standard. There is a pressure of social conformity in a secular society. I know of a Christian engineer who was working in South America who quit his job and returned to the States because he didn't feel he could conscientiously participate in the social life there. The nonprofessional has little opportunity for fellowship with other Christians. Servicemen overseas have often complained of this problem and it has been used as an excuse for participating in immoral activities. The nonprofessional seldom has much prayer support from the home Church, and he is not subject to the discipline of a mission board or local Church. If he would deviate from his original purpose, he could hinder the work of the professional missionary, and there is no authoritative body to remove him from the field of work. To help prevent this pitfall of spiritual disorientation, the nonprofessional should seek active fellowship with a local church, or with individual missionaries where he can experience mutual correction and encouragement. Some have found that being an associate member of the mission board has met the need; others prefer to be more free. All, of course, "Must have learned to draw continual supplies of grace from God by intimate and disciplined devotional habits, and through these to maintain spiritual depth and vitality."<sup>9)</sup> A dual mission membership may be the answer to the problem in modern times.<sup>10)</sup>

Since the Church's apostolic mission carries with it beyond its purely spiritual duties, influence upon temporal civilization, it follows that this mission is fully exercised only through the lay people doing their proper part in it.<sup>11)</sup>

If the laity of the Church dispersed in and through the world, are really what they are called to be, the real uninterrupted dialogue between Church and world happens through them. They form the daily repeated projection of the Church into the world. They embody the meeting of Church and world.<sup>12)</sup>

### **The Laity's Place in the Fulfillment of the Church's Responsibility for Foreign Missions**

Whose responsibility is foreign missions? Bavinck answers in no uncertain terms that missions, including foreign missions, is the responsibility of the organized institutional Church.<sup>13)</sup>

9) *Ibid*, p. 171.

10) For the advantages to this see Fife and Glasser, pp. 171-173.

11) Yves M. J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1963), p. 375.

12) Kraemer, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

13) Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

5) Wilmot, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

6) Fife and Glasser, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

7) *Ibid*, p. 169.

8) *Ibid*, p. 170.

This is over against the idea of Gustav Warneck who says that missions should be conducted by an inner circle within the Church (a Gemeinde), an ecclesiola in ecclesia.

Bavinck also says that the task of missions "Is not the responsibility of" a group of Church members, but is that of the Church, itself.<sup>14)</sup>

The responsibility of foreign missions is not that of corporations or societies independent of the Church, but rather that of the Church, itself. It certainly is not the responsibility of the State. Bavinck would not look with much favor on such colonial mission companies as the Dutch East India Company, etc. He thinks that if the Church would accept its responsibility of foreign missions, there would be no need for the independent mission societies and boards. If the Church is not fulfilling its responsibility in missions, the answer is not found in starting a society within the Church as Warneck might suggest, nor is it found in starting an independent group outside of the Church. But, rather, the solution is found in the reformation of the Church-bringing it to the place where it recognizes and accepts this responsibility. Bavinck says:

Scripture is quite plain that it is the Church, the body of Christ, which forms the organ through which and in which the glorified Christ will reveal his great work of salvation to the world ..... It is indeed the Church itself which is called to perform missionary work. There are no other institutions which can take over this responsibility.<sup>15)</sup>

The question which then arises is whether the "church" means only the Church in its institutional form, or whether it would also include the mission activities of individual believers. To this Bavinck answers that although the official missionary commission rests upon the Church in its institutional form, the ordinary Church member, by virtue of the priesthood of all believers, can on an individual basis as well as in organizations outside the Church, work in close cooperation with the Church. Bavinck allows for missions to be carried on independent of the Church, but emphasizes that it is first the Church's responsibility. He gives the example of Christian laity working in hospitals, schools, and other places -doing missionary work independent of the Church.<sup>16)</sup>

Bavinck does not restrict the responsibility of the laity in missions to office bearers. He feels that every member is included. He says:

14) *Ibid*, p. 61, see footnote.

15) Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

16) *Ibid*, p. 60.

The believer must not only live blamelessly before the world, but must also be in the daily conversation with the world, thereby declaring the great works of God. The missionary task may not be avoided by a single member of the congregation. The first Christian Church grew because of the spontaneous witness of ordinary men. This is the only missionary method that can endure in the long run. To be a missionary is to stand for Christ in our vocation and in all our activities.<sup>17)</sup>

Bavinck then made a distinction between the official or professional missionary service, as manifest in the sending out of missionaries and the spontaneous non-official or nonprofessional proclamation of the Gospel, as conducted by believers either as individuals or within certain organizations. "The work of missions," says Bavinck, "is too broad and too all-inclusive to be limited to the actions of the Church in its institutional form. Missionary activity takes place in life in its entirety, including both the organized and the unorganized activity of believers."<sup>18)</sup>

### The Laity's Role in the History of Missions

The laity has throughout the history of the Church played an important part in foreign missions, working both inside and outside the institutional Church.

Many of the Apostles were laymen. After the crucifixion a number of them seem to have returned to their "secular" work. On the other hand, they were office bearers, so this sets them apart from ordinarily considered laymen. The Church began with the witness and activity of "common" men. I Corinthians 12 speaks of the "diakonia" or "ministry" in the non-technical sense. Many apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists were laymen (of. Eph. 4: 11).<sup>19)</sup>

The Apostle Paul was often accompanied by lay helpers in his foreign missionary work. Some of these "fellow laborers" were Gaius of Derbe, Tychicus of Asia, and Sopater (Acts 19:29, 20:4). Philemon 4:2 and 3 speak of Eudias and Syntyche who labored with Paul. Romans 16:1, 6, and 12 mention other women who labored for the Gospel. It seems that a good share of those who labored together with Paul and the other apostles in the foreign missionary work were those who held no official office in the Church.<sup>20)</sup>

17) *Ibid*, p. 67.

18) *Ibid*, p. 68.

19) Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 19.

20) J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 40.

In the New Testament Church the Faith was spread in a spontaneous manner by dispersed laymen. The Faithful were dispersed by persecution. "Those who were scattered abroad went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Following the death of Stephen, these refugees went to various areas as missionaries. Some apparently were driven to Phoenicia, some to Cyprus, and others to Antioch. "Those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except the Jews" (Acts 11:19) But the preaching was directed to others besides the Jews. "There were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20).

In a sense, every Christian in the early Church was a missionary many of them foreign missionaries. Traders, slaves, and soldiers gave spontaneous witness in foreign lands of the Kerygma by word and deed. Pliny, writing to Tragan in about 112 A. D., not only makes mention of a large number of Christians, but also that these displayed a peculiar way of life, including such things as caring for and burying their dead, helping the poor, sick, and orphans, etc. Later the heathen could not help but notice when the Roman Church alone cared for 15,000 widows. A good number of the earliest Christians were slaves who were taken away their masters to another country. These slaves often were intellectually and culturally equal to or superior to their masters. In many cases the masters put the Christian Slaves to the task of teaching their children. Often the masters themselves were included among the students. The slaves used this opportunity to present the Christian message when at all possible. This was the method by which the Goths first were introduced to Christianity. In their many wars the Goths had captured a number of Cappadocian prisoners who were Christian.<sup>21)</sup> The multitudes of martyrs from various parts of the Roman Empire presented an unforgettable witness as they layed down their lives at the stake. The Apostle Paul and Justin Martyr are only two of a host who were tremendously impressed by the testimony of martyrs. The severe persecution and the spirit of the martyrs under Nero served to turn the attitude of the populace from one of hostility to Christians to that of sympathy.

A number of Church Fathers were laymen, including such men as Tertullian, Cyprian, Justin Martyr, Origen, and Augustine.<sup>22)</sup> They often witnessed first as philosophers. Both Cyprian and Augustine presented an outstanding witness as "secular" career laymen in the

21) Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Baltimore: Penquin Books, 1964), p. 55.

22) Kraemer, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 20.

field of education.<sup>23)</sup>

From the fourth century on through the mediaeval period, the monastic movement played an important part in foreign missions of the Church. Many of the monks could be classified in the "lay" category as they did not have to be ordained to definite office. As Kraemer points out, "His essential characteristic is that he does not have an 'office' or function, but a special form of life which consists in not living in and for world, but living the perfect evangelical life, which means to leave the world."<sup>24)</sup> Kraemer went on to say that most of the preaching of the mendicant and knight orders was done by the laity. These would include the Franciscans, Dominicans and the Jesuits, the great missionary arm of the Roman Church. Francis of Assisi considered his order essentially a lay order.<sup>25)</sup> Women's orders have always been lay orders. Those sent out by the various orders have often used the "comprehensive approach. They have performed various services such as teaching, nursing, social work, agricultural work, etc."<sup>26)</sup>

From about 500 to 1500 A. D., the foreign missionaries of the Church were, for the most part as in the first five centuries, the traders, the soldier, and the slaves. There was not the distinction between laity and clergy at first, as there is today or even at the end of mediaeval period. Traders from the East, especially Nestorian Christians, went to the eastern countries including Persia, Turkistan, India and China. Also, traders from the East came in contact with Christians as they went to the near East and Mediterranean countries. Soldiers sent to foreign countries witnessed there and non-Christian soldiers often became Christian after having contact with Christians abroad. An example of these is the viking, Olaf Trygvesson (969~1000) who became a Christian after abusing some of them in Great Britain, and later tried to convert Norway by force, using violent methods.<sup>27)</sup> Other Vikings settled down in Great Britain and were converted in Britain.

As in the first few centuries, Christian slaves in captivity witnessed to their masters. Also, some Christians bought slaves in order to convert and disciple them, and then send them back to their own country. Examples of these are Pope Gregory (c. 600) and later Williboard who bought forty Frisian slaves.

23) *Ibid.*, p. 20.

24) Kraemer, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

25) Howard Grimes, *The Rebirth of the Laity* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 46-48.

26) *Ibid.*, p. 49.

27) Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

As previously mentioned, emperors of countries sometimes became involved in the missionary enterprise. They were missionary agents in three basic ways. First of all, they often protected and supported the work of missions financially. The Frankish king, Pepin II, protected and supported the "missionary to the North," Anskar. Secondly, often when a king became converted to Christianity, the nation, or at least a good number of the population would voluntarily become Christian. Examples of this are King Ethelbert in Scotland, and King Canute in Denmark. Finally, there was the case where the Christian emperor would seek to convert populations by force. Otto the Great, the first "Holy Roman Emperor," sought to convert multitudes by the sword, as also did Olaf Trygvansson of Norway. In many cases political motives were present, and more harm than good resulted for the Christian cause. This was certainly the case with the Crusades. To this day the Moslems suspect ulterior, militaristic motives of any Christian who might seek to do mission work. Mention should be made of Charlemagne who already in the last of the eighth century who literally conquered the Saxons to Christianity.

One who could be classified as one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church was Ramon Lull (c. 1235). First he was associated with the Dominicans, and then with the Franciscans. He was a scholar who was burdened to evangelize the Saracens. Lull stressed the need to know the language of the people whom you wish to convert, sought to present the Christian religion in an intelligible way making use of reasoning, and also stressed the need of consecration and willingness to witness to foreigners. To illustrate the spirit of Lull, Neill gives the following quotation from him:

Missionaries will convert the world by preaching, but also through the shedding of tears and blood and with great labor, and through a bitter death.<sup>28)</sup>

Lull experienced all of these in his efforts to reach the Saracens.

In the beginning of the Protestant Reformation there was a lack of interest in missions on the part of the Reformers. They had repudiated the monastery which was a primary source of missionary personnel; they had repudiated the Papacy which had in some cases pushed foreign missions. Often when they repudiated the idea of Apostolic succession, they said that the Great Commission was only for the Apostles. Many expected the immediate return of Christ, and therefore considered foreign missions to be out of the question. It was however,

28) *Ibid*, p. 137.

a layman who challenged some of these early views of the Reformers. Von Weltz, a Dutch layman (1621-1668), challenged the Lutheran, Gerhard, who had said that the Great Commission had already been accomplished.

Many of those trained by John Calvin taught their laity the great truths of the Bible. These laymen became political and cultural leaders and wielded great influence in molding the societies in which they lived and worked. This outreach influenced most of Europe including France (Huguenots), Bohemia, Holland, Germany, Netherlands, Scotland, Czechoslovakia, England, Italy, and Switzerland. The Huguenots of France were recognized to be especially strong in two hundred cities of that country. It was said that they constituted ten percent of the population. Cities such as Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Heidelberg, Dort, Edinburgh, and Geneva became centers of the Reformed Faith. (See article by George Fry in the Oct. 23, 1970, issue of *Christianity Today*, "John Calvin: Theologian and Evangelist".)

Even up to and including modern times, the laity has been the stimulus for the missionary movement. In the nineteenth century the Sunday-school movement which in many ways was a foreign missionary movement was a lay movement. Such independent youth movements as the YMCA, the YWCA, and Christian Endeavor were missionary in nature. The Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), a lay student movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century was a great source of missionary personnel and a great stimulus for foreign missions. No one can dispute the fact that laymen were the key to the foreign missions emphasis of the "Great Century" of missions.<sup>29)</sup> Unfortunately, some of the above started out with an evangelical witness, but later became little more than social organizations having little evangelical witness.

Kraemer points out that the aggressive nineteenth century campaigners, men such as Moody and his companions, were laymen often working outside the bounds of the Church. But, says Kraemer,

It cannot be too strongly stressed that these great expressions of Christian lay-vision and sense of responsibility have performed vicariously a task, which in principle lies within the *calling of the Church*, but for which the Church as a whole was in the nineteenth century too clumsy, too when defensive and empty of real vision.

To the present day in the twentieth century the great figures emphasizing missions have included the laity. Far East Latourneau, is just one of a host that could be named. in the U.S.

29) See William T. Ellis, *Men and Missions* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1910), pp. 71-80.

30) Kraemer, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

A few examples of well-known laymen who have had a missionary outreach are Dr. Carlson who was martyred in Africa, a Dutch nurse under the Orthodox Presbyterian Church who was martyred in Eritrea, Nate Saint, the pilot who was martyred by the Auca Indians in South America, and Elizabeth Elliott, wife of one of the martyred men, who returned to Ecuador with her tiny daughter to teach the Indians to read. Also included are many of the Wycliff Bible Translators who have put the Scriptures into the hands of people of many countries in their own language. The list of lay missionaries is almost endless.

The first missionary to reside in Korea was not a professional missionary, but rather a Christian medical doctor who became the personal physician of the first foreigner allowed to reside in Korea, a U.S. foreign minister. Because of Dr. Allen's witness, the Gospel began to be heard. Through the years, many other foreign laymen have come as medical doctors, nurses, teachers, agriculturalists, industrialists, military men, etc. Dr. Chisholm and Dr. Byram are two medical doctors who worked in North Korea and in Manchuria. Dr. Chisholm later worked in South Korea ending up in Pusan. He witnessed regularly in the markets, selling Bibles, etc. One prominent missionary feels the large number of churches which sprang up after the war in the Pusan area was due partly to this physician's witness.

Bruce Hunt in the recent book, *The Korean Pentecost*, tells of some of Korea's outstanding lay missionaries of this century. Some of these laymen died in prison under the Japanese because of the witness they gave before the Japanese including their opposition to the Shinto Shrine worship being imposed on the Koreans. Elder Pak Kwan Joon, a well-known doctor who had started a hospital, with his son and Miss Ahn Ee Sook, a public school teacher, carried the protest against shrine worship into the Imperial Diet in Japan. They were later imprisoned in Korea and died in the Pyongyang prison. Miss Ahn Young Ae was a servant girl who died in Manchuria after imprisonment because of her faith. Mr. Lee Young Hee was a businessman who moved to North Manchuria for the purpose of doing pioneer evangelism. He started seven churches in just a few years, but was imprisoned where he died. Mr. Pak Ee Hum became a lay evangelist who was severely tortured and imprisoned in Manchuria where he died. Mr. Kim Yoon Sup was a lay preacher who started churches and stood against shrine worship. He was arrested ten times and finally died in prison. The two young sons of Sohn Yang Woon witnessed to the communists and were shot to death because they refused to deny their faith.

There have been many lay people who have had a missionary outreach in Korean church history, and there are many today. One of today's outstanding laymen having a witness is a

famous surgeon, Dr. Chang Ki Ryo. Dr. Chang operated on North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, and insisted on praying before the surgery. He is still an active witness for Christ and promotes various lay witness activities among the doctors, nurses, and others.

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