

## Salt and Light: Missions and the Church Worldwide

### Overview

We have learned that Christianity experienced dramatic growth in the first few centuries after the death of Christ. That growth slowed after the break-up of the Roman empire, and vast reaches of the world (outside of Europe and western Asia) remained untouched by its message. This changed with the Protestant Reformation and the development of technology. The world opened up to Christians who made the most of the situation by taking the gospel to people who had, for the most part, never heard it before. Missionary work resurfaced and it began to flourish.

The idea of missions can evoke images of men and women in pith helmets venturing into remote tropical locations, or of teenagers helping to build houses in Mexico over Spring Break, or of the offering plate going by to support a visiting missionary.

Missions may also convey some negative associations with 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial expansion efforts. In an age in which many value diversity, we might feel uncomfortable about the idea of asking others to give up spiritual traditions that have glued their culture together for thousands of years. Missions can also conjure up memories of local cultures and communities that were devastated by well-meaning missionaries who undermined local leaders, established norms, and local economies while introducing new diseases that decimated the population.

From its inception, the church has been an evangelistic body reaching out to unbelievers everywhere. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was an unprecedented period of missionary activity. As we explore the history of missions over the last 300 years, we will answer the following questions:

- What drives missionary passion in believers?
- How can the Christian faith be shared without destroying indigenous cultures? Is Christianity essentially only a religion of the west?
- Can people be saved apart from the gospel?
- What is the future of missions?
- What does the Great Commission have to do with everyday believers? Is everyone supposed to be involved in missions?

## Understanding the Setting

1700

1722 Moravians begin missionary activity

1740 First Great Awakening

1779 William Carey (“Father of Modern Missions”) converted to Christianity

1792 Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians*

Carey and others found Baptist Missionary Society

1793 Carey to India

1800

1810 American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions founded

1812 Adoniram and Ann Judson to India

1841 David Livingstone to Africa

## Step 1: Grasp the Issue

### Sound Bites

“Do not try to persuade the Chinese to change their rites, their customs, their ways, as long as they are not openly opposed to religion and good morals. What would be sillier than to import France, Spain, Italy or any other country of Europe into China? Don’t import these, but the faith. The faith does not reject or crush the rites and customs of any race as long as these are not evil. Rather, it wants to preserve them.”

– Roman Catholic document to French Catholic missionaries in 1659

“Missions has never just involved sharing Jesus. It is Jesus and something else: our culture, our clothing style, our language, our technology, our economic systems, our politics.”

“The task of the missionary is to evangelize, baptize, and build up new believers. Yet we persist in seeing ourselves as social service agencies.”

“The task of the missionary is to build God’s kingdom. Teaching agriculture, building hospitals, and feeding orphans is part of God’s call as well.”

1750: 57 generations after Christ, world is 22.2% Christian (85.2% of them being White), 25.8% evangelized, with printed scriptures available in 60 languages.

1900: 62 generations after Christ, world is 34.4% Christian (81.1% of them being White), 51.3% evangelized, with printed scriptures available in 537 languages. – David Barrett

“I am not reaping the harvest; I can scarcely claim to be sowing the seed; I am hardly ploughing the soil; *but I am gathering out the stones*. That, too, is missionary work; let it be supported by loving sympathy and fervent prayer.”

– Robert Bruce, Irish missionary writing of slow progress in Persia

“Missions is just a combination of Christianity, commerce, and civilization—they always go together.”

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## Case Studies

While discussing the sometimes devastating impact of missionaries on cultures in the 19th century, Dwight, a member of your small group answers, “Sure, each generation has made its share of mistakes. But the mistakes of missionaries in times past doesn’t mean that all missions damage cultures.” Estefan, a visiting student from Peru answers, “I disagree. It is impossible to ask people to accept a new spiritual faith without undermining the indigenous culture. Spirituality is at the heart of any worldview, and worldview is at the heart of any culture. Both logic and history prove that true evangelical missions, despite intent or method, will inevitably destroy traditional cultures.”

Who is right? Can we evangelize the world without destroying alternative cultures? Should we care? Explain.

You and your spouse have been struggling with a recent sermon by your minister, who’s challenged you to consider overseas missions. Your spouse understands the call, but answers, “I think all Christians are called to be witnesses for Christ in their daily lives, wherever they are, but they don’t have to go overseas to do it. Surely God has called us to be witnesses in the country we were born in. We should leave Christian work in other countries to the people who were born in them. I’m happy to contribute money, but I guess I feel okay about not putting much energy or thought into overseas missions.”

How would you respond?

**What are some questions we need to explore as we seek to gain a better understanding of this issue?**

## Step 2: Study the Scriptures

### **Matthew 28:16-20**

Here in the Great Commission, Christ gave the disciples their marching orders.

- What key elements does Jesus include for missions?

### **Romans 1:18-20**

Paul explains why even those who have not heard the gospel are accountable to God for their sin.

- What does Paul say about “those who have never heard?”

### **Romans 10:14-15**

- What does Paul indicate regarding the ability of persons who have not heard the message of Christ? Can they be saved?

## Step 3: Consult Other Sources

The spread of the Gospel outside of the Europe and North America was the result not of denominations but individuals responding to God's call. Reading 1 looks at the early leaders who would reach out of their personal and church comfort zones. Reading 2 explores the strengths and dangers of missionary movements being linked to other Western culture in colonialism. Finally, Reading 3 addresses the question, "What about those who never hear the Gospel?"

"To Earth's Remotest People," by Bruce Shelley.

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## To Earth's Remotest People

by Bruce Shelley

In an English village, late in the eighteenth century, stood a humble workshop. Over its door a sign announced, "Secondhand shoes bought and sold." Inside, the shoemaker, William Carey, repaired a neighbor's boot or, when time allowed, continued his study of Latin and Greek. Over the workbench was a crude map of the world. On it Carey had penned bits of information from the voyages of Captain James Cook or some other world traveler. A friend, Thomas Scott, called the workshop: "Carey's College."

Carey's workbench and map are fit symbols of the awakening interest in distant peoples during the Age of Progress and in the means of getting the gospel to them. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Protestant Christianity scarcely existed outside Europe and America. Asia was almost untouched by the gospel, except for small traces in India and in the East Indies where the Dutch had taken over from the Portuguese. Africa was the "dark continent" except for the ancient Copts in Egypt and Ethiopia. After eighteen centuries Christianity was far from being a world religion.

It is a different story today. The front page of almost any metropolitan newspaper carries news, daily, of events vitally linked with Christianity somewhere on the earth.

The great era of Christian expansion was the nineteenth century. "Never had any other set of ideas, religious or secular, been propagated over so wide an area by so many professional agents maintained by the unconstrained donations of so many millions of individuals." That is the informed judgment

of Kenneth Scott Latourette, the foremost historian of Christianity's expansion. For sheer magnitude the Christian mission in the nineteenth century is without parallel in human history.

How do we explain this sudden explosion of Protestant energy aimed at winning the world for Christ?

### The Pioneer in Modern Missions

During the first century of Protestant history, the Roman Catholic countries, Spain and Portugal, dominated the commercial and imperial expansion of European peoples. The great missionary names were Xavier, Las Casas, and Ricci. Only after the English defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588) and the emergence of the British and Dutch as colonial powers do new continents and peoples open to Protestant missionaries.

The first Protestants to attempt to reach distant peoples with the gospel were the Pietists. Moravian concern, however, was focused on individuals in some European colony, perishing without the knowledge of Christ. The Christian groups created by Pietists were tiny islands in the surrounding sea of "heathenism."

William Carey introduced Christians to missions on a grander scale. He thought in terms of the evangelization of whole countries, and of what happens when whole populations become Christian. He held that the foreign missionary can never make more than a small contribution to the accomplishment of the work that has to be done, and that therefore the development of

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the local ministry is the first and greatest of all missionary considerations. Above all, he saw that Christianity must be firmly rooted in the culture and traditions of the land in which it is planted. For all these reasons and more Carey gained the title, “Father of Modern Missions.”

The English cobbler was a most unlikely candidate for greatness. He was married to a girl who fell victim to mental illness, and what Carey earned as a shoemaker was often too little to provide enough to eat. Yet the greatness of the man was within, not in his circumstances. He had a ravenous hunger for knowledge and would go without food to buy a book. Columbus and Captain James Cook were his great heroes.

In 1779, through a fellow shoemaker, he was converted to faith in Christ, and in 1783 he was baptized as a believer. After gaining some preaching experience he became pastor of the Moulton Baptist Chapel, supporting his family by teaching and shoemaking.

In Baptist circles he met a fellow pastor, Andrew Fuller, who resisted the prevailing Calvinistic idea among Baptists that preaching should avoid application to the hearers and appeals to conversion, lest the preacher interfere somehow in God’s election of his chosen people.

“We have sunk into such a compromising way of dealing with the unconverted,” Fuller complained, “as to have well nigh lost the spirit of the primitive preachers, and hence it is that sinners of every description can sit so quietly as they do, year after year, in our places of worship.”

From Fuller’s teaching, Carey drew the inescapable inference that, if it is the duty of all men to repent and believe the gospel—as Fuller argued—it is also the duty of those entrusted with the gospel to carry it to the whole world.

In 1792 Carey published *An Enquiry into*

*the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. It created an epoch. In it Carey took up the five objections that people raised against missions to “heathen” lands: their distance, their barbarism, the danger that would be incurred, the difficulties of support, and the unintelligible languages. One by one he answered these. The same obstacles had not prevented the merchants from going to distant shores. “It only requires,” he wrote, “that we should have as much love to the souls of our fellow-creatures, and fellow sinners, as they have for the profits arising from a few otter skins, and all these difficulties could be easily surmounted.” He ended his appeal with practical proposals for the preaching of the gospel throughout the world.

By encouraging each other Carey and Fuller succeeded in breaking free from the restrictive theology of their time. They went back to the New Testament, especially to Jesus’ injunction to preach the gospel to all the world, and to the apostle Paul’s declaration of God’s intention: “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10, 11).

As a result, in October 1792 Carey, Fuller, and eleven Baptist colleagues formed the Baptist Missionary Society, and within a year Carey and his family were on their way to India.

The British East India Company, which had been the virtual ruler of India since 1763, was exercising its full power at that time. It was not enthusiastic about missions. Its interest was in profits. Most of its representatives, living free and easy lives and enjoying to the full their sense of racial superiority, considered “the sending out of



missionaries into our Eastern possessions to be the maddest, most extravagant, most costly, most indefensible project which has ever been suggested by a moonstruck fanatic. Such a scheme is pernicious, imprudent, useless, harmful, dangerous, profitless, fantastic.”

The Company refused Carey permission to live in Calcutta, so he settled instead in Serampore, under the Danish flag. He secured employment as foreman of an indigo factory in Bengal. Since the position demanded only three months of the year, he found plenty of time for intensive study of the oriental languages. In 1799 two fellow Baptists, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, joined Carey at Serampore. For the next quarter-century the three men worked together to organize a growing network of mission stations in and beyond Bengal.

Carey and his companions plunged courageously into all the intricacies of Hindu thought. They did not regard these studies as in any way a distraction from their missionary work. On the contrary, they regarded a full understanding of Hindu thought as an essential part of their equipment, not only because the preacher of the gospel cannot be clearly understood if he speaks merely out of the self-confidence of his own knowledge, but also because they understood that it is not only the souls and bodies of men that need to be redeemed—the thought-world of a non-Christian nation is also one of those realms that are to be taken captive and brought into subjection to Christ. By 1824 Carey had supervised six complete and twenty-four partial translations of the Bible as well as publishing several grammars, dictionaries, and translations of Eastern books.

### The Contagion of Missionary Service

The example of the Serampore trio proved

contagious. The beginning of the nineteenth century found a new and pervasive determination in Protestantism to carry the gospel to all men. The earlier prevailing attitude of the major churches had considered missions an unnecessary and hopeless undertaking. Now voices were raised on all sides proclaiming the duty of all Christians to share in the conversion of the peoples of the whole world. The gospel was not the private possession of European peoples.

The list of missionary pioneers would run into the hundreds: Henry Martyn in India, Robert Morrison in China, John Williams in the South Seas, Adoniram Judson in Burma, Alexander Duff in India, Allen Gardiner on Tierra del Fuego, Robert Moffat in South Africa, and many more. Scores of other missionaries and their wives are long forgotten because they died in a matter of months in some malaria-infested tropical climate or at the hands of some savage tribe.

In large part this new passion to preach the gospel to the “heathen” sprang from those portions of Protestantism deeply influenced by the eighteenth-century evangelical revivals in England and America. For the first three decades of the new missionary era the endeavor was almost exclusively evangelical.

This is hardly surprising. The evangelical awakenings revolutionized preaching and its objectives. Traditional churchmen usually limited the minister’s task to nurturing the seed of faith planted at baptism in virtually all members of the parish. Such men could not imagine preaching the gospel in a tribal society. At the same time those Christians who held a rigid doctrine of predestination never seemed to concern themselves with the elect in India or China. Evangelicals, however, like Carey, saw preaching as calling sinners to God through faith in Christ. They felt a personal responsibility to do this, and saw no

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difference in principle between “baptized heathen” in Britain and non-Christian peoples overseas.

Only in the 1820s and 1830s did interest in overseas missions become a general feature of British church life. This was due in part to the success of evangelicals in influencing English and Scottish society. Many of their values were adopted outside their circle. In particular, the idea of Britain as a Christian nation, with Christian responsibilities overseas, took root.

The vision of this missionary task is expressed in thousands of sermons and hundreds of hymns of that time. Reginald Heber, who gave his life for India, serving as Bishop of Calcutta, provides an example in his widely sung “From Greenland’s Icy Mountain”:

Can we, whose souls are lighted  
With wisdom from on high;  
Can we to men benighted  
The lamp of life deny?  
Salvation, O salvation!  
The joyful sound proclaim,  
Till earth’s remotest nation  
Has learnt Messiah’s Name.

Two emphases led to this new Protestant world vision. One, as Carey and Fuller illustrate, was evangelical. The Bible teaches that men are lost without faith in Christ, and the Lord commands believers in every age to make salvation known in all the world.

The other was prophetic. Many Christians in the nineteenth century followed Jonathan Edwards in the belief that the knowledge of the Lord would fill the earth as the waters cover the sea, and this spread of the gospel was preparation for the coming reign of Christ upon the earth. This belief in a future reign of Christ was called millennialism.

The Protestant mission to all the world

was no empty dream. The dedication of the missionary movement blended with the optimism of the Age of Progress to make the achievement of the goal seem quite possible. Thus, the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions took as its watchword, “the evangelization of the world in this generation.”

The vision was constantly renewed by some fresh account from Africa or the South Pacific. None of these proved more inspiring than the reports of the spiritual darkness of Africa or the horrors of the Arab slave trade sent home by David Livingstone (1813-1873).

The great explorer of “the dark continent” came from a hardy clan of Scotsmen. When he was nineteen, he determined to devote his life to the “alleviation of human misery.” He studied as a doctor to prepare himself for the work of a missionary, and, attracted by the fame of Robert Moffat in South Africa, he went to Africa to help in the work.

### Livingstone in Africa

Arriving in 1841, Livingstone served for ten years in the ordinary routine of missionary work. But he was not a man to stay long in any one place. The mind and impulse of the explorer were in him, and he was always drawn on, in his own words, by “the smoke of a thousand villages” that had never seen a missionary.

The first great journey that made him famous led him through the jungles to the west coast in Angola, and then—because he would not desert the African carriers who had accompanied him—right across the continent to Quilimane on the east coast. On this journey he showed all the qualities of a great explorer. His manner with the Africans was so patient that he never had to use violence. And his scientific and geographical observations

were minutely accurate. This one trip opened the heart of Africa to the modern age.

But Livingstone was at all times more than a traveler. His cause was the gospel. His journal abounds in passages of almost mystical devotion. Shortly before setting out on his great journey he wrote: "I place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ."

What moved him more than anything else was what he called "this open sore of the world"—the devastating slave trade of central Africa. Speaking to the students at Cambridge in 1857 he said: "I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity: do you carry out the work which I have begun, I leave it to you."

Commerce and Christianity? Was Livingstone simply a forerunner of those colonialist exploiters who made life in so many parts of Africa a nightmare? No, far from it. Livingstone realized that the slave trade could not continue apart from the African's own participation in it. When slave-raiding was the way to wealth, the temptation was always present to engage in those raids on weaker neighboring tribes that made life perilous for the defenseless. Only if the Africans could be persuaded to engage in legitimate commerce, exchanging the products of their own fields and forests for those desirable things the white man could supply, would the evil and destructive commerce be brought to an end. That, at any rate, was Livingstone's conviction, a central part of his dream for Africa.

How was this missionary vision turned to action? What were the channels for this burst of spiritual energy? The traditional denominations used one of three forms of church government: episcopal, presbyterian, or congregational. The supporters of each claimed to be following the Bible, and all the

main arguments on each side were well-known. Men had suffered—some even shed blood—for each form of government.

But as the conviction of the responsibility to spread the gospel worldwide began to dawn on British and American Christians it became clear that none of the traditional forms of church government would enable the church to embark on a world mission. Supporters of global evangelism were driven to find another form of cooperation: the voluntary society.

### Creation of the Voluntary Society

Again, Carey proved the pioneer. When he wrote his *Enquiry* he asked: what would a trading company do? From this, he proposed the formation of a company of serious-minded Christians, laymen and ministers. The group should have a committee to collect and sift information, and to find funds and suitable missionaries to send to foreign lands.

The voluntary society, of which the missionary society was one early form, transformed nineteenth-century Christianity. It was invented to meet a need rather than for theological reasons, but in effect it undermined the established forms of church government. It made possible interdenominational action. Anglican, Baptist, Congregationalist and Methodist could work together for defined purposes without raising troublesome questions of church structure. It also altered the power base in the church by encouraging lay leadership. Ordinary Christian men, and later women, came to hold key positions in the important societies, something thought impossible elsewhere in the church.

These features appeared early in the history of missionary societies. The London Missionary Society adopted in 1795 its "fundamental principle that our design is not

to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy or any other form of church government . . . but the glorious gospel of the blessed God to the heathen.” One of the founders called for “the funeral of bigotry.”

Thanks to the creation of the societies the missionary enthusiast who collected a penny a week from members of his local missionary society auxiliary, and distributed the missionary magazine, participated fully in the work of missions. Through the labors of such people candidates for service often came forward. The American missionary Rufus Anderson, wrote in 1834: “It was not until the present century that the evangelical churches of Christendom were ever really organized with a view to the conversion of the world.” They became organized by means of the voluntary society.

In the United States the first foreign missionary society was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810). It was formed on the initiative of a group of students at the newly created Congregational Andover Theological Seminary. The leader of the group was Samuel J. Mills, who while at Williams College had instigated the formation of a small society in which each member pledged to devote his life to missionary service. At Andover, the society included the later famous missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson. Students, then, as so many times in later years, laid the foundation for a missionary advance, this one for the youthful American nation.

In a few years Baptists, Presbyterians, and other major denominations followed the Congregationalists in creating missionary agencies. The conversion of the “heathen” became one of the major concerns of local congregations in every city and town in the country, stimulated by the continuous activity of local societies and women’s organizations,

“children’s days for foreign missions,” occasional visits from missionaries on furlough, periodical campaigns for offerings, and, more recently, the inclusion of support of foreign missions as a large item in regular church budgets.

By the end of the nineteenth century, almost every Christian body, from the Orthodox Church of Russia to the Salvation Army, and almost every country, from the Lutheran Church of Finland and the Waldensian Church of Italy to the newest denomination in the United States, had its share in the missionary enterprise overseas.

Many times these early missionaries were unaware of the conflicts that the gospel produced in other cultures. To most of them, Christianity in its Western form was Christianity. Therefore to make an Indian or a Malaysian a Christian was in great measure to turn him into a Dutchman or a Portuguese.

It is easy today to condemn this attitude. Yet every Christian society and every individual Christian, combines with the faith much that is cultural tradition. The problem has pursued all missionary work from the beginning. Nevertheless, the consequences of such an alien presentation can be disastrous to the progress of the gospel. If Christianity appears in Western habits that other people find shocking, such as eating of meat, or a greater familiarity between the sexes than is permitted in most Eastern societies, then the faith is condemned before it is even examined.

On the other hand, there is a distinctiveness of the Christian community that arises from the distinctiveness of the gospel itself. The gospel is a revolutionary power and any attempt to disguise this fact is likely to change the Christian faith into something else.

The depth of this problem helps to explain why Christianity to this day in those regions

dominated by ancient cultures—Islamic, Hindu, and Chinese—is still a minority, in some areas a meager minority.

## The Marks of Modern Christianity

In spite of all barriers, however, the Protestant missionary movement continued to expand. In the process it highlighted several characteristics of modern Christianity:

First, the worldwide expansion usually came by voluntarism not by compulsion. Since the time of Constantine the propagation of the faith had had the active support of rulers in Christian countries and often resulted in mass conversions. That was generally true of Roman Catholic missions in the seventeenth century throughout Asia and Latin America.

Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century, however, went, with few exceptions, without state support or state control. They advanced only by the power of persuasion. Thus, Christians found a way to engage in missions while upholding religious freedom.

Second, this missionary movement tapped the wealth and talents of rank and file Protestants. Unlike earlier missionary expansion led by monks and bishops, the new societies were organized on the widest base

possible. So the primary task of the churches, preaching the gospel, fell upon the people of the churches.

Third, a wide variety of humanitarian ministries accompanied the widespread preaching of the gospel. Mission agencies established schools, hospitals, and centers for training nurses and doctors. They reduced many languages and dialects to writing and translated not only the Bible but other Western writings into these languages. And they introduced public health measures and better agricultural techniques. In some cases these activities were closely related to the goal of conversion, but many sprang simply out of the recognition of social and physical needs that no Christian could in good conscience ignore.

In many respects, then, the missionary movement restored the gospel to its central place in Christianity. And in this important sense the movement recovered an element in the concept of the holy catholic church that the Reformation had obscured. A catholicity that began on Carey's workshop map, reached out to embrace new peoples in many new lands.



## The Great Century by Ruth Tucker

The spread of Protestant Christianity in the three centuries following the Reformation, though notable, gave little indication of what was about to occur in the nineteenth century. In 1800, according to Stephen Neill, “It was still by no means certain that Christianity would be successful in turning itself into a universal religion.”<sup>1</sup> Christianity might have appeared, in some circles, to be little more than a Caucasian religion that was being severely battered about by a wave of rationalism that was sweeping across the Western world. Would the profound power of the Evangelical Awakening in the eighteenth century make a difference? Would Christianity survive the modern era? The nineteenth century was crucial; and, instead of falling before the onslaught of rationalism, Christianity continued to be reinvigorated by an evangelical fervor that soon penetrated every continent on the globe. It truly was the “Great Century” for Christian expansion.

There were a number of factors that made the nineteenth century conducive to worldwide Protestant missions. The Age of Enlightenment and the eighteenth-century rationalism had been largely replaced by a new Age of Romanticism. It was a time to reject the excessive reliance on reason and to put more stock in the emotions and the imagination. And it was a time to put theory into practice. Reform movements sprang up in the newly industrialized nations, and churches and Christian organizations were reaching out

as never before through the participation of volunteer workers.

Changes in the world’s religious environment no doubt contributed to the rapid spread of Christianity in the nineteenth century. It was a period of decline for the non-Christian religions. “Hinduism, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism were relatively quiescent in the nineteenth century,” according to Martin Marty, and “Christians sensed that they could fill a vacuum.”<sup>2</sup> Catholicism, too, was on the decline in many parts of the world. The French Rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had taken its toll on the church, and the French Revolution effectively cut the economic purse strings of Roman Catholic missions. In Latin America, especially, Roman Catholicism witnessed many reverses. National movements saw the church as “the last bulwark of an outmoded and oppressive regime.”<sup>3</sup>

Protestantism, on the other hand, was thriving. The nineteenth century was a “Protestant era,” and more specifically an era dominated by evangelical Protestantism. In the British Isles the evangelical Christians exercised powerful influence in the highest levels of government and commerce, and in America church membership increased from ten to forty percent during the course of the century. Denominations were developing rapidly, and the Sunday school movement

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin, 1964), 243.

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century: North Africa and Asia*, vol. 6 of *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 445.

<sup>3</sup> Martin E. Marty, *A Short History of Christianity* (New York: Meridian, 1959), 318.

in both Britain and America was growing at a fast pace.

Politically, the nineteenth century witnessed tremendous changes as well. Although there were revolutions and social upheavals in Europe and a bloody civil war in America, it was an era of relative world peace. Western nations, through scientific and technological advances, were quickly becoming world powers, and their wealth and prestige were viewed with envy and admiration by many nonindustrialized nations. Politically, it was also a period of secularization. “From the era of Constantine and the Christianization of the Roman Empire to the latter days of the eighteenth century,” writes Martin Marty, “western men assumed . . . that religion was to be established by law and sanctioned by the legal arm of the state.”<sup>4</sup> But by the nineteenth century that was no longer true. Individuals were taking command of their own personal spiritual condition and their responsibility to reach out to others.

The eighteenth-century evangelical revivals that began in England with Whitefield and Wesley played an important role in awakening Christian leaders and laymen to the responsibility for evangelism world-wide. “No longer,” according to Harold Cook, “was the state held responsible in any sense for the propagation of the Christian faith.”<sup>5</sup> Evangelism was the responsibility of the church and its leaders, and it was this once again rediscovered truth that launched the modern missionary movement with William Carey in England and Samuel Mills in the United States.

But belief was not enough. A vehicle was needed to turn the belief into action, and that

vehicle emerged in the form of the mission society. The volunteer mission society, independent in some instances and denominationally oriented in others, transformed Christian missions, opening the way for ecumenical activity and lay involvement. “Never before,” according to Latourette, “had Christianity or any other religion had so many individuals giving full time to the propagation of their faith. Never had so many hundreds of thousands contributed voluntarily of their means to assist the spread of Christianity or any other religion.”<sup>6</sup> The first of these new societies was the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), soon to be followed by the London Missionary Society (1795) and the Church Missionary Society (1799). From Continental Europe came the Netherlands Missionary Society (1797) and the Basel Mission (1815); and from the United States, The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810) and the American Baptist Missionary Board (1814). There would be dozens more as the century progressed, for it was, as Neill has pointed out, “the great age of societies.”<sup>7</sup>

As important as the evangelical awakening and the new mission societies were to the spread of the gospel world-wide, without certain secular trends the foreign missionary cause would have been significantly curtailed. Both colonialism and industrialization had far-reaching effects on the expansion of Christianity. The Industrial Revolution had brought new power to Europe, and with that power came an urge to conquer. Colonialism and imperialism were on their way to becoming accepted government policies, and as such they had a significant impact on missions. “Commercial and colonizing

<sup>4</sup> Marty, *Short History*, 273.

<sup>5</sup> Harold Cook, *Highlights of Christian Missions: A History and Survey* (Chicago: Moody, 1967), 54.

<sup>6</sup> Latourette, *The Great Century*, 443.

<sup>7</sup> Neill, *History of Christian Missions*, 252.

schemes had brought the ends of the earth into new contact,” according to R. H. Glover. “The great East India Companies, Dutch and English, had—without intention or desire, it is true—paved the way for the missionary by making travel to, and residence in, Eastern Countries more practicable and safe.”<sup>8</sup>

The close tie between colonialism and missions has caused many historians to charge that the missionaries were merely “following the flag” as tools of imperialism. This is an issue that has been hotly debated by historians. In many cases the missionaries did “follow the flag” and aided colonial and imperialistic schemes. Others preceded the flag but even then, in many cases, bolstered colonialism. Livingstone, among others, pleaded for European commerce and settlements in Africa, and missionaries everywhere welcomed any privileges a favorable colonial power would grant them. Protestant missionaries strongly favored rule by Protestant countries and feared Catholic rule, and vice versa. However, by the year 1900 the majority of missionaries were not working in colonial territories ruled by their own home countries.

But despite this sometimes too cozy relationship between missionaries and the perpetrators of imperialism, the two groups were more often than not at considerable odds with each other. The commercial companies frequently stood in the way of the missionaries, and the missionaries, with few exceptions, decried the lifestyle of the traders and colonists. Rarely was the association harmonious. “The relation between missions and colonial expansion is complex,” writes A. F. Walls. “But one thing is clear. If missions

are associated with the rise of imperialism, they are equally associated with the factors which brought about its destruction.”<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, they are associated with social progress in underdeveloped nations. “Protestant missionary efforts in this period,” writes Ralph Winter, “led the way in establishing all around the world the democratic apparatus of government, the schools, the hospitals, the universities and the political foundations for new nations.”<sup>10</sup>

But valuable as such social progress was, it was not accomplished without the introduction of Western culture, accompanied in some cases by an almost wholesale destruction of native traditions and customs. As the missionaries spread out across every continent and into the island worlds, they brought a culture that bristled with strange new knowledge and power. It was generally hopeless to try to prevent the adoption of many aspects of their own Western cultures by the nationals in the foreign field, and in many cases the missionaries allowed and even encouraged such things as literacy and freedom from slavery and rank superstition. It is also true that within the environment of commercial and colonial circles “missionaries in the nineteenth century had to some extent yielded to the colonial complex. Only western man,” continues Neill, “was man in the full sense of the word; he was wise and good, and members of other races, in so far as they became westernized, might share in this wisdom and goodness. But western man was

<sup>8</sup> Robert Hall Glover and J. Herbert Kane, *The Progress of World-Wide Missions* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 58.

<sup>9</sup> A. F. Walls, “Outposts of Empire,” in *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 556.

<sup>10</sup> Ralph D. Winter, “The Kingdom Strikes Back: The Ten Epochs of Redemptive History,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey, 1981), 154.



the leader, and would remain so for a very long time, perhaps for ever.”<sup>11</sup>

Imperfect as they were, it was the nineteenth-century missionaries—a tiny company in comparison to other forces impacting the nonwestern world—who, in a relatively short period of time, turned what some may have thought to be a declining Caucasian religion into the largest and most dynamic religious faith in the world. They

were common people turned heroes, whose commitment and courage inspired succeeding generations to follow their example. This century was an age when little children dreamed of true greatness—of becoming a Carey, a Livingstone, a Judson, a Paton, a Slessor, or a Hudson Taylor.



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<sup>11</sup> Neill, *History of Christian Missions*, 259.

## Lost

by Robertson McQuilkin

**H**ave you ever experienced the terror of being lost—in some trackless mountain wilderness, perhaps, or in the labyrinth of a great, strange city? Hope of finding your way out fades and fear begins to seep in. You have likely seen that fear of lostness on the tear-streaked face of a child frantically screaming or quietly sobbing because he is separated from his parent in a huge shopping center. Lost. Alone.

Equally terrifying and more common is the feeling of being hopelessly entangled or trapped in a frustrating personal condition or circumstance: alcoholism, cancer, divorce. Incredibly alone! Lost.

The Bible uses the word “lost” to describe an even more terrible condition. Those who are away from the Father’s house and haven’t found the way back to Him are “lost.” Jesus saw the crowds of people surging about Him as sheep without a shepherd, helpless and hopeless, and He was deeply moved.

Worse than being trapped and not knowing the way out is to be lost and not even know it, for then one does not look for salvation, recognize it when it comes, nor accept it when it is offered. That’s being lost.

How many are lost in our world? We are told there are 200 million evangelicals. Some of these are no doubt lost, but at least that many people believe Jesus is the only way of salvation and that through faith in Him one is forgiven and made a member of God’s family. Surely some who are not evangelical have saving faith. So let us double the number to a hypothetical 400 million. Those who remain number more than four billion people or nine of every ten on earth. These are the lost—

longing for salvation but not finding it, or trusting some other way to find meaning and hope.

The tragedy of this century of exploding population is that three of four people have never heard with understanding the way to life in Christ, and even more tragic, half the people of the world cannot hear because there is no one near enough to tell them. As we approach the end of the second millennium A.D., one of every two on planet Earth lives in a tribe or culture or language group that has no evangelizing church at all. If someone does not go in from the outside they have no way of knowing about Jesus.

But are these people in the “dark half of the world” really lost? What of those who have never had a chance, who have never heard—are any of them lost? Are all of them lost?

Throughout Church history there have been those who teach that none will finally be lost. The old universalism taught that all ultimately will be saved because God is good. Not much was heard of this position from the days of Origen in the third century until the nineteenth century when it was revived, especially by the Universalist Church. Simultaneously with the founding of the Universalist Church, which was honest enough to be up front and call itself by that name, this teaching began to spread in many mainline denominations.

There are problems with this position. Philosophically, such a teaching undermines belief in the atoning death of Christ. For if all sin will ultimately be overlooked by a gracious deity, Christ never should have died.

It was not only unnecessary, it was surely the greatest error in history, if not actually criminal on the part of God for allowing it to happen. Universalism, therefore, philosophically demands a view of the death of Christ as having some purpose other than as an atonement for sin.

Another problem the Universalists face is that Scripture consistently teaches a division after death between those who are acceptable to God and those who are not. This teaching, and that concerning the atonement, are so strong in the Bible that Universalists did not accept the authority of Scripture. Thus the marriage between the Universalist Church and the Unitarian Church was quite natural...

For one committed to the authority of Scripture, our debate concerning the reasonableness of each position must yield to the authority of Scripture. What does Scripture teach concerning the eternal spiritual condition of those who have not heard the gospel?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:16-18, 36).

Scripture teaches clearly that there are those who perish and those who do not. Notice that it is those who believe *on Christ*—not

simply those who, through their encounter with creation and their own innate moral judgment, believe in a righteous Creator—who receive eternal life. God’s intent is to “save the world through Him [Christ]” (3:17). The word “through” speaks of agency: it is by means of Jesus Christ that a person gains eternal life.

The passage does not deny other agencies, however. The Japanese proverb assures us that many roads lead up famed Mount Fuji but they all reach the top. This is the Japanese way of expressing the viewpoint that all religions will have a good outcome. But Jesus Christ Himself said, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). In other words, Jesus Christ is the *only* agency of salvation.

The New Wider Hope would affirm this. Salvation is by Jesus Christ alone. But, it would hold, that does not mean Jesus Christ must be known by a person for that person to be saved.

Jesus assures us that people will be judged because they have not believed on the *name* (John 3:18). Peter is even more explicit in telling us that there is no salvation in any other *name* given among men (Acts 4:12). Surely it is no accident that the name is so prominent in the Bible, especially in teaching on saving faith. Peter did not say, “in no other person.” When a person is named, the identity is settled and ambiguity is done away with. Peter does not make room for us to call on the Ground of Being or the great “all.” You will be saved, he tells us, if you call on and believe in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. John, Jesus and Peter are not the only ones with this emphasis. Paul also speaks to the issue:

... “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed

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in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Rom 10:13-15).

The ones who call on *the name* are the ones who will be saved. But what of those who have not heard so they cannot call? Paul does not assure us that those who have not heard may simply believe on whatever they have heard. Rather, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

Scripture is very clear that there are two kinds of people, both in life and in death: the saved and the lost. It is also very clear on the way of salvation. But still, for those who truly care, questions may remain: Is God loving, powerful, fair, just?

Is God loving? Yes, God is good and that is why men are lost. In love He created a being in His own image, not a robot programmed to respond as the Maker designed. In creating such a being to freely love and be loved, God risked the possibility of such a being rejecting His love in favor of independence or even self-love. Humankind did, in fact, choose this option. Still true to His character, God provided a way back even though the cost was terrible. But the way back must not violate the image of God in man and must not force an obedient response. Rather, the God of love chooses to wait lovingly for the response of love. Those who wish to reject Him may do so.

But is it fair and just for God to condemn those who have not had an opportunity to respond to His offer of grace? The Bible does not teach that God will judge a person for rejecting Christ if he has not heard of Christ. In

fact, the Bible teaches clearly that God’s judgment is based on a person’s response to the truth he has received.

“That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:47-48).

“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:8-16).

Judgment is against a person in proportion to his rejection of moral light. All have sinned; no one is innocent. Therefore, all stand condemned. But not all have the same

measure of condemnation, for not all have sinned against equal amounts of light. God does not condemn a person who has not heard of Christ for rejecting Him, but rather for rejecting the light he does have...

But the question will not go away. How does one respond in a Japanese village when a new convert inquires, "What about my ancestors?" My response is simple: I am not the judge. "Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25). Abraham pleaded with God for the salvation of innocent people who did not deserve to be condemned and destroyed along with the guilty. He was appealing to God's justice, and God responded with grace more than Abraham dared ask. This crucial question recorded in the first book of the Bible is answered in the last:

"Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Rev 16:7). We are not called as judge—either of God, whose ways we do not fully know, nor of man, whose destiny we are not called upon to settle. Rather, we are commissioned as His representatives to find the lost, declare amnesty to the captive, release the prisoner.

We may not be able to prove from Scripture with absolute certainty that no soul since Pentecost has ever been saved by extraordinary means without the knowledge of Christ. But neither can we prove from Scripture that a single soul has been so saved. If there is an alternative, God has not told us of it. If God in His revelation felt it mandatory not to proffer such a hope, how much more should we refrain from such theorizing. It may or may not be morally right for me to think there may be another way and to hope there is some other escape. But for me to propose it to other believers, to discuss it as a possibility, is certainly dangerous, if not immoral. It is almost as wrong as writing out such a hope so that those who are under the judgment of God

may read it, take hope, and die. As long as the truth revealed to us identifies only one way of escape, this is what we must live by and proclaim.

Consider the analogy of a security guard charged with the safety of residents on the 10th floor of a nursing home. He knows the floor plan posted in a prominent place, and it is his responsibility in case of fire to get the residents to the fire escape which has been clearly marked. Should a fire break out and lives be put in jeopardy, it would be his responsibility to get those people to the fire escape. If he discusses with the patients or with a colleague the possibility of some other unmarked fire escape or recalls to them the news report he read of someone who had jumped from the 10th floor of a building and survived, he could surely be charged with criminal negligence. He must live and labor in obedience to the facts that are certain and not delay to act. He must not lead people astray on the basis of conjecture or logical deduction from limited information.

When all has been said that can be said on this issue, the greatest remaining mystery is not the character of God nor the destiny of lost people. The greatest mystery is why those who are charged with rescuing the lost have spent two thousand years doing other things, good things, perhaps, but have failed to send and be sent until all have heard the liberating word of life in Christ Jesus. The lost condition of human beings breaks the Father's heart. What does it do to ours?

In a dream I found myself on an island—Sheep Island. Across the island sheep were scattered and lost. Soon I learned that a forest fire was sweeping across from the opposite side. All were doomed to destruction unless there were some way of escape. Although there were many unofficial maps, I had a copy of the official map and there discovered that

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indeed there was a bridge to the mainland, a narrow bridge, built, it was said, at incredible cost.

My job, I was told, would be to get the sheep across that bridge. I discovered many shepherds herding the sheep which were found and seeking to corral those which were within easy access to the bridge. But most of the sheep were far off and the shepherds seeking them few. The sheep near the fire knew they were in trouble and were frightened; those at a distance were peacefully grazing, enjoying life.

I noticed two shepherds near the bridge whispering to one another and laughing. I moved near them to hear the cause of joy in such a dismal setting. "Perhaps the chasm is narrow somewhere, and at least the strong sheep have opportunity to save themselves," said one. "Maybe the current is gentle and the stream shallow. Then at least the courageous can make it across." The other responded, "That may well be. In fact, wouldn't it be great if this proves to be no island at all? Perhaps it is just a peninsula and great multitudes of sheep are already safe. Surely the owner would have provided some alternative route." And so they relaxed and went about other business.

In my mind I began to ponder their theories: Why would the owner have gone to

such great expense to build a bridge, especially since it is a narrow bridge, and many of the sheep refuse to cross it even when they find it? In fact, if there is a better way by which many will be saved more easily, building the bridge is a terrible blunder. And if this isn't an island, after all, what is to keep the fire from sweeping across into the mainland and destroying everything? As I pondered these things I heard a quiet voice behind me saying, "There is a better reason than the logic of it, my friend. Logic alone could lead you either way. Look at your map."

There on the map, by the bridge, I saw a quotation from the first undershepherd, Peter: "For neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other way from the island to the mainland whereby a sheep may be saved." And then I discerned, carved on the old rugged bridge itself, "I am the bridge. No sheep escapes to safety but by me."

In a world in which nine of every ten people are lost, three of four have never heard the way out, and one of every two cannot hear, the Church sleeps on. "Why?" Could it be we think there must be some other way? Or perhaps we don't really care that much.



## Step 4: Form a Response

1. Most of us are fortunate to be involved with churches that support foreign missions in one form or another. Spend time in prayer for the missionary endeavors of your church. You might pray for missionaries your church supports, specific projects your church is involved in, or opportunities you might have to be involved in missions in the future.
  
2. Briefly summarize how you would respond to someone if they asked you to explain what the Bible teaches about those who have never heard the gospel.

## Step 5: Discuss the Issue

1. What has been your experience with missions? What associations do you have with the term?
2. How should missions interact with culture? Can the gospel be spread without cultures changing?
3. To what extent do we face the same issues of cultural transference and interaction in our own culture, which is also not a Christian culture?
4. What factors inspire Christians to evangelism and missionary work? What factors have inhibited missionary activity?
5. Should all Christians be involved or care about missions? What are legitimate mission tasks?
6. How do you deal with the problem of those who haven't heard the gospel? What are relevant scriptural principles? What impact does your position have on evangelism?



## Step 6: Take Steps to Obey

Ask God to clarify your responsibility for missions as well as those things that prevent you from acting on his call. It may help to write a prayer summarizing this.

NOTES

## Issue Evaluation Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make brief comments on any of the following aspects of this issue:**

**Sound Bites and Case Studies** (Were any of these particularly helpful or unhelpful? Are there any quotes or scenarios you think we should add?):

**Study the Scriptures** (Were the passages selected appropriate? Are there other passages you might have added?):

**Consult Other Sources** (What were your overall impressions of the articles? Did they hold your interest? Were they instructive? Are there any you would drop or add?):

**Form a Response & Take Steps to Obey** (Were the exercises helpful and meaningful? Are there any you would drop or add?):

**Discuss the Issue** (Were any of the questions particularly unhelpful or especially helpful? Were they clear? Did your group discuss any issues that could be added to our list of questions?):

**Overall Impression of this Issue** (Please rate the issue 5= Outstanding, 1= Poor. Also include any general impressions or comments regarding this issue.):

1      2      3      4      5

**Corrections** (typos, grammatical errors, wrong passages, etc.):