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ENLISTING THE MISSIONARY IN RESEARCH WORK

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One of the most important social movements in modern times is the interpretation of cultures, as immigration, commerce, and international relations bring peoples into close contact. This article outlines a plan by which the missionary may engage in a study of this social process and help to a better understanding of the factors which are involved. Some possible results of such research are briefly indicated.

I

The day seems to have arrived when research work will be recognized as an integral part of the missionary enterprise, along with such other standard forms of activity as evangelism, educational work, or medical attention. This tendency is seen in the time and thought given to surveys since the beginning of the twentieth century, and in frequent appointment of special commissions for investigation, both by the boards at home and by the missionaries abroad. This modern emphasis upon research has arisen inevitably out of the growing recognition of the relationship of reliable knowledge to efficient methods and of such methods to final success.

Upon what does the Christian church base its hope of success in its effort to Christianize the world? We trust partly to the personal devotion and consecration of our missionaries, which may be called the spiritual element. But is there any prospect that present or future missionaries will surpass the pioneers in willingness to sacrifice and endure? We strive to increase our gifts and to multiply the number of laborers, and take courage when this is accomplished. But only a very superficial student of missions will see in this combination of numerical increase and Christian devotion a sufficient guaranty of the early coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. The working of the Spirit of God

is not confined to these two factors. To our zeal we shall continue to add numbers. But if the church is to fulfil its full obligation, then to our zeal and numbers must also be added approved methods of working and a more intelligent comprehension of what we are actually doing. These indispensable conditions of future success come only through investigation and experimentation.

In a certain sense research is one of the most fundamental factors of the entire missionary enterprise, because upon its discoveries and findings largely depends the effectiveness of all the standard forms of missionary activity. It is through deliberate investigation and research that the great basal industries of the world—such as rubber, steel, or automobiles—are being perfected. It was through investigation and research that the mystery of the magnetic needle and the terror of the capricious thunderbolt have been transformed into a science and technique of electricity. This has been accomplished by discovering the laws or ways in which these things behave and then, by working in conformity with these laws, compelling the forces and objects of the physical world to do our will. It is not maintained that human nature or society are as mechanistic in their workings as is the physical world, but evidences are not wanting that there is much more of orderliness in the conduct of the individual and of human society than has hitherto been supposed. If then through diligent attention we can arrive at generalizations which in a limited sense may merit the dignity of being considered as laws, and if we can direct our missionary work more perfectly in conformity with these, there is every hope that we may materially increase our missionary efficiency. At least the experiment is being tried and is well worth the trial.

II

This raises the question of the missionary as a potential research man. In some circles the missionary has not enjoyed

the reputation of being an expert or reliable investigator. He was supposed to be trained in dogmatics rather than in the methods of scientific investigation. He did not as a rule go abroad in the attitude of a learner but of a teacher. He was engaged in other pursuits, and had little time or inclination to search for knowledge. But, nevertheless, in spite of all this, for the last two or three hundred years missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, have placed the whole world under indebtedness to them because of contributions to the advancement of human knowledge which they have been able to make, even as a side issue to their main interests. They have not been scientific experts. They made no pretenses to be. But they have been pioneers; and some of them have even become authorities of recognized standing in the departments of geography, botany, language study, ethnology, oriental philosophies, and comparative religion. In this respect, the missionary will compare very favorably with other non-scientific laymen who have traveled abroad, such as the governmental official, the business man, or the tourist.

This creditable record of the past gives ground for encouragement and expectation concerning the future. As missionaries come to recognize research work to be an integral part of the missionary's legitimate occupation, rather than a mere side line, as in college and seminary they are trained more carefully in the methods of research and acquire the disciplined attitude of the scientific investigator, as they center serious attention upon the subtle social processes in which they are caught up, they will continue to make even more valuable contributions to our knowledge of human nature and to our control of human society. An increasing number of such missionaries are now found in the foreign field. It remains for the mission boards to set aside a certain limited number of these for the express purpose of prolonged study and investigation; and for the rank and file of the missionaries themselves to learn to look upon their mission stations as objects for

deliberate investigation and laboratories for research, as well as fields for faithful service.

In so far as the missionary can do this he will discover a new interest developing in his work—the interest and reward which comes from discovery and from a growing understanding of the mysterious workings of the human heart and of the Spirit of God. And, furthermore, as he sees the native church taking over an increasing proportion of evangelistic, educational, and administrative responsibilities, and as he, a foreigner, begins to cast about for some justification of his continued presence in an alien land, it is possible that he may find in this newer occupation of exploring the mysterious regions of racial and cultural interaction a form of missionary co-operation in which the distinctions between native and foreigner are reduced to a minimum, and in which all complaint concerning foreign paternalism has been removed. Racial rivalries are reduced to the vanishing-point in the dispassionate realm of scientific investigation. Here native and foreigner can work together in a common quest for all time to come. The most perfect and universal brotherhood is that which is gathered about the quest for truth.

III

Any movement as vast and as complex as the missionary enterprise is capable of a variety of interpretations, according as one aspect or another becomes the center of thought and emphasis. Not the least suggestive of these interpretations is that which looks upon Christian missions as one phase of the world-wide cultural fusion which is so characteristic of the present time.

Until the year 1492 the human race had been divided into five or six distinct cultural regions, isolated from one another by deserts, mountains, oceans, and crude methods of transportation. Each in its comparative seclusion was dependent upon the past as the chief source of wisdom and culture. Each one

was certain that its own past reached back into the distant region of the eternal and the divine. Out of that dim past came almost all those things which were considered to be authoritative and precious. It gave to men not only their birth, but also their religion, their laws, their habits of life, and those supreme values for which they were willing to fight and to die. Men living beyond the pale of each cultural group were considered as pagans and barbarians.

But with the marvelous perfection of our means of communication during the last three centuries, the barriers which had separated these racial groupings have melted away. The cultural quarantine of the ages has been broken down; and now we are in the midst of an unprecedented, world-wide exchange of commercial products, literature, religions, philosophies, economic systems, political experiments, and what not. In geometrical language, the old perpendicular line of historical transmission has now come into contact with this newer horizontal or latitudinal line of cultural interchange; and when two such forces come together at right angles, the outcome is determined by the equation of the two forces involved. In the language of biology, the old cultural genealogical line which in its relative isolation has been inbreeding or breeding more or less true to type for thousands of years is now being crossed with an alien stock, and the resultant type will bear the marks of both ancestors. The East is orientalizing the West. Tea, mah jong, kimonos, and pajamas are but symbols of other more subtle contributions from the Orient which are finding their way into our Western life. The West is occidentalizing the East. Twenty-five years ago this was spoken of as the "impact" of the West upon the East. We now understand that this process is not like the impact of a hammer upon an anvil in which the hammer rebounds or else the anvil is knocked to pieces. The so-called impact turns out to be rather an interpenetration, a fusion, an adoption, an adaptation, and a rejection of different cultural factors, accord-

ing to an intricate process which as yet we but very imperfectly understand.

Now Christian missions are but one part of this subtle, enormously complicated, and universal interchange. In fact, the mission station is the point where this fusion process sometimes reaches white heat, under the forced draft of the unrestrained enthusiasm of religious propaganda. The missionary himself lives in the very midst of it. Whether he is conscious of the fact or not, he is one of its chief agents. No one else therefore is in a better position to witness and record what actually occurs when culture plays upon culture, religion upon religion, and the sanctity and authority of traditional custom are challenged by ideas and institutions which come from abroad.

What the future of the world will be is beyond the vision of man, but so far as we know today it will depend chiefly upon this very process. If it can be understood and controlled for good, the Kingdom of Heaven and a New World-Order may be in sight; if not, we shall probably bungle along in the future as we have in the past, repeating the same perennial mistakes, falling into the same errors, and ending up each time in war, bitter disappointment, and destruction. This deliberate "control" for the good of the world will come only from such an intelligent understanding of the process itself as will give effective technique, and also from such sacrificial good will as will employ that technique unreservedly for the good of others. The missionary all through the past has been the symbol of this sacrificial good will. From now on he must give himself with equal devotion to the understanding of the process in order that his zeal may become more efficient through knowledge, and that he himself may become also a symbol of the world's best intelligence.

IV

There are certain kinds of survey work which can best be carried on, as they are being carried on, under the auspices of

the missionary societies, which are essentially promotional organizations. But scientific research is more immediately interested in knowledge than in propaganda, important as that may be as the ultimate purpose of such knowledge. It is more concerned for the time being with discovering how people act under given circumstances, and with what are the laws and principles of their conduct, than with proclaiming how they ought to act; and it is quite possible that such kinds of investigation may most fittingly be undertaken by institutions whose attention is given more particularly to scientific pursuits.

With the purpose of encouraging such investigation as this and of enlisting those who are interested in a co-operative effort, there has recently been organized in connection with the University of Chicago a Research Extension in Comparative Religion and Missions, devoted especially to the subject of cultural interpenetration as exemplified on the mission field. This Extension consists first of a Central Council composed of five Faculty members representing those departments which are most intimately related to the study, namely, Sociology, Anthropology, Religious Education, Comparative Religion and Missions, and secondly of the missionary alumni and others who are interested in the investigations proposed and are willing to co-operate. It is felt that if a goodly number of men and women, laboring in the different mission fields and trained in approved methods of research, can be enlisted in such an investigation, and if the results of this work can be brought together in a central office where they can be accumulated, worked over, compared, and interpreted, a very decided contribution may eventually be made to the efficiency of the missionary effort and to a better understanding of the probable future of the race.

One very fruitful field for investigation is found here at home in the accumulated missionary literature of the last two hundred years, and in the efforts at Americanization and the evangelization of foreigners who reside within our boundaries.

The inner experience of the missionary himself, who has resided for years in the midst of a foreign culture, more or less of which he has imbibed, is also an exceedingly suggestive object of study. But the main field for research must be the mission stations abroad, where East and West are coming into contact and where the interplay of culture upon culture and of religion upon religion has assumed the most intense form. These points of fusion and conflict must be made the objects of prolonged observation and even experimentation. Some of this work will doubtless be undertaken from time to time by specialists and by commissions appointed for that express purpose; but if we mistake not, the major portion of it, if it is done at all, must be undertaken by the regular missionaries, who are living continually in the midst of these momentous movements and who thereby are in a position to gain an intimate knowledge and appreciation which is denied to those who view the movement from afar.

With all such students the Research Extension stands ready to co-operate in so far as possible, suggesting methods of investigation, recommending literature dealing with the subjects in hand, co-ordinating the work of the investigator in India with that of his fellow-worker in China or South America, arranging for the publication of articles which may be of interest to the public, and providing a central clearing-house where the results of scientific research coming from many students in many lands may be accumulated, compared, analyzed, and finally given out to the world in the form of reliable generalizations, if such are forthcoming.

V

It may be in place to suggest here a few of the pertinent questions intimately related with mission work upon which more information is needed than we have at present. This will serve to indicate perhaps better than anything else the type of investigation proposed.

The old geographical seclusion of former days has been broken down, and peoples are now exposed as never before to an influx of outside influences both good and evil which threaten to overturn established customs and to discredit much of that which has long been held to be sacred and inviolable. The natural tendency, therefore, has been for these peoples to intensify other forms of protection, with a view to safeguarding those things which they cherish. It is evident, then, that these accentuated protective devices are matters of prime importance to the missionary who is hoping to get next to the people with his gospel message.

There appears to be a great difference in what may be called the relative "assimilability" of the different factors of an alien culture. Some of these are taken up more readily than others. Can such things as material objects, practical inventions, political forms, social customs, spiritual ideals, and religious interpretations be scaled or graded according to relative assimilability? If so, we should know it. Such a grading might reveal that some of our mission work is making the blunder of trying to drive the blunt end of the wedge in first.

Most of the regions and countries of the world are at present in the midst of a very pronounced disintegration—social, political, and religious. The old traditional "controls" which have held men in check and taught them how to live are being undermined and broken down by a thousand subtle forces that can no longer be resisted. In some cases this dissolution process has been safely moderate, in others it has become so pronounced that anarchy has been a real menace. In still other cases the country seems to have passed the acute stage of disintegration, and is slowly beginning the constructive work of a new integration of thought and customs. On the other hand, a few communities show as yet little or no signs of cultural dissolution. Now no great phenomenon of social life is more significant for mission work than this of the relative stages of disintegration and integration in which a particular

country or district may be found. It is just this that constitutes "the fulness of the times." Each country and race should be studied in this respect; its particular stage should be noted, for all questions of missionary policy and of ultimate success depend upon the intelligent adjustment of our work to conditions thus revealed.

VI

What, then, are a few of the results which we may hope to reap from this type of research, which to some might seem at first sight to be so indirectly connected with mission work that it becomes little less than an academic study and scarcely worth the time or attention of a busy missionary?

In the first place, it is just such investigations as these which will throw light upon the real nature of the transformation process in which we are engaged. It should answer eventually such questions as these: In what respects is mission work like the planting of a seed in soil? In what respects is it like Paul's figure of the grafting of a new branch upon an old trunk? In what respects is it like the crossing of two parent-stocks and the birth of a new offspring which partakes of the characteristics of both, and yet is not identical with either? At one time there was little doubt on this matter. Mission work was considered to be the planting of the good seed of the gospel. But we have since found that the process is too complex to be adequately described by any one figure; and, consequently, we are very much at sea with reference to what really is the inner nature of this great work to which 20,000 foreign missionaries have committed their lives. Nothing is more apparent on the pages of our missionary magazines than the confusion of thought and bewilderment concerning this vital matter. Part of this is of course due to the present doctrinal reconstruction within the church itself, but much of it undoubtedly arises from our ignorance as yet of the laws of social interaction when culture impinges upon culture. Only by patient and deliberate

investigation into what is actually taking place under missionary effort can such confusion of thought be removed.

A second result has already been referred to several times. A better understanding of the inner nature of this Christianizing process will clarify, as nothing else will, our present confused ideas with reference to the policies, the aims, and the objects of mission work, and should reveal methods of operation which will enable us to labor much more effectively.

So, likewise, much of the present idealism will be rectified and brought within the range of reason and possibility. The world's best idealism today is expressed in the phrases—New World-Order, Universal Brotherhood, Federation of the World, Kingdom of Heaven. But much of this has been conceived of in terms so unreal and so fantastic that the ultimate result inevitably has been to produce cynicism and despair instead of hope and courage in the minds of many. The cause of idealism today is suffering fully as much from the vain and extravagant imaginings of its own friends as from the open attacks of its enemies. Nothing less than a prolonged study of the transformation process which is actually going on under the influence of the missionary and of all other agencies of the common good will ever give us an intelligent and sane interpretation of that ideal of a new world-order for which the Christian labors and prays.

This then is the contribution which scientific investigation can and must make to the missionary enterprise: it will reveal what kind of an ideal is actually realizable; it will show more clearly how that ideal may be realized.