

## Discipleship And Mission

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No student of the missionary movement today can approach any aspect of his interest without the underlying consciousness of the kaleidoscopic nature of the times in which he and his church exist in this mid-twentieth century. Now as never before humanity, wherever it may have been, is moving with jolting speed along untried paths that may plunge it into disaster. Change and upheaval characterize our times. Great segments of the population, once quiescent and fatalistic, are now caught in a ferment of new hopes. Piece after piece of the world as we knew it is breaking off from the old sacrosanct order and re-appearing in new alignments, shaped by the demand for knowledge, for leisure, for freedom from the ravages of disease, and above all for an economic order rooted in their own wellbeing and severed from a system designed to pour profits into the laps of a wealthy few. Against this terrifying backdrop of the present day missionary movement our discussion of discipleship and mission turns back to the parallels between the first Christian age and our own, but to seek to reconstruct its urge and its passion and to recapture its vision and vitality, always with our times in mind, so that its lesson and example might be applied to our own experience.

The term “disciple” is the English form of the Latin “discipulus,” which is derived from the verb “discere” to learn; so a disciple means a learner or pupil. In the English Old Testament the word occurs only once, but it is significant because it appears at the conclusion of Isaiah’s autobiographical memoirs, which he composed to accompany the first recording of his oracles, saying, “Bind up the testimony, (and) seal the teaching among my disciples” (Isa. 8:16). The king and people of Israel rejected Isaiah’s message at the time of the Syro-Ephraimite attack, so the

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prophet announced that he would speak no more, but would wait for the fulfillment of his prophecies. This is discipleship before the advent of the Messiah, Isaiah entrusting his message to followers who would preserve and publish it in days to come. The likeness here between these disciples and those of Jesus is plain.

New Testament writers are all concerned with the Christian mission, the Gospels recording the implicit, while Acts and the letters of Paul the explicit demand for missionary discipleship. In the Gospels and in Acts the word “disciple” occurs approximately 250 times, referring most often to the Twelve. In the singular, Matthew and Luke employ it in a functional sense. Jesus tells his followers that if anyone were to come to Him without hating his own father and mother and wife and family, even his own life he could not be his disciple (Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26). Paul in his letters uses the corresponding but more specifically missionary term of “apostleship” which does not appear at all in the Old Testament and only rarely (8 times) in the Gospels.

In the sense that anyone who rejects his own life and follows Christ is a disciple, it can be maintained that there is no such thing as a distinct missionary vocation. The missionary like any believer is a follower of Christ. And the missionary movement itself in recent times has insisted that every country is a mission field. Discipleship is every Christian’s vocation, and the call of God is a missionary call to everyone to the kind of work for which he is best fitted in the place where he can best do it.

Notwithstanding this essential oneness of the Christian’s vocation, there is a sense in which discipleship belongs with mission, and in which the missionary calling is unique and distinct from that of the ordinary believer. Historically the missionary has always represented a breaking with the past, a going beyond the conventional and the accepted, often at times when the Church as a whole has become too complacent, too joined to the world. The missionary by his very nature has thus always had a prophetic function, the calling of the Church back to its true apostolic nature.

The missionary is further distinguished from his brother disciple in that he devotes his life to those in society who are considered the lowest in the human scale, the barbarian, the heathen, and the down-trodden. He crosses boundaries, breaks through barriers, and identifies himself with those of another race, creed, and color. He is engaged in planting the Church where it does not exist; he is the pioneer, the frontier worker of the Christian body. By so doing he is foreshadowing the reunited Church

that is to be, his very existence bearing witness to that unity. The nature of his vocation demands of him also a dedication that is different from that of the follower who remains in his natural environment. Always he must be ready to forfeit his life for his convictions. His call involves a certain totality of surrender, indicated in such matters as time and privacy. His speech and the color of his skin frequently deny him the consolation of anonymity. Yet the missionary has no monopoly of the heroic; of all the servants of Christ he is apt to realize most keenly his own inadequacy, and to assert with Paul that he is the least of the apostles.

Since missionary discipleship is most explicitly revealed in the letters of Paul, it is our purpose to rely upon the great apostle for our consideration of the topic before us. We will explore four aspects of missionary discipleship, its origin and roots, the gospel it proclaims, the sphere of its work, and discipleship as awareness of the times.

## THE ROOTS OF DISCIPLESHIP

What was the inception of Paul's missionary vocation and the origin of his call to discipleship? The upsurge of missionary enthusiasm that characterized the Western church in the nineteenth century has often been traced to a literal acceptance of Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19), but Paul in all probability did not know this so-called Great Commission.

### A. Paul's Conversion.

Paul told his Galatian readers that he had always been extremely zealous in the traditions of his fathers, until God, he concluded, had set him apart before he was born, called him through His grace, by the revelation of His Son, to preach among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:14-16). This was not so much obedience to a specific command, as a transformation of purpose that turned him from prosecutor to advocate, from destroyer to missionary. There perhaps were some other, more humanly inspired experiences that had a bearing on his missionary vocation, such as the help of Ananias at Damascus (Acts 9:10-19), the commissioning service at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3), even the conversion of the Roman proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, and the subsequent changing of his name from Saul to Paul (Acts 13:9-12). But the one thing his transformation hinged upon was that he had seen the Lord, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (I Cor. 9:1). In Acts, Jesus is seen after the resurrection only in the forty days before the ascension, but when Paul ends his list of

the appearances of the risen Christ, he adds the affirmation that “as to one untimely born, he appeared to me also.” He insists that though “last of all,” he was nevertheless a witness of the resurrection of Jesus (I Cor. 15:8).

We suggest then, that if we take Paul’s experience as the norm, the roots of discipleship are to be found in the personal encounter with Christ. Other factors may be found, but the taproot is the revelation from God of Jesus Christ. For Paul, the element of surprise in this experience was that it came upon him unsolicited. He refers to his mission in terms of involuntary compulsion, “Necessity is laid upon me,” a necessity which left his own personal will and ambition not consulted (I Cor. 9:16-17). The love of Christ constrains him (II Cor. 5:14). He feels under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish (Rom. 1:14). The redemptive work of Christ is an unchanging debt that rests upon his heart, making him forever no longer his own but an instrument of Christ. As a recruit joins an elite regiment of the armed forces and surrenders his will to the military tribune, so Paul feels he is no longer his own.

Paul’s experience, furthermore, carries a hint of strong revulsion. He characterizes the crucified Christ as a “stumbling-block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles” (I Cor. 1:23). Before his conversion he must himself have felt this way about the religion that he was persecuting. Karl Barth is quoted as saying that to become a Christian is like drinking a bitter poison or taking a draught of medicine. The one is revolting and the other necessary to health, but after taking either, the involuntary reaction is to vomit it forth again. So the discipleship of the Cross is an offense to the mind; what is more unnatural than to hate one’s own life?

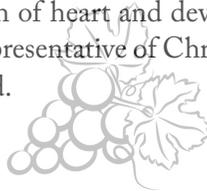
## B. Metaphors of Discipleship.

Paul attempts with many varying metaphors to give communicative life and meaning to his all-absorbing discipleship. He thinks of himself as an ambassador for Christ, beseeching others to be reconciled to God (II Cor. 5: 19-21); as a representative of Christ he believes that he is working together with Him in the divine work of the kingdom (I Cor. 3:9; II Cor. 6:1). The missionary has often been accused of feeling superior to the people to whom he has been sent. The effective antidote to this attitude is the Pauline conception of ambassadorship, that the missionary is the agent of the Christ whom he represents. The agent does not earn his right to be an ambassador, not is the gospel that he carries his own invention. It is the message that comes to him by way of the Cross, so the missionary is always conscious of being radically unworthy of his commission.

Another figure that Paul uses to illustrate his call to discipleship is that of slavery to Christ. He thinks of himself as the bond-servant of the Lord (Gal. 1:10), and the Greek *doulos* has the force of “slave.” Christ makes Paul a slave by His own example of humiliation, taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6-7), so that anyone belonging to Christ must himself be a servant, not according to his own wish, but according to the will of the Lord. The love of Christ controls him, yet paradoxically it is this very slavery which makes him free and transmutes him into an heir of God (with Christ) (Gal. 4:7). Captain Mitsuo Fuchida of the Japanese Air Force tells how he was “under orders” from Tokyo to lead the attack against Pearl Harbor. But after the war by way of the witness of a devoted Christian and his own reading of the Bible, he passed under other orders, and was brought into discipleship for Christ. Like Paul his mission is now taken not from man but from the Lord, for the proclamation of the gospel to the people of Japan.

### C. Implications of the Pauline Motivation for Discipleship.

It is complained that few people today experience the blinding light of the Damascus road, see the risen Christ, or hear His voice. The implication of Paul’s experience of discipleship, however, is that the call which leads to missionary service must stem from a personal meeting with Christ, and that anyone may have this meeting. Undoubtedly, there are other and perhaps valid reasons for becoming a Christian, but for the missionary vocation, involving as it does dislocation, loneliness, anxiety, persecution, and possible martyrdom, Paul insists on the believer’s meeting with Christ as all-important. This makes missionary recruiting a very delicate affair, for such discipleship cannot be entered upon lightly. The Moravians in their remarkable missionary history learned that it was disastrous to press missionary service upon their members. It became one of their maxims that the call to the missionary vocation must be from God alone. Missionary discipleship is a claim that each in his own way must answer in the presence of the Christ who laid the missionary vision so urgently upon the heart of Paul. Once entered upon, the missionary life fully absorbs the strength of heart and devotion, the worker always being aware of his place as a representative of Christ, even as a laborer indentured to the service of his Lord.



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## II. THE GOSPEL OF DISCIPLESHIP

Next we must attempt to bring into focus some aspects of the gospel it is the business of the disciple to proclaim--the first three emphases of the Pauline gospel.

### A. The Pauline Gospel.

Missionary discipleship, being rooted in the personal encounter with Christ, is concerned to proclaim a gospel which Paul characterized as justification not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16). Peace with God is obtained through Christ's dying for the ungodly, for since "we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Rom. 5:1; 8-9), A reading of the letters to the Galatians and Romans reveals Paul's many variations on the central theme of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. We "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom. 3:24-25). As Paul feels personally identified with Christ in His death, so he can assert that he walks with Him in newness of life, for "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The sole reliance for salvation is on Christ; if it were not so, "Christ died to no purpose," but since Paul feels himself crucified with Christ, it is no longer he who lives, but Christ who lives in him; and the life he now lives in the flesh he lives by faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him (Gal. 2:21, 20).

The Gospel of salvation which it is the vocation of discipleship to promulgate, secondly, involves release from the sin whose sway extends over all men (Rom. 3:9), and which is associated in Paul's mind with "death" (Rom. 5:12-13). Just as death inevitably comes to all men, so sin is inherent in all, making it impossible for any human being to justify himself before God. As Paul felt himself to be a slave of Christ, so without Christ man is under slavery to sin. Sin, therefore, is not something that a man does; it is a power that takes possession of him, a condition in which man finds himself, turning him into an open enemy of the God who loves him.

The idea of sin has been out of fashion in Christian circles for a number of decades, though recently the neo-orthodox and the existentialists have brought it back with something like Pauline clarity into the Christian picture. Even Jean-Paul Sartre, though not a Christian, in an article entitled, "Torture is a Plague of Our Era," is in fact describing the Christian conception of sin. He writes:

In 1943 in the ... Gestapo headquarters in Paris Frenchmen were screaming in agony and pain; all France could hear them. In those days the outcome of the war was uncertain and the future unthinkable, but one thing seemed impossible in any circumstances; that one day men should be made to scream by those acting in our name ... (But now) in Algiers people are tortured regularly and systematically, ... (and) appalled, the French are discovering the terrible truth that if nothing can protect a nation against itself, neither traditions nor its loyalties nor its laws, and if fifteen years are enough to transform victims into executioners, then its behavior is no more than a matter of opportunity and occasion. Anybody, at any time, may equally find himself victim or executioner.<sup>1</sup>

Here is a devastating admission of the depravity of human nature, which the Christian calls original sin, a condition for which Sartre has no answer, but which the missionary gospel does. The awareness of sin is of peculiar pertinence to the missionary, for not only does he know that the only solution is in Christ, but he realizes, as remarked by P. T. Forsyth, that “what goes deepest to the consciences goes widest to the world. The more completely we feel sin to be condemned in the Cross the more power and commandment we have to carry the absolutism to the ends of the earth.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul’s great answer to sin and to man’s helplessness is that of God’s act in Christ, which reconciles all men to Himself (Col. 1:20). This cancels the legal bond which stands against them (Col. 2:14). Only in the life and death of Christ is the sacrifice made and the price paid which will put man right with God. So it is that Paul can testify that he glories in nothing except “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). The gospel of Paul the missionary disciple is thus “Christ crucified ... the power... and wisdom of God” (I Cor. 1:23).

It is this gospel that rescues Christian ethic from the maddeningly commonplace and relates it to a quickening energy. It places the sinful in contact with cleansing. Confession floods the subconscious with forgiveness. Hope flames upon the ashes of despair. Life succeeds death. If all religions have satisfactory roads to the divine, the Christian mission is *ipso facto* invalidated, and we are reduced to innocuous cooperation with

<sup>1</sup> *Washington Post and Times Herald*, March 16, 1958.

<sup>2</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *Missions in State and Church*.

other faiths for the attainment of religious truth. It may be a sign of our neglect of the vital core of Paul's faith, that missionary recruiting officers report candidates in these days do not know what they believe. Without a personal encounter with the Cross, Christianity is a dead-letter, and the dynamic of the Christian mission is dissipated.

## B. Accommodating the Gospel.

If the Christian gospel is radically different from any other religious teaching, how is it to be accommodated to the non-Christian mind? It is at this point that the Athens speech in Acts is often referred to, and for two different reasons. Some missionary writers use the Mars Hill speech as illustrating the way in which the apostle appeals to the religious experience of his pagan hearers.<sup>3</sup> Others note that when Paul declares to the Corinthians that he is going to know nothing among them "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2), he is confessing the failure of his preaching at Athens.<sup>4</sup> Oscar Cullmann suggests that the very evidence of the failure at Athens is proof that the Cross is always a stumbling-block to those who do not believe, and therefore confirmation of Paul's true gospel as proclaimed to the Corinthians.<sup>5</sup> Any reliance on the Acts speeches for insight into Paul's mind is open to some question, however, for New Testament students inform us that these were probably the compositions of Luke rather than the utterances of Paul.<sup>6</sup>

In his letters, however, Paul makes it clear that he is willing to accommodate his preaching in the interest of bearing fruit for the gospel, asserting that he would gladly become all things to all men, "if by so doing he could win some for Christ" (I Cor. 9:22). If this statement is taken in conjunction with I Corinthians 2:2, it is evident that while Paul is eager to conform on almost anything, he will not compromise on his basic doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ.

This means, applied to present circumstances, that it is of great importance for missionaries today to be able to adapt themselves and their message to the people and culture where they are working. The mission boards have rightly placed great emphasis on finding the candidate who

<sup>3</sup> Arthur T. Pierson, *The New Acts of the Apostles*, p. 181; Karl L. Reichelt, "The Johannine Approach," *The Madras Series*, Vol. I, p. 89,

<sup>4</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, p. 88; Andre Retif, *Foi au Christ et mission d'apres les Actes des Apotres*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time*, p. 183.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 3.

easily adjusts. The very nature of the missionary vocation, operating on the exposed frontier of the Church, demands the ability to accommodate.

Ronald Hall, Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong, has said that a successful missionary should be addicted to hobbies, for they indicate an ability to spread one's interest and relieve the intensity that is likely to characterize the missionary's personality. He himself keeps two black sows of which he is immensely proud!

So much attention has been focused on the necessity of getting along with those of other beliefs and cultures, however, that we are in danger of forgetting the second half of Paul's statement--that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. The missionary's position, then, is a difficult one, involving a tension between the most radical identification of himself with the conditions of the people to whom he has been sent, and a totally uncompromising attitude on the subject of man's relation to new life in Christ. Lack of the former means loss of "communication," and surrender of the latter means relinquishment of Eternal Truth.

### **C. The Mystical Approach.**

A second appeal to the Athens speech is in the realm of mysticism, which by definition affirms that God is approachable by man. The author of Acts puts into the mouth of Paul the words of Epimenides, the Greek poet, that "in ... (God) we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), whereas in the letters there is no hint of man's communion directly with God. Paul is too deeply convinced of man's estrangement from Him (Rom. 1-3), of the power of sin that sets man at enmity with God (Rom. 5:20), and of man's need of reconciliation with Him (II Cor. 5:20).

Paul often speaks of being "in Christ," but never of being "in God." All things are from God and through Him and to Him (Rom. 11:36), but hardly are they in Him. Rather the relationship with God arises only through Christ and can only be focused in Christ. Paul like John Wesley thus denies all mysticism except Christ-mysticism. He would affirm that there is no common approach to God with the Eastern religions. On the contrary he would insist that the Eastern mystic is in fact drifting farther and farther from his goal instead of nearing it. The traditional movement of the mystic is ascent of the soul to God, something inherently impossible without help. But the whole direction of missionary discipleship for the apostle is the descent of Christ, who came down to empty Himself, taking the form of a servant and being obedient unto death (Phil. 2:7). Man, for

Paul, is a bankrupt criminal and no amount of mystical or moralistic effort on his part can set him on the path to the Divine.

Mysticism no matter how ineffable is compatible with profound egotism and does not face up to the problem of how sinful man can walk with a holy God. Paul would say that unholy man cannot stand before the sinless God; only God can render this communion possible. This is the negation of all religions that depend upon any kind of legalism or enlightenment, because they all rest upon some form of self redemption.

Karl Heim tells of a Japanese of the old Samurai class who had been brought up in the severe ethic of Confucianism and the ascetic discipline of Mahayana Buddhism, but under the influence of a simple Christian the thought was borne in upon him that all of his exercises might themselves be a great sin, as long as he was estranged from God.<sup>7</sup> In this situation the word of Paul came to him like a ray of light, "A man is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16).

### III. THE WORK OF DISCIPLESHIP

We turn our attention next to the question of how discipleship works out in the actual business of Christian living and of mission practice. The existentialists insist that the key to the meaning of existence is involvement, that man cannot separate himself from the process of living. Paul's whole missionary career is illustration of the same principle, for he could not accept the Christian life on any other terms than complete participation in the vocation of discipleship. A modern national missionary from Brazil to this country put it this way, "If you are not a missionary, you are a mission field"; and we could add that if you are not participating in discipleship, you cease to be a disciple. Let us consider briefly three aspects of Paul's missionary practice.

#### A. Pauline Speed.

First, there is the speed and extent of his missionary work. Toward the end of his career he wrote to the Romans summing up in startling fashion the range of his missionary outreach: "From Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:19). In the few short years of his missionary life he had worked in

<sup>7</sup> Karl Heim, *The New Divine Order*, p. 121.

dozens of towns and cities in four large Roman provinces, and he could say that he had “fully” preached the gospel of Christ in all this territory. For Paul to have considered his work done in the whole eastern half of the Mediterranean world in his two decades or so of itineration is not less than astonishing.

One significant difference between Paul and modern missions on this score is in the fact that Paul was moving from a poorer and subordinate culture to a richer and more dominant one, and consequently did not have to carry cultural trappings with him. The modern missionary movement, conversely, has been propagating the gospel in the cultural framework of a wealthier and technologically superior society, which tended to involve the transplanting of institutions rather than the bare preaching of the gospel. This not only deprived the mission of “Pauline dispatch,” but also laid it open to the charge of “cultural imperialism.” In comparison with modern missions, Paul spent only a short time in one place and yet could address the believers as the “church.” Without the support of finances or the prestige of a “higher” culture he had to rely on the constructive power of the Holy Spirit and cast his young congregations at a far earlier stage upon their resources. He believed, and saw demonstrated, that where the gospel was “fully” preached, it took root in the hearts of believers, and miraculously the body of Christ was formed.

## **B. Pauline Pioneering.**

A second principle of Paul’s missionary practice was his eagerness always to pioneer in new territory. He told the Romans of his concern not to build on another man’s foundation, and that he “no longer had any room to work in these regions” (Rom. 15:20, 23). Through the centuries the true missionary has followed in his footsteps, as is seen in the Irish missionaries who evangelized the European continent, in Francis Xavier who carried the gospel to India and the Far East, in the Moravians who within the space of a few short years sent missionaries to a dozen countries across the world, and in a later day by the towering figures of Carey, Morrison and Livingstone. One of the subtlest temptations of the Church is to become static and cautious, forgetting the Pauline passion to move on to virgin fields, and that, not when the existing Church has been “fully” built up, but when the gospel has been “fully” preached.

In our time geographical frontiers are disappearing, and in their place is the lure and challenge to find ever new and more persuasive ways of reaching with the Good News the vast increase in the world’s population.

It is estimated that the Church in all its efforts around the world is evangelizing a maximum of two million people a year. Yet the population of the globe is increasing annually by twenty to twenty-five million. In the next few decades, at the present rate of growth, it is expected that the population of many Asiatic countries will increase fifty to one hundred percent. By 1980 China alone may reach the astounding figure of one billion people. It is very doubtful whether without serious repentance and rededication to the Pauline example of missionary pioneering, the Church will be able to meet this massive new challenge.

### C. Missionary Giving.

Thirdly, Paul was much concerned about the duty of Christian giving. After the Jerusalem conference had laid upon Paul's conscience the remembering of the poor at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10), the Apostle by letter and visit had urged upon his churches the taking of a missionary collection (I Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 8-9; Rom. 15:25-33). Over a period of time he evolved a procedure for encouraging the members to this task, writing the Corinthians to lay aside something every week, so that the fund would be ready when he came (I Cor. 16:2). Paul's new Christians were largely from the lower classes and the poor. Although he found he could not expect much from unplanned solicitation, he felt giving was an important part of discipleship and could not be left to chance. Discipline, it might be noted at this point, is derived from the same root as discipleship and involves steady, consistent dedication. There is a curious similarity between the first two vows of a Roman Catholic priest and those of a Buddhist monk, namely, poverty and chastity. Only in the third is there a difference, obedience for the Roman Catholic and non-violence for the Buddhist, Protestants, on the other hand, have inclined to leave the discipline of poverty and giving to the individual conscience, just as Paul held up to his Corinthian readers the example of the Macedonian churches who were giving "of their own free will" (II Cor. 8:2-4). As the supreme incentive to giving the apostle pointed to Christ Himself who "though he was rich, yet for your sake... became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

The imperative needs of the younger Church in Asia and Africa are the modern counterpart of the request from the Jerusalem authorities, and the Church of the West would be less than Christian, if she failed fully to respond. A practical incentive today is the tenet of the Communist movement in the lands of the East, that everyone shall have according to his need and give according to his ability. This is not far removed from

Paul's entreaty to his people to love one another "with brotherly affection ... (and) contribute to the needs of the saints" (Rom. 12:10, 13).

The missionary movement has answered Paul's appeal to share in the Christian grace of giving, but paradoxically this very giving has created one of the most obstinate stumbling-blocks to the growth of the ecumenical Church. The United States with six percent of the world's population boasts sixty percent of the globe's wealth. This tremendous disparity has produced serious repercussions on the mission field, instilling in the younger church an ambition to match the economic status of the missionary. The problem is complex, for missionary giving is; on the one hand, necessary to the home Church, not as a donation after her own needs are served, but as sacrificial participation in the passion and Kingdom of her Lord. Generous as she has been, the higher standard of living of the Western Church seems progressively to have promoted forgetfulness of Paul's concern that the Corinthians "as a matter of equality" should share their abundance with their Judean brethren who were in want (II Cor. 8:14).

Missionary giving has then the problem of finding a method whereby the gift does not induce dependence. To give without stultifying growth and to receive without resentment demand much Christian grace. Because the Communist regime in China has insisted on the independence embodied in the "Three-Self Movement," the Chinese Church has apparently been more than tolerated by the new government and found added self-respect in financial separation from the West. Giving should be a two-way street. It is possible that in her material abundance, the Western Church is spiritually impoverished and needs both the prophetic insights of the younger Church, and the example of greater simplicity in living. Perhaps it will be the spiritual strategy of missions in the future to place less dependence on the material equipment for her task. Perhaps at least part of the missionary witness in the future will be living like the poor, rather than preaching to the poor, and thus demonstrate with greater sincerity obedience to the saying of Jesus, "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14: 33).

#### IV. DISCIPLESHIP IN THESE TIMES

Discipleship, in the fourth place, has meaning only in the context of the time in which it exists. We look first at Paul's conception of time and its end.

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## A. Pauline Eschatology.

The great missionary was convinced that he was living in the shadow of the imminent end of time, and his faith was characterized by an eschatological tension between the present and the future. Eschatology was the fabric of all his life and discipleship, for Paul during much of his life believed the end of the present age was not far off. He advised in relation to the married state that each person remain as he is “in view of the impending distress” (I Cor. 7:26). The “form of this world,” he says, “is passing away” (I Cor. 7: 31). Not only did Paul advise the Christian “to wait for... (the) Son from Heaven,” indicating fulfillment in the near future, but he is even now living in the redemptive age; “behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2). Christ has completed his work and nothing remains to be done for our salvation, except for Him to come again to receive the Kingdom. In the same way Isaiah’s disciples were to preserve his message for the future, and yet make it effective in the present. The tension for faith between the actuality of Christ’s advent in history and the sure hope of His return, a tension every Christian may know in his own experience, is a significant part of the incentive to complete the missionary task, and proclaim “the Lord’s death until He comes.”

## B. Suffering and Discipleship.

Integral to Paul’s eschatology is his concept of suffering which characterizes the lot of the Christian in the age between the times. Suffering for Paul is more than just enduring persecution and hardship; it is a means of grace whereby the believer is brought into fellowship with his Lord (I Cor. 12:26). Only by dying with Christ can he be raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4; Phil. 3:10-11). This is the explanation of Paul’s mysterious paradox of suffering, whereby he can proclaim that though “afflicted, he is never crushed, though persecuted, he is never forsaken; and though struck down, he is never destroyed” (II Cor. 4:8-9). There is a necessary connection between pain and redemption, for by his very capacity to suffer he recognizes his identity with Christ. Sufferings, moreover, are not only the hallmark of the time between the resurrection and the coming again, but without them the end will not come; they are effective as completing the sufferings of Christ and for the Church (Col. 1:24).

Martin Niemoeller has observed that the persecution of the Christian faith under Hitler brought new life to the church in Germany, and that in Eastern Germany today trials and privations are deepening the

spiritual life of the Church. In West Germany, on the other hand, there has been such a return of prosperity that indifference and complacency result. An Indian superintendent of the Hyderabad district of the Methodist Church gives it as his sober and considered testimony that he is ready at any time to be a martyr for his faith. It is at this point that discipleship and mission most inexorably meet; only persecution and affliction will be the price of fulfillment of the mission. This is the final and authentic demonstration of missionary discipleship, and it is for this reason in Paul's eyes that the acceptance of the Cross must be reckoned the key word for missions in any age.

### C. Our Times.

Arnold Toynbee characterizes our age as the post-Christian era and Albert Camus declares that now the human dialogue is drawing to a close. Man is only waiting in despair for the climax of time and of history. Reinhold Niebuhr likens our age to one of the great critical eras of the past:

Our indiscriminate freedom and our tremendous productivity have made our culture soft and vulgar... We have in fact become so self-indulgent that one may raise the question whether our position vis-a-vis the Russians is not the old historic situation: the 'barbarians,' hardy and disciplined, are ready to defeat a civilization in which the very achievements of its technology have made for soft and indulgent living... We are just as effete, and probably are more vulgar than the Byzantines when the Moslems took Constantinople.<sup>8</sup>

Just as the West tends to defend its status-quo, so the peoples of the East are proclaiming the watchword of "self-determination," which since World War II has resulted in over twenty new republics. The common front in North Africa, the Arab Republic in the Near East, the civil war in Indonesia, a student mob in Peru, those are the outward rash of an inner fever, a frenzied effort to revive self-respect in the face of white supremacy. The missionary movement not only cannot be ignorant of these developments and exist in isolation from them, but far more basic to its discipleship is the duty of translating their meaning to the Church at large. The mission realizes that in part these events are a product of its gospel, unexpected sometimes, at times unwelcome, but nevertheless demanding

<sup>8</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christianity and Crisis," March 18, 1958.

its concern. Its effort to understand them is motivated by an unrelenting zeal to utilize their momentum and to seize again the initiative for the Church of Christ.

### D. Eschatology and Discipleship.

The eschatology of discipleship means that not only does the Christian recognize the recalcitrance and unrepented evil of the times, but that being Christian involves participation by the disciple in history. Because history has a denouement and each moment holds within it a double destiny of life or death there is the necessity that the whole world have the opportunity to know the redemptive love of Christ. "The gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then will the end come" (Matt. 24:14). As the eschatological tension is a larger copy of the stress of the human situation, so the incompleteness of man's predicament can only be perfected in the final solution to the tension of the times.

Because of his exposed position the missionary stands in need of Paul's assurance that in spite of the struggle and apparent defeat in the spiritual warfare, the kingdom will be brought in when Christ comes again. Under the tension of knowing the present rule of Christ, yet realizing that the world in its present form is passing away, both the individual Christian and the missionary Church are made at every point dependent upon the grace and energy of God. It is precisely because this salvation "is nearer to us now than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11), that it is urgent for the gospel to reach as many people as possible. Missionary discipleship does not rest for foundation upon the distress of the world, nor upon the desire of the heart for salvation; rather, it is founded upon the still unfulfilled promises of God.

### V. CONCLUSION

Our conclusion from this study is to suggest that perhaps the most effective way in which the Church of the West can be recalled to the witness which is the reason for her being is to take seriously the Pauline prototype of missionary discipleship. The apostle believed that unless the Church is under condemnation of the world, the Cross is no longer central, and to that extent she has erred from her missionary calling. If the Church is not presently undergoing persecution, she can vicariously experience it on her missionary frontiers, for unless she takes upon herself the suffering of the world, she cannot be acceptable to God. Robert E. Speer called

an unmissionary Church a “fundamental immorality”<sup>9</sup>; and Emil Brunner asserts that the Church lives by mission as fire exists by burning.<sup>10</sup> In these frightening times it is one of the foremost duties of missionary discipleship by both word and deed to awaken the whole Church to a reconsideration of her life in terms of St. Paul, her first great missionary. What are the roots of the Church’s discipleship? What is the uniqueness of the gospel that she proclaims to the world? Is she performing her task in relation to the tensions of her own eschatological message and of the age in which she is called to witness?



## First Fruits

<sup>9</sup> Robert E. Speer, *Missionary Principles and Practice*, p. 259.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie Newbigin, *The Household of God*, p. 143.