

Advancing Strategies of Closure A Vision and a Venture

by K. Rajendran



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Outline: The Biblical basis for a vision and a venture

I. Theory (Galatians 1:15–2:1)

- a. Galatians 1:15, 16: Paul's clarity of vision for the Gentiles.
- b. Verses 1:16b, 17: Theoretical stage, a period of incubation and preparation.
- c. Verses 1:16, 17: Paul did not share this immediately with others—and did not go to Jerusalem—for fear of rejection!
- d. Paul went to Arabia for 3 years: A period of preparation.
- e. Verse 22: Paul was an unknown, insignificant person in the churches. In verse 18, he met only with the Apostle Peter for fifteen days and had an interview with James, the Lord's brother.
- f. Paul changed his name, not because he became a Christian (“behold all things become new”), but because he wanted to identify himself with the people to whom he went.

II. Model (Galatians 2:1-3)

- a. After 14 years, Paul created a model of Gentiles coming to Christ.
- b. He took with him to Jerusalem a Jewish convert, Barnabas, whose (old Jewish) name was changed to identify his character. Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, did not change his name. The change was in their lives, not in the externals. Titus did not become a Jew, but a follower of Christ.
- c. In verse 2, Paul communicated the essentials of the Gospel, a Gospel that changed lives, not one mixed up with traditions. The Gospel he and Peter preached was the same, but the methods and adaptations were different.
- d. Paul did not communicate a theory, but he had proof that his Gospel worked. We very much lack proven role models today.
- e. In verse 2a Paul shared this privately to key leaders and his approach gathered momentum. It is usually hard to share innovations with the “masses,” who are traditional and resistant to change. Trying to implement change at this level is usually impossible. Change always starts in a small way. Concerning change agents, Chaco Thomas says: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”¹
- f. In verse 3 we see that Titus, a Greek, was not circumcised, but his life was changed. Does tradition change lives? Does innovation have a place in the Church? For instance, why are most Protestant churches open only on Sundays? Can't they be open every day of the week for people to visit and pray anytime? Could a “guru” or “imam” be available throughout

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the day to speak, advise and counsel people on life issues, instead of just giving three point sermons? Could seminaries prepare such people or do they prepare only academic and scholastic brain machines to give apologetic lectures, without meeting the actual mental, emotional and physical needs of the people?

III. Other observations, suggestions and perhaps questions that need to be answered if the unreached are to be seriously addressed

“Mission work” has changed but the actuality and the relevance of changing “mission work” is slow. Our outlook of “mission work” has to change.

For example, past Protestant missionary activities were, by and large, driven by a colonial, monastic and medieval mindset of civilising people, paternalism and control by money and other resources. The practice of the mission compound and of extracting people from their societies (to keep them “holy”) is one well-recognized example.

[The] converts were called upon to separate themselves radically from the society. But the ‘churchly’ society was rather a transplanted version of the medieval ‘Christendom’²

There was confusion between communicating the Gospel and civilising people. Just like the two-thirds world mission movement today, Western missionaries had the same struggle.³ They equated “missions” with “civilising people.” Samuel Zwemer, Secretary of the famous “Student Volunteer Movement,” himself struggled with this dilemma in 1911 (during the height of the colonial Protestant missionary period). Zwemer said,

There is no hope in the shallow and mistaken cry, ‘civilising first and Christianity afterwards’. Civilising, without evangelisation introduces more evils into the non-Christian world than ever before. The Gospel is the only hope of social salvation, not to speak of its moral and spiritual power.⁴

Thus, mission agencies went to exotic unreached (“uncivilised”) outpost tribals, rather than impacting the nations of the world. Of course, this strategy also gave them “mass conversions.”

With hundreds becoming Christians, the numbers game became the driving force for missions across the world. If this trend continues, missions will continue to leave the major unreached peoples of the world unreached!

The immediate model for Indian missions had been the Protestant mission societies and missionaries of the 18th to 20th centuries. Their models were fresh in the minds of the Indian missions and leaders who succeeded them. Thus new missions and leaders have had an unquenchable fantasy to reach out to tribals and Dalits. These ideas came from their predecessors, who often equated missions with the uplift of the poor and the downtrodden. Compassion was needed, but missions were frequently connected only with “civilising” peoples. This ethos often equated “evangelism” with “civilising.” If the non-poor are reached with the Gospel, they will tend to the poor and societies will change.⁵

Thus it becomes important that the missions have a fresh outlook of mission, rather than merely copying their predecessors. Some of their methods will still be relevant while many others will have changed. The suggestion is that the missions build on the foundation of past heroes, but not mindlessly follow everything they did.

The way of the traditional definition of the Church and cathedrals must change if people are to become followers of Christ, not merely Judaic Christians. Even the churches’ worship patterns are Judaic, which is perfect in Jerusalem, but not in India.

The returning crusaders, ... in Constantinople saw the enormous, shining St. Sophia mosque, built by a Christian emperor as a cathedral but was later taken over by Muslims. This led to the desire of building cathedrals as a fad. All the major cathedrals in Europe were built within a 50 year period. This thrust, while not inherently evil, became the focus of the Church while evangelisation was neglected to the sidelines.⁶

For some, Cathedral is synonymous with Christianity.⁷

For some, the organisation of the “main-line churches” is the Church. Biblically this has to be corrected. This

will eventually pave the way for people to choose to become followers of Christ instead of becoming “Cathedral Christians,” which might be at times a hindrance to people who want to follow Christ without becoming members of a “church organisation.” This is not in any way to downplay the importance of the churches of any denomination, but to keep Gospel, traditions and organisations separate in order to communicate and bring people to Christ. In the process, people can select the organisational church with which they want to fellowship.

We have to become innovative and pragmatic in communicating the life-changing essentials of the Gospel, rather than the paraphernalia of man-made rules and regulations about what it means to “be a Christian.” In doing so, we will encourage many workable paradigms in different parts of the world, which can be followed in other places.

We have to encourage manageable and viable house churches where people feel comfortable in their own surroundings (environments), with their own ways of worshipping Jesus rather than following the “masses.” House gatherings will also multiply lay leadership.

We have to keep a balance between discipling “single” persons (extraction evangelism and discipling), on the one hand, and discipling the masses and establishing models of changed communities, on the other. Changed communities speak louder than convincing arguments, especially among the unreached peoples of the world.

Followers of Christ must retain their original culture as much as possible if they are to be witnesses in their societies. The Word and the concept of contextualisation are taboo for Christians who fear syncretism. But for many committed missionary-sending Christians, such things as Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and adapted Halloween celebrations are okay. Saul became Paul. Titus, Apollos, Diana, Cornelius and others continued to keep their original culture so as to retain their identification with their clans and societies. Following Christ means a change of heart, which

changes thinking and behaviour within the framework of the societies in which believers live and transmit Christ. Thus followers of Christ must be helped to keep as much of their original culture as possible without creating a strange cultural fusion. Asim should not become Robert (Is Robert in the Bible?).

A well-known Indian Sikh Journalist Khushwant Singh mildly ridiculed Christians when he said,

Many Christians continued bearing high sounding English names, their women wore a comical mixture of European and Indian dress. Their hymns translated sung to outlandish tunes (which) evoked more derision than reverence.⁸

Similarly, Stephen Neill, an English missionary Bishop himself, wrote,

Missionaries wished their converts to become as much like Englishmen as possible. Christianity in India today presents itself as an alien religion.⁹

Jack C. Winslow, a friend of Gandhi, wrote that missionaries with the Gospel brought unessential Western accompaniments.¹⁰

Cross-cultural evangelism has to include the local people sooner in the task of reaching both their own and surrounding peoples. At this point in history, with more Christians in the two-thirds world, there is a need to help such believers reach peoples in close proximity, as much as overseas. Evangelistic bands and leadership must consist of people from many cultures. Leadership should not just be based on economically stronger nations, a situation that simply perpetuates a mental colonialism, paternalism and unseen domination. This is not just a problem for Western countries; it can be and is being repeated by economically stronger Asian and African countries, just as in the days of old.

To reach the unreached, Christians must break the *culture* of the laity-clergy dichotomy, thus bridging the gap between professional (full-time) missionaries and all Great-Commission Christians. Many nations are closing the doors to the old style "full-time" missionaries. As many countries are becoming nationalistic and communalistic, future mission

endeavours will be by people who have a professional reason for their presence. The Philippines Missions Association is working on sending 200,000 tent-making missionaries by the year 2010.¹¹ This is a tremendous goal. Unless India changes in this regard, her mission endeavours will falter. Traditionally, Indian professionals in diaspore were asked to contribute financially to "send" the "called" missionaries. And they did. But the question is being asked about the missed possibilities of training lay people to plant more culturally "comfortable" house gatherings. Mission thinkers have to change or they will be the losers.

The mandate of the Great Commission is to help people follow Christ with a changed heart. This change of heart eventually will create changed behaviours, families, communities and thought patterns, resulting in a better society, mutual care and economic growth. Many missions have fallen into the trap of bringing economic growth and literacy without affecting the hearts of the people. Therefore, a clear focus should be kept. We must enable respective governments to help meet the external needs of their people. Christians could join in and show their concern, but the primary goal is to help people experience a change of heart and become followers of Christ.

In this respect, theological education as a whole has to be revamped if we are to reach all peoples with the Gospel of Christ. The character of missionaries has to be shaped just as much as their academics. As missionaries are mentored, they can in turn mentor others, as Paul encourages Timothy to do in II Timothy 2: 2.

The closure of missionary endeavours should have all the above components, not just conferences, seminars, and pet ideas of family industries. May the Lord Jesus help us to think, rethink and move forward with churches among all the unreached peoples. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹Chacko Thomas, OM, ICT, London, February 2002

²Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd* (Madras: CLS, 1974) p. 86.

³K. Rajendran, "Missions and Paradigm Shift – Is it spiritual?" *Indian Missions*, [April-June 2001] 21-22

⁴Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Unoccupied Mission fields of Africa and Asia* (New York: Laymen's Missionary Movement, 1911) p. 120.

⁵K. Rajendran, "Missions and Paradigm Shift – Is it spiritual?" *Indian Missions*, [April-June 2001] 21-22

⁶Ralph Winter, "The Kingdom Strikes Back," in Ralph Winter, Steve Hawthorne et al [Eds.], *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (California: William Carey Library, 1981) pp. 32-33.

⁷K. Rajendran, *Which Way Forward Indian Missions* (Bangalore: SAIACS Press, 1998) p. 133.

⁸Khushwant Singh, *India – An Introduction* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1992), p. 76.

⁹Stephen Neill, *Builders of the Indian Church* (London: Westminster: The Livingstone Press, 1934, 1934) p. 63.

¹⁰Jack C. Winslow, *The Eyelids of the Dawn*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1954) p. 77.

¹¹Interview with Rev. Ray Corpus, the General Secretary of PMA. London, Remap II consultation, 8th October 2002. Confirmed by the email from Danny Martin, the coordinator of Tentmakers International Exchange – TIE, Phuket, Thailand.