

A STUDY OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST HOME MISSIONS.*

BY VICTOR I. MASTERS.

There is just now among Southern Baptists an increasing interest in home missions, which is one of the happiest portents in the current of life of the denomination. It seems especially appropriate that the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which, as no other agency among us, shapes the thought of Southern Baptists, should in the special course of lectures provide as it has for presentations of the work; and while I am much oppressed at the magnitude of the task which by some chance has fallen to me, that I should stand in this presence and seek to interpret a work which in all the years has engaged the best thought and affections of a generous people, yet I can but rejoice if I may rightly express something of the life and purpose and opportunities of the home mission work of Southern Baptists.

It is a striking fact that Southern Baptists, who have prospered in home mission work as no other denomination in America, should have less written history of its achievements in this direction than any other leading denomination. Northern Baptists have more than one valuable work on their home mission enterprises; the Presbyterians, North and South, have a luminous home mission literature; the Congregationalists, Episcopalians and others have interpreted the work from their standpoint, and chiefly, of course, their own work. Perhaps the Southern Methodists who, next to the Baptists, have done most in evangelizing the homeland, are nearest to them in a dearth of a proper record of their deeds.

Southern Baptists as yet have no complete history of their home mission work, nor has one of our writers devoted himself

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with any effort at completeness to a portrayal of the great needs, obligations and opportunities in this sphere. Miss Mary Emily Wright, formerly of Augusta, Ga., has written a book on the "Missionary Work of the Southern Baptist Convention." The limited space of about 100 pages which she devotes to domestic missions presents a charming and instructive story. It is the best and, aside from even more abbreviated booklets, the only work available to Southern Baptists on the topic. I dare express the hope that it cannot long be said of the Southern Baptists, who have made so much history in missionary endeavor, both at home and abroad, that they are laggards in recording it.

The relation of foreign and home missions is that of affectionate twin sisters, and among their intelligent and devout supporters there can never be any rivalry between them. In the same sentence the Saviour gave command that his people should be witnesses to him both in the home country and to the uttermost parts of the earth. The same impulse to loving service and sacrifice for humanity's greatest good inspires the devotion of the disciple to both, and the needs of a lost soul in America and China are identical. There are in missions problems of policy, considerations of strategy, but among those who long for the Lord's coming and wish to lead souls to him there can be no division of the spirit.

Toward missions in general Christian denominations have assumed several distinct attitudes. The Moravians have placed the entire emphasis on foreign missions. As a consequence these noble people are to-day practically without a central home-hand from which to operate as a base of supplies. A Moravian bishop not long since in conversation with a Baptist minister admitted that in this policy his denomination had made a great mistake.

The Primitive Baptists are the most notable example of a Christian denomination avowedly arrayed against missions. With all due respect to the sturdy people of that faith, their position is that of ignorance, prejudice and selfishness. The denomination is rapidly dying out in mountain coves and backwoods settlements. A Christianity without the missionary spirit has not the vitality to keep it alive in this world of sin.

Its negativeness is no match for the marshalled cohorts of Satan.

Some Christians place the main emphasis on home missions. The Methodists come nearer being an example of that attitude than any other body of Christians, and as a result they have prospered much in America.

The other possible attitude is that of devotion to missions alike at home and abroad. It has been the theory of the Presbyterians and the Baptists, but the former have in fact given the greater part of their attention to foreign missions to the neglect of the base of supplies, and the Southern Baptists, whose thought is now happily swinging to a more normal attitude, have at certain periods in their history come suspiciously near turning a deaf ear to the cry of the needy in the home-land, while they with unswerving purpose sought the heathen on other shores.

Of the interdependence of home and foreign missions, Austin Phelps says: "If I were a missionary in Canton, China, my first prayer every morning would be for the success of American home missions for the sake of Canton, China."

"Home missions," says an eminent foreign missionary, born in India, "means that America must be won for Jesus Christ throughout her borders, so that she may conserve a high Christian life, and may do her God-appointed work as an evangelist among the nations. The whole foreign mission work of the United States rests back upon an effective and adequate scheme of home missions."

Dr. R. S. Stoors, a quarter of a century ago, wrote from Florence, Italy: "The future of the whole *world* is pivoted on the question of whether the Protestant churches of America can hold, enlighten, purify, the peoples gathered into its great compass." What this seer beheld then is becoming ever more apparent as the years pass.

Referring to the limitation of their ability in doing foreign mission work consequent upon their comparative lack of numbers in the home-land, Dr. S. L. Morris, of Atlanta, the brilliant secretary of Southern Presbyterian home missions, says: "The costliest mistake of the Southern Presbyterian Church has been the neglect of its home mission work.

THE EARLY DAYS.

The missionary development of our Baptist fathers in America was in process long before the Southern Baptist Convention was formed. Even in a brief survey some view should be had of those early days. When the colonists came to America they found in the Indian a mission problem. They had brought their religion with them, and though the struggle for existence in a strange wilderness pressed hard for attention, it was not long until they began to give some attention to evangelizing the Indians. Exceedingly few of the settlers were Baptists. The Congregationalists were in power in New England. The Friends held Pennsylvania. Into the South the Episcopalians came in dominant power and set up a State Church, while the Scotch Presbyterians got a strong hold in all the great Appalachian mountain belt. Yet it was given the Baptists in Roger Williams to have not only the first American champion of religious freedom, but also the first known missionary of the Red Men.

The Baptists then were a feeble folk, wholly without prestige. Their position to-day as probably the largest Protestant denomination in America is a striking anti-climax; and certainly one of the most important factors which brought it about was the spirit of evangelism and missions among the early pioneers. That spirit was for many years without organization or agency. At first it abode mainly in the hearts of the pioneer preachers, who with evangelistic fervor counted no labor too severe, no trip through trackless forests too fatiguing, no adaptation to primitive social conditions too trying, when the needs of the souls of men were in the balance. Sometimes they were imprisoned and sometimes their lives were in jeopardy, often they were persecuted. But they were moved by none of these things. Far be it from us to speak patronizingly of these men. In the hard school of experience by the grace of God they were *men*—men whose hearts were attuned to the voiceless cry of humanity's deepest needs. In our day we have none of more heroic mold.

When, on the foundation laid broad and well by these men, nurtured at a later period by certain local societies of various names and kinds, and at a still later date by the National Baptist Triennial Convention, the Southern Baptists came at last in 1845 to a self-realization in an organization of their own, its purposes were definitely missionary and its agents were the present Foreign and Home Mission Boards.

THE WORK WHICH CONFRONTED THE NEW BOARD.

The Home Mission Board took up the work when the South had a population of about 7,325,000, 4,525,000 whites and 2,800,000 negro slaves. There were in the territory about 350,000 Baptists, of whom 225,000 were whites and 125,000 blacks. There are now approximately two millions each of white and negro Baptists in this territory. While the population has multiplied about four times, the number of Baptists has increased more than eleven times. In 1845 there was one Baptist in the South to every twenty-four persons; now there is one to every six and a half persons. Southern Baptists have grown four times as fast as the general population. With all respect to other instrumentalities which have contributed to this result, the Home Board is undoubtedly the chief formal agency through which these altogether remarkable results have been attained.

It was no easy task which the Home Board found to take hold of. While the missionary spirit had expressed itself effectively through the pioneer preachers, and later through associational missions and still later through State missions, none of these agencies had really taken a full survey of the needs in any one State, far less in the entire South, nor had the general boards of the North done so. Before 1845 very little mission work had been done at the South by any general mission agency. The Baptist Home Mission Society was then engaged with the needs nearer its center of influence, and which were more fully understood and appreciated.

The first five years of the Board's activities, while blessed with fruitful results in conversions and church organizations,

was largely occupied in learning by actual trial just what the needs were. Railways were almost unknown in the large country to be influenced. Cities and towns were few, and the population scattered. A report of one of the missionaries employed the first year will serve as an example of a large part of the work done, and its counterparts are continually received at the Home Board office even until this day. His field was in Florida. He reported: "I am in a vast field of labor, having formed a circuit of about 450 miles in extent, and not an ordained preacher but myself in the whole bounds. Since the first part of March last I received no support. I have about twenty settlements in which I preach. It takes about thirty days to travel around my circuit, requiring more than half my time, as I perform the journey every two months." He reported fifty-one baptisms and five churches organized.

In 1847 a missionary reported from Alabama: "Grown persons in my district have never heard a sermon." Another from Mississippi said: "In a scope of country here 150 miles square there is only a single, solitary Baptist missionary preacher." Another from Arkansas wrote: "There is only one Baptist minister here to sixty miles square and but a few members of all denominations. Nine-tenths of the people hardly ever hear a sermon. There is no Sunday-school in the whole northeastern part of the State." A layman from Texas sent the secretary this cry: "We are like sheep without a shepherd here in Texas. I never saw destitution so great. Texas needs 100 missionaries." One Texas missionary reported that he was the sole preacher in a region of 150x50 miles.

And the destitution was not all in the younger States. South Carolina, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida and Georgia Baptists needed and received a large impetus from the Board in those days, which it will be wholesome for them to remember now.

To meet all this destitution the Board had but meagre funds. The missionary zeal of the fathers had shown itself rather in evangelistic and personal work than in formal effort and giving of their means. The fathers were afraid of boards and general agencies. They had reason to be, and we to-day

have received a blessing as a denomination largely from the fact that they were afraid. Their ancestors had been harassed and oppressed by the taxation and persecution of the established church in the old country, and they themselves were made to smart under the assumption and oppression of like ecclesiastical engines in America in the early colonial period. They came to consider a paid ministry or a central agency for accumulating money as vehicles for oppression and greed. The Home Board found this all over the South. And this at once curtailed its resources and showed the need of its work. Almost every year in those days the Convention issued a circular letter to the brotherhood trying to break down opposition to the new and formal mission agencies. This opposition was in many cases more from a jealous anxiety for the principles of Baptist independence and local self control than from niggardliness.

I said but now that this had in it a blessing. Though the Southern Convention was fashioned after the Triennial Convention, its boards became vehicles of a thoroughly democratic convention, adapted to the demands of a brotherhood, jealous of centralization, amenable to the convention and the churches, then, as now, as thoroughly their creatures as it is possible for such agencies to be. This the Northern societies were, and are, not.

THE NEGRO.

The religious weal of the Negro has confronted the Home Board as a problem from the first day of its existence until now, and while it is a problem still, complicated somewhat by the post-bellum activities of our Northern brethren among them, the Southern Baptists have not in vain warmed their hearts with compassion for the sons of Ham. At its initial meeting the Convention gave special instructions to the Home Board to preach the gospel to the Negro. From that meeting until now a somewhat careful search of the Convention minutes leads me to believe that in the annual meetings the Home Board or the Convention, or both, have each year placed special stress

on this work. The repeated emphasis which was placed upon it showed that it was regarded then as a work of prime importance. "If the Negro is lost through our neglect it will be our condemnation," said a Convention resolution. "Masters are as much the moral guardians of their servants as their children," said another.

Of like tenor were other references to the Negro, year after year, not only before the war, but with pathetic and beautiful insistence at the close of the great civil strife. Impoverished, demoralized, prostrate, mourning the loss of thousands of sons of the South, the Baptist denomination even in the South's defeat, felt no resentment at the stings and flings of a misguided North about their treatment of the Negro. The Southern white Christians loved the Negro and the Negro knew it. No one was more a stranger to the horrors of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" than the average Negro himself. But when the "Uncle Tom's Cabin" spirit, used by an all-wise Providence, had done its work, the Southern fathers in Israel gave it an answer that ought to place them forever above abuse for their ownership of slaves. In their own poverty they went quietly on with their work to uplift the inferior race, without even realizing that they were doing a noteworthy thing.

The board instructed all its missionaries to devote a part of their time to the Negroes. It reported that the chief object of the labors of many of the missionaries was to help the blacks, and declared that nowhere in the range of missionary enterprise had missions met with greater reward. The owners of the slaves became more and more interested in the work. Some of them built houses of worship for the slaves, and planters came forward and offered to pay the salaries of missionaries the board would send to their black people. In hundreds of white churches the slave membership was far greater than that of their masters. In 1867 the missionaries baptized 575 Negroes and in the next year 811.

Gradually, as the Negroes developed a ministry of their own, the board changed its activities to educating the Negro preachers. At that time the South had not sufficiently recovered from the war to enable the Southern Baptists to erect edu-

cational plants for the Negro preachers. Before they became able the Northern Baptists had come in and occupied the field to such an extent that the Southerners have since directed their efforts for the Negroes to institutions for their training and into evangelizing them through good men of their own race, though confessedly educating their preachers properly is decidedly the best work that can be done for them.

To-day there are 2,000,000 Negro Baptists in the South. In 1845 there were 125,000. Then there were 2,800,000 Negroes, now there are in Southern territory 9,000,000. One person in five among them is a Baptist. While the race has increased a little more than three-fold Baptists among them have increased sixteen-fold. The result is altogether extraordinary and the chief agency which has brought it about has unquestionably been the home mission work of Southern Baptists.

SERVICE IN CITIES.

From the first the Southern Baptists in home mission endeavor looked to the cities for a field. Missions were conducted in the earlier days in Washington, Annapolis, Norfolk, Baltimore, Richmond, Wheeling, Fredericksburg, Bristol, Raleigh, Charlotte, Greensboro, Columbia, Jacksonville, Tampa, Pensacola, Key West, Augusta, Atlanta, Columbus, Mobile, Montgomery, Birmingham, Vicksburg, Jackson, Louisville, Memphis, Knoxville, Nashville, Chattanooga, New Orleans, Galveston, Austin, Brownsville, Houston, Little Rock, Fort Smith, St. Louis, Jefferson City, Sacramento. This is but a list of some of the larger and better known places and presents not more than fifteen or twenty per cent of the whole work done in cities and towns prior to 1870. A detailed list of places aided in the older States would show that the Board did a large work in building up the Baptists in those States, which most of their descendants have forgotten. Up until 1870 more than two-thirds of the commissions which had been written by the Board were for service east of the Mississippi river. It aided the denomination in acquiring the strength wherewith to turn to the great empire beyond the river, not indeed with means com-

mensurate with the needs and opportunities, but in a time when every effort put forth would count for most, and though the denomination has scarcely yet realized the magnitude of the blessed results, it has won in Texas alone a wonderful and great country, which, though its Baptist resources are not yet even half developed to their full power, is now a great kingdom for Christ, that came up last year with one-seventh of the entire amount for foreign missions given by the denomination in the South. Texas is already the greatest Baptist State in the South, a mighty bulwark for civic righteousness wherewith to leaven the masses of superstitious and ignorant foreigners which are yet destined to fill the South and West and Southwest. What the great State shall be it will take an imagination corresponding to the vast stretches of the plains rightly to depict.

Texas is a trophy won to Southern Baptists through home missions. In itself, viewed simply as a strategic move for the Kingdom and for Baptist principles, it far more than justifies every dollar Southern Baptists have ever given to the cause, every anxious heart-throb of a weary secretary, wondering whether the brethren will hear his call or turn a deaf ear, and every year of patient, self-denying toil of every missionary, who through all these years has gone along his humble, difficult and unlauded way, willing to be of no esteem among men, and even of small repute among his own brethren, if he might, in the midst of grind and sacrifice, separated from congenial associations and his life unbrightened by the glamour of fancy or romance, lead sinful men to purity in Christ.

Even to mention the extent of the opportunity now before Southern Baptists in Oklahoma is more than I must try to do. Abler tongues have sought to portray that glorious opportunity so men would see and hear. How hardly does the average mind come to realize the greatness and significance of that which itself has not been beheld. Southern Baptists, as no other people, have the key to the moral and spiritual forces which shall control in that State, if they will but use it as they should.

The work which Southern Baptist home missions has done for the Indians would make a long chapter itself. It was emi-

nently successful, was torn to pieces by the war, and is successful again. If after so long there are fewer Indians instead of more (if, indeed, they are fewer), it is not the fault of the work, which is the work of Christ. At a meeting in the Indian Territory a Choctaw preacher recently said to a missionary:

"It is often asked what has become of the money spent on Indian missions. Come with me to your cemetery and I will show you the graves of hundreds of the sainted dead. Is the money wasted which filled their graves with Christians instead of heathens?"

BUT A GLIMPSE OF LARGER ACTIVITIES.

We can afford to pass Cuba by without reference, because it is in essence like the foreign mission work. I can also afford to omit a reference to the new evangelistic movement, which is but bringing up to date the first method of mission work of our denominational forbears. An abler speaker presented the cause in this course of lectures. I must omit reference to the work among foreigners, and the immigration problem, not from any idea that they lack importance, but for lack of time and because the main message would need to be a prophecy and an exhortation, which more become an abler seer. Also, the noble work of the war-time missionaries and the crying need of a large church-building fund must pass with the bare mention.

The great cry of the lost and suffering in our cities is yet destined to turn our home mission effort back to the cities, where it took hold long ago; but to meet a problem intensified and made difficult ten-fold more than in those former days. The South is no longer a place without great cities, and when we turn our attention again to the cities on any extended scale, as we must and ought, we will face the most difficult mission work the South has ever faced, the problem of getting hold of the hearts of people who have a near view of the Juggernaut of Mammon and know how cruel and heartless he is, who face temptation on every hand, and who, not without some reason, believe that the churches do not have a love for them which

will make their members break through the shell of social convention and selfishness to reach them.

THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE.

I cannot close without some reference to the home missions among mountain people. They are in every State in the South, east of the Mississippi, except Mississippi and Florida. In 1885 the Home Board began to give them some attention and in 1890 intensified this attention. The work has grown into a well-developed system of Christian schools. These mountain people are of Scotch-Irish descent and were once Presbyterians. It must have been the freedom and grandeur of the mountain country which did it, for time passed and they, though Presbyterians, became Baptists, and without any one seeking to proselyte them. Or do mountain fastnesses give one a clearer vision of truth? Their territory is one-fourth of the South. Their number is millions. Their blood is the most pure Anglo-Saxon blood in America. Their habits and manners are simple; they are like children. They fought as good soldiers in the Revolution. At King's Mountain they gave the British a blow from which they never recovered. But they retired to their mountain coves and valleys, and there they have stayed, uninfluenced to an appreciable extent by the throbbing pulses of the restless world. They are Sons and Daughters of the Revolution, who need not be ashamed, blue-bloods by rights which others prize highly, but they have organized no societies through which to set forth the claim.

What a vast opportunity is there. Evangelized, but not developed, converted but untrained, their prime need is education under strictly Christian influences.

Their hunger for education is often pathetic. The Christian Endeavor World from a missionary gives the following touching incident of a mountain boy: A young man entered a college office and, touching the president's arm, asked in a peculiar mountain brogue:

"Be ye the man who sells larnin'?"

Before the president could reply he asked again: "Look here, mister, do you uns run this here thing?"

The president replied: "Yes, when the thing is not running me. What can I do for you?"

"Heaps," was the only reply. Then silence; then the boy proceeded: "I has hearn that you uns educate poor boys here, and bein' as I am poor, thought I'd come and see if it was so. Do ye?"

The president replied that poor boys attended the college, but that it took money to provide for them; that they were expected to pay something. The boy was greatly troubled.

"Have you anything to pay for your food and lodging?" said the president.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "I has a little spotted steer and if you uns will let me, I'll stay wid ye till I larn him up."

Such persistence usually carries its point and he remained, and the little steer lasted for years. The president's closing remark on the incident was: "I have had the pleasure of sitting in the pew while I listened to my boy, now a young man, as he preached the glad tidings of salvation. Does it pay to help such boys?"

With only \$20,000 expense to the denomination, the Home Board maintained twenty-four high schools and colleges with 125 teachers in the mountains last year. There were 4,000 students, sixty of them young preachers. Can \$5.00 be better spent in character building than in keeping a mountain boy or girl for a year in one of these mission schools?

The home mission work of Southern Baptists has been abundantly blessed in every direction. In a history of sixty-two years it has expended \$4,448,700. This is a considerable sum, but Southern Baptists last year spent thousands more on local church expenses. The last annual report snows 18,798 baptisms, which has hardly been paralleled in the history of mission work. Two hundred and seventy-one churches were organized and 825 missionaries were employed. During its history, missionaries of this board have baptized 145,577 persons and organized 5,330 churches, or more than one-fourth the entire number now comprised in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Home missions has done another work for Southern Baptists which is not generally understood. It has unified them and held them together in their conventional work as probably no other force whatever has done.

DEMONSTRATED ITS RIGHT TO LIVE.

In 1882, when the Convention met in Greenville, there was talk in that body of doing away with the Board. It had just come to the hardest point in its career, and this was seriously discussed. Instead, it was moved from Marion, Ala., to Atlanta and the lamented Dr. I. T. Tichenor became secretary. Let Dr. Tichenor tell the story of what followed. I quote from a valuable manuscript historical sketch left by Dr. Tichenor which has never been published:

"In 1882 the Baptist Convention in Arkansas was in co-operation with the Home Missionary Society of New York. Missouri seemed lost to the board forever. Texas was divided into five missionary organizations, four of them receiving aid from the Home Missionary Society and the fifth paralyzed by its own dimensions. The entire territory west of the Mississippi had passed out of the influence of the Board.

"The Mississippi board was in alliance with the Philadelphia Publication Society, Georgia was co-operating with the New York society in Negro work, and Florida was hesitating between going to the Home Missionary Society and the Home Mission Board.

"Impressed with the conviction that the very existence of the Southern Baptist Convention depended upon the resuscitation of our own Home Mission Board, the new officials determined to reclaim the lost territory. Within five years there was not a Baptist missionary to the white people of the South who did not bear a commission either from the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention or one of the State boards in alliance with it. The territory had been reclaimed. Texas in one great convention was in hearty co-operation with the Board. So were Arkansas and Louisiana. The Board had demonstrated its right to live."

To which me say, Amen! It demonstrated that right

again in cultivating the cities and needy rural districts in the older States; again in its great work for the Negroes and Indians; again when it began to expand its work among the mountain people; again when, though cramped for means, it boldly advanced into the trans-Mississippi states and won so much of that great country.

And these are not the only ways in which it has demonstrated and is demonstrating its right to live. Surely our fathers were weary and sore and despondent from the post-bellum trials, surely they had lost their vision of the future by the continual stress of rehabilitating the downcast country, when they began to whisper among themselves that the Home Mission Board needed no further lease on life.

THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY, PRESENT AND FUTURE.

The twenty-five years since have been by far the best in its history and its success is even now increasing as never before. Never before has it taken such a broad hold on the denomination's confidence. And never before has it faced such strenuous needs, such marvelous opportunities, such deep moral obligations. May God give us vision to see and the will to meet them.

In 1882 our Baptist fathers could not know what changed conditions would confront us after a quarter of a century. After twenty-five years, in which the work has advanced from great weakness to the greatest strength it has ever had, our people are beginning to see that the best we have ever done does not measure up at all to the splendid opportunities in this sphere of activity. Strategy may doubtless be easily overworked in Christian missions, yet strategic considerations never pointed more clearly to a new emphasis on home missions than now. At last the tide of immigration has begun to turn southward. The North has about as many of immigrants as it knows how to use to economic advantage, far more than it has trained into true Americanism. The West is becoming full, and after a while will overflow. The westward movement will turn back. It seems certain that the Southland, in which

there is a larger percentage of Anglo-Saxons than is found anywhere else in America, must also face the ordeal of assimilating large numbers of these people. It will be a question of whether we will lift them to our standards or sink to theirs. In view of this fact, the thorough evangelizing of our own territory, especially the newer portion of it beyond the Mississippi, is of surpassing importance. And every year of niggardly effort in that territory now will entail a loss that ten years of faithful effort may not be able to retrieve in the future.

WHO WILL VOLUNTEER FOR THIS HIGH SERVICE?

If there be those among our strong young ministers who wish to volunteer for high work in gospel service I would ask them to consider the claims of home mission work. If a life of sacrifice for others appeals to you, where will you find it more than in city mission work? There you will need to see and be near those comforts and customs and social opportunities which we hold dear, and yet each day you may have to crucify your fondness for each for the sake of your work, so insidiously have they become the agents of Mammon. Does the hopelessness and hardness of a darkened heart appeal to you as an opportunity? The under stratum in city life is often as hardened as the heathen in his blindness.

Why does no one volunteer for a life of service on the frontier? There is opportunity for a life of consecration and high service, all the more complete because of the fact that perhaps even some of your own brethren are ready to discount it.

May God raise up men among you for foreign service. But may He raise up some of His best, too, to illuminate the dark places and beautify the waste places in our own fair home-land, that through them our people may have a clearer and closer vision of the will of the Master for us all as regards the needy and lost in our own country.