

IS FOREIGN MISSION WORK OUT OF BALANCE?

A QUESTION OF THE RELATION OF INSTITUTIONAL AND EVANGELISTIC AGENCIES

It will hardly be disputed that, until recent years, foreign missions have not developed along the lines of any pre-conceived or settled plan of policy, but that, in the main, they express the work and gifts of outstanding individualists. This indeed was inevitable. Conditions have only recently admitted of considered policies, unified plans, or centralized control. The man with the talents of the pioneer evangelist has opened up great territories; whilst others, with organizing ability and gifts for institutional work, have made notable contributions to the work along educational, medical and training lines.

Mainly, therefore, out of individualistic effort foreign mission work has come into being, and it would be a miracle if without re-shaping or re-construction it was found to be homogeneous or balanced in all its parts. But work which has come into existence in ways more or less casual and haphazard cannot be held or continuously developed except along lines of a settled plan and policy.

Mission work in its early stages was necessarily almost entirely evangelistic. But when the need for training an occupying force of native workers began to be realized the movement commenced which has led to what many regard as a disproportionate emphasis being placed on institutional work. The pendulum has swung too far, and the true mean has now to be discovered. For it is not overstating the case to say that many missionaries are forgetting how to

evangelize. And the lost art must be recovered, for world evangelization has hardly yet commenced.

The consequences of a slackening in evangelistic effort are plainly visible. In the case of one of the oldest and largest societies investigation reveals the surprising fact that although, during the last eight years, the staff of missionaries has very considerably increased, and over a quarter of a million sterling more has been expended than for the previous eight years, yet out of the seven different foreign countries in which operations are being conducted, in six there has been no advance in the eight years in native Church membership figures. Further investigation shows also that only a very small proportion of the total resources of the society are being devoted to evangelistic and church work. The suggestion seems, therefore, not unwarranted that the over concentration of effort on institutional work, to the neglect of direct evangelistic and church work, is mainly responsible for this arrested development of the native Church. And as all missionary societies have, more or less, come under influences which tend to a drift away from evangelistic work, the question of balance between the various forms of missionary enterprise is one which now calls for very serious consideration. Too much or too little may be read into membership figures, but they have a story to tell which cannot wisely be ignored.

Doubtless much of the work done during the period under review along educational and institutional lines has been subtle and penetrating, and impossible to express in statistics, but the grip on direct evangelistic work has been unduly loosened, and here is to be found the chief explanation of the arrested growth of the Church. Evangelistic work, above all other forms of missionary activity, requires to be once more recognized as of paramount importance. This is not only the day of opportunity for educational and institutional work but, to an equal or still greater degree, it is the day of opportunity for the more

direct form of evangelistic work. And these vital forms of work have unquestionably been more or less side-tracked and require again to be brought on to the main line. Evangelistic work is the key-stone of all missionary enterprise and it cannot be displaced without jeopardizing the stability of the entire structure.

When costly institutional work begins to absorb the greater part of a society's resources, evangelistic operations, to the furtherance of which these resources had previously been devoted, are bound to suffer. Indeed, a new emphasis on this side of mission operations is imperatively needed, for an insidious force is at work which, if not controlled, will tend ever increasingly to narrow down evangelistic effort, and this at a time when the opportunity and call for world-wide evangelization is rising to flood level. To establish and maintain a just balance between actual operations in the field and the institutional work needed for the preparation of the native workers required to further such operations, and to hold the ground won, should be a first charge on mission resources, for other work is only supplementary, and can never be a substitute for this.

The uncontrolled development of institutional work constitutes a grave danger, and apart from a restoration of balance between institutional work in its various forms, and purely evangelistic and church work, there is nothing to prevent the former by degrees edging the latter almost out of existence. Already it has done so to an extent which is very inadequately realized. An examination of the proportions in which staff and money are being shared between evangelistic and institutional work at the present time will probably bring this point out in a sufficiently striking manner. Although the work done at the various conferences recently held in China, under Dr. Mott's chairmanship, was so comprehensive and invaluable, the question of balance as between evangelistic and other forms of work did not appear to be adequately considered. Never-

theless it is as vital as any of the great problems confronting mission boards to-day.

The principles which guide mission authorities in apportioning the resources among the various foreign fields and the different forms of work in each field ought to be made clear. Not until this is done will the feet of those who are anxiously studying the question of balance begin to rest upon something solid. Mission work is of many kinds, and the value of each is proportionate to its power to further the attainment of the common end. In the past the parts have developed along independent lines, and conditions which could neither be controlled nor prevented have made this unavoidable—but what of the future? A start only has so far been made in world evangelization. Ten-twelfths of the work remains to be done. In the areas not yet touched the slate is practically clean. The past yields its experience but imposes no handicap on the modern pioneer. On what principles and in what proportions, therefore, shall work be established in the vast virgin territories which must soon be attacked?

There is so much poverty, sickness, and ignorance in each great mission field that the resources of all societies combined would not suffice to do more than touch the fringe of the merely physical or mental necessities of the people in any one of them. Such needs are of an obvious and clamant character, and for this reason there is always a danger of focussing so much strength upon them that the deeper needs of the human heart are neglected. Each mission district, and indeed each station also, naturally desires to have a complete and well-balanced work including all departments held to be necessary to give this result. But the most optimistic can never hope to see a time when it will be financially possible to make each station or district entirely homogeneous and self-contained. The most that can be expected is that each may be able to make its own contribution, in the hope that the resulting combination may be adequate for the work to be done. And where

all work requires to be supported out of a common fund, over-development in any one direction necessarily endangers other parts of the work, so that the question of defining and maintaining balance becomes one of supreme importance.

The value and need of institutional work is unquestioned. It is indeed so valuable that given unlimited resources no limit need be set to it. It is a handmaid to evangelistic work. But it is at the point where it ceases to be a handmaid, or begins to give a feeble or steadily diminishing service, that the question of balance becomes urgent. Heathen nations will be won for Christ by evangelization. In a thousand ways education, or institutional forms of work, may help, but they cannot take the place of evangelistic effort or justify diminution of it. No one would deliberately argue to the contrary, but it is none the less necessary to state explicitly the fact. Christianity has more to do with hearts than with heads. Fine evangelistic work is constantly going on in mission institutions, but it will be generally admitted that, accompanying great success, there is a grave tendency for the more vital work to be crowded out. Indeed it cannot well be otherwise when such institutions are undermanned, which seems to be the rule rather than the exception. And when government grants are sought for, or any form of external pressure operates to maintain a high degree of efficiency, there will always be a strong tendency for the work to become more an end in itself than a means to an end.

Wide-spread evangelistic work, and the building up of self-supporting native Churches depend in a large measure on the supply of properly trained native leaders, and without institutions for their training such will not be forthcoming. And the supply of men to such institutions depends in the main on the educational facilities of the mission for their earlier training. For this reason institutional work must not be feeble on the side which directly serves the interests of evangelistic and church work—it is part of it.

Institutional work is nearly always costly, and, once started, it exercises a dominating influence on the policy of a society. The initial outlay on buildings and equipment may rise to any figure. As the value of education in increasing the earning capacity of students is realized, running expenses may be met out of fees, but, first and last, this form of work must, in varying degrees, always prove a heavy tax on the income of a society. And because buildings and equipment are so costly there will always be a tendency to continue a work even when the time comes either to close it down altogether or to contract its scope. An institution does not know how to die. Nor is it easy to change the character or the policy of an institution.

On the other hand wide-spread evangelistic work need not be unduly costly either in men or money. In the country villages and small towns—where the bulk of the work lies—missionary societies ought to expect the little churches, from the first, to be self-supporting and to develop roots of their own. The missionary will then be able to widen his operations far more rapidly than in the days when the native Church was nursed and kept dependent for generations. Indeed, in the future, the planting of churches on a self-supporting and self-governing basis will proceed at a rate which will make the outlay of European resources along evangelistic lines a wonderfully fruitful investment.

In the interests of a balanced work it is of paramount importance that the moment should be discerned when further development in one direction can only be secured by a corresponding loss in another. Mission work is so many-sided and so widely scattered that this is no simple task, but it is clearly a work for which those who hold and control all the strings of a society's efforts are responsible. To allow success in one work or field to weaken some other work in its own way quite as valuable or perhaps more valuable elsewhere must be recognized as being both wasteful and futile. Yet this has happened. The over-development

of an institution in one country may quite conceivably lead to the closing down of a large field of work elsewhere. The fact that in each society all work rests on one common fund makes every part interdependent, no matter how separated they may be by distance or in character.

Those in charge of institutions naturally desire to see their work grow, and press for all they need or want in the way of buildings and equipment. Apart, therefore, from firm control, there is nothing to prevent strong personalities diverting to their own institutions resources which are intended to fertilize the whole work. It may be stating the case strongly, but it is certainly not incorrect to say that a vampire tendency exists in all institutional work. The interests of evangelistic work, unless constantly safeguarded, almost inevitably get drained.

In mission work there are two home bases, the foreign and the native. Resources for planting, if not always for running institutional work come, in the main, from the foreign base, and the average income from this source may be closely enough determined to enable the limits of necessary institutional work to be approximately fixed. But in the case of church work the proportion raised from native sources ought to rise, and indeed is rising, in an ever-increasing ratio to the amount put into the work from foreign funds. And when clearer views are held regarding the basis on which the native Church should, from the first, be founded, the ratio will rise still more rapidly. Whilst it would, therefore, appear necessary for a mission to fix limits to its activities in institutional work, in the case of church development, which ought to rest on native funds, such limits need not be imposed.

In one well-known mission field educational work has been extraordinarily extensive and successful. But a recent deputation to this field in its report expresses surprise that evangelistic developments have been confined to so limited an area although the work has been in progress for nearly a hundred years. May not the explanation be found, however,

in the fact that institutional and educational work tend almost inevitably to contract the area of operations? Of course they are never intended to do this but rather to be a preparation for later extensive developments. And does it not follow that a policy which confines an undue proportion of the missionary force to a few centres must tell against wide-spread evangelistic effort? After one hundred years the greater part of the field referred to still remains unevangelized, and until a larger proportion of the European staff is set free to act as pioneer leaders in the remoter districts favoured ones in a few large centres will continue to monopolize the missionary benefits so that the few are overfed whilst the rest starve. Now, why is the Church not more quickly advancing its outposts? The question is not difficult to answer. One of the grave dangers resulting from an under emphasis on evangelistic work is that missionaries become settlers instead of steadily and always pressing forward and outward. Even clerical missionaries are apt to become tied to the big compounds or centres so that their range is confined to a little group of churches over which they act as superintendents. And aggressive work thereafter practically ceases. The territory connected with a mission station is often vast and unexplored, but forward developments stop from the moment when the clerical missionary forgets that his true functions are those of an evangelist, and he devotes himself too completely to pastoral work. It does not suffice to train evangelists and to send them out alone. Evangelistic work is hard. Those who do it constantly and faithfully have to 'eat bitterness.' And if native workers are to be kept up to their work they will require to be well led. Leadership and example are essentials. And before evangelistic work, hard and difficult as it is, involving long journeys, hard travel, absence from family and the comforts of the compound or residential centre, is restored to its rightful place in a society's scheme of work, its dignity and importance must be more fully recognized.

It will not suffice for a missionary to direct operations from the compound, or to confine his journeyings to little tours round existing churches. His work is to lead and direct operations throughout the whole area for which his station is responsible. Missionaries are increasingly recognizing this, and especially those who have realized the extent of their work as the result of a personal survey. But over-concentration on institutional work has, to an alarming extent, diverted thought and strength from the main end of missions, hence the decay of evangelistic effort and, in some cases, the stoppage in the growth of the Church.

Is it not also true that an increasing number of the younger and most physically fit among the missionaries are being locked up in institutions, and that work demanding the greatest powers of physical endurance is increasingly left to those who are least able to do it ?

When wisely followed up, evangelistic work leads more quickly than any other form of mission work to the planting and rooting of a native Church, and there is also that spiritual health in it for the missionary without which his work counts for little. Indeed the health of the mission in general is dependent upon every form of work being held subordinate to the direct work of preaching the Gospel. This is work which keeps faith alive and vigorous, calls for enterprise and the pioneer spirit, and the enduring of hardness which is so essential to Christian fitness. On the other hand short-handed institutional work is apt to become a hard grind of daily classes. Spirituality gets crowded out, and teachers and students alike grow cold. For no one will deny the danger of hearts being neglected when time is all too short for the daily educational routine work.

Visitors, and even missionary deputations to China or India, are liable to underestimate the place of the village in foreign mission work. The traveller to China visits Shanghai, Hankow, Wuchang, Peking, and a few other large and easily accessible cities, and the teeming life

impresses him with the great need and the importance of these vast centres of population. The city intrudes itself. And yet only a minute portion of the population of China resides in cities, the rest occupying the myriad villages and small towns spread over the habitable parts of this great land. Those who are responsible for the allocation of missionary forces in China and in India require to realize that they are confronted by a problem of reaching 700 million people, three-fourths of whom are scattered in villages varying in size and density according to agricultural conditions and opportunities. Nearly one-half the total human race lives in the villages of these two countries, and often so close together are these villages that thirty to forty can be counted within range of the naked vision.

The resources required for country work, where population is divided up into small communities more or less easily accessible, need not be great, at any rate if the work is established on self-supporting lines, so that large results on a small outlay may be reasonably expected if the men chosen to organize and develop this work have adequate powers of leadership and the spirit of missionary pioneers.

A wisely adjusted balance requires to be maintained between the city and country work, and a comprehensive missionary survey will show that at present there is no such balance.

Those who wish fully to acquaint themselves with the responsibilities of a mission must not be satisfied with visits to the great cities, or with even a very thorough investigation of the work at the head stations or the branches worked therefrom. It is necessary to survey the territory for which each head centre is responsible. In no other way can a true idea of the character and extent of the task be properly gauged, and in no other way is it possible to gain a clear conception of the plans and principles which require to be followed before effective occupation becomes possible, and a stable and progressive work is established. Maps, diagrams and statistics are all helpful, but only when

they light up something which the eye of the leaders has actually seen. To visit the market towns in connexion with two North China mission stations alone involves a journey of nearly 2000 miles, and surrounding each market are the many villages which the market serves.

The due balance of the various forms of missionary effort can only be arrived at after a survey which brings into focus the dimensions of the problem in its relation to city, town and village. And such a survey will make plain the fact that the missionary problem, to a far greater extent than is at present realized, is a problem of the village. When every consideration has been duly weighed, it will still be found that a far larger proportion of mission resources can profitably be expended in evangelizing and planting self-contained native churches in the villages than is at present devoted to this work, and that the resulting profit will be out of all proportion to the additional expenditure involved.

If world evangelization is the true objective of all missionary effort, then those forms of work which are best calculated to further that end must always have first call on both men and money. Insidious influences begin to operate and power goes from the work when the place of evangelistic work is usurped. One of the reasons why institutional work is so apt to prove a drain on the evangelistic work is because its value, and, indeed, its existence, depend so largely on the maintenance of continuity. Classes cannot be discontinued, nor can the ordinary routine be interrupted, without seriously jeopardizing the standing of an institution. But evangelistic work is not done to a time schedule. A bell does not go at regular times during the day, and so a break in continuity, although not less fatal to success and advance, does not seem to be so, and evangelistic work is subordinated therefore to work which is of far less importance. It is no common experience to see a big institution sapping the vitality of a smaller one, and evangelistic work suffering to make good defective arrangements for staffing an institution.

Even institutions for the training of men for the ministry may endanger the work they are established to serve. When staff is unduly limited there is always a pull on the men engaged in evangelistic work to fill vacancies during furloughs and sickness, the result being that the native Church, which it is hoped may employ the men who are being trained, becomes through neglect too feeble and sickly to support them, so that workers who ought to be a charge on the native Church become dependent on the mission or are lost to the work altogether.

Medical work has been proved to be almost invaluable in furthering the general interests of missions, but even this work requires to be kept within proper limits. There were enough sick people to have filled up all His days, but Christ held the balance evenly between His healing and His preaching. Had He not done so, the bodily ills of many more might have been cured or relieved, but only at the expense of all that has since come out of His teaching and preaching. And so in medical, as in all other forms of work, a balance must be set and maintained.

Nothing in this article must be regarded as reflecting on any form of missionary enterprise. Institutional work is in itself so good, and certain forms are so essential if native leaders, whether lay or clerical, are to be equipped adequately for their work, that no one with a general knowledge of mission problems would dream of reflecting on institutional work as such. But in all policies we must allow for deflection, and the main purpose of this article is to urge the necessity of a readjustment of balance to restore evangelistic work to its own proper place, and to bring all other forms into a right relationship with it.

The world missionary survey which is to be one of the momentous outcomes of the Edinburgh Conference automatically raises this question of balance. With a wiser allocation of resources, and co-operation and combination on the basis of a common plan, the striking power of foreign mission forces will be tremendously increased.

It may be well to conclude this article with a word of warning. Signs are not wanting that missionaries in institutions are labouring under impulses which seem likely to drive them out from the classroom into the field. It will be necessary to watch this movement, so as to prevent a lack of balance in the opposite direction, which would be calculated to jeopardize necessary educational work.

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