

than the average English Faculty. Is it so absurd to think that ordinary folk might be the soundest bearers of 'memory and mature purpose'? Haven't they always been so?

## Missionaries Go Home—? by Marcel Boivin, W.F.

Some time ago I met here in England a missionary priest with whom I had worked while in Tanzania. I knew him for an excellent missionary, a man who had adapted himself well to Africa and had put himself entirely at the service of his people. Yet, when I met him, he stated his firm intention of never returning to Tanzania.

Why had he so radically altered the course of his life? Was it for personal reasons—failing health—or a compelling desire to marry? No. He had come back because he could not see why he should stay in Tanzania any longer. For one thing, the 'new theology' had considerably weakened the motives for which he had gone to the missions in the first place: if pagans already know God, why bother to cross sea and land in order to announce God? If men can be saved without being baptized into the Church, why go on instructing catechumens and making converts? Besides, after twenty years of experience, he had reached the conclusion that conversion to the Church did not appreciably affect people's lives—Christians seemed no better than pagans. Then, thirdly, there are enough Tanzanian priests to cater for the flock, and in the sectors of education and health, the country is sufficiently developed to look after its own people. Better leave now than wait to be expelled in five years' time . . . our time is limited, anyway.

Obviously, the majority of missionaries working in Africa or elsewhere are remaining at their posts, and of those who come home, not all come for the reasons given by the missionary I have quoted. I have, nevertheless, chosen to begin with this example because it so well illustrates the kind of questions missionaries are asking, questions as to whether or not they still have a role to play in the Church, and if they have, how they should be playing it.

Some conclude, as did the missionary quoted, that missionary work has become an anachronism. Others decide to stay on and to do their best in the circumstances in which they find themselves. For nearly all, the issue is not just a theological problem, it is a personal drama.

### *The background to the drama*

In the last century, entire continents which until then had been closed to the West and therefore to Christianity, were opened to the activity of the Church. This undoubtedly favoured the view of the

missionary's role in terms of a geographical mission, namely, a call to leave his country and to go to foreign lands to preach Christ to the heathen, a mission to implant the Church in regions where she had not yet been established. The missionary was a person who was sent from one part of the world to another. Missionary societies were formed in order to recruit volunteers in Christian lands and to send them to heathen lands. To these missionary societies were allocated mission territories: geographical areas in which the Church was yet to be implanted.

The way in which the missionary understood his role was also conditioned by the understanding the Church had of herself. The Catholic Church used to regard herself as the only community to have remained faithful to Christ throughout the centuries: the task of carrying out Christ's mission in the world was therefore a task exclusively hers. In that context, converting to Christ became nearly equated with converting to the Catholic Church, and the urgency of the missionary's duty to announce the Gospel was increased by the fear that unorthodox Christian communities would precede the Catholics and convert innocent people from paganism into heresy.

This near equation between the Catholic Church and the Church only contributed to stiffen two other quasi-equations: between the Church and salvation, and between the Church and true religion. A rather literal understanding of the theological axiom: 'Outside the Church there is no salvation', led to the practical belief that belonging to the institutional Church was a definite requirement for salvation. The understanding of salvation itself, as being the way to heaven, by contrast with damnation which was the way to hell, accounted for much of the haste in baptizing and in turning people into Church-members. Besides, the fact that it was taken for granted that pagans were idolators who did not know God and worshipped false gods, at once simplified and clarified the role of the missionary: his role was to substitute the one true divine religion—as embodied in the Catholic Church—for the many false human religions judged superstitious as a whole.

The missionary was thus entrusted with a mission which was, in a way, very simple and yet very extensive: he was a man sent by God to people who were living in darkness and error, his mandate being to lead them to the true religion and to make salvation available to them. The means to that goal was conversion to the Catholic Church everywhere on earth.

#### *The unscheduled act that spoils the play*

By contrast with a situation which, twenty years ago, made of the missionary a man who felt his life to matter greatly to Church and world alike, and whose area of action was three of the five continents of the world, the situation now obtaining is one in which the missionary's very existence is challenged.

A question sometimes asked in the past: 'Why send missionaries to Africa when there are so many non-believers in this country?' is one which now makes the missionary shiver, since it calls into question the manner in which he had so far understood his 'being sent'. On the one hand, it is obvious to anyone who walks on the streets of London that there is no need to go to India to preach the Good News to Hindus, or to go to North Africa to speak of Christ to Moslems. Less than ever before do geographical boundaries confine people of a same ethnic group and religion to a definite territory. On the other hand, some of the regions of the world which, until recently, could be termed 'mission territories' and determined the field of action of the missionary, have been Christianized so rapidly that we can no longer be sure whether, for instance, it is the Christians of Britain who should be sending missionaries to East Africa, or whether it should be the other way round.

Then the image of the Church has so drastically changed since Vatican II that the missionary cannot any longer know with certainty what is that Church he is being asked to implant elsewhere. The near-equation between the Church and the Roman Catholic Church is rapidly disappearing. Should the missionary collaborate with Lutherans and Anglicans in spreading Christianity, or should he go on building Catholic communities alongside Lutheran or Methodist communities?

Moreover, Vatican II has accepted that non-Christians can have a valid knowledge of God, and has recognized elements of truth both in world religions and in traditional religions. The theological advance is undeniable; but, given the multiplicity and diversity of, for instance, traditional religions in Africa, the practical task of finding those elements of truth and of building upon them is a problem which the best of computers would not manage to solve in a century.

Finally, if non-Christians can be saved within the context of their own religion, why not let them practise that religion in peace? At any rate, why should we cause an abrupt change to take place by importing a new religion, Christianity, when it is reasonable to think that adherents of non-Christian religions can gradually and smoothly discover Christ from within their own religions?

#### *The Epilogue: the end of the 'pioneer era'*

Although the task of the missionary seemed co-extensive with that of bringing the Kingdom of God everywhere on earth, his activity was by no means limited to the religious sphere. Given the conditions of the territory he was sent to, the missionary inevitably thought of himself as a pioneer in the work of civilization just as much as an architect of the Church. The scope of his activity had no limits. It ranged from opening dispensaries for lepers to creating technical schools in which youngsters could be taught such trades as

mechanics or carpentry. Missionaries have often been criticized for the way in which they brought Christianity to Africa and Asia, but the assumption that they were solely concerned with souls, going around preaching, teaching catechism and baptizing, without caring for the material welfare and the improvement of the living conditions of their flock is, in most cases, groundless. The truth is that the contribution of missionaries to what is now called 'development', has been at least as important as that of any other agency, and that their knowledge of the customs and psychology of the people was decisive in introducing these people to the ways of life of the West.

This is what makes doubly ironical the plea sometimes addressed to missionaries to insert themselves into the material and educational development projects of the countries they live in. Missionaries are now asked to give up responsibility for the schools or hospitals they were running, on the grounds that the local citizens are ready to take over these tasks. In consequence, a missionary who was formerly, say, headmaster of a school, is now made to feel redundant. Whereas before, he was clearly inserted in educational work, he is now asked to revert to the sacristy and to confine himself to the spiritual well-being of his flock. Here again, the ground is cut from under his feet; he becomes more and more uncertain of the usefulness of his staying on. To all appearances, he is a man without a job.

What then should be the role, if any, which the missionary could be expected to play in the world today? In the second section of this paper, I shall try to outline a solution to this question.

#### *Revising the missionary's part in view of the new setting*

The break-down of the social and religious structures in which the missionary had so far inserted himself, indicates that a solution to the problem of his role can only be found if it is set within the new set of circumstances now obtaining. He can no longer play a significant part if he insists on making only minor adjustments, for the scene itself has been altered. He must go back to what constitutes the substance of his existence as a missionary and work out a solution from there. What, then, is the mission that accounts for the existence of missionaries and from which an answer to the question of his role can be derived?

That mission is the very mission given by God to his people. It is bound up with an agreement to acknowledge God as their only God and to serve him only. As such it entails a responsibility both for making him known to all men and for inviting all men to enter his kingdom. Its immediate goal is reconciliation of men with God, this being the condition for reconciliation among men, and reconciliation between men and their world. Its ultimate goal is the realization of universal harmony, the final covenant by which 'God shall be our God and we shall be his people'.

That mission was first entrusted to a particular ethnic group, the

descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, but it was eventually taken away from them, for they broke their covenant with God and turned in upon themselves. It was then given to a people who could no longer confuse their identity with that of a particular nation of the world, namely, to the descendants of Abraham according to the spirit, to those who look on Abraham as their ancestor in faith.

Who are God's people at the present time? Since the coming of Christ, the new Moses who corrected the course followed by Israel, membership of God's people can no longer be primarily determined by external criteria, whether these criteria be allegiance to the Church of Rome or to the Church of England, baptism in water, submission to Church discipline. . . . As such, these are but substitutes for what used to be race, circumcision and observances; they only have value when they actually express a response to God's offer of a covenant and the acceptance of the responsibility attached to such an agreement. God's people are those who live and walk by the Spirit of God, those followers of Jesus whose life and conduct are an efficacious sign of God's love to the men of this century.

At this point, I would like to note two of the many implications that such an understanding of the people of God and of their mission has for the role of the missionary.

- (i) Conceived as a mission to establish the Church, the role of the missionary is, to say the least, ambiguous.

Such an interpretation of his role hides a return to the outlook of the People of Israel. They had come to visualize the promise of a land in material terms, the land of Canaan. Our mistake is not very different: the establishment of the Church everywhere on earth can easily mean, in practice, the occupation of the earth by Church-members. Similarly, behind the preoccupation with the increase in numbers of Church-members lies the temptation to ensure power to the Church.

In a word, the establishment of the Church may well have been confused with the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and here is the basic ambiguity. Even if, *per impossibile*, all men were to become Church-members in the next decade, it would still be no sign that the Kingdom of God had come. The rapid expansion of the Church in the last century has been the work of missionaries. Everything went well so long as the Church kept growing and foreign missionaries remained in control of the new Churches. Now that the project has developed sufficiently for missionaries to see for themselves that their work has ended up with established Churches and a sudden slowing-down process, there is a growing sentiment of frustration amongst them. A set-back in the expansion of the Church is not, however, a set-back in the coming of God's Kingdom; the missionary would gain by regarding his role as, essentially, not the establishment of the Catholic Church, or of any other Church, but the gradual

realization of the Kingdom of God, a share in the building up of the final Covenant.

- (ii) If the role of the missionary is made directly dependent on geographical factors, that role is going to become, at one point or another, devoid of substance; for his mission cannot be determined by anything so essentially transient as being sent from one territory to another. The missionary is sent by God to men; his mission is that of God's people—it is a mission to mankind.

To say that all the members of God's people must be missionaries to their fellow-men, wherever they may be, is not only theologically sound, it is, in the present circumstances, a very practical rule. After three years in Tanzania and five years in England, I have come to the conclusion that there is as much room for the proclamation of God's Kingdom in England as in Tanzania—if not more. Moreover, that proclamation does not seem to be less appropriate in the case of Roman Catholics in Italy than it is in that of Anglicans in England or of adherents of traditional religions in Africa. To give but two examples: one could find Roman Catholic communities, certainly in Rhodesia, perhaps right here in London, whose racialist attitude towards their fellow-men is contrary to the terms of the New Covenant; and one can certainly find inward-looking parochial communities whose concerns revolve around their own welfare as a parish and whose parish priests are content with looking after their flock.

Official ties of membership and external adherence to structures have more than once in history given false securities and led men to take for granted that they were members of God's people. If we were to ask the decisive question, not where is the Church, or what is the Church, but *who* is the Church, God's people might again be reduced to a remnant which would probably cut across barriers of denomination as well as across borders of territory.

*Missionaries: not yet to go home*

Having answered the question: what is the mission entrusted by God to his people, and bearing in mind that this mission is basically the same wherever it be carried out and whatever the social and religious context of the men to whom it is addressed, the next question is: is there still room for missionaries in the sense in which the word is generally used, namely, for men and women who leave their country in order to go and proclaim Christ to people of another land—that is, for 'expatriate missionaries'? And, if there is room for such men and women, what is their specific role?

- (i) I have no hesitation about the first part of the question: there is still room for men and women who will leave their country and go to other lands to proclaim the message of Christ.

There are two main reasons I would give for my answer. The first is this: granted that the Gospel may need to be preached again in Europe and America, the fact remains that there are millions of men in Asia and in parts of Africa who still have not heard the Good News of Christ. These men may have some knowledge of God, a knowledge which, incidentally, varies considerably in intensity and quality according to the religion they practise: but they have not yet learned that God is present to their lives and concerned with them to the point of having become one of them and of serving them; nor do they know with clarity that the privileged way of meeting God is through their fellow-men.

Then, in many of the new Christian communities, there is an urgent need for personnel who will for the time being take responsibility for the growth of community. We can discuss whether or not it was right to allow Christian communities to multiply as quickly and as incoherently as they did, for instance, in Rwanda or West Uganda. It nonetheless remains that unless there are expatriate missionaries who will volunteer to take up the task of guidance and leadership in the next few years, these communities risk deterioration and break-up. There is need for auxiliaries; an exchange between privileged and under-privileged countries is, in this respect, a most Christian way of helping one another.

The second reason I would give is a reason given by Father Adrian Hastings in his book, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*. It is the difference in the human condition that exists between the Western world—often regarded as the Christian world—and the Third World. 'For the great majority of people of the Third World, the human condition is one of poverty, hunger, the prevalence of disease from birth to death. All human needs concern the Church; the more needy a man is, the more the Church should seek him out' (p. 43).

The point here is not only that Christians of the West are now called upon to play the role of the Good Samaritan on a world-wide scale—the point is also that for them to withdraw, at this juncture of history, from the countries of the Third World, would be tantamount to denying a Gospel which requires incarnation as a pre-condition to witness. It is not enough for the Christians of affluent countries to preach and work for justice from their homes in the West; they must in some way share the conditions of the needy and oppressed and be seen to be actively involved in their predicament. Nor is it enough for white Christians to proclaim as a principle that peoples of different races and colours are equal before God: they must go and live with coloured people and demonstrate that it is quite possible for people of different ethnic groups to live as brothers. Should Christian missionaries from the West go back home, an artery in the Body of Christ would be cut.

There is room, therefore, for men and women whose share in the

mission of God's people will include that particularity of geographical movement.

(ii) What is the specific role of today's expatriate missionaries?

It is impossible to give a precise answer to this second part of the question. Given the variety of the religious and social conditions of the people to whom expatriate missionaries are sent, the modalities of their role will be determined by the situation and the needs of the people to whom they are sent.

To my mind, the only common denominator in the role of expatriate missionaries at this period of history is to be derived from the fact that, at present, such geographical mission will involve in most cases going from the Western World to the Third World. Given the human condition in which the majority of the people of Asia, Africa and South America live, it is momentous that the messenger coming from the West be a prophet of the living God who, centuries ago, 'heard the groaning of the sons of Israel crying out for help under their bondage' and spoke to Moses a word that was a programme for action, which eventually brought disaster to the realm of a proud Pharaoh and raised human nonentities to the status of a kingly people. The expatriate missionary must be a prophet of the God who appeared in Jesus, bringing joy to the poor and provoking the anger of their king, a God who played the part of an outlaw, destroying the existing modes of orderly behaviour and religion, and who paid the price of that peculiar brand of peace he was bringing in his own destitution and blood. It is true that the missionary is, in some way, a man who preaches a religion. That religion, nevertheless, has the peculiarity that it is about a God who confounds the plans of wise men and takes up the cause of the despised pariahs, about a God who sends the rich away empty and raises the lowly. It is a religion that is practised in the town and on the street, the religion that offers sacrifice on the desecrated Mountain of Calvary rather than on the holy Mount of Sion.

An expatriate missionary must identify himself with the poor and oppressed and share their aspirations—a process in no way easier now than when the Son of God became a man among us, a Jew among the Jews. He must be equally ready to offer the Christian sacrifice, as the price to be paid for the 'redemption' of the people he has come to serve.

In conclusion, I would like to mention an idea I have found recurring in almost everything I have read on development, an idea which concerns the Church as a whole but which is eminently appropriate in the case of the expatriate missionary: 'The role of the Church is to contribute to making this world a better place to live in'. There is no problem as to the truth of this statement, but how should the Church go about making this world a better place to live in? What is the hope she can offer to a world seeking justice and peace? The answer to that question will obviously be a complex



one, but in some way, it is inevitably going to be disappointing.

The Church must set about making this world a better place to live in, in the same way as Christ set about creating the world anew: the Church must lose the prestige attached to her divine origin, she must humanize herself, exist for men, become a servant of men, and eventually accept crucifixion. And we would do well to remember that the hope the Church can offer is the promise of a world which is not immediately attainable—and which, ultimately, it is not in man's power to bring about. What the Church holds out as the better world men should be looking forward to, is a world renewed by the Spirit of God, in which God will be all in all, a better covenant, made universal and everlasting by the Spirit of God, and no longer subject to the vicissitudes of the spirit of men.

Lest the hope of ever realizing this final covenant be regarded as futile, lest we be brought to despair, considering the contradictions that beset our present world and the divisions that persist among men, we have been given a pledge that such a covenant is possible, that, assuredly, it is the goal of our history, that—in spite of all appearances—it is already in the making.

This pledge is the marvellous deed God wrought in our history in his Son Jesus, the greatest of the missionaries ever to have appeared among us, Jesus, who existed in our world as a living communion between God and men, the prelude to the Covenant we are waiting for, and which will be finalized when he shall be our God and we shall exist as his people.

## Workers' Control

by Ken Fleet

'In the past workmen have thought that if they could secure higher wages and better conditions they would be content. Employers have thought that if they granted these things the workers ought to be contented. Wages and conditions have improved, but the discontent and unrest have not disappeared. Many good people have come to the conclusion that working people are so unreasonable that it is useless to try to satisfy them. The fact is that the unrest is deeper than pounds, shillings and pence, necessary as they are. The root of the matter is the straining of the spirit of man to be free.'—William Straker (Northumberland miner), in evidence before the Sankey Commission, 1919.