

## CRISIS IN WORLD MISSIONS

By Robert Hall Glover,

Home Director Emeritus, China Inland Mission

THE present is a crisis hour in the world of missions, as it is in the world of political affairs. Having just emerged from the most terrible war in all history, a war which has affected world-wide missions vastly more than any previous war had ever done, the missionary enterprise today finds itself on the threshold of a new era, big with challenging possibilities but bristling with perplexing problems. This fact is giving serious concern to missionary leaders, even as world conditions at large are giving similar concern to political leaders.

World War II broke out just when the missionary enterprise had reached its very zenith of opportunity, advance, and achievement for all time. No country is a better illustration of this fact than China, that oldest and largest nation of the world and greatest of all mission fields.

In missionary work, just as in military operations, one needs to take the long view covering a period of time, instead of a day-by-day view with its petty ups and downs, in order accurately to appraise progress and results. Perhaps only those who, like myself, were acquainted with the China of last century can fully appreciate the mighty impact Christianity has made upon that land and people. I think of the old China that I first contacted over fifty years ago, to be exact, five years before 1900, the turn of the century. "The Sleeping Giant of the Orient," she was commonly called—a nation wrapped in medievalism, facing backward in a dreamy worship of the remote past, steeped in idolatry and every kind of grotesque superstition, a nation static, non-progressive, bitterly anti-foreign, stubbornly resentful of any interference or even advice from without her borders.

Every step of missionary advance in those pioneer days was in the face of fierce resistance, official intrigue and duplicity on the one hand, and popular hatred and obstruction on the other. Insults and threatenings had constantly to be met, and from time to time open violence and bloodshed. All this continued right up to 1900, when it culminated in the Boxer uprising, instigated by the then supreme ruler of China, the notorious Empress Dowager, who plotted the murder of every missionary and the complete extermination of Christianity from the realm.

Consider now the contrasted picture, only thirty odd years later, of a China presided over by an openly confessed Christian ruler, genuinely sympathetic with missionary aims and efforts, a China wide open to the unrestricted propagation of the gospel throughout its length and breadth. I myself had occasion only a few years after 1900 to journey right across China to the Tibetan border, and in all those thousands of miles of travel I met with not a single insult or even discourtesy, but with uniform friendliness and generous hospitality. Think of a China which had within so short a time emerged from its former deep seclusion to take its place in the family of nations, and whose Prime Minister was one of the four chairmen of that epoch-making conference of fifty nations which assembled in San Francisco a few months ago to formulate plans for the peace and security of the world.

I believe that you will search the annals of history in vain for another instance of such a marvelous transformation as this, and within such a limited period of time, affecting as it does a people with an unbroken national record of 4,000 years and comprising one-fourth of the present

human family. And let me express my firm conviction, as one who has been in intimate touch with China throughout this period of change, that among the contributing factors in bringing about this transformation, the most potent of all has been the message and influence of Christian missions.

That the recent war struck the missionary cause and the church in China a heavy blow it would be folly to deny. Normal missionary operations have been largely disrupted. Active missionary ranks have actually shrunk to about one-ninth their pre-war size. Destruction of mission property has been enormous. The national Christians have suffered sore afflictions and losses. All this makes a dark picture. Yet there is also a brighter side, and seeming calamities have been wonderfully turned into blessings. The missionaries' ministry to war sufferers had a profoundly favorable effect and has raised missionary prestige to a new high level. The native churches have come through the fires purified and strengthened. Multitudes of Chinese, humbled by their sufferings, have become more responsive to the gospel, and conversions have been more numerous than ever before. The shifting of many millions of refugees from one area to another has greatly extended the radius of the Christian witness.

One of the most striking and hopeful features of the situation is the remarkable change which has come over the great and influential student body during the war years. Formerly the attitude of these intelligentsia toward Christianity ranged all the way from cold aloofness to positive contempt and bitter denunciation. But now these students are distinctly friendly to the missionaries. Many of them have been buying and reading the Scriptures, asking to be enrolled in Bible classes, and showing real spiritual concern. Not a few have openly confessed their faith in Christ, and Christian groups have been formed in quite a number of institutions.

Added to all this, China's present officialdom has been penetrated and permeated by Christian testimony. Surely the facts I have thus cited are indicative of a new day of bright promise for Christian missions in that greatest of all fields. With the masses more accessible and impressionable than ever before, the educated classes awakened to new interest and inquiry, and the government genuinely sympathetic and co-operative, one foresees for this postwar period unprecedented opportunities and results for missionary work.

While I have thus far dealt mainly with China, with which land I am most familiar, and which field perhaps presents the most striking illustration of the new opportunities facing missions at this particular time, what I have said about China finds application in goodly measure in most of the other mission fields. Were there time, I could dwell upon Africa, where the war years have brought changes which have a great and far-reaching bearing upon missionary work, and where new and challenging needs and opportunities confront the missionary forces. Not to attempt to go back as far as the days of the noble missionary pathfinder, David Livingstone, the contrast between the Africa of even forty years ago and the Africa of today, from the viewpoint of missionary access and achievement, is hardly less remarkable than that in China.

The Pacific Islands present still another example of the marvelous results of missionary effort, and of the thrilling possibilities of the immediate future if the opportunities are embraced. I have talked with American service men whose

ideas of missions have been completely revolutionized by their contact with one or other of these island groups. They have been so deeply impressed by the amazing contrast between Christian and non-Christian native groups that they have been moved to send liberal contributions toward missionary work, while not a few of them have determined to train and offer for post-war missionary service.

Latin America is a continent of dire need and golden opportunity for missionary attention.

Let me sum up briefly by saying that in the opinion of the best informed missionary leaders we face today a momentous crisis in world-wide missions. Added to the cumulative effect of long years of brave pioneering and patient seed-sowing which have brought us to the time of harvest there are new and valuable auxiliary factors which God in His providence has raised up in our day to expedite the task of world evangelization. Among these are the vastly improved means of transportation and communication, new railroads, motor highways, airways, telegraph, telephone and radio broadcasting equipment, and other material facilities of various kinds.

But we must not be content simply to nurse feelings of complacency because of these favoring factors and new facilities. We need to appreciate the added responsibility they lay upon us to utilize them to the fullest possible extent for the advancement of the cause which I am presenting. And we must not forget that over against the favoring factors mentioned there are also adverse factors to reckon with. The reopening of the doors to missionaries means also their reopening for all kinds of evil forces and influences, such as the moral vices of Western civilization, false cults and philosophies, Communistic propaganda, and other things which will contend hotly with Christianity for the mind and heart of the newly-awakened peoples of the Orient and Africa.

The situation is thus a critical and challenging one which demands prompt and vigorous action. The present golden opportunity will not await our convenience. Open doors unentered will close again; open minds uninfluenced for good will turn away to evil attractions. The opportunity at its best will pass, perhaps never to return.—*Religious Digest*.

## THE IMMINENCY OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

NO MAN may say Christ will surely come today; but all who believe in the Holy Scriptures are able to say He may come today. And there is a wide difference between the two statements. A thing that is imminent is impending, but hangs suspended, and it may continue to be suspended for an indefinite length of time. And it is just thus with the time of Christ's second coming—it is of itself sure, sure as the promises of God—but the time of its occurrence is uncertain, "It won't be long, it may be soon." This, without doubt, is the meaning of the Master's words, "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

But while we do not know the exact time of Christ's second coming, the Lord has given "signs of the times" which if we properly observe, we shall be watching, so that the day shall not come upon us as a thief in the night. Governmentally, the time of the end is to be a time of "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." Ecclesiastically, it is to be a time when men shall in large measure have "a form of god-

(Continued on Page 7)