

ARE WE OVEREMPHASIZING MISSIONS?

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In "Alliance Witness"

Those who labor to have missionary work advance at all costs are sometimes spoken of as lopsided. They are regarded as enthusiasts because they believe that "Go ye into all the world" is a literal command, and that it should have priority.

In an effort to prevent our becoming top-heavy on work abroad, some Christians warn us that the Church has a number of other jobs that are important, too. They want to see missionary work done, but not "at all costs." They want to see the Gospel preached, but not everywhere; that is, not until other things have had their share of attention. They fear overemphasis on Missions.

Surprisingly enough, these sentiments are heard on occasion in presumably missionary-minded churches. They are voiced not so much in criticism, but rather as a caution. Their proponents do not go so far as to say, "We are lopsided," but, "Let us be careful that we do not get too lopsided." Following that, objectives of deserving importance are enumerated. Then comes the suggestion that we ought to cut down on missionary emphasis, so that these other things will not be neglected.

What about this counsel? Is there real danger that other aims be forgotten? Should we listen to the subtle reasoning that missions are not supremely important, and therefore not imperative? Once abandon the conviction of the primacy of missions, and it is not hard to foresee what will follow. The task of missions then becomes just one of many, merely a part of a general program. In the end, it is buried beneath that anemic epitaph, "Benevolence."

Real accomplishments in any field of reasonable magnitude is secured by radical dedication and devotion. It requires extraordinary single mindedness. When you try to be balanced in the dispersal of your effort and energies, you may aim at a certain number of goals; but attention to any one will have to be limited so that each gets its share of attention. Without question, there are many worthy aims to which the Church can address itself; but do we want to limit the great goal of world evangelization? Do we want to whittle down our missionary effort so that we can better apply ourselves to a variety of aims?

As I stated previously, it is radical dedication and devotion that gets things done. We are radicals, we are extremists in this great work of missions. To be a missionary, you must be a person of radical conviction! No one but an extremist would leave his homeland to preach the Gospel in other parts of the globe. You've got to be lopsided in your emphasis, to face and endure an array of conditions, ranging from privation, hardship and isolation in the jungles or remote interior, to the tense and uncertain atmosphere of crowded cities. Only a radical would accept separation from his children for several years, or welcome rearing a family in a foreign land so that he might witness for Christ.

It is those of overwhelming conviction who support missions to the hilt, oftentimes giving out of proportion to their means. It is the radical preachers pulling for missionary giving with everything in them, keeping it a burning issue before their people, who make possible every advance on the mission field. It is the individual of radical conviction who eagerly devours missionary reports, and who delights in missionary conventions. It is he of extreme earnestness who gives himself to a ministry of intercession for the gospel effort in foreign lands.

A large segment of the evangelical fellowship is keenly aware of the priority of the missionary effort. Individuals, churches, and organizations have declared their chief

calling to be to "get the Gospel out as fast and as far as possible." They view all—their ministry, their resources — in relation to the progress of missions.

Lopsided? Yes! Top-heavy? Surely! Asleep to other aims? No — but they believe with deep and radical conviction that their only excuse for existence lies in what they can do for the missionary task. ***

If anyone asks, "Have we been wrong in being so wholly committed to missions? Have we erred in placing missions first, even to the neglect of other things quite essential?" we reply, "No!" China, today, is closed to the Gospel. Had it not been for lopsided, radical dedication to missionary effort, the preaching of the Word would not have gotten as far in that land as it did. Suppose a so-called proper balance had been sought in those groups labeled "lopsided"! It is plain there would have been fewer converts.

China is but one instance. There are other areas where Gospel work was begun before the war. Had it been delayed until after the war, even though doors were wider open, the problems and difficulties would have been much greater. It was this lopsided dedication to pioneering, this radical emphasis on missions, that effected the Gospel advance in places now closed, or hard to enter.

Of course, the main concern is that we be scriptural in our fervor and intensity of dedication. The testimony of the Word is clear enough on this point; and let me say reverently, the most radical event ever recorded is the departure from Glory of the Son of God to become the Savior of men. He "emptied himself" — what extremism! He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" — the ultimate in sacrifice and singleness of purpose.

"He ... spared not his own Son" — was God lopsided? "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses ... unto the uttermost part of the earth." What fanaticism! God coming upon man to energize him, so that he might evangelize!

No need to remind ourselves that we live in a time of fast-changing conditions. Deserving and worthy purposes will always seek our attention. But let's keep this clear — the winning of men to Christ, the world-wide proclamation of His salvation, is the first and chief task of the Church. To do that, will require of us as individuals continued radical and emphatic self-denial and sacrifice. It also will demand of us collectively that we keep that purpose preëminent and foremost, even to the deliberate subordination and perhaps the sacrifice of other aims.

"This one thing I do," cried the Apostle. Later, not even the shadow of the executioner's sword could darken the triumph of his departure. With singleness of purpose, dominated by one blazing passion, the salvation of the Gentiles, he "finished (his) course." What magnificent imbalance! There is a lopsidedness that is sublime!

TO SHED LIGHT

A poor blind woman in Paris put twenty-seven francs into a missionary offering. This amount seemed high for a woman of her means, and it was suggested that she could not afford it. "Yes, sir, I can. I am blind, and I said to my fellow straw-workers, 'How much money do you spend in a year for oil in your lamps when it is too dark to work?' They replied, 'Twenty-seven francs.'

"So, I found that I save so much in the year because I am blind and do not need a lamp, and I give it to shed light to the dark heathen lands."

ARE YOU REMEMBERING THE
SPECIAL EASTER OFFERING FOR
FOREIGN MISSIONS?