

## INTRODUCTION

DURING the Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council, the late Professor W. Freytag made a comparison between 1928 and 1958. In a way so characteristic of him he expressed the difference thus: "Then missions had problems, but they were not a problem themselves."<sup>1</sup>

The problematic character of the missionary movement which began about two and a half centuries ago has led to an ever more insistent question as to the *why* of missions. Not only the method but even the right of missions to exist at all is at stake. For those who see the missionary movement of the last few centuries merely as a historically distinct phenomenon, it is not difficult to consign missions themselves to the great institutions which have had their day, like any other specific historical complex, since missions will of course gradually disappear of their own accord. For what is old and obsolete is at the point of disappearing.

However, when missions are considered not as an historical phenomenon but as a commission from God, the question of a Biblical and theological foundation for mission becomes important.

There was a time when this Biblical foundation and motivation was not considered to be so urgently necessary as is now the case. In fact, the Biblical motive for missions was only one among many motives, and sometimes not even the most important one. The impulses that led to the awakening of missionary work have been varied and multiple in the course of history, and the deposit of all

these is plain to see in the history of missionary theory and knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

During the last thirty years, however, a growing resistance has been noted to a multiple foundation for missions, especially on the European continent. The plea has been made with ever greater emphasis for a “purification of the motive for missions” and for an exclusive limitation to a Biblical foundation.<sup>3</sup>

Though this Biblical foundation might not have been lacking in the past, we must admit that the theological basis was often quite narrow, and frequently took little or no account of the important trends in academic theological research.

So far as theology is concerned, missions have often been regarded as a by-product. And when attempts have been made to treat them as a theological problem, the reaction from the theological and church side has not been satisfactory. At this point a great change has come about in the last few decades. The result of the theology of the Old and New Testament points more and more in the direction of the universal *and* missionary character of the Church; and systematic theology is keeping up its end.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, there is a felt need in missionary circles for a broader and deeper theological orientation. Not only church and mission, but also theology and missionary thinking, are approaching each other more and more.

The influence of these factors is not always apparent at missionary conferences, perhaps because the themes of such conferences are more often concerned with practical missionary affairs and with missionary leadership rather than with theological sensitivity. Above all, there is always the language barrier, so that the results of theological research in one language area become known only slowly in another language area. In order to fill this existing lacuna to some degree, the attempt is ventured in the following survey to set forth the *most important* results of

the theological research of the last thirty years concerning the basis and the purpose, the place and the meaning of missions.

In discussions on missionary work and its distinctive place in the Church, it has been generally agreed that the Church has a missionary calling. The question has been, what is the relation between this calling, the existence of which is not disputed, and the shape it is to take, which *is* a point of dispute in our time and age, and which is usually expressed by the word "missions" (foreign missions, *äussere Mission*).

I had been asked to have this manuscript ready by April 1960. As I was unable to start work upon it till November 1959 and, once I had started, was occupied with other work time and again, it bears clear signs of the haste in which it had to be written. After it had been extensively discussed in Geneva from July 10 to 14, 1960, it appeared to be necessary to add a few things to it. Again this revision had to be postponed till the end of November 1960. This manuscript is now presented to the reader with apologies for not having been able to give anything better.

I would like the reader to take into account the following factors when judging it:

- (a) This little book is not intended to present a new Biblical theology of missionary work but a *critical survey* of what has been said about the subject by others in the past thirty years. The gaps that will be encountered are therefore indications both of gaps in the theological material and of faulty compilation.
- (b) I realize that in arranging the large amount of material in such a way that it could be given in the present paper, I have made the treatise more *schematic* than the Biblical data and their theological reflections warrant. Actually the data to be found in the Bible are more varied in character than

could be shown in the limited space available. It may be, however, that this gives the book greater practical value.

- (c) In view of the amount of material and the task I was given, I restricted myself to the questions that concern what is called the Biblical foundation of missionary work. The important and nowadays burning question of the relation between “the word of God and the living faiths of men” had to remain unanswered or practically so.
- (d) I have been asked what is meant by “Biblical theology of missionary work”. Personally I take it to mean a conception of missionary work that is as closely as possible related to what the Bible tells us. Every age needs a fresh encounter with the Bible, because every age has its own questions and problems. Nothing is more healthful than to listen to the Bible time and again, *not* because we want to hear the answer to *our* question from the Bible (theological ventriloquy through the medium of the Bible is a favourite but rather tiring and useless pastime), but because we want to miss nothing of the light that God’s Word sheds on our path.

Some people will consider my approach to the Holy Bible too conservative, others may consider it too liberal. Some people will think I have let myself be influenced too much by the present-day problems of missionary work, others that I have dealt with the material in too abstract and timeless a way. I admit that as far as the task entrusted to me is concerned, namely, to write a treatise about theological data (exegetic and systematic), I have overstepped the boundaries several times, particularly in the last two chapters and in the notes.

- (e) I have also been asked why I have taken the Old Testament as my starting point. Some were of the opinion that this wronged Jesus Christ as God’s

main revelation. I hasten to declare that I, too, consider the Scriptures precious because they testify of Jesus Christ (John 5: 39), and are realized in Him. The Scriptures have an open horizon turned towards Jesus Christ, but that also means that Jesus Christ has a previous history worth investigating. It is He who gives the Old Testament its perspective and He cannot be understood except in the light of God's actions in history, the history of salvation. That is why this book has been arranged in such a way as to deal with God's actions in history since the creation of the world. It seemed to me illegitimate, theologically speaking, (i) to project Jesus Christ back into the Old Testament and thus to interpret Him into its text; (ii) to surrender to those who exegesize away the Messianic nature of (parts of) the Old Testament.

- (f) Finally the author is surrounded by European continental theologians, which means that he has a certain opinion about theological subjects and that he deals with them in a characteristic manner. The author has not been either able or willing to turn himself into a cosmopolitan *in theologis*. The literature he used was also for the major part of European (continental) origin. There is no doubt that more British and American theological literature now exists in the university libraries than was the case twenty years ago, but there were all too many books that could not be secured and there was not enough time for travelling. So the author wishes to apologize in advance if he has missed out any important works to be found in Great Britain and America. The harvest of missionary ideas from systematic theology has been extremely poor, partly because systematic theology has shown very little interest in the questions with which we deal in this book, partly because the author has been very inaccurate

in his research in this respect; exegetic literature claimed practically all his time and attention.

As it has so often been necessary in this survey to refer to others, the author has been in danger of misunderstanding them and/or of reporting their opinions incorrectly. He sincerely hopes that he has succeeded in doing injustice to nobody and that he is capable of listening carefully enough to be able to pass on to others what he has heard.

I am indebted to the International Missionary Council for the honour of this assignment; to the Netherlands Missionary Council for permission to spend time on its fulfilment; especially to Dr. W. L. Holladay, who under pressure of time translated the first draft from the Dutch language; to Dr. A. M. Chirgwin, who reshaped the final text; to the Rev. Drs. J. Slomp, who took care of the notes, bringing them up to the Anglo-Saxon standard; and finally to all those who have helped me through discussing the first draft, in criticizing and stimulating my thoughts.

With the gratitude of a son and the pride of a father, I mention that the indexes of Bible references and of authors have been prepared by my eighty-years old father and my twenty-years old son. This symbolizes the fact that the present generation is nothing without the former, and helpless without the future, generation.

J. BLAUW

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