

S. Moffett: SM-lec\mis-theo.lec

Missions: Some Theological Musings

I don't know where I picked up the habit of biting off more than I can chew. I thought once I'd start a History of Christianity in Korea, ^{that} which would have been manageable; but ^{it} got drawn into a History of Christianity in Asia, all Asia. That's a completely different ballpark--not just one little peninsula, but a third of all the world's land surface, and nearly two-thirds of all its people! Yet here I am again, ^{I said} saying I'll talk to the Theological Students Fellowship on missions, which I can manage, particularly the history of missions, but I end up promising to talk about the theology of missions, and I'm not a theologian, I'm a historian. But a promise is a promise, and after all a historian can't help but notice that the history of missions has been shaped by the theology of the missionaries, and that if missions is to remain Christian, it can't by-pass ^{Christian} theology in favor of more popular racial or national or personal emotions ~~and experiences.~~ ^{and opinions.}

Let me begin, then, by commenting on the difference that theology has made in mission in the last two centuries, the 19th and 20th.

There was a time when Christians didn't feel the need to re-examine and re-imagine the world Christian mission every three ^{a few} years. They didn't need to ask why they had missionaries, and what missionaries were supposed to do. It was axiomatic. It was simple, and dangerous, and overwhelmingly urgent. It was as simple as the command of Christ, and as urgent as life and death, ~~For~~ millions upon millions were dying without Christ. Every second saw more souls slipping into a Christless eternity. No one had ever given them a chance. No one had ever told them that they could live forever in Christ. Faced with a challenge as simple as that the Church exploded into the modern missionary movement, a race against time and against the devil ^{for} of the greatest of all prizes, the eternal salvation of the human soul.

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classic and most familiar theology of missions. It is

If you are expecting me to ridicule that challenge, I am going to disappoint you. ^{I suppose I did overdramatize} As I summarized it, perhaps, I overdramatized it a little, but that is the classic, and most familiar theology of missions. It is evangelical, salvationist theology, and as a matter of fact, in large measure it was the challenge that sent me to the mission field. One day in Miller Chapel, the chairman of the Board, Robert E. Speer for whom Speer Library is named, stopped, took off his watch, and said, "Young men, [that fit then better than it does now] -- "Young men, this watch could tick for nine and a half years without numbering the unbelievers in China alone". Which is one reason I went to China, ^{at first,} not Korea, at first. That was my father's theology of missions, ^{but} It is not a 19th century theology of missions. It still sends more missionaries around the world than any other theology of missions, except perhaps in our shrinking, no longer mainline Protestant denominations.

But you know as well as I that there came a day of the shaking of the foundations. The old urgencies were denied, or at least ignored. No one seemed sure of anything eternal any more.)

So the challenge changed. The 1928 Jerusalem Conference of the International Missionary Council said (if you will excuse their language) "Our fathers were impressed with horror that men should die without Christ; we are equally impressed with horror that they should live without Christ".

It was a shift of balance, really, more than a denial-- a strategic withdrawal, they thought, to what was considered firmer theological ground. Millions upon millions are living in misery and in filth. No one can deny that. No one has ever given them a chance. No one has ever helped them to the the life abundant that Jesus came to give them. This was a challenge to a future in history--a future without hunger and without hate, without sickness and without tears where all men are brothers, and all women are sisters, where justice rolls down like the waters, and the nations shall study war no more.

This is the second, a more modern theology of missions--
a theology of the Kingdom. In its most popular form it is a theology of liberation

theology of liberation.

I do not intend to ridicule this view either. I has never seemed ridiculous to me to feed the hungry and to heal the sick and to work for peace and justice.

But again, you know as well as I how the paralysis of doubt has struck once more. The foundatins shook, and the roof fell in. Wars, holocausts, depressions, brutalities, corruptions, and failed revolutions in a disheartening crescendo of defeat. Worst of all, much of this was happening in what too many hkad believed was the Kingdom, western, Christian civilization. The Kingdom refused to stay built no matter how hard the liberators tried, and the builders began to lose hope.

Those have been the two famliar symbols of the missionary: the savers of souls, and the builders of the Kingdom. The problem of missions today is that neither pattern, the old evangelism, or the new activism, has proved to be able to carry the whole church with it to the Mission.

Actually, neither of the two theologies which those symbols represent is more credible or more convincing than the other. In an imperfect, warring world of selfish, quarreling people, is the promise of what the Marxists call "pie in the sky by-and-by", any less realistic than the promise of those same failed revolutionists to produce peace and plenty for all right here and now? Today's secular cynics won't believe either one.

So where do we begin, theologically. It might help if both the saver of souls evangelist, and the humanitarian builder of the Kingdom. took one step backward to a deeper more profound more Biblical theology. ^{Each has missed a step toward each other.} In a way, in basic motivation, there is not much difference between the two. At their best, in the church both honestly believe that their motive is love, Christian love. But I am beginning to question just how far love is the basic motive in Christian mission. In the Christian life, and even in Christian theology yes, of course, love is basic. A lawyer asked Jesus, "Which is the great commandment", and Jesus answered, "Love God, that is the first and great commandment; and love your neighbor, that is the second." (Matt. 36-39). Of course love is

fundamental to any Christian theology. But was love the motive in the original mission of the Church? Yes and no.

Love is fundamental, I need to repeat that. It was love that started the mission. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." (NSRV) But that was the love of God the Father. The missionary was God the Son.

I also believe that love had its part in bringing Christ into the world on his mission of reconciliation. However, it is interesting to note that the Bible does not say so. I it full of his love for everone, a compassion that knows no bounds, for publicans and sinners, Jews and Gentiles, unbelievers as well sad followers. But where are we told that he came to the world because he loved it? Insofar as the Bible distinguishes between the Son and the Father (a dangerous, unchalcedonian distinction, I know) dilstinguishes between these two persons of the trinity in reference to the mission, it tells us that the Father founds the mission because he loves, the Son goes on the mission because he is sent. The motive of the Son, the missionary, is obedience.

Look at the glimpse Paul gives us into the mind of Christ before the mission. The lesson is not love, but humility, and obedience, "even unto the death of the cross". (Phil. 2:5-8). He loves the world, of course, but he goes because he is sent. That is the only explanation he gives of the narrowness of his mission: "I am not sent but to the lost sheep in Israel." He loves the world enough to die for it, but he goes to the cross because he is sent: "Not my will, but thine, be done". The insistent, compelling motive of the mission is obedience. God is love; but it is obedience that forges and focusses and incarnates that love into a mission.

The lesson is absolutely the same when we turn to the apostles, the first missionaries of the Church. Was it love for a despised and rejected race that sent Philip to the Ethiopians? Not according to the record. "The angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip, 'Arise and go.'" And he went. Was it love that sent Peter to the proud and unclean, to the centurion? Not according



The Christian Mission: Its Motive and Its Task

by SAMUEL HUGH MOFFETT

*One of a series of speeches
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DIVISION OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
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THERE was a time when Christians didn't feel the need to re-examine the Christian Mission. They didn't need to ask why they had missionaries, and what missionaries were supposed to do. It was almost axiomatic. It was simple, and dangerous, and overwhelmingly urgent. It was as simple as the command of Christ, and as urgent as life and death. For millions upon millions were dying without Christ. Every second saw more souls slipping into a Christless eternity. No one had ever given them a chance. No one had ever told them that they could live forever in Christ. Faced with a challenge as simple as that, the Church exploded into the modern missionary movement, a race against time and against the devil for the greatest of all prizes, the eternal salvation of the human soul.

If you are expecting me to ridicule that challenge, I am going to disappoint you. It has never seemed ridiculous to me. As a matter of fact, in large measure it was the challenge which sent me to the mission field. But you know as well as I that there came a day of the shaking of the foundations. The old urgencies were denied, or at least ignored. No one seemed sure of anything eternal any more.

So the challenge changed. The Jerusalem Conference of the International Missionary Council said: "Our fathers were impressed with horror that men should die without Christ; we are equally impressed with horror that they should live without Christ." It was a shift of balance, really, more than a denial—a strategic withdrawal to what was considered firmer ground. Millions upon millions are living in misery and in filth. No one can deny that. No one has ever given them a chance. No one has ever helped them to the life abundant that Jesus came to give them. It was a challenge to a future in history—a future without hunger and without hate, without sickness and without tears, where all men are brothers and the nations shall study war no more. So the Church went forth to build the Kingdom.

I do not intend to ridicule this view either. It has never seemed ridiculous to me to feed the hungry and heal the sick and work for peace. But again you know as well as I how the paralysis of doubt struck once more. The foundations shook and the roof fell

in. Wars, depressions, brutalities, corruptions in a disheartening crescendo of defeat—and all this within what too many had believed *was* the Kingdom, western civilization. The Kingdom refused to stay hilt, and the builders began to lose hope.

Those have been the two familiar symbols of the missionary: the savior of souls, and the builder of the Kingdom. The problem of our time is that neither is quite able to carry all Christendom with him to the Mission.

Actually, in basic motivation, there is not much difference between the savior of souls and the builder of the Kingdom. In both the motive is love. But I am beginning to question just how far love is the motive of the Christian Mission. Was it the motive in the original mission of the Church?

Of course, love is fundamental. It was love that started the mission. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." But that was the love of God, the Father. The missionary was God the Son.

Of course, I am not preparing to deny that it was love that brought Christ into the world on His mission of reconciliation. However, it may be worth noting that the Bible does not say so. It is full of His love for men, a compassion that knows no bounds, but where are we told that He came to the world because He loved it? Insofar as the Bible distinguishes between the Son and the Father in reference to the mission, it tells us that the Father founds the mission because He loves, the Son goes on the mission because He is sent. The motive of the Son, the missionary, is *obedience*.

Look at the glimpse Paul gives us into the mind of Christ before the mission. The lesson is not love, but humility and obedience, "even unto the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:5-8). He loves the world, of course, but He goes because He is sent. He loves the whole world, but He goes to the Jews because He is sent. That is the only explanation He gives of the narrowness of His mission: "I am not sent but to the lost sheep in Israel." He loves the world enough to die for it, but He goes to the cross because He is sent: "Not my will, but thine, be done." The insistent, compelling motive of the mission is

obedience. God is love, but it is obedience that forges and focusses and incarnates that love into a mission.

The lesson is absolutely the same when we turn to the apostles, the first missionaries of the Church. Was it love for a despised and rejected race that sent Philip to the Ethiopians? Not according to the record. "The angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, 'Arise and go.'" And he went. Was it love that sent Peter to the proud and unclean, to the centurion? Not according to the record. "The spirit said unto him, 'Arise and go' . . ." And he went.

Was it a passion for millions of lost Gentile souls, dying without hope and without Christ, that made Paul the apostle to the Gentiles? He loved his own people too much for that. But obedience made him a missionary. "Separate me Barnabas and Saul," says the Spirit, and obedience sent him, almost reluctantly, to the Gentiles. "The Lord commanded me, saying, 'I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles.'" In the strange new world of the Bible, apostles and missionaries are made not by looking at the world in love, but by listening to God in obedience. They go in love, but they go because they obey.

At this point most of us are inclined to change the subject in embarrassment and go on to more practical things like techniques and methods, and campaigns and appeals. How can we wait around for missionaries to listen to the voice of God? I remember a girl in college who was earnest and intense and desperately wanted to go as a missionary to Africa. But God had not called her. There were no voices, no visions, and this inexplicable silence on the part of God was making her almost ill with anxiety. So one night, a tough-minded, realistic friend of mine stepped in to take a hand. She gathered a group of girls together, robed them all in white sheets, and at midnight stole into the troubled girl's room, moaning in hollow tones, "Come to Africa. Come to Africa."

Don't laugh at the poor girl, waiting for the voice of God. She was as much right as wrong: wrong in her stereotyped ideas of how God speaks, but completely right in believing that without the positive assurance of God's leading she would never be a missionary, even if she did go to Africa. In a

sense, we are only dressing ourselves up in white sheets and stealing upon the unwary, when we settle for the presentation of a lesser motive.

Weigh carefully all the hundreds of other factors: Christian love, desperate need, health, talent, strategy, Scripture itself. I would not dare to minimize their importance. But not all of them together can properly send the Christian to his mission until he can gather from them, as did Paul from the vision at Troas, the assurance that the Lord has called him to preach the gospel, not where he is, but *there* where God sends him.

Last week I heard a very great missionary speak movingly of the Christian mission as "a war of amazing kindness." As I read the hook of the Acts of the Apostles, another phrase comes to mind. It is also "a war of amazing assurance," the assurance that God has spoken, and we obey. The motive is obedience.

And what is the task? What does the missionary do over there? Well, he'd better do what God tells him to do. I am beginning to think that at least one reason why I was thrown out of China as an emhazzler was for doing what God did *not* tell me to do. Let me hasten to add that I didn't really emhazzle. All I did was keep the books as treasurer for mission and presbytery, but I was an American with financial responsibilities, and that is all the Communists needed to slap an emhazzlement charge on me. I can tell you now with all the great clarity of hindsight that God had not called me to keep financial records. It was the hest lesson I have ever had on the urgency of the need for transfer of authority to the younger Church.

After all, that is what God sends us to do. The task is to build up the Church. It is the essential task that sets apart the missionary from all other callings. He goes from a church that is able to send, like Antioch, to a land that has no church, or to a church that is not yet able to take its full place in the mission. I still like the classical definition of the full church: self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting.

The crucial question is: How do we build such a church? I don't want to be trapped here on the horns of the usual dilemma: How are you going to

build that church; by saving souls, or by saving society? When did God tell us to do either one? I can't save souls. Souls are saved by the Holy Spirit. And I can't save society. Society will be saved, and the Kingdom built, only by the Triumphant Christ. The missionary is not sent out to be God. He is sent out only to obey Him. And I think God sends us, as He sent his first missionaries, to *witness* and to *serve*. It is as simple—and as difficult—as that. First, witness. Tell the good news. That is something, God says, that you can do about saving souls, and He will do the rest. And second, serve. Help others in love, as you are able. That is something you can do for society, and He will do the rest. The savor of souls and the builder of the Kingdom must learn obedience in these two simple tasks. That is the way the Church is built.

The first task is witness. Tell the good news. That is the useless side of Christianity, our Communist friends liked to tell us. "Look at us," they said. "We get results: land reform, economic justice, and an end to feudalism. What does the Church do for the people? It talks!" I have just seen a new release from the Far Eastern Joint Office of the Division of Foreign Missions quoting a Chinese Communist listing of the order of importance of various occupations. It begins with soldiers, then moves on through a long list of professions in a descending order of usefulness, until it comes to a dismal end with "prostitutes and missionaries."

The Christian must reply that in the sense those Communists understood "usefulness," our main task is not to be useful at all. They were interested in the Church only as a tool in building up a new China. But the Church belongs to God and not to man, and it is not intended to become the tool of any social order—imperialist, or capitalist, or communist. You remember how the Jews wanted to use Jesus as a tool in building up a new Israel. They wanted to make Him king, and He would have made a very good king. But He refused. He said, "I came into the world to bear witness to the truth."

We are simply not sent to build the Church into a useful tool for society. We are sent to tell the truth. I don't base my answer to the question, "Do we need the Church?" on any long list of Chris-

turned to Jesus Christ. There are as many people asking, Why is the Mission a failure?—as, What is its motive and task? Is the mission a failure? We have obeyed and gone out. We have witnessed and we have served. Why don't the people follow us?

Well, why should the people follow us? I am wondering if there is not still another final lesson in obedience that we must learn. Not long ago I heard a young pastor speak of the story of doubting Thomas. Why did the disciple insist on seeing the print of the nails; why did he thrust his hands into the wound in the side? It was more than simply to identify the Risen Lord. He wanted to be sure that the Lord who was asking him to follow was indeed the same Lord who had suffered for him. Only then did he follow.

Perhaps our trouble is that most of the world no longer identifies us with Christ. To most of the world, the symbol of the missionary is not even the savior of souls, or the builder of the Kingdom. It may be unjust, but to most of the world the symbol of the Christian missionary is a soft, white, rich Westerner. And why should the people follow that? They look at the Communist— and whatever else you say about the Communist, you must credit him with this—that he is ready to sacrifice and to suffer and die. Then people look at us who have lost the marks of suffering of our Lord.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not ask to suffer. It is our Lord's suffering, not mine, that saves. But how can we ask the world to follow us to Jesus Christ until we are ready ourselves to follow Him? And He still says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." What have I really denied myself? What real cross do I bear?

It is "a war of amazing assurance," this mission of ours, but only in the obedience of suffering.

The Motive and Method of Missions. I started out confidently with the classic motives: the big goal to save souls, which launched the modern mission movement. And then the ^{later} equally passionate drive to save society, which changed the ~~whole face of missions~~ ^{missionary movement}, some say for the better, some say for the worse. And I decided that both are right, but both miss the main point. The missionary can no more save souls than he can save society. ^{In the Bible,} Souls are saved by the H.S., and the world is saved by God, not man. But man has his part. He obeys ~~or~~ Souls can be saved and the world can be changed —

That's the good news of the gospel. — but the mission ^{our mission} ~~fact~~ ^{the does} ~~fact~~ ^{It} ~~does not~~ ^{begin} with a passion for souls, or love with a love for humanity. ~~It begins with obedience.~~ ^{Even at the primary level, it all} ~~begin with a great~~ ^{love for the world — for the} God so loved the world... but he wasn't the missionary. His son was. And his son was sent. The only glimpse we are given of the mind of X^r. at the beginning of the mission

② Was it love ^{for the gentiles} that sent Paul and Barnabas ^{out of Antioch} to become the first missionaries of the dis. Chh. Paul ~~loved the gentiles~~ ^{loved the Jews even more, he} says. He was ready to die for them. He went to the gentiles because he was sent.

① Was it love for the Canaanites that sent Moses on his mission. He wouldn't even let his son ~~visit~~ ^{visit} so much as marry a Canaanite. He went to Canaan because he was sent. He didn't even know where he was going until he got there.

MOTIVE FOR MISSION

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What happened?

There was a time when Christians didn't feel the need to examine and reexamine the Christian Mission. They didn't need to ask why they had missionaries, and what missionaries were supposed to do. It was almost axiomatic. It was simple, and dangerous, and overwhelmingly urgent. It was as simple as the command of Christ, and as urgent as life and death. For millions upon millions were dying without Christ. Every second saw more souls slipping into a Christless eternity. No one had ever given them a chance. No one had ever told them that they could live forever in Christ. Faced with a challenge as simple as that, the Church exploded into the modern missionary movement, a race against time and against the devil for the greatest of all prizes, the eternal salvation of the human soul.

If you are expecting me to get up-to-date and ridicule that old-fashioned challenge, I am going to disappoint you. It has never seemed ridiculous to me. As a matter of fact, in large measure it was the challenge which sent me to the mission field. It still sends more missionaries out across the world than any other Christian theology of missions I have ever read. It is the theology of the overwhelming majority of our new partners in mission, the missionaries of the third world churches.

But you know as well as I that there came a day of the shaking of the foundations. The old urgencies were denied, or at least ignored. No one seemed sure of anything eternal any more.

So the challenge changed. Fairly early in the 20th century the Jerusalem Conference of the International Missionary Council (now part of the World Council of Churches) said: "Our fathers were impressed with horror that men should die without Christ; we are equally impressed with horror that they should live without Christ."

It was a shift of balance, really, more than a denial--a strategic withdrawal^a to what was considered firmer ground. Millions upon millions are living in misery and in filth. No one can deny that. No one has ever given them a chance. No one has

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ever given them justice. No one has ever helped them to the life abundant that Jesus came to give them. This was a challenge to a future in history--a future without hunger and without hate, without sickness and without tears, where all men are brothers, all women sisters, where justice rolls down like the waters, and the nations shall study war no more. So the 20th century church went forth to build the Kingdom.

I do not intend to ridicule this view either. It has never seemed ridiculous to me to feed the hungry and heal the sick and work for peace.

But again you know as well as I how the paralysis of doubt struck once more. The foundations shook and the roof fell in. Wars, depressions, brutalities, corruptions and revolutions in a disheartening crescendo of defeat--and all this within what too many believed was the Kingdom, the Christian West. The 20th century, for all its good intentions, just didn't manage to give us the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom refused to stay built, and the builders began to lose hope.

Somehow the century of ecumenics even failed to unite the church.

Those have been the two familiar symbols of Christian mission: the zealous savers of souls, and the revolutionary builders of the Kingdom. The problem, here at the end of the 20th century is that neither pattern, 19th century evangelism or 20th century activism, by itself, is quite able to carry all Christendom with it into Christian mission.

Did you know that where I live, if you draw circle around Princeton, New Jersey, with a radius of 70 miles, you will find within that circle at least 500 Korean churches, some say 600? The Korean churches started exploding with growth right back there in

S. Moffett

ANOTHER LOOK AT COLONIALISM AND MISSION: KOREA

Most college-educated Americans have been brought up on a steady diet of revisionist history. The United States gets blamed for all the economic ills of Latin America; Britain and France and Belgium for everything wrong in Africa. And now poor Columbus gets sandbagged with the anticolonialist axe, and instead of being thanked for giving the world a land where humankind could create the freest, most democratic and most generous country in the world, we are asked to bash him for robbing the North American Indians of land which for a thousand years they had already been robbing from each other.

Political correctness, it seems, has become more important than historical balance and honest reporting. Of course the past was not all good, but neither was it all bad. I am not about to defend colonialism. At times it was too bad to even try to defend. But when Christian missions are brought into the picture, and the attempt is made to blacken the cause of world missions with accusations of co-conspiracy and complicity with the colonial subjugation of the third world, I rise to suggest another look at the record.

I won't pretend that there is not some truth to linking missionary expansion with imperialism. Both the Christian church and the western empires were moving into Asia in the same places and at the same time. But complicity and co-conspiracy, no. And in the case of Korea, absurd.

A scholarly friend of mine has put it very clearly:

"By and large," he wrote, "the missionaries were a breed fundamentally different from their colonizing compatriots. Nevertheless, the..context in which they found themselves could not but influence their theology, mission work, and day to day conduct. They carried the odor of the colonial enterprise with them--much the way the stale smell of cigarette smoke clings to the non-smoker coming out of a room full of smokers".

Furthermore, in the case of Korea, more than anywhere else in Asia, the charge of western colonialism against the Christian missions is absurd. I come from Asia. My parents were married in Asia; I was born in Asia, and I was married in Asia. And from where I come from, Korea, the imperialists were not the westerners, but Asiatics, the Japanese.

I won't even accept the charge that Christian missions imperially uprooted the beautiful, natural eastern religions of the orient and replaced them harshly with an unsuitable, alien western faith, for Christianity is an eastern religion. If it violently uprooted any religions, those religions were not the old eastern religions, but the silly old religions of the west: the deceitful, immoral pagan gods and goddesses of Greek and Rome, and the barbaric superstitions of my own ancestral Scotland. Before the Christian faith came, my ancestors, the Scots, were running around the northern forests clothed in nothing but blue paint, killing each other and torturing their prisoners like North American Indians before Columbus. If we are going to go in for revisionist history, let's look for imperialism in both directions, east as well as west.

Are you surprised to hear me describe Christianity as an eastern religion? Well, remember that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Asia, not in Bethlehem in Pennsylvania. The first Christian king was an Asian, either from Edessa in what is now eastern Turkey, or from Armenia in Asia Minor, not the one westerners usually think of as the first Christian king, the emperor Constantine of Rome. And Christianity was not forced on China by western missionaries. 1300 years ago, while my ancestors were still heathen barbarians, a Persian missionary from what is now Iraq brought the Christian faith all the way across Asia on the Old Silk Road to the capital of T'ang dynasty China and was welcomed by the Chinese emperor. If there was any imperialism in Christian mission in those days of beginnings, it was as Asian as it was western. Asiatic.

Nor was it imperialist even when the missionaries became westerners. That is a stereotype repeated for example by good novelists, but not very reliable historians. You remember Michener's novel about Hawaii, usually well researched but with a caricature of self-righteous, puritan Yankees forcing western clothes on their unwilling converts in the beautiful, innocent Pacific islands.

Let me tell you a story, a true account which my wife Eileen found in a letter from one of those early puritan missionaries to Hawaii. It was written in 1822 by Mrs. Richard, who was in the second boat of missionaries to the islands. As the ship sailed into Honolulu harbour, native canoes came swarming out to meet her. In them came some of the native chiefs, and their wives. Mrs. Richards described what happened as they came aboard. She noted that the native women weren't wearing very much in the way of clothing, but that did not seem to disturb her. The Hawaiian women clustered excitedly around the American women, fascinated by their dresses. They fingered them, and exclaimed over them, until the missionary women, wanting to be friendly, decided it would be a nice thing to do if each one of them would be willing to give up one of her few frocks, brought all the way from Connecticut, to present to the Hawaiian women as a gift, a token of their desire to be friends. And the women went off simply delighted. But, wrote Mrs. Richards, "Perhaps we made a mistake. All they wanted us to do for the next two years was to make dresses for them, and we had only one sewing machine. Besides, that is not why we came here."

Michener's popular caricature of the missionary fits Korea even less than Hawaii. In Korea, the natives were not the savages, the Koreans thought the missionaries were the savages and barbarians. They learned that America was only about 150 years old, and thought, how can a country only 150 years old be civilized. Our culture stretches back 4000 years. As for the missionaries, they were obviously savages. They smelled bad because of the dairy products they ate and drank, cheese, butter

and milk. They had bad manners. Their language was nothing but nonsense syllables, and they couldn't understand even the simplest sentences in Korean.

But Korea, all Asia in fact, was on the edge of a revolution, a revolution in which the missionaries played an important and benevolent part, not an imperialist part. Remember that I said that in Korea, when the Japanese came in, imperialism in Korea was Asiatic, not western. It was other Asians who robbed Korea of its freedom for 45 terrible years. And it was the missionaries who protected them, and supported them in their struggles to retain their identity.

My father went to Korea 100 years ago in the first wave of western pioneers to that forbidden land which for centuries had closed its coast to foreign intruders. He landed in 1890. In 1895 the Japanese murdered the Korean Queen, and the frightened King asked the missionaries to take turns sleeping in the palace in the royal bedroom, hoping that the presence of foreigners would deter the Japanese army from killing him, too. My father took his turn. It was the western missionaries the King trusted. They were Korea's only friends, the poor king thought. The enemies were Asians, Japanese not westerners. And for a while the king refused to eat any food which was not prepared by missionary wives and sent to the palace in a locked box, for fear of poisoning. The religious imperialism in Korea was Buddhist/Shinto, the anti-colonial protection was western and Christian.

The best parts of the political and social revolution which then swept over the Korean peninsula in the wake of the Japanese conquest were the changes in the culture influenced by the western missionaries, not the Asian conquerors.

There was the medical revolution. The first Protestant missionary was a medical doctor, and the first hospitals were Christian hospitals--hospitals, leprosariums, and even tuberculosis sanitariums, for tuberculosis was then Korea's greatest physical plague, with one out of every ten Koreans coming down with TB.

And there was the educational revolution. The first

schools to teach science and technology were mission schools. The most radical part of that revolution was education for women. There were no schools for women in all Korea until the western missionaries came. Mrs. Scranton, a stout-hearted and very determined Methodist took one look at the old Confucian school system, all male, and said, "This is just plain wrong." So she opened Korea's first school for girls. When she went to one old Confucian scholar to ask if he would allow his daughter to enroll, he looked at her over his tortoise-shell glasses and said, "Can cows read?" But the school opened anyway, and today it is the largest women's university in the whole world. Mrs. Scranton was no western imperialist; she was a liberator.

But they did plant churches, those early pioneers, and some say that was religious imperialism. No, it was simply giving the people a free choice in religion. No one made them become Christians. But when they saw what the missionaries were doing and how they behaved, they were impressed, and wanted to hear more about the great God of the universe who loved them enough to die for them. And when some did ask to become Christians, the missionaries made very sure from the beginning that it would be a Korean church which was planted, not a western mission church.

My father was stoned on one or two of his early trips into what is now North Korea. But he stayed for longer and longer periods of time until he began earning trust and friendship. Soon he was not only welcomed but loved. In fact, when Jack London, a novelist like Michener, came to Korea as a war correspondent during the Russo-Japanese war, unlike Michener he did not find the old imperialist stereotype of a missionary there. He went north toward the fighting in Manchuria, looking for an elusive missionary he had heard of named Moffett. It was somewhat like Stanley looking for Livingstone in Africa, he said, because he had been told that if he needed help in north Korea, Moffett was the man. And when he found my father he wrote back that any foreigner who wanted anything done in that part of Korea must only say Dr. Moffett's Korean name, Ma Moksa, and all doors were open.

Three years later the first Koreans graduated from the little seminary my father had started. And then the missionaries turned the church over to the Koreans. They ordained the first Korean pastors, And lo and behold, one of the seven men so ordained turned out to be the man who had led the mob which had stoned father in the streets of that same city sixteen years earlier. They elected the first moderator of their Korean church, and the missionaries expected them to elect a Korean moderator. But instead, polite as always, elected my father, and the man who was stoned proceeded to ordain the man who had stoned him, and when he went out as a Korean missionary to preach to a strange island off the southern coast of Korea, Cheju-Do, the people stoned the Korean missionary.

I hope I have persuaded you to look a little more kindly on the missionaries. They made their mistakes, but they were not imperialists. They went out at the call of God to bring a message of love and Good News and true liberation.

My faith is neither eastern or western. It is universal--as universal as the love of God, and as unique as Jesus Christ who said, "No one cometh to the Father but by me. And Korea is just another example of its universality, and its unique power to transform. A friend of mine visited Korea, and was astonished. He pointed out in surprise, that though Presbyterianism had started in Geneva with John Calvin, the largest Presbyterian congregation in the world is in Seoul, Korea--a downtown Presbyterian church with a congregation of 60,000 members. And though Methodism started in England with John Wesley, the largest Methodist congregation in the world is in Seoul, Korea. And though Pentecostalism, in its modern form, started in Southern California, the largest Pentecostal church in the world is in Seoul, Korea.

If ever Christianity was imperialist, and in many places I suppose it at least carried that stigma, it is imperialist no more, and I am proud to call myself a missionary.

Samuel Hugh Moffett

For the last forty years much of mainline western church rhetoric has painted the world Christian missionary outreach around the globe as just another arm of western imperialism, arrogantly adding religious proselytizing to the injustices of western military and economic expansion.

What a change in just one generation! In my father's day coming home on furlough from the mission field was something of a triumph. The missionary was a hero. Today he or she is an anti-hero. Even in some churches I am eyed askance as a throw-back to a more primitive era, to the evil days of colonialism, and cultural aggression and the white man's manifest destiny. We live in a day of the cracking of the mirror of the missionary image. In the old days, furlough was a temporary withdrawal from the frontier for rest and recuperation in the warm embrace of the heart of Christendom. Christendom does not have that kind of a heart any more, and coming home is more of an icy shock than a warm embrace. We are now almost ashamed to send out more foreign missionaries.

Well, I come from a country where the imperialist oppression was Asiatic, not western. My parents were married in Asia; I was born in Asia, and I was married in Asia. I even belong to an eastern religion, Christianity, which uprooted the beautiful, natural, innocent religions of the West 2000 years ago. But real history tells us that those "beautiful, peaceful" western religions of our ancient ancestors were no more beautiful and peaceful than the "beautiful, innocent, peaceful" eastern religions which seem so attractive to American college students today. Before the Christian faith came to my ancestors the Scots, my own forebears were running around the northern forests clothed in nothing but blue paint, killing each other and torturing their prisoners like North American Indians before Columbus. If we are going to go in for revisionist history, let's look in both ways, not just what happened west to east, but east to west or east to east.

Christianity is an eastern religion. It moved in history from east to west. It began in Asia, not New York. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Asia, not Bethlehem in Pennsylvania. The

first Christian king was, as far as we can tell, not Constantine the Great of Christian Rome, but an Asian king, either a Persian Arab in West Asia or an Armenian from Asia Minor.

For any of you who still think that Christianity is an alien white man's religion, exported by imperialists like me to Asia, let me remind you that there are more Presbyterians, for example, in little South Korea than in all our huge United States, and that there are 400 Korean churches in the city of New York alone and another hundred in Philadelphia. Christianity was not forced on China by western missionaries. It was brought by a Persian missionary to the Chinese 1300 years ago, in 635 AD, about the same time (563 AD) that a European missionary began to convert my savage Scottish ancestors.

Christianity today is the world's only universal religion; it is no longer either western or eastern. Korea now sends out about a thousand foreign missionaries, which is twice as many as my own mainline American denomination.

So let me now give you a look at the history of Christianity in Asia from an Asian Christian point of view. You are all too familiar with the western point of view, the Michener point of view: the haughty, self-righteous puritan forcing western clothes on the beautifully naked islanders.

Let me tell you just one story, which my wife Eileen found in a letter from one of those early puritan missionaries to Hawaii. She was in the second boat of missionaries to reach what they then called the Sandwich Islands. As the ship sailed into Honolulu harbor, the native canoes came swarming out to meet her. In them came some of the chiefs, and their wives. Mrs. Richardson wrote that the native women weren't wearing very much, but that did not seem to disturb her. When they came aboard, the Hawaiian women clustered around the American women, and were fascinated by their pretty dresses. They fingered them and exclaimed over them, and the missionary women, who wanted to be friendly, decided that it might be a nice thing to do, if each missionary woman would be willing to give up one her frocks brought all the way from

Connecticut, to present to the Hawaiian women as a gift, a token of their desire to be friends. And the women went off simply delighted. But, wrote Mrs. Richardson, " Perhaps we made a mistake." All they wanted us to do for the next two years was to make dresses for them, and we only had one sewing machine. And besides, that is not what we here to do. We came to tell them about Jesus.

So much for Michener's Hawaii--half-true, half-false--and that's the difference between revisionist history, and history based on primary sources.

In Korea, the anti-colonial label fits the missionaries even less credibly than in Hawaii, and there I am even closer to the sources. My own father went to Korea in 100 years ago in 1890, in the first wave of western missionaries between 1884 and 1890.

But those first westerners were not the first missionaries. The first missionaries were Asiatic, not western. The first foreign missionary to Korea was Chinese, a Catholic priest baptized by the Jesuits in Peking and sent to Korea where he was martyred--an arrow piercing his ear and his head chopped off with a great sword--in 1801. That was almost a hundred years before the first Protestants arrived.

And Protestantism too, in Korea, did not begin with a westerner, but with a Korean. One of our later missionaries once said, "The Koreans have always been one step ahead of the [western] missionary". Before any westerner could establish a Protestant mission in Korea, a Korean ginseng peddler, taking his medicines across the Yalu for sale in Chinese Manchuria, was converted there and was persuaded to stay and help with a translation of the New Testament into the Korean language. Western missionaries were still forbidden to enter Korea, but the young Korean convert offered to take some Bible portions back with him to his home village. And even before the first westerners were allowed to enter, he had converted the whole village to the Christian faith.

The next year, the first resident western Protestant missionary landed. He was a tall, red-bearded medical doctor who

was told he would have to go back to China. No missionaries, the American ambassador (minister) told him, was allowed. Korea was a closed land to foreign religions. But by the grace of God the ambassador's wife, the first white woman ever seen in the capital, was a hypochondriac. When she heard that her husband was sending the only western doctor within a thousand miles back to China, she said, "You can't do that to me". And like any husband, he wilted, and looked for a way out. He persuaded the king to let the missionary stay, but not as a missionary, labelled rather as "physician to the American legation".

It was providential. A few months later, a rebellion broke out in the palace. The young progressives invited the ruling conservatives to a banquet, and hired assassins to murder the conservative leader, Prince Min of the royal family. The assassins broke into the banquet, and the Prince fell bleeding from head and shoulders from deep slashes of the swords. The astonished American ambassador pulled himself together, and said, "I happen to have a miracle worker over in my legation. Perhaps he could save the Prince's life. A sedan chair was rushed to bring him to the palace, and when Dr. Allen arrived the palace practitioners were trying in vain to stop the bleeding by pouring boiling pitch into the Prince's wounds. The missionary/legation physician was afraid there was no hope, but began to work. For four months the Prince hovered between life and death, then the fever broke, and a grateful royal family summoned Dr. Allen to the palace. "How can we reward you for what you have done?, they asked. Give me a hospital," he said. And he got his hospital, the first legally permitted Christian institution in the whole country, and not an arrogant western imposition, but a royal gift for services rendered at great risk. The penalty, at least technically, for anyone treating royalty and failing to save the life, was death.

Five years later, when the Japanese murdered the Korean queen as a step toward conquering the country, the frightened King asked the American missionaries to take turns sleeping in his bedroom at the palace, hoping that the presence of the foreigners

would keep the Japanese from murdering him. My father took his turn. And again, it was the presence of the foreign missionaries which was the most trusted power against, not for, imperialist expansion. The missionaries were Korea's friends, not enemies. For a while the king refused to eat any food which was not prepared by missionary wives, and sent to the palace in a locked box. The imperialism in Asia was Asiatic and Buddhist/Shinto, the anti-colonial force was western and Christian.

This was one reason, among many, surely for the amazing growth of Christianity in Korea. No one calls Christianity western there, any more than we in America remember that it was Asiatic missionaries like St. Paul, who brought the gospel to our European ancestors.

Christians were first called Christians in Antioch, in Asia. The first church building, as distinct from a house-church, was erected not in Rome, but in Asia, in Edessa in 201 in what is now eastern Turkey. The oldest Christian hymnbook, as it is sometimes called, is named The Odes of Solomon, and was written not in Europe but in Asia, in Syria. The greatest missionary movement of the church's first 1500 years was not Catholic, or Orthodox, and certainly not Protestant, but Nestorian, the church in Asia outside the Roman Empire, which called itself the Church of the East. Its "pope", the patriarch, in the early 1300s was a Mongolian, whose cathedral was in Baghdad.

And today, the world church is steadily becoming more and more Asiatic, more third world, less western. Presbyterianism began in Geneva with John Calvin; but the largest Presbyterian congregation in the world is in Seoul, Korea. Methodism began in England with John Wesley; but the largest Methodist congregation in the world is in Seoul, Korea. Modern Pentecostalism began in Southern California; but the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world is in Seoul, Korea. And there are more than 6,000 Protestant churches today in that one Korean city, Seoul, Korea. Who says that Christianity is a western religion?

Well, I heard that every day for a while when I was in

China, in the early days of the Chinese communist revolution (I had been taken by the communists in 1948, and did not get out of China until 1951). They kept telling me that Christianity was an imperialist western export which had no business propagating itself anywhere in Asia, and most particularly in communist China where everyone knew that all religion was false, and western religions most false of all.

Acts is happy to invite the public to this forty-ninth (49th) in a series of special lectures which have featured outstanding speakers from various parts of the world, both Asian and Western. This series is designed to make available to a wider audience recent developments in biblical, theological, and missiological scholarship.

We sincerely welcome Prof. Samuel Hugh Moffett as our distinguished special guest lecturer during this 1990 Spring Semester.

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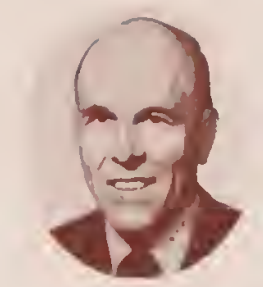


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Dr. Samuel Hugh Moffett
Professor of Church History

- B. A. Wheaton College, 1939
- Th. B. Princeton Theological Seminary, 1942
- Ph. D. Yale University, 1945
- Missionary to China, 1947-1951
- Associate President of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Seoul, 1970-1981
- Director and Professor, ACTS, 1974-1981
- Professor, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1982-present
- President Emeritus, ACTS, 1981-present



Dr. Samuel Hugh Moffett

“Christianity and the Third World”

“기독교와 제3세계”

Dr. Samuel H. Moffett is presently visiting Korea for the centennial celebration of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary founded by his father in Pyongyang. Dr. Moffett taught in the Yenching and Nanking universities until the communist takeover when he was reassigned to Korea.

Dr. Moffett has authored two books on Korea, Where e'er the Sun and The Christians of Korea. He has coauthored (with his wife) Joy for an Anxious Age, a Bible study guide on Philippians. He is a member of numerous church and university boards and learned societies. He is presently writing a two volume history of the Church in Asia.

Monday, May 21, 1990
at 7 : 00 p. m.

The lecture will be in English with Korean translation.

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