



A Tale of Three Cities

by

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At times a patient contracts a particular disease. The doctor prescribes a particular medicine. It is a good medicine and it kills the disease. But then, unforeseen side-effects appear that must in turn receive the focus of medical attention. In this lecture we will present an analysis of the nature of the disease, note the medicine used for its cure, and then concentrate on the unforeseen side-effects that the medicine produced. In chapter three we will address ourselves to the questions of what must be done to restore the patient to full vigor.

Mission Integration

Thirty years ago, roughly speaking, we Presbyterians engaged in a new, bold, risky venture. It was called Mission Integration. Up to that time the history of our overseas work followed a relatively standardized pattern. Presbyterians would begin work in a particular country. To do that they would organize themselves into an “American Presbyterian Mission.” A church would, in time, be born. That church would enjoy varying degrees of autonomy, depending on the country. For an extended period of time there would then be two separate organizations, the church and the mission.”

The Mission Integration radically revised our structures. The Third World church was given all responsibility. All American personnel then came under the direct authority of the church of that land. Missionaries, renamed Fraternal Workers, then served in the Third World only on the invitation of those Third World churches to which we were historically related. Property was often given, lock, stock and barrel, to the church of that land, and the American Mission as an organization was dissolved.

This bold new step was carried out by men and women of vision and commitment. It was a good step and it has achieved many good things. However, now a generation has passed. To my knowledge, no critical analysis of this radical turning point in our 175 years of Presbyterian mission history has ever been made. My wife and I were privileged to begin our missionary career under the old system of service under an American Mission. It has also been our privilege to have offered supportive participation to the change and now to have served under the new system for twenty-five years. It is thereby, as participants and insiders, that we reflect on what has been gained and what lost, and what new formulations our obedience may now require of us.

Especially in the light of our new church in America it seems particularly appropriate at this time to take a fresh look at the structures of how we fulfill our world-wide mission responsibilities.

Missionary Power

More precisely defined, our topic is power—missionary power. Our question is, “What is the nature of missionary power and how should it be exercised for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God as our church reaches out cross-culturally in the name of Christ in this country and around the world?”

Initially, a distinction in the nature of power itself must be made. Power can be defined in two different ways. The first we will call “negative power.” Negative power is the power to coerce. The second we will call “positive power.” This power is for us the freedom to choose the path of our own servanthood. Our Lord took upon Himself the role of the Suffering Servant. This has often been described as a “powerless role.” In one sense it was. He did not coerce others. But if His suffering is to be fully meaningful, the Suffering Servant must be free to choose His own path; He must be free to choose when and if He will set His face to go to Jerusalem. The Good Shepherd in John (10:17-18) says,

“I lay down my life. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Keeping this basic distinction in mind, namely negative power--the power to coerce—and positive power—the freedom to choose the path of servanthood—we must attempt a power analysis of the modern missionary movement.

It is possible to trace two power movements in recent mission history. One was positive. This was a movement outward in four stages. The second was a potentially negative move upward. Each of these movements must be noted briefly. First, the four-stage position move outward. This is a move from individual concerns to interest in an ever-widening community.

THE MOVE OUTWARD: Stage One—Pioneer Era

Stage one was the pioneer stage. In the early nineteenth century pioneer missionaries exercised positive power in a pure form. Lansing journeyed up the Nile River in Egypt in a houseboat in 1860 selling Arabic Bibles and other Christian literature. He chose his own path as he went, preaching and teaching in villages along the Nile. He was in authority over no one. There was no power to coerce. He had only the power of freely fulfilling his own obedience as shaped by his missionary colleagues. Like the seventy of the New Testament, if rejected in one village he went on to the next (cf. Lansing, *passim*).

The very nature of the task created men and women of strong wills, deep loyalties, a willingness to suffer and a commitment rarely matched in the history of the expansion of the Christian church. We think of the John Alexanders of Assiut, the Helen Martins of the Girls' College in Cairo, and many others of the last century and of this. They built schools, founded hospitals, established churches, itinerated in health-breaking preaching missions and the like, and they usually ran one-person shows. Gradually that one-person power had to be shared. Stage two was thus born.

Stage Two—Development of Key Centers

The second stage saw expansion and development in certain key centers, such as Assiut. John Hogg of Scotland was the man, and as he concentrated his efforts in that city and district a church came into being, a hospital was founded, and a school started. In this second stage, described to me personally by my late father, the great mission figures of Assiut would come to the yearly Egypt Mission Association with prepared agenda. As sometimes perceived by people in other cities, this agenda was, “What is good for Assiut is good for the mission, the church and the Kingdom of God.” In this stage mission power was often concentrated in major centers where a cluster of institutions were built and thrived.

Stage Three—Development of Regional Concern

In time a third stage evolved: regional concern. In my experience, upper and lower Egypt were the central foci. In key votes personnel and funds were channeled to aspects of the work of the mission on the basis of a sometimes gentle and sometimes strenuous tug between upper and lower Egypt.

Stage Four—Global Awareness

The fourth stage was the gradual awareness that the mission of the church was international. In the mid-fifties I was personally a part of the beginning of reflection on this development. For example, in Christian medicine the first task is always the basic task of alleviation of human suffering. By 1958 this was being done in Egypt by government hospitals and our mission hospitals were moving to a new role, that of offering quality, integrity, Christian compassion without regard to social class, and some needed specializations. But what of Ethiopia? There, stage one of mission medicine was still a critical need. For the people of Maji, the basic task of alleviation of human suffering was not being done. So, some asked, was it not time to consider shifting our medical resources to Ethiopia, even at the expense of retrenchment in Egypt? Such discussions were beginning to be possible. So the movement was from the personal to the station, then to the district and finally to the international arena. In short, the people involved were gradually widening their horizons from “our work” to “our city” to “our district,” and finally to “our community of nations and its needs.”

This four-stage development can be traced. However, the entire process was abruptly terminated by the mission integration in the late fifties. Suddenly there was no longer any forum in which missionaries could discuss or initiate any ministry. The arena for the discussion moved to the Western mission executive office.

Who will Decide questions of Funding and Priorities?

What monies are to be spent by whom, when and how, and what personnel are to be made available for what projects? It is obvious that little ministry of any kind is possible without funds and personnel. Indeed, is not the incarnation itself witness to the need for ministry on the deepest level to involve the giving of life across great barriers?

When funds are collected and personnel recruited in one country for use and service in ministry in that same country, one set of presuppositions apply. But when funds and people cross cultural

barriers, unique aspects of missionary power come into play. The reality of missionary power must be openly and carefully analyzed if creative use of that power is to be assured.

The Dollar in the Offering Plate

When Mr. or Ms. Presbyterian in Pittsburgh places one dollar in the offering plate for overseas mission, missionary power is created. Americans at some point will have the critical say of “Go” or “No go” as to how that dollar is spent.

We can naively say, for example, “The Egyptian Church must decide on its own priorities and we will only respond to their requests.” Ah, but which requests? The ones on which we concur, naturally! So then there are Americans in American church offices that control the flow of money and personnel. “No, no,” we answer. “We will invite Third World churchmen to sit with us in the American church offices to help us make the decisions on funds and personnel.” But how much money is to be at the disposal of that particular office? Well, yes, of course money comes to the General Assembly from presbyteries. So there must be Third World churchmen on our presbytery committees so that we are not making decisions that will affect them. But does not the money come to the presbytery from the churches, and are not church sessions made up of Americans? And what about the individual American Christian giver? Press the argument full circle and you will need Third World church leaders at every Presbyterian postbox picking up the monthly pay check, cashing it and subtracting the funds of their choice before Mr. or Ms. Presbyterian banks the check. Ergo—*reductum ad absurdum*. At some point Americans will decide on American funds. Accountability requires it.

Mission giving creates missionary power, and that missionary power resides necessarily in the hands of the church from which the mission giving generates. This is not a necessary evil. Rather, responsibility for discipleship cannot be abrogated! Giving in any church is an extension of the discipleship of that church.

Conclusion: mission power is an inevitable result of mission giving. To pretend that there is no mission power is to hide our heads in the sand. The only question is, how that power can be exercised in ways that guarantee its use as positive power, the power to create free servanthood, and not as negative power, the power to coerce or seduce other people. The first, positive power, assures the integrity of the mission. The second, negative power, when it occurs, damages the self-hood of the receiving church.

The mission integration process of the late fifties had as its clear conscious focus the desire to decapitate any possibility of Americans exercising coercive power over Third World churches and institutions. As we have noted, the theory was, dissolve the organizations of “American Missions” that we had built and operated for 130 years around the world, and assign all North American church workers to Third World churches only at the request of and under the direction of those churches. In this manner the Gordian knot will be cut and the churches given a new birth of freedom from foreign coercive power. It was a good step, a bold step and carried out with courage and good will. But it is necessary to examine some scarcely perceived presuppositions of what we were doing.

Having lived through this thirty year period since that bold new step, my own experience has led me to identify a set of seven presuppositions. Perhaps some are unforeseen results. It is to these seven presuppositions that we would now turn.

Questionable Presupposition #1—Permanence or Impermanence

First, the integration process moved us (consciously or unconsciously) from assumptions of permanence to assumptions of impermanence. What is the task of cross-cultural mission? How long should it last? The task, we began to think, was to get the church started and pull out. This was seen in four stages. These are:

Stage one: the pioneer work of establishing the church.

Stage two: turn things over to local church leaders following Paul's footsteps and let them take full responsibility for all aspects of our projects and institutions.

Stage three: we remain only in areas of expertise, such as Bible translation, medicine, education or perhaps some technical fields such as water resources, and the like.

Stage four: train local people in these specialties and withdraw all personnel and phase out all funding—mission accomplished.

This view affirms a concept of the body of Christ that I find theologically wanting. This says that once the church is strong in country X that we no longer need each other, except superficially. We can give speeches to one another at international meetings and that will do.

The great commission, however, tells us, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...and lo I am with you always, to the end of the age." D.T. Niles the great Sri Lankan theologian, notes that the last phrase of the Great Commission affirms that this task is to the ends of the world *and* the end of time. That is, the task of crossing to another culture in the name of Christ is an eschatological necessity, not a historical contingency. the task continues to the end of the age.

Catholic and Indigenous theologies

Niles' point can be stated another way. That is, the church must always struggle between catholic (*kata holos*) theology, namely that which all Christians in every place affirm, and indigenous theology, that which takes root in the culture and soil and history of a particular place. Universal Christian doctrine can be sterile because it does not relate to a particular time and place. But fully indigenous theology can betray the Gospel by taming it. Communication then becomes accommodation. Adaption becomes imitation and the offense of the Gospel disappears. Again, Niles writes, "Because we have come to terms with our own society the total word of God has to be declared to us by another".¹ And this need, I am deeply convinced, extends for all of us to the end of the age.

Another New Testament metaphor that leads us to the same conclusion is the image of the body of Christ, which allows for no separation between the various parts of the body. Once the leg achieves full strength, does it no longer need the rest of the body? I am convinced that the church in Lebanon, for example, needs our church. I am also convinced that we need them.

¹ Niles, Daniel T. *Upon the Earth*. McGraw-Hill, New York 1962 p. 170

But when integration took place we suddenly found ourselves operating under a non-Biblical concept of the Church that consciously or unconsciously substituted impermanence for permanence. Our residences were sold and we found ourselves in rented flats. Renters are not there to stay—house-owners are! Short-term specialists became the norm, not the exception. At the tender age of 58 I am next to the youngest Presbyterian career professional missionary in the Middle East. Our Middle Eastern band has been reduced by 90 percent. If withdrawal is the goal, then we are succeeding. If the “mutual encouragement of faith” of Romans 1:11 is a critical part of a two-way continuing task, permanence must consciously be re-established in our thinking on all levels.

Questionable Presupposition #2—Missionary Power can be Eradicated

The second theological assumption was the probably unconscious idea that if all power was struck from the hands of all the missionaries, that missionary power would no longer exist.

So we are back to the Third World church leader at the American Presbyterian mailbox. No, we moved the power over funding and personnel back to the Western mission executive and then pretended that said power no longer existed. For thirty years it has remained in the Western mission executive office. We have argued above that Americans somewhere will inevitably make decisions about American missionary power, and rightly so. We must fill our own corporate discipleship. The missionary power generated in worship by prayer and giving is a sacred trust that each church must carry out and cannot rightly delegate to others. We have not done so. My point is that the integration process moved and concentrated missionary power from Khartoum, Cairo and Beirut to New York/Atlanta/Louisville, and the many became the few. The power over funds and personnel remained in American hands. It is just that they became different American hands.

Questionable Presupposition #3—“Missionary, Work thyself out of a Job”

The third presupposition is the question of a job vs. a calling. One coin-of-the-realm attitude that has grown out of the impermanence assumption discussed above is the old adage, “A missionary should work himself/herself out of a job.” I agree and disagree.

Positively, certainly each church must give birth to its own leaders, and those leaders must develop/take/be given responsibility on all levels as soon as possible. Paul appointed bishops and deacons in Philippi and they, so far as we know, led the church in that city.

Negatively, two things can be said. First, while Paul did turn over the leadership of the Philippian church to the Philippians, he did not turn over his own calling as an apostle to the Gentiles to anyone. Philippian bishops took over Philippi, but Paul continued in the ministry to which he felt himself called before he was born. A job can be turned over to anyone at any time. A calling must never rightly be surrendered. Daniel Boone leaves Booneville, Kentucky, to other settlers, but he does not then return to Virginia. Rather, he moves on to St. Louis because he is a pioneer. A job can be defined in non-theological terms. A calling is profoundly theological. We have too often thought in terms of jobs and not in terms of callings.

Questionable Presupposition #4—The Third World Churches would all successfully evangelize their countries

We forgot that all people are sinners. There was no plan B, no contingency arrangements, no place to go in case of failure. We assumed that all younger churches would prove to be the spiritual descendents of the church in Philadelphia, described in Revelation 3:7, that was always faithful to its calling. What in fact was the Spirit saying to the churches? Of the seven mentioned, only the church in Philadelphia and in Smyrna were exclusively praised. Judgment rings all through the letters. As American Presbyterians we dissolved our own structures, turned millions of dollars worth of property over to the various churches around the world with the apparent romantic assumption that the world contained only Philadelphians. John was not so naive. He spoke openly of the Ephesians who had abandoned their first love; of the church in Sardis that thought it was alive but was really dead; of the church in Theodocia that thought it was rich and needed nothing, but was wretched, poor, pitiable, blind and naked. John was blunt.

Our assumption—that the national church would evangelize its own country—is like two allies fighting a war. One general says to the other, “We are closing our command center and placing all our soldiers under your authority. You will, of course, fight with distinction and win the war.” Well, yes, one can certainly hope so! Or it is like saying to the church at Philippi in the first century, “Greece is your show. Succeed or fail, we will not go to Athens or Corinth except at your request and under your leadership.” The freedom to succeed or fail with their own church at Philippi is their right. but what about Greece? This brings us to the fifth presupposition.

Questionable Presupposition #5—Political boundaries = national church jurisdiction

The fifth presupposition is perhaps the least perceived and has perhaps been the most damaging of all to the integrity of the mission. This assumption is the blurring of the boundaries of the church with the boundaries of the modern political state. We call it “The National Church.” But it was only a church of nationals. Did we brainwash ourselves by an inaccurate vocabulary? In one country of the Third World, where Presbyterians are at work, the church to which we are related now comprises three thousandths (.003) of one percent of the population. The rest of the people of that land comprise 99.997% of the population of that land. We have said that the vision of the three-thousandths of one percent of the people will be the only vision we will allow ourselves for any ministry to the other 99.997%. My colleagues at work in that country tell me that the church is authentic, brave and vital. That church should naturally have full authority over its own destiny. Such was the goal of the integration process. That goal was well-chosen and nobly achieved. For that we are all glad. But is it fair to that small, brave church to place on it the burden of catching from the Spirit of God all of the vision required for any service by anyone for the 99.997% ? This then is the result of the unconscious theological erasure of the line between church and nation.

pan ta ethne Furthermore, in the New Testament the word nation meant an ethnic people. Today we use this word nation for an often artificially created political boundary that usually includes within it many, even hundreds, of ethnic peoples.

Not Two Cities, but Three, should share the Mission Power

Philippi should have full control over what happens in the bounds of its own church, but the integration process gave to the Philippians the unexamined burden of providing the vision for any and all who want to work anywhere in the entire Greek-speaking world.

If Philippian bishops want Paul to stay in Philippi, does he have the right to move on to Athens and Corinth? Our current structures say no! He must stay in Philippi!

Questionable Presupposition #6—Dismantle the mission structure and integrate it into the ministry of the national congregations

The sixth fallacy is that of the two pyramids. Thirty years ago, in many of the nations of the world, as we have observed, there was a Church of Nationals and an American Mission. These stood like two pyramids, side by side, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in tension. The integration process said, “We will tear down pyramid one (the American Mission) and the individual stones will be incorporated into pyramid two (the church in that land). For the first fifteen years after integration, my analysis was that the second pyramid had no open spaces in its sides. We tore down pyramid one and then found few holes in pyramid two into which to place the loose stones. Why? Because pyramid two was already built. A pyramid does not stand unless its sides are intact. The churches of nationals to which we were related already had their extended family inter-relatedness, their traditional ties and their historical pecking order. The pyramid was already constructed. The loose stones of the dismantled pyramid could not, by the very nature of the case, be fully incorporated into the second pyramid. This observation was, I think, accurate. But I am now convinced that the Antiochian apostolic band should not be incorporated into the power structures of Philippi. They are there as servants. They can best remain as servants. But like their master, they must maintain the freedom to choose the direction of that servanthood. We read in John, “I have the power to lay my life down and I have power to take it up again. This charge I have from my father.” Paul, having defined himself as a servant of Christ, carefully maintains freedom to direct and redirect the energy of that servanthood. It was not the vision of the Philippian bishops that sent him to Mars Hill or Corinth or Rome; it was his own.

Our last presupposition is the other side of this same coin.

Questionable Presupposition #7—The Holy Spirit leads only thru Third World Church leaders

The seventh and last unexamined assumption is certainly unintentional and unconscious, but no less critical thereby. Unintentionally and indirectly, we established structures which functionally say, “The Holy Spirit never gives an authentic new vision to North Americans in Third World countries.” More particularly, the Spirit only moves through some Third World church leaders, those Third World church leaders with whom we have some relations. The resultant losses we have sustained are, in my opinion, staggering. If the right decisions were made today it would take a generation to recover. We have allowed ourselves no way to follow the guidance of the Spirit in seeking new national partners in the fulfillment of our own new initiatives. Indeed, new initiatives that spring from the souls of North Americans are by default ruled illegitimate. Unconsciously we said: initiative = assertiveness = new forms of colonialism. But Jesus initiated His own path to the cross. Of His own life He says, “I have power to lay it down. This power no one takes from me.” Our structures were designed to affirm the self-hood of the church. This great plus, as we have

indicated, was achieved. The unanticipated result was the sometimes potential and sometimes actual loss of the integrity of the mission.

These seven observations are hard words. I do not want them to be heard or ever read as a criticism of the sincerity, dedication, intelligence, vision or integrity of any church leaders, past or present, in the first or third worlds.

We have described mission as a “tale of three cities”: Jerusalem, the headquarters of the mother church; Philippi, the center of the younger church; Antioch, the home of the apostolic band pledged to cross-cultural witness and ministry.

Alfred North Whitehead has written, “Each generation criticizes the unconscious assumptions made by its parents. It may assent to them, but it brings them out in the open (Whitehead, 37).”

My perspective is limited and, as such, imperfect. I can only offer what I know. We turn then to examine the effect of integration on each of our three cities.

First, Philippi

What did integration do to Philippi? Where the Philippian church was numerically large, the integration process can be given high marks. It affirmed the self-hood of the church. The church took on new responsibilities. New leaders found their gifts used and thereby strengthened. The church took over full control of its own destiny. The goals set forth by John Coventry Smith in his book, *From Colonialism to World Community*, were admirably achieved.

Where the church was small, the size and number of the properties large, high marks can also be given. Yet the process inevitably rearranged the priorities of that church. Visualize a strong, self-reliant church with 50 small congregations in Western Pennsylvania. Suddenly give them the property and the controlling votes on the Boards of the University of Pittsburgh and all Presbyterian colleges in the Synod of the Trinity. What will then happen to the priorities of that church? It does not take much imagination to follow the path of the necessary shift that will inevitably take place irrespective of the commitment and good will of those involved.

Niles is again helpful. Prophetically he discussed this very danger. He noted the tendency for the service institutions (hospitals, schools, etc.) to become buttresses of the church. He wrote, “The pastorates became largely dependent on the schools for their finance, their leadership, and their influence in the general community...”²

Yet, Philippi is alive and struggling as we noted in our first lecture, and great pluses for the self-hood of the church were achieved, and for this we are all grateful.

Second, Jerusalem

What then of Jerusalem? Previously we analyzed the nature of positive missionary power and the fact that the simple act of placing a single dollar in an offering plate creates missionary power. We

² Niles, p. 148-149

also observed that at some point in the movement of that dollar a representative of the givers will make a critical decision as to how it is to be spent. We saw this as faithfulness in discipleship, not as a necessary evil. When an Egyptian pound is placed in an Egyptian offering plate, Egyptian missionary power is created and Egyptians will necessarily and rightfully decide what happens to that pound. Funds and personnel will and should move in fulfillment of the mission of the Egyptian church as a result. The integration process, in an unforeseen fashion, moved the decision-making power of mission in regard to American funds and personnel from Third World countries to the Western mission executive office.

So now, thirty years later, all roads lead to Jerusalem.

Third, Antioch

What then of Antioch? Antioch was torn down, stone by stone, and left a ruin. What are the results for the Antiochians? On the positive side it has meant a deep sense of gratification that we are in service because the people of the lands where we serve had directly invited us. The burden of management of property and institutional administration has been, for the most part, lifted. A sense of being with and suffering with the people of the Third World has been greatly enhanced. Our participation in the life of the church at the deepest levels has at times been intensified. For all these movements we are profoundly grateful. At the same time there have been critical unforeseen losses. A number of these can be perceived and described.

First, the women of the former missions were, by the integration process, almost totally disenfranchised. Women make up roughly two-thirds of the apostolic Antiochian band. As power moved from the former mission associations to the churches of the Third World some ordained men could continue to participate in church decision-making. Women, with rare exceptions, could not. Smith thoughtfully pays tribute in his book to the contribution of his wife. He writes, "I have always been glad that the Presbyterian church had a policy of appointing both husband and wife as missionaries...and each had the same vote in all meetings of missionaries."

If and when I write my memoirs, sadly I will not be able to make the same statement about my wife, Ethel. Husband and wife are still both appointed, but there is no forum anywhere in the Middle East or in America where my wife has a voice or a vote in any of the decisions that govern our lives. The same is true of our single women. The rare exception is that of clergywomen service churches that happen to recognize women's ordination. The integration process almost totally eliminated our own Presbyterian women's participation in any of the decisions that determine their and our destiny. In my view, the injustice has been tragic and the loss incalculable. Women's rights earned by 150 years of sacrificial serving were destroyed overnight.

Second, there is an essential freedom at the heart of every human being that must not be surrendered. Current policy says, "We only respond to requests from the field." Thus, Jerusalem sends a lady English teacher to India only if the Indian church asks for said teacher. So, one could argue, is not the direction of the servanthood of that teacher under the teacher's control? After all, the teacher says yes or no to the initial offer. No one forces her to go to India and teach in that school! Ah—but what if that teacher, while in India, senses God's guidance to work with a disliked minority community that cannot afford the fees of the school in which she is teaching? She is invited by the Indian leaders of that minority community to join them. She makes inquiries.

But the original Indian church which owns the school in which she is already teaching would naturally rather have their free teacher. Well, you say, she can always leave. No one is forcing her to continue at a task that has become meaningless and unfulfilling. But to leave now is to leave both the meaningless task and the new invitation. To leave is fine if the teacher has no identification with the people of that land, no commitment to them, no desire to seek a place where she can suffer with them in a task where that suffering is worth its cost. If no language has been learned and no sustained self-giving exercised, leaving is no problem! But what if the very goals of contextualization have been accomplished? What if costly sustained self-giving has been the pattern of decades? What if the giving of her life to the Indian people has become a calling, not a job? What then? In that case, our present structures leave her nothing but anguish. Mother Teresa is illegitimate—she, a European, initiated a new vision!

Now, thirty years later, what are some of the specific results among the Antiochians from the loss of that essential theological freedom?

Results of Dismantling Antioch—Its Effect on the Missionary Band

First, fortunately for some, their vision continued to be among the top priorities of others and thus no erosion of their obedience occurred. For others this erosion was so deep and the resulting stress levels so unbearable that they were obliged to leave. Thirdly, some highly trained top people moved to other mission organizations where this freedom was not denied. (An inner circle of Antiochians quietly refers to them as “liberated missionaries.”) Fourthly, some went underground and tried to carry out their continually renewing vision invisibly, lest they be accused of unauthorized initiative. Fifthly, some were trapped. The meaning of their tasks dried up, but they were too old to be recycled back into new professions in the States (having acquired skills in the Third World not marketable in America). These then grimly held on to the less-than-meaningful tasks as their only option for employment. Sixthly, others were able to recycle themselves and simply quit. So in the Middle East our Antiochian refugee band is now reduced, as we noted, by 90 per cent.

Dismantling—Its Effect on the Mission Giving

Presbyterian mission funding problems have been subjected to many types of analyses. I will not review them. They range from Angela Davies to a lack of connectionalism to everything in between. I would suggest something else that stems from the creative mind of one of my thoughtful Lebanese colleagues. Funding patterns, he argues, are evidence of the Spirit of God. Like water making its way down a hill, when a stone falls in the rivulet the water builds and builds and finally finds a new path down the mountain. It cannot be stopped. When we so structured ourselves that no new initiative was allowed (by deliberate design) to spring from any Antiochian, perhaps the Spirit of God found its own way around us through the independents.

In passing we can observe that uneasiness with our present structures has been voiced by many. Niles talks about the necessity of “new procedures by which true partnership in decision-making can be maintained between sending and receiving churches.” He continues,

“When a missionary Church is reduced to the bare function of recruiting agent of personnel and finance to support another Church, then the heart of the missionary connection has been betrayed”.³

Glenn Reed, former Presbyterian missionary and U.S. Mission executive, recently said to me, “We lost our initiative and the independents took up what we discarded.”

A Consideration of the Middle East Christian Outreach

This brings us to an examination of a unique creative venture in Mission that took place in the past thirty years in the Middle East, that conceived of the problems differently and created a structure that brought Jerusalem, Philippi, and Antioch together in a new creative three-way relationship. I refer to the Middle East Christian Outreach, with its international headquarters in Cyprus, and hereafter referred to as MECO.

Authentic Partnership

The cross-cultural missionary and the home executive must enter into a creative power sharing structure. MECO insisted that the first was not the employee of the second. This can be illustrated by the example of two ornithologists who set themselves the task of photographing cliff swallows in their natural habitat. One holds the rope and the other clamors gently down over the cliff laden with cameras. The one is not necessarily the employee of the other. Rather they are equal partners, each carrying out a critical aspect of a joint task. They may jointly decide to photograph a certain cluster of birds at a particular spot, but once the professional bird watcher/photographer is lowered down over the cliff it is he/she who decides when it is appropriate to move the rope--not the partner on the top of the cliff. Only the person down over the edge can see when the birds have flown or moved on and when the rope must be moved to the left or to the right. Granted, the person at the top may note an approaching storm or spot a dangerous loose rock, and if he loses his grip the photographer falls to his/her death. The interdependence of the two is total.

MECO thinkers argued as follows. They saw that the English field missionary and the London home office executive must share missionary power together. The power to set policy must be equally distributed between missionaries and Western executives. Then the year by year authority to allocate funds and personnel (within the guide lines of that policy) must be in the hands of field missionaries, not home executives.

International headquarters of MECO is in Cyprus. The General Director is a career missionary with fluent Arabic and thirty-year track record of successful grass roots service in the Middle East. He continues to be personally involved in ministry in Arabic in Cyprus, Egypt, Lebanon and beyond. MECO's Supreme Council meets in Cyprus once every three years to set top priorities. Each of the six home offices in Canada, America, England, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia has a seat. Each field council of missionaries has a single seat from Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and the Arabian Gulf. The General Director and his associate then join them to make up the roster. Thus, top level policy for the Middle East is formulated in the Middle East by a council in which field missionaries and Western mission executives share equal voting power.

³ Niles, p. 34

So an authentic double partnership was born. On the one hand the people who hold the rope and the people risking their lives on the end of that rope share missionary power as equals. Jerusalem and Antioch became equal partners! On the other hand, what then of Philippi? What then of the Third World churchmen in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and elsewhere? Here is where the model is, in my view, so brilliantly conceptualized and executed. In each place the missionary ministers as a powerless servant of the church or institution in which he/she serves. As in our system, Westerners serve only by invitation. they are there only as servants. But they also can dream dreams and see visions. They can seek new individualized wanderings. New visions are subjected to the most careful scrutiny by their missionary colleagues in the country where they serve and from the International office in Cyprus. National partners will direct what takes place, but the freedom to move from one servanthood to another is preserved.

MECO has grown 400% in 15 years because national Christians have swamped the headquarters in Cyprus with their requests for personnel. During this same period we continued to decline in number. In some places, MECO people moved in as we moved out. So the water found its way down the mountain. The wind continues to blow. The question finally becomes—do we hear its sound?

A formal suggestion

I hereby formally suggest to our Church at large that we need a Middle Eastern Presbyterian Outreach; a Southeast Asia Presbyterian Outreach; an African Presbyterian Outreach; a South American Presbyterian Outreach, and that the current missionary power now in the American colonial offices be shared with these reconstituted Antiochian apostolic bands in the major centers of the world where we are still at work.

Conclusion

We are Antiochians. We know the sins of our city and understand why it was torn down. We also know its Biblical roots and think that it can be rebuilt along New Testament lines. We ask only for the power to seek out new masters as we try to follow our own Macedonian vision in the night. With D.T Niles, our goal is that both the self-hood of the church and the integrity of the mission be preserved and advanced. For mission in the New Testament is a tale of three cities, not two. It is that New Testament vision that we seek to clarify and restore.
Soli Deo Gloria Kenneth E. Bailey, Th.D.