

Introduction

When I was first asked to do two talks on missions for this conference, I settled on the titles *Missions Undone* and *Missions Redone*, intending first to offer a critical look at many of our common practices, and then perhaps to suggest a way forward. But after listening to both talks some might want to say they should have been titled *Missions Undone* and *Missions Undone Some More*. This is not a function of having a critical spirit—the kind of a person who goes through life trying to find something to snark about. Rather, I speak as a warm advocate of the missionary enterprise, the son of a missionary, and one who grew up in a home that subscribed to every missionary newsletter that ever was. I want to speak here as a true friend of missions, and not to speak as someone who exhibits the soft friendship of low expectations.

Gaming the Game

Inside each capable administrator, there is a petty bureaucrat, yearning to get out. Inside each visionary, there is a wild antinomian, yearning to get out. Each one is suspicious of the inner other guy, when they ought to be suspicious of their own inner guy.

Mission cannot be accomplished without visionary leadership. Mission cannot be accomplished without a supply corps, and working supply lines. Without the supply guys, the visionary is Napoleon marching on Moscow. Without the visionary, the administrator is an undersecretary for Garbonzo bean subsidies in eastern Washington, involved in a desperate turf war with the Chickpea guy for northern Alabama.

Missionaries need accountability, and need to understand what it is. Those providing it must also understand what it is. In order for it to be true accountability it has to be personal. Accountability has a face, not just a file cabinet. This kind of accountability happens within a local church.

When someone resists accountability, they do it in the name of resisting the suits and haircuts with the file cabinets. But the real issue is seen in the avoidance of personal accountability. The file cabinet game can be *gamed*, which is why people do it. That game is actually the pretence of accountability, which should be understood as a working truce between the visionary and the bureaucrat. The visionary knows what to file so that he can continue doing whatever he wants, and the bureaucrat has what he needs so that he can cover his butt. And the work of the kingdom staggers on.

Driving Joy

The biblical motive for mission is to be joy, gratitude and excitement. Christ is risen. The first missionary movement was born out of persecution (Acts 8:1), but the disciples

involved in it scattered in all directions, telling people *the good news* about Jesus (Acts 8:4).

Declaring the good news about Jesus is the only point of missions, and consequently other motives are not just inadequate for the task, but are rather an utter contradiction to it. The gospel as it is in Jesus is a gospel of sheer grace, and to be *guilted* out to the mission field is to deny the efficacy of that grace. And if the missionary doesn't believe the message, then why should anybody else believe it? And to go to the mission field in an attempt to get one's own spiritual life in order is likewise a denial of how God works with men.

Joy is the only motive consistent with the message itself.

Here and There Both

The Pharisees were characterized by missional zeal. Unfortunately, it was missional zeal for Pharisaiism, but you can't have everything.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matt. 23:15).

Actually, the principle that Jesus applies to the Pharisees here extends far beyond the boundaries of their particular set of hypocrisies. The principle is this: you export whatever it is you are manufacturing.

What you practice at home is the show you take on the road. What you grow in your fields is what you load on the trucks. Compassing sea and land doesn't generate a new message. The way you live when you get on the plane is going to be the single best indicator of how you live when you get off the plane. In short, don't expect geographical location to fix anything.

Jesus applies this to the active presence of Pharisaiical hypocrisy. But it also applies to negative spaces. Not only do you export what you have, you cannot export what you don't have.

This is why reformation and revival in our churches here is a necessary precondition for effective evangelism there. Say that someone says he has a real burden "for the lost" in WangoBango.

Say that the person at church he is speaking to suggests they spend that afternoon going door-to-door at student housing for the local university. There are lost people here too. Suppose further that the evangelistic ardor of the prospective missionary suddenly wanes. This is a bad sign, and it is a bad sign of what I am talking about.

If the motive force for a church's evangelism is excitement over the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, then that evangelism will be in evidence both locally and in foreign

missions. But if 98% of the evangelism done by a church is overseas, they are trying to export something they do not have. And because the appropriate motive force is missing, and the mission work still needs to be sustained, there is a distinct drift in how the work is maintained. We suddenly find ourselves in the world of guilt manipulation and blood on the envelope appeals.

The first step in foreign missions is domestic mission. The first step toward Africa is right across the street.

False Gods of Mission

If the driving and fundamental motive for missions is to be joy over the resurrection of Jesus, resulting in the consequent message that He is indeed Lord over all, does this mean that we may have no other motives whatever?

Well, we may have other motives, but there is a strict condition placed on it. If we don't understand this following condition, then the answer is *no*, we may not have any other motive other than joy. Here is the condition—any other motives must be carefully and clearly distinguished as *subordinate* motives.

Say a man enlists in the Navy in the Second World War, and he does so because he has a motive of wanting to "defeat Hitler." He winds up assigned to a destroyer, and becomes a cook there. Say that one rough morning the heavy rolls make it hard to cook the eggs right. He says in exasperation that all he wants to do is have the seas calm down so he can get breakfast on. One of his friends finds this curious—don't you want to defeat Hitler anymore? The question cannot be answered without the concept of subordinated motives, and with that concept it can be answered quite easily.

Because Jesus rose from the dead, and because we are really glad about it, we want to preach the message that He is Lord of all to every creature. And as a corollary of preaching the Lordship of Christ to everyone, it is also necessary to teach everyone how to live in obedience to Him. The obedience that He calls for encompasses *everything*—we are to baptize the nations (because He rose), and we are to teach them to obey everything He commanded.

But these other tasks that we would take up, from ending sex slavery to ameliorating grinding poverty, must be subordinated to the joy. Otherwise, we will be trying to do good things in the name of our false gods—with the result that we will make things worse than they were. False gods don't save people.

Now for white people, these false gods of missions have been an unholy trinity—the Baal of Personal Guilt Over Having It So Good, the Molech of Personal Self-Discovery, and the Universal Spirit of Smug Superiority. People who are out on the mission field in the service of these gods should just get their plane tickets home.

Despite the Jesus Jargon

One of our central difficulties with missions is that we have not yet identified the bane of benevolence. We have not yet figured out how to protect the mission field from destructive do-gooding. Not only do we not prevent it, we still positively recruit for it.

We learn a great deal from the parable of the Good Samaritan. We learn the straightforward lesson, called moralistic by some, which is "help a guy, woodja?" We learn the more oblique lesson (for us), which is that the Temple worship in Jerusalem stood condemned. If the priest and Levite had stopped to help that man, and he turned out to be dead, or if he died on them, they would have been defiled, and unable to serve God in the Temple. But that Temple would be defiled with many more dead bodies than *that*, and soon enough.

But one of the lessons we do not glean from this parable is the need to take the victim off to a homeopathic hospital to make his condition worse with remedies we got off the Internet. One of the tenets of the Hippocratic Oath needs to be mastered by us—first, do no harm. Don't make things worse.

Because we have not yet really understood the deep connection between gospel and culture, between *the need for widespread regeneration* before anything significant can be done in a culture, we have simply gone in with boatloads of money (by their standards) and created cultures of entitlement and dependency. We have done this because we are not nearly cynical enough about our own benevolent motives.

Missions can have a god complex. Missions can go into villages and play dress up dolls with the people. Missions can be paternalistic. Missions can be clueless when it comes to sound economics, and can therefore create economic craters everywhere they go. Missions can have the same purblind approach to wealth and poverty that the World Bank has, only with Bible verses attached, and getting the same results despite the Jesus jargon.

And lest anyone mistake my meaning here, and write me a hot letter, there are of course missionaries out there who avoid these traps, and who warn the rest of us about them. May God increase their tribe. But we really ought to stop sending out people to the field unless they have a true and abiding hatred for a particular kind of benevolence.

The King of Missions

Missionaries should know the gospel, and be trained in the great doctrinal themes of the Bible. They should also be good-hearted people, but the good-heartedness does not supplant the need for craft competence. This is also true of the other areas that surround mission activity. Missionary pilots should be really good pilots. It is not enough that they "love Jesus." Medical missionaries should be trained, gifted and equipped in the best medical knowledge we have. We shouldn't be sending naturopaths out to the villages to kill off the natives. Bible translators should have training in linguistics and techniques of translation, and should have mastery of both languages they are working with. And so on. Good intentions won't fly the plane, won't heal the infection, and won't translate Romans. You have to know what you're doing. Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will

stand before kings (Prov. 22:29). This includes the king of missions. Craft competence matters.

And this does not cease to be true when it comes to economics. One of the greatest blights that the Third World has had to endure is the ongoing, officious, meddlesome and *incompetent* generosity of the West. International aid, like the locusts mentioned by the prophet Joel, has destroyed millions. But that's all right, we say to our smug little selves. At least we got some of that guilt salve on our white suburban consciences.

Every missionary who longs for his people to enjoy a better and higher standard of living (as he should) had better not try to get there by simple donation of money, goods, and services. Rather, he should read, and master, *The Mystery of Capital* by Hernando de Soto. While he is at it, he should also read *When Helping Hurts*.

These, and other books like them, should not just be read as something to just check off the list. The framework of wisdom here needs to become part of the orthodoxy of mission relief work. If a candidate doesn't understand this basic framework in his bones, then he shouldn't be entrusted with any mission relief work whatever. He should be bounced from the program just like a guy who flunked out of flight school—despite the fact that he really does love Jesus.

Laughable, Right?

Whenever you build an organization (and this would include mission organizations), there is an inexorable tendency to have the mission shift from the original mission to the maintenance of staff positions.

In his recent (very fine) book, David Mamet says something very important. He is not talking about mission organizations per se, but rather human organizations. This happens to our institutions for the same reason that weeds grow in our gardens. "In the growth of any successful organization, a now-entrenched bureaucracy may work to change its object from production of a product to protection of its (useless) jobs" (*The Secret Knowledge*, p. 76).

What would we think of a mission organization teaching agricultural techniques to the native peoples, and their instruction included an exhortation not to worry about weeding their gardens because "these were Christian gardens"? Laughable, right? So why do we think that vice-presidents of administrative development and hiring can't grow in Christian organizations?

We should throw ourselves into the work of ministry. When we do this, some things will fall off or break, of course. The purpose of the church is not to be well-organized. The purpose of missions is not to be well-organized. The purpose of the church is to do the work we are called to, with organization being a means of keeping our tools sharp. When the organization decides that the best way to do that is by keeping them all in the tool box, the problem I am talking about has manifested itself.

Father, Not Sugar Daddies

Let us start with an obvious principle, and then go on to show that it is a biblical principle. Sometimes earthy observations are dismissed by Christians as having a carnal wisdom to them but, it is supposed, they somehow are not representative of the "way of the Spirit."

The principle is that you get more of what you subsidize, and less of what you penalize. Now this means that when our missions culture has subsidized a culture of welfare-like dependency in poorer nations, and has stuck with this terrible blunder over the course of a century or more, we cannot act surprised when we find that we have created semi-permanent cultures of welfare-like dependency. You get more of what you subsidize, and less of what you penalize.

The unyielding truth of this principle is why liberals hate it so much. They don't like having to deal with the idea that tax laws have consequences, for example, and on the flip side they don't want to believe that deterrence works. As with all such departures from the wisdom of God, the whole thing turns into a mass of contradictions. They want to believe that a \$10,000 fine affects behavior and that a \$10,000 tax bill won't. But like it or not, all real consequences affect all real behavior.

They are fond of saying that sociologists have not yet demonstrated that capital punishment has a deterrent effect. But it most certainly does, even if at the most rudimentary level. I once saw a comedian who had more insight into this issue than many of our crackerjack eggheads. He said that if you go down to the kitchen in the middle of the night, flip on a light, and discover a cockroach in the middle of the floor, you immediately move to crush it with your foot. You never stop yourself in mid-stomp to ask, "Wait . . . I wonder if this will actually deter the others?" At the most basic level, it will certainly deter *that* one.

Because liberals don't want God to govern the world, they don't want it to run the way He says that it does. And so this is why we need to show that this principle is not just a common sense observation, one that must give way to any appeal to the mystery moves of the Spirit. No, God insists that we will get more of what we subsidize, and less of what we penalize. This is not to deny that there are mystery moves by the Spirit. Here's one. What He does is soften men's sinful hearts so that they will accept the fact that a man reaps what he sows. It is only on this foundation of law that it becomes possible for a man to reap the grace that Christ has sown.

Here are just a few scriptural examples of the principle. We see general statements of it, and we see specific applications.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8).

"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11).

"A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again" (Prov. 19:19).

We are all familiar with the common saying that insanity is doing the same thing over again, hoping to get a different result this time. Insanity is planting morning glory and praying for a wheat harvest.

So if the West wanted to create a dependency culture in Third World cultures, what should we have done differently than what we actually did do? And if we wanted to create healthy native churches that were not perpetually looking for handouts, that were raised by the Spirit to stand on their own feet, what would we have done differently?

Any time one church plants another, it is necessary to guard against the perverse effects of the "differential" between the two churches. If this is true even within our own nation (and it is), how much more is it the case when there is a broad economic disparity? There is a difference between a gift that creates or restores the right kind of equality (2 Cor. 8:14), and a gift that becomes a wage rendered for the wrong thing, calculated to obtain perverse results. When someone is paid for being poor, it is often the case that they will do their job, and will work at being poor. When someone is paid for being entitled, then it is not surprising that they become indignant when someone points out they are feeling entitled. That's their job.

And on the flip side, when someone's livelihood is that of helping the poor, a real employment threat might consist of the poor not needing help anymore. As Judas Iscariot found out millennia ago, the poor are a gold mine.

And it is no use pretending that this kind of thing is a rare event, like a comet or something. It is happening all over the world, all the time. But even though it is most common, I don't want to overstate my case. There are a number of missions and missionaries who are aware of this danger (and it is a danger), and who guard against it. But we don't guard against it nearly enough. One indicator that someone has this problem is when they become indignant, as though I accused them personally when I did nothing of the kind. This is an "if the shoe fits" analysis, not a "one size fits all" analysis. If someone reads these words as though I were saying that all missionaries do this in the same way that all triangles have three sides, then that means, at a minimum, that these words probably do apply to *them*. The guilty run down the road with nobody chasing (Prov. 28:1).

So God calls us to be involved in missions as though we were parents, called to raise our children up to maturity and independence. But what we have actually given way to is the temptation of being silly grandparents, who think that our job is to spoil everybody rotten. But we need to be *fathers*, not sugar daddies