

THE CHURCH AND MISSIONS

WEEK 5: THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AND MISSIONS.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this six-week class is to zero in on the mission of the church from a Biblical perspective.
- Our schedule will look like this:
 - Week 1: What is our mandate?
 - Week 2: What is the church's role in missions or the centrality of the church?
 - Week 3: What was the Apostle's Paul's strategy for missions?
 - Week 4: Kyle Baker sharing his personal call to missions.
 - **Week 5: How has the church historically accomplished missions?**
 - Week 6: How should church members be involved in missionary work?

INTRODUCTION

- This morning I want to take you on a trip through history to see how we got to where we are today with regards to The Great Commission, the church and worldwide missions work.

THREE ERAS OF MISSIONS IN OUR MODERN DAY¹

The First Era: Coastlands William Carey 1792

- An “under thirty” young man, William Carey, got into trouble when he began to take the Great Commission seriously. When he had the opportunity to address a group of ministers, he challenged them to give a reason why the Great Commission did not apply to them. They rebuked him, saying, “When God chooses to win the heathen, He will do it without your help or ours.”
 - He was not permitted to speak again on the subject, so he patiently wrote out his analysis, “An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.”
 - The resulting small book convinced a few of his friends to create a tiny missions agency. The structure was flimsy and weak, providing only the minimal backing he needed to go to India.

¹ <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/four-men-three-eras>

However, the impact of his example reverberated throughout the English-speaking world, and his little book became the Magna Carta of the Protestant mission movement.

- William Carey was not the first Protestant missionary. For years the Moravians had sent people to Greenland, America and Africa.
 - But his little book, in combination with the Evangelical Awakening, quickened vision and changed lives on both sides of the Atlantic. Response was almost instantaneous: a second missionary society was founded in London; two in Scotland; one in Holland; and then still another in England.
 - *By then it was apparent to all that Carey was right when he had insisted that organized efforts in the form of missions societies were essential to the success of the missionary endeavor.*
- In America, five college students, aroused by Carey’s book, met to pray for God’s direction for their lives. This prayer meeting, later known as the “Haystack Prayer Meeting,” resulted in an American “means”—the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions.
 - *Even more important, they started a student mission movement which became the example and forerunner of other student movements in missions to this day.*
- In fact, during the first 25 years after Carey sailed to India, a dozen mission agencies were formed on both sides of the Atlantic, and the First Era in Protestant missions was off to a good start.
- Realistically speaking, however, missions in this First Era was a pitifully small shoestring operation, in relation to the major preoccupations of most Europeans and Americans in that day. The idea that we should organize in order to send missionaries did not come easily.
- Carey’s influence led some women in Boston to form women’s missionary prayer groups, a trend which led to women becoming the main custodians of mission knowledge and motivation.
 - *After some years women began to go to the field as single missionaries.*
 - Finally, by 1865, unmarried American women established women’s mission boards which, like Roman Catholic women’s orders, only sent out single women as missionaries and were run entirely by single women at home.

There are two very bright notes about the First Era.

- **One is the astonishing demonstration of love and sacrifice on the part of those who went out.**

- Africa, especially, was a forbidding continent. All mission outreach to Africa, prior to 1775, had totally failed. Of all Catholic efforts, all Moravian efforts, nothing remained. Not one missionary of any kind existed on the continent on the eve of the First Era.

- The gruesome statistics of almost inevitable sickness and death that haunted, yet did not daunt, the decades of truly valiant missionaries who went out after 1790 in virtually a suicidal stream cannot be matched by any other era or by any other cause.
- *Very few missionaries to Africa in the first 60 years of the First Era survived more than two years.* As I have reflected on this measure of devotion I have been humbled to tears, for I wonder—if I or my people today could or would match that record.
- **A second bright spot in this First Era is the development of high quality insight into mission strategy.** The movement had several great missiologists. In regard to home structure, they clearly understood the value of the mission structure being allowed a life of its own.
 - *For example, we read that the London Missionary Society experienced unprecedented and unequalled success, “due partly to its freedom from ecclesiastical supervision and partly to its formation from an almost equal number of ministers and laymen.”*
 - Regarding field structure, we can take a note from Henry Venn who was related to the famous Clapham evangelicals and the son of a founder of the Church Missionary Society. Except for a few outdated terms, one of his most famous paragraphs sounds strangely modern:
 - Regarding the ultimate object of a Mission, viewed under its ecclesiastical result, to be the settlement of a Native Church under Native Pastors upon a self-supporting system, it should be borne in mind that the progress of a Mission mainly depends upon the training up and the location of Native Pastors; and that, as it has been happily expressed, the “euthanasia of a Mission” takes place when a missionary, surrounded by well-trained Native congregations under Native Pastors, is able to resign all pastoral work into their hands, and gradually relax his superintendence over the pastors themselves, ’til it insensibly ceases; and so the Mission passes into a settled Christian community. Then the missionary and all missionary agencies should be transferred to the “regions beyond.”
 - Note: no thought here of the national church launching its own mission outreach to new pioneer fields! Nevertheless, we see here something like stages of mission activity, described by Harold Fuller of SIM in the alliterative sequence:
 1. A Pioneer stage - first contact with a people group.
 2. A Paternal stage - expatriates train national leadership.
 3. A Partnership stage - national leaders work as equals with expatriates.
 4. A Participation stage - expatriates are no longer equal partners, but only participate by invitation.
- Slow and painstaking though the labors of the First Era were, they did bear fruit, and the familiar series of stages can be observed which goes from no church in the pioneer stage to infant church in the paternal stage and to the more complicated mature church in the partnership and participation stages.

- Samuel Hoffman of the Reformed Church in America Board puts it well: “The Christian missionary who was loved as an evangelist and liked as a teacher, may find himself resented as an administrator.”
- By 1865 there was a strong consensus on both sides of the Atlantic that the missionary should go home when he had worked himself out of a job.
- Since the First Era focused primarily upon the coastlands of Asia and Africa, we are not surprised that literal withdrawal would come about first in a case where there were no inland territories.
- Thus, symbolizing the latter stages of the First Era was the withdrawal of all missionaries from the Hawaiian Islands, then a separate country.
- This was done with legitimate pride and fanfare and fulfilled the highest expectations, then and now, of successful progress through the stages of missionary planting, watering and harvest.

The Second Era: Inland Hudson Taylor 1865

- A second symbolic event of 1865 is even more significant, at least for the inauguration of the Second Era. A young man, after a short term and like Carey still under thirty, in the teeth of surrounding counter advice established the first of a whole new breed of missions emphasizing the inland territories.
- This second young upstart was given little but negative notice, but like William Carey, brooded over statistics, charts and maps. When he suggested that the inland peoples of China needed to be reached, he was told you could not get there, and he was asked if he wished to carry on his shoulders the blood of the young people he would thus send to their deaths.
- This accusing question stunned and staggered him. Groping for light, wandering on the beach, it seemed as if God finally spoke to resolve the ghastly thought: “You are not sending young people in the interior of China. I am.” The load lifted.
- With only trade school medicine, without any university experience much less missiological training, and a checkered past in regard to his own individualistic behavior while he was on the field, he was merely one more of the weak things that God uses to confound the wise.
- *Even his early antichurch-planting missionary strategy was breathtakingly erroneous by today’s church-planting standards. Yet God strangely honored him because his gaze was fixed upon the world’s least-reached peoples.*
- Hudson Taylor had a divine wind behind him. The Holy Spirit spared him from many pitfalls, and it was his organization, the China Inland Mission—the most cooperative, servant organization yet to appear—that eventually served in one way or another over 6,000 missionaries, predominantly in the interior of China.
- It took 20 years for other missions to begin to join Taylor in his special emphasis—the unreached, inland frontiers.

- One reason the Second Era began slowly is that many people were confused. There were already many missions in existence. Why more? Yet as Taylor pointed out, all existing agencies were confined to the coastlands of Africa and Asia, or islands in the Pacific.
 - People questioned, “Why go to the interior if you haven’t finished the job on the coast?”
- ***I am not sure the parallel is true today, but the Second Era apparently needed not only a new vision but a lot of new organizations.*** Taylor not only started an English frontier mission, he went to Scandinavia and the Continent to challenge people to start new agencies.
 - As a result, directly or indirectly, over 40 new agencies took shape to compose the faith missions that rightly should be called frontier missions as the names of many of them still indicate: China Inland Mission, Sudan Interior Mission, Africa Inland Mission, Heart of Africa Mission, Unevangelized Fields Mission, Regions Beyond Missionary Union.
 - Taylor was more concerned for the cause than for a career: at the end of his life he had spent only half of his years of ministry in China.
 - In countless trips back from China he spent half of his time as a mobilizer on the home front. For Taylor, the cause of Christ, not China, was the ultimate focus of his concern.
- As in the early stage of the First Era, when things began to move, God brought forth a student movement. This one was more massive than before—the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, history’s single most potent mission organization.
- In the 1880’s and 90’s there were only 1/37th as many college students as there are today, but the Student Volunteer Movement netted 100,000 volunteers who gave their lives to missions.
 - Twenty-thousand actually went overseas. As we see it now, the other 80,000 had to stay home to rebuild the foundations of the missions endeavor. They began the Laymen’s Missionary Movement and strengthened existing women’s missionary societies.
- However, as the fresh new college students of the Second Era burst on the scene overseas, they did not always fathom how the older missionaries of the First Era could have turned responsibility over to national leadership at the least educated levels of society.
- ***First Era missionaries were in the minority now, and the wisdom they had gained from their experience was bypassed by the large number of new college-educated recruits.***
 - Thus, in the early stages of the Second Era, the new college-trained missionaries, instead of going to new frontiers, sometimes assumed leadership over existing churches, not reading the record of previous mission thinkers, and often forced First Era missionaries and national leadership (which had been painstakingly developed) into the background.
 - In some cases this caused a huge step backward in mission strategy.

- By 1925, however, the largest mission movement in history was in full swing. By then Second Era missionaries had finally learned the basic lessons they had first ignored and produced an incredible record.
- **They had planted churches in a thousand new places, mainly “inland,” and by 1940 the reality of the “younger churches” around the world was widely acclaimed as the “great new fact of our time.”**
- The strength of these churches led both national leaders and missionaries to assume that all additional frontiers could simply be mopped up by the ordinary evangelism of the churches scattered throughout the world. More and more people wondered if, in fact, missionaries weren’t needed so badly!
 - Once more, as in 1865, it seemed logical to send missionaries home from many areas of the world.
- **Shortly after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, there ensued the shattering World Wars and the worldwide collapse of the colonial apparatus.**
- By 1945 many overseas churches were prepared not only for the withdrawal of the colonial powers, but for the absence of the missionary as well. While there was no very widespread outcry, “Missionary Go Home,” as some supposed, nevertheless things were different now, as even the people in the pews at home ultimately sensed.
 - Pioneer and paternal were no longer the relevant stages, but partnership and participation.
- In 1967, the total number of career missionaries from America began to decline (and it has continued to do so to this day). Why? Christians had been led to believe that all necessary beachheads had been established.
- By 1967, over 90 percent of all missionaries from North America were working with strong national churches that had been in existence for some time.
- The facts, however, were not that simple. Unnoticed by most everyone, another era in missions had begun.

The Third Era: Unreached Peoples Cameron Townsend 1934 (Linguistic Barriers)

- This era was begun by a pair of young men of the Student Volunteer Movement: Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran.
- Cameron Townsend was in so much of a hurry to get to the mission field that he didn’t bother to finish college. He went to Guatemala as a “Second Era” missionary, building on work which had been done in the past. In that country, there was plenty to do by missionaries working with established national churches.
- But Townsend was alert enough to notice that the majority of Guatemala’s population did not speak Spanish. As he moved from village to village, trying to distribute scriptures written in the Spanish language, he began to realize that Spanish evangelism would never reach all Guatemala’s people.

- He was further convinced of this when an Indian asked him, “If your God is so smart, why can’t he speak our language?” He was befriended by a group of older missionaries who had already concluded the indigenous “Indian” populations needed to be reached in their own languages.
 - He was just 23 when he began to move on the basis of this new perspective.
- Surely in our time one person comparable to William Carey and Hudson Taylor is Cameron Townsend.
- Like Carey and Taylor, Townsend saw that there were still unreached frontiers, and for almost a half century he has waved the flag for the overlooked tribal peoples of the world.
- He started out hoping to help older boards reach out to tribal people. Like Carey and Taylor, he ended up starting his own mission, *Wycliffe Bible Translators*, which is dedicated to reaching these new frontiers.
- At first, he thought there must be about 500 unreached tribal groups in the world. (He was judging by the large number of tribal languages in Mexico alone).
- Later, he revised his figure to 1,000, then 2,000, and now it is closer to 5,000. As his conception of the enormity of the task has increased, the size of his organization has increased.
 - Today it numbers over 4,000 adult workers.

Unreached Peoples: Donald McGavran 1935 (Social Barriers)

- At the very same time Townsend was ruminating in Guatemala, Donald McGavran was beginning to yield to the seriousness, not of linguistic barriers, but of India’s amazing social barriers.
- Townsend “discovered” the tribes; McGavran discovered a more nearly universal category he labeled “homogeneous units,” which today are more often called “people groups.”
- Paul Hiebert has employed the terminology of “horizontal segmentation” for the tribes which each occupied their own turf, and “vertical segmentation” for groups distinguished not by geography but by rigid social differences.
 - McGavran’s terminology described both kinds even though he was mainly thinking about the more subtle vertical segmentation.
- **Once such a group is penetrated, diligently taking advantage of that missiological breakthrough along group lines, the strategic “bridge of God” to that people group is established.**
 - **The corollary of this truth is the fact that until such a breakthrough is made, normal evangelism and church planting cannot take place.**
- McGavran did not found a new mission (Townsend did so only when the existing missions did not properly respond to the tribal challenge). McGavran’s active efforts and writings spawned both the church growth movement and the frontier mission movement.

- The one devoted to expanding within already penetrated groups, and the other devoted to deliberate approaches to the remaining unpenetrated groups.
- As with Carey and Taylor before them, for twenty years Townsend and McGavran attracted little attention. But by the 1950's, both had wide audiences.
- By 1980, 46 years from 1934, a 1910-like conference was held, focusing precisely on the forgotten groups these two men emphasized.
 - The Edinburgh-1980 World Consultation on Frontier Missions was the largest mission meeting in history, measured by the number of mission agencies sending delegates.
 - **And wonder of wonders, 57 Third World agencies sent delegates. This is the sleeper of the Third Era!**
 - Also, a simultaneous youth meeting, the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions, pointed the way for all future mission meetings to include significant youth participation.
- **As happened in the first two eras, the Third Era has spawned several new mission agencies.**
 - Some, like the New Tribes Mission, carry in their names reference to this new emphasis.
 - The names of others, such as Gospel Recordings and Mission Aviation Fellowship, refer to the new technologies necessary for the reaching of tribal and other isolated peoples of the world.
 - Some Second Era agencies, like Regions Beyond Missionary Union, have never ceased to stress frontiers, and have merely increased their staff so they can penetrate further—to people groups previously overlooked.
- More recently many have begun to realize that tribal peoples are not the only forgotten peoples. Many other groups, some in the middle of partially Christianized areas, have been completely overlooked.
 - These peoples are being called the “Unreached Peoples” and are defined by ethnic or sociological traits to be people so different from the cultural traditions of any existing church that missions (rather than evangelism) strategies are necessary for the planting of indigenous churches within their particular traditions.
- ***If the First Era was characterized by reaching coastland peoples and the Second Era by inland territories, the Third Era must be characterized by the more difficult-to-define, non-geographical category which we have called “Unreached Peoples”—people groups which are socially isolated.***
 - Because this concept has been so hard to define, the Third Era has been even slower getting started than the Second Era. Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran began calling attention to forgotten peoples over 40 years ago, but only recently has any major attention been given to them.

- More tragic still, we have essentially forgotten the pioneering techniques of the First and Second Eras, so we almost need to reinvent the wheel as we learn again how to approach groups of people completely untouched by the gospel!
- We know that there are about 10,000 people groups in the “Unreached Peoples” category, gathered in clusters of similar peoples, these clusters numbering not more than 3,000.
- Each individual people will require a separate, new missionary beachhead. Is this too much? Can this be done? Is there any realism in the slogan gaining currency, “A Church for Every People by the Year 2000?”
- The AD2000 Movement adds “and the Gospel for every person...” which, of course, cannot be accomplished unless each people is first penetrated.

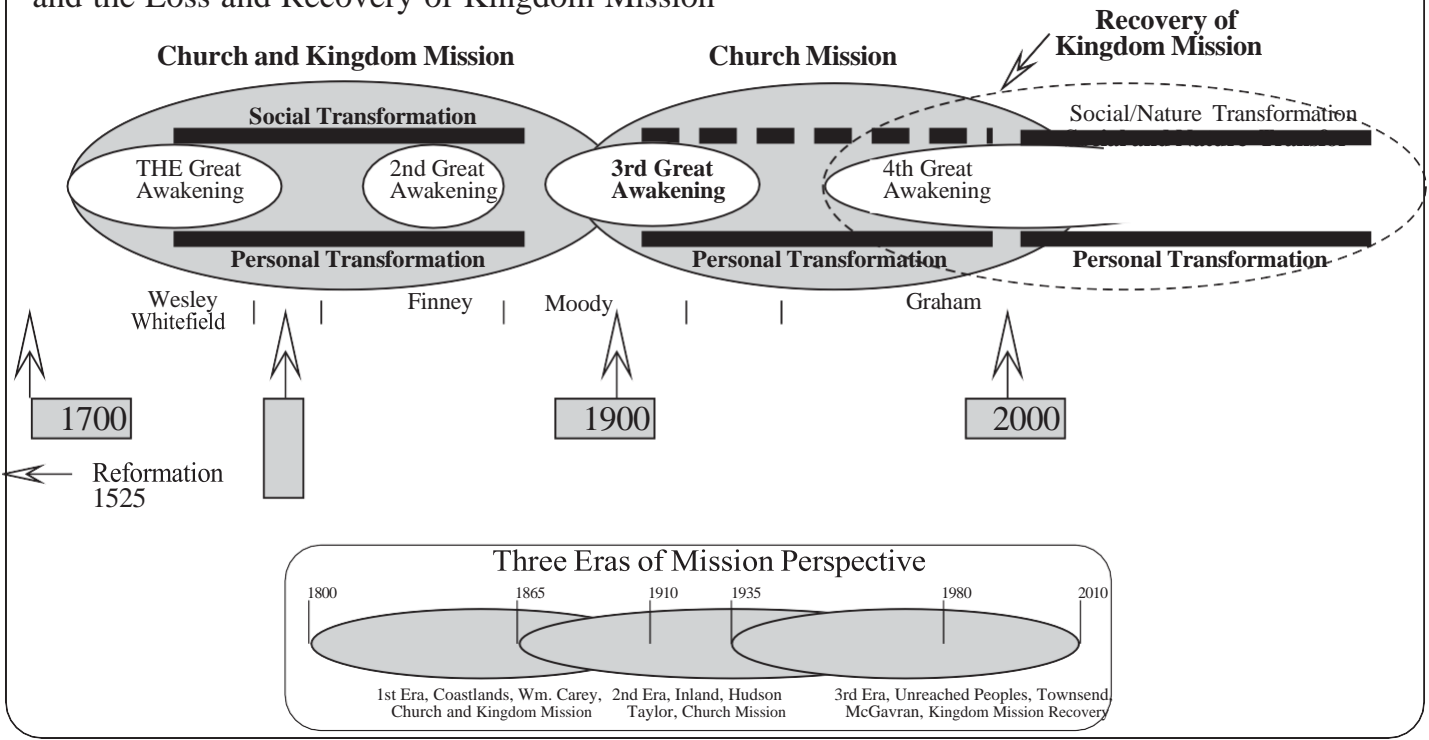
SOME TAKEAWAYS FROM THE HISTORY OF MISSIONS

- In a seminal article in 1974, missionary and scholar Ralph Winter identified two structures of God’s redemptive mission: the local church and the missionary band. Winter adopted the term ‘modality’ to refer to the New Testament church. As for the missionary band, which he calls ‘sodalities,’ he cites the mission agency as one contemporary example. Winter describes the relationship between the two as being like a town government (modality) and the private businesses in it (sodalities). The two structures cooperate and are inextricably linked, with the former monitoring the latter. Winter’s paradigm has been very influential and rarely challenged.²
- “...two alternate approaches to mission, concluding that as the Church pursues God’s broader Kingdom purposes in combatting evil it is empowered to more effectively reach unreached peoples.”³
- Why the need for so many exterior missions’ boards and sending agencies?
 - The church stopped being the church and para-church ministries took over.
 - The church saw that parachurch ministries were willing to do the work, so they abdicated their responsibilities and focused on other things.
 - The same can be same about Biblical counseling, seminary training and a host of other issues that the church is mandated to take responsibility for but has left it up to outside organizations.

² <https://www.om.org/en/news/keeping-our-goals-priority>

³ <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/new-insight-from-the-three-eras-of-mission-history>

Three Mission Eras and the Loss and Recovery of Kingdom Mission



Three Eras of the Modern Missions Movement

