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**Evangelical
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As seen from the outlines above, neither the classic Pentecostal doctrine nor the ideas of positive thinking match up to the developed prosperity ideas. Nevertheless it can be seen that each supplies the lack in the other. Clearly further historical research would need to be done to verify further the validity of the conclusion, but from a theological point of view a synthesis of ideas would seem to be fairly well established.

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Affluence—The Achilles Heel

Jon Bonk

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The following thought-provoking article reached our office several months ago. In this the author describes the influence of the affluence particularly on Western missions making observations from church history and common sense as well as the theology of incarnation. It is an honest analysis of some of the root causes of the so-called Mission-Church tensions, albeit with two limitations: first, primarily it is aimed at the Western missions whereas in recent years the modern Two-Thirds World missionaries have grown to an unbelievable total of 15,000 to whom this analysis does not apply. Second, given the changing policies of missionary organizations as well as foreign exchange rates, the figures need to be taken with a pinch of salt—though the conclusions still hold good.

Editor

GLOBAL DISPARITY

Since the industrial revolution less than two centuries ago, the material and economic gulf separating the industrialized 'North' from the agrarian 'South' has grown to astonishing proportions, and most evidence suggests that the chasm will continue to widen.

This is neither the time nor the place to speculate on the *reasons* for this growing disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.¹ What is of interest is the historical anomaly which has appeared. For the greater part of the *modern* missionary movement, most Christian missionary endeavour has been undertaken by the 'rich' to the 'poor'. This is historically anomalous, since there is little if any precedent for it in the first 1700 years of Christian history, and certainly none in the earlier record of church missionary activity as recorded in the New Testament and patristic sources.

The earliest Christian missionaries operated in a world that was not as sharply polarized economically and materially as is true of its modern counterpart. The first

¹ C. Piero Gheddo, *Why Is The Third World Poor?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973); William Byron (ed.), *The Causes of World Hunger* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); and P. T. Bauer, *Equality, The Third World and Economic Delusion* (London: Methuen, 1981). These three books provide a representatively diverse and stimulating analysis of the reasons for this phenomenon.

missionary force was almost entirely p. 210 constituted of natives of an obscure, impoverished, foreign-dominated and occupied country which was little more than a back-eddy of the vast imperialist Roman empire. In this century, on the other hand, it has become more common for Christians to think in terms of mission *from* the political, military, and economically powerful centres *to* those dominated. Our institutional structures so reflect this model of operation that the sending of missionaries by the poorer churches to the rich North is implicitly assumed to be logistically impossible. The money is simply not there.

For example, 1982 figures published by the International Red Cross indicate the estimated GNP of Ethiopia and Zaire to be \$120 and \$210 respectively. While GNP is obviously a crude and to some degree deceptive measure of relative affluence, few would deny that Western missionaries sent to such third world countries are usually very wealthy by local standards. A missionary family of four proceeding to Ethiopia with a reputable and representative IFMA member agency is required to raise approximately \$23,000 in annual support, while a similar family commissioned by a well known EFMA denomination to serve in Zaire may expect to be supported by about the same amount.²

The social dynamics likely to characterize the relations between two families which such widely disparate incomes can best be imagined by putting oneself into the position of the Ethiopian family of four with an annual income of \$480, or into the position of the Zairian family whose annual income totals \$840. In the case of the former, the missionary family's income is 67 times greater; in the case of the latter, the differential is 38 times!

What genre of relationships is the missionary family likely to develop with the Ethiopian or with the Zairian family? Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to turn the tables on ourselves: What sort of relationship does the average missionary family develop with a family whose earning power is 67 times (\$2,144,000 per year!) or 38 times (\$1,216,000 per year!) its own? Or put another way, what sort of relationship would church members expect to develop with a pastor with an annual income 30 to 70 times the congregational average?

Whatever one might imagine, it would be exceedingly difficult for genuinely fraternal relationships to develop in such circumstances. At best, in the case of the missionary, such wealthy families might come to be regarded as potential benefactors or supporters! At worst, rich families might be regarded with suspicion and envy. Similarly, it is—humanly p. 211 speaking—nearly impossible for the 'rich' western missionary family to associate with the poor Ethiopian or Zairian family in any genuinely fraternal and understanding way. To the missionary family belongs the privilege, power, and position that go with wealth. Conversely, it will be hard for the poor family to understand or appreciate the motives of the missionary family, in his eyes privileged beyond imagination as evidenced by clothing, transportation, holidays, special schools, technology, and other amenities that are the lot of the rich.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE

Rich missionaries are not a uniquely twentieth century phenomenon. The first London Missionary Society missionaries to central Africa must have presented to native observers a mind-boggling spectacle of material plenitude. Financed initially by a 5,000 pound sterling gift from millionaire Robert Arthington, the first party of six missionaries set out on July 25th, 1877 to transport 28,500 pounds of supplies 830 miles from the Zanzibar

² I am deliberately refraining from citing the names of the agency and denomination involved, since they are by no means atypical.

coast to Lake Tanganyika. The journey, which was to have been accomplished in six months by means of ox wagons at a cost of £5,106 sterling, in fact took longer and cost more. The oxen which were to have pulled the wagons having died, missionaries found it necessary to employ no fewer than 868 native carriers to transport their goods. It took them almost a year to reach their destination. By 1882 the enterprise had cost the mission a staggering £22,000 sterling. By 1885 over £40,000 sterling had been expended upon this effort in central Africa, with no appreciable results.

Although missionary lifestyles may have seemed modest by European standards, to Africans they represented spectacular, scarcely believable ostentation and affluence. David Picton Jones, a key missionary during this period, began to suspect that missionary affluence might be the primary obstruction in the process of making the gospel comprehensible to the people. He discovered that whilst LMS efforts remained barren, his Muslim employees from Zanzibar were winning converts. Writing to the foreign secretary, Jones observed:

... it is a remarkable fact that the Zanzibar men have had far more influence over the natives than we have ever had—in many little things they imitate them, they follow their customs, adopt their ideas, imitate their dress, sing their songs, and ... speak their ... language. I can only account for this by the fact that the [Muslims] live amongst them, in a [p. 212](#) simple manner like themselves, intermarry with them, and to some extent partake of their notions. Our life, on the other hand ... is far above them, and we are surrounded by things entirely beyond their reach. The consequence is, that they despair of trying to follow us—indeed they *cannot* follow us ... I have found by experience that they are exceedingly ready to imitate anything within their power, especially the young, and I feel sure in my own mind, if we were to bring ourselves nearer their own level—as near to it as our health and character as Christians would allow—we would gradually raise them up to a higher standard, and to a more civilized life. As it is they have nothing to lay hold of, they despair of ever becoming like us, they regard us as being of another (if not a higher) order, and they believe that our religion, however well adapted to us, is to them altogether unsuitable. When I talk to them of ... [God] ... and tell them that He is good and merciful, that we always endeavour to do His will, and that we are His children, they will answer coolly, pointing to the wonderful things in and about our house—You are his children *indeed* ...³

Even in cases where missionary labour was rewarded with fruit, relationships between western missionaries and native Christians all too often were not what they should have been. This was due in part to the social and economic disparity separating them. Rev. V. S. Azariah of India, addressing delegates to the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, spoke of the problem of co-operation between foreign and native workers. Whereas, he said, missionaries were well known for their condescending love, kind feelings, hard work, and self denial in their relationships with non-western Christians, in only a few exceptional cases were they known for their close, intimate, friendships with their native brethren: ‘... missionaries, except for a few of the very best seem ... to fail very largely in getting rid of an air of patronage and condescension and in

³ The letter was written by David Picton Jones (Uguha) to Ralph Wardlaw Thompson (London) on December 2, 1884, and may be found in the Council For World Mission Archives (incoming Letters, 5/5/C) at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The early details of this mission to Central Africa are outlined on pages 649–670 of volume I of *The History of the London Missionary Society 1795–1895* by Richard Lovett (London: Henry Frowde, 1899). For more detail, see my dissertation, ‘All things to all men? Protestant Missionary identification in Theory and Practice, 1860–1910, with special reference to the London Missionary Society in Central Africa and Central China’. (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1982).

establishing a genuinely brotherly ... relation as between equals ...'⁴ Azariah concluded his address with the now famous challenge: 'You have p. 213 given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. GIVE US FRIENDS'.⁵

COMMON SENSE

The human experience everywhere shows that economic disparity and social distance breed envy and suspicion. People tend to establish friendships with their 'own kind' economically and socially. This rule is by no means abrogated when a missionary travels from North America to Africa or elsewhere. Thus it comes as no surprise that western missionaries tend to develop their closest friendships and fraternal social ties with fellow missionaries or with other members of the foreign community. Holidays are spent in the company of fellow westerners; recreation and leisure time likewise find many missionaries seeking out the company of their own peers; missionary children are educated in exclusive schools. Now of course there are practical, common-sense reasons for all of this—but that such social behaviour is both evidence of and gives rise to alienation cannot be gainsaid. Even the use of complicated expensive technology in 'getting the job done' heightens the social and material differences between missionary and non-missionary, tending not only to keep western missionaries at a distance from those whom they seek to influence,⁷ but often obliterating or at least obscuring the spiritual nature of the western missionary's Concerns.⁸

THE INCARNATION

Since the church is Christ's body—here on earth to carry out the wishes P. 214 of its Head—it is both instructive and necessary for missionaries from the west to reflect on some of the implications of the incarnation. In the first place, the incarnation teaches us that *the medium is the message*, to a large degree. This immediately suggests that some means are necessarily inappropriate in missionary endeavour even if they 'work'. The 'war-time lifestye' advocated by Ralph Winter and practised by many western missionaries is to some degree disturbing in its tacit insinuation that the end and the means, the message and medium, can be separated. The temptation of Christ teaches that in accomplishing kingdom objectives, even those readily available means which would

⁴ The entire address is found in volume IX, *World Missionary Conference, 1910 ... the History and Records Of The Conference* ... (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1910), pages 306–315.

⁵ *ibid.*, page 309.

⁷ Doris Haley, 'Ralph and Roberta Winter: A Wartime Life-Style', *Family Life Today*, (March 1983), page 29–33. The ever visionary Ralph Winter here advocates a very simple personal life-style combined with the use of every resource possible, including expensive technology, in evangelizing the world. Is it possible that this is simply a variety of the three temptations faced by Christ, speeding the kingdom building process by means of powerful and sensational but essentially worldly means? Christ rejected short cuts then; what he makes of our uncritical use of expensive technology today is a matter for speculation. What is certain is that this technology, while enabling the western missionary to establish physical proximity with poor people, ensures the maintenance of a vast social and economic distance between him and the people before whom he attempts to live out and preach the incarnation.

⁸ See, for example, Jacob Loewen, *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), pages xi–xii of Introduction. He cites an instance where a group of teachers from a South American tribe perceived *money* to be 'the axle of the missionaries' way of life', and now that they were Christians, the axle in their life as well!

have made his work easier, which would have accomplished the task faster, and which would have made his message more palatable, were not permissible. The whole life and ministry of Christ teaches us that God's messenger does *not* have the right to utilize *all* the means potentially available to him in accomplishing God's purposes on earth.

When the Word was made flesh, genuine identification occurred, not the empty posturing of a salesman Or a politician out to make a quick sale or get a vote. The Word was made flesh in the scandalous guise of an illegitimate child, with no social distinction whatsoever. The Word grew up poor, lived surrounded by the poor, and died poor. Yet all means were at His disposal. He was the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God, yet he willingly became a helpless, dependent infant, needing to learn obedience and grow in wisdom, with humble beginnings which saw him occupying only a few square feet in the bottom of a manger. The Sustainer of the universe, the Owner of the cattle on a thousand hills, had nowhere to lay His head; the Everlasting Father was dead at 33; the Holy God was executed for not being religious enough! Emmanuel! God with us! *The medium was the message!* Now we know that God *really* cares, *really* understands, *really* knows our predicament ([Hebrews 4:15-16](#)). Surely the incarnation teaches us something about God's mission strategy! This is the model all Christians—*especially* missionaries—are to adopt ([Philippians 2:3-8](#)).

In this day when western mission agendas seem largely preoccupied with talk of techniques and technology, and when mission theory appears frequently to regard man as more sociological than theological, we need men like Paul, like Roberto de Nobili, like Hudson Taylor, like James Gilmore, and like Bruce Olson who, divesting themselves of their natural affluence, security, and position, attempt to become more truly 'all things to all men'. Were this to be done today, the financial cost of mission would be considerably less. Of course, the human and personal cost would be much more. But the lives of p. 215 western missionaries would be more in harmony with the Christ they preach, for where a man's treasure is, there is his heart also. One of the most hard-to-scale barriers to human communication and fraternity would be breached. Not domination, but true service, would be more possible and more likely.

Eleven years ago, *Mission-Focus* carried an article entitled 'The Shape of Mission Strategy' by David A. Shank.⁹ It suggested that the term 'strategy', as a military term, carried with it built-in notions of conquest, imposition, imperialism, planning, structuring, and all that goes along with an army fighting a war. Mr. Shank proposed then that it was time for Western missions to think, instead, in terms of a 'cross strategy'. The strategy of the cross involves self-denial, servanthood and identification. This strategy renounces privilege and embraces servanthood. Accordingly, the missionary adopting the cross-strategy wouldn't call others up to his material-social level; he would step down to theirs; he wouldn't have others serving him, but as a servant he would allow others to dispose of him. He would be more vulnerable, and his agenda for action would be determined by the One he serves. He would be at risk. He would not only *seem* to want to identify, he *really would* identify.

Docetism was a heresy which argued that Jesus only *appeared* to be a man, but that he was really only God all the time. Can it be that as modern missionaries, doing mission out of affluence, much of what we have called missionary sacrifice has been at heart Docetic—with missionaries merely playing at identification? Perhaps it is not possible for missionaries from the West to do more than they are doing. Perhaps we are so enmeshed in and dependent upon the expensive clutter of our material technologies and sociological strategies that we can't propagate our faith apart from it. I hope not.

⁹ David Shank, 'The Shape of Mission Strategy,' *Mission-Focus* Volume I, number 3 (January 1973).

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

There is obviously no simple solution to the Pandora's box of western missionary affluence. Lifestyle habits and expectations are not only deeply rooted culturally and psychologically, but institutionalized in the sending agencies and in on-the-field structures of *modus operandi*. Nevertheless, a start—however modest and inadequate—must be made somewhere by someone.

Perhaps the best place to begin is at home—in our training [p. 216](#) institutions and in the lives of those of us who are involved in the preparation of missionaries. Teachers of missionaries would do well to model simplicity and contentedness themselves in their personal life styles and ambitions. Physical facilities likewise should, ideally, be kept from ostentation. Better to err on the side of frugality! There is something slightly incongruous in the spectacle of soldiers preparing 'to endure hardness' in a soft and luxurious milieu, in the midst of bounty and ease.

Furthermore, mission studies curricula should devote more attention to the communications, interpersonal and cultural problems attendant upon a situation where the 'rich' function as apostles. Here at Winnipeg Bible College and Theological Seminary we have begun modestly with two courses: 'Rich Man, Poor Man—And the Bible: An Agenda for Rich Missionaries in an Age of Hunger' surveys and applies scriptural teaching regarding the stewardship of money and possessions, with special reference to the historically unprecedented material disparity which distinguishes people of the 'North' and 'South', and the concomitant ramifications for Christian missionaries from the 'North'. Another course, entitled 'Missionary Identification', discusses the practical significance and logical consequences of an incarnational model of missionary service. Mission strategy courses likewise, while not dealing specifically with the issue, at least take cognizance of the implications such disparity might have in implementing a strategy.

Thirdly, one can read. The Bible itself is the most radical textbook in this regard, but books, such as those by Miriam Adeney (*God's Foreign Policy*), Ron Sider (*Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*), John White (*The Golden Cow*), Richard Foster (*Freedom of Simplicity*), and Jim Wallis (*The Call to Conversion*) can jog the conscience and spur us to practical obedience in this matter. Reading the biographies of missionaries such as Roberto de Nobili, Hudson Taylor, James Gilmour, and Bruce Olson can inspire us in the knowledge that others have trod this path before us, and while the path today may be largely overgrown with weeds, it is still faintly visible and can—though with great difficulty—be followed. Even more academic books can help. Daniel Johnson Fleming, late Professor of Missions at Union Theological Seminary (New York) produced a series of books which grapple realistically and sympathetically with the problem. The most helpful of these, in my opinion, are his *Ventures in Simpler Living* (IMC, 1933) and *Living as Comrades: A Study of Factors Making for Community* (Agricultural Missions, 1950).

Finally, this issue should be confronted head on at student conferences such as Urbana, as well as at congresses and consultations [p. 217](#) on evangelism and missions. Perhaps consultations should be arranged dealing specifically with the issue and all of its complex subsidiary challenges.

What will come of all of this? Will the affluent western church divest itself of its vast wealth and properties? Will mission societies incorporate a vow of voluntary poverty into their candidating procedures? One can hardly imagine it. Discipleship in the area of material goods has never been widely popular, but there have always been some disciples who cling lightly to their possessions, and who not only *claim to* seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, but *obviously* do so! As colleagues—fellow disciples in the great task assigned to the church—we can at least follow the advice of the writer of the

letter to the Hebrews: ‘... Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds ...’ ([Hebrews 10:23–27](#)). I welcome dialogue on the subject!

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Martin Luther and John Calvin on Property

W. J. S. Gilbreath

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In this well documented historical research, Gilbreath compares the attitudes of both the Reformers to economics in general but property in particular. The discovery that both the Reformers' views were consistent with their respective theological frameworks is reassuring. The similarity between them concerning property comes as a pleasant surprise and has important consequences. We regret that footnotes though valuable had to be omitted in favour of brevity and readability.

Editor

The Reformation took place at a time of rapid economic growth and change. Not until the twelfth century did money come into common usage in the cities of Europe; by the fifteenth century it had spread to rural areas as well. This move away from a barter economy made credit possible, and this in turn stimulated increases in production, international trade, and foreign investment. The importation of the newly-discovered riches of the New World contributed to chronic inflation throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This led to popular outcries against price-gouging merchants, unscrupulous property-owners, and opportunistic usurers.

It is arguable that those developments facilitated the sale of Papal indulgences and thus contributed to the proximate cause of the Reformation—Martin Luther’s Ninety-five Theses. Certainly, the Reformers were troubled by the hardships that economic changes were inflicting on their parishioners, and attempted to apply Christian ethical principles to contemporary problems.

Martin Luther was not reluctant to express his very strong opinions on property and economic activity. The characteristic vehemence of his writings on trade and commerce has led some to conclude that he did not understand economic matters. For example, R. H. Tawney thought it ‘idle to scan them [Luther’s writings] for a coherent and consistent doctrine’ of social morality. It may be true that Luther did not fully comprehend the economic revolution of his time, but his views on economic affairs were, in my opinion, quite coherent and unified by the principle of faith in God. In fact, as we shall see later, **p. 219** Luther’s analysis of financial contracts of his day displayed considerable business insight, perhaps even sophistication.