

Two extracts from the famous book:

THE **NT** ORDER FOR CHURCH AND MISSIONARY

Alex. R. Hay

First page and a half:

Where Our Weakness Lies

The present world situation, both in so-called Christian lands and in what is termed the Mission Field, is profoundly influencing the thoughts of Christian men and women. The world is passing through a period of great crisis. Foundations have been shaken, old standards and values are being discarded as inadequate, moral standards have been lowered. Rationalism, materialism and unbelief are boldly aggressive, challenging the Church even from within. Forces are being discovered which God created for good but which Godless man is incapable of restraining. In the midst of it all, fear grips the hearts of men. A way of salvation – of material prosperity, security and peace – is sought, but man seeks it in his own way and turns still more resolutely from God. As one Tower of Babel collapses, he sets out to build another.

This situation has not developed suddenly. It is the result of great movements that have been manifesting themselves among men and nations and gathering momentum, particularly during the last three decades. Unmistakably, it is the development which prophecy has caused us to expect as the preparation for the appearance of the ‘Man of Sin’.

As is to be expected, the rapidly changing conditions are seriously affecting the work of the Church. In most ‘mission’ lands there is a state of flux and ferment that is crystallizing into situations that present an entirely new set of problems, much more complex, much more difficult and fraught with great dangers. Modern civilization is advancing apace. Nationalism is steadily growing and manifesting an increasingly exclusive and militant spirit. In so-called ‘Christian’ lands also the situation has changed – so much so that they must be recognized definitely now as mission fields urgently needing to be evangelized.

Under the stress and strain of these conditions the Church throughout the world is being tested and proved as perhaps it has not been since the days of fiery persecution in the Early Church. From the early trial it emerged triumphant. In spite of its weakness at that time, its material poverty, the fact that few of the learned and powerful were among its members, its defenselessness and the blood that flowed, there was manifested a spiritual power that neither Satan nor man could conquer or restrain.

To what extent is the modern Church and modern methods of church planting standing the strain that is now bearing with ever increasing force upon them? Can we say, ‘All’s well with the Church: the gates of Hell are not prevailing against it’?

It is instructive to take stock of the present progress of the Church’s witness. Looking beyond local successes and leaving aside enthusiastic reports and optimistic prophecies, let us consider the facts as they are. Although, undoubtedly, there has been reason for encouragement at times and in some regions (for the Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation) on the whole the results have been far from satisfactory. They ought to have been much greater. We have a right, considering the teaching of God’s Word and the recorded experiences of the Early Church, to expect much greater progress and the manifestation of much greater power. The history of modern missions shows nothing that can compare with the worldwide conquests of a very much smaller group of laborers during the first century of the Church.

No matter how full of faith and optimism our missionary vision may be, we face the fact that, at our present rate of progress, there is no hope of the world ever being evangelized.

The Personal Cost

It will have been realized that the practice of New Testament missionary methods demands much of the missionary. He must have faced the Cross in the fullness of its significance. He must be prepared to pay the cost to be filled with the Spirit of Christ so that he may manifest Christ.

“Always, wherever we go, carrying with us in our bodies the putting to death of Jesus, so that in our bodies it may also be clearly shown that Jesus lives. For we, alive though we are, are continually surrendering ourselves to death for the sake of Jesus, so that in this mortal nature of ours it may also be clearly shown that Jesus lives” (2 Cor. 4:10-11, Weymouth).

It will have been observed that what was accomplished by the founders and first missionaries of the Early Church was done through the normal working of the Holy Spirit. It is often thought that Barnabas, Paul, Luke, Timothy, Titus, Silas and the other New Testament Evangelists just suddenly and miraculously found themselves possessed of the necessary knowledge and experience for the ministry they were called to, that the churches sprang up miraculously, that Elders were found ready immediately and that a special dispensation of the Spirit's power was manifested at that time in both Evangelists and converts.

That may seem a plausible excuse for the comparative powerlessness evident today, but there is no ground for it in Scripture. We have seen that Paul and his companions had to go through years of preparation in the school of hard experience, becoming thoroughly acquainted with the principles of spiritual life and ministry and with the structure of the local church, before the Holy Spirit sent them forth to the work. It was seven years after Pentecost before the Lord led out to the evangelization of the Gentile world, because Greek-speaking men must first have years of experience to fit them for the work. Those who ministered did so at as great a cost as is required of us today. In the churches, Elders and Deacons were not appointed until ample time had been given for them to be proved. Even in the church in Jerusalem this was so. And the enemy was just as active in just the same way, spreading false doctrine, causing divisions and using every weakness of the human heart.

No, it was not easier in those early days; the work was done then just as it has to be done today. It was done victoriously because it was done in God's way, in the power of the Spirit, through utter yieldedness, obedience, prayer and faith. Those who are willing to walk in the same way today will reap the same fruit. The whole difficulty is the cost of this walk. It means taking the way of sacrifice that our Lord and the early Evangelists of the Church did not shrink from taking. It means continual death to the flesh with its desires, wisdom and pride. That there are those who are willing for this, there is no doubt. There has always been such a company and there always will be so long as the Spirit of Christ remains among men. The number may not be great, because few will be willing to pay the cost, but the Lord will be with those who do and their labor and testimony will bear eternal fruit.

FINISHED - AND YET JUST BEGUN:

'Tis the story of the Church
Onward marching, ever such
As at Pentecost was born,
Pressing onward to the morn,
Victor through the darkening night,
Ever in unconquered might
Strengthened,
Till its course is run.