

VI

THE GOD-GIVEN PEOPLE MOVEMENTS

While the typical pattern of missionary activity has been that of the Mission Station Approach occasionally People Movements to Christ have resulted. These have not as a rule been sought by missionaries—though in Oceania, Indonesia and Africa there have been some exceptions. The movements are the outcome of the mysterious movement of the Spirit of God. Their pattern of growth is very different from that described in the last chapter. They have provided over 90 per cent of the growth of the newer churches throughout the world. The great bulk of the membership and of the congregations of the younger churches consist of converts and the descendants of converts won in People Movements.

In spite of this, we maintain that People Movements were the exception, and that the typical approach of the last century was the Mission Station Approach. The number of mission stations from which Christian movements have started is small compared with the number serving static churches. Mission enterprises are, for the most part, those which serve non-Christians and gathered colony churches. The leadership of many conferences on missions comes largely from those who know and are immersed in the Mission Station Approach. And, as Dr Hendrik Kraemer writes: "Missionary thinking and planning in this revolutionary period are still overwhelmingly influenced by the Mis-

sion Station Approach." The Mission Station Approach must then be taken as the typical outcome of the past years, and the People Movements as the exceptions.

In dividing mission work into these two varieties—that operating through the Mission Station Approach and that operating through the People Movements—it is recognized that there is some mission work which cannot be classified under either head. For example, there is the translation and printing of the Scriptures. We are not attempting an exhaustive classification, but a practical one into which more than 90 per cent of missionary activity can be placed.

Some People Movements Described

Adoniram Judson went to Burma as a missionary to the cultured Buddhist Burmese. But he took under his wing a rough character, by name Ko Tha Byu, a Karen by race. The Karens were among the backward tribes of Burma. They were animistic peasants and were supposed by the Burmese to be stupid inferior people. "You can teach a buffalo, but not a Karen," was the common verdict. Judson spent six months trying to teach this former criminal, now his servant, the meaning of the redemptive death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and made such little progress that he was inclined to take the common verdict as true. However, he persisted, and a few months later Ko Tha Byu became a convinced, if not a highly illuminated, Christian.

As Judson toured Burma, speaking to the Burmese of that land, Ko Tha Byu, the camp follower, spoke to the humble Karens in each vicinity. The Karens started becoming Christian. Here a band of ten families, there one of two, and yonder a jungle settlement of five families accepted the Lordship of Christ. We do not have the data to prove that those who came were inter-

related, but it is highly probable that chains of families were coming in. A chain reaction was occurring. We can reasonably assume that among his close relatives alone, to say nothing of cousins and second cousins, Ko Tha Byu had a host of excellent living contacts. The early converts doubtless came from among these, and their relatives.

Judson, translating the Bible into Burmese, was concerned with more important matters than a Christian movement among a backward tribe. He never considered the Karen converts as more than a side issue. His later associates, however, the next generation of missionaries, included some who were veritable Pauls, expanding the movement as far along the paths and across the rice paddies as possible. To-day there is a mighty Christian Movement among the Karens and their related tribes in Burma, numbering hundreds of thousands of souls. The Christian Karens are the educated Karens and will provide the leadership for the mixed population of Karens, Kachins and other tribes which predominate in parts of Burma. The Christward Movement among the Karens may well be the source of a Church numbering millions, and exercising a decisive influence upon the history of all South-East Asia.

By contrast, the Mission Station Approach to the Buddhist Burmese has yielded its ordinary quota of small, static mission station churches with a membership of perhaps 20,000 souls for all Burma.

The Karen Christians are good Christians. In a hundred sections of Burma there are communities of Christian Karens with their own church building, their own pastor, their own tradition of regular worship, their own Sunday school, and a Christian tribal life which augurs well for the permanence of the Christian Churches of Burma. The Karens, disciplined through a

People Movement, and now in the process of perfecting, are not under the delusion that a nominal Christianity is worth anything to God. The thousands of churches scattered across the country contain a normal proportion of earnest Spirit-filled Christians. They are "reborn Baptists" who will compare favourably with the reborn Baptists of any land.

We stress this because it is a mistake to assume that People Movement Christians, merely because they have come to the Christian faith in chains of families, must inevitably be nominal Christians. Such an assumption is usually based on prejudice, not fact. All churches face the problem of how to avoid creating nominal Christians. Even Western churches, made up of only those individual converts who testify to regeneration, soon come to have a second and third generation who easily grow up to be nominal Christians. The policies of the churches may vary in their ability to produce Christians vividly conscious of their own salvation. People Movements in themselves do not encourage the production of nominal Christians.

Up in the north of Pakistan there was a lowly people called Churas. They were the agricultural labourers in a mixed Muslim and Hindu civilization. They formed about 7 per cent of the total population, and were Untouchables. They were oppressed. They skinned dead cattle, cured the skins, collected the bones and sold them. They had been largely overlooked by the missionaries preaching Christ to the respectable members of the Hindu and Muslim communities, and organizing their few hard-won converts into mission station churches. Then a man named Ditt from among the Churas turned to Christ, continued to live among his people, despite their attempts at ostracism, and gradually brought his relatives to the Christian faith. The missionaries were at first dubious about admitting to

Christian fellowship these lowest of the low, lest the upper castes and the Muslims took offence and came to think of the Christian enterprise as an "untouchable" affair. But those who became Christians were pastored and taught and organized into churches. Because the converts came as groups without social dislocation the efforts of the pastors and the missionaries could be given largely to teaching and preaching. Attention did not have to be diverted to providing jobs and wives, houses and land for individual converts. The Mission to whom God had entrusted this Movement was made up of devout men and women and they gave themselves to the task. The outcome was that at the end of about eighty years there are no more Churas in that section of India. *They have all become Christians.*

Whereas the church in mission station areas often numbers no more than one-tenth of 1 per cent of the total population, in the Chura area *the church* numbers 7 per cent of the population. There are congregations in many of the villages and a Christian witness is maintained, not primarily by foreign missionaries, but by the citizens of Pakistan.

In Indonesia there is a large mission work. In addition to static gathered colonies there have been also a comparatively large number of God-given People Movements. In the north of Sumatra there is a flourishing Batak People Movement, numbering hundreds of thousands. In 1937, on the island of Nias, off the north-west coast of Sumatra, there were 102,000 Christians: in 1916 there were none. In the northern parts of the Celebes the Minahasa tribes were by 1940 fairly solidly Christian and in the centre the growth of People Movements was rapid. There were tribal movements toward Christ in the Moluccas, the Sangi and the Talaud Islands. Around the year 1930 between eight and ten thousand a year were being baptized in Dutch

New Guinea. In the 1920's on one of the islands not far from Timor several thousands were baptized as a result of a People Movement. By 1936 the number of Protestant Christians was reported to be 1,610,533. The Roman Church also has increased by numerous People Movements. In 1937 there were 570,974 members of the Roman Catholic Church.

The only instance in the entire world of a few thousand Muslims being won to Christ occurs in Indonesia, in the midst of these numerous People Movements. It is also interesting that in Indonesia there is apparently a bridge between the natives and the Chinese immigrants, a bridge over which Christianity can cross. If this were strengthened it might well happen that more Chinese would become Christian indirectly *via* the People Movements of Indonesia than have been won in China itself.

In Africa there have been a large number of People Movements. The day is not far off when most of Africa south of the Sahara will have been disciplined.

There is an instructive case of People Movements in the Gold Coast. These have grown into a great Presbyterian Church. For nineteen years (1828-47) the Basel Mission of Switzerland battled to establish a foothold in the Gold Coast. Of the sixteen missionaries sent out ten died shortly after arrival. The daring expedient had to be adopted of bringing in eight West Indian families to demonstrate that black men could read the white man's Book, and to provide missionaries less susceptible to the ravages of the climate. During this time there had not been a single baptism. The first four baptisms were in 1847 among the Akim Abuakwa tribe. The following table shows how the Church grew.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Church members</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Church members</i>
1847	4	1894	12,000
1858	365	1918	24,000
1868	1,581	1932	57,000
1890	9,000	1953	137,000

Till about 1870 the records show evidence of the exploratory Mission Station Approach. Slaves were purchased, freed, and employed at the mission stations for instruction. Run-away slaves were given shelter. Labourers on mission buildings were settled on mission land. In 1868 there was one missionary for each thirty Christians. The Basel Mission had a gathered colony at each of its nine mission stations. But in the decade 1870 to 1880 outlying chains of families started becoming Christian, and several stations among the Tsui-speaking tribes began to be surrounded by small Christian groups in scattered villages. Schools were established in each and the groups gradually became churches. An important feature of this movement, like many other African People Movements, was that pagan parents frequently sent their children to Christian schools, desiring them to become Christians. The school thus had enormous influence.

Early growth was tribe-wise. Teacher-preachers, the slightly educated first generation Christian workers on whom so much of the discipling of the tribes of Africa has depended, were usually recruited from each tribe in which a Christian movement started. They were then trained and sent back to that tribe to teach others, shepherd the Christians and win others to Christ. Later, as Christian movements arose in practically all the tribes, they became a uniting factor in the life of the nation, and workers were appointed more or less regardless of tribal relationships.

The present 137,000 members are organized into

594 self-supporting congregations, led by seventy-two college and seminary trained African ministers, with over 500 unordained assistants. The church maintains a large system (95,000 pupils) of excellent parochial schools, which, because of government grants, cost the foreign mission little. Growth is continuing. In 1953 there were 13,000 baptisms.

Mission Stations and Church Headquarters

The towns and villages where missionaries assisting Christward movements live are called "Mission Stations". This is the universal terminology for centres of missionary activity. We should not be confused at this point. There are mission stations which are hemmed in, where the growth of the Church by conversions is exceedingly small. These are enmeshed in the gathered colony approach. Then there are the mission stations blessed with People Movements, where almost every activity of the station contributes to the conversion of chains of families. The mission station becomes the religious and cultural centre of a people. It has its schools, hospitals, seminaries and missionaries' residences. It will superficially look very like a static mission station wrapped up in its institutions and its small non-growing gathered church. But because it is serving a growing movement in a stratum of society, it constitutes a totally different kind of approach.

It would be helpful to missionary thinking if everyone, from the missionary societies of the sending countries to the church councils of the younger churches, would give two separate names to these two kinds of mission centres. Let the one continue to be called mission stations: let the other begin to be called church headquarters.

The Churches Born of People Movements

The most obvious result of Christian missions which have been fathering and furthering Christward movements is a tremendous host of Christian churches. It has been calculated that there are well over a hundred thousand congregations of Christians brought to a knowledge of God through recent Christian People Movements. These exist in most of the non-Christian countries.

Let us consider the unexpectedly large number of People Movements. The Islands of the Pacific have been largely disciplined by People Movements. India has its extensive list of movements from the Malas and Madigas, the Nagas and Garas, the Mahars and Bhils, and many others. Indonesia and Burma total well over a score of People Movements of some power. Africa has numerous tribes in which the churches are growing in tribe-wise fashion. Two new People Movements are being reported as this book is written: one in Formosa and one in Mexico. Our list might be made much larger. Each of these hundreds of People Movements is multiplying Christian congregations as it grows.

These scores of thousands of congregations have many features in common. There are many members of the churches who are illiterate. In some lands the percentage of illiteracy in the People Movement churches is over eighty. The pastors of the churches are usually men with about seven years of schooling plus some seminary training. The church buildings are often temporary adobe or wattle buildings, though there are many well-built churches among the older congregations. The foreign missionary cannot get around to see the Christians more than once or twice a year. He is usually a director of pastors, in reality a kind of bishop, carrying on the administration of the churches, while

CPM churches

the actual leadership of the congregations is almost entirely in the hands of nationals. In some older People Movements to-day national ministers head the church, while missionaries work as assistants directed by the church council. The services to Christians, so marked in the Mission Station Approach, are very much curtailed. The numbers of children are so great that, aside from small unsatisfactory primary schools, few children get a chance at education. In the mission station churches it is common practice for every child to be sent, largely at mission expense, through school as far as his intelligence will allow him to go. But in the People Movement churches the bulk of the Christian population has available to it only such educational advantages as the average non-Christian shares. This makes for an illiterate and ignorant church membership.

In some African countries, the school picture is totally different. Government does its education through missions. In such lands the children of the Peoples Movements have excellent educational opportunities and the membership of the churches is growing up largely literate.

Scattered as the congregations are it is difficult to reach them with medical aid. Cholera and small-pox epidemics, sudden death from cerebral malaria, infant maladies which carry off children like flies, and health conditions which are a scandal to the human race, are characteristic of these myriad rural churches.

Yet People Movement Churches are remarkably stable. There are reversions, specially in the early days, but on the whole, once a people has become Christian, it stays Christian even in the face of vigorous persecution. In addition to the faith of each individual and the courage which comes from world-wide fellowship, the very bonds of relationship and social cohesion keep weak individuals from denying the faith.

The Missions Fashioned by People Movements

Missions serving People Movements are overburdened. On the whole they get about as much money per missionary as the static missions. Since the number of missionaries sent to the field bears no fixed relationship to the number of Christians in the indigenous churches, the big productive missions tend to have only about as many missionaries and hence as much budget as the big static missions. But since their responsibilities are so much greater, the People Movement Missions are unable to assist their churches as they should be helped.

One result of this is a good many arrested People Movements. Let us assume that a thousand persons have come to Christ in chains of families. Their shepherding takes all the funds that the mission station can use for such work, and a good deal more. To exploit the opening further would take so much additional effort that mission finances would be badly upset. This one station would then receive much more than was "fair" in relationship to other stations. So expansion ceases. Those who have come in absorb all the energies of the mission station and in about twenty years have become an educated Christian group which has no marriage connections with its former community. The Christward movement has become a large static mission station church or an "arrested" People Movement.

There is a beneficial aspect, however, to the chronic shortage of funds in growing church missions. There is no pampering of Christians. They early learn that discipling does not include getting them land, making them loans, giving them jobs and getting them out of scrapes. It is generally agreed that the less physical and financial support the missionary gives the indigenous Christians and congregations the better. When the mis-

sionary is short of money for the pressing enterprises of the group movement, he is not likely to err in giving financial aid to Christians in ways which are detrimental to the growth of an independent spirit in the Church.

It is, however, regrettably true that People Movement Missions, facing a chronic lack of funds, come to be content with a sub-minimum standard of achievement. If 85 per cent of the Church is illiterate—"Well, that is just the way the Church is here." If only five young men out of 15,000 Christians have gone to high school in the last five years—"Well, this is really an improvement upon the previous five years when none went." If pastors as a rule are men of only a sixth-grade education and a year of Bible training—"Well, it is not good, but it is the best we can do with what the churches raise and the mission gives." Many a People Movement Mission has been short of funds for so long that it comes to make a virtue of the necessity, to the great detriment of the growth of the Church.

The mission station tendency to make the institution an end in itself is also occasionally found at church headquarters in the midst of a People Movement. There are hospitals at the geographical centre of a thriving caste movement which serve primarily non-Christians. There are schools in cities at the centre of a great rural church with only a very few students out of the rural People Movement. The school finds its field of work in educating the non-Christian boys of the city. There are colleges in the midst of People Movement Churches which can number on the fingers of both hands all their graduates from among the growing churches. Such institutions justify their existence in typical Mission Station Approach fashion.

In Africa some church headquarters are in danger of becoming station centred. Those heading up the large central training schools get wrapped up in them. They

never work in the villages. They tend to form a station centred group and, in the business meetings of the church or mission, to vote as such. Whether the People Movement goes on growing or not becomes unimportant. Tensions develop between educational and evangelistic work. Africa has been relatively free of such tendencies, but the new educational and medical policies which governments are putting into practice build up bands of missionary specialists at the centres, thus making it easy to slip over into a Mission Station Approach.

In parts of Africa the church headquarters can be divided into those which serve arrested or completed People Movements, and those which serve growing ones. There is danger that men and money will be allotted, not on the basis of the growth of the churches, but on the familiar basis of "fairness to all stations". Thus in the midst of tremendous opportunities for discipling, a church headquarters serving an arrested movement of 10,000 souls might get just as much foreign assistance as one serving a greatly growing movement of 40,000.

Merely to be geographically connected with People Movements does not turn mission stations into church headquarters. Until those in charge of the institutions at the centres hold steadily in view that the service of the growing churches is the highest missionary service, there is likely to be a good deal of Mission Station Approach even in the midst of growing People Movements.

Unvalued Pearls

One of the curious facts about People Movements is that they have seldom been sought or desired. Pickett records, in *Christian Mass Movements in India*,¹ that most

¹ Abingdon Press, New York, 1933.

People Movements have actually been resisted by the leaders of the church and mission where they started. These leaders often had grave doubts whether it was right to take in groups of individuals, many of whom seemed to have little ascertainable personal faith. Nevertheless, despite a certain degree of repression, movements did occur. One wonders what would have happened had missions from the beginning of the "Great Century" been actively searching and praying for the coming of Christward marches by the various peoples making up the population of the world.

Those People Movements which did occur were seldom really understood. The way of corporate decision was obscured by the Western preference for individual decision. The processes of perfecting the churches were confused with the process by which a people turns from idols to serve the living God. Even where there has been great growth, as in parts of Africa, faulty understanding of People Movements has resulted in much less than maximum growth and has caused needless damage to tribal life.

Christward movements of peoples are the supreme goal of missionary effort. Many who read this book will not agree with this, and, indeed, it has never been generally accepted. Yet we not only affirm it, but go further and claim that the vast stirrings of the Spirit which occur in People Movements are God-given. We dare not think of People Movements to Christ as merely social phenomena. True, we can account for some of the contributing factors which have brought them about; but there is so much that is mysterious and beyond anything we can ask or think, so much that is a product of religious faith, and so much evident working of divine Power, that we must confess that People Movements are gifts of God. It is as if in the fulness of time God gives to His servants the priceless beginning

of a People Movement. If that succeeds, the church is firmly planted. If it fails, the missionary forces are back to the preliminary stages of exploration. Yet the essential recognition that the People Movement to Christ is the supreme goal is not often made by Christian leaders. Gifts of God come and go unrecognized; while man-directed mission work is carried faithfully, doggedly forward.

It is time to recognize that when revival really begins in China, Japan, Africa, the Muslim world, and India, it will probably appear in the form of People Movements to Christ. This is the way in which evangelical Christianity spread in Roman Catholic Europe at the time of the Reformation. It is the best way for it to spread in any land.

Half-Starved to Death

Compared with the small compact gathered colony churches, in the People Movements there are always large numbers of Christians and congregations spread out across a countryside. This makes the task of spiritual nurture difficult. For example, I recently visited in Africa a church headquarters serving 150 congregations with a total of 30,000 souls. These congregations are scattered over an area of 100 by 200 miles. There is one missionary assigned to the supervision of the 150 churches and 100 church schools. With a motor truck he may get to see each congregation once a year. The congregations are grouped into three pastorates, each in charge of an ordained African, who has about fifty part-time catechists under him. Each ordained supervisor has a bicycle. His field averages forty by fifty miles in extent. He may get to see each congregation once in two months—if he is exceptionally vigorous. There are no women's workers. Most of the Christians are illiterate. Most congregations receive inadequate instruction

and partake of communion irregularly. Nor do they engage in the worship of God at all sufficiently. Inevitably spiritual malnutrition on a large scale results.

Such People Movement Christians live at a low level. They are illiterate, ignorant, and superstitious. Their economic condition is probably poor. Compared with mission station Christians, they need more and better training. Though this is a larger and more rewarding task than mission station work, the church headquarters has no more money than the mission station. The churches it cares for are therefore chronically half starved.

There is a poignant tragedy in this chronic spiritual malnutrition. The impression is created that People Movement Christians, by virtue of their coming to Christian faith in chains of families, are necessarily Christians in name only. That People Movement churches contain many earnest Christians who really know and love their Lord, and that the ancestors of the modern missionaries came to Christ in sweeping politico-religious movements, are facts conveniently forgotten. The evidence actually seems to indicate that better Christians are produced as a result of "coming to Christ in chains of families" than by the method of "one-by-one out of a hostile environment"; and that spiritual starvation in any Church, whatever its cause, does certainly produce nominal Christians. It is a tragedy to ascribe the undesirable result to the only method by which the Church grows greatly.

Who starves the People Movements? Those who decide policies in modern missions are many. There are the missionaries themselves and their colleagues the national ministers. There are the bishops and supervisors of the churches. There are the ministers and supporters of the sending churches. Finally, there are the secretaries and officers of the mission boards. All these

four groups of leaders are constantly weighing in their minds the relative values of various pieces of work. Consequently, it invariably happens that in the decision the mission stations are compared with the church headquarters. This is entirely right and proper. In the comparison, however, the growing churches frequently come off second best. Let us see why. The mission stations are easier to visit. They have been established at centres of transportation. A busy secretary in a two-months' visit can see more at a mission station in three days than he can of a growing church in a month. The persons in charge, national and missionary, also know their mission stations. They have been there frequently. They have not seen a tenth, and may be not 1 per cent of the unimpressive little village congregations. Then, too, the mission station churches seem to be so much more "Christian". They are so much more educated and orderly. Their members are persons of some influence in the towns and cities. Many of their members speak English, whereas practically all the country people speak neither English nor the standard vernacular, but only some dialect. The district missionary is constantly complaining about the low standard of his workers and the difficulties of adequately supervising them. No wonder the People Movement churches seem like "a difficult and somewhat unrewarding type of mission work" and thus are allocated resources which are much smaller than the number of their congregations would seem to require.

Thus growing churches are usually woefully undermanned, under-taught, under-cared-for and under-perfected. The speed of their expansion is slowed to a fraction of what it might be under maximum cultivation. Naturally, there have been exceptions to this generalization. There have been People Movements so compelling that no neglect could slow them down.

There have been missions which felt that the discipling of a given tribe or people was their high privilege and who bent every resource to that end. They realized that the success of their high schools and colleges was to be measured in terms of the numbers of new Christians from out the growing movement who passed through them; that the function of the medical programme was to make and keep a thousand congregations healthy; and that the primary duty of the mission was, by using every means possible, to develop the local movement into one which raced across the land to the geographical limits of the people within which it was thriving. But such competency has been the exception, not the rule.

Infant Mortality High Among People Movements

Partly because Christian missions have stressed secondary aims and individual conversions, partly because they have failed to understand how peoples accept the Lord Jesus Christ, and partly because the people concerned has resisted, there is a high mortality among new movements. The movement of a people is usually at the outset easily stopped. The numbers concerned are small and may remain small for a generation. The power available through numbers is extremely limited. The relationship with the foreign mission and the foreign missionary is difficult. It is easy to start wrong patterns with the little group of Christians. For example, when peasants become Christian and their creditors demand immediate repayment of loans secured by land, the missionary who loans money runs the grave danger of making evangelization seem a process of buying Christians, and if he does not loan money his new fellow Christians lose their precious land. If the children of the new churches are not educated at all, the movement may fail because the church is left illiterate. If they are

Emphasis on physical needs to the point of distraction from the main thing.

highly educated, the second generation may move out of the villages into the cities and into white-collar jobs, and the movement may die out in the very places where it started. If the former leadership is recognized as the leadership of the new Christian churches there is danger that it will continue to lead the churches in sub-Christian practices or lead them back into paganism. If it is not recognized, it is likely that a contest for the people will develop between the younger and the older leaders. Any of these might prove fatal to the young movement.

Sometimes so much immediate ethical advance is required that the tender young movement dies. For example, sometimes the Christian leaders feel that the pagan society being disciplined should, in the act of becoming Christian, abandon practices which many communities in the older churches still observe. But before baptism pagans do not have an ethical religion, do not have the Holy Spirit or the Bible and do not from childhood have the example and teaching of Christian leaders. To expect great measures of reform at the outset is putting the cart before the horse. Yet it is a natural error. Christianity should mean something spiritual. Conversion should be a great forward step. However, we would be well advised to bear in mind the simple orders which the early Church, facing this same problem, laid down in writing: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from murder, and from what is strangled, and from unchastity." To be sure, it is the part of wisdom to use the exaltation which accompanies any People Movement to secure what degree of social and spiritual advance can be achieved. But to lay on the newcomers such grievous burdens that they cannot even enter Christianity as

groups is a serious error and one which has contributed to much infant mortality among new movements.

The nurture of new People Movements is difficult. There are very few persons who know how to rear them. The geographical difficulties are considerable, especially for missionaries unaccustomed to walking! The language barriers are serious because, though the intimate language of a people is likely to be some dialect, the Christian faith, its Bible, its prayers and its worship usually come to them in the standard language. The values cherished by the new converts are often curious even to the nationals from nearby movements or from the gathered churches. It is difficult for the first pastors, who have come from some other people, to know what is socially possible or impossible. These factors contribute to cause the early demise of many new movements.

Five Great Advantages

People Movements have five considerable advantages. First, they have provided the Christian movement with permanent Christian churches rooted in the soil of hundreds of thousands of villages. For their continued economic life they are quite independent of Western missions. They are accustomed (unfortunately too accustomed) to a low degree of education. Yet their devotion has frequently been tested in the fires of persecution and found to be pure gold. They are here to stay. They are permanent comrades on the pilgrim way.

They have the advantage of being naturally indigenous. In the Mission Station Approach the convert is brought in as an individual to a pattern dominated by the foreigner. The foreigner has set the pace and the style, often to his own dismay. But such denationalization is a very minor affair in true People Movements.

In them the new Christians seldom see the missionary. They are immersed in their own cultures. Their style of clothing, of eating and of speaking continues almost unchanged. Their churches are necessarily built like their houses—and are as indigenous as anyone could wish. They cannot sing or learn foreign tunes readily, so local tunes are often used. Thus an indigenous quality, highly sought and rarely found by leaders of the Mission Station Approach churches, is obtained without effort by the People Movement churches. Church headquarters, however, need to make special efforts to keep thoroughly indigenous their training of People Movement youth and leadership.

3 People Movements have a third major advantage. With them "the spontaneous expansion of the Church" is natural. The phrase "spontaneous expansion" sums up the valuable contribution to missionary thinking made by Roland Allen and the World Dominion Press. It requires that new converts be formed into churches which from the beginning are fully equipped with all spiritual authority to multiply themselves without any necessary reference to the foreign missionaries. These might be helpful as advisers or assistants but should never be necessary to the completeness of the church or to its power of unlimited expansion. Spontaneous expansion involves a full trust in the Holy Spirit and a recognition that the ecclesiastical traditions of the older churches are not necessarily useful to the younger churches arising out of the missions from the West. New groups of converts are expected to multiply themselves in the same way as did the new groups of converts who were the early churches. Advocates of spontaneous expansion point out that foreign directed movements will in the end lead to sterility and antagonism to their sponsors, and that therefore the methods now being pursued, here called the Mission Station Approach, will

never bring us within measurable distance of the evangelization of the world.¹

Desirable as spontaneous expansion is, it is a difficult ideal for the Mission Station Approach churches to achieve. They might be freed from all bonds to the Western churches, they might be convinced that they had all the spiritual authority needed to multiply themselves, they might be filled with the Holy Spirit and abound in desire to win others to Christ, and yet—just because they form a separate people and have no organic linkages with any other neighbouring people—they would find it extremely difficult to form new churches. In People Movement churches, on the contrary, spontaneous expansion is natural. Both the desire to win their "own folk" and the opportunity to bear witness in unaffected intimate conversation are present to a high degree. There is abundant contact through which conviction can transmit itself. True, in People Movements this natural growth can be and, alas, sometimes has been, slowed down by the atmosphere and techniques of the all-pervading gathered colony approach. But once these are recognized and renounced by the leaders of the People Movement churches, it becomes comparatively easy for spontaneous expansion to occur. Missions can then, like Paul, deliberately attempt to use the relatively unplanned expansion of a Christward People Movement to achieve still greater and more significant enlargement. Thus we come to the most marked advantage of these movements.

¹ The point of view developed in the following books is most important for any serious student of missions in the coming age. They are obtainable from World Dominion Press, London, and Friendship Press, New York: *Missionary Methods—St. Paul's or Ours?*, Roland Allen; *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, Roland Allen; *Objective and Method in Christian Expansion*, Alexander McLeish.

Enormous Possibilities of Growth

These movements have enormous possibilities of growth. That these possibilities are to-day largely ignored and unrecognized even by the leadership of the churches does not diminish either the truth or the importance of this fact.

The group movements are fringed with exterior growing points among their own peoples. As Paul discovered, the Palestinian movement had growing points in many places outside that country. Just so, every Christward movement has many possibilities of growth on its fringes. For example, the Madigas have become Christians in large numbers. They are the labourers of South India. They have migrated to many places in India and even abroad. One cannot help wondering whether a fervent proclamation by a modern Madiga St. Paul carrying the news that "We Madigas are becoming Christian by tens of thousands each year: we have found the Saviour and have as a people come into possession of the unsearchable riches of Christ", might not start Madiga Movements in many parts of the world.

People Movements also have internal growing points; that is, the unconverted pockets left by any such sweeping movement. Here the leaders of the Christian forces must be alert to see to it that strategic doorways are entered *while they are open*. Doorways remain open for about one generation. Then they close to the ready flow of the Christian religion. Until the discipling of the entire people, there will be both internal and external growing points. Both will yield large returns if cultivated.

Of rarer occurrence are the bridges to other communities, such as that over which St. Paul launched his Gentile movements. In order to be called a bridge, the

connection must be large enough to provide not merely for the baptism of individuals, but for the baptism of enough groups in a short enough time and a small enough area to create a People Movement in the other community. More of these bridges would be found if they were assiduously sought. More would be used for the expansion of the Christian faith if leaders could be led to understand them and become skilled in their use.

The possibilities for growth in People Movements are not by any means confined to developing new movements. Leaders of People Movement churches find that after the church has attained power and size the normal processes of growth, including the baptism of individual seekers on the fringes of the church, often produce more quiet regular ingatherings year after year than was the case during the period of the greatest exuberance of the movement. One might conclude that once a People Movement church has gained a hundred thousand converts, and the church has become indigenous to the land and forms a noticeable proportion of the population, it is likely to keep on growing. A moderate amount of missionary assistance, at places where the churches feel their need, produces results far beyond that which those accustomed to the mission station tradition would consider remotely possible.

Providing the Normal Pattern of Christianization

The fifth advantage is that these movements provide a sound pattern of becoming Christian. Being a Christian is seen to mean not change in standard of living made possible by foreign funds, but change in inner character made possible by the power of God. In well-nurtured People Movement Churches, it is seen to mean the regular worship of God, the regular hearing of the Bible, the giving to the church, the discipline of the congregation, the spiritual care exercised by the

Christian pastor, habits of prayer and personal devotion and the eradication of un-Christian types of behaviour. This life, centering in the village church, often built by the Christians themselves, is seen to be the main feature of the Christian religion. There are no impressive institutions to divert attention from the central fact. Christians become "people with churches, who worship God" rather than "people with hospitals who know medicine", or "people with schools who get good jobs". The health of the Christian movement requires that the normal pattern be well known, not merely to the non-Christian peoples, but to the leaders of church and mission and to the rank and file of members. The People Movement supplies the pattern which can be indefinitely reproduced. It is the pattern which has obtained throughout history, with minor variations.

Does the Method Replace the Message?

The historic message of the Christian Church has been: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." The Church has good news for the world. It is that sinners by repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ are saved by grace through faith. "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Do we then maintain that we should abandon the message and turn to the induction of People Movements as the way of salvation? Are we proposing a method, when what is needed is more faith and more surrender to God's will?

Let us be clear on this at once. The method we advocate does not and cannot ever replace the message. God has a plan of salvation. This He has made clear in His Word. Only as men, individuals or peoples, accept it can they gain everlasting life. Jesus Christ is the same,

yesterday, to-day and for ever. He is the revelation of God. There is no substitute for faith in Him.

Yet through all these twenty centuries the message has been presented in many ways. Some have been more successful than others in leading men to accept the Saviour. The way of group action is the one which has disciplined most of the world. Through this method the message will be understood better, by more people, in a shorter time than by any other. The message is the Lord. His chariot is the People Movement.

The Power of God unto Salvation

Failure to win souls for Christ is commonly the cause of much heart searching on the part of church and mission leaders. "If only we were more spirit-filled, more constant in prayer, more holy in life, souls would be won and our church would grow", they say. Their theology stresses hot sparks. The heat of the spark, the degree of dedication, and the completeness of one's own salvation—these are the essential matters in the thinking of many. Radiant faith in the indwelling Lord is certainly essential. But the truth not often seen or stressed is that Christianity, like electricity, flows best where there is good contact. The power of God acts best within a people. We have seen in Chapter III how the power of God won a very large segment of the Hebrew people for Christ in the first forty years of the Church—and hardly touched the other peoples in the midst of which the Hebrews were immersed! It flowed with great power where it had good contact. St. Paul was a Spirit-filled man, a man of prayer, rich toward God, yet he made it his practice to go to those groups who had already been prepared by the decisions of their blood relations. This same phenomenon can often be observed down through the centuries. Christianity has flowed most powerfully when it has flowed within

peoples. Electricity will flow through miles of copper wire, without jumping an inch to another nearby wire with which it is not in actual contact.

The president of a Christian college in a mission field once remarked to me that it was curious that those brought for baptism into the churches of the city where the college was, were often brought by the least reputable of the members of the churches. Investigation indicated that these people were the only Christians in living contact with their non-Christian relatives. The Christians in that city had come from the underprivileged strata of society. Rich service in a mission which stressed education had lifted most of the abler members of the church to a degree of culture and moral insight which put them out of touch with their relatives. Some of them actually disclaimed their relatives in an effort to improve their own social standing. The weakest members of the church were the only ones who had any real contact. It was through these contacts that sinners were being brought to Christ. There are many other illustrations of the fact that cold sparks with good contacts have, as a matter of historical fact, produced more growth than hot sparks with poor contacts.

Individual Salvation

Can salvation arise through a group decision? This is a most important question. Let us imagine a case in which, through a group movement, in some one year 500 have come to Christ. The leaders of the 500 have some real faith in Christ, some appreciation of His meaning for mankind, otherwise they would not lead their fellows out of "Egypt". But among the 500 there are probably scores whose becoming Christians means perhaps little more than being willing to go along with their friends. Does mere membership then in this

Christian group, without any more individual acceptance of Christ than is implied in a willingness to follow the group into Christianity, confer salvation?

This difficulty in the fundamental theology of group movement churches will loom particularly large to those churches which practise believers' baptism, and which broke with the older branches of Protestantism over questions similar to this. Those who practise believers' baptism maintain that merely being born into a Christian church and baptized into it in infancy does not in any way confer salvation. They feel that neither the baptism of infants who cannot believe, nor the baptism of ignorant members of a group, has in it the stuff out of which redemption is made.

But the difficulty also exists for those who practise the baptism of infants. "It is one thing", they will say, "to baptize an infant who is a member of a Christian family and is exposed to the redemptive influence of life in that family and in the church; and it is an entirely different thing to baptize groups of persons out of heathenism who cannot have the faintest idea what it is all about."

This is to paint the difficulty in darker colours than the facts warrant. Most groups being baptized have received a great deal of instruction before baptism. Very few come to the place of baptism without hearing the Word of God many times. If 500 were baptized in any one year, it would mean only forty persons a month. A great deal of instruction can be given to each one of forty persons in that time. In addition to this instruction there is always a great awareness of the Christian faith arising out of a multitude of experiences over the decades before baptism. In most group movements there is the vital inner experience of having observed other close relatives in the Christian faith, of having watched them baptized and having heard their

no contact—
no impact!

pastor expound the Scriptures. So that there is considerable unformulated knowledge of Christ in the minds of even the least active of the group.

Needless to say there is every reason for using the one-by-one method, pressing the claims of Christ and the meaning of discipleship on each individual within the group. The more personal decision there is among the members of a group the more it will please God and the more blessing it will bring to itself. There is still more to be said in defence of a genuine inner experience for group movement converts. In the third chapter of St. John it is recorded that: "This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light." By "light" the writer clearly means the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Every man is judged if he prefers darkness to light. The light may be a faint glimmer or the noonday sun, but whatever the degree of brightness, he is judged by whether he follows it. The members of a pagan people when that people first turns to Christ, may all reach individual convictions that salvation is through Christ. In some, although the degree of conviction may be small, it is there. But it is to be borne in mind that the capacity of most individuals in many societies for individual decision is small. Most decisions are shared decisions. A wife is not taken or an ox bought without consultation with others. For the group mind to be formed, many individuals must express agreement. So that we may truly say that *when a group comes to Christ, every member has had a share in the final decision*. Only those who have loved the light (even in a small degree) have participated in the group decision. This truth is made clearer by the realization that in most groups there is (as was the case with the Jews in the first century) a section that do not become Christian. Since each individual is free to move or to stay back, "coming with

others" indicates a degree of "following the light".

We believe, then, that in the initial discipling of a people participation in a group decision is a sufficient following of the light to confer salvation on each person participating in the decision. It is *not* "membership in the group" but "participation in following Christ" which is the vital factor.

Should We Be So Concerned with Mere Numbers?

Some people question any emphasis on numbers. They say: "Obviously the discipling of peoples is concerned with mere numbers. Those who are attracted by such a process fail to realize that even where a numerous church is not built up, precious souls are being saved. One soul is worth all our effort."

There are several answers to this objection. The first is that no numbers of redeemed persons are ever "mere numbers". Numbers of persons brought into living worshipping contact with the Way, the Truth and the Life are never mere digits. They are always persons beloved persons, persons for whom Christ died. They are our own brothers and sisters. As such the more who come to Christian faith the better. We consider any disparagement of "numbers" of converts ridiculous, and do not believe that on second thought many would advance the objection.

Then, again, evidence shows that qualitative advance is best made with socially whole men and women. People Movements toward Christ produce good Christians, better in many instances than the only other method being used. They are better, because Christianity means to them a way of life with Christ rather than a way of life with a rich foreign mission. They are better because they are less dependent on outside resources. They are better because they are more rooted in the soil, and more likely to continue living there. They are

better because, when well led, they worship God more regularly and give to God more of their substance. They are not as cultured in the Western manner as mission station Christians. They may not make as good an impression at first glance. But they are good Christians. We maintain that the discipling of *peoples* brings about more sound qualitative advance as well as much greater growth in numbers than the Mission Station Approach.

People Movements in nominally Christian Lands

Are People Movements the normal pattern of church growth in nominally Christian lands? Roman Catholics are carrying on a great missionary campaign in North America. Protestants are carrying out great missionary campaigns in Latin America. When Russian tyranny is softened or overthrown and freedom of conscience becomes a reality in the U.S.S.R., Orthodox, Protestants and Romans will seek to re-win to Christian allegiance those secularized by the totalitarian State. Can we say that People Movements are a normal pattern of such missionary labours in North America, Latin America, Asia and Russia?

In an individualized society, such as that of cosmopolitan and urban North America, the conversion of individuals is the principal form of church growth. But in large sections of Latin America, Russia and Asia, society still exists in a non-individualistic form. Wherever this is so, particularly where there are laws or customs which prohibit or prevent free intermarriage between Christians of the missionary church and the population being evangelized, *the missionary church must somehow or other start a People Movement, or it will be walled off and confined to an ineffective and expensive conversion of individuals here and there.* This is true because the gathered churches are "beach-heads" into the habitat of the

human spirit, while the People Movement churches are "break-throughs" which open up race and nation to the beneficent liberating influences of the Good News.

