



Concern for the world

The church/mission grid depicts concern for the church on the vertical axis and concern for the world on the horizontal with increasing degrees of interest. Numbers in parentheses correspond to the major styles of relationships. The 1,1 pattern, devoid of interest in world evangelism or the church, is an IMPOVERISHED, APATHETIC approach. The 1,9, emphasizing solely ecclesiology, is caught in the "Church Planting Syndrome." The opposite extreme, 9,1, with a high concern for the world but no concern for the church, is the "Evangelistic Syndrome." The balanced approach, of course, is represented by the 9,9 PARTNERSHIP position, equally committed to the church and world evangelism.

Hopefully, under God, *partnership* of church and mission can become the style of our relationships. It will go a long way to remove the unbiblical pattern of a "churchless mission" or a "missionless church."

INTER-MISSION RELATIONSHIPS

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"'Master,' said John, 'we saw a man casting out devils in your name, but as he is not one of us we tried to stop him.' Jesus said to him, 'Do not stop him, for he who is not against you is on your side'" (Luke 9:49-50).

"Some of course, are preaching the Good News because they are jealous of the way God has used me. They want reputations as fearless preachers! But others have purer motives, preaching because they love me, for they know that the Lord has brought me here to use me to defend the truth. And some preach to make me jealous, thinking that their success will add to my sorrows here in jail. But whatever their motive for doing it, the fact remains that the Good News about Christ is being preached and I am glad" (Phil. 1:15-18).

"Let God's curses fall on anyone, including myself, who preaches any other way to be saved than the one we told you about; yes, if an angel comes from heaven and preaches any other message, let him be forever cursed" (Gal. 1:8).

1. The biblical ground for inter-mission relationships

I hope the above Scriptures sufficiently lay the groundwork for our treatment of this vital subject. Two of the Gospels, Mark and Luke, record the incident in which our Lord strongly rebuked sectarianism. The context was the same in both records. Jesus was in Capernaum and while on his way to a house, the disciples had engaged in some private discussion among themselves. The topic was of great interest to all of them, for it majored on position, influence, and authority. "Who should be the greatest?" This seems to be the one thing that bugs most religious circles today. The plague is still with us. Everyone wants to be a leader. So it was with the disciples. Jesus had been talking about his forthcoming death in Jerusalem. "The son of man shall be delivered unto the hands of men." But this sublime truth they did not understand. I doubt if they even tried to understand it. There was something else that engaged their thoughts and which they understood perfectly. Jesus was speaking about a new order. They all wanted to be part of the new order — whatever it meant. More important to them, the new order must have some leadership — and each one wanted to be that leader. This resulted in a dispute among them. Is it not true today that the "leadership plague" is crucial to the barrier to relationships which ought to exist among Christians?

Our Lord's answer was simple. He allowed them all to have their little talks. Then on getting into the house, he asked them for a confession:

"What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?" Of course, they were too ashamed to say. They held their peace. He then called for a child whom he set before them as an object lesson in the humility they lacked and so desperately needed. "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name receiveth me." The message did not really sink in, for John asked his question about the one who cast out devils. Were they wrong in forbidding him to do so? You were wrong, said Jesus in effect, "Although he is not part of our group, his mission being essentially similar to ours, he is ipso facto one of us."

Jesus dealt with the *task*. Paul in his letter to the Philippians deals with the *motive*. Paul says he knows of some who preach Christ out of an insincere motive. They are jealous of Paul's success. And how true this is today! We hear of one group doing particularly well in an area of Christian service — and we perhaps rush there from ill motives. Paul says they want reputation as fearless preachers—that is, they must have said or done things deliberately to hurt or cause offence. Paul adds that they wrongly think that they can excite similar feelings within him by making him jealous of their success. I am not entering into judgment of people's motives, says Paul, neither am I taking a stand against them because they may or may not be sincere in their motives. Rather, and contrary to all their expectations, I rejoice, in that whatever their motive for doing it, the fact remains that the Good News about Christ is being preached and I am glad.

If these were all the revelations concerning this matter, the Lord's people would be put into much confusion of thought. But writing to the Galatians, Paul pours out hot imprecations on some preachers of the "Gospel." At first sight this might appear contradictory to the above. Here Paul does not rejoice, he curses. Why? Is it because they do not belong to the Pauline party? What does he mean by "preaching any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you"? Is this not being unduly narrow and dogmatic?

Now some have used this Scripture as the basis of "no relationship" with any group that does not sign the dotted line on every tenet of faith embraced by their group. Frankly, I cannot endorse such a stand because it would give the stamp of "infallibility" and "exclusiveness" to some "form of words" which men have put together from the Holy Scriptures in the light of their own particular understanding of the Word. One thing we need to note here is that Paul is not talking about someone whom he regards as a "brother."

He is talking about some whom he categorically denounces on a ground which is relatively simple and clear. Let us note the difference — the individual in Philippi preaches Christ, albeit from a wrong motive. *The one in Galatians does not preach Christ.*

2. The right balance in inter-mission relationships

Here Paul strikes an important balance which we should note in considering "across-the-border" relationships with other Christians. Some ecumenists teach that all division is sin, even division between the Christian and the world. We cannot go along with such fallacy. Of course, we know that there is the world which is the object of God's love,

but there is also the world-system, opposed to God, masterminded by Satan, which is the object of God's wrath. To the former, we are to bring the proclamation of glad tidings of reconciliation; we are to announce the Messiah; we are to bring them to "kiss the Son whilst he is yet in the way." But with the latter, we are to "come out from among them and be separate" (II Cor. 6:17). We are to "love not" for "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

I think this question of maintaining a right balance in our relationships is very important, because if we don't get it right we are likely to cast away many of God's children or confuse others in such a way that they will recoil from any attempts at fostering meaningful relations between Christians. The question is, when should we say, "He that is not against us, is for us"? When do we *rejoice* in the act, regardless of the motive? And when do we *reject* relationship with the "brother" in spite of the act? I believe that the marks of false teachers are so numerous in Scripture that no mistake should be made in detecting them. To highlight some of the basic ones, *false teachers will deny*:

- a personal God
- the incarnation of God in human flesh
- the person of the Holy Spirit
- the virgin birth
- the sinless life of Jesus Christ
- the divine miracles performed by Jesus Christ
- his physical death, burial and bodily resurrection
- his ascension to the right hand of the Father
- his Headship of the Church
- his personal and imminent return for his saints

I do not speak as a theologian but as a churchman. But I am convinced that where there is a true and hearty desire for relationships based on the Word of God, his directives are so plain that "he may run that readeth." Even "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err" (Isa. 35:8).

3. The need for inter-mission relationships

From this sketchy treatment of the general framework for "relationships" I turn my mind specifically to "inter-mission relationships." I thank God for the numerous agencies it has pleased him to raise up over the years as light shining in dark places to reach the habitations of cruelty and publish glad tidings to the poor. As a churchman from the Third World, whose privilege it has been to serve the Body of Christ in Africa and elsewhere for more than two decades in various capacities, I think I may comment on the manner in which "the sending church" has been a blessing to "the receiving church" in the matter of missions.

a. *An antidote to Sectarianism* — These have indeed been numerous but this is not the place to recount them. Rather, what we are considering is the question of "inter-mission relationships." In their book *Nigeria under the Cross*, Michael Marioghae and John Ferguson, commenting specifically about the Church of Jesus Christ in Nigeria, said: "Europe has imposed its sectarianism upon Nigeria and Nigerians have very properly revolted against this." What is said of Nigeria here can be said of

Africa, Asia, and Latin America in varying degrees. Perhaps the word "revolt" is rather strong but when one considers the stance of the proponents of "authenticity" in Zaire, one really wonders if "revolt" is indeed inappropriate. Too often traditional jealousies and rivalries that have stood for centuries and bear no relevance to the heartbeat of the "evangel" are transported across the seas only to leave "the receiving church" bewildered. As chairman of the Nigeria Evangelical Fellowship and president of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), I have witnessed scenes where genuine efforts at fostering relationships on the "Foreign Mission field" are frustrated as a result of pressures from "Home Mission Boards" who happen to pitch in different camps at "home."

b. *An incentive to promotion of evangelical fellowship* — This is not always understood by nationals who sincerely wonder why there cannot be more meaningful relationships for Christ's sake and the Gospel's. We have now held three major evangelical conferences in Africa — 1966, 1969, and 1973. On each occasion, invitations went out to over forty countries in Africa to evangelical churches/missions both within and without structured evangelical groups. No fewer than an average of thirty African countries have been represented at our conferences. The Africans, talking to us feel they need to go back home and draw the line in favor of an evangelical fellowship. But what happens? As an example, we find that in one country, there are four or five evangelical denominations that are offshoots of various missions.

The field supervisors of two or three have directives from their home boards that they are not to have too much to do with works established by a certain mission. The field supervisor, therefore, applies all types of pressures to dissuade the Africans from going into a fellowship with the other groups. It is unnecessary for me to list country after country where we have known this to happen. My question is, on what ground does the home mission board take such a stand?

I hope I have said enough to indicate that I do not believe the Scriptures teach us to embrace all and sundry so long as they name the name of Christ. But the Scriptures definitely tell us when to reject a "brother." My submission is that the grounds on which most missions "reject" other missions' agencies do not always conform to what the Scriptures lay down. With false teachers we should not and cannot compromise. But what do we say about divisions based on differences of revelation on things like:

- infant baptism versus adult baptism?
- mode of baptism, immersion or sprinkling?
- charismatic operation of the Holy Spirit?
- ministerial dress?
- antepost millennialism?

Are these related to that for which Paul said we should "curse" anyone who teaches or embraces that which is contrary to what we hold? I do not wish to throw stones but we would have had only a grand picnic at great cost and much grief to our Lord if we do not take this opportunity to search our conscience in this matter of inter-mission relationships.

A missionary is necessarily a leader. Thus it matters very much which way he leads. It is not therefore surprising to find that there are

only about fifteen countries in Africa with evangelical fellowships. Of these, there are at least three known countries that are reluctant to relate to a continent-wide association of evangelicals as a result of missionary action. If ecumenists go too far left, does that make evangelicals correct for going too far right? What is more, to what extent is it right to transport attitudes and prejudices which are probably relevant in one land, within the context of a particular historical setting, into another land which bears little or no sympathy to the case in point? If "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" is that why the Jewish missionary society and the Samaritan missionary society should foster similar divisions and near hostilities among converts in Hongkong, Bangui, Basutoland, and Nepal? Is there no "common ground" in the "everlasting Gospel"? I am not asking that this conference try to undo centuries of history. Rather, what I plead for is a realignment of thoughts and attitudes towards one another right from the base — which in this case is at the missionary society/association level. We thank God for what is already being done in this direction, but I am sure a lot more can be achieved.

c. *More effective utilization of resources* — The Lord's people have not always been the richest on earth, but the material resources which it has pleased the Lord to bestow on his Church could surely be better utilized with greater coordination among missions and missions' agencies. There are projects like graduate schools of theology, trans-national communication of the Gospel, research, and several other projects that are better handled on a joint basis than for everyone going his own little way. Much dissipation of energy, unnecessary duplication of effort and scarce resources can be avoided in the field of literature, if this line of thought and action is vigorously pursued. What about a joint onslaught on an unevangelized area? Why concentrate missionary endeavor in one particular area? We must of necessity solidify our frontal attack somehow, somewhere, if the unreached two billion of the world are to be effectively evangelized.

d. *Government representation* — Furthermore, the image of missions before the world and government functionaries is always better enhanced with a greater representation of cohesion among missions and missions' agencies.

e. *The maintenance of a proper evangelical identity* — I have little doubt that some of the thoughts outlined above were part of the motivation for the First All Africa Church Conference held at Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1958. Unfortunately, many who have watched that movement since then cannot but be struck by its rapidly changing face. If today many evangelicals in Africa do not properly consider themselves as belonging within the movement, let it be said for the sake of history that that which repels them today has not always been there. To illustrate the point, we recall that the Second All Africa Church Conference was preceded by an All Africa Christian Youth Assembly at Nairobi. The theme of the assembly was "Freedom under the Cross." By the time that conference was over, these "young Christians" were declaring that they had come "to see that political action is not enough." A report of the conference recorded this conclusion: "If we are to understand the relationship between freedom and authority, or the meaning of our lives here on earth, we do

not begin with the idea of freedom as a philosophical concept. We begin with the Cross as a historical reality, and with Jesus, whose life, death and resurrection have given meaning and content to the idea of freedom. . . . It is important that we keep this order straight, for to reverse the order and begin with the idea of freedom and only ultimately refer the idea back to the Cross might produce a wonderful religious ideal, but it is to miss the astonishing truth that there is no true freedom except under the Cross." That was in 1963. But the situation today is vastly different. Bangkok 1973, with its concept of "Salvation Today" shocks the conscience of millions of evangelicals.

Where do we turn? These trends surely greatly emphasize the need for intensive and cohesive cooperation among missions and missions' agencies the world over. I would like to stress the need today for a world missions body arising from this Congress. There appears to be an urgent need today, in the light of the objectives of ICOWE, to consider the formation of an international association of evangelical missionary agencies.

What is the biblical basis for missions? I was invited to Western Germany in January, 1974, to participate in a series of meetings preparatory to the synod of churches. Some of the burning questions raised included: What is the role of missions today? What causes should missionary funds support? What do the "unevangelized" of the world need — reconciliation with God or economic emancipation? What is the place of Black Theology in missions? Is the "lostness of man" as crucial in missions today as it was in the days of Hudson Taylor? Someone must speak to these issues. If truth is not diffused, error will be. We cannot afford to deal with these matters in isolation or we shall be swamped under the avalanche that is swiftly sweeping under our feet. Many of these problems are common to all of us. That was my pleasant surprise in Germany. I spoke from my heart the same truths that it had been my privilege to share in the backwoods, cities, colleges, seminaries, and institutions of Africa, Asia, and the United States. I found that the same questions were being asked. The same answers met the need, perhaps in a different way. This is why I am more than convinced of the place for a platform to plan together a common strategy to deal with common problems relating to missions.

If I may summarize, the call for the type of association suggested above is based upon the performance of very useful tasks, some of which are: To present an evangelical identity and present it to the Christian public and to government; to affirm the biblical basis of missions; to exchange information and promote research; to coordinate the use of resources (personnel, finance, training etc.); to plan together common strategy to deal with common problems.

Furthermore our experience in Africa has highlighted the need for close liaison between churches and missions. I would suggest the encouragement of associations of missions' associations and individual missions with national evangelical fellowships or alliances of churches. I hope from what has been said that we clearly have in mind what relationships to "rejoice" in and what to "reject." My plea is that this "rejoicing" should be in a concrete, organic form to give meaning and content to the

relationships. If we are to complete the task of world evangelization by the turn of this century, if this Congress is given to finding, under God, how this supreme task is to be speedily accomplished, then I hope that evangelical missionary agencies, missions' associations, national evangelical fellowships, and all areas of churches seek the mind of the Lord for one common worldwide platform whereby this desire of the Lord can prosper in our hands.