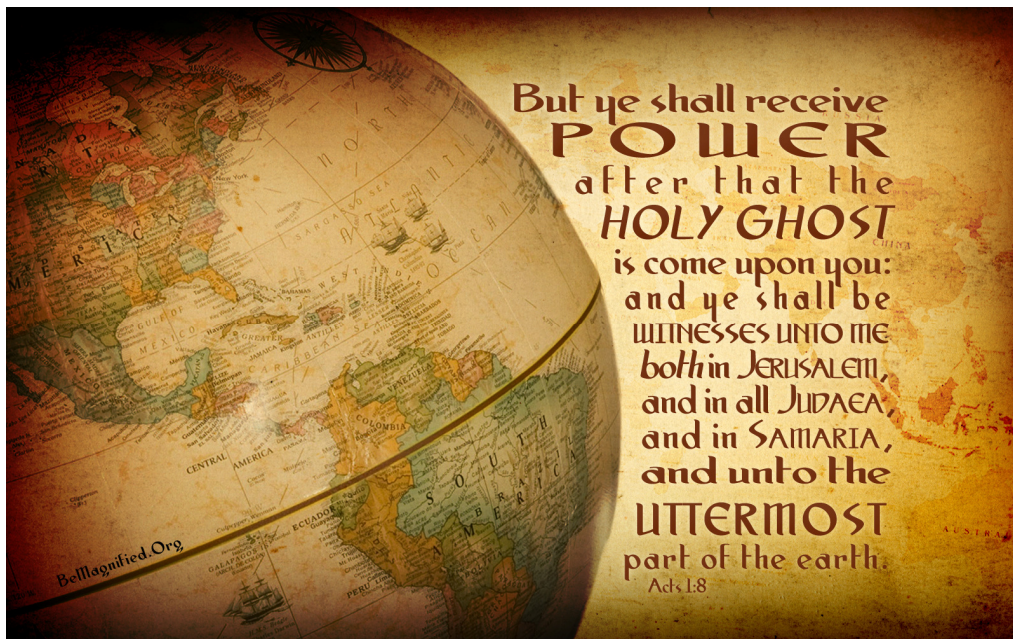


# WORLD MISSIONS HISTORY



## HISTORY OF MISSIONS

- PENECOST TO 1800
- 1800 – WORLD WAR II

# EVANGELICAL TEACHER TRAINING ASSOCIATION WORLD MISSIONS HISTORY

## Christian Missions Defined.

What is meant by Christian Missions? The following definition is simple and clear:

*"Christian Missions" is the proclamation of the Gospel to the unconverted everywhere according to the command of Christ.*

"Missions" comes from the Latin word 'mitto' – "I send". A missionary is therefore a "sent one". The missionary does not go or speak of his own initiative, but as a commissioned agent of the **One** who sent him.

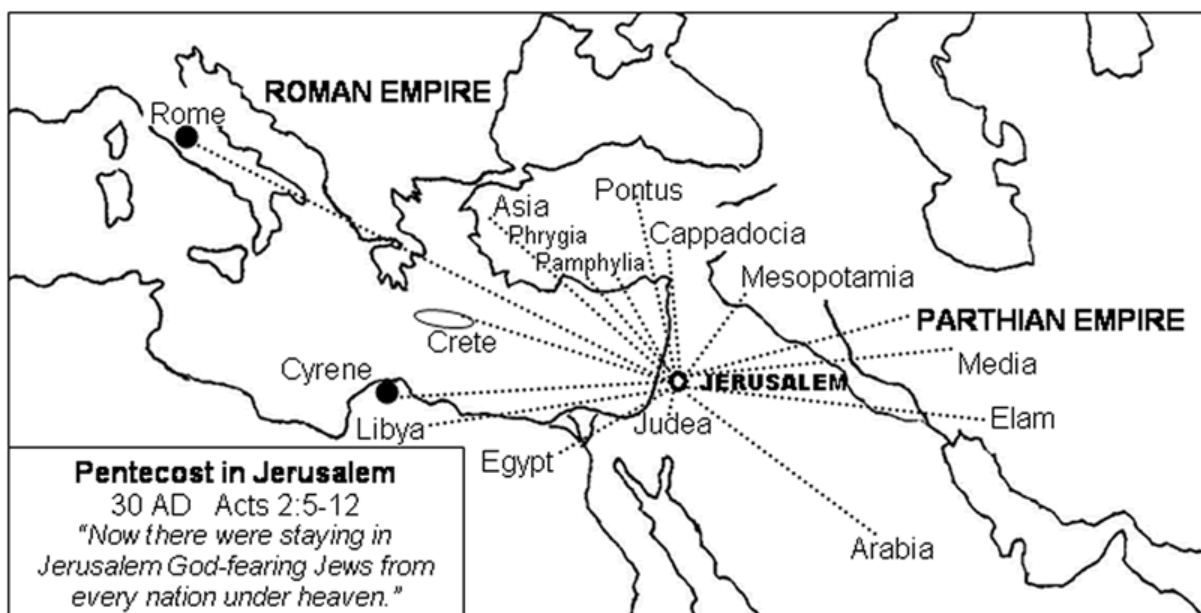
In its historical development, Missions has passed through a number of stages. The gospel message spread far as Christians believed the resurrection message and lived the resurrection life. For three centuries following Pentecost the light of the gospel burned brightly but with the legalization of the Church under Constantine, and the growing political concerns, the light began to dim.

## History of Missions: Pentecost to 1800

Christian Missions, in the strict sense of the term, began with the return of the disciples to Jerusalem from the Mount of Ascension.

### Apostolic Missionary Progress

The countries mentioned in Acts, as represented by the company assembled in Jerusalem on the occasion of the first Pentecost after Christ's ascension, indicate something of the extensivity of gospel witness-bearing even early in this period. We read of "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the part of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes (convert/new believer), Cretes and Arabians" (Acts 2:9-11)



Other passages attest to the extension of the field of missionary operations still further, for we read of Barnabas of Cyprus (Acts 4:36), Nicolas of Antioch (Acts 6:5), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27), and Ananias of Damascus (Acts 9:2, 10).

Then we have the record in Acts of the **missionary activities** of Peter in Judea and Philip in Samaria, and the much more extensive journeys of the Apostle Paul. These journeys are summed up by Paul himself (**Romans 15:19**) in one comprehensive statement – “from Jerusalem, and round about until Illyricum”, which makes them cover Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia and the territory on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea. Subsequently his missionary endeavours extended to Italy, and possibly Paul may have lived to see the fulfillment of his desire to visit Spain, and the western confines of Europe (Romans 15:24),







So wonderfully effective was the progress of missions that before the death of the Apostles, churches had been planted in all influential centres of Asia Minor and Greece, as well as in Rome itself, and few areas of the Roman Empire had not at least heard of the new faith. "By the end of the first century, Christ had been preached from Babylon to Spain (3,000 miles), from Alexandria to Rome, by a Greek-speaking Church". It was, indeed, a *witnessing church*.

While the first century of Missions must ever stand in a class by itself, because of the personal life and ministry of our blessed Master and His immediate disciples, it may be said that the general lines and features of the work, during this earliest period, continued mostly unchanged throughout the two centuries that followed.

### **Early period: 30-300**

The period following the death of the apostles was not one of great leaders so much as of many leaders. First-generation Christians were mission-minded. The whole church was glowing with the spirit of witnessing. The missionary operations of the time were not that only a few apostles had an active share in the extension of the gospel, but that every Christian was a witness to Jesus Christ. A large number of "non-professional" evangelists moved around the Empire sharing the gospel.

The light of Missions was nearly extinguished during the Dark Ages when ceremonial religion took over. Even the re-discovery of the basic truths during the Reformation did not spark evangelism. Mighty as were the changes wrought, and far-reaching as were the influences put out by the Reformation, it is to be remembered that the movement was not missionary in its character. It was a battle against ecclesiastical abuses, moral corruption and real heathenism. The Reformers became so absorbed with the struggle for freedom from the Papacy, that the needs of the outside world were forgotten.

But in the seventeenth century when the Pietists began to apply biblical truths in their own lives, the flame was rekindled. The exciting days of exploration, revolution and revival of the eighteenth century illuminated the way to the century of missions that was to follow.

### **Extent of expansion**

By the year 250, the German scholar, Harnack estimated that there were about thirty thousand Christians in Rome. It is estimated that about 10% of the Roman Empire's fifty million people were Christians by 313. Of importance was that these Christians were not only ordinary people (traders, soldiers, and slaves), but also intellectuals, like Justin Martyr (c.100-165), who found in Christianity what philosophy, could not offer.

By the end of the third century the gospel had spread to all regions of the empire; Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt and North Africa, with the strongest areas being Rome and Lyons in southern France. The rural and village people, however, were largely untouched. In addition to the Roman Empire, the church had also infiltrated into the region of Mesopotamia.

### **Factors contributing to expansion**

- ♦ The defeat of the Near Eastern world by the Greeks, three hundred years before Christ's birth, made Greek the common language of the empire. This made it possible for believers to witness to unbelievers anywhere and churches could communicate with each other in a common language. Because Rome was in control of most of the world west of the Euphrates, this made trade and travel on the best road systems in the world possible without the obstacle of national boundaries.
- ♦ The Jews who were scattered around and living in almost every city of the empire taught about the God of the Old Testament and the standard of God's righteousness. Evangelistic emphasis was on a convincing personal witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, the need for conversion and a complete break with the former lifestyle. The commitment and zeal of believers had a great impact on the lives of others. With the disillusionment and the emptiness of philosophy and polytheism, the Gentiles were open to having their needs fulfilled by the gospel.
- ♦ Two centuries of heavy persecution also contributed to the growth of the church after the year 64. Men and women dying for their faith had to know what they believed and were convinced of its truth. Many people were brought to Christ as a result of the steadfast witness of these Christians and the threat of persecution made sure that the church remained purified.

- ♦ In contrast to the moral degradation of the way the Romans lived, these Christians reflected honesty and unselfishness in practical ways. This was a stark contrast to the decaying Roman society of the day and the example of the Christians attracted many who saw Jesus as their only hope.

### **Medieval period: 300-1500**

For the next twelve hundred years, the course of the church was determined by the events of the fourth century. By the opening of the fourth century, Christian Missions had so covered the then-known world, that when Constantine ascended the throne, he found Christianity, if not numerically, at least intellectually and morally, so potent a factor that it had to be considered and deferred to. It could not be ignored. Rome, at first inclined to regard the Christians as harmless fanatics, soon changed this attitude and despite the Christian's loyalty and exemplary conduct, treated them with suspicion and dislike. Prohibition of the faith and persecution of those who embraced it, set in and became progressively more severe.

Under Constantine's rule (274-337) the light of the church began to dim with the legalization and growing political concerns. The church became engrossed in theological controversies, to the sad loss of its spiritual life and hence also of its missionary vision. Purity of faith and simplicity of worship gradually were lost and spiritual declension set in. Missionary zeal and activity at once began to wane. The church leaders were compelled to divert their energies from propagating the gospel to defending their faith.

The church became more aware of political importance and dishonestly and the vices of the flesh became a way of life. The ignorance of scriptural truth became more common. There was no longer a deep commitment to reach the lost and the Christian life became merely a ceremony. Church leaders were more concerned with political and financial advancement and the laity became more and more perfunctory in their worship.

The missionary work of the several centuries which followed, however, stood out in contrast to that of the early Church which was characterised by the effort of a few individuals and not of the Church as a whole.

Among the prominent missionaries of this period was Ulfilas (311-388). In 341 he reached out to the Goths. Patrick was the first great missionary to Ireland (432) and other individuals reached out to the pagan tribes who had taken over Western Europe.

From the year 500, the church entered a period of conflict with two foes – barbarians, who were eventually “Christianized” and faithful followers of Islam out to convert the world. There arose in the East a new religion, destined to have a vital bearing upon world evangelism as one of its most powerful antagonists. From the beginnings of Islam in Arabia (622) the church concerned itself with survival against the new threat. Muslims conquered North Africa and extinguished the church there. Jerusalem fell in 638 and Constantinople in 1453. Only the Battle of Tours (Spain) in 732 and the Battle of Vienna in 1529 prevented the conquest of all Europe by Islam. The need of a military defense of Christendom, together with the political emphasis of the church, all but paralyzed missionary activity.

### **Reformation period: 1500-1800**

The Protestant Reformation was the most important and hopeful period in fifteen hundred years for the church and missions. The authority of the Bible was rediscovered and the way of salvation swiftly brought on a whole new era. This period also saw the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church challenged.

### **Delay in missionary development**

Although this should have been an exciting time, sadly these newfound truths did not have an effect on missions for at least 200 years. The new understanding of salvation through faith

alone; the translation and printing of Scriptures for personal study, and the excitement of Reformation churches for new freedom, lost their potential impact in ecclesiastical wranglings. Although the Protestant church showed no evangelistic zeal, from 1500 – 1700 the Roman Catholic Church won more converts from paganism than it lost to Protestantism.

J. Herbert Kane in his book, *Understanding Christian Missions*, lists several factors for this:

1. The Reformers taught that the Great Commission only applied to the original apostles who fulfilled it in their day. If later generations were without the gospel, it was their fault and the church should not intervene.
2. While the Roman Catholic Church was launching a successful counter-reformation, the Lutheran and Reformation churches were fighting among themselves. Thirty years of War left Germany in economic and social chaos with the church totally uninvolved in evangelism and missions.
3. Protestant Europe was isolated from Asia, Africa and the New World. The Roman Catholic countries of Spain and Portugal were the great exploration and colonization powers of the day. The largely Protestant British and Dutch peoples did not enter the international scene until a century after the Reformation.
4. Protestant churches had no religious orders committed totally to a cause, whereas the Catholic faith was spread effectively by such groups as the Franciscans and the Dominicans.

### **The beginning of missionary development**

1. Modern missions started with the **Pietists** in central Europe.

As the Protestant Reformation had reacted against the Roman Catholic corruption of doctrine and morals, so the Pietists reacted against the barren orthodoxy and formalism of the Reformation churches.

Lutheran pastor Philip Spener (1635-1705) led the Pietist movement. He emphasized the need of the following:

- ♦ A personal conversion experience
- ♦ Bible study
- ♦ Prayer
- ♦ Spirit-filled living
- ♦ Missionary zeal

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries most of the Pietist activity was centred around Halle, Germany. The first missionary was sent out in 1705 from the Danish-Halle Mission to the East Indies.

2. The next thrust came from the **Moravian church**



**Count Zinzendorf** gave refuge to those fleeing from Roman Catholic persecution in 1722. A Moravian colony that was established on his estate became a centre for world missions. In 1732 missionaries were sent to the Virgin Islands and Greenland. Following this, other missionaries were later sent out to Surinam (Dutch Guiana), West and South Africa, Jamaica and the Indians of North America. In less than a generation, 226 Moravians entered into 10 countries with the gospel.

3. **A marked revival of prayer** – Scotsman, **Robert Millar**, affirmed that what was needed to reform the pagan world, was prayer. In 1744, as a result of a refreshing revival, a call was issued widely for a sustained concert of prayer “that God’s kingdom may come”. It met with a hearty response from Jonathan Edwards and other Christians in America became involved in a seven-year “Concept of prayer” for the spread of the gospel throughout the world. The Pietist movement together with the evangelical awakening in

America and England, helped prepare the church for a new worldwide concern and thus laid the foundations for the modern missionary enterprise.

4. **William Carey** was justly called the "Father of Modern Missions". His book "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen" (written in 1792), was a landmark in missions history. The book advocated that there needed to be an initiative to reach the lost. This was a revolutionary concept that many would not accept. Even William Carey's own Baptist church told him that "God would convert the heathens when it pleased Him, and that God would do it without the help of Carey or the church". Not daunted by their reactions, Carey with his family and two associates, set sail in 1793 for India, where he served for forty years. William Carey's work and influence was instrumental in setting up many new mission agencies. Some of these included the London Missionary Society (1795), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1810) and the American Bible Society (1816).



Students, who had been inspired by William Carey, were used by God to inspire an interest in missions in the United States. Likewise God used William Carey to ignite that same fire and interest in Europe. A farmer by the name of Samuel J. Mills left his farm, sensing a call from God, and in 1806, enrolled in college to prepare for seminary. In turn, Mill's life touched the lives five other young men who became known as the Society of the Brethren. Seeking refuge from a storm during a prayer meeting, they took cover in a haystack and while in it, they began to pray for the people of the world and resolved to become America's first missionaries. **The "Haystack Prayer Meeting"** as it is now known, was the beginning of the American overseas Missions involvement.

- ♦ **Adoniram Judson**, who was responsible for forming the Society of Inquiry on the Subject of Missions, joined the Haystack Group. Together with a group of likeminded men, Judson showed a deep concern for missions worldwide. As a result of this, in 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was established and, two years later, Judson and several colleagues were ordained to take the Gospel to India.



### **Summary**

Christianity was destined to spread. Everywhere "new creations in Christ Jesus" were being made. This supernatural reality resisted the pressure of persecution from without and doctrinal division from within. At times, hostile winds had all but extinguished the flame, yet the light burned brighter and shone further as the centuries passed.

With the exploration of new worlds, the gospel had to bridge more diverse and difficult cultural gaps to meet spiritual needs. As with pioneers like Peter, Thomas, Barnabas and Paul, those who gave themselves to missions could best rejoice in what God was doing.

Believers in each generation have been responsible for communicating the gospel to those living in their time. Some succeeded better than others, but the basic dynamics has always been the same - individuals empowered by the Holy Spirit bearing witness to Christ where He was unknown. Just as Peter and John had the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in Central Judea, so did men like Spener and Zinzendorf in central Europe. God also used the committed men of the Haystack prayer Meeting as He had used the praying believers at Antioch.



## History of Missions: 1800 – World War II

Worldwide evangelism had for seventeen centuries fulfilled the prediction of the Lord Jesus Christ and this period demonstrated that the power that was evident at Pentecost had continued. However, this was only the beginning. The spread of the gospel and the growth on the church in the 1800s far surpassed everything which went before.

### The nineteenth century

The nineteenth century was termed **“The Great Century” for missions**. It was so called by the Historian Kenneth Latourette. This was due to the impact of the French Revolution on Europe at the end of the eighteenth century and the “great Century” reached its climax at the Edinburgh Missions Conference in 1910. It was during this period that Protestant missions expanded at the highest rate since Pentecost. There were several international and technological factors that, together, made this possible.

### Factors contributing to missions development:

- ♦ At the end of the **French Revolution** and the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, the way for Protestant Britain to explore and colonize freely was opened. As religious wars were ending in Europe, this period of relative world peace was conducive to world colonization. Nationalistic concerns and the resulting international rivalries also increased pressure for an outward look.
- ♦ The development of **the steam engine** and **steamship** opened up the world for missions more than anything else had done. With literally hundreds of inventions using the mechanical power of the steam engine, a new demand for raw materials was created. Finding resources and additional markets for all the products that were produced meant that the British, Dutch and French embarked on intensive exploration and colonization.
- ♦ Large sections of Africa were opened to the gospel because of Britain's stand against slave trade and also as a result of **David Livingstone** and Rhodes' explorations. Livingstone's publication of his *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* in 1857 motivated further investigation and missionary infiltration of the African continent. Holland also established large colonies in Africa. But the progress of the gospel was not limited to Africa alone. India, a country that had long been resistant to missions, opened up when they came under British rule. Treaties signed by 1858 also permitted European nations to enter into China.
- ♦ While the beliefs and influences of the European nations spread, there was a **decline of Islam** after it had dominated the lands around the Mediterranean for a thousand years. The spread of Islam was reversed by the advance of France into North Africa and by the independence movements in Greece and the Balkan countries.
- ♦ In contrast, the **vision for expansion**, which had motivated government and commercial interests, was caught by Christian organisations. Missionaries attempted to move into areas explored by their fellow countrymen and establish churches.
- ♦ Englishman **John Wesley** and followers of the Methodist movement sparked a **spiritual revival** in New England. While not all Protestant churches became involved in missions, new agencies gained momentum.



- ♦ By the middle of the nineteenth century, the **second evangelical awakening** in the United States began. There was a great burden to pray for missions, both individually and corporately, by laymen. This resulted in a growing sense of responsibility for evangelism and missions. This revival spread to North Ireland and increased the number of missionary volunteers from both sides of the Atlantic.

## **Survey of the major developments**

The opportunity to share the gospel was opened up as political horizons expanded and a new interaction developed between countries. These will be evaluated individually:

### **Far East (China, Japan, Korea)**

In 1853 Hudson Taylor arrived in China from Britain. He was the most instrumental person in reaching the largest of all ethnic groups with the gospel. Despite many disappointments and serious ill health, Hudson Taylor established a *faith mission* that was supported solely and directly by prayer and faith. This kind of approach was new. "Praying! And answers to prayer!" that was the passion of his life. He learned to move men through God, by prayer. Hudson Taylor believed that to evangelise the people you needed to identify with them. He encouraged the local people to develop their own church and Christian education leaders. Growth was swift and within thirty years, missionaries from around the world were evangelizing in every province.



In 1900 a group of Chinese staged a violent uprising against foreigners and Chinese Christians. This was known as the Boxer Rebellion and about 135 Protestant missionaries were killed. However, this interruption did not diminish the missions thrust. By 1910, the Protestant missionary force totalled more than fifty-five hundred. But many young Chinese Christians, being more concerned with patriotic expressions of Christianity than evangelism, hindered the spread of the gospel.

In Korea, a Buddhist country, the turning point for missions was reached by a visit from Dr. John Nevius. He introduced the "Nevius Method" which included major features as:

- ♦ a self-supporting witness
- ♦ a church organisation limited to support by the Korean church
- ♦ full-time leaders appointed and supported by the church
- ♦ church buildings constructed with local funds

Believers were equipped to witness by providing Bible study and by giving intensive training on an annual basis. During the period 1894 –1910, Presbyterian and Methodist churches grew to over thirty thousand members with adherents totaling many thousands more. Church growth then slowed because of the Japanese invasion of 1910, which ended the Korean Empire and brought persecution to Christians.

Although American missionaries entered Japan in 1859, Christianity was prohibited until 1873. Early growth was slow because Christianity was considered to be an intellectual position rather than a heart position. However growth finally came when the number of missionaries rose substantially between 1882 and 1888. Church membership also grew during that time from five thousand to over twenty-five thousand. While the number of Christians in Japan has always been few, the influence of these Christians was proportionally greater than their numbers.

### **Southeast Asia**

When the United States drove Spain out of the Philippines in 1898, a new field was opened for Protestant missions. It was a time when missionaries were welcomed because the young people were discontent with the Roman Catholic Church and they sought Western education.

From 1902-1911, the Christian and Missionary Alliance went into Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. In Thailand missionaries were welcomed but the people resisted the idea of conversion and this made evangelism difficult.

The gospel had its biggest impact in Indonesia. The work of the Dutch saw more Muslim converts than ever before. In the mountain areas, the Bataks, who had been untouched by Islam, began turning to Christ in great numbers after strong initial resistance. Church membership grew from 7,500 in 1881 to 103,500 in 1911.

### **South Pacific**



that area.

John Paton was a pioneer missionary to New Hebrides Islands in 1858. In 1870 the first missionaries arrived in New Guinea (now Irian Jaya). This island, the second largest island in the world, is lined with almost impassable mountain ranges. As a result, evangelism was slow and difficult. There were 500 separate language groups living on the island. John Patterson was martyred on the Island of Nukapu and this caused a new wave of support for missions in

### **India**

Although Carey and Judson had already begun work in India, it was not until Britain took control in 1858 that the door really opened to evangelism. While the Muslims and Hindus appreciated the educational and medical benefits provided by the missionaries, they felt threatened by the change of lifestyle that Christianity required. Despite this, the Protestant community multiplied itself ten times in the period 1851-1901.

### **Middle East**



Samuel Zwemer, who served in Arabia for sixty years (1891-1951) undoubtedly, had the greatest impact on the area. A new encounter between Christianity and Islam arose because Christians were increasingly trying to understand the nature and origin of the Muslim teachings.

### **Africa**

The people north of the Sahara Desert had been Muslims since the seventh century. In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese explorers were first to enter, followed by the Roman Catholic missionaries, but it was not until 1800 that Protestant missionaries reached sub-Saharan black Africa. The British Baptists first reached Sierra Leone in 1795. Then in the year that Britain abolished slavery (1833), American missionaries started working in Liberia. Other missionaries soon entered Ghana and Nigeria.



The next thrust came as David Livingstone and Robert Moffatt opened up south-central Africa. Responding to Livingstone's challenge, students moved into central Africa in 1857. Kenya was reached by the British in 1884 and then other groups from the United States followed them into Zaire (Congo) in the last quarter of the century.



In addition to spiritual needs, Missionaries arrived and established bases to care for medical and educational needs. Colonial governments supported the Missionaries and provided them with aid and encouragement. Overall, the response to the gospel in Africa over the past 100 years was greater than on other continents. This encouraging result was because of the large number of Missionaries that had been sent out and also apart from Animism, there were no ingrained religions south of the Sahara.

## Latin America (Mexico, Central America, South America and some islands)

Protestant missions only entered Latin America by the middle of the nineteenth century and missions did not gain momentum until about 1870. Spain lost its hold on Latin America between 1810 and 1824 and each country became an independent republic, starting with Mexico. Because of the warning to European powers to stay away from the Western Hemisphere given by the Monroe Doctrine, most of the mission activity in that century came from the United States or Canada. Because the Roman Catholic Church had been established in Latin America for over 400 years, most of Christendom did not feel the need to go there. However, despite the fact that Latin America was not considered as a mission field, many theologically conservative American missionaries did go to Latin America.

## Later developments

Although the first mission sending agencies were interdenominational, as the missionary thrust developed, denominations began to extend their organisations overseas by establishing their own mission boards.

- ♦ In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Faith Mission appeared. The principal of the mission was that there be no direct solicitation of funds for their work. Workers were not guaranteed a fixed salary, but trusted the Lord to supply their needs through the voluntary offerings of His people in answer to prayer. Hudson Taylor established the first Faith Missions in 1865. This was the China Inland Mission (now Overseas Missionary Fellowship) and was established in Britain. New agencies also developed in the United States. These included the Christian and Missionary Alliance established in 1877, the Evangelical Alliance Missions in 1890, and the Sudan Interior Missions in 1893. Large components of the missionary activity today are Faith Missions. Churches without denominational affiliations are their primary sources of personnel and funds.
- ♦ Bible Societies have played a key role in the development of missions in the past 150 years. Because missions involves the communication of the Word of God, it is essential that Scripture needs to be copied into many different languages. The Bible Societies have been doing this with extraordinary effectiveness. The Pioneer societies were the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), the National Bible Society of Scotland (1809), the Netherlands Bible Society (1814) and the American Bible Society (1816).

Missionaries have done most of the Scripture translation work with the Bible Societies providing technical assistance and supervision. Scripture portions, published without notes or comments, were sold at subsidized prices by local missionaries and nationals.

Since the 1880's there have been an increasing number of *students volunteering for missionary service*. In 1886 one hundred university and seminary students signed the Princeton Pledge stating, "I purpose, God willing, to become a foreign missionary." In addition to this, hundreds of young people sought training for missionary service at the newly formed schools such as Nyack College (1882), Moody Bible Institute (1886) and Ontario Bible College (1894).

Despite William Carey's proposal in 1810 for a World Missionary Conference being scorned, a hundred years later his dream became a reality. At the 1910 Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh (Scotland), more than 1,350 delegates from 153 missions agencies from the around the world attended. It was here that the Chairman, John Mott, challenged students to complete the "evangelisation of the world in our generation".

## **The early twentieth century**

Due to a number of forces and events, missions moved into a different direction during the nineteenth century.

### **Forces affecting missions**

- ♦ Industrialization and colonization created an atmosphere of wellbeing and invincibility and the threat of war was unthinkable. The outlook for missions was optimistic taking into consideration the increasing number of missionary recruits, training institutions and Bible Conferences.
- ♦ World War 1 shattered this confidence as the colonized and newly "civilized" people of the world began to doubt the values of those countries that fought such a war. A new nationalism which resented foreign dominance and sought individual national identity increased the reaction against the West. The hope of throwing off the Western yoke of domination was quickened. Since missionaries had arrived at about the same time as the colonial administrator, their images were linked together. A realistic separation was needed between missions and politics. Missionary personnel had to adjust to this new era.
- ♦ It was assumed that biblical Christianity had no peer, but following the war the question of the uniqueness of Christianity was raised. Many theologians even began to accept other religions as equal to Christianity. This view was clearly evident at the second World Missionary Conference held in Jerusalem in 1928.

### **Events affecting missions**

- ♦ The *Russian Revolution* in 1917 set a new anti-Christian force in motion. In less than half a century this posed the biggest threat to Christianity since the conquest of Islam. Communism, whose aspiration and aims seemed reasonable at first, did in fact pose direct opposition to the gospel.
- ♦ *Economic chaos in America* in the 1930s caused a sharp decline in missions recruitment and funding. Despite this, churches sacrificially continued to support missionaries who went into the field. One missions board called for, and got, two hundred new recruits during this period.
- ♦ In 1932 the "*Layman's Foreign Mission Inquiry*" voiced doubts about the uniqueness of the gospel. Fifteen laymen representing seven American missions boards visited Asia and Africa. They collectively reported that the aim of Christian missions was to "see the best in other religions", to help the adherents of those religions to discover, or to rediscover, all the best in their own traditions, to cooperate with the most active and vigorous elements in the other traditions in social reform and in the purification of religious expression. The aim should not be conversion." This report was detrimental to those whose understanding of the biblical basis of missions was not clear. It fostered a secular, humanistic perspective which resulted in a decline of missionary involvement in many denominations.
- ♦ Describing the first half of the twentieth century, historian Stephen Neill stated, "The increasing dominance of the United States in the political affairs of the world is reflected in the vigor, generosity and vision of the American churches in the field of Christian missions." The number of Protestant missionaries in the world increased four times in this period to 43, 000 with two-thirds coming from the United States. Neill labeled this time "*the American century for Protestant missions.*"



While the missionary involvement of many historic denominations has remained fairly constant, other boards have shown considerable increase. As an example, one agency, which began at the turn of the twentieth century, has grown to include 1,300 missionaries.

- ♦ During the first third of the twentieth century, the *Bible College movement* produced a large number of missionaries and pastors for churches with non-denominational missionary support. Contrary to this, historic or state churches of western Europe drastically curtailed their missions involvement. The effect of World War 1 and the Hitler era all but eliminated the once strong German churches from the missionary scene. Secularism further eroded the degree of British and Dutch involvement.

An *ecumenical emphasis*, which developed in the missionary movement, blurred notably in the earlier cross-cultural evangelistic concern. The theological concessions needed for unity tended to weaken the idea of the uniqueness of the gospel in meeting man's spiritual needs.

### **Summary**

While the nineteenth century was primarily one of initiative and penetration by missions, the first half of the twentieth century was a period of consolidation. Most major areas of the world had, at least, been touched by the gospel. The emphasis then shifted to expanding these footholds through new churches and mission agencies working together.

The period between the world wars was also a time of recovery and preparation for new mission thrusts. Economic and political changes, as a result of the First World War, needed many adjustments, and few new mission boards were established. Instead, efforts were directed toward recovering from the trauma and upset of war. The tide of missions that had been rising before World War 1 was confined for a generation and then it resumed its upward direction after World War II.

