

## WRONG APPROACHES TO MISSIONS

### A. The general failure of missionary efforts.

- \* Liberal missions have tried to saturate pagan society with the Christian spirit without calling for personal conversion--failed disastrously. Fundamentalist missions have made many converts, but turned them into clones of themselves and made religion an artificial system of beliefs--disaster too--most of the time, missionary efforts turned out to be a morbid appetite for effecting conversions, founded upon an overweening self-confidence and self-love.
  - Genuine love having been taken out of mission, what was left was imperialism, colonialism in ecclesiastical garb
- \* Tale of a missionary in a dark corner of Africa where the men had the habit of filing their teeth to sharp points. He was trying to convert a native chief. Now the chief was very old, and the missionary was very Old Testament--his version of Christianity leaned heavily on Thou-shalt-not's. The savage listened patiently. "I do not understand," he said at last. "You tell me that I must not take my neighbor's wife?" "That's right," said the missionary. "Or his ivory or his oxen?" "Quite right." "And I must not dance the war dance and then ambush him on the trail and kill him?" "Absolutely right!" "But I cannot do any of these things anyway!" said the savage regretfully. "I am too old. To be old and to be Christian, they are the same thing!"
- \* One African minister, who had not only received the Gospel, but the western culture that went with it, was trying to tell his congregation what heaven was like. Grasping for the right image, he finally blurted out, "It will even be better than the way the missionaries live!"

### B. Human pride and triumphalism.

- \* Presumptuous of us to think that it is we who are taking God to the mission field rather than God taking us. The difference is critical.
- \* We whip up an artificial triumphalism by recounting our "successes" which we measure in the spirit of numerolatry-- very obnoxious and self-seeking.

### C. Abusing culture.

- \* 2 major blunders: failure to respect other cultures, and heavy-handedly imposing our own.
- \* We hold out a universal standard for sin--our own! OR We go to the other extreme, being so lenient toward culture that anything goes.
- \* Our culture is so different from that of biblical times that some critics (such as Bultmann) have dismissed much of the Bible as irrelevant, and others (such as Tillich) have rephrased the kerygma in such a way that it is no longer recognizable.

### D. Academic approaches and missionary techniques.

- \* Missions promoted from inside buildings, behind a desk, on the other side of lecterns, by means of textbooks is a travesty.
- \* Academic structures aim first of all at their own success--missions is only one means toward that success.
- \* Leaders are trained in public relations and in fund-raising, grantsmanship and donor management; God is given only lip-service.
- \* The more "professional" our approach, the more unconvincing our message.

### E. Hounding and rushing.

- \* People who are always seeking to impose their standards on others are like the woman in the Screwtape Letters: "She lived for others. You could tell the others by their hunted looks."
- \* God is not a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated Father hurrying about seeking help to carry His salvation to the world.