

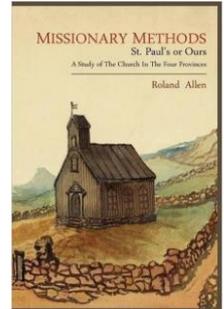
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Missionary Methods – St Paul's or Ours?

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Notes by Alison Morgan November 2005

Critique of the modern missionary movement; author himself said his writings would come into their own only in the 60s – which was the case. This now recognised as a missionary classic. Much is wisdom now with hindsight; but much also still a challenge, a reminder not to adopt the values of our culture in our methods.



Author's preface

The secret of the foundation of Paul's churches, which were indigenous in the proper sense of the word, lay in his recognition of the church as a local church (as opposed to our national churches) and in his profound belief and trust in the HS indwelling his converts and the churches of which they were members, which enabled him to establish them at once with full authority. vii

I : Antecedent Conditions

Introduction

Our assumption has been that converts in a new country must be submitted to long probation and training, extending over generations before they can stand alone. But this obviously isn't how it was when Paul planted churches – and surely the account in Acts of how he did it is meant to guide us? We don't do as he did because we've done it badly and it's gone wrong. It's not the method itself. And we don't do it because it doesn't fit in with the way we do things – we are used to feeling superior to natives, we are used to an elaborate system of church organisation, and to a peculiar code of morality, and we think it necessary to pass these things on. We need to ask some hard questions to convince ourselves we should do it Paul's way.

Strategic points

Did it work for him because of the nature/location of the places he preached in?

He didn't plan it all – cp being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go to Asia, then Bithynia, and then being directed to Macedonia; Ephesus was because he happened to be passing through and they listened, and he went to Athens because he was driven out of Macedonia. Little sign of design.

BUT – both he and Luke speak of provinces rather than cities; he went only to places under Roman administration; his practice in a province was to establish centres of Christian life in 2 or 3 places from which it would spread.

All the places he went to were centres of Roman administration, Greek civilisation, Jewish influence, or commercial importance. He went to the key places.

Class

Did it work because he appealed to a special class of people? It doesn't seem so. He began in the synagogue, but they didn't usually respond, and he publicly separated from them. But some key people did join him. Outside the synagogue there's no evidence he appealed to a particular class. Most of his converts were working class, labourers, freedmen and slaves – as it happened.

Moral and social conditions

Were they so unlike ours as to render comparison futile? Not really – they don't seem that much different from conditions in modern India or China. Common characteristics include belief in demons, lack of profundity in

religious rites. Difference is the effect of slavery and the amphitheatre on people – brutalising them. But this means they came from further away, it was surely harder to reach them, not the reverse.

II : The Presentation of the gospel

Miracles

Was his success due to miraculous powers?

He performed them in Iconium, Lystra, Philippi, Ephesus, Troas. From Antioch, Derbe, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth there are no records of miracles. The miracles were never used to persuade people to receive teaching – he made no offering of miracles. But miracles were nonetheless a sign of divine power/approval. They also illustrated the doctrine of release.

Finance

Was his success due to financial arrangements?

He seems to have had 3 rules: to seek no financial help for himself; to offer none to his hearers; to not administer local church funds. We haven't done it that way – we've kept the financial reins.

The substance of his preaching

Was it due to his method of preaching?

We only have 3 examples of his preaching: Antioch (Acts 13.16-41), Lystra (Acts 14.15-17), Athens (Acts 17.22-31). Plus some refs to its substance – Acts 16.17, 17.2-3, 17.18, 19.37, 20.21.

Common elements in his messages:

- appeal to a common past
- statement of facts – resurrection
- answer to objection that the academics aren't behind this teaching
- appeal to craving for pardon, promise of peace
- warning of dangers involved in rejection of God's message

Common characteristics of his messages: sympathy, courage, respect, confidence. He expected his hearers to be moved. He didn't just scatter seed, he believed he was sent to those to whom he was preaching at that moment, and he expected a response. This is key. The air of expectation pervaded all accounts of his preaching: he expected sth to happen, and so did his hearers. Further, he always tried to bring them to a point. He didn't just scatter seeds; he planted them. He brought people to a place where decision was clear, and then demanded they make one. It was to risk rejection; but it was effective. Much of our teaching is not.

III : The Training of converts

The teaching

How far was his success due to the teaching he gave his converts?

He taught them to rely on the Holy Spirit. We teach them to rely on the missionary. This is the heart of the matter. We gather converts, but we don't train them to maintain their own spiritual life. They stay dependent. We end up with the Mission with its own organisation, and the body of native Christians, often with a separate organisation of their own. They do not own the Mission.

Paul preached in a place for 5-6 months and left behind a church capable of growth and expansion, with locally appointed leaders. Then he visited them occasionally. How would we feel about ordaining locals within 5 months??? In his time they didn't even have bibles...

What did he teach them? From his letters:

- rite and manner of rite of Holy Communion
- teaching re resurrection (and presumably therefore the life of Jesus before that point)
- to rely on the Jewish OT
- the form of administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper

That is, he left a simple system of Gospel teaching, 2 sacraments, and the OT. No forms of service, no forms of prayer, unless maybe the LP. No certain evidence of a particular form of creed, or written gospel. Not much – and yet it was the essentials, and they could learn them. We deluge people with stuff, till it all gets far too complicated.

The other factor is, his converts became missionaries; they received the Spirit of Jesus, who is a missionary Spirit. We quench that Spirit, teaching our converts to believe none but highly qualified missionaries may preach.

The training of candidates for baptism and ordination

How far was his success due to his method of preparing his converts for baptism/ordination?

His teaching followed baptism, not v.v. To be baptised it was enough for a spiritual change to have taken place – eg the Philippian jailor. But nothing suggests mass baptisms either. There seems to be no rule, except that repentance and faith is what's required. Paul left his new churches too quickly to do much baptising – he must've baptised some key people and then left them to get on with it. We ourselves violate this principle – we keep all the control to ourselves.

Paul ordained as elders members of the church itself – he didn't appoint outsiders, graduates of some provincial school for ordination training. The elders were from the church to which they ministered; there was a close bond between them and it. This makes an enormous difference. Their qualifications were primarily moral, not intellectual; a class of teachers grew up alongside them. The elders must have administered the sacraments. Finally, Paul ordained not one elder but several – authority is meant to be shared, not concentrated in the hands of one man.

Consequences of our not following these practices:

- people are deprived of sacraments
- young leaders are taken away for training and that training puts them out of touch with their churches
- the natural leaders of the village are silenced, so elders in the community are not elders in the church
- the natural teacher is silenced

IV : St Paul's method of dealing with organised churches

Authority and discipline

How far was his success due to his manner of exercising authority and discipline?

He appointed elders, then wrote to them when controversies arose. But even then, **he didn't lay down the law so much as explain the principles**. Eg when fornication is an issue in Corinth, he never mentions the law of the OT, or advocates a code of conduct. He reminds them their bodies are temples of the HS. When it comes to a case of incest, he doesn't suggest it's a breach of the 10 Commandments. His gospel is not law but Spirit. And yet in our dealings with native converts we habitually appeal to law – and often to a law they don't have any understanding of or sympathy for, because it comes from our culture not theirs...

The only issue where he does seem to lay down law is in matters of marriage and divorce.

Unity

How did he succeed in maintaining unity?

The churches he founded weren't independent bodies. He spoke of the churches as unities, and they were bound together by trade routes. They were also bound to other churches not founded by Paul. The bond was a spiritual one, and not institutional. They did things very differently in Jerusalem and Corinth, but Paul refused to transplant the customs of the Jerusalem church to Corinth, he refused to set up any central administrative authority, he declined to establish tests of orthodoxy, and he refused to allow the universal application of precedents – he didn't carry decrees from Jerusalem to Achaia. **His concept of unity was spiritual**. How did he maintain it?

- he took it for granted
- he used his position as intermediary between Jew and Greek to strengthen it
- he encouraged mutual acts of charity
- he encouraged communication

This is very different from our approach to maintaining unity. We act out of fear of schism; we enforce unity through European officials, we appoint European bishops and our clergy govern their parishes in the same way clergy do at home. We insist on every native church using our prayer book, singing our hymns, using our church furniture, even when we have to export them to them. The divisions which there are are the ones we ourselves transplant, between denominations and churchmanships. In other words, we maintain unity through law.

V : Conclusions

Principles and Spirit

We have done really well in spreading the gospel. It's everywhere. BUT – it's still exotic, ours not theirs; **our missions are still dependent on us; and they all look the same, even when the people they are planted amongst are entirely different.**

Paul had 2 principles: he was a preacher of the gospel, not of law; and he must retire from his converts to give a place for Christ.

Application

Paul's principles in founding churches:

1. all teaching must be simple and able to be immediately applied in practice
2. all organisation must be easy to understand and maintain
3. all finance should be handled by the people themselves
4. a sense of mutual responsibility between Christians should be inculcated
5. authority to exercise spiritual gifts should be given freely and immediately

Epilogue

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