

Nationalism without God

The time is not now, nor will it ever be until Christ returns, that missions are outdated, and that the church should no longer reach out. To say that we are now living in a "post-missionary" age is folly. If there ever was a time for an all-out missionary effort it is now. The church cannot withdraw from the fulfillment of the Great Commission, though the task seems so formidable.

Cultures are in convulsion, societies in explosion and dictatorships are increasing. The very foundations of ancient Asian cultures tremble. The social and political roots in Africa are being cut. Many Africans feel unsettled through the influence of Western secularism and materialism. Old ways no longer suffice and cohesive societies are disappearing. Communism is making rapid gains. Eastern religions and Islam are becoming more aggressive.

One burning issue in missionary strategy is militant nationalism, a Western product. In our "global village" nationalism is a force to be reckoned with. Even in Canada, the spirit of nationalism is growing. Churches which have their membership straddle the U.S.-Canadian border find their witness curtailed.

What is nationalism? Nationalism is a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation. Nationalism as a force is rather new on the world scene. It didn't become a recognized sentiment molding public and private life until the end of the 18th century. Its roots are in the French revolution. Its philosophy spread from Europe to put its stamp upon South-America, Asia and Africa. By the end of World War Two, the world experienced it for the first time as the greatest determining force.

Nationalism's philosophy looks so simple. Each nationality should form its own state. But the development of nationalism went hand in hand with the process of secularization.

Many new nations have been formed; and they are seeking their own identity! Many of them view Christianity as a threat to their national development.

The missionary is seen by many as a left over from the colonial era, a carrier of Western culture. The former Belgian Congo's, now Zaire, attitude proves the point. President Mobutu dropped his Christian name, Joseph Desire, and assumed the name Mobutu Sese Seko. The people of Zaire must have an identity card showing their African names with their baptismal name, which is no longer recognized, in small print and in brackets after it. Churches and schools must adopt Africanization policies.

Nationalism has often become a real enemy of the missionary endeavour of the church. Religion is viewed as opium for the people. Religion threatens, and blocks economic development.

If we want to become strong and vital as a nation, we must secularize our life, and adopt Western techniques. Communism has really "capitalized" on nationalism. Russian propaganda broadcasts that religion is the ally of capitalism and imperialism. Religion preserves the status quo and the economic stranglehold over the poor masses. It has to be radically removed to give new life.

Missions can never be satisfied with "soul saving" only. Christ, never withdrew from life. He touched with His presence and preaching every aspect of life.

We shall have to learn to be Christian in our attitudes and in our way of thinking. Christianly we shall have to try to solve the problems of unemployment and class distinctions and poverty. This requires flexible programs.

Missions in the seventies can no longer have fixed programs and patterns. In some cases poverty must be shared, because there is not enough wealth to be shared. Dr. Samuel Escobar said,

"I think we must come to the point where we also see the cross in Christians who for the sake of Christ and in obedience to him are ready to risk their lives in the hands of extremists of the right and of the left, in Christians who try to be witnesses in the world of labor, politics, improvement of human relations, the fight for peace; and the fight for justice. These are laymen, and the fact that they are ready to suffer for Christ living in the world of politics and civic affairs does not make them less than those who are engaged full-time in the communication of the gospel."

Missions, by its very nature, cannot maintain the status quo. The gospel does not only renew individuals but also the structures of society. It must speak to nationalism, so that it won't become another god. Nationalism without the gospel is idol worship.

Nations and races are a result of the Fall, but nevertheless God has worked through nationhood. He even choose a nation to be His very own people! Each nation has a right to maintain its own identity, and to defend it, providing that it places itself freely under the discipline of God's Word.

Christ is still the Healer of the nations and glorious King. May the Christian church be free and ready to tell nations about her King!

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