

GOSPEL HIGHWAY

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Applied Principles Of Missions (2 Cor. 10:12-18)

by B. S. Poh

Reformed Baptist churches have existed in Malaysia for the past twenty-five years. Pioneering work began in 1982, which led to the establishment of the first Reformed Baptist church in this country a year later. Twenty years on, there were fourteen congregations established throughout Malaysia and one in Singapore, seven of which had fulltime pastors. Opportunities opened up for us to be involved in planting Reformed Baptist churches in a number of countries in South-East Asia. We were also called upon to help new churches farther afield. Sadly, the fellowship of churches in Malaysia broke up after that. The few congregations with which I continue to be involved carried on the work of foreign missions, although with some initial difficulties. Two local preaching points had had to be closed down.

As we persevered on, the Lord opened up new opportunities for us. Our remaining congregations stabilised and began to grow. New frontiers were opened up to us to plant churches overseas. With fear and trembling, and trust in the Lord, we move forward in the work of missions. Much have been learned as we searched the Scripture and applied biblical principles to the practice of missions. Here, we present some of the things we have learned, in the hope that they will be encouraging and instructive to others.

Our aim

A natural starting point would be to consider the Great Commission, as given in Matthew 28:18-20 and other related passages. Since I have expounded on the Great Commission elsewhere, I will not repeat the substance here.¹ Instead, I will begin by stating in summary our missions policy. Our missions efforts are geared towards planting confessional and mission-minded churches. We believe that the gospel is to be proclaimed persistently until disciples are made, who should then be constituted as local churches. National pastors are to be trained to lead these churches so that they become self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating within a certain period of time. The churches planted in a certain geographical location are to serve together in fellowship as far as possible.

As I see it, there are four major areas of consideration in the attempt to extend our missions effort. These areas of consideration are also areas of concern because of the lack of clarity of thinking among the people we know of who desire to engage in missions. There are times when the differences of understanding and approach would affect us and others who engage in the work of missions. These areas of consideration and concern are: (i) the men who do the work of church planting; (ii) the locale or place where missions is carried out; (iii) the methods employed; and (iv) the support of such men & the work they are involved in.

I. The men

Identifying and training men

The first area of consideration is to find reliable, biblically qualified men to do the work. (We are not excluding the roles of women in the work of missions.) We have prayed for years for local missionaries, preferably young couples, to be raised up so that they can be sent forth to the surrounding nations, but God has not given us any person yet. Until such time as missionaries are sent out, the pastor of the church would have to explore missions possibilities and be alert to

providential opportunities of cooperation in missions with national pastors. We have learnt, over the years, to be sensitive to God's leading and to be careful not to cause offence. We do not want to appear so "hard up" - to be overly anxious - to make contacts, taking down addresses of everyone we meet with, writing to them, and offering to come to speak. We do not want to impose on a church that is theologically strong and actively engaged in missions already, who do not need our help but from whom we can learn.

Meanwhile, we have been led providentially to know certain men in their own nations who are supported by us financially to plant churches. In any nation, it is not difficult to find men to join us. However, we do not want just any men but only men who are faithful to God, men who are willing to learn, and who are in agreement with our doctrine, after sufficient exposure to it. In fact, we have found it necessary to reject many who were keen to join us because we were not comfortable with their character or were not convinced that they were with us theologically. We believe it is far better to support one or two faithful men than twenty men who look upon church planting as a profession with which to gain funding from abroad.

Practically, this entails exposing the men to teaching in their own countries a number of times, followed by teaching them for periods ranging from two weeks to three months in Malaysia. When translation into the national language is needed, the teaching is less effective. When no translation is needed, the teaching is obviously more effective, for we can say things the way we want, with the necessary emphases placed where we want them. We are able to ascertain directly how effective we have been in teaching, and how well the men have understood us. I speak Indonesian and, therefore, find it easier to minister to that vast country of great need. There are so many unreached people groups, quite apart from the need for faithful churches to be planted in areas dominated by nominal Christianity.

We have found it necessary to groom even experienced pastors in the practicalities of biblical outreach methods, expository preaching, and church government. We have had to sharpen them with regard to church distinctives and the need for conviction on theological issues. We have had to wean them from the idea of pursuing higher theological degrees to improve on their calling as pastors. We are careful not to send men from third world countries for training in affluent countries. Apart from the fact that we are unable to support such men financially at the present time, we do not want these men to be tempted to remain there and not return to serve in their own countries. We are aware that not all national pastors are easily drawn away to forsake their own countries for more affluent ones. We are currently supporting two young men from a neighbouring country who are training in a church-based seminary in a country that would not be regarded as affluent.

In each country, we look for pastors of independent churches, or young men fresh from seminaries, who are willing to learn. We avoid drawing men away from other denominations, unless they are seeking to be clearer in their theological convictions. We do not believe in competing with other denominations, let alone engaging in carnal rivalry with other churches as though we are involved in some business enterprise. Sad to say, we do not often see a reciprocal spirit in other Christians. We have encountered unethical practices in other Christian groups which have upset us much. Given a choice, we would prefer starting a new work where no church exists, based on the principle laid down by the apostle Paul in Romans 15:20, "And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation."

Justification for adopting national pastors

At the same time, we are conscious that the Great Commission involves establishing local churches, and not merely winning converts nor leaving behind weak churches that quickly go astray. This means that there is justification, yea, a responsibility, to nurture churches that are weak theologically, missionally, governmentally, or financially. That the Great Commission requires the planting and nurturing of churches until they are reasonably strong is a point is often overlooked, and we need to pay more attention to it.

o Matthew 28:20 says, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...". All things commanded by the Lord are to be taught to the disciples.

o 1 Timothy 3:15 says, "...but if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth". The local church is not only to be the pillar which holds high the truth, so that its light shines in the spiritually dark world to draw sinners to Christ. It is also the ground, or foundation, on which the faith of converted people is built up.

o 1 Corinthians 3:6 says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." What are we to do when we encounter a church whose founder has left it languishing, or who is still with the church but does not know what else to do to strengthen it? Surely, we have a duty to help that church towards a more biblical position, without the risk of being misunderstood to be stealing a flock, or interfering in another church. This is especially so when we are invited, or welcomed, to help that church.

o In Acts 19:1-7, Paul gathered the disciples of John the Baptist into a church, after teaching them more accurately the gospel.

o In Acts 20:20-21, Paul reminded the Ephesian elders, "...I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Here, we see the apostle's approach in evangelism. Then, in verse 27, we read, "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." In the two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:10), Paul not only proclaimed the gospel to win souls, but also strongly established the church there.

What I am saying is that there is biblical justification to adopt a national pastor as our missionary to strengthen the church and to plant new churches. After all, if we were to send out missionaries from our church in Malaysia, they would have to train up national pastors as soon as possible to carry on the work. Such involvement in the life and ministry of the church, without in any way imposing upon it nor interfering with its policies, is far more beneficial to both parties than to pour funds into a situation we are unfamiliar with or are uninterested in. We have known of rich churches from overseas who would pour money into a missions situation without considering whether they are doing more harm than good. Instead of being involved in missions by taking risks and giving of their time and labour, they are content to give large sums of money to national pastors. They do not seem to be aware that many national pastors in financially deprived situations are good at canvassing for money from overseas for dubious projects. One national pastor I know of took pride in writing to one thousand contacts overseas every year to get funds. He said that his efforts were worth the while if one or two such contacts responded to him positively.

II. The locale

We consider next the locale or place where missions is carried out. Theoretically, we may argue that missions begins at our home church, for without a sending church there would be no missionaries sent out to evangelise and to church plant. We might even say that missions begins with our heart, for where there is no mission-mindedness, no missionary endeavours will issue forth from the church. However, we are here discussing the actual place where the church planting is carried out.

Spatial aspect of the Great Commission

We note that the Great Commission includes a temporal, as well as a spatial, dimension. Most people will recognise the spatial dimension, namely that we are to go into the world, to make disciples of all nations. We should not be concerned only with growing a bigger home church by reaching out to the people in the vicinity, but we are to engage in planting churches farther afield as well. In one's own nation, we would call this "home missions". When extended overseas, we would call it "overseas (or foreign) missions". Both must be carried out. That there is the spatial aspect to the Great Commission is agreed upon by everyone. That the spatial aspect involves more than evangelising the vicinity of the church is not recognised by all. The early church understood the Great Commission as including the planting of churches farther away. This can be easily established.

o Starting from Acts 13, we find that the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul involved the planting of local churches. The sending church at Antioch understood the Great Commission as involving the

planting of local churches, and not merely evangelising its vicinity.

o Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” How did it happen that there were a number of churches scattered throughout those places so quickly? Those churches must have been formed out of those who believed while in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9, 40-4). But who could possibly have gathered them together as churches? The answer seems to be supplied by the next passage.

o Acts 9:32 says, “And it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.” In verse 36 of Acts 9, we read that Peter was in Joppa next. From there, he was called to Caesarea where he preached in Cornelius’ house, with the result that the household believed and were baptised. Peter had been travelling around visiting and teaching the churches which seemed to have come into existence by the gathering together of believers from the day of Pentecost.

o 1 Corinthians 9:5 says, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” Here, Paul is arguing for his right to travel with a wife - a right which he chose not to exercise - and, indirectly, reveals that the church in Jerusalem was more active in church planting than is commonly realised. The church in Jerusalem was sending out men, accompanied by their wives, to systematically plant and strengthen churches.

o 2 Corinthians 1:1 says, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia...” The city of Corinth was in Achaia, and the church there appeared to be the only constituted body of believers in the province. There were, however, other believers who seemed to be under the supervision of the church in Corinth. They would constitute what we call preaching points. The church in Corinth was entrusted with the task of passing on the apostle’s epistles to the preaching points under its care, just as the Colossian and Laodicean churches were exchanging epistles from the apostle (Col. 4:16).

Local church growth and wider church planting

We have gone to some length in making the point that there is the spatial aspect to the Great Commission, which is to be understood as not only the evangelisation of the vicinity of the local church but also the planting of churches farther away. What is the relationship between local church growth and wider church planting? Should we wait till our church is of a certain size before we contemplate wider church planting? The answer is that wider church planting should be engaged in the moment a church comes into existence. We may compare this with evangelism by a new convert. Does the new convert need to wait till he is more mature, or till he has attended a class on evangelism, before he starts evangelising? We would say, no, he must start evangelising straightaway, for he has known enough of the gospel to be saved and he should now pass on what he knows to others. Furthermore, it is as he evangelises that he learns to become more effective in the task. There is no better school of evangelism than that of personal experience! In the same way, the church that is newly constituted should consider establishing one or two preaching points farther away from its vicinity with the view of nurturing them into churches.

In 2 Corinthians 10:15, we read, “...not boasting of things beyond measure, *that is*, in other men’s labours, but having hope, *that* as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the *regions* beyond you, and not to boast in another man’s sphere of accomplishment.” Paul had his own sphere of ministry, covering a vast region which included Corinth. He was constantly pushing the limits of this sphere by preaching and planting new churches. In the present verse, he is saying that as the Corinthian church became more mature in faith, it would need less attention from Paul, who could then give more attention to pioneering work. In turn, the Corinthian church would be able to contribute to the wider church planting by prayer, financial support, and sending helpers to the mission field. Corinth was plagued with internal problems, to the extent that it could not see the missions opportunities and responsibilities. The church should have been more involved in the wider ministry instead of being so introspective. We see, then, that a church does not need to wait long before being involved in missions. If the church can do little, let the little be

done. If more, let more be done. We remember what the Lord says in Mathew 25:29, “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.”

How far should we stretch ourselves? Would there not be the danger of stretching ourselves too thin, being involved in too many places and accomplishing nothing solid and lasting, gaining on quantity but compromising on quality? That is always a danger which we are aware of, and which we try to avoid. Just as we have not been too anxious about making many contacts and supporting many national pastors, we have not been too keen about having ministries in places like China, India and Africa. We have contacts in those places but, at this time, we do not sense God’s leading for us to be involved there. We also have to consider the needs of our own country, which we look upon as our primary mission field. There are many unreached people groups and places in this country. We do not want to focus on foreign missions at the expense of local missions. Our resources are truly limited as a local church, and by working in fellowship with like-minded churches, there are still limitations to our abilities. However, between over-stretching ourselves and failing to stretch sufficiently in missions, we prefer to err on the side of the former. The Lord will provide all our needs when we have the heart to serve Him.

Temporal aspect of the Great Commission

We consider next the temporal aspect of the Great Commission. Here, we are not referring to the abiding relevance of the Great Commission. Rather, we are referring to the need to preach the gospel to the subsequent generations of those who have received the gospel. Acts 2:39 says, “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” The promise of the Holy Spirit, given to those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, and thereby procure eternal life is, firstly, to those who were hearing apostle’s message, secondly to their descendants and thirdly, to all who were farther away. All three categories of people would receive the same promise of the Spirit if they responded to the same gospel message of “Christ, and Him crucified”. That has to be so because the qualifying phrase, “as many as the Lord our God will call” is for all the three categories. Any other understanding of the verse will do violence to its natural construction and contradict the one way of salvation revealed to us in the Scripture.

We see here the temporal as well as the spatial aspects of the Great Commission. The gospel is not only to be preached to others who are afar but also to the descendants of those who have believed. What that means for missions is that a christianised community needs to be evangelised all over again when nominalism has set in. Often, a reasonably strong remnant of the faithful is able to carry on the work of evangelising the community, if there is the awareness that nominalism has set in so that the community now constitutes a mission field. This awareness is sharp if there is the understanding that there is a temporal aspect to the Great Commission. In most christianised communities, however, this understanding seems lacking or absent. The faithful remnant bemoans the low spirituality of the community and prays for revival, failing to see that the people have largely become pagan. The children are catechised, and the adults admonished, as though they can be born again by the mere process of Christian education and admonition. However, if it is understood that these are virtually pagans in a christianised culture, there will be the forthright preaching of the gospel to the people, to call them to repentance and faith.

We look upon a nominally Christian community as a mission field to which missionaries may be sent, and to which the gospel must be proclaimed. We do not have to wait till the Christianised community is won over by another faith, such as Islam, before we regard it as a mission field. For example, the nations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea should have been evangelised many times over before Islam took over in the seventh century. In the nations surrounding us, and in our own country of Malaysia, there are such christianised communities that have declined spiritually to the extent that they are virtually pagan.

III. The methods

Gospel proclamation and supportive means

The method ordained by God for the salvation of sinners is the hearing of the gospel. Romans 10:17 says, “So then, faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The instruments of gospel

proclamation are preachers who bring the gospel to the hearers. Romans 10:15 says, ‘And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things.*”’ The examples set by our Lord and the apostles show that the taking of the gospel to hearers is to be done literally. The Great Commission cannot be properly and completely carried out without the literal presence of the preachers - to make disciples, to baptise, and to teach obedience to all the Lord’s commands. When a preacher proclaims the gospel “publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20), doing it persistently until disciples are made, God is actually present in a way not encountered when literature, radio broadcast, and even television broadcast are used. This truth is not difficult to understand when we remember the reality of the spiritual dimension, in which a soul meets with other souls in gospel outreach.

Let me hasten to add that I am a strong believer in using literature and electronic broadcasts as aids to evangelism. They are powerful tools, and must be used wherever possible. Indeed, in closed countries, these are the chief means of reaching the unreached. So, in order of importance, the means to be used should be: (i) the personal presence of the missionary, living among a people and bringing the gospel to them directly; (ii) the use of tools such as literature and electronic broadcasts as complements to verbal gospel proclamation; and (iii) the use of those tools when the presence of missionaries is not possible. All these means are to bring the gospel to the hearers. The danger of missionary endeavours turning into mere social activities is very real. A missionary doctor may end up healing the sick without healing the soul. A radio broadcast may end up becoming Christianised entertainment devoid of gospel proclamation.

What we have discussed above are the methods of delivery of the gospel, their relative importance, and inherent dangers. More serious are the methods of outreach, or approaches to soul winning, which may be classified under three categories: (i) Level 1 approaches, which involve direct gospel delivery of all sorts which we have considered; (ii) Level 2 approaches, in which good works (or social concerns and community projects) constitute the front end of contact with souls, which is accompanied by secondary gospel presentations; (iii) Level 3 approaches, in which good works is carried out with the aim of paving the way for future gospel presentations. Level 1 approaches do not need elaboration here. Examples of Level 2 approaches include opening a rural clinic in which all the patients are required to hear a short gospel message before seeing the doctor, running a kindergarten in which the teaching contents are based on the Bible, giving free tuition to students which begins with twenty minutes of gospel proclamation, and the like. Level 3 approaches are purely community projects or social works that provide a Christian presence, to show forth the love and concern of Christians in practical ways. My contention is that Level 3 approaches cannot be regarded as true missionary work unless it is coupled to Level 1 approaches. For example, a play school is operated to take in only toddlers of those who attend church on a regular basis, and a bakery is started to provide employment in a poor community at the same time that there is active evangelism and church services.

In a closed community where evangelism is illegal or dangerous, Level 3 approaches have been attempted such as working as language teachers and doctors, or opening factories to provide employment to the people. If those approaches are not accompanied by definite attempts to befriend and win the trust of individuals so that the gospel can be shared, despite risks, they cannot strictly be called missionary work. Of course, it is within the right of Christians to engage in Level 3 approaches if they insist to do so, but they are merely engaging in doing good works, which are different from missionary work.

Good works and gospel preaching

In recent days, the relationship between good works and gospel proclamation has been resurrected for debate in missiology.² It is advocated that social transformation should accompany personal transformation, as exemplified in the awakenings of 17th and 18th century Britain and America. It is claimed that personal transformation predominated at the expense of social transformation in the awakenings of 20th century. It is proposed that a recovery of social transformation should be made without neglecting personal transformation in the 21st century. This gives rise to the call for evangelicals to be socially involved, while maintaining the preaching of eternal life. What I fear is that there will be social transformation at the expense of personal transformation, simply because the true gospel is not powerfully preached, and not preached in the context of a robust recovery of the truths of

the Reformation. It is only when lives are truly transformed, when God is worshipped in awe, when the Bible is held to be the all-sufficient word of God, that there will be such a filling of the Spirit which leads to an overflow of good works and the transformation of society. In his book, "Revolution in World Missions", K. P. Yohannan perceptively noted that where social work predominates the number of converts is noticeably small, and where there is direct gospel proclamation the number of converts is obviously high.³ This observation is relevant also to our earlier discussion on the the approaches to outreach - whether they are Levels 1, 2 or 3 categories.

Reformed Christians who consistently preach a distinct gospel in the context of strong adherence to the truths of the Reformation have always been active in doing good works, both in the past as well as present. This is such a well known fact that there is no necessity to quote examples. However, there are those who emphasize the truths of the Reformation without preaching a distinctly gospel message on a regular basis. When such Reformed people are spurred to do good works, there will be a tendency to divorce the good works from direct gospel proclamation. They will end in the same situation as the Arminians who attempt to transform society without achieving true personal transformation - the Arminians because of the defective gospel that they preach, the Reformed because of the lack of proclamation of the true gospel.

For ourselves, we have made direct gospel proclamation the chief method of winning souls and establishing churches. We will use literature and other tools to reinforce the gospel that has been preached. We will also engage in good works whenever appropriate, without minimising on the work of gospel proclamation. We want to be careful about merely doing good works, all in the name of preparing the ground for future evangelism.

IV. The support

Duration and amount

Our goal of church planting is to nurture the newly planted church to the point where it is self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. The financial support of national pastors is based on a "3+2+2 formula". Initially, an assessment will be made of what constitutes a adequate support for the man and his family. The assessment is made by making enquiry of the average wage of workers in the country and in the place where he lives. We want to support the family up to the limit of his basic needs, not below that. Otherwise, the man will have to find another source of income by working part-time or by getting support form another source, which will result in a clash of interests between the two supporting parties. The amount of support will be assessed after three years, then after another two years, and then another two years. Ideally, the newly planted church should grow in number of converts and in spiritual maturity such that it becomes self-supporting in seven years. That ideal is not always achieved, and we recognise that it is God who gives the increase.

It may be that the amount of support has to be increased upon assessment because of increasing needs of the growing family or of the growing ministry. The aim is that the church becomes increasingly self-supporting. Theoretically, ten working members who tithe regularly should be able to support the pastor and his family. Due to the peculiar needs of the pastoral ministry - including hospitality, travels, and the like - fifteen to twenty working persons who tithe regularly may be needed. It is not uncommon to have congregations that are self-supporting and, in fact, able to support others, although having less than ten working members. Blessed are such congregations!

Freedom on the mission field

The missionaries supported by us have to sign a simple statement of agreement with our missions policy. One point of agreement is that the missionary has the freedom to act as the situation demands on the mission field, although we are available for consultation. The missionary knows the situation best, and there will be many occasions when decisions have to be made immediately instead of waiting for directions from the supporting churches. We help to raise funds for one-off projects such as the purchasing of land and the building of a place of worship. Such projects, which require no haste to decide upon, would have been discussed with the supporting churches.

In missionary circles, the manner and degree of accountability in the expenditure of money have been a matter of contention and strife.⁴ We are of the view that the missionary should be given the

responsibility and freedom to carry out the project without detailed scrutiny by the supporting churches. An acknowledgement of receipt of any sum of money would be sufficient, without having to cast doubt on the integrity of the man through demanding detailed reports of expenditure. It might turn out that the man we are supporting is not the trustworthy person we thought he was, which would lead to a closer inquiry and a likely parting of ways. That is the risk involved in any gospel endeavour, which we have to accept. However, to require detailed accounting as the project progresses is not only contrary to the trust we are supposed to have in the person in the first place, but it will also shackle the missionary with extra burden and hinder him in the primary work of gospel preaching.

Wrong methods of financial independence

An untrustworthy man would attempt to squeeze as much support as possible from the sponsor, accumulating for himself property - including a church building, a house, a motorbike or car, and more - with the view that when the time for ending the support arrives, he will be reasonably well-catered for. It is one thing to seek support for genuine gospel needs, it is another to rake in support for future security. This is an area where great sensitivity is called for in both sponsor and missionary. The ideal is that there is mutual trust and common commitment to do all to God's glory.

A common approach towards gaining financial independence on the mission field is by the church attempting to do business of one kind or another. The members are employed to do the business, with the understanding that they are to contribute a definite proportion of their earnings to the church. It is argued that this method provides employment for those without jobs. Sometimes, the members are harnessed to work without pay since it is a church project meant to generate money for gospel work. We do not favour such methods of generating funds because such a church is now becoming a business enterprise, accumulating for itself assets and properties, which the supporting churches are often asked to supply the funds for. In the end, the church will be similar to the Roman Catholic Church, which is rich with properties and businesses all over the world!

Another situation is when the supported church phases out financial dependence from one source, and then takes on support from another source. When this happens, we cannot say that there is true financial independence. When done on the sly, or on the pretext of disagreement with the first source of support, the ethicality of the action comes into question. We must remember that there is a day of judgement, when we face the Lord who “searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thought (1 Chronicles 28:9).

Biting off more than can be chewed

One final situation we wish to consider is the tendency to engage in ministries that the church is not ready for, which would require more funding from the supporting church. Why must a new and small church open an orphanage, run a nursery, and have a seminary? Cannot these wait, while effort and funds are channeled to gospel outreach, the training of church members, and harnessing them to evangelism and church planting? Establishing a seminary requires the employment of qualified lecturers and supporting staff, the setting up an adequate library, the provision of accommodation for the students, the purchase of office equipments, and perhaps the purchase of land. We can understand when a large, well-established, church runs a seminary. We can accept it when a group of like-minded churches decide to establish a seminary. But for a fledgling church, still struggling to be financially independent, to start a seminary and run an orphanage is hard to understand. It is a case of “biting off more than you can chew”.

Do not get me wrong - I am not against running such institutions, and I am not against doing good works. The biblical warrant for a seminary lies in it being an extension of the teaching of the church, or a group of churches, when need and available resources coincide. Running an orphanage as part of the good works of the church, and in conjunction with efforts at bringing the gospel to others, needs no justification, but only if the church is able to afford the time, man-power, and money. The point I am making here is that there will be great difficulties in gaining financial independence if the planted church continues to seek support from without, all because of the wrong perception that a church is incomplete without running institutions like orphanages and seminaries. There is no glory in doing God's work under perpetual financial support from abroad.

Conclusion

We have considered four matters: (i) the men who do the work of church planting; (ii) the locale or place where missions is carried out; (iii) the methods employed; and (iv) the support of such men & the work they are involved in. Along the way, we have highlighted biblical principles that underlie our missions policy and approach. We have also highlighted what we perceive to be defective understandings and methods on missions. I wish to emphasize that our experience in missions is limited, although not insignificant or inconsequential in the eyes of God. We are still learning, and are keen to learn from others.

We do not harbour great ambitions for ourselves but, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of God’s people, we intend to cautiously extend our ministry in Asia - all to the glory of the Triune God. For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

References:

1. See, for example, “A Command to Plant Churches,” by Poh Boon Sing, Founders’ Journal Issue 37, Summer 1999, wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ37/contents.html
2. See, for example, “The Future of Evangelicals in Missions”, by Ralph D. Winter, Missions Frontiers, Sept-Oct 2007, The US Center for World Missions, 29:5.
3. “Revolution In World Missions”, K.P. Yohannan, Gospel For Asia, 1932 Walnut Plaza, Carrollton, TX75006, USA.
4. See, for example, “Financial Accountability A Must”, ARBCA Update, Vol. 24, No. 3, Summer 2007.

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