

USING VOCATION AS A PATHWAY TO MISSIONS

BEFORE WE CAN DO SO, WE HAVE TO GET A BIG ROCK OUT OF THE ROAD!

If we were to ask Jesus what He wants from us, His answer would be "Everything you've got! That is the message we are challenged by in Romans 12:1-2 where we are told that we, as priests, are to "present our bodies as a living sacrifice" on God's altar. The Holy Spirit then moves Paul to say this is our "spiritual service of worship." This means our vocations also belong to Jesus for His use.

I was working at the World Fair in New York City in the 1960's when Juan Monroy discovered the churches of Christ at the Fair (Juan is a noted author in Spain and was sent to the Fair to represent Spain). I was not on duty at our pavilion, but one of my partners was. He told Juan that churches of Christ are non-denominational Christians who follow the Bible example for what the New Testament church is to be like. He then said that he was a member of that same church and that he had helped establish such churches in Morocco, Spain and Portugal.

A few years later at a Pan European Lectureship in I believe Costa Rica, I heard Juan say that he had found U.S. church members tend to believe they are few in numbers because they are so faithful. Juan then said he begged to differ. He said he thought we were few in number because we are so unfaithful! The point he made was that so few of us are dedicated to evangelizing. He was right!

The dynamic for growth in the early years of progress of the church in our country was generated by Christians using their vocations and their homes as pulpits for the spreading of the Word. As they moved westward to expanding work possibilities, they would immediately begin their effort to plant a church. They did not know much about church planting, but they knew what they believed and were able to share that with others. Because they believed the task of evangelizing was the task of every Christian they did what they could, and God blessed their efforts. The churches in the area in which I grew up in Southern California offered courses in personal evangelism and in leadership training. Our home congregation had perhaps seventy members, but out of that membership a number of very gifted evangelists were created who went out and made their mark on the world. Some of these preached by church support, and some of them went and preached using their vocation for support. My Uncle John McCalister was a builder, and during his life he planted churches by

moving to a city, beginning his building trade, and evangelizing. As the members grew in number, he would help them build a church building, and would then move on to another city. In the 1950's as I was traveling through Idaho speaking of our work in Italy, I met a Brother Free who was a builder and was in the process of constructing his sixth church building as a builder-evangelist.

In recent times I do not hear that often of classes in personal work and leadership training being offered in local congregations. What I do see is that more and more of the work of the church is being done by "full-time" workers on church support. I have also witnessed that for many of these "full-time" workers, the term "evangelist" is a misnomer. As a church begins to grow, it seems that building-centered activities take the place of home-centered activities. Consequently, I have seen an increasing effort to make what happens in our buildings become our basic method of outreach! It also seems that most of our "supported" workers' time is spent on meeting the needs of the church. That old line seems to be true, we have learned to spell "service," as "serve us!"

Most of us are aware that a recent shockwave swept through churches in the U.S. when Warren and others who had popularized the "seeker" church model, announced their effort a failure. I had earlier read a statement by Warren that their churches were in effect spiritually a mile wide and a foot deep. He also said they were not converting people but dealing with believer swarmers. By his recommendation that we need to get back to the Biblical model. I assume he intended to recommend no longer trying to give people what they want, but rather what God wants. To believe we are not growing because people are not interested in the truth does not hold water! The growth of religious groups such as the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses demonstrates that persistent efforts to share a specific teaching will bring in converts regardless of the presence or absence of truth. In my take, we are not growing because we have given a task that requires the efforts of all the church, to just a few members of the church. Ephesians 4:15-16 tells us that when every part of the body does its part, body growth in love will occur. Consequently we have paraplegic congregations all over the land where a few overburdened workers are trying to carry almost all of the load. Earlier in that same passage, we are told that a fundamental task of church leaders is to "equip" Christians so that they can do the "work of service" that will "build up the body of Christ" (v 11-12). I believe that such a task is not in the purview of very many elders of the church as they evaluate what God requires of them in the Body of Christ.

I also believe that few members of the church realize that we are all intended to be priests, laying all that we are and have on the service

altar of God (1 Peter 2:1-9, Rev. 1:4-6). For many years I have carried with me almost everywhere I go, two study sheets that touch on the area under consideration. One of them discusses the nature of our calling in the church presenting this concept of the "full-body" ministry where every body part does his or her assigned portion of the work. The second shows how the gifts God has given us are intended to indicate our ministry in the body, and offers suggestions as to how we can discover our gifts. These two studies are available on-line in this sequence under the titles: "Building the Church Through Diversified Ministries," and "How to Discover Our Gifts." If we do not change our view of how the church is to function, we will not only fail to evangelize as God has assigned us to do...we will also lose many of our members and especially our young people. When I signed up for sports in high school and in college, I did not do so expecting to spend all of my time sitting on the bench. In my more than fifty-nine years of working with churches, I have had occasion to notice that the happiest church members are the busiest ones, and those most likely to cause you trouble are those who have nothing to do!

THERE MAY VERY WELL BE A SECOND ROCK THAT WILL NEED TO BE MOVED!

I have tried to make the point that while we decry a clergy/laity distinction, we have developed a very obvious one! Once that happens, there tend to be some negative effects that will follow. Most professions have worked hard to make it clear that they are needed. They do this in a number of ways. It may be in the way that a particular profession dresses, the costume they wear which identifies that profession. It may be because they have a function to perform, and perform it at such a high level that most who observe them would say, "I could never do that, what could we ever do without them!" Another way can be through creating a vocabulary that only those in that profession use, which therefore has to be interpreted in order for others to understand what is being said. If we do not define these new terms, we run the risk in the process of presenting a message which remains only partially understood. If there are words that all understand which immediately convey our message, then why would we want to use technical words that we have to explain? The final one that I will mention is that the bar to a task can be raised so high that most people will screen themselves out as candidates to perform it.

At times I have heard negative remarks about the usefulness of vocational ministry. People say that it is embarrassing to have people not adequately prepared go to the world as representatives of Christ. I could tell you of two of my students that I tried my best to get them to give up their desire to be ministers of the Word. Neither of them

listened to me, and in later years both of them proved me wrong in my evaluation of their potential. I had the opportunity to apologize to one of them and compliment him on his record of service.

One of my sayings that I try to impart to my students is that with God, "Availability matters more than ability." If we have ability and are not available, we are of no use to God. However, if we are short on ability but are available, God can make up for whatever we lack. Moses insisted that he was not qualified to do what God was asking him to do. Finally, God asked Moses what he had in his hand, and he said he had a stick. God then said that that was enough...that Moses, his stick, and God could get the job done, and they did (Exodus, chapters 3 & 4). It helps to keep in mind that the rapid progress of the church around the Mediterranean world was in large measure the work of "ordinary Christians" (Acts 8:4). It stands to reason that the church could never support enough "full time" ministers to reach the whole world for Christ. What is reasonable is that when the ordinary church members are the evangelistic cake, and the supported ministry is the icing on the cake, total world evangelism is possible!

I have also heard that vocational missionaries do not have the time to do missionary work after they have worked all day at their profession. Those of us who have spent significant time on the mission field know that a great deal of our most successful efforts will take place in people's homes in the evenings after dinner. This comment also ignores the fact that the work place itself is a mission field. When I was preaching for the old 17th St. Church in San Francisco, I preached a sermon on making deals with Satan. I specifically mentioned that we do that when we work so hard to make our chosen vocational pursuit successful that we do not have time to evangelize. This is certainly something that the Devil will support! After we dismissed, a man who ran a large construction company building things like bridges, and high rise buildings, came to me and said that for years he had made such deals with Satan. He said the future will be different. That year he baptized thirteen people into Christ, and still kept his business going. We are talking about 1956. A few years ago, out of the blue, I got a letter from him in which he said he just wanted to tell me that he was still keeping his word.

A companion paper on-line discusses the pros and cons of what is called "tentmaker missions." Keep in mind that that term comes from the Apostle Paul whose profession was that of a tent maker. It seems that the Jewish people of his day insisted that their sons have a manual trade upon which they could fall back when necessity so demanded. The Bible tells us that for a good part of his earthly ministry

Paul made tents to support both himself and others traveling with him (1 Cor. 18:1-3, Acts 20:33-35, 1 Thes. 2:9, 2 Thes, 3:8).

EXAMPLES OF VOCATIONAL MINISTRIES:

I have just mentioned Paul as a Biblical example. It is obvious that he was still successful even though much of his time was used in working to meet living costs. I will limit my illustrations to missionaries of churches of Christ, although there are many outstanding examples from various denominations that could be mentioned.

JOHN SHERRIFF was a stonecutter. As a young man he moved from New Zealand to Australia where he found the Lord. Then he moved to So. Rhodesia in 1897 to do missionary work, supporting himself by his trade as a stonecutter. He eventually operated two quarries with as many as 100 employees coming from various African nations. He began teaching his workers Bible lessons, converting many of them. He then sent them back to the various nations they came from with a trade that he had taught them (stone cutting), and a Christ to preach! As they began establishing churches, he periodically visited in each church confirming them in the Faith. In addition, he established a boarding home for black children in Bulawayo, all work undertaken at his own expense. During his life he received international recognition for his work as a stonecutter, but what is much more important is that he pleased the Lord!

J.M. McCaleb preached to the people of Japan from 1892 until 1942. During this period he never set a price on his work and never asked for a specific salary. He supplemented funds that he was given through his work as a teacher. He is remembered for his famous hymn, Of One The Lord Has Made The Race. I had the privilege of taking a class taught by him on Oriental Missions at Pepperdine after he returned from Japan.

AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN WWII were the key to the great thrust in foreign missions by churches of Christ after the war. Many of them evangelized for Christ in the various countries where they served in the military. Their evangelistic activity was first of all among their own fellow soldiers. Howard Bybee, who has served so many years in Italy is a case in point. He was led to Christ by fellow military who were members of the church. About fifteen of us who were stationed at Ft. Lewis, Washington in WWII received the backing of the church in Tacoma, Washington to plant a church in the capital city of Olympia. One of us preached, we led singing, we taught classes, and we began a church. Our soldiers also tried to reach out to others as well. When they returned home, many of them then returned to the countries in which they had served, now with the spiritual cannon, the Word of God.

In this regard I must mention my beloved fellow student at Pepperdine, Sub-T Club member, and life-long friend and fellow worker, Harold Paden. After receiving purple hearts for having been wounded and the bronze star for bravery in action in Italy, he later led a group of many, including myself, to Italy to take the gospel to that great people. Until his death a few years ago, he was still working in behalf of the church in Italy. Harold was one of the most successful missionaries of our time, and will always be remembered by many who came to know the love of Jesus because it was so beautifully shown through Harold.

COL. SILVEY was the military attache to the American Embassy in Rome. Both he and his wife were constantly working among the Italian churches during their years in Italy. They also furnished many very gracious services to those of us who were working as missionaries in Italy at that time. For example, they were able to offer some of us some vacation days in a beautiful villa at the sea south of Rome which was property of the U.S. Government.

THE MITCHELLS have spent a good part of their lives working in Italy. For a part of the approximately eighteen years spent there, we were supported by churches and individuals. However for a good number of those years we were self-supporting. During our earlier years in Italy, we had been involved in planting churches in Florence, Prato, and Pistoia. Subsequently we have spent years in Florence first supported by Harding University, and later by Pepperdine University as we were involved in initiating educational programs for those two schools. At the same time we were able to work with the above mentioned churches and also hold meetings in other Italian cities. Over the past eleven years, while working on a part-time basis with Harding, we have been able to spend from six weeks to three months each year doing evangelistic work in Italy at our own expense. Something we plan to do as long as health will permit. Since I am a professor of counseling and a licensed psychotherapist, I now usually do meetings on things pertaining to personal problems and to family as this brings outsiders into contact with the church.

JOHN MURDOCK was sent by the University of Wisconsin to Brazil to demonstrate a process for soil enrichment of soil spoiled by a failure to practice crop rotation. While there his Christian demeanor left a lasting impression on the people of Rio Grande do Sol State in Brazil. Howard Norton, writing of this brother said, "He came to be accepted at the highest levels of government, and when he returned to the United States many rose up and called him blessed, because he had shown that entire area how to help itself." (Missions For The Seventies, Outreach Pub., Oklahoma Christian College, 1970, p. 104).

VOCATIONAL MINISTRY (VM) TRAINING:

When I moved from Pepperdine to Harding in 1980, I came with the mission of helping establish a Harding campus (HUF) in Florence. I have favored Christian universities establishing overseas campuses as I believed many students would eventually go back to those places to share the Gospel. Such has been the case! In addition I had the desire to initiate a degree program in Vocational Ministry. My first effort was to do so using the general education required hours as a major thoroughfare for such a project. For example, public speaking could have featured Bible based presentations, general psychology could have feature group process, dynamics of learning bent toward religious education, and so forth. My projected program would have been mostly covered without requiring additional hours as the courses would, for the most part, have served for both General Ed., and VM. My idea did not make muster, so the present program requiring 33 hours was a compromise. However, given the fact that sixteen hours of Bible are already required at Harding, this would mean only 17 more hours beyond what all the students had to take. To further sweeten the pot, the second major would take the place of a minor which meant taking the VM path ended up amounting to one hour less than one would have to take who went the minor route. I should say that the VM second major does require that there be a "gainful employment" first major, otherwise it cannot be taken. Their first major earned their living, and their second major became their mission at their own expense.

The outcome over the years has been rewarding. By this date, hundreds have taken the VM route. Students have gone out with their friends to plant a church, or to strengthen a weak church. Eric and Kristi Bond, graduates working in Superior, Wisconsin wrote: "The vocational ministry second major exposed us to topics of which we had no previous knowledge. These would include Christian counseling, helping people through grief or loss, communicating the gospel clearly, personal evangelism, and church growth. We have found these to be very practical in the mission field in the Northwest where our vocational mission team has planted a church. The most important benefit is that we are now devoted to ministering to people and serving the church, as we plan to do wherever we go."

While I was dean of the Bible department, I met each year with the deans of sister schools, and each year I would bring VM to their attention and encourage them to adopt such a program for the benefit of the church. I believe there are now seven of our larger schools that have such a program.

VOCATIONAL MISSIONS EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

Principal Overseas Hiring Agencies:

Employment Division, Department of State, Washington, DC
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,
Liaison Office for North America, Washington, DC International
Communication Agency, Recruiting and Employment Branch,
Washington, DC Office of Overseas Schools, A/OS,
Department of State, Washington, DC Pan American Health
Organization, Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Regional Office
of the World Health Organization, Washington, DC United
Nations, Office of Personnel Services, New York, NY New
Transcentury Foundation (publishes a bi-monthly list of career
opportunities overseas with private and voluntary
organizations), 525 23rd St., NW, Washington, DC

The World Trade Academy Press (publishes numerous guides as to
businesses and companies overseas who hire Stateside personnel), 50
E. 42nd St., New York, NY

Note: some of these may be out of date. The best route to go is to
open the internet and type in either Vocational Missions, or Tent-
maker Missions and you will have hundreds of sources at your
disposal. With the shrinking of the world, there are and will be
increasing opportunities for employment overseas. I read of a man
who wanted to do missionary work in The Ukraine and he was able
to find that the bread in that country was not very good. He then
was able to set up thirty mobile bread making stands with bread of
the quality in France or Italy, and now has many employees and
contacts with many persons which he is evangelizing.

THE U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MAKES THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS IN A LITTLE PAMPHLET ENTITLED, "EMPLOYMENT ABROAD, FACTS AND FALLACIES."

"A great variety and number of important jobs are unfilled
because it takes more than mere technical skill to meet the
requirements. Even with salaries and allowances paid by the
Government, most technicians can earn more money, more easily,
in this country. Only the men who consider their jobs more
important than luxury, and work to serve, men who will make
sacrifices of convenience as well as money, are worthy to take the
key positions, for a man cannot serve in another country unless he
has faith that will stand in strange surroundings, a faith that goes
beyond any excitement of adventure or inducement of worldly
gain. Even where the financial rewards are attractive, as they are

in some commercial concerns, persons going out today must have a deep conviction of the brotherhood of every man, and a willingness to appreciate the thinking as well as the habits of other people.”

WORK AREAS THAT ARE MOST PROMISING:

Teaching in private schools overseas

Teaching in military dependents schools

Teaching English

U.S. Government work (a publication of some years ago stated there were about 500,000 military and 45,000 U.S. civilians employed outside our borders).

American Business Firms – One of our grandson-in-laws went to work for a company which has offices overseas for the specific purpose of being able to transfer with his job to a country of choice to do mission work.

Opening your own business overseas – restaurants, language schools, import-export firms, travel agencies, agricultural pursuits, etc.

Carl Mitchell (Presented at the Global Missionary Conference, Arlington, Texas, July 24, '08)