

Indian Missions Tomorrow

R. Stanley, 31 May 2020

God be praised for the hundreds of indigenous Missions He has raised in India following the steady exit of foreign Missionaries due to political and other reasons. What He has done through these organisations over the years is marvellous in our eyes (Psa 118:23). Heaven rejoices over the thousands and thousands of lost sheep brought into the fold (Lk 15:7). The best is yet to be! (Jn 1:50b). It's the responsibility of each Christian to uphold these ministries with sincere prayers, sustained involvement and sacrificial offerings to enable them fulfil their calling.

On the negative side, the deteriorating health of many of these para-Church organisations is a matter of grave concern. The reasons are numerous. The spiritual emphasis is insufficient. Biblical principles are ignored. Satan's targeted attacks are incessant. Original vision is blurred. The collapsing global economy is a major blow. Even before the Corona outbreak, it was only a hand-to-mouth condition in most of the Missions. With the Indian economy shrunk by over 30% due to COVID-19, the future of our ministries is gloomy, especially relating to our financial needs. We do not need to lose heart and turn pessimistic, because God who has called us is faithful and He would fulfil His purposes without fail (1 Thess 5:24).

It has been a growing burden in my heart for quite some years to address certain key issues relating to Indian Missions both for enlightenment and encouragement. Annan J.J. Ratnakumar's recent 16-point letter of 28 May 2020 to the General Secretary of the India Missions Association (IMA), the umbrella body for about 280 Indian Missions with a total staff strength of 60,000, is timely. He has requested the IMA leadership to organise a National Consultation of the leaders of Indian Missions, NGOs, Churches and key-supporters to get helpful input for the post COVID-19 scenario. This is definitely the need of the hour in the Mission context.

Following my retirement from the Blessing Youth Mission (BYM) as its Founder-leader in 2003, after giving leadership to it for 33 years from 1971, I have had the privilege of interacting with various Missions in India which included addressing their National Staff Retreats and visiting their fields. As one of the founding members of IMA, representing BYM in the 1970s, I cannot forget the glorious years of fellowship with men of God like Dr. John D. Richard (1923-2018), Rev. Theodore Williams (1935-2009), Rev. G. S. Mohan (1931-2003) and Rev. J. C. Bose Meiyappan (1938-2001). Meeting with most of the Indian Mission leaders in the Annual Conferences of IMA was unforgettable. I was the first Treasurer of IMA, starting with no money of course! The first logo of IMA was my design! Besides leading BYM from the central office, my wife and I have lived with the field missionaries in several non-Tamil States of India for seven years, which blessed us with educative experiences.

With this background I sit to write this Article, titled, ***Indian Missions Tomorrow***. Several points raised by Annan Ratnakumar in the said letter might be reflected here. The contents of this Article may help the proposed Online Consultation in some way. Because my views are quite radical, I abstain from Consultations these days. In this letter I may sound critical, though, honestly, my intention is to be analytical. Mine is

missionary blood! My blood-group is “M positive.” After the Corona outbreak, I wrote an Article, titled, “*To Mission Supporters ...*” on 7 April, and another, titled, “*Missionaries & Corona*” on 16 April. These were sent as attachments to my Online Letters 124 and 126 respectively on my website: StanleyOnBible.com.

Para-Church organisations, as we know them today, were not there in the New Testament days. In a limited sense, our “Missionaries” are comparable to the “Apostles” who were pioneer workers. They were going to regions where Christ had not been named (Rom 15:20,21). It was after Jesus “sent forth” His disciples, they were called “Apostles” (Lk 9:1,2,10; 6:13; Mt 10:1,2). Similarly, it was after Paul and Barnabas were released from the local ministry team in the Church at Antioch and “sent forth,” they were called “Apostles” (Acts 13:1-4; 14:14). These Apostles were primarily Church planters (1 Cor 3:6). Local Churches were integrated with their mobile ministries (Acts 14:23,27,28). But our Missionaries and the Missions of today are not functionally thus linked to the sending Churches, though that would be ideal. As such we can only draw suitable lessons from the practices and teachings of the Apostles as seen in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles.

(1) The future of Indian Missions primarily depends on the **leadership**. The generation of founding leaders of several of our organisations is either not alive or not active. They have passed on the “baton” to the nextliners. Sadly the “mantle” has not fallen on many of them (Dt 31:14,15; 1 Ki 19:16,19-21; 2 Ki 2:9-13). The new leaders will be successful only to the extent they wait on God, hear Him, and follow His Word (Prov 8:34; Dt 33:3). The forgotten spirit of sacrifice of their forebears must be restored. They must be ready to burn themselves and melt like a candle to brighten up and bless their ministry (Jn 5:35; 2 Cor 12:15). Mere management techniques and administrative skills won’t be sufficient to face the future challenges we would encounter in India. Leaders must be “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Eph 6:10). Any blessing to a Mission has to flow from the head (Psa 133:2,3). The leaders must be humble enough, honest enough and holy enough if they expect their ministries to be healthy enough (Prov 15:33; 2 Cor 7:2; Josh 3:5).

Not all Missions are started with a genuine God-given vision. Reaction, Overseas promises, Splits and Lust for leadership are among the impure motives. God does not honour such ministries in the longer run. Earlier we close down these petty shops the better for His Kingdom.

(2) Winds of adversity are blowing vehemently in India against Christian ministries, especially the missionary organisations. Each Mission is comparable to a battalion. Each **Missionary** is a soldier (2 Tim 2:3). Irrespective of his rank, each soldier must be strong enough to fight the enemy. Equipping each Missionary for the battlefield is the supreme responsibility of the Mission and its leadership. The spiritual wellbeing of each Missionary must be the top priority. Shepherds also need shepherding care (1 Pet 5:1-4; Lk 22:32). When leaders visit mission fields, it must not primarily be for inspection but impartation (Rom 1:11). The visiting leaders must have a definite word from the Lord for each field staff. A father’s heart worries over his son’s health setback (1 Tim 5:23). Visits should be long enough to understand the field problems and struggles.

The strength of a chain is measured by its weakest link. Several field Missionaries are spiritually drained, physically exhausted, and mentally depressed. Invite them to places where they can “rest awhile” and restore their energy (Mk 6:31; Isa 40:30,31). The Missionary Rest Houses of the Blessing Youth Mission are a positive step in this direction. I salute the Missionaries Upholders Trust (MUT) which addresses the various unmet needs of the Missionaries. The secular employer-employee concept which has subtly infected Christian Missions is blood cancer. The relationship between the Leaders and the Missionaries must be like the Paul-Epaphroditus model (Phil 2:25).

(3) The field staff of Indian Missions are generally divided into “Missionaries” and “**Native Workers**.” The latter by and large are treated like second class citizens. It was during the period of “foreign” Missionaries, their Indian coworkers were called “native” workers. This designation should now be abolished. For administrative convenience, if necessary, they can be called as Associate Missionaries. Otherwise the anti-Christian authorities of respective States may sometimes challenge us. I will not be surprised if some day the interstate evangelistic activities would be banned. Any day, these “Native Workers,” so-called, would have to man the situation. Even a senior Apostle like Peter called himself an “Elder” while addressing “Elders” (1 Pet 5:1). The Apostles appointed “Elders” for each new Church they planted (Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5; Js 5:14). The other names for “Elders” are “Pastors” and “Bishops” or “Overseers” (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Tim 3:1; Tit 1:7; 1 Pet 5:1,2). A paradigm shift is a must here for the new Churches to survive future storms. The glaring disparity in the salary structure and in the distribution of Christmas allowances and the like between the Missionaries and the Native Workers should also go at the earliest if we are to return to the New Testamental model. Any practice followed by the early leaders, if found unscriptural as we grow, must be unhesitatingly abandoned (1 Cor 13:11; 1 Pet 1:18b). Let’s not wait for a movement like “*Quit India*” to explode in our fields.

Thank God for all Missiological studies. However, we must keep in mind that the Biblical pattern cannot be improved upon. No updating is necessary for a Book that’s already and always up-to-date. Everything that can be shaken must be shaken so that only that which cannot be shaken may remain (Heb 12:27).

(4) Social service has taken the backseat in most of our missionary endeavours. Our forefathers embraced Christianity when they were wooed by the love in action shown by the European and Western Missionaries. The Schools, Colleges, Hospitals and the like they established played a vital role in Church growth. The slogan of William Booth (1829-1912), the founder of Salvation Army, was “*Soap, Soup, Salvation.*” If we think that this order is not right, we can change it as “*Salvation, Soap, Soup!*” We project field missionaries as working among the downtrodden, the underprivileged and the marginalised. This is the picture our promotional films present before the supporters. We are not justified if atleast 50% of the field expenses does not go to social service. Let’s not spiritualize the Messianic Manifesto (Lk 4:18,19).

Each Missionary must get a field training from relief organisations like World Vision. Because of the Corona outbreak and the return of the migrant labourers to their respective home States, the medical needs of the people in the mission fields will be enormous. Experienced doctors, unemployed medical graduates, nurses and such health

workers must be placed in the fields atleast for short terms to minister to the sick. Pay them decently, otherwise they won't come. Christian Missions are under the Government scanner. The only project for which Apostle Paul and his missionary team raised money was for relief (Acts 11:29,30; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 9:7-9). As usual we quote these texts mostly for anything but charity! Missions can partner with NGOs wherever possible for social services. Evangelism need not always be linked to social work (Mt 5:45).

(5) Praise the Lord of the Harvest for the souls added to His Kingdom and the Churches planted. From day one, the Missionaries must be looking for potential candidates for **future leadership of the new congregations**. Jesus recruited disciples not at the end of His three years of ministry, but right from the start (Mt 4:19-22; Jn 1:43). Missionaries must function as Pastors for a few years only. They are supposed to be mobile ministers. They should leave the new congregation under the care of a couple of Elders. Unless such autonomy is granted to the congregations, the locals would not "own" the ministry, and stand "united" on the face of local threats. Did not the foreign Missionaries leave the congregations and huge Church buildings with Indian leadership, though our standards were far below theirs? People grow when they are trusted. It's always safer to transfer the ownership of our immovable properties to the local tribal congregations. The defects of the disciples were simply too many when Jesus left them with the Great Commission (Mt 28:17-20; Mk 16:11-15; Lk 24:25,48). Even in a city like Crete, which was full of liars, beastly men and lazy gluttons, Titus was able to appoint Elders for leadership (Tit 1:5,12). Away with colonialism in our independent Motherland! The Missionaries who planted these Churches can visit them periodically for encouragement and guidance (Acts 14:21,22; 15:36). Missionary Paul sent letters to the Churches which he could not visit personally due to wearisome journeys or frequent imprisonment.

The Southerners' dominance on the North Indian field Churches due to financial supremacy is not relished. (I am an Indian Christian from Tamilnadu). With the registration of several Indian Missions in the Southern States, if the Government insists on local registration for the functioning of the new Churches, we will be in trouble. God can use even a non-Christian government to drive us to follow Biblical pattern! The national approval rating today for Prime Minister Modi is near 70%. The central control of field Churches is unscriptural. We need not repeat the mistakes of our first generation leaders. Church growth will be faster when the believers themselves of the new congregations start evangelising their kith and kin and communities (1 Thess 1:8-10). The Church that grows by "additions" will start growing by "multiplication" when each one reaches one (Acts 9:31; 12:24; 19:20). Sheep, not Shepherds, litter! I never grow tired of quoting Missionary Evangelist T.L. Osborn (1923-2013): "The laymen will write the last chapter of Church history!"

(6) Thanks to the one who coined the words, "**Tentmaking Missionaries**." By this we understand the voluntary movement of Spirit-filled believers in secular jobs from the reasonably well-evangelised regions to least-evangelised areas on request transfer or for new jobs. Such State-to-State migration with families, when both the spouses are career-people, is more easily said than done, unless circumstances place them in Egypt like Joseph or in Babylon like Daniel. The ultimate answer would be in a Heaven-

sent revival in the existing Churches which would propel each member to personal soulwinning and neighbourhood evangelism. To realise this, the preachers in States like Tamilnadu, Andhra and Kerala must cut short their itinerant programmes in these States and invest their time in the Northern Churches to labour for a spiritual awakening. These three States at present are somewhat overcrowded with pulpiteers. Kingdom-builders, and not personal empire-builders, would heed this call to brighten up Bharat!

The South-India-based Missions can consider shifting their **headquarters** to the Hindi belt to create a wider sphere of influence and give their entire organisations a national flavour. The hq of Gospel Echoing Missionary Society (GEMS) is in Bihar, the graveyard of missionaries, and that of Maharashtra Village Ministries (MVM) is in Nagpur, the hq of RSS. The Tamil Brothers, Augustine Jebakumar and Kulothungan, the leaders of these two Missions, can advise us if we think of such a move. Let us bury our ego and learn from others. No organisation is complete in itself.

(7) During the current crisis the economy has tripped from slowdown to shutdown. The worst affected is the lower income group. The Indian Missionaries belong to this category. It is questionable whether even the Minimum Wages Act is followed in Indian Missions. Churches boast of sending to the Missions an amount of Rs. 5000/- or a little more per month for sponsoring one Missionary. Is this the average monthly income of the Church members? No wonder there's a slump in the number of Missionary applicants. With the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities, the **salaries of Missionaries** must be substantially increased, even doubled. Already most of them are in heavy debts. They have either drawn huge sums as advance from their Missions or borrowed from outsiders to meet the educational and marriage expenses of their sons and daughters. There are those who receive practically nothing from the Mission when they retire because of deductions for the advances. Widows undergo untold suffering with their salaries cut into half following the death of their spouses. The so-called pension to the retired Missionaries is not sufficient even to pay the house rent. Old-age health problems add to the misery. I'm reserving the other points for a future article, to be titled, "*Sufferings of Indian Missionaries.*"

I have been advising Missions for quite many years not to go on increasing the staff strength but limit it to 300 to 500. Let there be two or three Missions with 300 staff each instead of the one with 1000. My words fell on deaf ears. Folks thought I was lacking faith. We must not mistake presumption for faith (Lk 14:28-33). Mismanagement has become the badge of several of our organisations. Any Mission that doesn't have a rainy-day reserve for atleast two or three months, for staff salaries and other regular expenses, is oversized. Do not quote the "daily bread" prayer against me. I need more space to prove my point. I believe in family planning. Don't you? If you have already grown too large, breaking it into two or three manageable units is not a bad idea. It will pave way for several new leaders to emerge. It is not easy to mobilize huge funds after the challenging voices of the charismatic founding leaders die out. Who can say that God's hand was not behind the Government in banning foreign contributions? (Job 12:9). I appeal to all Mission leaders to have in-house brainstorming sessions with their senior staff and key supporters to take appropriate steps lest we plunge into

irreversible situations. May God bless you with prophetic voices when you gather for discussions (Acts 15:13-17). Be open to any change for the better. Blessed are the flexible; for they shall not be broken!

(8) The Church-Missions relationship is still strained. The fault is primarily on the Missions. To start with, we said that we are not a “substitute” but only a “supplement” to the Church. Do our present activities prove this? Do the Mission leaders approach Pastors for concurrence before appointing one of their congregational members as a Prayer Group Leader or a Fund Mobilizer or a District/Regional Coordinator of the Mission? Don’t we get upset when one of the keypersons of our Mission gets involved in another ministry also? Do we volunteer to train the youngsters of local congregations for neighbourhood evangelism? If your pastor is not missionary-minded, it’s “your” responsibility as a Mission-mobilizer to make him so. Missionary-mindedness is more than financial contribution. Back-door entrance does not please our Chief Shepherd (Jn 10:1). An open dialogue of Mission leaders with Church authorities would help ease the tension. The Government looks at both the Churches and Para-Church organisations as a single group. It may tighten up rules in the coming days. Churches and Missions would badly need each other in the forthcoming difficult days. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 is applicable not only to individuals but also to institutions, more so for Churches and Missions. Though a Mission-person, I would unhesitantly say, “Churches don’t exist for Missions, but Missions are for Churches!” The Church is the building, whereas the Missions are a scaffolding. The closer we get to this understanding, the better it would be for both. Missions must labour for revival in the Churches. Our Periodicals must not simply be a promotional material. They should serve solid meat to any reader.

It’s encouraging that Pastors’ Fellowships and Missions’ Fellowships are functioning in several cities and towns, though the attendance in these gatherings is poor. Besides these separate gatherings, there can be common gatherings of Church representatives and Mission representatives, atleast once in two months. Paul needs Peter, and Peter needs Paul. Mutual appreciation is a mark of maturity (2 Pet 3:14-16; Gal 2:7-9). I recall Annan Emil Jebasingh’s Tamil song: *“Dark days are ahead; the level of unity among us will decide our victory or defeat!”* Just before his Homecall in 2013 at the age of 72, while in the CMC Hospital, Vellore, he whispered to me his growing burden to gather about twenty senior servants of God in India to wait before Him, without any agenda, to understand His mind for the future years of His work in this Nation (Acts 13:1,2). I wish this happens!

(This article is available in Tamil also. Share it with Mission Leaders,
Missionaries, Mission Supporters and Pastors.)

R. Stanley, 13 Church Colony, Vellore 632 006, Tamilnadu, India

Tel: 00 91 98437 07600, 98430 11943

<StanleyOnBible@hotmail.com> <Evangeline@StanleyOnBible.com> www.StanleyOnBible.com