

THE GREAT DIVORCE

~~~~Neal Pirollo

Some time ago a good friend of mine separated from his wife. It was more like he deserted his family. He had been married for some time. There were children. But the cares and allurements of the world, coupled with his growing self-indulgence and introspection resulted in this tragic separation. His wife had to take on double responsibility: Long hours at work; raising the children by herself—feeding them, clothing them, nurturing them, helping them choose their college and career direction. She often appealed to her husband for financial assistance. Sometimes he helped; more often he didn't. They were his children, but his neglect was terrible.

Years went by. As if by an act of God, this wayward husband gradually awoke to the error of his ways. He knew he must return. Attempts at reconciliation were made. But, try as she might, the faithful spouse found it difficult—almost impossible—to allow him to return. As hard as it was to manage on her own, with the structures of survival she had put into place, she thought it easier to struggle alone rather than spend her energies on reconciliation. What responsibilities should he assume? What aspects of home life could he manage? What did he know about all that had transpired during his absence? Add to these questions the hurt and resentment that had built up over the long separation. At its best, it was often too difficult to even think about.

A young man—a cobbler now—had a map of the world posted above his workbench. Day by day God was building in him a compassion for the lost of the world. Given an opportunity to share this passion with a group of churchmen, his appeal was cut short with the statement: "If God wants to save the heathen, He will do it without your help or ours!" And in 1793, this terrible separation resulted. Consumed in self-indulgent preoccupation and dulled in its senses to the heart of God wanting to enlarge His Family, the Church dissented its responsibility to participate in the Great Commission.

But William Carey would not be deterred. And the "modern" faith missionary movement began. As a "para-church" organization. Though members of the Body of Christ joined the various organizations, no organization was the Body of Christ—the living, vibrant, God-ordained organism to whom God had given the Great Commission.

Whatever should have been, might have been, or could have been--the past is past. We must look at the situation as it is today. The Church—the Body of Christ—is awakening from a long sleep of self-indulgence. As they, one by one, whether local congregation or denomination, come to the "faithful spouse" and say, "We were wrong. Will you please forgive us? Let us resume our rightful place in world evangelization", the mission agencies must respond. But not unlike the faithful spouse in a marriage relationship, few mission agencies are finding the grace to forgive and put the necessary effort into reconciliation. Some are so exhausted trying to fulfill the functions of the Church that they do not have the energy to even ask the question, "What are the steps to reconciliation?" Some are verbalizing a desire for reconciliation, but when suggestions of steps to take are made, they have every reason in the world as to why this one or that one won't work! Others are just trying to ignore the problem, hoping it will "go away!"

The compass of this article does not allow the luxury of making those suggestions. However, there is an excellent book available, written by an astute missiologist that is crammed full of ideas to effect this reconciliation. *THE CHURCH IS BIGGER THAN YOU THINK* by Patrick Johnstone will give you the Biblically-based prescription for healing this ill and building a new relationship.

However, there is a final point I wish to share: For three reasons, reconciliation *must* be accomplished. Whatever the cost involved, whatever the energy needed, whatever the time it takes, whatever the personnel required, mission agencies *must* respond positively to the Church as it comes to seek reconciliation. I realize it will require an honest spirit of humility—by both partners, but it *must* be done.

Reason One: It is God's order. The Great Commission was given to the Church. (I sat here for a long moment as I thought what of say next. I decided: There is nothing more that needs to be added to this reason! The fact that Jesus gave this Command to the Church is a matter of Record. On second thought: Actually the Great Commission is neither a "commission" nor a "command." In reality, Jesus simply said, "*As you are going throughout Jerusalem, as you are going throughout Judea, as you are going to Samaria [the unloveables of the world], and as you are going to the regions beyond [cross-cultural outreach], you shall be witnesses unto Me. And today, we are those living epistles known and read of all men.*" Christ's statement was a declaration of fact—not a "special something" that required a "special calling.")

Reason Two: As mission agencies are being reluctant to put forth the effort to bring reconciliation, local congregations that feel compelled to reach to the uttermost parts are doing it on their own. Some, with adequate internal structures, and some by linking efforts with national ministries, are being successful without a mission agency. But they are the exceptions, not the rule. The mission fields of the world are becoming increasingly strewn with the casualties of failed attempts; at the least, wrecking havoc in the sending church and the missionary, and at the worst, causing confusion and broken relationships on the field.

Reason Three: As aging mission agencies are being forced to relate with a younger generation in the Church, they must come to realize that there is a major, basic different point of view. The younger generations more and more want a greater and greater involvement in the decisions relating to the tasks to which they commit. Past generations "signed the check" and said, "God bless you. Go do it." Today's (and tomorrow's) generations want to be a part of the strategizing, planning and execution of the task. (And they are more interested in task-related proposals than "career" commitments.) When they are thus engaged, their involvement allows them to contribute all human and material resources necessary to see "our" task accomplished.

It *can* be done; it *must* be done!

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