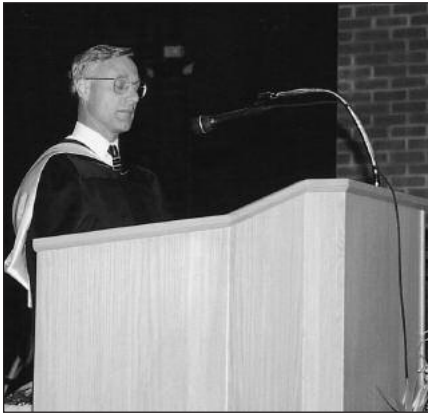




# Even So I Send You – Some Reflections on the Current Missionary Task of the Church<sup>1</sup>

By J. De Jong



Dr. J. De Jong

We live in changing times with regard to many aspects of church life, and this also affects our approach to mission. Changes in our society and in the opportunities and possibilities given to us lead to new approaches and new avenues with regard to the exercise of the believer's mandate in the world. Given our history we are accustomed to think of missionaries as those who go to very primitive areas and preach the gospel to people who are illiterate or totally cut off from the mainstream of civilization. But the constellation of mission work of the Reformed churches is changing. We now work in more civilized countries, and in more advanced

cultures. And most areas of the globe have been confronted with the message of the gospel in one way or another. Some are now sent out to teach rather than preach, or to provide help and assistance in training pastors rather than being ministers themselves.

What is mission? Where do the limits of mission stop and where does providing aid take over? What is the relation between mission and providing aid, or between mission and teaching? These are the questions with which modern day missiology must grapple. And as we grapple with them we must admit that we cannot simply rely on the old ways of doing things. We must exploit the new possibilities that the Lord opens up to us as Reformed churches. At the same time, we are called to work in a way that honours the Reformed and Scriptural principles concerning the work of mission. We cannot compromise our position, or adopt the style of the mainstream churches with their emphasis on humanitarian deeds, and on imparting a gospel which gives no offense, but only provides resources for people to go on living in the present darkness they are in.

In my address tonight I would like to consider some of these issues and also offer a contribution to the discussion concerning the many challenges facing the church's mission today. We want to consider the changing nature of the

missionary task of the church. We consider first, the modern perspectives regarding this missionary task; second, the abiding principles regarding this missionary task and third, the current directives regarding this missionary task.

## Modern Perspectives

Missiology, the science of missions, has been undergoing much change and development in the last thirty years. You can characterize this period as the breakthrough of the modernistic idea in mission. This modernistic idea is: we cannot really speak of mission in any traditional sense, that is, of a being sent by Christ to the unchurched or the unreached. Can we in the west presume to say that we have a message for the rest of the world? The old adage was: there is no salvation outside the church. But this must be turned around. There is no salvation inside the church, for there people are complacent and self-satisfied. There people think they have a ticket to heaven, but they have let themselves fall asleep. The church must change if it wishes to be saved. It must go out into the world and become the church for the world. It must join in the suffering of this world, and share people's suffering, becoming partners with them of the suffering of God in the world.

These sentences capture in a nutshell what the new missiological thinking is all

about. David Bosch speaks of the emergence of a new paradigm, that is, a new world and life view with respect to missions.<sup>2</sup> That new world and life view or paradigm is predominately characterized by the abolition of any sense of western priority, as if the west would be in a position to show others the way to salvation. Mission does not flow from the west to the rest of the world's nations. There is a new flux, a new matrix with a complex chart of points and counterpoints, a grid of interchanges and flow lines going in every direction. One can hardly speak of mission anymore, for everyone is at the same time sent, but also one to whom one is sent, a giver and receiver, one who shares and one who experiences sharing. As Lesslie Newbigin puts it:

It is no longer a matter of the simple command to go to the ends of the earth and preach the gospel where it has not been heard. In every nation there are already Christian believers. . . . The missionary calling is thus merged (or dissolved) into the general obligation of all Christians everywhere to fight injustice, challenge evil, and side with the oppressed.<sup>3</sup>

Here one meets with the end point of the modernistic idea: you cannot really speak of mission anymore today.

Let us consider some elements of this emerging paradigm in missions, and also the impact that this paradigm has had on the activities of many mainstream churches today. First, we can no longer speak of the mission of the church. The preferred concept today is *missio Dei*, the mission of God.<sup>4</sup> God is the real and only missionary. We do not do mission, we only participate in God's mission. And therefore the church cannot dictate to the world, but in its sharing with the world it at the same time discovers with the world what the mission of God is all about.<sup>5</sup>

This means, secondly, that the church is not a body for itself. It is always church for others. The essence of the church is mission. The church is a missionary church, and being a missionary body belongs to the very essence of the church. As Bosch puts it, the church is never static.<sup>6</sup> It is a pilgrim church, a church on the move; it is essentially a sign or a sacrament of the comprehensive salvation of God, and of God reconciling the world to Himself. The church is not the bearer of a message; the church is an illustration of God's involvement with the world.

The one *missio Dei* breaks down into the various *missiones ecclesiae*. All churches are involved in mission. But here there are not mother churches

opposed to daughter churches. All churches are equal, and all are involved in mediating God's salvation for the world. Here one meets the modern ecumenical approach. Churches of all denominations, stripes and colours are included in the *missio Dei*. Modern missiology is essentially a missiology of convergence, and especially convergence between Protestant and Roman Catholic missions.<sup>7</sup> On these points, the church of Rome has changed dramatically. Protestants were formerly called "heretics" and "schismatics" but are now labelled as "dissenters" or "separated brethren" or "brothers and sisters in Christ."<sup>8</sup>

A fourth characteristic of the modern approach concerns the salvation which the church mediates. It is described as a comprehensive salvation, liberating the whole of life from the false structures of tyranny, hardship and oppression. The whole matrix of spiritual and material life together forms the one eschatological idea of salvation. It is holistic and all encompassing. The term most commonly used to describe this salvation is: the coming of the kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately the one mission of God is God's movement – His self-journey through the world. This is a journey of humiliation and suffering. God sends His Son to journey to suffering and death. And His Spirit demands the same journey of those who are disciples in the true sense. The *missio Dei* is marked by compassion for the world and by suffering.<sup>10</sup> The holistic approach of mission demands that the church sacrifice itself for the good of the world. The rich must give to the poor, the strong to the weak, so that God's triumph can be seen in weakness, and His riches in our voluntary poverty.

The new approach to missions also incorporates a new approach to other religions. One can no longer speak of a message of light to free those trapped in darkness. One cannot speak of the relation between the Christian and the non-Christian religions as a difference between truth and error, "but only as the dynamic relation of a part of truth to all of the truth."<sup>11</sup> David Bosch notes how through the years the terminology at the meetings of the WCC has changed: from speaking of the witness of the Christian faith to men of other faiths it has become "dialogue between men of living faiths."<sup>12</sup> From witness to dialogue – a telling mark of the times. For the end result, as before, is that one can no longer speak of the mission of the church.

<sup>1</sup>Text of the address given at the Twenty-second Convocation of the Theological College, September 6, 1996, at Redeemer Col-

lege, Ancaster, Ontario. Elements not included in the address have been incorporated in this revision.

<sup>2</sup>Bosch follows the model of Thomas S. Kuhn, which he introduced in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (second enlarged edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Hans Küng applied Kuhn's model to theology in general, and Bosch in turn applied it to missiology, see David J. Bosch, "Vision for Mission" *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 76, No. 301 (January, 1987) 8-15. See also David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991) 349ff.

<sup>3</sup>Cited in James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, (eds) *Toward the Twenty-first Century in Christian Mission. Essays in Honour of Gerald H. Anderson* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1993) 2.

<sup>4</sup>For the background of the *missio Dei* concept see L.A. Hoedemaker, "The people of God and the ends of the earth" in F.J. Verstraelen (ed.) *Missiology. An Ecumenical Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 157-171.

<sup>5</sup>L.A. Hoedemaker says: "Missiology and ecclesiology are being pulled toward each other," see F.J. Verstraelen (ed.) *Missiology. An Ecumenical Introduction*, 160. Behind this new approach we can see the influence of the Dutch theologian J.C. Hoekendijk, see J. C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out* (translated by I.C. Rottenberg, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966). See C. Trimp, "Het program van Hoekendijk" in *De dienst van de mondige kerk* (Goes: Oosterbaan en Le Coindre, 1971) 90-116. See also P. Van Gurp, *Kerk en zending in de theologie van Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk* (1912-1975): *een plaatsbepaling* (Haarlem: AcaMedia, 1989).

<sup>6</sup>Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 373. See also David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future. Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Valley Forge, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1995), 32.

<sup>7</sup>For a Roman Catholic perspective on changes in missions see R.J. Schreiter, "Mission into the Third Millennium" *Missiology* Vol. 18, n. 1 (January, 1990) 5ff.

<sup>8</sup>D.J. Bosch, "Mission En Route to A.D. 2000" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 14, No. 4, (October, 1990), 149-152.

<sup>9</sup>J. Verkuyl, "The Biblical Notion of the Kingdom: Test of Validity for Theology of Religion" in C. Van Engen et. al. (eds) *The Good News of the Kingdom. Mission Theory for the Third Millennium* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 71-81.

<sup>10</sup>For an example of a trinitarian approach to mission, see George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972) 25-31, 35ff. Dr. Peters opposes the modern ecumenical approach, yet laments the lack of solid missions theology in evangelical circles. See also David J. Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models for Mission" in James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, 185-192.

<sup>11</sup>F.J. Verstraelen, et. al., 444.

<sup>12</sup>David J. Bosch, "The Church in Dialogue: From Self-Delusion to Vulnerability" *Missiology*, Vol. XVI, no. 2, (April 1988), 134.

to be continued 

# Even So I Send You – Some Reflections on the Current Missionary Task of the Church<sup>1(2)</sup>

By J. De Jong

## Unchanging Principles

*In part 1 of his speech, Dr. De Jong wrote about the changing nature of the missionary task of the church. Missionaries no longer work in very primitive areas among illiterate people totally cut off from the world. Most of the world has, in one way or another, been confronted by the gospel. Often, men are sent out to teach and train indigenous people to be missionaries and pastors to their own people. Dr. De Jong then examined the modernistic perspective of mainstream churches and the World Council of Churches who no longer want to speak about the church bringing the light of the gospel to a people trapped in darkness; rather, they speak of a “dialogue between men of living faiths.” In what follows, Dr. De Jong writes about how the Reformed Churches have historically understood the missionary task, and how this view*

*is based upon the unchanging principles of Scripture.*

Now we would also like to say something about the unchanging principles with regard to Reformed missiology. For even though we recognize that we live in changing times, we all realize that God’s Word does not change, and His norms for mission still apply. Therefore a Reformed missiology will be antithetical in character to many of the perspectives that dominate modern missiology. At the same time, in the process of interaction with modern missiological themes, it will seek to apply the unchanging norms to the current situation facing the church today in its missiological task.

We have another reason for going back to the Reformed principles of mission this evening. One might say that the basic principles of Reformed missiology were set forth at the Synod of Middelburg in 1896, thus one hundred

years ago. And the speech this evening is also commemorative of the work of this synod. Allow me to tell you something about the work of this synod as it relates to our topic.<sup>2</sup>

## Middelburg 1896

The synod of Dordrecht held in 1893 appointed deputies to report to the Synod of Middelburg 1896 concerning the structure and method of the work of mission according to Reformed principles. The report brought out a very important principle: mission is not the task of private societies, but of the church of Christ. Christ gathers His church, and He uses the means of the preaching of the word. However, this report said that for practical reasons it would be better that mission was governed by deputies of the General Synod, and that these deputies be appointed to coordinate the work for the various churches. For this

position they had a number of compelling arguments.

The deputies suggested that there were no direct Scriptural givens with regard to what method should be followed, i.e. the more centralized, or the more decentralized method. They also felt that a decentralized approach – as they termed it – would be irregular and poorly structured. By way of example they mention a possible mission meeting held with delegates from all kinds of different bodies: the church of Rotterdam, the classis of Amsterdam, the combined classes of De Hague and Leiden, the province of Friesland, and the combined provinces of Overijssel and Drente. This would result, according to the brothers, in inequality in leadership, methods, correspondence and approaches, in ease of work and in perspectives. The Deputies then postulated a marked difference between the order of churches in a federation, and the order of church life on the mission field.

Further, the brothers argued on the basis of Art. 30 C.O. that mission matters could well be conducted by an agency appointed by the churches in their broadest assembly, since many questions in the area of mission were matters of the churches in common. For this they gave many arguments, of which I mention only a few. They held that a missionary to a certain extent occupies a general office. The relation of the churches to the mission churches is a matter of the churches in common. Many matters the church had to deal with – liturgy, doctrine and so on – concerned the churches in common. A fourth argument concerned the relation to the authorities. Since this was regulated by the General Synod according to the Church Order, the relationship between the mission churches and the government could best be regulated by a synod. And finally the brothers argued that where each local church was not able to fulfil its calling independently it was the duty of the churches in common to deal collectively with these matters in major assemblies.

A number of other arguments were added to solidify the position of the reporting deputies, and one must commend them for expending every effort to bolster their position. They stated that the decentralized approach would seriously effect the unity of the churches. There should not be any competition between churches; indeed, cooperation in the financial arrangements was necessary. Leaving these matters to local churches would also damage the unity and continuity of the mission effort since consistories change their make-up

from year to year. And with every difference of opinion among member churches there would be a long process of appeals, blocking the forward thrust needed to get things done. Next they maintained that the spiritual strength of the churches was too small to support the decentralized approach. For example, interest in mission was not the same everywhere. Many churches lacked the expertise to maintain a mission project, or even to adequately assist in maintaining it. Some churches were simply too busy to handle mission affairs on their agendas. And some churches did not have the means to properly train and examine their missionaries. Here, too, expertise was lacking. The young and weak mission churches could not do with a haphazard and at times conflicting support system. They needed strong centralized leadership. Hence the deputies opted for what they called a more “centralized” approach.

When this report was considered by synod, the deputies appointed by synod to deal with the matter came with a different approach. They were critical of the report that has been submitted, and specifically of the reasons given for the so-called centralized position as opposed to the decentralized one. Although they had a greater affinity with the tenor of the minority report, they also could not accept its conclusions. They found the recommendations of the minority report premature, and not sufficiently based on Scriptural principles. They suggested that mission be considered in accordance with the principles set forth in Holy Scripture. Pragmatic considerations were not to be permitted to hinder the implementation of sound Scriptural principles. And the fundamental principle here was: mission is the task of the local church.

Let us consider some of the synod committee’s arguments as they opposed the formidable looking construction of the deputies’ report. First, appealing to Acts 13, 14 and 16 they stated that Scripture is clear with regard to the demand that mission be conducted by the local church. They insisted that the church order does apply to the mission situation as well, that is, in those areas of the church order which reflect confessional principles. They stated that there were insufficient grounds presented to prove that mission was a matter of the churches in common ad Art 30 of the Church Order. There were also insufficient grounds adduced to justify the conclusion that these were matters which could not be finished in the minor assemblies. The deputies argued that it was not proven that the centralized approach is the ide-

al way to ensure sufficient funds for mission work. And finally they stated that a strong centralized leadership as defended by the reporting deputies would be more of a hindrance than a help to the progress of the mission.

After a good deal of debate, the position of the synodical deputies was adopted. Thus Middelburg 1896 gave a strong impetus for making mission a matter of the local church. David Bosch can say that one of the chief elements of the emerging paradigm in mission is the discovery of the local church.<sup>3</sup> Yet he was mistaken on this point! The priority of the local church was discovered long before the seventies and eighties of our century. It was already promoted at the synod of 1896!

This is not to say that Middelburg 1896 provided us with a complete list of missiological principles which we can just adopt today. On the contrary, much work needed to be done. If I may be brief at this point, one can say that the thread of 1896 was really picked up again after the Liberation of 1944. The next major synod dealing with missions in a more comprehensive way was the Synod of Amersfoort 1948. This synod pushed missiological developments in a continued Scriptural line.

### **Amersfoort 1948**

The key point in 1948, in opposition to the growing climate of the day, was that the essential task of the church with regard to mission is the preaching of the gospel. Under pressure of modern missiological views, many held that the church had a comprehensive task with regard to mission. The so-called comprehensive approach, introduced at the meeting of the International Missionary Council in Jerusalem in 1928, was winning converts among Reformed proponents as well. But the Synod of Amersfoort said that the primary task of the church is the preaching of the gospel.<sup>4</sup> The auxiliary functions are indeed a part of the task of the church, but are required in the measure that they foster and promote the missionary task. The work of providing necessary assistance is also a task given to the church as a whole, that is, it is not a task of the special offices, but a task to be initiated by the office of all believers. It was seen as a diaconal task given to the whole congregation. It was also argued that the help provided must be adapted as much as possible to the needs and circumstances of the people.

On this point Amersfoort 1948 brought in a correction to the line of Synod Middelburg 1896. For although Middelburg gave the task of mission to

the local church, it also promoted a strong comprehensive position with respect to the various auxiliary services that need to be provided in mission work. The argument on which this position was based was the notion of prevenient, or preparatory grace.<sup>5</sup> This theory held that through various temporal and physical auxiliary means, the hearts of people are prepared by God in order to receive the spiritual blessings of His Word. This theory of preparatory grace has its roots in Abraham Kuyper's theory of common grace, which he, in turn, adapted from Reformed scholasticism.<sup>6</sup> In rejecting the comprehensive approach, Amersfoort also opposed this aspect of the line of Middelburg 1896.

One sees since 1896 a two fold line: decentralization of the mission mandate, and a specification of the mandate to the matter of preaching the gospel, with an added provision for necessary auxiliary services. The task of the church concerns those auxiliary services necessary to advance the preaching of the gospel. Further work, such as the building of schools and hospitals fall outside of the immediate task of the church. And as we remember Middelburg 1896, we do not mean to boast in ourselves. We may thank the Lord that He opened the eyes of His servants so that the church took up its missionary task. And we may thank the Lord that He led the synod of Amersfoort 1948 to set its demarcation line against the modernistic ideal in mission. For the comprehensive approach ultimately ends in the promotion of liberation theology, and a horizontal gospel which brings no lasting peace to people.

### Holy Scripture

At this point we would submit that this historical line as indicated by the Reformed synods treated above follows the line of Holy Scripture itself. To be sure, we must keep a trinitarian perspective.<sup>7</sup> However, mission cannot adequately be treated with the notion of *missio Dei*. In fact this notion tends to blur the specific mandate given by Christ to His church. One cannot say: the Father sends His church. It is more accurate to assert that Christ is the author of mission. This is the import of John 20:21, the text from which our title has been taken this evening: "As the Father has sent me even so I send you." To be sure, all mission begins with the decree of the Father. But historically the execution of the mission mandate begins with mandate given by the Son.

The text of John 20 implies that although there is an analogy between the sending of the Son and the sending of

the apostles, this is not a direct identity.<sup>8</sup> Christ was sent for a specific task. He now sends His apostles in the power of the Spirit in order to gather the harvest, that is to bring forth the fruits of His task. Christ gathers His church, in accordance with the confession of Lords Day 21.<sup>9</sup> He sends the Spirit into the world to work with the Word for the completion and fruit of His work.

The apostles serve as His ambassadors, and the apostolic mission means being agents for God and agents for Christ, 2 Cor. 5: 18ff. Only in this oblique sense can one speak of a *missio Dei*. And just as the apostles were sent out in their task by local churches (Acts 13:1,2) so the local church sends ministers of the Word who are especially set apart for the gathering of the converts from the nations. Jesus sent His disciples into the world with the promise of His care and protection, (Mt. 28:18,19; John 17:22). As these disciples were sent, so all those whom they appointed to succeed them through the generations carry on the one *missio Christi*, the mission of Christ to all the world.<sup>10</sup>

The method of mission remains: the preaching of the gospel, and its goal: the planting of the church.<sup>11</sup> The apostle Paul preached the good news to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles, Rom. 1:5; he then sent fellow workers and evangelists to solidify the initial gathering of the churches, Tit. 1:5, Phil. 2: 19.

Once this planting has taken effect, the sending churches can provide additional support, but only as a gesture of support from a sister church. This is not mission in the technical sense of the term, but, as Amersfoort 1948 said, a matter of post-mission, or follow-up care. The *Form for the Missionaries of the Gospel* calls the missionary to preach the gospel, to administer the sacraments, and to institute the offices. Once this point is reached, a new dimension of labour must be initiated, a dimension which cannot be termed mission in the proper sense.<sup>12</sup>

Just as the Son suffered in the flesh in accordance with the mission given Him by the Father, so His servants are called to suffer in the flesh in their missionary task, bearing abuse for the sake of the gospel. Here again the relation is one of analogy, not identity. Yet, as Bosch has pointed out, while compassion is one of the great motivating factors of mission, but *marturia* – witnessing and suffering – is one of its chief characteristics.<sup>13</sup> The apostles had to "complete what was lacking in Christ's sufferings" – i.e. bring the supplement which would ennoble the whole, Col.

1:24. So the church is called to offer that sacrifice which shows that its compassion is not only spoken, but also felt. Our compassion for the lost must result in a willing sacrifice for the gospel. It must be proclaimed first among Jews and Moslems, but then also among all peoples – and especially those who have not heard it before, (Rom. 15:20).

<sup>1</sup>Text of the address given at the Twenty-second Convocation of the Theological College, September 6, 1996, at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario. Elements not included in the address have been incorporated in this revision.

<sup>2</sup>The Synod of Middelburg is rightly called the mission synod where the *magna charta* of Reformed missions was set forth. The Report of the Deputies appointed by Synod 1893 is found in the Acts of 1896, see *Rapport van de Deputaten tot de Zending aan de General Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland bijeengeroepen tegen 11 augustus 1896 naar Middelburg*, (Leiden: D. Donner, 1896) 1-100. The report covers the pages 1-66, the appendices 67-87. Also included is a minority *Nota* with an alternative proposal re the regulation of mission, 88-99. Deputies who wrote the minority statement (N.A. De Gaay Fortman and L.H. Wagenaar) defended the priority of the local church in mission. The missionary must be sent out by a local church, see p. 91.

The Synod dealt with mission in Articles 62, 75, 116. A Committee was appointed by Synod (reporter: Dr A. Kuyper) which essentially drafted a whole new report, which was eventually adopted by the Synod, cf. Article 118, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 379-379.

<sup>4</sup>See the *2de Rapport:de verhouding van den zendingsarbeid tot medischen - en onderwijs - arbeid op de zendingsterreinen (over de kwestie "hoofd"- en "hulp"- diensten)* drafted by the deputies for mission matters as appointed by the General Synod of Groningen 1946. The Synod of Amersfoort 1948 followed the lines as recommended in the majority report, see *Acta van de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland gehouden te Amersfoort van 19 October to 18 November 1948* (Kampen: Ph. Zalsman, 1949), Article 129, 49; see also the report of the deputies appointed by synod, Appendix 40, 171-178.

<sup>5</sup>See *Acta Middelburg 1896*, 72.

<sup>6</sup>A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie* (2nd. ed. Kampen: Kok, 1911) II, 203-207.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, C. Graafland, "Theologische Hoofdlijnen" in C.A. Tukker, et al. *Gij die eertijds verre waart... Een overzicht van de geschiedenis en taken van de zending* (Utrecht, De Banier, 1978), 71-119.

<sup>8</sup>The contracted conjunction is used here with *kathos* in a comparative way, see S.G. Green, *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1912) 342.

<sup>9</sup>D.K. Weilenga, "De Zendingarbeid" *De Reformatie* Vol. 21, #5 (November 3, 1945) 36.

<sup>10</sup>The view often ascribed to the Reformers, viz., that the mandate of Mt. 28:18, 19 was limited to the apostles, must be rejected. It cannot even be maintained that the Reformers en masse held to this view. Beza wrote in

this vein, but he did not gain any support for his view. See J. Van de Berg, *Waarom Zending?* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 10. See also L.J. Joose, *Reformatie en zending. Bucer en Walaeus: vaders van de Gereformeerde zending* (Goes: Oosterbaan en Le Cointre, 1988), 16-37.

<sup>11</sup>C. VanderWaal, "Zending – kerkplanting" in *De Reformatie* Vol. 33 no. 15 (May 17, 1958) 262f. The *plantatio ecclesiae* was a key element in the mission theology of G. Voetius, see H.A. Van Andel, *De zendingsleer van Gisbertus Voetius*, (Kampen: Kok, 1912), 19, 70ff., 148-149.

<sup>12</sup>This view also goes back to Voetius, who was far ahead of his time in his stress on the freedom and autonomy of the local church, see H.A. Van Andel, 79, 186.

<sup>13</sup>D. J. Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models for Mission" in James M. Phillips and P.T. Coote, 182f. 

---

# Even So I Send You – Some Reflections on the Current Missionary Task of the Church<sup>1(3)</sup>

By J. De Jong

## Current Directives

*In part 1 of his speech, Dr. De Jong wrote about the changing nature of the missionary task of the church. Missionaries no longer work in very primitive areas among illiterate people totally cut off from the world. Most of the world has, in one way or another, been confronted with the gospel. Often, men are now sent out to teach and train indigenous people to be missionaries and pastors to their own people. Dr. De Jong then examined the modernistic perspective of mainstream churches and the World Council of Churches who no longer want to speak about the church bringing the light of the gospel to a people trapped in darkness; rather, they speak of a “dialogue between men of living faiths.” In part 2, Dr. De Jong wrote about how the Reformed Churches have historically understood the missionary task, and how this view is based upon the unchanging principles of Scripture. In what follows, he ends with some suggestions for directives and strategies for our current situation – Editor.*

These issues are in flux today. I mentioned some in the introduction to my speech. What about teachers? What about training indigenous workers? What about providing assistance? So we could go on.

We must develop strategies and solutions that do justice to the missiological insights gained in the past. We should not overturn Amersfoort 1948: the specific task of the church remains the preaching of the gospel. If we do, we will not be able to hold on to the gains of Middelburg 1896. If we neglect our history, we will follow the way of the general breakthrough, the modernistic idea which blurs the boundaries between church and world, and between mission and dialogue. If one is not clear on his concept of the church, he cannot be clear on his concept of mission. A solid missiological strategy requires a solid ecclesiological foundation. The chief characteristic of the emerging ecumenical paradigm is that it has no sol-

id ecclesiological footing, and therefore has no concrete missiological direction.

We need to keep the primary task in mind. In this context we need to develop directives and strategies for our immediate situations. Allow me to give a number of suggestions.

### 1. The continuing task

The church still has a missionary calling today. The gospel must be preached to the ends of the earth, Mt. 24:14. Despite many changes in the existing world order, and despite the general post-Christian climate of the modern age, the church must continue to seek to reach the unreached: those who have never heard of the gospel or have become thoroughly estranged from it, and have no Christian churches in their immediate vicinity.

### 2. Mission vs follow-up care

We must retain the distinction between mission and follow-up care. Once the churches have been planted, whatever help the churches provide falls in the category of continued care and support. But continued care and support is not mission work in the proper sense of the word. And we probably need to institutionalize our continued care in more formal channels, so that the lines of responsibility and accountability are clearly delineated.<sup>2</sup> For example, the churches may need to consider the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad or the ICRC as an effective channel to provide assistance and support to sister or member churches. We can also use the ICRC to provide assistance to the mission projects of other member churches. But this should not be confused with our own specific missionary task, which must have continued priority in our minds.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Training of indigenous workers

More attention is being given today to the training of indigenous workers. The primary responsibility for training falls on the young national churches themselves. But if they can benefit from training at foreign schools, as for exam-

ple, our college, then we should capitalize on these opportunities. The recent formation of the Institute for Reformed Theological Training in Kampen is a good step in this direction. However, Hamilton also has a role here, and we should be willing to support the training of indigenous workers as best we can. Then some of the expertise and knowledge gained throughout our history can also be passed on to other Reformed (and reforming) churches.

With increased mobility on the part of native workers as well as increased visa problems and difficulties for foreign workers, we must think more in terms of training indigenous workers rather than simply sending our own missionaries to foreign countries. For example, training Indonesian workers to carry on a ministry among Indonesian people may be more beneficial for us in the long term than training western missionaries for work in Indonesia. We are facing a policy of closed doors in more and more areas. But native workers can more easily be readmitted after more extensive training.

This is not a question of championing the priority of the western established churches over against the foreign nations. However, we do recognize that God has followed His pathway with His church, and this does involve the decisive lines that He has set. He Himself determined that the gospel go not eastward at first, but westward, Acts 13:24f. He chose the churches in Europe and opened Europe to the gospel. And He had the gospel brought to the new world. We do not exalt ourselves or seek to give a priority to ourselves. I do believe that Hamilton here has its own unique task along with other Reformed training institutions in the world. This is not simply a matter of giving, but also receiving; not simply an issue of teaching, but also of learning, as each in our own place we may be instruments in the universal gathering work of Jesus Christ.

### 4. The diaconal task

The Lord has also provided us with the means to give help to needy

churches and needy people the world over. Along with being missionary churches, our churches must also be diaconal churches. We promote the missionary congregation;<sup>4</sup> at the same time, we must promote the diaconal congregation. One cannot defend the missionary congregation without at the same time defending the diaconal one, or vice versa. And a diaconal congregation will use its means and resources to foster and promote the work of mission wherever possible.<sup>5</sup>

## 5. Relationship between word and deed

In this regard, the relationship between word and deed needs our continued attention. At the very least we must say that these two belong together, and should proceed in harmony and cooperation as much as possible. One element lacking in the approach of Synod Amersfoort 1948 was the perspective on the role of the deacons in mission. The deputies left open whether the deacons were to be included locally in the diaconal work for mission projects. Apparently they saw the task of the deacons as limited to the local church. But the diaconal task of the local congrega-

tion is not limited strictly to the care of the poor within its own walls. The deacons can also provide direction and leadership in diaconal outreach beyond the local congregation. And what better avenue to pursue this than to seek to provide necessary help and support to fledgling mission congregations?<sup>6</sup> Hence I find it a positive development that our relief agency (CRWRF) is seeking to develop short and long term projects in connection with the Canadian Reformed mission work.

## Conclusion

Ultimately we must be reminded of the fact that the missionary task of the church is not over. We can and should not hide behind other people's projects or other peoples' endeavour. Providing assistance is one thing, mission another. And the Lord calls us to be a missionary church. He calls us to be a living diaconal church. The needs are many; the challenges are great. But willing hearts make light work! And willing hearts are hearts of love – to the brotherhood, and to a world of people lost in pain.

<sup>1</sup>Text of the address given at the Twenty-second Convocation of the Theological Col-

lege, September 6, 1996, at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario. Elements not included in the address have been incorporated in this revision.

<sup>2</sup>So C. Haak, in *Zending in beweging, Bundel ter voorbereiding op het congres Zending in beweging op D.V. 8 en 9 december 1995* (Zwolle: Gereformeerde Missiologische Opleiding, 1995), 31ff.

<sup>3</sup>It is noteworthy that the Roman pontiff has stressed the abiding importance of the mission mandate to the nations for the Roman Catholic Church. Despite a stronger sense of ecumenism, the Pope has not compromised on the central aim of Roman Catholic mission. He says: "Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that she *alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation," [emphasis in text]. See the encyclical *The Mission of Christ the Redeemer (Redemptoris Missio)* [Vatican translation] (Sherbrooke, PQ: Editions Paulines, 1991) 82. If Rome retains the mission mandate so strongly, how much more should not the true church be vigilant! <sup>4</sup>This, of course, is not meant in the modern sense as defended by ecumenical missiology, viz., that the essence of the church itself is missionary.

<sup>5</sup>See the reports of the conference *Zending in Beweging* (Zwolle: GMO, 1995).

<sup>6</sup>See C. Trimp, "Zo zullen wij toenemen in liefde tot alle mensen" summary in *Dienst*, Vol 39. no. 4 (July-August, 1991), 13-18.