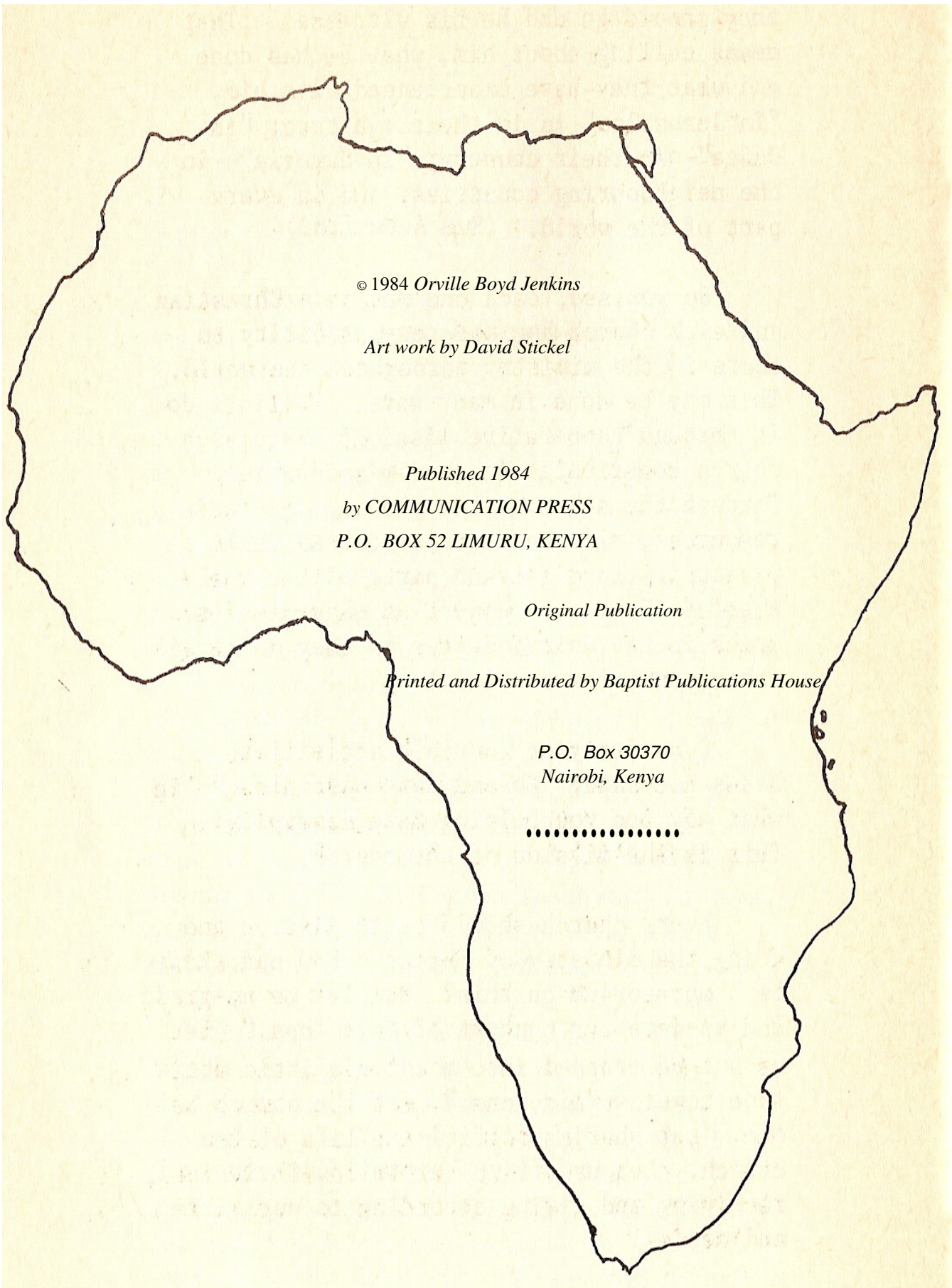


***Missions:  
A Modern Definition***

**Orville Boyd Jenkins**

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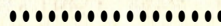
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## MORATORIUM?

A few years ago, the Reverend John Gatu from Kenya called for a moratorium on Christian missions. John Gatu was moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and President of the All Africa Conference of Churches. So in one respect, he was speaking on behalf of millions of African Christians when he called for a moratorium on missions.

A moratorium would be a period of time in which the Western Christian churches stopped sending missionaries to Africa and other "Third World" countries. This would give African churches time to grow, to become independent and to develop their own governance without the dominance of Western missionaries.

Yet we see indications that independent African Christian Churches in Kenya and other countries are increasing their requests for Western missionaries. Some are African Christian churches which are unrelated to established Christian missions.

Examples are the African Brotherhood Church and the African Christian Churches and Schools, requesting missionaries from Canadian Baptist churches to help them fulfill their mission. The Baptist Convention of Kenya, an independent and self-governing fellowship of churches, continues to request more missionaries from the United States to share in the ministry of Baptist churches in Kenya. This is happening all over Africa.

## A MORE ADEQUATE CONCEPT

Perhaps this call for moratorium reflects an inadequate view or concept of missions. Perhaps in the old days, missionaries came to develop and control. It was *their* church and *they* ran it. This may be one reason why John Gatu felt that there should be a moratorium on missions.

But such a concept of missions is deficient. It is unnecessary to require a choice between this concept of missions or none. The modern concept does not seem to involve the deficiencies of the older approach. Missionaries go as witnesses and they train and assist national Christians to become independent, to be witnesses themselves and to do the work of the Church in their country.

It seems to me that the modern concept of missions is a very Biblical one. It is involvement of the world-wide church in world-wide ministry. Missions is seen as an integral part of ministry, with all Christians, wherever they are, working as equals.

There should be no question of a moratorium if missionaries go in order to witness; if their work includes teaching and training new Christians to undertake the leadership of the church. Jesus told his disciples, "Go and make disciples of all nations." That seems to me to be an imperative command.

The church of Jesus Christ--if it wishes to follow *Jesus Christ*--must be making disciples. That means, then, when one person makes a disciple, that new disciple will also begin making disciples, as he matures in following Christ. So every follower of Christ should be a disciple-maker.

There should be no question of the missionary keeping new believers from growing, from doing their own missionary work, from organizing and running their

own church, from maturing in faith and financial strength. Christ should be the head of all of our work. This means each will serve the other; one will not dominate the other. The older Christian will help the younger Christian grow.

### **LOCAL FREEDOM**

In 1956 Baptist mission work began in Kenya. Now [1984], 28 years after Baptist missionaries first came to East Africa, there are 450 Baptist Churches in Kenya. Of these 450, about 360 are self-supporting. All the others are on the way to being so, and these churches have been starting other churches and developing their own local ministries.

The churches are organized into a fellowship which is controlled by the churches ("local congregations" in Baptist polity), not by the mission. The Baptist Mission has no control over the Baptist Convention. This is as it should be. The churches are free and independent to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, in any and every part of the world, in any and all local circumstances.

A missionary is one who goes; the missionary witnesses and establishes churches. In the Baptist faith, it is our goal to go to all countries to win people to Christ, to establish independent, self-governing, self-supporting congregations which develop their own programs, carry out their own outreach and send out their own missionaries. The Baptist Convention of Kenya, organized in 1971, is sponsoring 13 missionaries of its own. This is significant to me--this is not a question of missionaries from one country dominating Christians in another country.

It is a matter of sharing, with each contributing his skill in the place where he feels he should be working. Those who have become Christians have the right, the privilege, the opportunity and the responsibility to share their faith with others. Thus each of us should be "going," just as Kenyan Christians are now winning others to Christ. African Christians are winning African people to Christ and they are establishing their own churches and running their own affairs.

These churches are also missionary churches. Sharing is the life of the church.

This same thing is occurring in other countries like Brazil. Baptist missionaries from the Southern Baptist Convention and from other Baptist groups in the United States have been working with Brazilian Baptist churches. The Convention of the Brazilian Baptist churches has its own foreign mission board which also sends missionaries now into several other countries, including the USA. Yet Brazilian Baptists are still receiving foreign missionaries from the United States.

There should be nothing strange about this, because the concept of Christian ministry is sharing. If the Brazilian churches feel they need assistance from missionaries from the United States, that is well and good. If they feel they can send missionaries to other countries at the same time, that is well and good. They are participating in the total life and ministry of the Church.

The same thing is occurring in France, where there is a Federation of Baptist Churches. The Federation requested assistance from Baptists in the United States, who have sent several missionaries to do various sorts of church-related work.

It is not a question of the developed going to undeveloped or of the American going to the African, but it is a matter of sharing and doing ministry. Missions is a part of the ministry of the church. In France many of the people have the concept that they don't need missionaries--they are civilized.

This attitude indicates that the work of a missionary is to bring civilization to people. This, however, is not the work of the missionary. The French Baptist Federation has requested missionaries from America to assist in something more profound than civilizing the French people!

### **BEYOND CULTURE**

The missionary does not go to a country to civilize people. Each people in the world and each culture has its own civilization. The purpose of the missionary is to go and witness to Christ and to help people respond to Christ. In Romans 3:29 we are told that God is the God of all people, not the Jews only. He is the God of the Gentiles also.

It is important for us to understand that all the people in the world are the people of one God and all the people in the world should be doing God's work. We are told in John 1:12 that to all who receive Jesus, he gives the power to become the children of God. Every person who accepts Jesus Christ has the privilege of being a child of God. This means he will be doing the things that a child of God does--wherever he lives or whomever he comes in contact with.

There must not be one group telling another group what is right and true, but there must be an approach of exploring together, of helping each other to interpret the Bible and God's will. To assume that all Christianity and all Christians in the world are to be judged by American Christianity is to *miss the point*.

What does that mean? It means that to judge all Christianity by American standards is to commit sin. For the meaning of sin is to miss the point, to miss what you are aiming at. We should not be judging the world in terms of American Christianity, but we should be judging all the world and all Christianity--including the American church--by the witness of the Bible.

There should be cross-cultural ministries. That is, members of one culture working to communicate the gospel in another culture. We still must send, but we must also receive, because of the concept of sharing. Missionaries must be sent and they are usually sent to people who have not heard the gospel.

But the church exists to some extent in almost every part of the world. It is not a question of one nationality dominating another nationality, but it is a question of the church which is one throughout the world sharing in the common ministry throughout the world.

Certainly we must send missionaries, because some people will be called out of our churches who feel their work is in another country. This is right and good. We must send those who wish to go. And yet we must be open and

willing to receive and to learn also. The Christian life is not simply giving, teaching and leading. It is also following, understanding and learning. The church in every country should be sending those called out from there.

### **UNITY IN VARIETY**

In Ephesians the fourth chapter, we find a statement which may help us. The Apostle Paul is explaining about the gifts within the church. Ephesians 4:7 says: "But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." Now, what are some of these gifts? Paul continues in verse eleven, "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for equipping the saints to do the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ."

There are gifts given to the church as a whole. There is no one person who has everything needed to make the church Christ's body; the gifts are spread out among us. We all must share, so that the life of each of us can be complete. We all need each other within the church--within the congregation, within the world-wide fellowship of God. God has given each of us gifts and Paul lists some of the leadership gifts here; The purpose for these leadership gifts is given in verse twelve: "for equipping the saints to do the work of ministry."

Each of us has a gift which should be contributed to the total body of the church in order that we might be helping equip God's people for the work of ministry. Each of us who follows Jesus Christ has a place in the ministry of the church. There is no concept in the New Testament of professional ministers who do ministry on behalf of the rest of the church. Each person--whether he is a leader or "simply" a member--has the responsibility to be a *minister*. If you have accepted Christ, he has called you to be a minister.

But there are various gifts: some are pastors, some have the gift of teaching, some would be prophets or evangelists. All of these gifts together enable the Church to do Christian ministry. That is what missions is all about. Each of us doing what we have been given the gift to do, in the place we feel God wants us to do it. You don't have to work in the church all day, you don't have to preach all the time, but you do have to be "doing" ministry, or otherwise you are not "doing" Christianity.

The variety of gifts within the church is meant to lead to overall unity. Ephesians 4:13 says, "This will continue until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God." We are all to share together and to attain the unity of the faith together. There is a unity that we will find if we all commit ourselves to Jesus Christ, the one Lord, and contribute all our gifts to the church, his one body. We would then attain the unity of faith.

### **THE WORLD-WIDE KINGDOM**

Each of us grows up in a culture, but each of our cultures represents only a part of the people God has created. To make God into the image of our own race, our own church, our own nation, will cause us to lose sight of the

worldwide character of God's Kingdom and of the fact that God is greater than any of us.

No individual, no congregation, no denomination, no nation can contain God. God is not the God of the Americans; He is not the God of the Baptists nor of the Methodists nor even of the Charismatics. God is God, and each one who comes to Jesus Christ must come to God, not bring God to himself.

The real question is not whether we should or should not send missionaries. The question is: Is each member of the church doing what he should be doing, in the place he should be doing it? Each follower of Jesus Christ must be engaged in ministry. That is, we must all be doing God's will and God's work" *within* our community and with the people who need him. Missions is a part of that ministry--evangelism, outreach, social ministry, leadership training and missions all go together!"

Is your church doing anything beyond meeting on Sundays and singing hymns? Are you carrying the witness of Christ with you during the week, on your job? Do you do what you do *for Christ, through Christ and with Christ*? At this point we must consider the missionary in the light of the world-wide character of God's Kingdom, the fellowship of the saints, the gifts that each of us has to contribute.

We must consider the missionary in light of the work of the one Church throughout the world in its many facets, in its many expressions. This is where the missionary comes in.

### **WHAT IS A MISSIONARY?**

The missionary is a Christian believer who goes to witness. to live for Christ, to be a part of the community but in a culture other than his own.

He may be doing any kind of job. He goes as a Christian witness. He may be a white man in a black culture, he may be a black man in a white culture, he may be a Christian from India working in Kenya. He may be of any race in any other race's culture, or of one language group in any other language group.

But he should be part of the total Christian community where he lives. Each and every part of the church should be sharing, sending, going and simply *being* Christian.

### **CHURCH AND MISSION**

To be the church is to be in mission.

Are you in mission? Is your church in mission in your own community? In the nation? In other parts of the world? It is not a question of foreign missionaries dominating national Christians. This question should never come up.

The situation should be each Christian sharing with other people, that



they may also become Christians, and continuing to teach and train these new Christians that they may become ministers as well. The "original" missionary will want to lead his "converts" to become missionaries also, to become teachers, leaders, pastors. They should be a part of their community life in their own local area.

Are you living a "missionary" life?

Are you being a missionary where you are? Or do you say, "That group has its own church and its own pastor. Those people can go to *their* church if they want to." That attitude misses the point. The point is, are you doing what you can to do the work of Christ *where it needs doing*?

You may be the only one who can do it. Your church may have a special mission which you are overlooking. Jesus told his apostles they should go and be his witnesses. That means telling about him, what he has done and what they have experienced with him. "In Jerusalem" is in their own town; "in Judea"--in their country; "in Samaria"--in the neighbouring countries; and in every part of the world. (See Acts 1:8.)

So you see, each one who is a Christian and each church has the responsibility to share in the ministry throughout the world. This may be done in many ways. Baptists do it through cooperative missions where each church contributes to send missionaries.

Through the sharing, the pooling, of their resources, all the churches extend their ministries to different parts of the world. American Baptists support as many missionaries in the United States as they do in all other countries combined!

Consider your church's activities. Jesus has said, "Go and make disciples." In what way are you helping make disciples? This is the mission of the church.

Every church should be in mission and doing the ministry of Christ. How can there be a moratorium on this? But let us up-grade and up-date our concept of "missions." Let us not be trapped into a colonialistic attitude towards "missions." Let the church be one. Let sharing fulfill the life of the church. Let us affirm our fellow-Christians, receiving and giving according to our gifts and needs.

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