God's heart for the world in every generation

Looking back over some of the history of missions it is striking to discover that God said many of the same things to different generations. The world was different, politics were different, communications were different and many methods were different, but the basic needs of people and what it would take to share God's love in every corner of the earth were not so very different!

The short survey below focuses mainly on the beginnings of The Church Missionary Society in parts of Africa and the Middle East. Similar surveys could be done of the American Presbyterians and many other groups that came into being around this time. One of the blessings of missionary biographies is that we uncover those things that God put on the hearts of His servants as He sent them out into His world. Sometimes they failed to reach their goals, not because the vision was wrong but because the methods by which they tried to achieve it needed to be better thought through. One example of this is the setting up of denominational churches without due attention to the culture of the people.

God is putting many of the same things on our hearts today. Our revised Mission Statement can be seen expressed in different vocabulary by those who have gone before us over the decades. This is what is on the heart of God:

Vibrant communities of Jesus worshippers among the least reached.

We have listened to God's heart for the nations. We also need to know from Him the details of how this is to be achieved. Methods will vary from country to country and situation to situation. We need the Holy Spirit to reveal to us His plan for the different places to which He has sent us. So here is just a brief survey of some of those who went before.

In the middle of the 18th century in England there was a great revival inspired by the preaching of John Wesley and others. Those impacted by this revival became known as "evangelicals" because of their emphasis on **individual conversion** and **justification by faith**.

As this movement grew there was an increasing desire to take the Gospel where it had not yet been heard. At the same time there was an increasing awareness of **the value of each individual**. This highlighted the scourge of slavery. As these concerns took hold a number of mission groups came into being in England:

The Baptist Missionary Society (1792)

The London Missionary Society (1795)

The Church Missionary Society (1799)

The Society for Missions to Africa and the East (1799)
[in 1812 this was renamed The Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East)

At a meeting in March 1799, John Venn raised the question of what they personally were going to do about spreading the Gospel. They established certain fundamental principles:

- To follow God in the same way as the missionaries of the early church
- To begin humbly and on a small scale
- To put money after prayer and study
- To depend on the Holy Spirit

A further meeting in April passed the following resolution, **"It is the duty highly incumbent upon every Christian to endeavour to propagate the knowledge of the Gospel among the heathen."**

The Church Missionary Society was ready to embark upon the task but they met many difficulties:

- Since they were seeking clergy as missionaries the proposals had to be agreed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. It took 16 months for him to consider their aims and even then his response was non-committal. He said that, **"He would look on the proceedings with candour and it would give him pleasure to find them such as he could approve."** Together with other leaders in the Church of England he didn't see any need for a new missionary society. No bishop gave formal approval to the society until 1815.

- Another difficulty was the choice of mission field. West Africa seemed the natural choice. There was a colony for freed slaves in Freetown, Sierra Leone, that had been set up in 1786. Few other places were open. In India the East India Company did not approve of reaching the Indians, although it did accept chaplains for British communities. In China no foreigners except traders were admitted and Japan was closed to outsiders.
- A further delay was due to their inability to find missionaries. No suitable Englishmen were found although many were interviewed. It wasn't until 1804 that two German Lutheran clergy, Melchior Renner and Peter Hartwig trained in the Berlin seminary and sailed for Freetown.

Some Beginnings in Africa

Henry Venn was the chief secretary at the CMS headquarters. His judgement as well as his experience had convinced him that all mission churches should be:

- self-supporting
- self-governing
- self-propagating

They realised early on the importance of training Africans for the ministry and a Training Institute was opened in 1827 at Fourah Bay. Education was of prime importance and every mission station had a school. Slowly an independent Sierra Leone church was achieved. By the 1850s only the bishop was European but all the pastors were African. By the 1870s they began their own missionary society to work in neighbouring districts.

Over the next 50 years CMS, together with other groups, established work in Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. Much of this involved education, medicine and commerce.

Work began in Sudan in 1899 at Omdurman and the following year in Khartoum. The pioneer party who were hoping to reach into the south was made up of Llewellyn Gwynne, Dr Frank Harpur and Archibald Shaw. They were not allowed to enter the south until 1905. Funds that had been given in memory of General Gordon were used to set up the first mission station at Malek in 1906.

CMS saw the development of the church as two distinctly different areas. The north was linked with Egypt and part of the diocese of Egypt and the Sudan. In 1945 Sudan became a diocese in its own right. But in 1920 the southern Sudan mission was placed under the oversight of the Bishop of Uganda. In 1926 Bishop Leonard Kitchen was consecrated as the first bishop of the Upper Nile diocese. At his death in 1935 this diocese was restored to the jurisdiction of the diocese of Egypt and the Sudan.

The mission worked in these two areas in quite different ways. In the north work was among Muslims and was quite restricted. The church remained small. Medical work was centred on the hospital in Omdurman. Later there were other clinics as well as a children's home and a girls' elementary school. The government asked CMS to open schools in the Nuba Mountains and they chose to do this in Salara in 1935 and Katcha in 1939. These schools were taken over by the government in 1959.

In the south the emphasis was also on education and medicine, but the work was among tribal people:

- The Dinka at Malek and Akot
- The Nuer at Ler and Zeraf island
- The Zande at Yambio and Maridi
- The Bari at Yei, Loka, Juba and Kajokaji

A shortage of personnel and funds in the 1920s and 1930s made it difficult to fulfil all the requests of the government. All stations had elementary schools for boys and girls but there was only one secondary school – The Nugent School it was begun in Juba in 1920 moved to Loka in 1929. The best students from the mission schools were sent either to the school itself or to its technical department.

By the 1930s both the mission and the church were growing. Revival had spread into South Sudan from Uganda and by 1941 there were ~18,000 Christians. That year the first ordinations took place including that of Daniel Deng who became the first Sudanese Anglican Bishop in 1955.

Beginnings in the Middle East

Right from the beginning CMS had shown concern for this area and encouraged translations of the Scriptures into Arabic and Persian. Henry Martyn carried this forward in his brief stay in Persia in 1812. The vision of CMS was to establish links with the ancient Eastern churches then under Muslim Turkish rule. The goal was to see them revived and used as instruments to reach out to the Muslims among whom they lived.

The invitation to embark on this work came from a Roman Catholic in Malta. In 1815 William Jowett went on an exploratory trip to visit oriental churches with the goal of starting Bible Societies to print and circulate Scriptures in the vernacular. He made his base in Malta and set up a printing press there. In 1825 men went to Egypt to make contacts with the Coptic Church and in 1830 they tried to reach the ancient church in Ethiopia. The Maltese Press was producing Scriptures and prayer books in Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Italian, Maltese and Amharic. The Turkish government banned distribution of these Scriptures, but their ban had little effect. Orthodox church leaders were not much influenced and the work didn‘t fulfil the hoped-for goals.

In 1849 a second exploratory trip was sent out at the request of Samuel Gobat, the bishop in Jerusalem and the British Consuls in Syria and Mosul. As a result, it was decided to start work in Palestine. The Rev. F. A. Klein was sent to Jerusalem. Others followed. Several stations were opened, but the main one was Nazareth. The work came up against much opposition and moved forward very slowly. In 1875 CMS held a conference in London on Missions to Muslims. This did a great deal to push the work forward. Educational work expanded as did medical work and work among women began. By 1899 there were 59 missionaries in Palestine of whom 28 were single women and 3 were doctors.

Victory in the Crimean War (1875-1856) meant that the British and allied governments could force the Sultan of Turkey to pass a decree which seemed to secure religious liberty throughout the Ottoman Empire. Two missionaries were sent to Constantinople (Istanbul) and for a time there was a very fruitful work there with a number of people coming to faith. But strong opposition eventually made evangelism impossible. CMS was also very challenged financially and so in 1877 their work was handed over to the American Mission.

After the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, F.A. Klein was relocated to Cairo and the mission there was re-opened. The Anglican Church in Egypt grew as a partnership between the missionaries and the British expatriates. The churches established came under the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem.

In 1908 Llewellyn Gwynne was made Assistant Bishop of Khartoum. In 1920 Egypt and Sudan became a separate diocese with Gwynne as bishop until his retirement in 1947. Egyptian membership of the churches was small because CMS stuck to its original intention not to proselytise the Coptic or evangelical churches, but to focus on the evangelisation of the non-Christian population.

Cairo remained a strong centre not only with schools for boys and girls, but with the Old Cairo Hospital opened in 1889 under Dr Frank Harpur. In 1905 a book depot opened in Cairo. Its most famous publication was “Orient and Occident” an Arabic magazine on religious and general subjects started by Douglas Thornton and W. H. Temple Gairdner. Its circulation went far beyond Egypt. It was still in publication in the 1980s. Thornton died in 1906 and Gairdner continued on his own until 1923 when Constance Padwick came as his assistant. They believed that Christian literature work was essential to advance evangelism in a country of such ancient culture and wide literacy.

Work in Iran began in 1869. Robert Bruce had been working under CMS on the borders of Afghanistan, and he needed a knowledge of Farsi. He was on his way back from England to India and stopped off in Isfahan. He settled in the Armenian suburb of Julfa. After a year there CMS agreed that he could stay longer in order to revise and complete Henry Martyn’s translation work. After two years some enquirers were seeking baptism and the Armenians had asked for a school to be established. A little while later there was a famine and he organised relief work funded by money from Germany.

In 1875 he returned to England on leave. His enthusiasm and his passion to move ahead with the work generated a lot of support and CMS decided to adopt this as a mission. In 1879 Dr. E.F. Hoernle

joined Bruce and they began medical work in Julfa. Miss Mary Bird pioneered work among women opening a small dispensary in Isfahan in 1892. From 1894 Dr Donald Carr carried on Hoernle's work . In 1894 he was joined by Dr Emmeline Stuart – the first woman doctor in Iran. Now they were able to open and run the women's hospital.

In the same year work began in Kerman where Dr. G. E. Dodson pioneered surgery for carpet weavers. He died in 1937 after 34 years of service. Iranian dispensers had worked in Yezd since 1893 and the work was officially recognised in 1898. Work in Shiraz was established in 1900. So by the turn of the century a dedicated group of missionaries were serving the nucleus of an Iranian church through translation and literary work as well as schools and medical missions.

The First World War caused the evacuation of all CMS personnel in 1915, but they returned within 18 months. An industrial school for women and girls started in Iran in 1916 and led to the revival of many indigenous Iranian crafts.

From the late 1920s government pressure on missionary institutions caused many to close. Those with Iranian principles survived for a time but were sold to the government in 1951.

Work had begun in Baghdad in 1883. It was set up as a separate mission in 1898. In 1896 a hospital was established in a private house. In 1901 the work had spread to Mosul where another hospital was built. Evangelism focused on Shia Muslims but progress was very slow. At the outbreak of the First World War two of the doctors were interned for a short time before all personnel left to Egypt.

In Palestine in the early 1900s there was growing friction between the decisions of the CMS locally and the Palestinian National Church Council that was rightly developing as an independent body. Appeals were made to CMS in London against the local CMS group. This sad state of affairs was made worse by the outbreak of the First World War. All CMS workers left until 1918.

In 1920 Wilson Cash, the missionary secretary in Egypt, was appointed to Palestine as well. His appointment and visits of delegations from London in 1921 and 1926 gave the mission a fresh start. The work was divided into 5 districts:

- Jerusalem (with Gaza)
- Jaffa
- Nazareth
- Nablus
- Transjordan

Medical work continued at Gaza where Robert Stirling had worked from 1893 to 1917 and Jaffa which had been founded by Miss C. A. Newton and was bequeathed by her to CMS in 1908.

The delegation that visited in 1926 recommended closer co-operation with other societies and approved the setting up in Jerusalem of the Newman School of Missions – a school of languages and Islamic studies for missionaries under the directorship of Eric Bishop.

In their educational work the mission was advised to concentrate on the Bishop Gobat School for Boys and the Jerusalem Girls' College. In the 1940s the headmistress of the Girls' College was Miss Winifred Coate. After the proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948 she became well-known for her work in the Arab refugee camps in Zerka.

In the first half of the 20th century it became clear that the role of the missionary must change from leader and overseer to partner. Now as new workers were sent out they were asked, **"To undergird these young churches, to give them our fellowship and to share with them the rich heritage of our Christian experience. … We believe this can be best accomplished by missionaries becoming partners and co-operators in the church."**