

A Review of Church History

The Early Church also had difficulty in the matter of “sharing God’s blessings”. In fact, this has been true throughout most of church history. Having learned her lesson through sufferings of birth pain, the Early Church preached the gospel to nations around the Mediterranean Sea, a service which was remarkable. But after the passing of the first-generation believers, the Church's zeal for missions diminished and her doctrinal purity became ritualistic. In the 4th Century, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Although outwardly the Church seemed to have conquered the Roman Empire, in reality, the Roman Empire corrupted the church.

During the ensuing 1000 years of so called Dark Age, Catholicism flourished. Although Christianity did exert certain influence and made some contributions to the culture of that time, and produced such people as Francis of Assisi who risked his life to preach the gospel to some extremely antagonistic Muslim kings, it fell far short of the demand of the Great Commission in terms of spreading the gospel and accomplishing global missions.

In 1517, Martin Luther initiated the Great Reformation Movement. For the next 200 years, however, Protestants were busy in defining Christian teachings and dealing with fierce attacks of the Catholic Church. They did not have time to think or engage in world mission.

On the other hand, in late 16th century, the Catholics began their Counter Reformation Movement by organizing the well-disciplined Jesuits and Inquisition. They tried to recover the lost ground to the Protestants in Europe, and to engage in vigorous missions elsewhere. Their missionaries reached India, Japan and China. Fathers Michel Ruggiri and Matteo Ricci, who went to China during the Ming dynasty around 1601, were Jesuit missionaries.

It was only after a long period of two centuries, the Protestants started slowly to take up their world mission ministry. Through the pioneering efforts of a few individuals, like William Carey of England and Count Zinzendorff of Germany, the gospel was proclaimed from Europe to Africa, the Americas, Asia and other regions. It is quite appropriate that Kenneth Scott Latourette called the 19th century a “Great Century” for world mission.