

Appendix B

A Missionary Call

by Robert E. Speer

What constitutes a missionary call? It is a good sign that men ask this question. First, because it suggests that they think of the missionary enterprise as singularly related to the will of God. Second, because it indicates that they believe their lives are owned by a Person who has a right to direct them and whose call they must await.

But when we have said these two things, I think we have said everything that can be said in favor of the question because, far too often, it is asked for thoroughly un-Christian reasons.

For instance, Christians will pursue a profession here in the United States having demanded far less positive assurance that this is God's will than it is for them to go out into the mission field. But by what right do they make such distinctions? Christianity contends that the whole of life and all services are to be consecrated; no man should dare to do anything but the will of God. And before he adopts a course of action, a man should know nothing less nor more than that it is God's will for him to pursue it.

If men are going to draw lines of division between different kinds of service, what preposterous reasoning leads them to think that it requires less divine sanction for a man to spend his life easily among Christians than it requires for him to go out as a missionary to the heathen? If men are to have special calls for anything, they ought to have special calls to go about their own business, to have a nice time all their lives, to choose the soft places, to make money, and to gratify their own ambitions.

How can any honest Christian say he must have a special call not to do that sort of thing? How can he say that, unless he gets some specific call of God to preach the Gospel to the heathen, he has a perfect right to spend his life lining his pockets with money? Is it not absurd to suggest that a special call is necessary to become a missionary, but no call is required to gratify his own will or personal ambitions?

There is a general obligation resting upon Christians to see that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached to the world. You and I need no special call to apply that general call of God to our lives. We do need a special call to exempt us from its application to our lives. In other words, every one of us stands under a presumptive obligation to give his life to the world unless we have some special exemption.

This whole business of asking for special calls to missionary work does violence to the Bible. There is the command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." We say, "That means other people." There is the promise, "Come unto

Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." We say, "That means me." We must have a special divine indication that we fall under the command; we do not ask any special divine indication that we fall under the blessing. By what right do we draw this line of distinction between the obligations of Christianity and its privileges? By what right do we accept the privileges as applying to every Christian and relegate its obligations to the conscience of the few?

It does violence to the ordinary canons of common sense and honest judgment. We do not think of ordering other areas of our lives on this basis. I think ex-president Patton of Princeton was represented the situation accurately when he used the following illustration. He said, "Imagine I was employed by the owner of a vineyard to gather grapes in his vineyard. The general instructions were that as many grapes as possible should be gathered. I went down to the gate of the vineyard and found the area around the walls well plucked and the ground covered with pickers. Yet away off in the distance no pickers at all are in sight and the vines are loaded to the ground. Would I need a special visit and order from the owner of the vineyard to instruct me as to my duty?"

If I were standing by the bank of a stream, and some little children were drowning, I would not need any officer of the law to come along and serve on me some legal paper commanding me under such and such a penalty to rescue those children. I should despise myself if I should stand there with the possibility of saving those little lives, waiting until, by some legal proceeding, I was personally designated to rescue them!

Why do we apply, in a matter of infinitely more consequence, principles that we would loathe and abhor if anybody should suggest that we should apply them in the practical affairs of our daily life? Listen for a moment to the wail of the hungry world. Feel for one hour its sufferings. Sympathize for one moment with its woes. And then regard it just as you would regard human want in your neighbor, or the want that you meet as you pass down the street, or anywhere in life.

There is something wonderfully misleading, full of hallucination and delusion in this business of missionary calls. With many of us it is not a missionary call at all that we are looking for; it is a shove. There are a great many of us who would never hear a call if it came. Somebody must come and coerce us before we will go into missionary work.

Every one of us rests under a sort of general obligation to give life and time and possession to the evangelization of the souls everywhere that have never heard of Jesus Christ. And we are bound to go, unless we can offer some sure ground of exemption which we could with a clear conscience present to Jesus Christ and be sure of His approval upon it. "Well," you ask, "do you mean, then, that I should take my life in my own hands?" No! That is precisely what I am protesting against! That is exactly what we have done. We have taken our lives in our own hands and proposed to go our own way unless God compels us to go some other way. What I ask is that, until God reveals to us some special, individual path on either side, we should give our lives over into Jesus' hands to go in that path which He has clearly marked out before His church.

I want to say one last thing.

I think love will hear calls where the loveless heart will not know that they are sounding. If there were a hundred little children crying, a mother would be able to pick out the voices of her own - especially if they were voices of pain and suffering.

There is a mighty keenness in the ears of love, and I wonder, after all, whether that may not explain a great deal that one is perplexed over in this matter of a special missionary call. Is it possible that, in many cases, it is just a matter of a calloused heart, a reluctant will, or a sealed mind?

God so loved the world that He gave. It was need in the world plus love in God that constituted a call for Jesus. Do we need more than what sufficed for Him? If they were our own, would we hesitate and hold back?

Let us lay aside all double-dealing, all moral subterfuge, all those shuffling evasions by which the Devil is attempting to persuade us to escape from our duty, and let us get up like men and look at it and do it.

Students are old enough to decide to do their duty. They are old enough to decide to go to college. They are old enough to decide for law and medicine and other professions. They are old enough, too, to decide this question. God forbid that we should try to hide from solemn consideration of our vital duty behind any kind of pretext.