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Co-operation

MARTIN GOLDSMITH

THE apostle Paul's authority in the young churches was great, but he rarely used it. He was quick to establish local leadership and to instruct the converts in the faith so that they could stand on their own feet. Paul's mission field was an enormous one, so it was obviously impossible for him to preach the gospel effectively to all in that immense area. The task of evangelism and the general work of teaching in the churches had to be done by local believers, if it was to be done at all. The New Testament shows us churches quickly becoming self-governing and young Christians immediately going out to their neighbours with the gospel. Antioch in Pisidia is an obvious example in Acts 13. In verse 48 we are still hearing how many were believing as a result of Paul's preaching and then in verse 49, immediately we read, 'And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region'. It was presumably the new believers who spread the Word, for we do not hear of Paul himself rushing from village to village — on the contrary we know that Paul and Barnabas were driven out of the district through the jealousy of the Jews.

Paul worked to establish live independent churches and we in the mission field of the twentieth century are called to do the same. The day of the missionary being in charge of everything and running a largely western-style church is over — in England too the day of the autocratic ministry running its church with little active lay participation should surely also be over. Political considerations are playing a large part in making missionaries leave their positions of authority in their churches and bringing local people to the fore. The white man is no longer respected as such and we need to be working towards a fully indigenous church. The pattern of missionary work today should be one of missionary co-operation with the local church — not vice versa. It has been the privilege of my wife and myself to see this principle working out in practice during these last few years.

In 1946 the Karo Batak church numbered only 5,000 members, a small minority struggling for existence in the midst of the other 295,000 Karos who were still animists. The church, like the whole of Karo culture, was centered on the market town of Kabandjahe, which lies in the heart of a great 4,000' high plateau in North Sumatra, with volcanoes towering above it. By 1960 the church had increased to some 20,000 Christians and felt the need of outside help in Bible teaching. They had seen the CIM at work elsewhere and invited the Mission to send workers. And so in 1961 my wife and I went to Kabandjahe to start work in co-operation with the already independent Karo Batak church, having agreed with them that we should take no part either in their finances or their administration. We came to a church that was growing fast, but desperately needed help with teaching the new Christians and with giving new vision to many of the leaders. The animists and the Christians were keen to be taught all we could give them about

the Lord, for this was a ripe harvest field which God had been preparing over the years.

Part of the agreement between the CIM and the Karo church was that the Karos should provide a house and 'basic furniture' — a double bed 3'9" wide seemed to fit the term 'basic' quite well. We were given a small house, with one room upstairs and one down; this house was on a small side road near the centre of the town, a road which was used by everyone on their way to market. As the downstairs room led right off the road, it meant that it was easy for all and sundry to drop into our house informally at any time of day, for the door was always open. They were able to see that we lived like them in a house like theirs — they saw us queueing for the daily water supply at 6 a.m. at the end of the road, doing the housework or lighting the paraffin lamps. This broke down much of the feeling of separation that they felt with white people after many years of colonial administration. They got to know us as people and could talk with us about daily problems because we shared these things with them in our daily life. Soon they were wanting to share spiritual problems as well as material ones and we began to find that talking to visitors was one of our most fruitful fields of service. When preaching or speaking, familiar illustrations from daily life could be drawn upon and the Karos listened with respect because they knew we had to put the Christian truths into practice in the same sort of conditions as they experienced.

On arrival in Kabandjahe it soon became apparent that the villages all around were waiting for the gospel and that a harvest could be easily gathered if evangelism were done there, but the Karo church was doing nothing about it. Village evangelism was not thought of. It is frustrating for a missionary to refrain from organizing the local church to do the work that should be done, but it is wiser for him to wait until they see the need and organize it themselves. The missionary can pray, teach and hint; if he does more than that the work will inevitably become his work rather than their work. But patient waiting was well rewarded in this situation. After some months the Karos realized their responsibilities and organized teams of lay workers to go regularly each week for evangelism to the neighbouring villages. Each team went once a week to one village. At first they began work in six villages — and now three more have been opened. The Karos themselves ran everything, although they did ask us to help them. The missionary was not indispensable even at the beginning, so the calls of furlough made no difference to the work of evangelism in Kabandjahe and area. The success of the Kabandjahe evangelistic teams has helped other Karo churches to start the same scheme on a smaller scale and thus new groups of Christians are springing up in various parts of Karo-land. The Lord has given much fruit in these first efforts at village evangelism.

If the Karos are to do the work of evangelism and to teach the converts, they need to be taught themselves. Perhaps the main task of the modern missionary is to teach the church leaders and to give them new vision for their work. Bible courses in the Karo church for leading men and women was an effective means of bringing new life as well as biblical knowledge to many. These leaders will take the fruits of these courses to many ordinary church members to whom the missionary will never have the time to give regular Bible teaching. It was a joy to us to see God at work giving new life and new vitality in witness to many men and women through leaders'

courses not only in Kabandjahe itself, but also in other towns and villages where we were invited to give regular teaching. The Karos have been brought up on strong meat with their Dutch Reformed background and therefore demand solid Bible teaching rather than purely devotional material. It is a challenge and stimulus to the missionary to be called to give regular teaching of this sort in a foreign language, with no peace and quiet for preparation.

Soon after our arrival in Kabandjahe the church asked us to start a Youth Bible Study. We thought it would be good to hold it in our own home where an informal and friendly atmosphere could be established, but the church insisted that it be held in the large and dimly lighted church building in order that the youth should become accustomed to coming to church. It was not an inviting prospect to face about fifteen rather unresponsive young people seated in ones and twos down the pews of a church which seats 1,000 — on Sundays they usually only get congregations of about 600, although on special occasions the church will be full. But God was at work in the lives of those few young people and after a few weeks they began to find new life in Christ. The inevitable consequence of new life was that they brought their friends. So numbers grew. But when we were up to forty-five each Monday evening, numbers stopped growing. This was God's plan. He wanted to consolidate His work before bringing more new faces to the Bible study. Lives were radically changed. 'Crossboys' (the Indonesian equivalent of the Mod or Rocker) were converted and became gentle and keen Christians who could be trusted. Nominal Christians found Christ could change their lives too. People in the town began to gossip about what was happening to young lives at the Youth Bible Study and several men visited us to ask what was the secret of these changed lives. Then numbers went up again until the record of 125 was registered. So every Monday evening about 100 youths, aged from between fifteen to twenty-five would come together in the church for an hour's solid Bible teaching — there were no games or other attractions, for Christ proved to be enough of an attraction.

New life in Christ among the young people was soon expressed in active service for the Lord. Once a week a group of them would join with us for ward services in the local government hospital. At first they were only willing to help with the singing, but then they began to lead the services and finally they were glad to do the preaching too. This 250-bed hospital gave us complete freedom to witness when and how we liked. Once a week we held the ward services and once a week we would go in for bed-to-bed visitation and selling literature. Hearts were open to the gospel. One remembers with thanksgiving the men's TB ward where there were about fifteen patients who were all heathen. But after some weeks God worked. As we approached that part of the hospital one of the men called out, 'Come up to the TB ward here, for we are all Christians now'. Yes, they had all determined to follow the Lord Jesus as God and Saviour.

The young people are now also hard at work among children both in the town of Kabandjahe and also in the surrounding villages. Karo Sunday schools are large, but are never divided into smaller classes and the teaching is usually somewhat dreary. But these younger teachers come for regular courses for Sunday school workers in our home and are beginning to put into practice more attractive methods. There is, however, still much which needs to be improved in the Kabandjahe Sunday school with its 400 children.

The role of the missionary is not to teach in this Sunday school but rather to teach others to do it.

Literature is playing a big part in the enlivening of God's Karo children. There is a fairly good range of doctrinal and devotional literature, but still many gaps which need to be filled. Good commentaries are almost non-existent and we have a need for more books of every type. The Indonesian Christians love to read and the difficulty is always to find enough books for them — in other countries the problem is distribution, but in Indonesia the problem is rather that of production. The Karos are no exception to this rule. They read avidly all the books we can find for them and God blesses them in this way. Every day, on average, we sell about twenty to twenty-five books or Bibles and we reckon to have at least one person a week tell us of their conversion or some other definite spiritual blessing through literature. Books are taken and sold at every meeting we attend and many people come to our house to buy from the little bookstall near the front door. The CIM is producing books like *By Searching, Peace with God*, and Martin Luther's life, to fill some of the gaps in Indonesian literature, but all these books are printed and distributed through the Indonesian Christian Publishing firm. Thus in literature too the emphasis has been on co-operation.

The Karo people are ripe for the harvest and these are days of glorious harvesting. Yet there was a fine young evangelical missionary in this area, who finally returned home after some years without seeing any fruit at all. Today there are no traces of his ever having been there. Why was this fine missionary fruitless in the midst of a ripe harvest? It seems that the answer lies in his failure to co-operate with the local Karo church. He tried to start his own denomination and would not work together with the Karo church. The Karos inevitably felt that the man could not be a real Christian, for surely Christians are members of the church! They therefore never really listened to his message, for they were not interested in strange foreign sects. The white missionary today must work with and under the local church in co-operation.

News of Student Work

FROM THE TCCU

Four new training colleges opened their doors for the first time at the beginning of the present academic year and already in two of them (St Martin's, Lancaster and Callendar Park, Falkirk) there is an official CU. Unions have also been established recently at Brighton, Caerleon and Nottingham Training Colleges, and at the College of St Mark and St John, Chelsea. Still more groups are hoping for official recognition soon.

There has been an encouragingly large number of conversions throughout