

## Article

# A Restless Spirit: Missions in a Wesleyan Context

Methodists with a restless missionary spirit took their place in the story of global evangelization and carried the Christian message around the world. The determination of Methodist leaders to minister on other continents was one striking evidence of this.

John and Charles Wesley left England and served in colonial Georgia for a season. Thirty years later, Francis Asbury also left England to minister in the American colonies. He remained there for 45 years and never again saw his mother or his native land. In 1784, he was elected one of two bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church when it formally organized in Baltimore. Thomas Coke, the other bishop, crossed the Atlantic frequently and died at sea in the Indian Ocean en route to India, where he had expected to evangelize.

British Methodists continued sending missionaries, including William Arthur, who served in Mysore, India, for several years. Arthur returned to Great Britain and served as secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society for 17 years. His book, *The Tongue of Fire* (1856), sparked world-wide interest in pneumatology (the theology of the Holy Spirit) and remained for decades on the Course of Study for ministers in Methodist denominations all around the world.

American Methodism matured and the M.E. Church also grew active in home and foreign missions. Home missions were necessary to evangelize on the American frontier that relentlessly pushed west. Circuit riding preachers served far-flung preaching stations and were rarely at home with their families; instead, they pushed further into remote places. Rev. Peter Cartwright stumbled upon a remote community that had been settled for three generations and yet the people had no idea who Jesus was.

The challenge of global missions also presented itself. Enterprising holiness evangelist William Taylor established a chain of missions in India, another in Africa, and a third in South America. The M.E. Church elected him bishop for Africa in 1884, where he continued planting churches and equipping ministers.

The same missionary spirit characterized groups that separated from mainline Methodists.

William and Catherine Booth founded the Christian Mission among London's urban poor. After it was renamed the Salvation Army, their daughter Evangeline took command of the Salvationists' growing corps in America, while others carried their mission to other world areas.

Free Methodists launched missions to Liberia and southern Africa in the 1880s, less than a quarter century after their founding. Today, over 90 percent of Free Methodists live outside the United States. Wesleyan Methodists launched similar work in Sierra Leone and India.

The Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association, a small Wesleyan-holiness denomination in the Midwestern United States, sent missionaries to Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. These churches and missions affiliated with the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Church of the Nazarene in the mid 20th century.

The Missionary Bands of the World was another small denomination devoted primarily to missions. Originally known as the Pentecost Bands, they later merged with the Wesleyan Methodists.

The Church of the Nazarene manifested a strong emphasis on global evangelization at its outset. The denomination was formed through the merger of three distinct parent bodies located respectively along the Atlantic coast, the Pacific coast, and throughout the South. All had work in India at the time of their merger in 1907 and 1908.

By then, the eastern group had sent nearly 20 missionaries to India and had missionaries in Cape Verde. The southern group also had missionaries in Japan and Mexico. The western group had a school and orphanage in Calcutta, India.

Hiram Reynolds was the visionary mission leader of early Nazarenes. An Illinois native, he moved to New England in his twenties. He was converted at a Methodist camp meeting in Vermont, entered the ministry, and served as a pastor for 10 years. He then became an evangelist, moving in ever-widening circles.

His evangelist's heart was at the center of his passion for missions. From 1897-1907, he was general missionary secretary of the eastern group. He continued that role in the united church for 17 of the next 25 years. He served simultaneously as the Nazarene's second general superintendent. At each assembly he conducted and on every platform where he stood, Reynolds pushed the missionary interests as he sought to rally Nazarenes around this priority.

While Reynolds traveled, Nazarene women organized themselves to support missions. The purposes of the Woman's Missionary Society included mission education, promotion, and funding. A WMS constitution was approved in 1919, and a network of local and district WMS chapters was formed during the 1920s. Over a third of

all Nazarenes belonged to a local WMS chapter by 1932. The ladies also engaged in “box work,” sending clothes and other items abroad to missionaries and orphans.

Susan Fitkin was the first general WMS president. She was raised a Quaker in Canada. Before marriage, she was an evangelist. After uniting with the Nazarenes, she took a leading role in missions advocacy. Her book *Holiness and Missions* appeared in 1940. It was a missiology (theology of missions) written from the Wesleyan-holiness perspective.

With leadership from Reynolds and a growing mission-mindedness through the WMS, the church was poised to grow outside North America. Nazarenes were in India by 1898, Cape Verde by 1901, Canada by 1902, Mexico by 1906, Swaziland by 1910, China by 1913, and Peru by 1914. Two other denominations merged with the Nazarenes in 1915, adding work in the United Kingdom, Cuba, and Guatemala. By 1921, the church was in Argentina, South Africa, Syria, and Palestine.

Evangelism, social ministry, and education were the three pillars of missions endeavor.

Evangelism was primary. The gospel was preached, churches were created, and Christian workers were trained to lead as pastors and evangelists. Missionaries taught indigenous pastors Bible, theology, and pastoral and evangelistic methods. In time, indigenous pastors made innovations as they contextualized approaches. Missionaries and national pastors nurtured disciples. Religious music was translated into local languages and indigenous Christian music developed.

Social ministries usually took the form of medical work and orphan care. The first effort at medical missions among Nazarenes was in Swaziland, where a small hospital opened in 1916. The structure proved inadequate and poorly located. Surgeon David Hynd, a Scot, arrived in 1924 and built a larger hospital in a more favorable location, and the first wing of Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital opened in 1925 in Manzini.

That same year, Bresee Memorial Hospital opened in Taming-fu, China. A decade later, Reynolds Memorial Hospital opened in Khardi, India. In the 1960s, Nazarenes opened another hospital in Papua New Guinea.

Each hospital was a hub. Surgeries and other essential care occurred there. Around each hospital were other associated ministries—often clinics, or specialized centers like the leper sanitarium in Swaziland. Medical missionaries also practiced an active program of field medicine, in which skilled nurses traveled a regular circular route, routinely bringing medical services to those places that were harder to reach.

Orphan care was another form of social ministry that occurred through missions. Nazarenes cared for orphans in India, China, Mexico, and Swaziland at different points.

Education was critical in missions. Missionaries taught basic

literacy to children and adults alike. Hospitals trained nurses and gave them experience before sending them out to practice in other places. Bible training schools for ministers were a necessity. Often this called for cross-cultural workers to translate theological texts and curriculum into other languages.

The missions produced highly effective leaders. The first Nazarene convert in Argentina, a young woman named Lucia Carmen Garcia, began planting new churches in the suburbs around Buenos Aires with another young lady, Soledad Quintana. Lucia finished college, continued her church planting ministry with her husband, was in the first group of Argentinian ordinands, and earned a doctoral degree in foreign languages. She educated aspiring ministers at the Nazarene Bible School in Buenos Aires and translated core Wesleyan theological texts into Spanish.

In India, Samuel Bhujbal was educated in mission schools, converted at age 15, attended university, and became headmaster of the Nazarene boys’ school in Buldana at age 22. He led the Young People’s Society, organized camp meetings, and generally inspired others. India’s Nazarene churches were organized into a district in 1937, and Bhujbal was the first district superintendent. He developed a range of evangelistic strategies, deployed personnel, trained pastors, published newsletters, and translated books.

World evangelization has generally led to the development of many new denominations around the earth. The World Methodist Council, which counts Free Methodists, the Wesleyan Church, and Nazarenes among its member denominations, was an outgrowth largely of the fruit of two centuries of British and American Methodist missions.

The mission story of Nazarenes, however, has led to a different outcome—a church not shaped by national lines. In 1980, Nazarenes formally embraced internationalization as their policy for the future. The idea of an international church was enabled by two revolutions in the 20th century—one in communications and another in transportation—which facilitated inter-connectedness between churches and districts in far-flung parts of the world.

Americans dominated the Church of the Nazarene when internationalization was embraced formally, but a different type of denomination eventually emerged. United globally in a single denomination, about 23 percent of Nazarenes live today in the U.S. and Canada, over 29 percent in Africa, and another 29 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. The rest are scattered across Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific.

Every denomination’s missions story ends somewhat differently. The opening of Eastern Europe since 1990 has added new chapters and dimensions to the story of many denominations, underscoring that Christian mission in the modern world is ongoing.

**STAN INGERSOL** is a church historian who has served as denominational archivist for the Church of the Nazarene since 1985.