WHY DID THEY GO?
Motivated by "the greater vision?"

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Introduction

For almost one hundred years students of Avondale College have served God in the islands of the South Pacific. Many of them accepted a call to service at great personal cost. Some did not return. Many gave up opportunities for further education, financial security, career advancement, and close association with friends and family.

Despite the apparent costs, most do not question the providence of God and His leading in their lives as they reflect on their mission experience. When they talk together they remember the challenges and the frustrations. They laugh at themselves and the ineptitude they displayed learning to live in another culture. In their quieter moments they reflect on the miracles they have witnessed and the difference that mission service made to their lives

This chapter will consider some of the motives that inspired students of Avondale College to respond to the call of mission service in the South Pacific.[1]

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[1]When preparing this chapter, I asked some missionaries if they would describe their motives for mission service. I regret that others could not have been consulted. Also, those who responded have not necessarily expressed all of the reasons why they accepted their appointments. The reader should keep these limitations in mind when considering the responses that are discussed.

Why Should We Go?

There are good reasons and there are poor reasons for being a missionary. Sadly, mission service can provide an opportunity for chronically depressed people, for example, to escape from circumstances that threaten to engulf them. It may be attractive to a person who is driven by a need to coerce or dominate others. Occasionally, misguided people who have convinced themselves that their views are indispensable, act with a sense of superiority, continuously disparaging other people and their cultures.[2] Fortunately, these motivations are not common.

While we recognise that we do not live in a perfect world, it is not the intention of this chapter to concentrate on improper motives. It is far more profitable and encouraging to consider reasons why Seventh-day Adventist Christians should be involved in mission and the responses of some Avondale graduates who have been so engaged. To assist us I would like to suggest a simple paradigm which describes motives for mission according to four points of reference: God, the world, the church, and the individual

Motivation as a Response to God

There are some motives which reflect our understanding of the character of God.[3] They include, for example, a desire to bring glory to God; a deep sense of gratitude to God; and a recognition of responsibility to God in obedience to the gospel

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[2]Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 168-75.

[3]Johannes Van den Berg, in a study of British missionary awakening between 1698 and 1895, cites the constraining love of Christ as the master motive for the awakening of interest in missionary endeavour in the British Isles. See Johannes Van den Berg, *Constrained by Jesus' Love* (Kampen: Kov, 1956), 195.

commission.[4] Seventh-day Adventists should be strongly motivated by a desire to uplift the name of God in the world. We understand that the message of Revelation 14:6 commences with a universal call to give 'glory' to God and 'worship' Him as Creator, Saviour, and Judge. We take very seriously Christ's mandate to make disciples of the peoples of the world (Matt 28: 19,20).

Motivation as a Response to the Needs of the World

Other motives take into account the needs of the world. For example, we can be motivated by a love for the people of the world; by a concern for their eternal salvation; by a commitment to serve them; by the desire to relieve poverty, suffering, injustice, oppression, etc., or by the imperative to announce the soon return of Christ to the world.

Motivation as a Response to the Nature and Viability of the Church

Then there are motives which arise from commitment to the church. The church must reproduce itself if it is to survive. Christ's intention was that his disciples of all ages should belong to a community of faith. The church is to be built up and edified.

Motivation as a Response to Our Own Needs

Finally there are some motives which come from the heart of each individual. There is the desire for a deeper personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ.[5] There is also the sense of challenge and adventure that mission service brings.

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[4]See Nels F. S. Ferre, "Fear, Duty and Love as Ultimate Motives for Christian Missions," *International Review of Mission* 37 (1948): 393; and Donald G. Miller, "Pauline Motives for Christian Mission," in Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 79-82.

[5]Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 167.

Why Did They Go?

In order to discover their motivation for mission, a questionnaire was distributed to sixty-five missionaries to the South Pacific who had attended Avondale College. Some of them had worked in the islands for most of their lives, and are now retired. Others completed just a few years of service and have recently returned home.[6] As was expected, the motives listed by the respondents varied considerably.[7]

Motivation as a response to God

The motive that was given first priority was "the sense of call." The consciousness of divine providence in the decision to engage in mission service was very strong in this group of people. Tony and Jacqui Wall, for example responded that they "were called and accepted" because they "believed it was the call of God." Graeme Humble simply stated that "the call of God was incontrovertible." Many others, such as Clive Butcher, Neville Tosen, Eric Kingdon, Owen Twist, Vern Parmenter, and John Gate, referred simply and specifically to the " call of God" as their first motive. Robert Granger responded that he had been convicted of "a lifelong desire and calling" to engage in mission service. Adrian Raethel wrote,

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[6]This was a qualitative survey. Sixty-five forms were posted. Fifty-seven were returned. The questionnaire contained three main questions. The first asked the respondents to list in order of priority three of their personal motives for mission service. The second asked for reflection on the source of vision for missionary service. The third sought an opinion regarding the role of the missionary in the twenty-first century.

[7]Unfortunately, it has not been possible to detail each response in this chapter. Regrettably, space has prevented the inclusion of the comments of many respondents. However, an effort has been made to select and discuss some of the recurrent themes. When people are cited, no reference details other than the name of the respondent in the main text of the chapter is given. All written responses are in the possession of the author.

"1. Laurel and I felt God was calling us. 2. Laurel and I felt God was calling us. 3. You guessed it—Laurel and I felt God was calling us."

However, not all respondents understood the call to service as divine intervention. Some used the word 'call' to describe an appointment by a committee. In fact, there appeared to be ambivalence in the mind of some as to the relationship between a sense of divine providence and the role of church administration. While recognising that a degree of tension may remain, some affirmed their confidence in the power of the Spirit of God. Rex Moe, for example, wrote that he still believed that the Lord works through committees to call people to service and that such appointments should not be taken lightly. Rex added that he believes there is still a place for mission. For him the need for mission will exist "as long as the gospel commission exists."

Motivation as a Response to the Needs of the World

Another motive which was mentioned almost as frequently as the 'call' was the motive of service. In many responses the desire to serve God was articulated in a way which indicated that service to the world was understood as service to God. Not only was a commitment to service evident in the responses but it was the nature of that commitment that may explain why so much has been done in the last 100 years of Seventh-day Adventist mission in the South Pacific. Clive Barritt, for example, spoke of a "a deep desire to serve wherever God calls" and Barrie Bidmead was "happy to serve" where needed. John Kosmeier listed as his three priorities, "1. God's service; 2. God's service; 3.God's service—He laid it on our hearts. There was no other motive."

One cannot take these words seriously without experiencing a strange sense of incredulity. As I read, I found myself addressing the writers, saying to myself, "Do you really mean what you are saying?"

Those of us who know people like Clive and Lorna Barritt, Barrie and Katy Bidmead, and John and Beth Kosmeier know that they do mean it. They have demonstrated that their words are not empty, meaningless cliches. Their service for God and the world speaks far louder than mere words.

Veteran missionary to PNG, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, Calvin Stafford wrote: "I was fed a diet of mission stories by parents who had been missionaries in India, 1914-1917. This created in me a desire to serve God as a missionary all through college training to give my life to God in any service and place *no matter how isolated"* (emphasis mine).

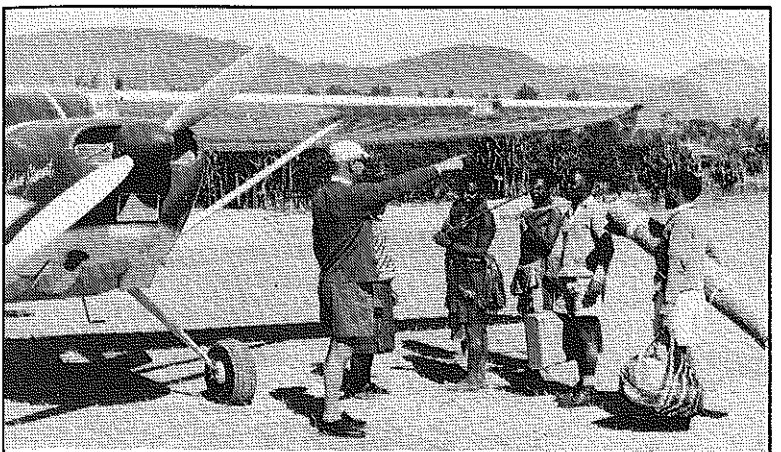
I cannot read these words without feeling a lump somewhere deep in my throat. Calvyn and Beryl Stafford have given a lifetime of service in places like Kumul, Paglum, Korela, and Kukudu. Along with many others, they have demonstrated what faith, courage and commitment to God can do. Calvyn and Beryl, we who follow in your footsteps salute you and give praise to God.

Motivation as a Response to the Nature and Viability of the Church

Surprisingly, very little was said which related motivation for mission to the nature of the church as a community of faith. There were some responses which indicated that sharing the gospel was an important motivation. However, those responses related that task more to obedience to the gospel commission and to the need of the world to have an opportunity for salvation than to the viability of the church and the value of a nurturing community of faith.

When I asked myself why so little was said about the church, I was hard-pressed to think of an adequate reason. Missionaries are generally very supportive of the church. Many have given their lives to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and been nurtured by it. But as I thought about the silence I wondered if we are taking our church too much for

granted. We may need to be more protective of our church and be motivated to share the benefits of membership.



Pastor Len Barnard, pioneer Seventh-day Adventist aviator, standing beside his plane, the 'Andrew Stewart,' at Kandep, PNG, in 1965.

Motivation as a Response to Our Own Needs

There were several responses which recognised that there are some personal needs which can be well met by engaging in mission service. The desire for a deepening faith relationship with Jesus Christ and the joy of witnessing His presence and power in personal lives was mentioned by many. Some commented that the Lord seemed much more real when they were wrestling with the problems that they encountered in mission service.

Humour was evident in some of the responses. Laurie Draper, for example, said that one of his reasons for going to PNG was to "escape from mid-life crisis!" Given the contribution that Laurie and Joy made while they were there, there is no way that they possibly could have had time for mid-

life crises. One spouse who shall remain nameless listed as her most urgent reason for going "to remain married!" The she added, "Would I go again? - Yes, tomorrow."

Many cited the desire for adventure as an important motivation. Mike Brownhill said that "the excitement and appeal of discovering a new culture, especially on a beautiful South Pacific island" sounded very attractive indeed! Sid Griffith, David Webster, Wilf Rieger, Ray Coombe, and Len Barnard mentioned that they were motivated by the spirit of adventure. After describing his sense of call and the leading of the Lord, Lynn Weber added that an important motivation for him was "to get out of Sydney." He concluded, "I mean I love Sydney but. . ." Lynn is a New Zealander!

Mission service is a lot of fun. Missionaries are interesting people to be with. But when I read the responses for the last time I became aware of another aspect of the motivation that may escape the casual observer. In many responses I could detect a motive which seemed to work against other legitimate motives of personal satisfaction and accomplishment. That motive I can only describe as the motive of self-sacrifice.

I read David Caldwell's response and I was deeply moved. David and Joy Caldwell spent twelve years in Papua New Guinea and Tonga. David wrote: "I was so keen to go to PNG [during the war] that I left teaching in Tasmania and joined the army to get there! Recently [after spending 12 years in service there and many years elsewhere], I have enjoyed 4 short trips with a dental team to the Solomons and Vanuatu—it's like being a missionary again for two-week stints!" David and Joy will always remember their time of service. On the very bottom of his survey form David has written the words: "have two infant graves in PNG." David and Joy, and those with you who have made incredible sacrifice, we honour you.

Should We Still Go?

Among the respondents to the questionnaire there was unanimous agreement that there is still a place for mission. Ken Vogel used the word "absolutely" to state his point of view that mission is still necessary today. Others simply affirmed its necessity by answering "yes" to the question of the continuing need for mission.

However, many insisted that mission will be different in the future. Ed Parker wrote that "mission works toward indigenisation." "It operates at the level of service." As we enter the twenty-first century, "mission should never be patronising . . .nor ethnocentric." Kelvyn Peuser spoke of the need to train indigenous leadership in the Pacific but observed that this will bring greater responsibility and "less reliance upon overseas staffing and funding." Alwyn Gersbach talked of the need for "cross-cultural fertilisation of concepts and the development of national leadership."

In the early history of mission in the South Pacific mission-sending and mission-receiving areas of the world were well defined. Those boundaries are no longer clearly defined. "From everywhere to everywhere" is the slogan of the modern missionary movement as people from all nations on earth accept the challenge of the gospel commission. Access to education, transport, technology and global media have forever changed the face of mission. Many stereotypes and maxims will continue to be challenged as we look to the future.

Further, the nature and definition of mission has changed. David Potter commented that "every Christian is a missionary, an ambassador for heaven in an alien world." David has reminded us that while the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs people who will travel the skies and seas to share God's love, the church looks to its members to share their love across the street, in the village, in the school, and in the workplace.

Conclusion

I cannot read the responses of these men and women without being impressed by their commitment to God, to the needs of the world and to the church. As I reflected on their words I found myself compelled to ask some searching questions. Where are the people who are going to follow in their footsteps? Can mission be anything more than a quaint anachronism from the past? Is a vision for service more to Avondale than a striking motto? Can a strong sense of vision survive the influences of urbanisation and secularisation and relativism and pluralism and post-modernism and. . . .?

A positive answer can be given to each of these questions if we act to ensure that the spirit of service and conviction of God's leading does not disappear at Avondale College, and in the hearts and minds of Seventh-day Adventist Christians. There is still a world to serve. There are millions of people in Asia and Africa and, increasingly, in the post-Christian West who need to know Jesus Christ.

Perhaps they will only have the opportunity to know him as they see Seventh-day Adventist Christians who are prepared to act as Jesus would in the world and demonstrate the kind of attitude that has been shown by these past students who have served God and shown what it is to be motivated by a "greater vision."