

# Foreign Missions

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*Foreign Missions should occupy a prominent place in every parish ministry, and clergy should take a leading role in promoting and encouraging interest in this vital work.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 11:30, Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 28:19, Luke 24:46, Romans 10:14

**Topics:** "Foreign Missions", "Evangelism"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes the importance of Foreign Missions in every ministry, highlighting how it reflects the clergyman's spiritual life and the need for a genuine missionary spirit. He discusses various methods of work for furthering worldwide evangelization, including studying New Testament principles, engaging in missionary reading and study, and organizing missionary prayer meetings and sermons. Additionally, he stresses the significance of supporting Medical Missions, subscribing to missionary magazines, and focusing on Jewish missionary work. The sermon underscores the clergyman's pivotal role in fostering a parish's interest and involvement in Missions through personal dedication and active engagement.

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## Transcript

Section 1. Their Place in the Ministry.

It ought to go without saying that Foreign Missions should occupy a prominent, not to say predominant place in every ministry. In some respects they constitute a test of a clergyman's own spiritual life, because they show whether or not he has the genuine missionary spirit. It is an almost universal experience that there is no contradiction or incompatibility between interest in Home Missions and interest in Foreign Missions. The distinction thus drawn is merely one of convenience, because in the sight of God there can be no "Home" or "Foreign" work. "All souls are mine" is the Old Testament word, and "Go ye into all the world" is the New Testament counterpart. It has been well and truly said that our great problem is not so much the "non-Church-going," as the "non-going Church," and it will probably be found in almost every instance that the extent and power of missionary work in a parish will depend largely on the clergyman's own attitude to God's great work of world-wide evangelization. It is unspeakably sad to contemplate the fact that, judging from the reports of Missionary Societies, there are several hundred parishes in England alone where nothing seems to be done for Foreign Missions. It would be interesting, and perhaps spiritually significant, to discover what is collected each year in such churches for "Church Expenses," and how these expenses are made up. We happen to know two or three churches where one-tenth of every

collection is devoted to the work of Foreign Missions, and we have yet to learn that these churches suffer financially or spiritually by putting God's greatest enterprise first. Let every clergyman therefore settle it in his own heart that if missionary work is not of much interest to him, he should carefully scrutinize his own spiritual life in the light of God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Section 2. Methods of Work. Assuming that a clergyman enters upon his work as Curate or Incumbent with a keen desire to do all in his power to further the work of worldwide evangelization, the question will often arise as to the best methods of exercising influence and bringing his people to see the claim of the world in the sight of God. What then can such a clergyman do? The following suggestions are made as the result of reading, experience, and consultation with those who are being blessed of God in the furtherance of this work. 1.

First and foremost, the clergyman should study the New Testament principles of Missions in order to see what God thinks of them and where He places them. In particular, he will concentrate on our Lord's teaching during the Great Forty Days, and will find that in the five records in Holy Scripture worldwide missions formed the main theme of our Lord's conversations with His disciples. As part of this teaching, He will observe that our Lord places three great truths on an absolute level of equality and importance: the absolute necessity of the death of the Messiah; the absolute necessity of His resurrection; and the equally absolute necessity of repentance and remission being preached in His Name among all nations (Luke 24:46-47).

This passage alone with its solemn threefold emphasis on "It is necessary" ought to be sufficient to show the place that Missions occupied in the mind of the Risen Christ, and therefore the place that they should occupy in the heart and life of all His servants. The more a clergyman ponders the great realities of the New Testament concerning the work of Christ for the whole world, the more he will find his heart, and mind, and conscience stirred to do God's will. 2. Missionary reading will also prove abundantly fruitful.

If the clergyman is interested (and who is not?) in modern ecclesiastical problems, he will find many of them being attacked, and to a great extent solved, in the Mission Field. The study of a book like Lindsay's Church and Ministry in the Early Centuries will reveal the important bearing of Missions today on some of the acutest controversies at home, and in the same connection, that invaluable quarterly, The East and the West, and that most useful monthly, The Church Missionary Review, will provide abundant material for missionary reading and study.

More popular magazines like the Church Missionary Gleaner and the Mission World of the S.P.G., will enable the clergyman to know definitely what is being done in the Foreign Field. 3. Definite missionary study as well as general missionary reading should find a place in a clergyman's life. There are text books now published year by year by the C.M.S. and other organizations, which will provide a man ample material for a winter's study of some great Mission Field. No one could take up The Uplift of China or The Desire of India, or The Reproach of Islam, without finding his own life enriched in a variety of ways.

It is only in recent years that we have heard of "The Science of Missions," for up to a comparatively short time ago no one thought of collecting, combining, and commenting on the data of missionary work. But today authorities in various branches of the Christian Church are generalizing on these facts and are producing results which make Christian Missions a much more intellectual reality than ever before. To this survey the Christian minister can contribute much by his interest in and study of missionary principles, missionary facts, and missionary possibilities.

And in particular, his personal sympathy with and advocacy of missions will be deepened and strengthened in proportion to the thoroughness he can give to the study of the various missionary fields and problems. 4. Individual private prayer will naturally form an important part of a clergyman's work for Missions. The C.M.S. Cycle of Prayer, or a similar Cycle of some other Missionary Society, will give intelligent guidance day by day, as we endeavour to make our missionary intercession more definite and real.

Our reading will influence our prayer, and our prayer will react in turn upon our reading. 5. A Missionary Prayer Meeting will of course be included in the parish organization. It may be monthly, or, if convenient, even oftener. The ordinary Parish Prayer Meeting might be given a special missionary turn on the first or some other gathering of the month. There may not be many people to attend such a meeting, but of its spiritual fruitfulness there can be no question. 6. Missionary meetings of various kinds will naturally be in a clergyman's mind.

A Branch of the Gleaners' Union helps to bring together the keen, earnest missionary workers, and these gatherings can be varied from time to time in quite a number of ways. Sales of Work on behalf of Missions are also useful, and of course they will be entirely free of all the unworthy and impossible methods usually associated with bazaars. A quiet Sale of Work undertaken by those who often have no opportunity of giving money to the cause will do nothing but good. An All-Day Working Party for Medical Missions has also proved of real service in many parishes.

Particulars of what has been done can be obtained from a little booklet included in the list of works mentioned at the end of this volume. The Annual Meeting of the Missionary Society will be made a special feature, and will undoubtedly help forward the cause if properly arranged. 7. Sermons from time to time by missionaries will also be considered, though it may not always be useless to ask our honoured brethren to give accounts of their work instead of preaching ordinary sermons.

There is nothing that a congregation as a rule finds more interesting than a clear account at firsthand from those who have had personal experience of missionary work. 8. From time to time during the year missionary sermons should be preached by the clergyman of the parish. There would be no collection for Missions, but simply a sermon, calling attention to the work, and perhaps giving information. Archbishop Temple was in the habit of laying great stress on this, and there can be no doubt about the spiritual value of it.

It may be found wise not to announce it beforehand lest people who are not interested in Missions may be conspicuous by their absence, and instead of an ordinary sermon dealing with missionary principles some Mission Field might be taken, and the salient points of the history and methods dealt with in the form of an address, or sermon. Such sermons might well be given at least once a quarter, taking morning and evening in turn. These opportunities would be as useful to the clergyman as to his people in leading him to study afresh the missionary problem, and obtain information of missionary work.

No one could "get up" the story of Uganda, or Fiji, or Tinnevely, or the Punjab, without becoming interested himself, and passing on the interest to others. 9. Medical Missions should not be overlooked because of God's wonderful blessing resting upon this twofold effort on behalf of Christ. 10. An endeavour should be made to get people to subscribe regularly for a missionary magazine. A Literature Secretary in a parish will probably accomplish this work best of all, though it will need a clergyman to call attention to the value and importance of missionary reading.

If people would only take in such a paper as the Gleaner, their interest in Missions would be deepened, and they would be led to more prayer and effort. 11. In several churches Missionary pictures cut out from current magazines are put upon a green baize-covered board, which hangs in the church porch. A notice at the foot of the board would also inform the reader where the magazines could be obtained. The interest in Missions will often be deepened by such a simple effort. 12.

If the parish has sent out any missionaries into the field, it would be of great value to have a board in the church with their names, dates, and allocations. Nothing could well minister more to real fellowship in work than this constant reminder of those who had been "sent forth" in the Master's Name. 13. The clergyman must ever be on the lookout for likely candidates for missionary work, young men and young women, and he should help them along after they are found. Many a candidate would be greatly assisted by the loving sympathetic efforts of a clergyman to give some lessons in Scripture, or the Prayer Book, or even a little guidance in the Greek Testament.

For this purpose the arrangements made by the Home Preparation Union of the C.M.S. will prove a genuine help to a clergyman. 14. Work among children must necessarily be given a prominent place in the interests of Missions. The members of a Scripture Union, or Children's Service, or a Band of Hope, should be encouraged to join the Young People's Union of the C.M.S., or some kindred missionary organization. Then with Working Parties and Missionary Addresses in Sunday School and elsewhere, together with the distribution of some children's missionary paper, like the Round World, the attention and interest of boys and girls will be awakened and deepened. 15.

One of the newest, and certainly the most important forms of parochial missionary work is known as "The Missionary Study Circle". A few keen true-hearted workers unite to study seriously some definite Mission, or some missionary problems. The clergyman will often be found the best leader of this band, but of course it is by no means essential that he should do this work if he can obtain the help and guidance of a thoughtful missionary-spirited layman. In any case, however, he will need to show his own personal interest in missionary study whether he attends the Circle or not.

The C.M.S. has developed this work remarkably during the last few years, and every clergyman should write to the Society for information. 16. Last, but not least, let no parish forget the Jews. "To the Jew first" is a great New Testament principle, and it has its modern applications. As a rule, it will be found that the keenest Bible students in a parish are those who are interested in Jewish missionary work; and although it may not be a popular form of missionary effort, it will well repay the attention that can be given to it.

The monthly magazine of the London Jews' Society, The Jewish Missionary Intelligencer, will be welcomed by all who have at heart the interests of God's people, the Jews. It is a mistake to call them "God's Ancient People," for they are still His people, "beloved for the fathers' sake". There are other methods that will doubtless commend themselves to different clergymen in different circumstances. But perhaps enough has been said to show how true it is that almost everything in a parish with regard to Missions will depend upon the spiritual keenness of the clergyman himself.

Section 3. Some Missionary Books. Among the very many books that are now available for use by clergymen and others for missionary study, only a few can be mentioned, but it is thought that they represent some of the latest and best work in this connection. For the clergyman's own intellectual and spiritual life in relation to Missions, Dr. Mott's book, The Home Ministry and Modern Missions, probably comes first. Side by side with this will be the same writer's newer work, The Decisive Hour of Foreign

Missions.

Two books dealing with missionary principles in the light of the New Testament should be carefully studied. They are *The Holy Spirit in Missions*, by the Rev. A. J. Gordon, and *The Key to the Missionary Problem*, by Dr. Andrew Murray. Dr. Eugene Stock's admirable handbook on Missions will give a vivid summary of what is being done, and will be the means of introducing the reader to further and fuller works. Dr. Pierson's *The New Acts of the Apostles* is a book of first-rate value, written with all the incisiveness and fullness of information characteristic of that great missionary advocate.

Missionary biographies are now among the most interesting books that come from the press, and one firm, Messrs. Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, seem to have made this their specialty. A reference to their lists will show this, and the works are all valuable and informing. As one illustration, mention may be made of a book, *Men of Might in Indian Missions*, by an American writer, Holcomb, giving sketches of the leading Indian missionaries which are of truly fascinating interest.

Other biographies, like the *Lives of James Chalmers*, *Bishop Hannington*, *John G. Paton*, *James Gilmour*, and not least of all, *Douglas Thornton*, will stir the heart and impel to prayer and effort. For work among children, the C.M.S. issues a series of "Talks" to Young People, which are full of material, well arranged for workers. Nor must we forget the great and valuable *History of the C.M.S.*, by Dr. Stock, and the equally important *History of the Bible Society*, by Mr. Canton. In connection with a competition instituted by the Editor of the *Christian*, six volumes have been published in Messrs.

Morgan & Scott's "Missionary Series". They are all of real value, and should be studied by clergy, for their inculcation of missionary principles and their accounts of missionary work. For work among the Jews three books may be specially mentioned: *Israel My Glory*, by Wilkinson; *The Ancient Scriptures and the Modern Jew*, by Baron; *The Jew in Prophecy and Fulfillment*, by Kellogg; and several books and pamphlets published by the London Jews' Society, written by the late Secretary, the Rev.

W. T. Gidney. And once more, as essential in view of all the interests of the gathering, every clergyman should endeavour to obtain the volumes of the Reports of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference. Other works will readily suggest themselves on this great and almost vast subject. All that is now suggested is that serious reading is not only available on missionary topics, but is imperatively the duty of all who wish to do the very best for themselves and their people in spreading the Gospel throughout the world.

There may have been a time when missionary literature was dry and uninteresting, but if so, that day has gone never to return. Works on Missions in the present day merit the attention of the world's greatest thinkers, and no clergyman can regard himself as well informed if he does not know something at least of what is being written on this great topic.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/foreign-missions/>

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