II. John H. Reisner

Rural Missions Since the War

Around the globe, from Africa to Japan, the post-war years have seen, for the most part, a steady advance in relating the resources of churches and missions to the everyday life of village people. The one major exception to this condition is Korea where the rural church situation has been grossly neglected. In South Korea there is only one agricultural missionary. Several women missionaries have resumed their village programs but, by and large, missionary and national effort has been concentrated in institutional and city work. The Union Christian Service Center at Taegon has great potential for a rural training and service program, but it needs greatly to be strengthened, with personnel and funds, if it is to become an effective agency.

In Japan, there is an increasingly energetic and effective rural church movement and a large number of rural parishes have been organized. Several years ago the Church of Christ in Japan established a Twenty-Year Committee on the Life and Work of the Rural Church. It also supports a specialized rural training center, and within the last two years three regional rural church conferences and two training institutes have been held.

Probably in no other country has the cause of rural missions moved ahead so rapidly as in the Philippines. This applies both to institutional and local rural church programs. During the past three years there have been four regional rural conferences, two national conferences, and three local training institutes. The Union Theological Seminary in Manila has made it possible for a number of its students to attend special summer-school courses in one of the government colleges of agriculture. The Central Philippines University has recently established a College of Agriculture and has made an outstanding contribution in its extension and youth-club programs. Silliman University, in Davao, has plans for reorganization which call for a College of Rural Engineering and a Rural Institute that will relate the various other colleges and departments in the University to a program of rural training and service. Not the least significant development is the increasing number of rural pastors who are assuming leadership in community development schemes.

In Thailand, the Mission of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America has under way a colonization scheme, while the United Christian Missionary Society is undertaking a program of community development.

In Indonesia, there is developing an increasing interest in the rural church. The first conference on rural reconstruction was held in June 1955 under the auspices of the Christian Protestant Church of Bali.

Programs of a number of rural centers in India have been greatly strengthened through extension and community development projects. Several national and a considerable number of area rural conferences have been held. The Allahabad Agricultural Institute has been improved by more adequate physical developments and an enlarged and better-trained faculty. For the past four years the Institute has operated an important demonstration extension and community development program in some three hundred villages in the surrounding countryside. The Institute has also provided special training for several hundred students, both men and women, for government service. Dr. and Mrs. W. H. Wiser, missionaries of the Presbyterian
Church, U.S.A., who have long devoted their time and talents to working with the village people in Marshra, are now writing a new book which will indicate the changes in village life that have taken place since the appearance of Behind Mud Walls. This book is recognized as one of the classics dealing with Indian rural life.

In Lebanon, in October, 1954, a rural missions conference was held at the Jibrail Rural Fellowship Center, delegates coming also from Iraq and Syria. The Jibrail Rural Fellowship Center, with basic-education schools for village boys and girls and an extension service, is an influential factor in the growth of community-development programs in the Near East.

The first Rural Missions Conference ever held in Egypt convened in October, 1954. Significant also was the fact that the Coptic Orthodox Sunday and Rural Day Schools and the Coptic Catholic Church were represented. An important result of the first conference was the establishment of a permanent Christian Rural Workers' Committee for follow-up work. A second conference, larger than the first, was held in 1955. The Department of Agriculture of Assiut College has been greatly strengthened and is now operating an important village-development project.

In the western hemisphere, within the last two years, a number of notable rural missions conferences have been held in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Cuba. Interest in the rural church, in better training for rural pastors, and in relating the rural church to the needs of the community have all shown progress. A number of wholly new rural projects have been started since the War.

In Africa, two major rural missions conferences were held, in 1955, at Waddilove, Southern Rhodesia and Silva Torto, Angola. As a result, interest in agricultural and rural missions has been greatly stimulated. Some of the best work in relating the church programs to the everyday life of village people is to be found in Angola.

**Contribution of Rural Missions to Government and International Programs Of Technical Assistance and Rural Community Development**

It is a true statement that programs of rural community development are being undertaken by certain governments with the cooperation of other national and international agencies, to a very considerable extent, based on successful missionary experience. The principle of helping people to help themselves, which serves as the basis for so many community-development programs, was successfully demonstrated at the Martandam Rural Y.M.C.A. Training Center more than twenty-five years ago. Graduates of this center have had important influence in development of programs in Egypt, Ceylon, and other South Asian countries.

Community development now occupies an important place in the government programs of India, Egypt, and the Philippines, with many other countries becoming increasingly aware of their responsibility in this area. Christian efforts will continue to influence government developments in the future.

Since rural missions has contributed much to these national and international programs, it is highly necessary for the Christian movement to keep closely in touch with the leadership and programs of such international organizations as the World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, U.N.E.S.C.O., and the bilateral programs of the United States and other nations. If recent governmental and international experience has one major contribution to make to rural missions, it would probably be recognition of the
importance of involving village people in an understanding of their own problems and making them responsible in large measure for their solutions.

These world-wide movements to bring help to the village people of the world present in a very definite way a pressing challenge to Christianity. Most government programs will be involved with matters of production, better crops and farm animals, better health, better education and so on rather than with the village people themselves. Technical assistance and community development might be described as the application of modern scientific knowledge to the problems of the field and home. In most cultures these new scientific teachings will impinge directly on some religious superstitious belief. This is inevitable, but one can safely predict that scientific truth will win out. This inevitability, nevertheless, has its dangers because the religious beliefs provide most of the village people with their surest sense of security. Village people will increasingly be in need of a new faith to live by as modern science brings them new things to live with. Can Christianity replace the religious beliefs that are destroyed in this process of change?

The Future Creativeness of Rural Missions

Until recently, and in many countries up until the present, Christian missions have been the most active agency in the villages trying to bring new ideas, new life, new ways of living to the village people. They have pioneered in better agriculture, better home and family life, better health and sanitation, healthier recreation, education, and in many other ways. As mentioned above, their creativeness in developing techniques and a Christian philosophy of village development have made important contributions to modern governmental programs. Can rural missions be as creative in the next thirty years as in the past? There is still much to be learned about guiding rural people to study and solve their own problems. For example, how to train and use unpaid lay leadership in community development needs much more study and demonstration than is as yet available. We should make the development of people rather than of programs our major responsibility and demonstrate that Christianity can provide a new faith to live by as well as the fabric of a new individual and collective village life.