

## KUYPER ON MISSIONS

Kuyper was 52 years old when he was asked to lead a seminar on missions. He mentioned at the outset that he did not feel really qualified. It was during the period that the church of the *Afscheiding*, the secession of 1834, was in the process of uniting with the churches that had left the national Reformed Church under the *Doleantie* instigated by Kuyper. Interestingly, there was an immediate desire during the union talks to start thinking about missions. So Kuyper was asked to lay the theological groundwork for this mission work. The lecture-seminar took longer than planned and lasted a full day. Kuyper apparently lectured from notes but some in the audience took careful notes, also of the discussion. The transcript was later reissued in 1940 with an introduction by Prof. J. H. Bavinck who held the first chair in missiology at the Free University.

LECTURE ON MISSIONS BY PROFESSOR DR. A. KUYPER

GIVEN AT THE MISSION CONFERENCE,

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WITH A PREFACE BY DR. J. H. BAVINCK, PROFESSOR OF MISSIONS

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## PREFACE

At the request of the publisher I am happy to write an introduction to the new edition of the great lecture on Missions by Dr. A. Kuyper given at the mission conference of 50 years ago (January 28 to 30, 1890). Actually it was not so much an address as a series of theses that were put forward, explained and discussed in depth. All this was carefully recorded by members of the audience as a result of which we have a clear impression of

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what was said in these meetings. It is indeed regrettable that we do not have a copy of the full text of the lecture by Dr. Kuyper but just the text of the theses and the brief elucidation show clear issues, bold reasoning, and above all sound principles.

All this is especially striking if we realize that this presentation was made at a time when the churches in Holland were in a state of conflict and consolidation. The unification of the Christian reformed church dating from the Secession of 1834 with the reformed churches of the Doleantie led by Dr. Kuyper had not yet been completed and everything was still in a state of flux. It is a wonder of God's grace that at a time when there were so many domestic church issues to deal with, attention was directed at the mission field and strategies were mapped out for the development of mission work (which at that time was still carried out by the Dutch Reformed Mission Society). It was an even greater miracle that from the very beginning the principles of mission work were clearly formulated. Mission is the task given to the church itself. This was the basic thought that permeated the entire Amsterdam conference, a concept then still strange and new but which in recent years has received widespread international support.

There are in this address by Dr. Kuyper theses which testify to an amazing depth of vision. I point to the fundamental theses I to VIII, with their explanation, and also to the methodological theses XVIII to XXII. However, it is natural that thoughts were expressed that we would not want to say in the same words. For example, when in thesis XIV it is stated that the pagans and Muslims have to hear first the Law and then the Gospel, we would not want to separate these two so sharply because it is everywhere evident on the mission field that the greatness of the Law is best understood in the light of the Gospel. Also, in some respects we think differently about the "true elements" in Islam, as put forward in thesis XVI. What appeared at first to be "true elements" in the world of Islam frequently proved to be something quite different than expected. Closer understanding convinced us that the apparent "true elements" were in fact entirely opposite to the truth in Christ. We have also learned to understand both pagans and Islam in subtler forms than is expressed in the words "sensual" and "idolatry," traits which we have found also in the refined but no less dangerous forms of pantheistic mysticism and world escapism. And finally, we believe that the task of missions is not so much to be directed against Islam as such but rather against man who

is conceived in error and sin. We have learned that it is not always justified to identify a person entirely with the religion he confesses. Many adherents of Islam are not Muslims in the sense that they are true representatives of what Islam requires and teaches. Their knowledge of their own religion is often much too little. Therefore Missions aims rather at the goal to awaken human beings, whoever he or she may be, from delusion to the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.

Thus during the half century since the Amsterdam Conference on Missions our views on certain issues have changed somewhat. Nevertheless I do not hesitate to say that in what he presented there Dr. Kuyper laid out fundamental principles of lasting significance. The notions Dr. Kuyper expressed about the office of the Missionary (thesis XXIII) were supported at the conference by Dr. [F. L.] Rutgers. In 1896, when the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, now united, had to decide on the correct principles of missions at the Synod of Middelburg, they followed the thoughts laid out in a report defended by Dr. Kuyper. This shows that Kuyper's ideas in these matters had grown and matured.

Missions are receiving more and more attention, also in our churches. Mission work has grown enormously in the last 50 years. Therefore we are profoundly grateful for the words Dr. Kuyper said about the principles of missions. And this deep respect of course turns into sincere gratitude to God, who has led us in these ways and has been with us step by step.

Here follows the transcript of the notes of the theses, the elucidation, and the discussion as recorded by one or more participant.

The first group of 8 theses dealt with dogmatic propositions which focus on determining the relation between missions and the Eternal Being.

1. All mission activity originates from the sovereignty of God; is based on the creation of human beings in the image of God; is necessitated by sin; and is grounded in the confession that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
2. All mission activity by human beings is only a shadow, representation or instrument for the only principle (or real) mission of the Son through the Father.
3. The mission of the angels, whose name indicates that they are messengers, is the main purpose of their existence as far as we are concerned.
4. The mission of Moses and the Prophets was to be the temporary means which the Son before his Incarnation used to carry out his own mission task.
5. The Incarnation was the entry of the Son into the world in order to carry out the first phase of his mission.
6. The mission of the Evangelists and the Apostles, unlike that of the Prophets, was not representational or but rather an instrument in the hands of Christ and was different from all later mission activity as it concerned the ecumenical church in all times and places.
7. The Holy Scriptures are the lasting and continuing revelation of the mission of Christ and his charge or command to the world.
8. Throughout the ages Christ exercises his mission in the local churches through his ministers of the Word. This mission is directed to all who are baptized and thus are members of the covenant of Grace.

Following the presentation of these 8 propositions Kuyper gave a commentary.

As regards the first point, Kuyper stressed that mission flows from God's sovereignty, not from His love or mercy. All mission is essentially obedience to God's command; and

the content of the message likewise is not an invitation but a commandment, an order. The Lord does not recommend or exhort but mandates: Repent and believe! Kuyper referred to Isaiah 16:14 where it is written that God did not send the false prophets and did not give them orders. God does punish those who are not obedient. Reference was made to Romans 1:5; 6:17; 16:19 and 26; etc. Psalm 119 presents a general understanding of missions: "Your commandments are very wide." The will of God for his creatures are orders and instructions of an obligatory nature.

Missions assumes sin—distancing. God is after the sinner who has distanced himself from Him. He does not send for plants and animals. In nature God effects his ordinances directly. Human beings are created in His image and He is after human consciousness and will. And thus missions is based on the creation of men according to His image. God is after intellect and will, including those of angels.

Missions is based on the confession that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father but also the Son. The work of the Holy Spirit is not only bound to the counsel of the Father but also to the mediation of the Son and thus to the Word. Because the Father works through the Spirit of the Son, there is room for missions through the church. The *filioque* clause is rejected by many mystics. Therefore they have no eye or heart for missions: the Greek Orthodox Church does very little on missions. That church suffers from fanaticism and nihilism.

In summary, missions delivers a command, is directed to the fallen image bearer of God and is based on the confession that the operation of the Spirit is bound to the Word.

Missions not only has a relation with the Godhead but also with the Mediator. Jesus emphasizes that he is sent by—that he is the missionary of—the Father. Many people place Christ next to the Prophets and Apostles. However, the latter are subordinate to the One sent by the Father. Coccejus taught that the Old Testament did not have Christ and that the gospel was first written by Matthew; the Son did not become mediator until he became flesh. We believe that the mediator became active right after the fall and that this was part of God's eternal plan. However, before his Incarnation Christ used prophets and shadows. Pagans seek to know God through witchcraft and sorcery but

God tells the church to listen to Moses. The ambassador has to represent the King and for us that can only be the Son of the Father.

Angels are also sent out. They are ministering spirits for the benefit of those who inherit salvation. In the book of Revelation the ministers of the Word are called angels of the churches.

The Son carried out his own mission through the use of shadows. Abraham saw His day and was glad. From time to time Christ appeared in the form of a person or an angel. In the contrast between Melchizedek and Aaron lies the difference between the shadowy and fleeting priesthood and the priesthood that was permanent and real. In the Old Testament, missions was a shadow and representation of Christ's mission.

When he assumed flesh, Christ put aside His representatives and carried out his offices directly. This first state of the Son's official work ended with his Ascension. The second state will begin with his Return.

There was no discussion after this session and there were no questions on this dogmatic part.

Part two had 9 theses.

9. Christ exercises his mission among Jews, Muslims and pagans through His churches; He seeks out these whom the Father has given Him as elect, and He incorporates these in the covenant of grace through baptism.

10. Every attempt by the churches to promote missions among the Jews, Muslims and pagans as an excuse for their neglect to conduct missions among the baptized is pharisaic.

11. Christian missions entails a command or burden to which every missionary has to submit. It is to bring the Word of the King as His ambassador whom he represents.

12. When Christ uses human beings in His missionary effort, He empowers them with His own authority so that whoever rejects the missionary also rejects Him.

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13. Missions among the Jews, Muslims and pagans has to be carried out through the churches, just as evangelism to the baptized is done by the ministers of the Word. Other forms of proclaiming the gospel among Jews, Muslims and pagans is not missions but is similar to the efforts of a non-ordained evangelist.

14. All missions among Jews, Muslims or pagans starts with the law and then with the message of the gospel.

15. Missions among Jews should not aim at making a convert of an individual person (in which case there would be no need for a separate mission to Israel) but rather should aim at changing the rabbinical system which is the heart of the Jewish religion. Armed with much knowledge one has to enter this difficult terrain and seek to rebuke the pride of the Jews through the Law and once this pride is broken to heal the wounds through the Gospel.

16. Similarly, missions among Muslims should not be confined to individuals but rather should deal with Islam itself. Missions here should connect with Islam's anti-pagan efforts as well as with the true parts that are retained in Islam's confession of Moses and the Christ; but then it should point out that these good parts have been overgrown by the weeds of the confession of Mohammed and the Koran and have suffocated the true biblical message. Then rebuke the Muslim's pious sensuality and restore the Law and Gospel in its fullness and purity and thus replace the essence of Islam with the Christian religion.

17. Missions among pagans has four objectives: First reject their idols; then bring the ministers of the idols to the sacrament of baptism so that they can reveal the church of Christ to their people; next, link this manifestation of the church with the mother church; and finally, replace the pagan way of life with a Christian form or life-style.

The explanation by Kuyper of these theses went about as follows. The note-taker is always careful in adding "approximate."

Missions should never be disconnected from the Mission of the Word. Rome thinks that all the treasures are inside the Church. Therefore Rome only has a mission for those outside the Church. Our forefathers always spoke not just of missions but of expanding

and planting the church. (I am amazed that Kuyper already in 1890 speaks of church planting, JHB). This is correct. The church has to be carried out. The way missions is conducted at the present time is not correct. This is the result of the French Revolution. The emphasis in those days was on nature man (natuur mens). The unbeliever thought that men was innocent, happy and unspoilt. Christian-minded people had pity on these ignorant men. So as a counterweight to the coffee houses, clubs etc to ennoble the people, Christians created organizations to spread the gospel among the unbelievers. This way of conducting missions by the various Mission societies was not scriptural and actually quite revolutionary. That these societies were still effective was due to the fact that they included many outstanding Christian leaders. But how to correct the practice of conducting missions?

First, it has to be kept clearly in mind that Christ is the Missionary. He carries out his mission. The mission societies place the emphasis on the person of the missionary. The idea of garnering souls and saving souls and bringing them to Jesus is not consistent with the belief that the missionary follows Jesus in finding the elect. We can not save people, not even our own children, and only Christ is able to attract people to the faith. All pelagian leaven has to be removed. The purpose of missions is the Holy Baptism and to incorporate the convert into the covenant of grace (in external sense).

The main motivating power of missions is obedience. And this without being hypocritical. To ignore the baptized in our own churches and who live like unbelievers among us and make this neglect up by mission activity among the pagans is pharisaic.

Mission carries with it a burden, a command of the Lord. A burden for the pagan as human being. As a creation of God the pagan has to honor God and to be converted. In his ambassador the Lord comes Himself and claims the pagan as his inheritance.

The missionary has authority. He is not a salesman whose products can be refused. He comes with the authority of Christ. Like the Father has sent me so have I sent you!

It is well to remember what the Catechism says about the keys of the Kingdom which have been given to the ministers of the Word. Therefore they have authority in the House of the Lord and have the authority to bring the command to conversion. An oefenaar (a non ordained person with special spiritual gifts who can conducts prayer



meetings etc and can be translated as practitioner) mentions what the Lord has done to his soul and as a brother among the brothers (and sisters) can express words of encouragement and admonishment. Now the relationship between such an oefenaar or practitioner and an ordained Minister of the Word can be compared with the missionary of the mission societies and the real missionary which the church has ordained. Kuyper mentions here that the members of one of the reformed denominations see it also this way and are ready to move from the mission society to the church itself.

The gospel has to be brought to the Jew, the Muslim and the pagan. The foundation of the gospel is not present in the natural heart but has to be carved in through the law. Penitence, breaking up in pieces and falling on knees has to come first. The missionary has to place the law of God first before bringing him the gospel.

Missions has to be contextualized. Mission under the Jews will occur mostly in cities like Amsterdam. If there is Jewish butcher somewhere in the country, the local church can deal with that and no special missionary has to be brought from Amsterdam. As Christians we have no room for hatred towards Jews nor do we have special favoritism towards them. The key is the antithesis of Christ versus the Jews. The sin of the Jews is their pride, their self elevation. Jews have to be told that they have trashed the law, have falsified the original revelation in the law, and have cut off the spiritual roots of the law and have substituted their own ideas and covered it like weeds. Thus they can not understand the typical character of the law and Christ became foolishness and abomination. This is pride! Also the sabbatism among us is a Jewish influence.

Most people who were missionaries among the Jews do not know who they really are. There are three groups of Jews: the modern Jews (which are almost pagans); the orthodox Jews; and a small group called the Rabbinicals. This last group presents the most problems. We have to show the falsehood of their reasoning and the untenability of their position. One has to bring them the law again as Christ gave on the Sinai and explained in the days when he was in the flesh. In this way will the basis be laid for the gospel. Again it is all for the honor of God!

The sin of Islam is its sensuality. We have to understand and honor the line by which Muslims are tied to Abraham. Ismael came out of Abraham and he circumcised him.

Christ has saved Ishmael's life. Islam has a world mission as a bastion against paganism. Their main error is to place a higher revelation above the Scriptures (which is also the case with the Mormons). Kuyper refers to an Indonesian who praised Jesus and the Christ in such words as he had seldom heard. What then is the error of Islam? Christ preaches a spiritual life as against the sensual life of the Muslim. Emphasis is on external life of pleasure. This also explains that they seek to convert with the sword.

Idol worship is the cardinal sin of the heathen. In earlier days missionaries destroyed the images and cut down the old holy oak trees. Now the missionary does not use force but still the main task is to destroy the false gods. Furthermore the church has to be revealed and their society has to improve by a better understanding of family life, marriage, the relation between parents and with their children.

Then follows a period of discussion and questioning. Those who participated included brothers Schaafsma, Lion Cachet, Wagenaar, Hovy, Gispen and Rutgers. All familiar names.

Rev Schaafsma objects to the rather favorable view and diagnosis of Islam. Experience shows that Islam is the toughest enemy of the Christian missionary.

Rev Lion Cachet objects to the view that the missionary movement in England and Scotland was based on unscriptural and revolutionary ideas. Carey, Fuller, Ryland and others from the very beginning based their activity on the Holy Scriptures and the command of the Lord. They as well as the great Church Missionary Society, and the pioneers in missions of the Scottish churches were church people and far from being revolutionaries. They desired to bring the gospel to the heathens and Muslims, not because of some general human love or to improve their culture and general wellbeing, but rather in obedience to the command of the Lord to plant his church and in their work the Bible was the foundation and rule. This was also the opinion of Hardcastle, Bogue, Eyre Love and the other founders of the London Missionary Society which however did not adopt a church position. These men had nothing to do with revolutionary ideas. And as regards the Dutch Missionary Society, if this would be terminated and taken over by the church that would constitute a fruitful evolution and a real fulfillment of its objectives.

Dr. Wagenaar asks whether the word "represents" in thesis 9 is in conflict with thesis 6.

Brother Hovy points out that the practitioner (oefenaar) and the private missionary also has authority because he comes with God's Word and the call to believe.

Rev. W. Gispen asks whether the baptism of the private missionary from the mission societies should be acknowledged even if they are not ordained.

To give the lecturer some rest (Dr. Kuyper was suffering from the flu) Prof. Rutgers continued to answer the questions. He mentioned that Dr. Kuyper did not consider Islam a bridge to Christianity but a dam against paganism. He also said that opposition to the Christian faith is stronger among Muslims than among the heathen, and it is again stronger among Jews than among Muslims. The rule seems to be that an error is more difficult to overcome if it contains some elements of truth. On the issue of baptism by private persons rather than by ordained ministers, he argued in a long complicated answer that while sometimes things are done that are not wise and should not be recommended, it nevertheless should not be ruled out as invalid. In the Christian church baptism is not declared invalid when it is administered by a person who has no official qualifications.

Kuyper returned and thanked Prof. Rutgers for his willingness to field questions. Following up on the answer given to Mr. Willem Hovy, he added that there are two types of authority: sovereign and moral; authority of the speaker and authority of the word. The practitioner speaks with moral authority. As regards the issue raised by Dr. L. Wagenaar, Kuyper admitted that he had difficulty finding the right formulation. He had used the word 'representation" in thesis 11 in a broader context. He now restated it as follows: "It is bringing the Word of the King through his ambassador, in whom the King himself comes." Kuyper suggested that Rev. Lion Cachet was thinking of missionary activities in England which contained a mixture of revolutionary ideas, such as love for the man of nature, the noble savage.

Rev Gispen concluded the morning session with prayer.

In the afternoon Dr. Kuyper presented his next group of 5 theses.

18. Missions among heathens and Muslims, when preaching law and gospel, should acknowledge the peculiarities of the people and their environment and leave complete freedom for confessing Christ, so that when these people are ready to form their own churches these local peculiarities and forms are preserved.

19. Churches should not select their areas of activities in an arbitrary manner, avoid fighting with other churches in the selection of fields but preferably cooperate with other churches in allocating the mission fields.

20. The burden and the justification for missions rest with the local church. Because of the small size of an individual church it is recommended that several churches cooperate through appropriate church relations rather than through a separate organization.

21. Missionaries must receive an education which in no way is less than that of other ministers of the Word. This education has to include special knowledge of the idol worship, the social situation and the language of the people to whom they will be sent.

22. It is desirable that missionaries are sent in pairs of two.

Elaborating on thesis 18, Kuyper explains that the Bible does not lay down specific guidelines for the conduct of missions among different peoples. Therefore, while upholding certain principles it is best to maintain as much variety as possible in terms of level, conditions and character of the people. Variety in the area of confession and worship is possible.

As regards thesis 19, Kuyper fears that much effort and money has been wasted because of divisions among churches. He has personally experienced such waste. He cites the fact that among Catholics seven mission organizations are operative. It happens that some people, for monetary gain, become converts under each of these organizations and so also enter the statistics seven times. Not enough has been done to divide the fields.

In contrast to the Congregationalists, we send the missionaries out from the local church. From this cell as the local church can grow the ecumenical church. Common issues can be dealt with by a group of local churches. No separate organization is needed and then attached to the church.

We have to send our best people to the mission field. In the old days Rome held high a Boniface and we again have to look up to our missionaries. Instead of giving them a modest education of a lesser quality, they should receive a superior education. Finally, the Lord sent His messengers in sets of two. This is good practice.

This explanation is followed again with a period of debate. Brother Hovy asks how we have to divide the mission field with Rome. Or do we have to regard the work of Rome not as Christian missions in accordance with God's Word?

Dr. Wagenaar agrees with the contention that from one cell as local church can grow the ecumenical church. He advocates that the churches carry out their mission efforts through the classis or synod. Through them as well as the church councils the best persons will be selected. He proposes to change the wording of thesis 20 as follows: "The duty and right to engage in missions rest in each local church. Because of the local church's smallness and its limited (financial) power, cooperation with other churches should be a goal, if not a requirement."

Rev. Van der Valk agrees with this point. Deputies are indispensable in the execution of the missionary task. But he is in full agreement with the general exposition of principles and methods of operation.

Rev. Lion Cachet: I have put after thesis 20: Amen! He gives strong support to the thesis that missionaries receive the best education possible. For example, selected for the mission field should be doctors in theology of the Free University who have received their degree with the highest honors and who also receive two years of additional specialized education.

The question is whether only such men should be sent out? Or is there room for men with "singular gifts" and who are called to do mission work at a more advanced age or for other reasons were not able to receive an appropriate university education. The

answer should be yes. Therefore the wording of thesis 21 should read: "The servants sent out should as a rule receive a level of education . . . etc." At the great London Conference the authorities complained greatly about the waste of money and effort on the mission fields and encouraged greater allocation of fields.

Dr. Kuyper replied by suggesting that the issue of the missions of Rome be treated at a future conference. To deal with the issue whether Rome's missions is Christian or anti-Christian would require another set of theses. As regards Dr. Wagenaar's amendment, he accepts it.

At this point the lecturer develops his last group of 5 theses.

23. A missionary among Jews or heathens has an office not unlike that of an evangelist and can as such administer the sacrament of baptism, though not that of Holy Communion. The latter can only be administered after a church has been established and arrangements have been made for administering the sacraments of baptism and communion.

24. Once a missionary has baptized a number of converts and has formed a church, he has become the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in that church and ceases to be a missionary. His preaching of law and gospel and the administration of baptism among the unconverted take place not as a missionary of the mother church but as a minister of the new local church.

25. If these newly established churches are temporarily not capable of supporting themselves completely, the mother churches can support them on a temporary basis, but the former missionary should not be paid by the mother church.

26. Missionaries in the true sense of the word remain the burden of the sending church.

27. Because of the possibility that missionaries may become ministers of the Word in new churches, they should be ordained and made eligible for a call before being sent out, and in this way they are authorized by the churches to preach the law and the gospel and to incorporate the converts in the covenant of grace through the administration of baptism.

A missionary who speaks with authority must hold an office. But which office? It is ministerial. Our missionaries cannot be treated like the evangelists who worked with the apostles, though they are very similar. Dr. Kuyper seemed to prefer to call them evangelists because the name missionary gives the impression that the regular minister of the Word is not a missionary. The task of the evangelist ceases with baptism and his area of work is not tied to a certain place.

When a church has been formed and still maintains a missionary, the character of the church is falsified. When a church has been established, it is responsible for missions and not the other way around.

Churches can support other churches as needy churches, but there should be no other tie that might influence their work.

It is desirable that less attention be paid to the monies and less inquiries were made whether salaries were secure. The missionary should say: I do not ask; and the sending church should say: we will take care and pay! It is very important that the authority of the missionary is clearly spelled out in the letter of transmittal.

In the discussion of these last theses there seemed to be much disagreement about a missionary's lack of authority to administer Holy Communion. Dr. Rutgers also took issue with the preference for calling a missionary an evangelist. In the New Testament evangelists had a different task than today's missionaries. Christ himself called the evangelists, while today the churches call the missionaries. It is not advisable to differentiate too strongly the various duties or authorities between ministers and missionaries, also because newly created churches should not be left to themselves too soon.

Rev. Cachet agreed with the speaker that churches have to care for their missionaries. It has happened in the past that missionaries suffered from hunger. The sending church should make sure that its missionary does not have to take care of his daily bread and any other financial needs connected with his missionary activities. Finally, brother Leiszen from Beverwijk commented on the preaching of law and gospel. No details are given here, but Dr. Kuyper did answer the question.

At the conclusion, chairman thanked the speaker for his important work. Since it was already 4:30 p.m. it was decided to postpone the lecture by Rev. Schaafsma till the next session, which would commence at 9:30 a.m. At the request of the chair, brother Van der Valk from Vlaardingen closed the meeting with a prayer of thanksgiving.