

Foreign Missions 1975-1985 – The First Ten Years (Part 2)

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Missionary goes on a camel ride in Iraq.

A new world. So many unusual sights and sounds. The waves of the ocean pounding the shores of an island dotted with thatched huts, tea plantations as far as the eye could see, the windy silence of the desert, luscious trees of fruits not found at home, the chords of loud Latin music filling the air, the tempting pungency of curry and saffron, the vivid colors of jacaranda trees.... These were some of the beautiful things that beckoned our missionaries to embrace the uniqueness of God's nature in a new land. Yet the vast majority of missionaries claimed that they were neither spiritually nor practically prepared for the shock of seeing the terrible poverty in their countries.

A first glimpse of a tiny country in Africa:

I looked along the streets, observing the people. Most vividly I remember a fat, bare-breasted woman who had huge pots of beans and other foods that she was dishing out to some children. There were hundreds of people on their way to work. The unpaved and uneven roads, the ruddy soil- everything was plunged into the red light of the rising sun. For me, it was a special atmosphere, as it was the dawn of our mission, too. With a certain anxiety, I made my approach into the city. I envisioned a big city center with at least some skyscrapers. (My search for skyscrapers was in vain!)

I'll never forget my first walk across the big market of the city. At first I didn't know what was going on- such a swarm of people, a loud babel of voices, and a smell that made me feel sick. But something inside told me that I should be able to handle it since I was assigned to work in this country.

And from the Middle East:

Toward the evening I wandered out on the streets for the first time and a completely new world opened in front of my eyes. The brown mud and stone houses looked as if they had no roofs. The people who passed by seemed very wild-looking to me. They wore turbans, and around their hips were girded big crooked daggers which gave a rather militant impression. Women, on the other hand, were dressed all in black and wordlessly flitted through the streets. I was in a different century! I felt Abraham could have walked here or maybe Moses, but then I saw that empty tin cans were scattered all around and I knew I had not traveled back in time. Nobody seemed to care about picking them up.

I dared to make my way deeper into the city. Barefoot children wearing little caps roamed through the lanes; the intense aroma of baked bread permeated the air. The sun could not be seen anymore. The clouds had faded into numerous hues of red. Never before had I experienced a sunset of such intensity. The whole city was suddenly plunged into a symphony; from over forty minarets throughout the city, muezzins summoned the people to prayer. The people quickly hastened to the mosque and soon the melodious recitation of the Koran could be heard from the loudspeaker.

Once the initial shock or even repulsion had gone, what was it that bridged the chasm in the hearts of our

brothers and sisters to want to stay, to want to restore that nation?

Oh, what a pressure in my heart! I wanted to burst or run away, but where could I go? There was nobody I knew. On the contrary, all the people looked at me with the same hostile eyes. Lonely, I walked through hot roads to the lake just outside the city. During earthquakes this lake had swallowed many people. As a consequence, the atmosphere was dark and sinister.

Behind me a vast field of ruins looked devastated and ghostly. God's grievous heart. How could He live here all the time, with the dead people, the dead city, the dead country? I thought, 'I have to do something for You, since You are more miserable than me. I have to hold out, at least.

Father expressed the heart of a pioneer in the following way:

You will want to endure this pain for the sake of your mission, and for the sake of the people whom you need to save. Then cheerfully, you kneel down and pray to God, comforting Him, and God will approach you and embrace you. He will call you His child. He will be able to feel that you understand Him. At that particular moment you can truly experience the heart of God.



Fritz Piepenburg, missionary from Germany to Yemen (1975)

As foreign missionaries they had to adapt to their new cultures and abandon some things which they felt were "right" from their own. In some areas of the world it is proper to kiss a person on both cheeks as a greeting. In other cultures, a person is insulted if a guest doesn't have something to eat at his home, no matter how humble the food is. No matter what kind of upbringing the missionaries had, learning to embrace new customs sometimes brought about embarrassment, and feelings of repentance if by some chance they had offended their hosts:

At dinnertime I had one of my first experiences with a different culture. In this cement-floored home -- more like a hut with an open patio -- our host spread a cloth on the ground and then placed the meal on it. But when this elderly lady sat down to eat the meal, I noticed that she forgot to bring the eating utensils. Since I was her guest I didn't want to say anything and just waited. To my surprise, she began eating with her hands after her short prayer, and I was even more astonished when she looked at me and expected the same thing.

She looked at me and asked if I had ever eaten with my hands. I replied that I had not. She told us that she eats this way because 'it is the way Mohammed (Peace be upon him) ate.' She asked, 'Did you know that this is the way Jesus used to eat?' Her question was almost like a challenge to me; I tried to be gracious about thrusting my hands into the bowl of rice curry placed before me.

For the missionaries in one nation to find each other upon arrival was often quite a task, having been given only their names. Sometimes it was a matter of hours; sometimes it took a matter of months. They discovered each other in some very unusual ways. One Japanese brother found his American sister in a library because he recognized her 1800 Couple Blessing ring!

Efforts to Create Unity

It was God's and True Parents' dream that three sets of those footprints would meet within each nation and become one. But True Father also knew just how difficult this goal would be to achieve. He even said that "brothers and sisters drive nail s into each other's heart s which makes the pain unbearable," but he also said that this is the very point at which a person can realize the pain that God and Father have been sustaining all this time – not for their own sake, but for the sake of the world. One German missionary wrote:

American self-confidence encountered Japanese pride; openness versus taciturnity. And another seasoning, in addition to the already well-spiced dish, was German stubbornness. The whole encounter was framed by completely strange and, in every respect, unusual surroundings.

One is used to blowing his nose in a noisy way; for the other this shows terrible manners. Another one has to switch from chopsticks to a knife and fork. In some parts, people eat their soup noisily, while in the West people try to eat as noiselessly as possible.

In the West people express joy and suffering; in the East it is a mark of good breeding to mask one's emotions. Something that sounds agreeable in the German language means something disrespectful and insulting in English. In the Oriental view of what a woman should look like, one of us may have definitely been too tall, and the other not thin enough.

Simply everything was confusing. The language difficulties did not allow us to express our hearts as we desired. And our personal characters, which were not rounded to begin with, had many sharp corners that seemed to jut out all too often.

We each were tested to such an extreme degree I had never imagined it possible. I had such pride in myself and my "old continent" -- such typical arrogance; such obstinacy and lack of modesty. If I had realized these foibles at all before, they were but pins pricking my heart. In the mission field, they became like stakes – the pain forcing me to break free from the old.



Jette Jensen overlooks the town of Julianehab, Greenland

Yet another sister expressed how, when there was lack of trust, harmony was impossible to create.

Disharmony was in the air so many times and I could not speak my mind - my heart was full of spiritual junk, troubles, accusations, and self-accusations. I never could stand to live in friction with someone. Usually I tried to compensate. Now I could not do it -- I was without words, without language. Only relentless attrition. Someone else was also there: God. But even with Him, I did not get along so well.

At first we maintained external kindness, but after a while we could no longer pretend in front of each other. Mistrust, the poison of the soul, sneaked into our hearts. 'Why does my brother look so strange when he talks to me? Why doesn't my sister say goodbye to me properly when she leaves the house? Why is he so long in the bathroom, and why do the two of them talk so much when I am not there?' Mistrust is the greatest evil.

Father uncovered the key to unity in his conference speech, something many missionaries had learned only after many painful months or years: "There is only one secret, one way to become one. You must do it without words. Silently serve. Simply try to serve each other. That attitude alone can make people unite."

The missionaries in one African country felt unity was vitally important and did everything in their power to unite. These three representatives felt "married" to one another, and each night after sending their new members to bed they stayed up until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, and sometimes later, to talk over their problems, and the work for the future.

They felt that until they all agreed on a decision or a goal, they simply could not, and would not, go to bed. Through arguments, tears, and especially prayers, they grew in love for each other, their mission, and their missionary life. When one of the three missionaries went through an especially difficult time and locked himself in his downtown office, the other missionary brother brought him a sleeping bag and sat outside the office until he unlocked the door, accepted the sleeping bag, and accepted his brother's love.