

THE MACHINE THAT MAKES MISSIONARIES

By Charles C. Ryrie

No one would debate the fact that it is the Lord who sends laborers into the world.

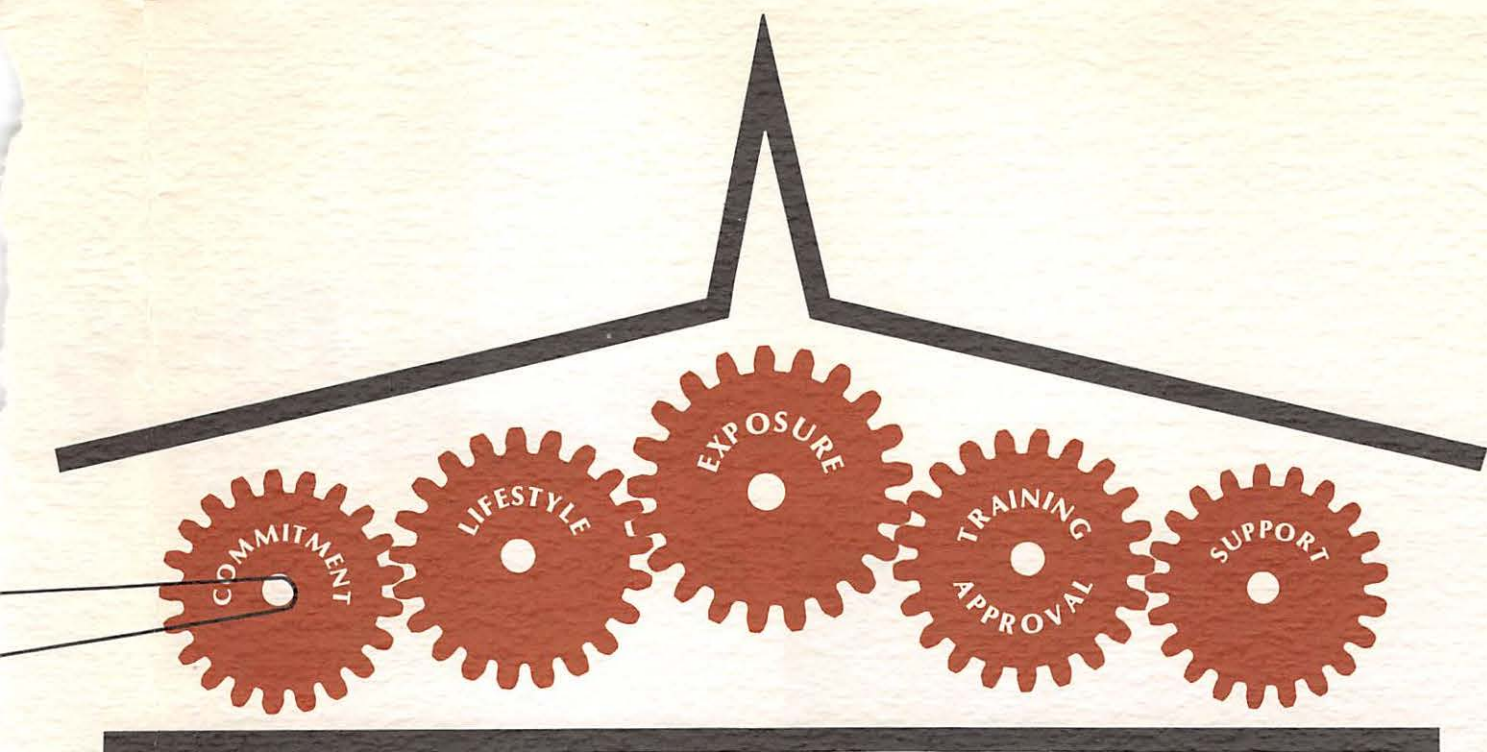
But the sovereign God uses means. Prayer is the one mentioned in that famous passage about laborers in Matthew 9:38, but the Lord uses other means as well.

One of the most important is the local church, for it provides the atmosphere in which missionaries are born and nurtured. The home in which a young person grows up may or may not be Christian. The schools he or she attends may be secular, or if Christian, may or may not exert much influence to be open to missions. The circle of friends may or may not include personal acquaintance with missionaries. But the local church should be exposing the young person to all the influences that will make a godly person, including exposure to God's worldwide plan.

What are some of the influences that a local church particularly can bring to bear on her young people?

Commitment. Can there be any doubt that the greatest problem in the church and in every phase of Christian work is lack of total dedication on the part of Christians? When and where will our young people hear about commitment? Hopefully at home, but certainly in church. Hopefully at the Christian college they may attend, but better before that time. The local church is the key in keeping before its people, and especially before its young people as they mature, the challenge of giving their lives unreservedly to do the will of God. This won't mean, of course, that every one will be led to foreign countries, but commitment provides the soil in which missionary concern grows.

It goes without saying (or does it?) that commitment not only relates to the flow of workers into all the world,



but also to the release of funds to support those workers. It seems to me as I travel around that I do not hear the emphasis on dedication as much as formerly. Perhaps we are overreacting to altar calls, campfire services, etc., but we must never forget that dedication of life is a biblical doctrine that ought to be strongly proclaimed in the ministry of the local church.

Lifestyle. Just as a child in a family needs to be taught by his parents the standards of that family, so dedicated Christians need instruction in what God expects of His children. We hear a lot today about what ought to constitute a proper Christian lifestyle, meaning an appropriate standard of living. We need to discuss the standard of living, but we also need to discuss the living of standards.

The Bible provides ample principles to guide us in holy living. Explaining these principles is an important part of the ministry of the local church. But it is not enough to explain the principles, they must also be applied. The corporate wisdom which the leadership of the church can provide in doing this is crucial to the proper nurture of its members.

Exposure. Probably no group can expose young people to missions and missionaries as well as the local church. Not only are the customary avenues of exposure available — the missionary conference, reports from furloughing missionaries, communication through letters — but newer opportunities made possible by the ease of transportation which today give young people the chance to visit foreign fields themselves. Family vacations, work projects, and summer internships out of the country provide unusual exposure, and those who have such experiences return to infect others in the

church for missions in a way almost nothing else can. The local church becomes a veritable communications center in the making of missionaries.

Training and approval. Since there is no such thing as an “instant missionary,” the potential missionary needs training long before he or she ever applies to a mission board. So again the local church assumes a prominent role as a training center, offering the variety of opportunities there are for service in a church. It provides in-service training.

With that process of training goes evaluation both of the ministry performed within the local church and the character of the person. Development in service and development in character go hand in hand.

Normally, it would be expected that a local church should be able to certify that the candidate would qualify in his home church for the same ministry he intends to do on the mission field. If the home church would not hire the candidate, why should anyone else be expected to support him or her? Trained and approved people would certainly cut down time and personnel losses which are sometimes experienced.

Support. If the committed young person has been molded, exposed and informed, trained and approved, then there will be no question as to support. Financial, personal, prayer ties will forge ever stronger links between the missionary and his or her church, links that will strengthen both parties throughout life. The church that, under God, made the missionary will certainly want to provide loving support of its representative in another land.

Mission boards do not make missionaries. Parents may; schools can; but local churches must.