

**From the introduction to
Evangelism: Christ's Imperative Commission,
by Roland Q. Leavell**

God Moved On

The apostles and early church members took Jesus' commission seriously. They taught men publicly and from house to house. They testified for Christ, both to the Jew and also to the Gentile. They took the "good news" of the truth in Christ to all the known world. Since apostolic times, wherever the church has maintained an evangelistic, missionary zeal and a soul-winning fervor, the Holy Spirit of God has given his blessings to the church. Wherever the church has lost its missionary zeal and soul-winning fervor, God has moved on.

The center of the Christian enterprise during the first half of the first century A.D. was in Jerusalem. The apostles sought to obey the commission of Christ. "You will be witness to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:18). But the Judaizers, certain Christian Jews did not want the Gentiles to become Christians unless they should become Jews first. This anti-missionary spirit conquered the Jerusalem church. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on! (Acts 15)

The center of the Christian enterprise during the second half of the first century A.D. was in Antioch, in Syria. Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and others worked there and went out from there. Worldliness and sensuality, seeping in from the sordid environment of Antioch, poisoned the life of the churches. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

Strong centers of the Christian enterprise during the second and third were established in Ephesus (present day Turkey) and in Alexandria, Egypt. The gospel was preached throughout the entire Roman Empire. But the Gnostic heresy, denying the essential deity of Jesus, crept in. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

A strategic citadel of the Christian enterprise from A.D. 330 until the close of the sixth century was in Constantinople (Istanbul, also in Turkey). Missionary activity radiated from there into Ireland and Scotland, and among the Germans. But Constantinople united the church and state. Formalism

became the order of worship. Lifeless liturgies usurped the place of spirituality. Finally, the inroads of Islam killed the already waning power of Christianity there. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

The center of the Christian enterprise in the West from about 600 A.D. until about 1050 A.D. was in Rome. There was much missionary activity at first. They evangelized the Anglo-Saxons, Irish, Scotch, Germans, and Scandinavians. But unscriptural beliefs crept in. Biblical theology decayed. Preaching and religious instruction were neglected. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

The Christian enterprise flourished in France during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, especially when the papacy was located in Avignon (1309-1377). However, the pope was greatly strengthened about the same time, and a mighty struggle between church and state developed. Schism rent the church in two and led to stagnation. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

The center of evangelistic and evangelical Christianity during the middle of the sixteenth century was in Germany. Martin Luther's reformation began in 1517 and soon others, like John Calvin in France and John Knox in Scotland, began to add their voices to the reform movement. Fervent preaching of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than through ecclesiastical ceremony and sacrament, spread the gospel through Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Bavaria, Bohemia, Moravia, and elsewhere. But bitter controversies between reformers arose concerning their theological interpretations. They forgot the souls of men. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

A mighty center of Christian opportunity for evangelism during the exploration of the Western world was in Spain and Portugal. Missionaries went into Central America, South America, the Philippines, and the southern parts of North America. But the gold which they found ushered in an age of materialism. Their greed for gold supplanted their passion for souls. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

The center of the Christian enterprise during the period of the colonization and development of the Western world was in England. Missionaries won far-reaching victories in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India. But bloody

religious wars were fought. The age of skepticism came and an ungodly rationalism flowed out of France and Germany in to English thought. Religion was paralyzed. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

The center of the Christian enterprise during the first half of the nineteenth century was New England and the states along the Atlantic seaboard. The so-called "Revival of 1800" began around 1785 and continued in power until about 1812. The educational institutions were saved from the grip of infidelity and were transformed into mighty evangelistic agencies (Harvard, Princeton, Yale . . .). Prosperity was ushered in. The churches were immeasurably strengthened. The foreign missionary movement in America was born in the midst of this revival. But after some years heresies crept in, denying the deity of Jesus and the inspiration of the Scripture. Materialism soon absorbed their interests. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

(In 1951, when Dr. Leavell wrote this book, he concluded the introduction this way . . .)

Today the center of the Christian expansion is definitely in the United States, with special concentration in the southern regions. The lessons of history are clear to those who would learn. American Christians must evangelize, or else God will move on.

===== My Own Ending

By the twentieth century the center of the Christian expansion was definitely in the United States. The foreign missionary movement expanded as a new wave of evangelicals led the churches to the ends of the earth seeking the lost. However, the materialism of the previous century also grew and Biblical theology began to decay. Relativism soon infected the churches. In some churches the scriptures lost their authority and in others it became a weapon to wage war against any who were not "like-minded." Denominations divided and divided again. Their evangelistic zeal was chilled, and their soul-winning fervor was killed. God moved on!

Today the center of the Christian enterprise is in the second and third world, among the poorest and most persecuted people in countries south of the equator.