

Missions According to Scripture

Abraham Kuyper

Translated by Pieter Tuit¹

Introductory comments to the published speech by Abraham Kuyper.

As an introduction to the eleventh anniversary of the Reformed Mission Society, I spoke at the Scottish Mission Church a simple word that, based upon notes of a reporter and written by the same, imperfect though it might be, is presented to a wider audience. I did not think that this was worthwhile but it was the wish of the board of this society. I would just like to make a few introductory comments. First of all I am only responsible for the material content and not for the form or presentation. Furthermore my participation at the anniversary of this society can be seen as a sign of sympathy for her standpoint but not at the expense of my appreciation for other sister organizations. I gladly welcome criticism on the mission thoughts developed here.

“As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You” John 20:21b.

There is in our tiny country, among the many mission societies that have arisen within our cramped borders, a small organization that we call The Reformed Mission Society. This society does not give up hope and will not hang its head in discouragement even though it is not able to boast in great deeds, has not been able to spread its wings wide, and has already known better days. There is still reason for thanksgiving and rejoicing and that’s why we celebrate her anniversary tomorrow to the glory of our God.

This is, then, the occasion that brought us together here. The Reformed Mission Society did not want to celebrate this within her circle only but together with everyone who, with her, love the Christ and gather around in order to pray to him: “Lord give us a prayer in our hearts that receives its strength only from the mediating prayer of Christ so that our hearts can rise to you in truth and find an answer before your throne.”

¹ Translated from Kuyper’s *De zending naar de Schrift: inleidend woord voor het elfde jaarfeest der Nederlandsche Gereformeerde Zendings-Vereeniging* (“Missions According to Scripture: Introductory Speech for the Eleventh Anniversary of the Dutch Reformed Mission Society”). Special thanks to John Bolt for his revision of this translation.

This mission society is not satisfied with numbers and names, nor with the news and reports that await her tomorrow. She knows the importance of testing her devious heart and frail work on the only source of truth and of immersing her work into renewing by the Word of our Lord.

I have been asked to lead you in this, and my message is derived from the word that John spoke in his gospel in chapter 20, verse 21: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

This will be the word from Scripture that will sanctify the experiences of our mission and be the law of God for every mission endeavor, whereby we, with quiet reverence and deep humility will meditate upon after the singing of Psalm 65

Forth from Thy courts, Thy sacred dwelling, in jubilant accord,
 We hear sweet strains of praise swelling, O Israel's mighty Lord!
 O God who hears our imploration, We come to pay our vow;
 Soon men from every tribe and nation Before our God shall bow.

Every human being that lives is a missionary. The exception is he who is like a vegetable, who is indifferent to everything that happens around him, who is always led by others, never thinks nor acts independently, and does not truly live, but everyone who truly lives, lives in such a way that it may be called life, has something wherefore he lives. Everyone who knows what he wants and strives for is a missionary: missionary of Christ or missionary of the Satan.

This should be rather clear even with little thought, that is, if one is conscious of the following misunderstanding. This is what I mean. Generally one supposes: the missionary demands distance. This is correct if one does not mean distance in the form of space but distance in a moral and spiritual sense—a distance therefore not between space and space but between spirit and spirit. Everyone who seeks to plant forth his spiritual direction, his moral insights, is a missionary over against those who are of a different spirit, even though they are next to him or live in the same house with him.

It is in this sense, I say that missions is universal. However, will there be those present who want to limit missions to the Christian church? I tell you that the followers of Buddha in the continent of India will put your mission endeavors to shame. They have brought their teachings over the great mountains of the Himalayas. Ask about the courage and the dedication of the followers of Mohammed. They not only spread his teaching with the sword but have also with superior spiritual power reached into the heart of Asia and in many of her islands, in Africa, and even in Europe. Go to our colonies in the East and ask: "Who are the most dedicated missionaries?" Thousands and millions who once were pagans have been converted to Islam. To Christendom, how few?

Every area of life is a mission field and is labored upon from different directions. Look at the former Rome that brought her life's convictions from the Sahara to the Danube, from the Atlantic to the Euphrates. Think of the Jesuits and have, in spite of their teaching, respect for their dedication, courage, and self-denial.

The same is true with the French revolution of 1789. It exploded as a deeply felt spiritual conviction. There were men, even though they may not have our sympathy, of whom we must confess that they knew what they wanted—men who went out to witness to the world, who conquered, and who also came to our country. Who amongst our elders do not remember this? In our time, they continue their mission in the men of the international movement who show their mission in Communism. Curse their striving, reject their speeches, their influence—that is right; but have respect for their spiritual power. Their last drop they will give for the cause, for the planting of their convictions. The commune is their kingdom.

Closer to home, we find the same in the world—the God-hating world in which we all live. Ask if this world does not do mission with a dedication that puts us, the Christian church, to shame. Ask if she does not have her day—and Sunday schools in all kinds of houses of entertainment and places of temptation—and if not many newspapers are daily mission magazines for what she stands! See in the fairs her annual anniversary, celebrated with a fervor that borders to the fanatic that became clear when there was a possibility of not having it. Is every missionary a missionary for Christ or a missionary for Satan? The place where we are meeting now was once a mission school for lust and sin before it became a mission church of Christ.²

Where does this come from? Why does every human being or human spirit have this striving, this urging? The reason is because with our God there is an eternal counsel that is nothing else than a big mission program and that mankind is created after the image of God. After the fall into sin, mankind departed from God and went in an opposite direction; yet the driving force of a hunger for spiritual victory remained.

With the Father of lights, the life of his love is to send and always to send. His angels are missionaries, the literal translation of their name. In his revelatory work, he sends first his patriarchs and prophets and later his Son. When he went to heaven, he sent His Spirit and after the Spirit, he will have completed his work. God will send his Son once more in the future. The Lord speaks of the prophets, “I have sent to you.” Of the angels it is said that they have been sent for the sake of those who will inherit salvation. What is more known than the words on the lips of Jesus “who was sent by the Father,” and who does not think of the Comforter without adding, “whom I will send.” This is the reason that mankind, originating from God, always sends, even if it is away from God.

No, the congregation is not more diligent in this than the world. God has said to mankind, created in his image: “multiply and fill the earth.” Mankind remains faithful to this command and will, even though it fell into sin, fulfill this order even if it is in an opposite direction. However, the world, in spite of her

² The Scottish church was at one time a theater.

intense striving, cannot fulfill this mandate anymore. She is powerless. She is empty. She is poor. She cannot fill the world with her spirit. What she cannot do is restored by God's grace.

In the midst of this evil and fallen mankind, God has placed, according to his eternal counsel, a church, and to her applies again that word: "multiply and fill the earth." To her calls an apostle: "Be ye imitators of God as beloved children." Jesus says in the words of our text, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." I send you like I have been sent, in suffering, in shame, in despising, in martyrdom, and in death, but my life is in you, and this is your true strength, therefore will your witness not be fruitless.

The words of Jesus answer three questions: Who has the right to send? Who should be sent? What is the goal that alone gives this sending her glory and her strength?

Who has the right to send? He who sends must have the right and the authority to do so. He must be able to say: "Go," so that the sent one will go. Furthermore, the messenger, the one who is sent, wherever he comes must have the right to demand. He is not only a messenger but also an ambassador, like the ones sent by kings, through whom the king who sends, as it were comes himself and speaks with majesty.

So it is with the Father. He sends his Son. He says to this Son: "Go," and he answers: "See, here am I to do your will." This Son asks that mankind honor God as the Father.

The Son acts just as royally in the sending of his apostles. He does not wait until his disciples come to him, but he calls them and sends them out with the words, "who receives you, receives me."

After the apostles have established the church, this royal authority is transferred to the church, and note, to the church alone. Because, "she is a royal priesthood." It is said to her: "What you will bind on earth will be bound in heaven." She has the right to say: "Go, who receives you, receives me and who receives me receives the Son of God." She has the right to demand obedience from everyone. To her it is said: "All things are yours."

In answer to the question: "Who has the right to send?" is, therefore, the only answer, the church—and not only the invisible church because the work of missions has an external side that demands organization. Therefore, the right to send lies with the Christian church as the visible expression of the church of the Lord.

That this is true has been realized even instinctively. Just look at whatever mission organization that, when a missionary had to be ordained, called upon one or more ministers. But this was still the wrong way. It is the way of Rome, the way of an immoral ordering, and this order is not the one applicable to our church. If the missionaries truly want to establish churches, and not just organizations of people in other lands, in larger or small number with more or less faith, then they have to stand in connection with the historic church of Christ.

If, besides looking at the preaching, we also note the administration of the sacraments, then it is clear that no one may do so unless in union with the order of the church.

The right and the authority to send lie therefore alone with the Christian church. However, this is usually not the way it goes now. One goes out, sent by a few, but where is his letter of authority? The truth is, he does not have one, but, if he goes in the name of a church that has called him, than he comes to the heathen world also with the spiritual and moral authority of the church of Christ.

Two large missions have been undertaken in this way. They are Rome and the Hernhutters. The question is now not what Roman missionaries bring the heathen. The question is not whether we have antipathy for the one and sympathy for the other. We just point to the fact that both missions originate in the church, and the result shows that the fruit of both missions is much richer than the others.

Sad to say, the church does not understand these things anymore. This does not surprise us because the church has lost its way. For a long time it was like this: inside was the congregation that belonged to Christ; outside the world. The preaching in our churches became missions. Every sermon was not anymore a feeding of the believers with the Word but either a moral lesson or an evangelistic, methodistic call to repentance. Under these circumstances, the mission of the church itself had to get lost.

Thankfully there were men, who, doing what the church failed to do, set their hand to the plow and started a mission on their own account. This was in no wise unfruitful. However, this undertaking will lose its way, if it does not realize that its way of working is only preparatory and if it does not look for the moment when the work will be taken over by the church. This is why the Reformed Mission Organization has my strong sympathy because this is what she prophesied. When the Reformed Church becomes what she should be at that time, the organization will cease her work or become part of the work of the church.

The believer must also, with the work of missions, as the psalm sings, glorify the Lord in the midst of the "gods." This means, in connection with the ordinances and powers ordained by God. In the midst of the gods, that is with the realization of the royal and priestly majesty that one has in Christ. When the church takes up again the keys of the kingdom, when she acts again according to the Word that "all you will bind on earth will be bound in heaven and all you will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven," then she will also take up the work of missions.

Then it will happen that in royal majesty she will claim the world for Christ. Then the holy chain will be restored in her five parts: the world to the church, the church to the apostles, the apostles to Christ, the Christ subject to the Father; and along that chain flows the stream of most holy and eternal love.

Come thank the Lord with me as we sing from Psalm 138:

With all my heart will I record thy praise O Lord and exaltation;

Before the gods with joyful song will I prolong my adoration.
I'll worship toward thy holy place and for thy grace and truth extol thee;
Above thy name, Thou, Lord Most High, didst magnify thy Word so holy.

They all shall sing in joyful lays and laud his ways with jubilation;
For great is God in majesty, the Lord is he of all creation.
Jehovah looketh from on high with kindly eye upon the lowly,
But knoweth those from far who hide in sinful pride their ways unholy.

Who must be sent? Here also our text answers: Like the Father has sent me, oh my congregation, has the Lord sent you and must you send from your bosom.

What was the sending of the Father? First he sent his messengers—the patriarchs and the prophets. They were just a shadow of the Son, messengers from the earth, accompanied by the messengers from heaven, God's angels.

When the fullness of time had come, he sent his Son born of a woman, born under the law. He accomplished here the work of his mission and fulfilled all that was foreshadowed and prophesied. When he went to heaven and left this earth, the Holy Spirit came to complete his work. When he has returned after the completion of his task, the Son will return. So, first messengers, then the Son, and finally the Holy Spirit.

Now beloved, how are we judged here? We, you know it, are sending only messengers. However, without wanting to speak evil of what is done well, our missionaries are in the eyes of the congregation more like hirelings rather than sons. She gives them her money but not her love. They are not her children, the children of her spirit. It is an extra-special person who labors as an apostle under the heathen—a man who knows he is called and equipped to this mission task and performs wonders in the heathen world. These men are not made by an organization or society. They are born in the bosom of the congregation, the church.

It was different in the first century. The church then was further along than we are today. She performed miracles and won whole tribes and nations. That church grew at times in an unruly way; she was rather wild with the plow. Weeds remained behind and grew behind the back of the church. Thus, it became necessary to plow again over the same territory. I mean: Rome grew up, spread, and destroyed much of what was planted. Then came the Reformation with the call to plow again.

What was her mistake in spite of the blessing that accompanied the Word of God unleashed by her? Too soon did she lay her hand in her lap before the land was cleansed with the result that slowly but surely a sleep of death came over the church.

Where did our work of missions from the last century come from? From the spirit of general well being, and what is imperfect in her can be traced back to that origin. We are speaking here of missions in general, there are of course, positive exceptions. The Reformed Church was asleep; missions did not come

from her spirit. No, another spirit had arisen, a community sick spirit of association that preached love for mankind and that wanted to be useful. That spirit infected that part of the congregation that was still alive, and that spirit, married to the Christian confession, conceived the work of missions.

Accordingly for this tendency toward impersonal spiritual association the main need became money—first money, then prayer. That money was used to send out messengers. Money, not the spirit, provided the leverage. It was a business that forced men—not a plant that men nurtured. In gifts was her strength.

The congregation may not remain at this point of the sending of her messengers. More needs to be done. Many who support the work of missions are giving a lot, indeed an awful lot, but he who gives himself gives with the sacrifice of all he has. Who will give his Isaac, his son, the only one he loves?

It is to this point that the congregation has to come. The congregation must send her sons. The spirit of mission must envelop her as congregation and infiltrate and sanctify her in such a way that she will plead with God that he will give her children—those exceptional men in whom is found the essence of the spiritual power of the congregation. Alas, where are they? Why has this good gift that God alone can give been withheld from us? There must be something that hinders the giving of this gift.

The congregation must grow from her womb men who are born for missions, who are put in the cradle for that purpose, and who are not good for anything else. Men who do not only have the Word of God in their hands but who also have the personal formation to be an apostolic organ for a particular people, who do not have to ask where shall I go but who have the conviction in their hearts: “there it is where the Lord calls me, for that people have I been born.”

These men must not go alone. Paul and Barnabas and later Paul and Silas went together. In the same way must they, as representatives of God’s church, work together in heathen lands. Such a mission, such a missionary grows together with the people to where he goes. He does not stay at a distance but enters into the situation, becoming one with them: like Jesus who became man for our salvation.

As she sent her sons in this manner, she, at the same time, sends her spirit. That is, she must include in her congregational life the heathens who have been asked by the Word of her sons and have become obedient. She must pour her spiritual treasure into the churches that have been founded afar and together live that life that is from God and unto God. In this way, comes the communion of the saints. In this way, God’s church is built up and extends. In this way, God’s kingdom comes.

What is missions really all about? What is here the goal that gives missions her nobility and her strength? Also here our text provides the answer: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” To whom has the Son been sent? Paul answers this very clearly when he writes in the epistle to the Philippians that “he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in

human likeness . . . that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and [and here is the purpose of it all] every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The Son humbled and emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, and in this way accomplished the work of redemption. Now he is glorified and sits at God’s right hand and governs with his Word until one day all will be one in worship, that is, live to the glory of God the Father.

Usually we hear as answer to the question, what is the purpose of missions? the conversion of the heathen, the saving of souls. All this is beautiful and good; but it is impossible that this is the final purpose that gives mission her nobility and strength.

What else one may ask? The extension of the church answers another. However, the church is a means and not a goal.

No, we must return to him who, also in missions, works out his decree. To him who, also here, says to us: “I do not do this for your sake but for my great name’s sake.” To the glory of God the Father, this is the final goal of Jesus’ coming, the final goal of the church, and therefore also the final goal of missions. When the church forgets this, she moves away from the right foundation. Only when she continually keeps this goal before her eyes, will she, as means, be serious about the conversion of sinners, the saving of immortal souls and the extension of the church.

Only in this way will missions be enabled. Consequently, she will not tie herself to a society, a board, or policy. Then, she will act as ambassador for the highest King and as accomplisher of his eternal counsel together with the armies of God in all the glory of the royal majesty that is given to her and rests on her.

In this way, she will come to her full strength. What is the strength of the church? This rests in her being weak because, so says the apostle Paul, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” It is exactly this sense of weakness, this nothingness, this smallness, this sense of complete inability that leads the Christian church to depend on God. Because of this, she enjoys God’s help through the Spirit who lives in her.

This is why the Christian church can do nothing to her own glory, but she must send to the glory of God. Or, tell me, who truly loves his Father who is in heaven—he who has said that he will not give his glory to another? How can he stand it that the heathen are always and continuously doing this? that idols get the honor that only belongs to the Father? Who can stand it that he is unknown by thousands and millions and replaced by false gods?

Just note how in the Old Testament it is idol worship that mostly hurts God and is most severely punished. If we are children of this God, redeemed by His Son—we who once also served idols but are now saved through his boundless mercy according to the counsel of his love—will there not arise in us pity for others, no calling, if, through the salvation of others, God’s honor may increase?

The church of Jesus Christ may never forget, that she is like a besieged fort surrounded by enemies. She is called to continuous and uninterrupted battle, and, in all her striving, the goal must be to take away from Satan what belongs to Jesus.

According to God's eternal counsel, there must come before the throne of God not just a great multitude of people, regardless from where. No, his elect will be a church, divided into generations, nations, and tongues, and, in this way, sing that new song before the throne. Jesus has said to his church: "you shall inherit the earth." Therefore, lovely and touching the conversion of a few souls might be, it is not just the conversion of a few souls but also that of people as nations.

Read this in Romans 11. It is made clear in the total context of this chapter. Therefore is Israel chosen by God as a people, and it always continues as a nation so that as a people it may have a future.

What is then the calling of the church? It is this: First of all to bear spiritual children and then to send them out. If they are present, than the sending will happen automatically. Then a voice will rise: "Whom shall I send?" The answer will be: "Send me because from my mother's womb I have been called for this purpose, the fiery coal from the altar has also touched my lips. I shall witness for you."

In return, the answer will be: "Go to this people." When "so that they hear but not understand, and see but not perceive," is added, and when the church will ask in doubt: "How long Oh Lord?" then is the answer with respect to the nations so often: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

This is the command in the name of the King: "Hear or not hear, for your salvation or your destruction." Christ does not do half a job, and, with him, the church must not do a half a job. Not to build houses, or to teach agriculture or to bring civilization in heathen lands goes the missionary out but to claim the heathens for Christ, as that Rock, which has been made the cornerstone, but which will destroy one upon whom it falls and who stumbles over it will be destroyed. Are we conscious of this conviction my listeners? Do we sense the same? Mission is always bringing something—blessing or curse!

When we look around and observe the signs of the times, we note that the Lord at this time afflicts the Reformed Church with powerlessness but still works in her. We have to do a double work therefore. Because of her condition, we, as a society, must send in her place and seek to do away with the society so that the church may send again.

Therefore, my listeners, do we need to humble ourselves before the Lord as a church. Ezra, the innocent one, who had not soiled himself with strange women fell down on his face and said: "Lord we have sinned!" This applies to us also. If our mission work now is so difficult and does not advance, then we

should not say that this or that people is not suitable for missions, but we need to confess that the blame is with us.

This kind of humility is no hollow sound but leads to the pricking of our conscience: you who did nothing, you who did something, you who did much.

There are those who do a lot for missions, who sacrifice money, labor, and trouble for this cause. Brothers and sisters, your actions are not to be despised, you are building with diligence and love on the building of God. But let me ask you, did you with your building in breadth also look after the deep foundations? Did you experience, with the denying of yourself, the struggle of faith of a Mary? Did you sense that all this is a work of death if it does not come from above? Have you always worked for the Lord? Or is this your conviction: "I do a lot for missions. I don't have to do anything for the church"? How can the love of Christ be in you if you do not love his church?

We need to encourage one another. This is the purpose of this speech tonight, but this encouraging, is it to praise, to lift up on a pedestal, to raise up one another? No it is to show one another the cracks, to name the sins by name so that we lie together in death: and then to get you out of there by pointing to him who is the Lord of Life.

Let us therefore search our hearts carefully if we have given our gifts with a glad heart, if the work was never too much for us, if all the trouble never burdened us, if we never pointed to ourselves and always only had eye for the glory of God. You say, "I do not know these sins, they have not touched me." Oh withdraw yourself speedily; then is your hand unholy. If so, seek forgiveness in the blood that can cleanse all sins. Double your gift and kneel down with these words: "Lord I am nothing; You are everything."

There are those who don't do much but still something—little—but enough to let yourselves be judged by your consciences. This is something that you could have let go, but you wanted to participate. You also wanted to say, "I have spun a thread for the robe of missions." If this is so, you have judged yourself: You have your reward already.

Then there are those who do nothing—this is the most terrible—nothing and that because of various reasons. There are those who do nothing because they are not in the kingdom. They do not love Christ. They are servants of the world. We do not speak to them now because we do not expect them to be here.

Then there are those who say, "my children do so much for this cause, it is something they enjoy doing, but for me I don't bother with it." What a foolish way of reasoning, as if there is something that is good for your children but not for you. A while ago, a Jewish mother came to me. She desired baptism for her children. When I asked if she desired baptism for herself she answered, "we women do not bother about religion; this is for men only." You, then, do the same.

Then there are others who say, "I would do something for missions if the situation was not the way you have described it. Everything is going wrong, they

are not doing it the right way, and in no way can a blessing rest upon this work. As long as things go wrong, I will not participate.”

So, you think that you know it better and can do it better? Well, this is a very good reason to get involved immediately, to immediately raise your voice and to tell all the board members of the societies what, in your opinion, is the better way. There is never a reason to withdraw.

“Let your light shine before men.” So if you truly had a conviction—a light—you would be found wanting if you did not show it.

Would it be that every member in the church of Christ, who has not yet found his own particular and special calling, would just connect with the kind of work that appeals the most, that fits with his spiritual direction, until God points him to another, a special calling.

It must become a holy undertaking that only leans on God. It is to the shame of a congregation that has shortages in the mission fund. It is not a choice if we want to give or not. He who does not give, sins.

Oh, there is so much artificial, so much unholy, yes even sinful in the work of missions. This will be realized when the glory of God is our goal.

Let us therefore be watchful!

A terrible time is coming. The falling away will become more and more universal, and the Antichrist will show himself more and more powerful. In various ways, the Tempter will go around and he will set his snares in such a way that if this would be possible, even the very elect would be tempted.

Maybe you will yet experience it; that God will say to you about this Holland: My congregation, my turtledove, there is no place anymore for you on this piece of land. Oh may it be that in that time through your mission work another place has been prepared for you. Do not forget, the time can come that not just a smile or a picture will persecute you but that they will demand your blood and your life.

When did the Lord Jesus speak the words of our text? It was at the end of his earthly life when he was preparing to go. Also, for us, the time may be short. Therefore, “Awake those that sleep and stand up from the dead and Christ will alight over you.”

You, congregation of Jesus Christ, humble yourself. Remain constant in your love and don’t let this prayer disappear from your lips: “Savior, Bridegroom of my heart, you gave us the freedom to pray to the Father, your kingdom come!

Then you will hear the response of the Word of the Lord: “Congregation, you have loved much, therefore many sins are forgiven you.”