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# Publisher's Note

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*Awake, O Church!* is a thought-provoking book by a missionary about missions. Author Barry Grant watched and pondered and prayed as he considered big questions. What is the purpose of missions? What did Jesus teach? How did the early church approach missions? This book summarizes his conclusions.

*Awake, O Church!* emphasizes that mankind's greatest need is not humanitarian help, but Jesus. The author stresses it strongly enough that it may seem he is opposed to humanitarian aid. But as you read, you'll see he isn't.

The author writes from a first-person perspective, drawing from his observations and experiences involving a range of missions, not just Anabaptist ones. He doesn't tell his stories to glorify himself, but God.

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Perhaps if all of us would more faithfully take God at His Word, we also would be compelled to join those who “cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” We Anabaptists would like to believe that we’re doing missions right, and yet, we can make the same mistakes as others. We can learn from this book.

The author’s foreign mission service has been limited to Haiti, but his goal for the book is not to present a comprehensive view of world missions. His goal is to wake us up, to help us realize how missions can do actual harm, and to stir us to follow Jesus more faithfully.

This book provides an opportunity for us to evaluate the way we do missions and learn from the experiences of others. We encourage you to read the book prayerfully and ponder its message to understand its emphasis on meeting spiritual needs.

# 1. Missions Today

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## What Is a Missionary Today?

“They’re just going to kill him, right in broad daylight?” I asked the money changer.

“Yep, just like that. It’s the way it works here.”

I couldn’t believe my eyes. I had gone into the village that morning to change some money when I noticed a large crowd gathering. Most of them were young men who taxied people around on their motorbikes. There must have been hundreds of them. The eerie thing was, I knew many of them. They had caught a young man accused of stealing a motorbike, and now they were going to show everyone what happens to a thief. They tied the man hand and foot. Then they tied the rope

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from his ankles to the back of a motorbike. Off they went, up and down the road, dragging the thief, all the while whooping and hollering. It all ended after they burned his corpse in the street.

I was distraught. The question kept going through my mind: *What am I doing wrong?* There are probably hundreds of active missionaries in this small country of Haiti—and I am one of them. When something like this happens, I really wonder: *Are we—am I—making a difference?*

A common question parents or teachers ask children is, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Children often name exciting things like an astronaut or a jet pilot. The child’s answer gives us an idea of his interest. In a Christian home a child may say, “I want to be a missionary.”

What does that mean? Today there are so many different types of missions and missionaries that it can be difficult to know what a missionary is.

Why do adults become missionaries? Are they adventurous and want to travel the world? Do they want to travel to a faraway land and go from village to village preaching the Gospel? Do they want to live with an unreached people group, learn their language, and teach them about Jesus? Maybe they just want to go to a different culture and explore. Perhaps for some, being a

missionary would mean warm weather, sandy beaches, and no alarm clock.

Today there are more missions and more missionaries than ever before. However, there also seems to be more darkness than ever, and the church itself is too often being overcome by darkness.

The more wealth we American Christians have, the more we become involved in missions. There are thousands of missions around the world and a great variety in the way they “do missions.”

## What Does God Want From Missions?

With mission work increasing on every side, I believe it is time to step back and see if we are doing it right. It only makes sense to look at what our work is producing and see if it is what we are aiming for, or more importantly, if it is what God is aiming for. I will try to answer some questions about missions, including, “Who are we working for?” “What is our objective?” “Who should we send?” and “Why are we doing missions?”

At times in the past, there has been a great drought in the mission field. People did not go. Today we have a different problem. No longer are people not going; they *are* going, but for the wrong reasons. Missions are multiplying, not only among Anabaptists, but among Protestant churches in general. Hundreds of thousands

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of American Christians travel each year to a foreign country on a “mission trip”—but for what purpose? My goal for writing this book is to address that question.

It seems that much of the church in America has given itself to pleasure. American Christians do many things for the simple sake of pleasure. Church functions, and even some church services, are designed to provide pleasure. This self-pleasing attitude permeates church life, even affecting the churches’ approach to missions. And we Anabaptists are not immune to this mindset.

But when we travel to another country to simply please ourselves, we may do harm to God’s work. We may believe we have good motives, but we really need to stop and ask ourselves, “Why are we going?”

As a missionary, I learned many things the hard way. My family and I felt God’s call to the mission field, but we didn’t know exactly what He wanted us to do. We decided to step into the waters and let God lead. We rented a home in a small village in the country of Haiti. We did not know then about the large number of missions in this small Caribbean country. After a few years, we began to realize a very fearful thing: Even though there are missions and missionaries everywhere in this small country, the country’s spiritual state continues to grow worse.

Many people feel led to give to missions, and billions of dollars each year are spent in mission work. I believe

we owe it to the faithful supporters all over the world to give a realistic report on what is actually going on in missions in today's world.

## **How Did Jesus Do Missions?**

If we look at our best resource on missions, the Bible, and see how Jesus and the early church carried out missions, we can get an idea as to how we should do it today. Jesus himself organized the first mission outreach. The Book of Mark tells us that

he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no script, no bread, no money in their purse. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them (Mark 6:7, 8, 12, 13).

**In my experience, most missions are doing exactly the opposite of what we see Jesus doing in this passage.**

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*Jesus called them.* I have asked many missionaries why they decided to move to a foreign country and become a missionary. The answers are interesting: “I’m in between jobs and thought it would be a good time to do some missions.” “I’m young and plan to have a family later, so I’d better do it while I can.” “My family has always been involved in missions!” Some want to get away from problems; others just want to get away for a while and experience a different life and culture for a few years. One middle-aged man on the mission field told me he got tired of the long daily commute and needed a change. Very few say they were specifically called by God.

*Jesus sent them.* Notice that they were called before they were sent. This may not seem important, but I believe it is. Some see a sad situation and want to go help but may not be spiritually ready to go. Being compassionate and having a desire to help does not qualify us to become missionaries. We first must be called. Then we will be sent.

We also need to understand this: When a person is called, he *must* go. Many believers say they have never been called to missions—but have they ever even considered that God may be calling them? Their business and social lives do not include God’s work as part of their schedule. Their hearts are not set on serving God, so

they're not really listening for His call. We must be ready and listening for the call at all times.

*Jesus told them how they should go and what they should take with them.* Notice what the disciples did. They went out and preached that men should repent. I've heard it said they didn't take money because they didn't have any, but I find that hard to believe, seeing that Jesus, the Son of God Himself, sent them. It seems more realistic that they simply were more focused on presenting the solution to man's sin problem.

Jesus "commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no script, no bread, no money in their purse." We have drifted far from this model. Missionaries today often take containers holding most of their household items.

One missionary family, preparing to go to a faraway land to preach the Gospel, spent weeks packing household items. On the way, their ship sank, and the family escaped with only their lives. The wife suggested God might be saying they should not go on. The husband rightfully said, "No, God wants us to go. He just didn't want us to go with all that baggage."

True, Jesus did not command that we all do missions like this. But can't we trust that Jesus' way is probably the best way? Many missions operate in poor countries,