

Indigenous Pioneers

BY CHARITY SITES

To understand the *how* of the unreached, one must understand how indigenous principles became the strong force that they are in AG World Missions today. These missionaries were most influential in bringing these issues to the forefront of our mission and followed New Testament principles through which national churches are now flourishing throughout the world.

The Inspiration

Roland Allen trained for ministry at Britain's Oxford University and became a priest in 1893. In 1895, he traveled as a missionary to northern China. During his missionary work, he began to re-evaluate missionary methods of establishing churches. Allen realized that national churches could not be formed or developed in the same way as Western churches. Instead, they must be established to function and grow on their own — in other words, to be self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing. In 1912, he conveyed his ideas concerning indigenous missions in his well-known book, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* Allen's work was the inspiration which ignited a missions effort that would focus on indigenous principles.

In 1921, inspired by Roland Allen, Luce wrote a series of three articles in the *Pentecostal Evangel* entitled "Paul's Missionary Methods." These writings introduced indigenous principles to the Fellowship. Later, in the May 9, 1931, *Pentecostal Evangel*, Luce wrote an article called "Scriptural Methods in Missionary Work," where she expressed her observations of missions in the New Testament Church:

"This recital of the crying need of Christless lands makes us feel how hopeless and impossible is the task of taking to them all the Gospel, how can we ever complete the task? The solution of the problem

The Initiator

Alice Luce became a missionary to India in 1896. Almost 15 years later, she served with a missionary group in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she felt called to Mexico. Her passion was to reach out to Spanish-speaking countries and so, after meeting missionaries Henry and Sunshine Ball, the idea for Latin American Bible Institute was birthed. Ralph Williams, who later served as a missionary to Latin America along with Melvin Hodges, served as the school's first superintendent. Luce wrote most of the curriculum and became well-known for her missionary service in education.



Alice Luce

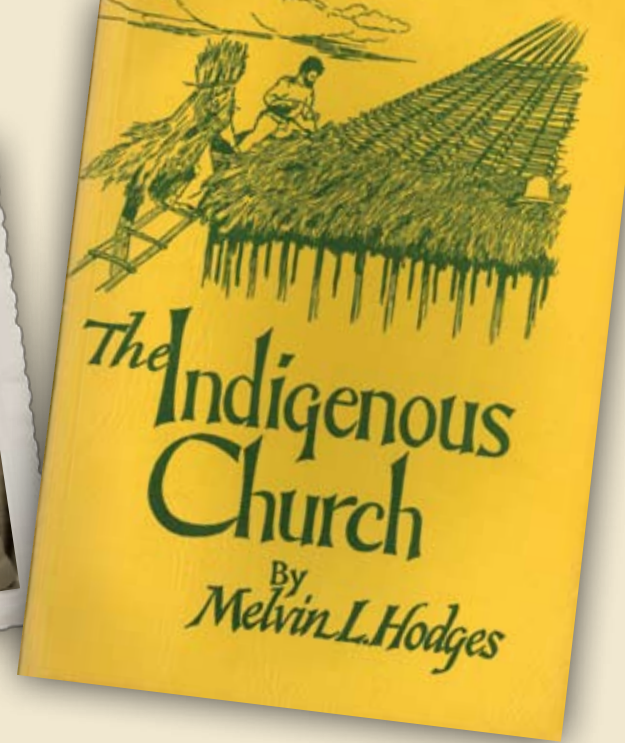
AG missionaries convene in 1920.



Noel Perkin



Melvin and Lois Hodges



seems to me to lie in the missionary methods of Paul. He taught, established and grounded nationals in the Faith during his first visit to them, and then he chose out from among them deacons and elders in whose care he left the infant churches ... the whole burden of the support, government and extension of the churches appears to have been left to their own national workers."

Luce was keenly aware that *how* missions is done must be grounded in principles that had already been established by the early Christian Church. The most effective way to reach the unreached was, essentially, to help national believers help themselves. Giving national churches the ability to support themselves and thrive on their own creates a greater opportunity for the churches to multiply.

"I firmly believe that we missionaries are doing our best work when we are training the national workers to go forth and carry the Good News themselves."

Luce's plea was for missionaries to make indigenous principles a priority, knowing that it would bring the greatest results for the Kingdom.

"If we twentieth century missionaries followed Paul's methods without fears or misgivings, I believe we should soon see the national churches growing faster than ever, and a robust type of Christian life would develop which would surpass our highest expectations."

Undeniably, Luce was right.

The Integrator

In 1918, at the age of 25, Noel Perkin went to Argentina as a missionary. After four years he returned to the U.S., married Ora Blanchard, and they began pastoring. In 1927, Perkin became Assemblies of God foreign missions secretary (now executive

director). In 1929, indigenous practices were written into the records of the General Council, and in 1931, the first missionary manual was published. This manual included principles for national church relationships.

Under Perkin's leadership, two significant policies were instituted that shaped the future of the Fellowship's mission throughout the world.

The first was the commitment to establish indigenous churches. We do not transplant the American church abroad. The 1931 AG missionary manual, published under Perkin's leadership, states: "The winning of souls to Christ and establishing of assemblies in all places where converts are won should be regarded as the primary objective of all missions." It further stipulated that missionaries were to establish churches that were self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating.

Second, Perkin closely followed Alice Luce's belief that missionaries are most effective when they are "training the national workers to go forth and carry the good news themselves." His passion for advancing the cause of Christ throughout the nations was guided by indigenous methods, and his leadership in foreign missions created opportunities to integrate these principles into AG missionary activity.

Perkin, having a banking background, understood the numerous benefits of self-support. He conveyed his priorities through many writings to the Fellowship and missionary family:

"The big task of the missionary is to make missionaries from the national Christians. More people are won to the Lord from the ministry of national evangelists than by the word of a foreign missionary. The work in Nigeria doubled in a short space of years, and it was attributed to the faithful witness of national Christians and not to the ministry of the missionaries. ... Our work in Central America is

very largely carried on by national ministers receiving no support from foreign source" (Published in *Heritage* magazine, Fall 1987).

These are just a few of many examples in which Perkin led the way in incorporating indigenous principles into the Fellowship's methodology. Policies and practices he initiated more than 70 years ago continue to guide AG World Missions today.

The Instructor

In 1936, Melvin and Lois Hodges left for Latin America as appointed missionaries. After a year in El Salvador, they served in Nicaragua, where Hodges founded the Matagalpa Bible School and served as president for five years. While in Nicaragua, he and missionary Ralph Williams helped organize the Nicaraguan Assemblies of God, and also established a short-term Bible school. The Hodges family then returned to El Salvador, where Melvin served as principal of the El Salvador Bible School. He also served as superintendent of the El Salvador work for four years.

Hodges continued to work in Central America, testing and proving indigenous principles firsthand on the mission field. Early in his ministry, he became firmly convinced that training national workers was the key to the effective evangelization of any country. He, along with other pioneer missionaries, planned curriculum and prepared for some of the first organized Bible schools in what is now recognized around the world as a model mission field.

In 1950, Hodges became the field superintendent of the Assemblies of God Fellowship in all of Central America. During his term, the number of churches in Central America increased by more than 400 percent. In 1953, the Division of Foreign

Missions asked Hodges to publish the church planting principles which were producing such amazing results in Central America, and so he wrote *The Indigenous Church*. Hodges defined and refined principles that had been established by early founders and became one of its strongest advocates.

In 1954, Hodges became field secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, overseeing missionary efforts in 26 countries. He served in this position for 20 years. During that time, the number of churches in Latin America more than doubled and the number of members increased by more than 700 percent.

As Hodges dealt with these indigenous principles in depth, he kept reiterating the importance of laying the right foundation in establishing indigenous national churches. Hodges rightly stressed that if principles were compromised early on, it would be very difficult to correct, as was experienced in Liberia and Togo (see page 16). If, in the construction of a building a foundation is crooked, the compensations to try to straighten it can often be more difficult than laying a right foundation in the beginning. This is a primary reason why AG World Missions values and practices indigenous methods of evangelism and training from the start.

Missionaries Roland Allen, Alice Luce, Noel Perkin and Melvin Hodges were used by the Holy Spirit in helping our Fellowship practice biblical principles that continue to effectively reach the unreached. Clearly, establishing indigenous churches that multiply themselves is the primary way to *how* we can reach the billions who are still lost and waiting for the message of the Savior. **tpe**

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