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Walter Lowrie (1784–1868): Champion of Presbyterian Missions

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On December 6, 1838, Walter Lowrie, the corresponding secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, stood behind the pulpit and addressed the large congregation gathered in the Brick Church, New York City. His task that day was to convey "farewell counsels" to John Mitchell and Robert Orr, the first missionaries sent to China by the Presbyterian Board. As he spoke, Lowrie expressed the urgent needs of this field of labor where one quarter of the earth's population both lived and died without knowledge of the Savior. He also admitted the many difficulties—even life-threatening difficulties—the missionaries would surely face. However, as he drew near the close of his address, his voice spoke with conviction and hope: "Nothing can be more certain than that these efforts are in obedience to the Saviour's commands; that this is His plan for the extension of His kingdom; that He is with His servants always, even unto the end; that His glory will be promoted by the heathen being brought into His fold; and, finally, that this is His work, and He will bring it to pass."[1] With these words of encouragement, these laborers were thrust into the fields "white unto harvest."

Though largely forgotten today, Walter Lowrie was well known in his generation; in the nineteenth century, his name was synonymous with Presbyterian foreign missions. He served as the first corresponding secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, a position which he held from the board's founding in 1837 to his retirement at eighty years of age in 1865. His life embodied the missionary spirit, both in his indefatigable zeal for Christ's kingdom and in his own

1. This address is printed in full in his memoirs, edited by his son. John Lowrie, ed., *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1896), 82–96.

personal sacrifice. His spirit motivated and inspired scores of Presbyterian missionaries who followed Christ's last command in taking the gospel to the uttermost ends of the earth. Reflecting on the early days of the modern missionary movement in the nineteenth century, Robert Speer comments, "It has been true throughout that the missionary movement has been given its direction and has achieved its effects scarcely more through its agents on the field than through the men who have been its representatives and administrators at home."[2] As a champion of Presbyterian missions at home, Lowrie's life deserves to be remembered today.

His Early Years

Walter Lowrie was born on December 10, 1784, in Edinburgh, Scotland, as the fifth child of John and Catherine Lowrie. When he was just eight years old, his family immigrated to the United States and settled in Huntingdon County in south-central Pennsylvania. They soon discovered that farming conditions were not ideal, and, in 1799, his father John made the decision to move the family again, this time over the Allegheny Mountains and into the pioneer lands of western Pennsylvania. The family settled in the northwest corner of present day Butler County, about fifty miles north of Pittsburgh, and here they remained.

The Lowrie home was a godly one; Walter Lowrie would later remember his mother as "kind, affectionate, and benevolent, with deep and uniform piety."[3] Though there was not a settled church in their vicinity when they first arrived, his father soon was instrumental in founding the Scrubgrass Presbyterian Church, where he became the principal elder.[4]

But the most decisive event in young Lowrie's life occurred in 1802. Prior to this, the sparsely settled lands of northwestern Pennsylvania had been devoid of a regular ministry. But during that year, the Rev. William Morehead engaged in an itinerant ministry for several months, followed the next year by several young ministers and licentiates from Jefferson College who spread themselves throughout

2. Robert E. Speer, *Studies of Missionary Leadership* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1914), 11.

3. Lowrie, *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 2.

4. S. J. M. Eaton, *History of the Presbytery of Erie* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868), 46–47, 71.

the region and preached.[5] The preaching of these young men was greatly blessed by God, and a period of revival ensued. Throughout the whole region, many came under deep conviction of sin and were brought to the Savior. Men and women became hungry for God's Word. Many new Presbyterian churches were established, with thousands being added to their membership.[6] Walter Lowrie traces his own conversion to that time. Over the course of several weeks he fell under a deep conviction of sin—even suffering violent physical agitation after one prayer meeting—until he finally obtained "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is notable that this man who would later devote his life to missions was converted through the efforts of home missionaries.

The United States Senator

After his conversion, Lowrie gave serious consideration to entering the ministry and subsequently began studies under the Rev. John McPherrin. On January 14, 1808, he married McPherrin's daughter, Amelia. Around that time, Lowrie chose to discontinue his studies and pursue other spheres of labor. Though the historical record doesn't give a clear indication why, it appears that contributing factors included demands at his father's sawmill, increased interest and usefulness in civil affairs, and circumstances surrounding his marriage.[7]

5. Jefferson College was in 1802 a newly formed school located twenty miles southwest of Pittsburgh, which grew out of the Rev. John McMillan's Canonsburg Academy, a school which itself began as a ministerial training academy modeled after the well-known "Log College" of Neshaminny, Pennsylvania.

6. It is generally understood that the revival in western Pennsylvania was an extension of the revival that began in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, the previous year. It was attended by certain "bodily exercises," such as "jerking," "jumping," "barking," and "yelling." Nevertheless, these phenomena didn't occur among everyone, and God's grace manifested itself primarily through powerful preaching, deep conviction of sin, and the centrality of the person and work of Christ.

7. It appears that Lowrie, lacking consent by McPherrin to marry his daughter, took her by horseback to Butler, where they were married by a former magistrate. At the next session of the Presbytery of Erie charges of scandalous conduct were brought against Lowrie, and the Presbytery voted unanimously to suspend Lowrie from the sacraments "until he give satisfactory evidence of sorrow and repentance." It appears that such evidence was soon given and Lowrie was restored to full communion in the church. See Minutes of the Presbytery of Erie in session in the Plain Grove Church, August 23–24, 1808, cited in Gaius Jackson Slosser, "Walter Lowrie, Mission Organizer," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 36 (1958): 7–8.

Lowrie then moved to Butler, where he served as a schoolteacher, County Commissioner, and Justice of the Peace. His fellow townspeople recognized his Christian integrity, and, in 1812, they honored him by electing him to the state legislature. There he served for seven years, until the state legislature elected him to represent Pennsylvania in the United States Senate. In 1819, Lowrie left his wife and children behind in Butler to serve his first term in Washington, D.C.

Those were great days in the Senate; giants like Calhoun, Clay, and Webster dominated the floor. Lowrie very ably took his place in that august body. While in the Senate, he took particular interest in matters concerning Native Americans as well as slavery. Lowrie believed passionately that any states admitted to the union should be free.[8] During these years, Lowrie earned the respect of many of his colleagues. He was so admired that, when Lowrie announced in 1825 that he would not run for reelection, senators from both parties offered him the position of secretary of the Senate. He served in this role until 1836. While in Washington, Lowrie was noted as a man of deep evangelical convictions and thorough piety, leading a weekly prayer meeting that was attended by a number of congressmen.

The Beginnings of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions

These years were also crucially important years for the Presbyterian Church in the young United States. Since its first General Assembly in 1789, the Presbyterian Church continued its pattern of growth. However, at the same time, a deepening division began to manifest itself in the church, which finally came to the surface in the 1830s. The Old School party expressed great concern about the doctrinal latitude tolerated within the church, and suspected that some New School ministers did not hold to all the doctrines of the Westminster Confession.

But another vital matter concerned both home and foreign missions. For years, the Presbyterian Church had conducted its missions through voluntary societies which were not under the control of any church body.[9] The Old School, though, was not satisfied with this

8. During debate over the Missouri Compromise in 1820, Lowrie declared, "If the alternative be…a dissolution of the union, or the extension of slavery over the whole Western country, I, for one, will choose the former." *Annals of Congress*, vol. 35, 209.

9. By the 1820s, the vast majority of Presbyterian missions—directed mostly

approach, believing strongly that such efforts were to be undertaken directly by the church itself. Ashbel Green, the elder statesman of the Old School, expressed it like this: "In [the General Assembly] we already have an organization, than which none could be devised better adapted to the prosecution of foreign as well as domestic missions; in a word…every member of the Presbyterian church should use his influence, and all his means, for evangelizing the heathen, through the agency of the Supreme Judicatory of our church."[10] This spirit of church-based mission was perhaps most strongly felt in Lowrie's home synod, the Synod of Pittsburgh. The Synod of Pittsburgh—described by Green as "always the most forward and active Synod of the Presbyterian church in missionary enterprise"[11]—marshaled its own resources to establish in 1831 the Western Foreign Missionary Society. This Society was strictly Presbyterian in its arrangement and overseen by the Synod. It aimed to engage the Presbyterian church in "a new, earnest, and persevering endeavor, which we owe to the heathen of our own and foreign lands; and of imparting to our church judicatories as such, a due sense of responsibility, and such a Missionary impulse as these eventful times imperiously require."[12] Rev. Elisha Swift resigned from his pastorate at the Second Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh to become the Society's corresponding secretary, and soon it inaugurated Presbyterian missions in West Africa and Northern India.

Walter Lowrie was deeply engaged in the efforts of the Western Foreign Missionary Society from its founding. Financial resources were slim, and the Society would likely have ceased to exist had not Lowrie made an anonymous gift of one thousand dollars to pay

toward the native people of North America—were conducted through the Board of Commissioners of the American Home Missionary Society.

10. Ashbel Green, *A Historical Sketch or Compendious View of Domestic and Foreign Missions in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1838), 46. Green's book, prepared at the request of the newly formed Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, contains an excellent summary of early Presbyterian missions, as well as a thorough record—and partisan analysis—of the debates that led to the formation of the Presbyterian Board. Also, see Earl R. MacCormac, "Missions and the Presbyterian Schism of 1837," *Church History* 32:1 (1963): 32–45.

11. Green, *A Historical Sketch*, 102.

12. This statement is extracted from the Circular distributed by the Western Foreign Missionary Society at its founding in 1831. Green, *A Historical Sketch*, 104.

Dr. Swift's salary for one year.[13] He also served on the Society's Board of Directors. But what led Lowrie to have such a peculiar interest in missions? It appears that there were several factors: first, he was acquainted with Africa through his work in the U.S. Senate and his interest in the American Colonization Society, which sought to relocate freed slaves in western Africa. Second, he had a brother-in-law who went to India as a lay-missionary but had to return for health reasons, and eventually died in Lowrie's house in Butler, Pa. But third, and probably most decisive, was the interest his oldest son John Lowrie expressed in going to the foreign mission field himself. In 1833, John and his new bride departed for India. He spent only two years there; his wife became sick soon after their arrival and died. John also became seriously ill and had to return to America.[14] Nevertheless, the sacrificial spirit of his own son and daughter-in-law surely further enflamed Walter Lowrie's own missionary zeal.

In 1836, Elisha Swift resigned as the secretary of the Western Foreign Missionary Society. The choice of his successor was obvious to the Board. They had to ask Lowrie twice before he agreed to leave his position as secretary of the U.S. Senate to assume the position of secretary of the Western Missionary Society.

At this time, there was an effort within the wider church to move the Western Foreign Missionary Society out from under the control of the Synod of Pittsburgh and to place it under the control of the General Assembly as the entire church's Board of Foreign Missions. Lowrie and the other members of the Board were supportive of this, as they longed for the entire church to take up the work of missions. This plan was inaugurated in 1835, but then surprisingly defeated at the 1836 General Assembly. Nevertheless, the matter was brought again before the 1837 General Assembly and overwhelmingly passed. Thus, in 1837, the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions was formed, a board directly under the control of the General Assembly.

However, it was at that 1837 General Assembly that another significant event occurred: at this Assembly the Old School/New School division came to a head. The Assembly, heavily represented

13. Slosser, "Walter Lowrie, Mission Organizer," 11.

14. The account of John Lowrie's missionary labors can be found in John Lowrie, *Two Years in Upper India* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1835). John went on to labor as his father's assistant for many years before succeeding him as the corresponding secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions.

by commissioners representing the Old School, voted to exscind four synods from the church.[15] With the church divided in two, the Board of Foreign Missions that was created operated under the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Old School). By this board Walter Lowrie was elected corresponding secretary, and to this work he dedicated the remainder of his life.

The Organizer of Presbyterian Missions

The Presbyterian Board commenced its work with a sense of excitement and anticipation. It was a day of small beginnings; at the time they had just eleven missionaries working at four stations in northern India, two missionaries ready to leave for China, one in western Africa, and seven working among the Indians in North America. But they had their eyes set on more extensive labors. In the Board's first report to the 1838 General Assembly, Lowrie wrote, "The field is the world. And when so large a portion of it, lies enveloped in the darkness of Papal and Pagan superstition, it is her duty to send the knowledge of the true light there, and to occupy at once such portions as God in his providence may have prepared for the reception of her messengers."[16] Lowrie then went on to challenge the church to provide both the men and the means to send them. If indeed the church itself is the missionary agency, then she must rise to the task of sending forth every qualified missionary into the field so that the gospel can be preached to every creature. God's people must consecrate both her sons and her wealth to this great cause. Lowrie concludes the report:

> Why should this great work be delayed? The Church has the same Bible now she will have then,—the same motives—and

15. Officially, the General Assembly voted that the Plan of Union had been unconstitutionally adopted in 1801, and thus they expelled the four synods formed under that Plan—Western Reserve, Utica, Geneva, and Genesee. The Plan of Union was an arrangement into which the Presbyterian Church entered with the Congregationalist Association of Connecticut in order to partner in evangelizing western New York and the Northwest Territory. The churches formed under the Plan of Union could either be congregational or Presbyterian or a mixture of the two. Because of this, these churches were marked by laxity in both discipline and doctrine.

16. *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions to the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Presented May 1838* (New York: Published for the Board, 1838), 20.

> the same Lord and Savior to be with her, to hear her prayers and bless her efforts. In the providence of God, our branch of Zion is now called to take part in this great work; the experiment is now to be made, whether or not she will become a missionary church, and unite in sending the knowledge of the Saviour to the heathen. By the advancement of this cause, the glory of God will be promoted, as well as good will to man, and the peace and holiness of the Church. Who is on the Lord's side? God in his providence propounds this question to every member of the Presbyterian Church, and to him the answer must be returned.[17]

The Board undertook its task with eighty members—equally divided between ministers and elders—which met twice per year. The larger Board then annually elected a smaller Executive Committee, consisting of nine members plus the corresponding secretary and Treasurer. The Executive Committee met at least once per month, and had the duty of appointing all missionaries and agents, designating their fields of labor, authorizing all appropriations and expenditures of money, and overseeing the work of the corresponding secretary. But it was Lowrie, the corresponding secretary, who shouldered the burden of conducting the daily business of the Board. His tasks were many: he communicated by letter frequently with the missionaries on the field, offering counsel and direction; he considered the qualifications of those seeking to enter missionary service; he oversaw the publication of *The Foreign Missionary Chronicle*, a monthly magazine issued for the purpose of "setting forth the proceedings of the Missionaries of our own church, and endeavoring to awaken and encourage larger desires of usefulness among the people of God";[18] he sought to raise funds for the work; he made regular reports to the Board and an annual report to the General Assembly; and he constantly sought, through speaking and writing, to call the church to an awareness of her biblical duty in carrying out the missionary calling.

In establishing the priorities of missionary work, Lowrie understood that two fundamental undertakings were essential. First, the missionary must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He quoted the Apostle Paul to make his point: "To the Jew this may be a stumbling

17. *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions to the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Presented May 1838*, 25.

18. *Foreign Missionary Chronicle,* vol. VIII (New York: Robert Carter, 1840), iii.

block, and to the Greek foolishness, but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Let no missionary society place any other agency above that of the living preacher, lest they be found wise above what is written." Second, the missionary was to use every means possible to raise up a native ministry. The indigenous preacher possessed many advantages over the foreign missionary: facility with the language, understanding the culture, the expense of his education, and acclamation to the climate. Through the training of native ministers, the spreading of the gospel could multiply exponentially. These two tasks—preaching the gospel and raising of a native ministry—constituted the focus of Presbyterian missions throughout Lowrie's years as secretary.[19]

The foreign missionary task at that time was one which required great sacrifice—not only the sacrifice of familiar surroundings, a known language, and the nearness of friends and family, but often the sacrifice of one's own life. Many missionaries died within just a few years of arriving in their field of labor. At times their deaths came at the hands of hostile natives, but more often it was the result of sickness or disease. John Lowrie, reviewing in 1868 the history of Presbyterian mission efforts in western Africa, highlighted this in rather staid language: "Unusual mortality has marked the progress of the missionary work of this coast."[20]

Walter Lowrie was no stranger to this kind of sacrifice. We mentioned earlier how his daughter-in-law died soon after arriving in India. He also had a son, Reuben, who went to China as a missionary, where he subsequently died in 1860 at age 32. But perhaps his most notable grief was the loss of his son, Walter Macon Lowrie, who was murdered at the hands of Chinese pirates in 1847 at age 28. Young Walter had been converted while a student at Jefferson College and then studied for the ministry at Princeton Seminary, where he was actively engaged in the Society of Inquiry on Missions.[21] In 1842, he departed for China as a missionary with the Presbyterian Board.

19. Lowrie, *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 121–22.

20. Ed. John Lowrie, *A Manual of the Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: William Rankin, Jr., 1868), 68.

21. For an account of the remarkable influence of this student-led society on Presbyterian missionary labors in the nineteenth century, see David Calhoun, "The Last Command: Princeton Theological Seminary and Missions (1812–1862)" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1983).

Over the next several years, he mastered the Chinese language and regularly preached to the Chinese people at the mission station in Ningpo. But his chief work was with his pen: he translated parts of the New Testament and a considerable portion of the Catechism, and also made plans for a dictionary.

In 1847, on his way back from a missionary convention in Shanghai, his ship was overtaken by Chinese pirates. The pirates laid hands on no one except Lowrie, the foreigner, and they threw him overboard into the sea, where he drowned. The death of young Walter Lowrie greatly affected the church back in America. His character had been marked by unusual piety, seriousness, love for the heathen world, and missionary zeal. After his death, at the request of others, his father published his journal and letters.[22] This quickly stood next to David Brainerd's *Diary* and John Sargent's *The Life and Letters of Henry Martyn* as among the most inspiring missionary literature read during the nineteenth century.

In leading the Board of Foreign Missions, Walter Lowrie demonstrated great wisdom and administrative skill. Though many others in the church contributed to the work, he was "the efficient head of the missionary work, and the controlling power of its administration."[23] And he was diligent and persevering in these labors. The Rev. William Paxton said of him, "No man ever devoted himself with a more entire consecration to any one work than did Walter Lowrie to the work of missions. He gave to this one thing his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength."[24] But perhaps his most enduring impact was felt in how he stirred up the church to devote herself to this great task. He was frequently asked to speak to Presbyterian congregations and never failed to express with a burning heart the great necessity of this work. Paxton describes Lowrie's manner of speaking: "With no pretention to oratory, he went before the people in the most humble way, presenting in a conversational style his simple statement; but, warming with the deep interest of his theme, he grew eloquent, and seldom closed without riveting his subject upon the conscience, or moving his audience to tears."[25] In the two addresses contained in his *Memoirs*,

22. Ed. Walter Lowrie, *Memoirs of the Rev. Walter M. Lowrie* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1849).

23. Lowrie, *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 184.

24. Lowrie, *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 184.

25. Lowrie, *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 183.

one can certainly feel—even through the printed word—the pathos which was conveyed to his hearers. His glowing zeal for the kingdom of God sparked scores of laypeople and missionaries to commit themselves to taking the gospel abroad through giving, praying, and going. And by the gospel thus taken abroad, thousands of people who once were without hope and without God in the world became heirs of everlasting salvation.

During the years of Lowrie's leadership, the Presbyterian Church's missionary efforts consistently expanded.[26] By 1865, the year of his retirement, the Presbyterian Church had sixty-one stations in twenty-two different fields, primarily in western Africa, north India, China, Siam (now Thailand), and among Native Americans. The missionary force that began very small nearly thirty years earlier had multiplied to sixty-three ministers and ninety-two lay missionaries, in addition to fifteen native ministers and 141 native workers. There were 1,012 communicant members in the churches that were established, and 5,817 children at mission schools. The money given toward missionary work in 1868 by churches, individuals, and bequests totaled $235,169.85.[27] The missionary vision that Lowrie and others possessed at the Board's founding—of the organized church dedicating itself to the work of missions—had been realized and would continue to be realized in even greater measure in coming decades.

In 1865, at the age of eighty, Lowrie's health began to weaken, preventing him from devoting his accustomed energy to his task. On May 4, 1865, he addressed a letter to the Board of Foreign Missions declining reelection as their corresponding secretary. The news was greeted with a mixture of sadness and thanksgiving by the church. At that year's General Assembly, the following resolution was adopted:

> That we take great pleasure in recording our high appreciation of the invaluable services of the retiring Secretary, the Hon. Walter Lowrie, and we tender to him our heartfelt thanks and

26. In 1861, the Presbyterian Church split into separate southern and northern churches. The Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America prosecuted their missions through a committee of the General Assembly, and made Robert Leighton Wilson, who had worked alongside of Lowrie, its first corresponding secretary. Because of this split, the Board of Foreign Missions (which now belonged to the northern church) experienced a slight decline in both missionaries and receipts.

27. These statistics are taken from *A Historical Sketch of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, 1837–1888* (New York: C. H. Jones & Co., 1888), 28.

> sympathy, praying that the Gospel he has striven for so many years to make known to the perishing may be his all-sufficient consolation in his declining years; and that, in God's own good time, he may have an abundant entrance ministered to him into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This "abundant entrance" was to be given to him over three years later. His health continued to decline during these years until, after a fall from his stairway, he sustained a severe concussion of the brain. Though his mind suffered, his heart continued to be with the Lord and with the missionary cause. During his last days, his son John records how one night his father—under the impression that he was among Indian chiefs—exhorted them with great feeling to pay heed to the message of the missionaries and to look to the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.[28] On December 14, 1868, Walter Lowrie, the great champion of Presbyterian missions, entered that place where missions is necessary no longer.

Lessons from his Life

The Scriptures frequently exhort us to look to the example of those who have walked before us, and to follow them insofar as they have followed Christ. Lowrie made an indelible mark upon nineteenth-century Presbyterian missions; from his life we can pull four principles that should inform missions today.

The Centrality of Missions to the Work of the Church

As we have seen, one of the signal contributions of Old School Presbyterianism to the work of missions in the nineteenth century was the weight given to the unique role of the church: the church itself was to be a missionary society. Lowrie passionately believed that the work of missions properly belonged to the church and not to any voluntary society. But this view has an important corollary: if missions is the church's work, then the church must not neglect it. Rather, among the various functions given to the church, the church must understand that its calling to take the gospel to the entire world is fundamental. This was the great burden of Lowrie's life. He tirelessly labored in order to stir up the church to fulfill its missionary mandate. In his speaking, his writing, and his annual reports to the General Assembly, he never

28. Lowrie, *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 170.

ceased laying before the church the importance of world missions. Likewise, the church today must keep missions central to its work.

The Spiritual Task of the Missionary

The purpose of missions is primarily spiritual: to proclaim Christ as Savior with the desire for seeing sinners converted and gathered into churches where they grow in Him. The purpose of missions is not to elevate the morals of a nation, provide education, or relieve poverty, however noble these goals might be. Rather, the church must prioritize the task which it has uniquely been given: to proclaim the gospel of Christ. This spiritual emphasis characterized nineteenth-century Presbyterian missions. The world's problems then—measured by disease, poverty, ignorance, and death—were far more severe than they are today. And yet Lowrie understood that "there is something worse than death, and there is something better than human flourishing."[29] The worse problem is slavery to sin and the impending judgment of God; their greatest need is to become reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and made heirs of everlasting life. So while the Presbyterian Church did send doctors to the foreign field and did establish schools at their mission stations, such work was always subservient to the greater task of proclaiming the gospel.

When Lowrie wrote and spoke, he always drew attention to the spiritual darkness of the nations, and how that darkness compelled the church to send forth missionaries. Such emphasis needs once again to characterize the church's mission labors. In undertaking missions, the church must not become sidetracked, sending out missionaries merely to perform mercy ministry, literacy training, or education, and neglecting its most important and uniquely given task: to take the gospel to all mankind.

The Need for Personal Sacrifice

The Christian life is costly. Jesus elucidated this cost when He said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not

29. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011), 242.

worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37–38). This cost was poignantly experienced by nineteenth-century missionaries; in fact, it would have been impossible for the gospel to be carried to foreign lands apart from the willing, costly sacrifices of thousands of missionaries.

Walter Lowrie not only frequently called missionaries to such sacrifice, he also proved willing time and again to make such sacrifices himself, and he fervently believed and proclaimed that the great ends obtained by missionary labor made such sacrifices worthwhile.

He sacrificed his finances—his anonymous gift of a thousand dollars kept the Western Foreign Missionary Society from dissolving. In addition, during his later years as corresponding secretary he refused to take a salary. He also sacrificed his worldly honor. He gladly gave up his position as Secretary of the Senate, and also the possibility of being appointed Secretary of the Treasury under President Andrew Jackson, in order to serve the Foreign Mission Board.[30] Though the world viewed this as a demotion, Lowrie understood that he was moving into God's greater field of service.[31]

Lowrie also sacrificed his comforts. For example, in 1852, at age 67, Lowrie took a rigorous two-and-a-half month journey on horseback to visit many of the missions among the American Indians.[32] And he held his post as corresponding secretary to the old age of 80, stepping down only because of impaired health.

Finally, and most significantly, Lowrie sacrificed his family. He gladly saw three of his sons depart the shores of America as foreign missionaries, never seeing two of them—and the wife of the third—again on this side of heaven. When as corresponding secretary he called fathers and mothers to give up their sons and daughters as missionaries because "the cause of Christ requires this sacrifice, severe and painful as it is," he spoke those words as one who offered this sacrifice himself.[33]

30. On the possibility of being appointed Secretary of the Treasury by Andrew Jackson, see *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 110.

31. This decision bears a similarity to D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who, in 1927, gave up a very promising career as a physician to become an evangelist at a small chapel in Wales. See Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899–1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 81–129.

32. A fascinating account of this journey from Lowrie's diary is included in his memoirs. *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie,* 134–59.

33. These words were spoken by Lowrie at the departure of the Rev. Robert Sawyer and his wife for western Africa in 1841. See *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 98.

Why was Lowrie so eager both to suffer cost himself and call others to do the same in pursuing the work of missions? It was because he had his eyes fixed upon the great goal of missions: the salvation of those lost in darkness. He was motivated by zeal for the glory of God, love for lost sinners, and recognition that the peoples of the earth cannot be saved apart from the gospel of Christ.[34] Thus, the church must do missions no matter the cost. One cannot read Lowrie's writings for long without seeing how persistently he brought this theme before the church. He played the same note over and over; he longed for the church to recognize that no sacrifice was too great for the worldwide spread of the gospel. Let one quote suffice by way of example:

> Let it be admitted, that to plant the Church in Africa, will cause the death of some of God's servants. If we take the example of the apostles for our guidance, we will not find in this a sufficient reason for leaving the millions in this country in the unmolested possession of Satan.... Although there be a risk to human life, in sending to benighted Africa the knowledge of the Saviour, his commission, the spirit that was in Him, and the example of His apostles require it to be done.[35]

Biblical Calvinism as the Motivation for Missionary Labor

Though by temperament Walter Lowrie was a "grave and sober" man, not given to exuberance, his labors were characterized by a quiet, solid confidence.[36] At his death, the Executive Committee of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions adopted a resolution of thanksgiving, in which they, among other things, commended "the humble, earnest, and prayerful confidence with which he always carried forward the work."[37] That confidence was rooted in Lowrie's conception of missions as the sovereign work of God.

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34. While still a U.S. senator, Lowrie recorded in his journal, "My heart and soul are pained to think of such immense multitudes of China, ignorant of the Way of Life.... Should the way open for my going to them...I feel I could leave all for that purpose." James A. Kelso, ed. *The Centennial of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, 1831–1931* (Pittsburgh: Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Presbytery of Pittsburgh, 1931), 130.

35. These words also were spoken by Lowrie at the departure of the Rev. Robert Sawyer and his wife for western Africa in 1841. *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 99.

36. For a brief description of Lowrie's character see Speer, *Studies of Missionary Leadership*, 39.

37. Lowrie, *Memoirs of the Hon. Walter Lowrie*, 171.

In our day, Arminianism frequently levels the charge that Calvinism inhibits the work of world missions. Dave Hunt represents this view when he says that Reformed missionaries "bring the gospel to the world not *because* of their Calvinism, but only *in spite* of it."[38] But just the opposite is true: the doctrines of God's sovereign election and Christ's particular atonement furnish the missionary with the assurance that his labors will not be in vain, for Christ has purchased a people from every nation. Similarly, the doctrine of the Spirit's effectual call inspires the missionary with confidence, for the work's final success depends not on his own meager efforts, but on the Holy Spirit's powerful work. Thus armed with this truth that "God saves sinners," the missionary is freed from the discouragement that comes from relying on his own flesh, and instead boldly goes forth, knowing that he is merely an instrument used by God to accomplish His divine work.

Most people today identify nineteenth-century Old School Presbyterianism with theological rigor, Calvinistic orthodoxy, and a strict Presbyterian polity. This is accurate, but it doesn't go far enough. Old School Presbyterianism should also be identified with missionary activity. For the soil of the church's Calvinistic convictions produced a deeply felt missionary piety that resulted in sacrificial, confident, zealous, missionary endeavor. This is why it is important to remember Walter Lowrie today; Lowrie is the consummate example of the missionary zeal of Old School Presbyterianism. His Calvinism was the best kind: it led to a life confidently committed to the cause of world missions. May many follow in his steps.

38. Dave Hunt, *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Sisters, Ore.: Loyal, 2002), 29. This position can be refuted on both historical and theological grounds. For the argument from history that Calvinism motivates missions, see Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 152–63. For the theological argument, see J. I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1961), or R. B. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961).