The Legacy of Gustav Warneck

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Introduction

very age and generation has a variety of pilgrims. Some are pastors and some pedagogues, some are writers and some prophets, and some combine all in one person. Whatever their charisma may be, they themselves are a gift of the God of history to the times in which they live. Their legacy is what they inherited from their progenitors and what they in turn pass on to their progeny. Yet, unless used with prudence, such a legacy can become a burden rather than a blessing. Goethe's advice, as expressed in a Faust soliloquy, is noteworthy:

> Whatever you inherit from the past By usage does become a noble prize. But when neglected, never will it last. Your spirit, to creation, must arise.¹

The legacy of Warneck deserves to be treated in that manner.

The Pilgrim

On March 6, 1834, Gustav Traugott Leberecht Warneck and his wife, Johanne Sophie, both of Naumburg near Halle (East Germany) on the Saale River, became parents for the first time. Disregarding the orthodox tradition of the meaning of names, they simply called their son Gustav Adolf, a name which in mission circles of Protestant Europe has more historical than religious significance. The bearer of the name soon dropped the "Adolf" and went down in history as Gustav Warneck, the pioneer and father of Protestant missiology. His pilgrimage took him from a family needleshop in the present industrial city of Naumburg to a professorship in the intellectual circles of Halle. As the oldest son of a master craftsman in needlemaking and in keeping with tradition, the vocation of Gustav Junior was predetermined: he, too, would become a needlemaker. The odds were against him for anything else. His parents were extremely poor. The outlook on life in the home was narrow; opportunities for education were scanty. In addition, Gustav was a delicate boy, suffering from a serious lung illness.

When still quite young, he entered his father's workshop, counting heaps of needles, thereby helping to eke out a living for a rapidly growing family. Inwardly, however, he possessed an insatiable yearning for knowledge and learning. By sheer self-determination and the reluctant consent of his parents he finally succeeded in entering the Gymnasium (a grammar school) of the Francke Foundation at Halle. Without financial support from his father, Gustav left home with one *Taler* (75¢) in his pocket. That was all his mother could spare for her oldest son.

A clear goal, hard work, the influence of several teachers, eventually a scholarship, and a "sound conversion experience" were a combination of factors that helped Warneck to graduate from the Gymnasium with "shining honors" and to enter theological studies at Halle University (now Martin-Luther-Universität) in 1855. In 1858 he passed his theological examinations—again with honors. In the same year he accepted a position as private tutor in a noble family at Elberfeld. Here he was introduced to the spiritual atmosphere of Lutheran Pietism in the Wuppertal–Rheinland region. He was also asked to serve as counselor to three hundred children in the local orphanage.

The year 1862 proved to be packed with events and decisions that changed the course of Warneck's life. For one thing, he became assistant pastor in Roitzsch, a small village in Saxony, within the Diocese of Bitterfeld. The place name (literally "bitter field") was, indeed, indicative of his bitter experiences there. The people were crude compared to those in Wuppertal. Yet he got a taste of what it might mean to become a fulltime pastor, should he move in that direction.

Moreover, this was also the year in which Warneck married

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Henriette Gerlach from his home village Naumburg. The Warnecks shared forty-six years of married life and became parents of nine children, of whom several died as infants. Here in Roitzsch, Warneck also met Reinhold Grundemann (1836–1924), his intimate colleague in later years. Their common interest was world mission and their friendship lasting and mutually enriching.

Finally, in Roitzsch Warneck came to grips with reality. Ever since his conversion in Halle he had entertained the thought of becoming a missionary. But a renewed attack from his besetting illness convinced him that he would never be able to pursue a missionary career overseas. He settled the matter by becoming a missionary to missionaries. But his joy was great when his son Johannes and one daughter went to serve overseas.

In 1863 Warneck followed a call to pastor a church in Dommitzsch, near Torgau in the Leipzig district. He stayed seven years. These were hard years, but fruitful for both the pastor and the people. It should be noted that with his *Pontius Pilate* (1867), Warneck began his literary career in Dommitzsch.

Meanwhile, however, Warneck continued his studies and eventually received a Ph.D. degree from the University of Jena in 1871, and an honorary doctorate (D.D.) from the University of Halle in 1883.

The following three years with the Rheinisch Mission Society in Barmen (1871–74) were the most formative years in terms of his mission philosophy. He taught at the seminary where mission candidates received their training; he traveled widely in churches where people prayed and paid for the mission enterprise; he interacted frequently with such eminent theologians and ecclesiastical leaders as Theodor Christlieb (1833–89) of Bonn and Johann Christoph Blumhard (1805–80) of Bad Boll; and he worked closely with administrators like Friedrich Fabri (1824–91) of the Barmen Mission. Warneck commented in later years that his experience in Barmen had been God's providential leading, exposing him to an area of service for which he had been searching all his life.

Barmen was not the last station of his pilgrimage. In 1874 he moved with his family to Rothenschirmbach (near Eisleben, Martin Luther's birthplace). Here he pastored a 700-member church for twenty-two years. With this move began his time of greatest productivity for the cause of world mission. He received and counseled missionaries and mission leaders from all continents, wrote hundreds of articles and over twenty books on mission. The hitherto remote village suddenly became famous throughout the world because of its famous pastor. Rothenschirmbach turned into such a busy place that the post office expanded its services from one mail delivery weekly to two daily. In all of this his church lent full support to its pastor in his endeavors as a world missionary spokesman, statesman, and penman. He became the apostle to apostles, the father of Protestant missiology, and the missionary educator par excellence.

Warneck often sensed a vacuum in his own spiritual pilgrimage. When the American revivalist Robert Pearsall Smith conducted meetings in Brighton, England, Warneck went to hear him. With the exception of brief visits to Switzerland and one to Sweden, this was his only trip to a foreign country.

In his book *Letters on the Meetings in Brighton* (1876), Warneck reflects on his own experience of renewal and *Heiligung*, or sanc-tification. Although not uncritical—that would have been against his nature—Warneck speaks of having found "freedom" and "true joy in Christ" at these meetings. In his fourth letter (July 31, 1875) he wrote his friend:

Never in my whole life has the Majesty of the living God stood with such reality before my very eyes; never has this Majesty been so tangibly close; never did sin seem so exceedingly sinful as in the light of this holy Majesty; never has any object of shame appeared so despisably shameful as in these days.²

There was one more move for Warneck. In 1896 he occupied the first chair of mission studies in Germany, a position which he held for twelve years. Upon retirement in 1908 he remained active as a writer.

On December 26, 1910, the Halle newspaper headlines announced the passing of the greatest missiologist of the time. The pilgrim Gustav Warneck had reached the end of his terrestrial journey. He journeyed on to a celestial country while listening to the melody of the Christmas canticle:

> Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel. Luke 2:29–32 RSV

The Preacher

It is expected, even in our day, that the pastor be a preacher. But not always is it taken for granted that the preacher be a pastor. Warneck was both, but first a pastor/preacher, then a preacher/pastor.

The Pastor/Preacher

While studying at the Francke schools in Halle, Warneck manifested unique pastoral qualities. He was a member of the *Wingolf*, a nineteenth-century German model of the present InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Students came to him for counsel, sought pastoral care, and requested prayer. He was always ready to help, even in times of sickness and poverty. But there were moments when he became very direct, almost to the point of being offensive. On one such occasion an older friend put his hand on Warneck and said, "Gustav, speak kindly with Jerusalem."

One time Warneck was again suffering from a severe lung hemorrhage, which "brought him to the brink of death and left little hope for future usefulness." But even then he encouraged those who came to see him and in turn was consoled by them. One day the Halle professor Friedrich August Gottreu Tholuck (1799–1877) came to his bedside, saying, "Warneck, you will not die, but will proclaim the name of the Lord."³ That was prophetic.

The Preacher/Pastor

The pastor became a great preacher. Although there were times when he agonized over his text, he was always a man with a message for the hour. When things were hard going he followed the counsel of his teacher, Tholuck, who said, "When I prepare my sermons I throw myself on my knees and ask the Lord to unlock for me the door to the real life of the text."⁴

Warneck was a perfectionist both as pastor and as preacher. But he was as hard on himself as he was on young theologians and mission candidates. His son Johannes Warneck says that his father was frequent with criticism and infrequent with compliments. "I found father's criticism of my first sermons harder to bear than that of the examination committee. After what I thought had been a fair presentation he would calmly respond, 'That was nothing.' Or he would say, 'With such material you can't entice a dog to come out of his niche.' "⁵ Conference speakers, particularly the younger ones, had to write out their speeches and sermons and hand them to Warneck for scrutiny. Whoever passed without having to revise or rewrite his paper was given a modest compliment in the third person: "He's a becomer."

But Warneck practiced what he preached. He himself was an outstanding orator. His sermons were well organized, rich in content, tastefully illustrated, rhetorically excellent, and spiced with humor. He despised boredom in preaching. Although he admitted that boredom is no "sin unto death," he maintained that "it is a sin that deadens."6 Warneck's preaching focused on the church and the kingdom of God. "A healthy and actively fruitful missionary life," wrote Warneck on one occasion, "must be rooted in the local church." Convinced that the pastor is the key person to promote that kind of mission spirit and recruitment in his own congregation, Warneck labored tirelessly on mission sermons and lessons for the preacher's use. Such lessons, he contended, must be biblically sound, theologically stimulating, factually informative, scientifically accurate, homiletically useful, generally interesting, and experientially practical. His three-volume Missionsstunden (1881; 1886; 1899) is a prime example of his creative mind in these areas. The kingdom parables of Jesus play a central role in his preaching.

The Pedagogue

Warneck had a desire to become a "teacher to the Gentiles," as his colleague Martin Kähler, his son Johannes, and others have pointed out. Although his physical weakness prevented him from becoming a teacher overseas, he did become a true pedagogue, molding thousands of lives. There are two dimensions to Warneck the pedagogue—one is philosophical, the other practical. Both are articulated in his major work, the *Evangelische Missionslehre*, or *Evangelical Theory of Mission* (1892–1905).

The Philosophical Pedagogue

Warneck's desire to become a teacher to the Gentiles was based on the assumption that life itself can be molded by external influences. In fact, the Finnish missiologist Seppo A. Teinonen calls Warneck's early theology a "theology of life." This is true. The life-principle can be traced through all his writings. Life is created by God, therefore precious. Though humankind has fallen and has become alienated, it is not entirely dead. Traces of the divine image remain, making human beings both redeemable and redeem-worthy.

According to Warneck it is possible for the natural person to know God, but only in part. Such partial knowledge of God gained by natural processes lays the foundation for a deeper religious experience to become a Christian. The fullness of life, however, is attainable only by grace through the Word of God. This life, in turn, helps humans understand the very Word they hear or read. He cautions, however, not to misinterpret the meaning of being Christian. The true Christian, he insists, is "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), not merely an educated or a cultured manifestation of "natural man."

Just as there are two sources to bring fullness to life, so there are parallel currents from which emerge the fullness of history. One current evolves from the "kingdom of nature" and is seen as *Weltgeschichte*, or "world history"; the other evolves from the "kingdom of grace" and can be seen as *Reichsgeschichte*, or "kingdom history." As spiritual life is based on natural life, so is kingdom history based on world history. Thus he maintains that the developments in world history are in a sense prerequisite to kingdom history.

In his "Ethonological Foundations of Mission," Warneck expresses some rather modern ideas. He states that the gospel in its very essence is "supraworldly"; it is simply not affected by social, cultural, and ethnic elements. Therefore, the gospel has the capacity not only to transform every type of natural community and the culture of a people, but also to adapt to any kind of situation that is not in direct violation to the core of the divine message.

The Practical Pedagogue

I have already pointed out that Warneck the pilgrim accepted a private teaching assignment for a wealthy family in Elberfeld. This was a prestigious position for the time. Educators recognized in him the "young gifted pedagog," and soon a more challenging opportunity presented itself to demonstrate his reputation.

In 1861 Warneck was called to an orphanage in Elberfeld where a religious revival of a rather emotional type had gone beyond control. It was making newspaper headlines throughout Germany. The record has it that Warneck's pedagogical efficiency soon normalized the unhealthy conditions among the young people of the orphanage. The seventy-five-page manuscript entitled, "An Experimental In-Depth Evaluation of the 1861 Emerging Children's Revival in the Orphanage of Elberfeld" reveals Warneck's insight on religion and human nature sporadically surfacing in German Pietism at that time.

The third area in which Warneck practiced his gift of teaching was at the Barmen Mission. Here he dealt with seminary students who prepared to become overseas missionaries. He was an excellent teacher and knew how to create interest, enthusiasm, and love for world mission. Unlike most other teachers who relied on the lecture method, Warneck guided his students in reading and research to become independent thinkers. It was here in Barmen that he saw the need for a comprehensive mission theory. His vision turned into ideas, and his ideas into the most complete system of mission theory ever produced.

Warneck also became the first professor of missiology on the continent. "Warneck's life-work on behalf of the Christian world mission," writes the Norwegian missiologist Olav Myklebust, "was essentially an act of education, and that in the true and comprehensive sense of that term."⁷ Warneck's goal was to make the study of mission an integral part of the university curriculum. His great phrase was that "mission as an academic discipline cannot remain a mere alien, but must attain the right and privilege of citizenship in the science of theology."⁸ He realized his goal in his lifetime.

R. Zentgraf, a one-time student of Warneck, has called his teacher, "the pedagog of the church to world mission." Whether he wrote, lectured, or preached, says Zentgraf, he was always teaching world mission.

His mission seminar was such an introduction to the word and spirit of the Holy Scriptures that we simply became absorbed by the thought that the entire New Testament was part and parcel of mission literature. Indeed, we became so fascinated by this idea that henceforth we had to read the New Testament as *the* book of mission. Every paragraph and every line breathes mission and contains the key to interpret world history from a divine perspective.⁹

The Penman

Once Warneck had been captivated by the spirit of world mission, as he saw and experienced it in Barmen, he devoted himself unreservedly to that calling. Never was there a time in which he questioned his *Sendung*, his apostleship, or sense of sentness in that respect. That is why he has been called the "missionary to missionaries"; "the man of the hour for the mission of his time." His colleague Kähler, in a special tribute to Warneck, speaks of "Gustav Warnecks Sendung," or sentness.

In the very concept of sentness, Kähler points out, one recognizes an entirely new school founded by Warneck. It was a "school without walls" through which thousands of sent ones, according to Kähler, became aware of their own sentness and were sent into all the world to carry out the Mandate of the Master to "make disciples of all nations."

The most effective means Warneck used to disseminate ideas and mission information was his penmanship. He wrote some thirty books, at least ten times that many articles on mission, and hundreds of missionary letters—and all of that with a quill pen.

The Scientific Mission Journal

In 1873 Warneck attracted two of the most competent men-Grundemann, the cartographer-statistician, and Christlieb, the educator-theologian—and together with them founded the famous *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift* (AMZ), whose chief editor he remained for thirty-seven years. In his dedicatory editorial, "*Dic cur hic?* Unser Programm" (Our Program), he fully recognized the various attempts made by others to bring the theory of mission to the level of an acceptable science. But he also pointed out the areas of failure. Thus he proposed and promised to provide for all levels a fundamental knowledge of mission history and discussions touching "geographical, linguistic, anthropological, ethnological, sociological, and religio-historical" dimensions as well as the theory of mission itself.

Those familiar with the *Zeitschrift* will be impressed not only with the wealth of accumulated knowledge contained in this "unique missionary encyclopedia," but also with the scientific thoroughness with which it has been treated. Warneck's exegetical treatment of Matthew 28:16–20, which he called "Christ's Magna Charta for the Church," is no less than a classic commentary on that text.

The Study of Mission History

Warneck contended that knowledge of world mission begins with acquaintance with world history. He produced a long essay entitled "An Abstract of a History of Protestant Missions," published in the AMZ and in Herzogs Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche (1882). Warneck does not treat mission history in isolation; every incident is treated in the context of world history, sociocultural history, and colonial history.

He constantly rewrote, revised, and expanded until his history of mission became "a classic masterpiece and the historical foundation for all future missionary histories," as Martin Schlunk puts it. "So surely had the master and the material grown together that after his death no single person was in a position to reedit his work; it took six of his ablest students to prepare the tenth edition."¹⁰ It should be added that this history was translated into several foreign languages, including independent English editions in Europe and America.

The Field of Cultural Anthropology

Warneck was in many respects ahead of his time. He took the cultural implications for the communication of the gospel remarkably seriously. This becomes even more striking when one thinks that cultural anthropology and ethnology as sciences were still in their infancy.

In 1879 Warneck published a monumental work on the reciprocal implications of world mission and culture. Four years later Professor Thomas Smith of New College, Edinburgh, translated this work under the title *Modern Missions and Culture: Their Mutual Relations*. Smith had intended to write his own book on the same subject. But, he says in the introduction, while reading the original, "I formed the opinion that, in respect to variety of research, and in respect of clear statement, Dr. Warneck's book is superior to any that I could expect to write."¹¹

Considering the time in which Warneck wrote, one is amazed at the insights he expressed regarding the complexities of the sociocultural value systems of peoples and what bearing they have on the proclamation of the gospel. He speaks of culture as being in itself "an entirely neutral concept," which is to be interpreted from the perspective of the insider. Only then, contends Warneck, can the missionary hope to understand the caste system in India and the polygamous marriages in African societies.

In principle, Warneck agreed with the ideals of the Western missionary to abolish the caste distinctions and to prohibit plural marriages. But, he cautioned, a measure of toleration must be exercised and the gospel must be trusted as a transforming power to bring about the desired changes in due time.

On the basis of careful study, he insisted that Christians from various castes should be allowed to form their own church within the given social structure, and that men in polygynous marriages, when they become Christian, be admitted to baptism and church membership. He contended that consistent teaching of the Word was the key to achieve the ideal forms of the Christian way of life in any culture.

It cannot be overlooked, however, that Warneck was a "child of his time." This also applies to his view of culture. Despite his farsightedness in some areas, he was nearsighted in others. He says, for example, that Western culture is far superior to the cultures of Asia and Africa, even superior to the advanced Hindu and Chinese cultures. Cultural anthropologists of our day reject such views. Perhaps that is why his book—though without question a pioneer effort in missionary anthropology—is rarely referred to by scholars in that field.

Theory of Missionary Science

Warneck's five-volume *Evangelische Missionslehre* was his *magnum* opus. In 1955 Myklebust spoke of it as the unsurpassed treatment of "the Protestant theory of missions," and in 1978 Johannes Verkuyl called it "a trail-blazing effort in systematic missiology."¹²

This work more than any other has earned Warneck the title "Father of Protestant Missiology." During the last thirty years at least six major dissertations have been produced in which the *Missionslehre* received primary attention.

The five volumes are divided into three major parts, each dealing in great detail with the many dimensions of mission philosophy and principles. In part I Warneck attempts to build a broad foundation for his concept of mission from a dogmatic, ethical, biblical, ecclesiological, historical, and ethnological perspective. His thesis is that God has chosen to make himself known through Christianity as the full and final revelation of God for complete and universal salvation of humankind. This part contains valuable material and merits translation into English.

In part II Warneck discusses the various mission agencies. Because the church has failed, he maintains, the mission societies have been called into existence. He sees in this less the biblical model than the historical development. Thus he justifies the existence of the societies on the grounds of the church's failure.

The last part treats the mission fields of the world in all their complex geographic and religious diversities.' The Great Commission, says Warneck, rests upon the Christians to Christianize all non-Christians by making disciples of peoples, not only of individuals. His key concept is *Volkschristianisierung*, the Christianization of entire peoples.

Because of this theological conviction, Warneck failed to see the legitimacy of the Student Volunteer Movement's slogan, "The evangelization of the world in this generation." He believed that this was not realistic optimism, but a statement of arrogance and the expression of sheer superficiality and naïveté.

John R. Mott (1865–1955), the international student leader and missionary statesman, discussed this matter with Warneck on several occasions. Although they respected each other they never fully agreed. Warneck saw in his own concept of Christianization all that the evangelization theory contained and insisted that the task of mission goes far beyond mere proclamation of the gospel throughout the world in a rapid and superficial manner.

In a critical review he categorically stated: "I cannot agree with the tone of triumphalism in which this new missionary movement is being signalized."¹³ His reasons can be briefly summarized: (1) There is unbiblical eschatology. The evangelization of the world will not expedite the return of Christ, but it is his imminent return that motivates us to evangelize. (2) There is weak eccelesiology. The evangelization of the world in this generation is done by large groups of evangelists without giving due consideration to either a solid church base or to thorough preparation for the task. (3) There is inadequate understanding of the task. The evangelists confuse kerússein (proclamation) with matheteúein (making disciples). Disciplemaking, Warneck insisted, includes evangelization, baptism, church building, and continuing teaching. (4) The goals are based on mechanical mathematics. The apostolic missionary practice yielded not only quantitative, but also qualitative, fruit.¹⁴

Various attempts have been made to reconcile Warneck's theory with that of the Student Volunteer Movement. But no unanimity has thus far been achieved.

Warneck's Missionslehre was not only the standard work for Protestants; Catholics borrowed from him and developed their own theory of mission. Joseph Schmidlin (1876–1944) became a pioneer in this respect when he wrote his Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss (1919), which was also published in translation as Roman Catholic Mission Theory (1931). In his foreword, Schmidlin acknowledges his indebtness to Warneck, calling him "the founder and pioneer-master of mission theory."

The Prophet

The pilgrim Warneck was more than preacher, pedagogue, and penman. He was also a prophet in his day. He was invited to speak at the London Missionary Conference of 1888. Circumstances at home prevented him from going. He did, however, submit a paper on "Missionary Comity," which was read by a representative.

In this paper Warneck delineated in detail the things that separated and those that united missionaries and mission organizations. He pointed out that the factors uniting the mission forces were more than those that divide. He also suggested ways to increase the positive and decrease the negative elements in the interest of sound ecumenism. In fact, he outlined a plan for decennial general missionary conferences. These conferences, he suggested, should be supported by a central committee that would continue to give counsel to agencies and coordinate all Protestant mission activities overseas.

The ideas Warneck expressed in this paper—and in part III of his *Missionslehre*—were so progressive and prophetic for his day that the London delegates listened to the reading, put the paper in the files, and never looked at it again. But several decades later Warneck's vision was realized at the 1910 Edinburgh Mission Conference and with the formation of the International Missionary Council in 1921.

Conclusion

Warneck could also be described as a philosopher or thinker. But that in itself deserves an entire paper. So does his work as a promoter of mission. He was, indeed, a creative spirit, ever striving to improve on what he had inherited from the past in order to enrich the legacy for generations to come.

Some of the secondary literature, particularly that by Continental scholars, reflects a rather critical attitude toward his missiology. It is noted, however, that the majority of critics treat his work only in fragments. This means that the legacy of Gustav Warneck has never been fully dealt with and a biographical treatise of his life and work is long overdue.

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