

WHAT IS ORIENTATION?

Vivienne Stacey, for *GO Magazine* Dec 1967

There was only one properly orientated missionary. *“And he was not at all like the psychologist’s picture of the integrated, balanced, adjusted, happily married, employed, popular citizen. You can’t really be very well “adjusted” to your world if it says you ‘have a devil’ and ends by nailing you up naked to a stake of wood.”* (C S Lewis in **The Four Loves**.) Christ was fully orientated to God and men. He was always on the same wavelength as His Father. He knew what His Father wanted Him to do, and did it. At twelve years of age He told His mother what He meant by being orientated: *“Don’t you know that I must work for my Father?”*

We must accept the fact that the perfect man must have been perfectly orientated. The outworking of His orientation was bad for His reputation. He was called a drunkard, He clashed with His family, He was thrown out of the town where He grew up, He was betrayed by one of His chosen friends. So today an orientated Christian may be called a “square”, be misunderstood by his family, not keep up with the Joneses, be rejected by his “set”.

Christ’s comments on orientation are equally surprising. He advocated no building society loan, for the Son of Man had no permanent home. He paid his taxes without grumbling or fiddling. He did not despise bank balances, but He challenged those who were too attached to money. He foresaw that the rich fool might have a coronary before he could enjoy his retirement. He knew the people who made covenanted gifts or had missionary boxes, and so He sent out His group with less than their forty-four pounds of luggage and they never went short. His most unqualified statement on orientation was *“You are in the world but not of it”*. This raises questions, not only for the missionary, but for every Christian. How can one be in Oxford Street and not of it? Can one be a friend of drug addicts and homosexuals without sharing in the new morality?

When a missionary takes off and does seventeen flying hours to the other side of the world, he is well supplied with instructions on how to orientate himself to his new environment. For a year or so he struggles to learn the language, customs and thought patterns of the people. He is bound to fail somewhere, either because the standard is too high for fallen man or because his definition of orientation is not correct. He can never sit where they sit because he, but not they, might be evacuated in an emergency.

What is orientation? It is turning your face to the East in order to find out where you are. It is a deliberate and prolonged attempt to know a country, its people, their beliefs and language, without turning one’s face away from God. Understanding others does not necessarily mean accepting their beliefs and way of life. It means referring everything to the vertical direction, that is, to God. There is no static definition of orientation for it has to be worked out in a changing world in stress and conflict.

It is not only the Christian who seeks to be orientated to his society and to his God. At every main ‘bus station and railway station in Pakistan there is a notice with an arrow and one word upon it – *“qibla”* “*Qibla*” means “direction”, and the word reminds the Muslim to turn his face towards Mecca and say his prayers, even on the ‘bus. Christ too had a *“qibla”*: He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. The compelling motive for orientation for the Christian is Christ – He is the Christian’s *“qibla”*. To be fully orientated to Him, to take up one’s cross to follow Him, is to start to answer the question “What is orientation for me?”.