



Occupation of the Field

By Kai Kjær-Hansen

The Eighth International LCJE Conference was held August 19–24, 2007, at Lake Balaton, Hungary, after the plan to hold the conference in Budapest had failed.

One of the reasons the conference had been scheduled for Budapest was that 80 years ago an important conference on Jewish evangelism was held there. Indeed, two important conferences were held in 1927: one in Budapest (April 7–13) and one in Warsaw (April 19–25).

Before the delegates met in Budapest and Warsaw in 1927, several years of preparatory work had been done. Eighteen months before the conference a detailed questionnaire was prepared and sent out. When the replies were received, “a digest of the information was skilfully drafted” and “when published was distributed to every delegate.” This was before the meeting.

The answers to the questionnaire are divided into eleven theme groups. In the report after the Budapest meeting there are nine topics:

1. Evangelisation and Message
2. Christian Education
3. Medical Missions, Philanthropy and Community Centres
4. Christian Literature
5. Occupation of the Field
6. Training and Welfare of Workers
7. Spiritual Power
8. Co-operation
9. Work among Jewish Women

At the plenary sessions the topics were presented and a general discussion followed. Next the delegates were divided in fairly equal numbers to various “Findings Committees.” After that the themes were discussed again at plenary sessions and the results were published as “Findings” in the official report *The Christian Approach to the Jew*, which appeared, well, in 1927. Quite impressive and professional!

A wealth of statistical and demographic information was gathered. Here is one interesting example of how they worked up the material

and asked some self-critical questions on the theme "Occupation of the Field."

In "Addendum on Palestine," it is said by way of introduction: "Palestine contains 1 per cent of the Jewish population of the world; yet, if we take mere numbers into account, it draws to itself 12 per cent of the missionary man-power. The fact is that, though there are many 'missions', there are few 'missionaries' in the sense of men qualified for direct and profitable contact with the Palestinian Jew."

It is assumed that the total of Christian workers among Jews is one thousand. The question is: Are these one thousand workers distributed in an expedient way? I quote:

For example, a conservative estimate shows that there are over 400 towns and cities in the world with Jewish populations varying from 5000 to 300,000 or more, but the total numbers of places in which there are established Missions does not seem to exceed 160, and in a considerable proportion of these there is only one individual worker.

Further, when we find that Mission Stations total about 270, it is at once apparent that more than one Mission is at work in many of the occupied places. Indeed, in some of them three or more Missions are at work. Besides, some of these Missions have large staffs, showing that a large proportion of the agency is concentrated in a relatively small number of towns and cities. To give an instance or two: Hamburg seems to have at least 30 workers, and there are as many employed in Budapest; in Bucharest there are over 20, In Constantinople 15; Safad has 12, Tiberias 24, Haifa 11, and Jerusalem over 40.

For present purposes the list need not be extended, but here we find over 180 agents employed in only eight of the occupied cities.

The most extraordinary concentration seems to be in Palestine, which, with only 160,000 Jews, contains more Jewish missionary agents than there are in the Slav lands of Europe, where over 6,000,000 Jews have their homes.

It is not too much to say that many of the great Jewish areas lie entirely fallow. It is doubtful if more than twenty cities in Russia, Ukrainia, Poland, and the Baltic States, together are occupied by Missions. Czechoslovakia, with 360,000 Jews, has only an occasional worker; Transylvania, with a quarter of a million, has only one regular worker.

And the list continues with further examples following the same pattern. Therefore they cannot recommend that more missionaries be sent to Palestine and, "after all, if effective mission work is to be done in Jewry, it should be self-evident that missionaries must be sent where the people are."

This is the way we do it today, isn't it? We have missionaries "where the people are" and we do not focus on just one place – or do we?

