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Interview of Pat McGee

Pat McGee

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Pat McGee who is serving on the evangelistic field of Indonesia was interviewed by Joe Hacker and Keith Robinson on February 11, 1970.

Hacker: Pat, could you give us a brief historical outline of the work in Indonesia from the beginning to this date?

McGee: In 1967 the Laurel Church of Christ sent me and my family to the nation of Indonesia. Since that time there have been three families who have followed us to the nation of Indonesia. My wife and I arrived in the nation during the month of October, 1967. From that date to now there have been over 70 who have been baptized into Christ. The Steve Cate family who is sponsored by the Raleigh Church of Christ in Memphis and the Colan McKee family who is sponsored by the Plateau Church of Christ in Mobile are now working in Medan, North Sumatra. The Bob McCarty family who is sponsored by the church in Marmaduke, Arkansas, is living with us in the capital city of Djakarta.

Robinson: Could you tell us of the religious background of the people with whom you are working?

McGee: Indonesia is the largest nation in southeast Asia and also the largest Islamic nation in the world. Because of this, of course, the nation of Islam is the predominant religious belief of the people of Indonesia. I suppose about 90% of the total population is Islamic. About 8% are Protestant denominational in belief and 2% or less are Buddhist-Hindu in religious belief. There is a real underground belief of animism and superstition among all of these religions, especially Islam.

Hacker: Could you give us a thumbnail sketch of the cultural and economic background of these people and how it effects your work?

McGee: In Indonesia there are 200 distinct ethnic groups. These are very similar to the tribes in Africa as we know them. Each one has its own cultural and social pattern. Also the economic background would vary from island to island. There are 3000 islands, and these 200 ethnic groups spread themselves across these different islands. Therefore, since agriculture is the important form of income, it makes the people to have a very low income. In fact, I read recently that the average government income during 1969 was about \$70 per month. Of course, the average Indonesian will earn around \$30 or \$40 per month.

Robinson: What about some of the problems that you had to face and some of the challenges you have had to overcome?

McGee: When we first arrived in Indonesia, of course, for about eight months we were the only family who was living there. There were problems which we had to confront: the problems of adjustment in a strange land, the problems of continuing our language learning, the problems of keeping our spiritual attitudes and our own

spiritual development growing. These challenges helped us to grow and mature in Christ. As we began to work with the people, of course, our major challenge was to lead the Indonesians to Christ and to establish the Lord's church there. There were things in which Satan tried to hinder us but as we began to work among the people, we found that they were very interested in religion and that they were very intense in desiring to know about Christ and the message of Christ.

Hacker: Pat, what methods are you using now which you find to be most successful?

McGee: Because the Lord's church was not recognized by the government and because we had never had any missionaries to enter that nation before 1967, we were not registered with the Department of Religion. Therefore, we had to select methods which were very simple. We cannot work in any kind of public, open way. We cannot advertise in newspapers. We cannot speak on the radios. Therefore, we have used the gospel meeting method. We have opened our home almost every evening for gospel meetings. We have invited speakers to come from Malysia, Singapore, and others who are passing through the area. I believe in 1969 we had 13 gospel meetings.

Robinson: Have you tried some methods that have proved to be ineffective?

McGee: We knew that when we got there we were going to have to select methods that would be very unassuming, methods that would not attract a lot of attention. We have found that the door to door approach is not workable in Indonesia. We have found that methods that are very showy in nature--methods that attract a lot of attention--are not practical because they do attract lots of attention. These methods we have found unusable though there are some methods we know are excellent methods, but we cannot use them yet. An example of this is the Bible correspondence course and the preacher training school. We know that they will be effective when we arrive at a stage in our development where we can put them into practice.

Hacker: How do you feel about special approaches to mission work such as exodus movements or groups going to places such as Indonesia? Do you think that these would have any workable value?

McGee: Well, because Indonesia is the kind of nation that it is and since the Lord's church is not yet recognized by the government, any large group or exodus would naturally attract attention. There would be a problem of them getting into the country since it would be impossible for them to get missionary visas. They would have to have their visas for secular work or as students or some other way of getting into the country. So methods where a large group would move into Indonesia or exodus groups such as this could be practical but it would not be the typical kind of exodus movement as we know it in America.

Robinson: You mentioned that you did not have any training schools and that this is impossible. What are you doing in regard to training converts?

McGee: What I meant when I said that was that we have not yet established a school as such where the young men are trained to be preachers. One of the reasons for this is that we have very few young people. Most of those that we have brought to Christ

are middle aged; they are men and women who already have their jobs, who have already chosen their vocation for life and have no desire to become a full time preacher. Therefore, the kind of training which we have done and the kind of teaching which we have done has not been preacher centered but rather centered in the idea of training Christians to evangelize and do personal work and to be able to discuss and teach the Bible to other people.

Hacker: What about your attitude in Indonesia concerning American support for national preachers?

McGee: Well, I think we do have one man who is being supported \$30 a month for his full time work of preaching. I think it is not possible to make a blanket statement saying that this is bad or this is good because it would depend upon the nation and the particular factors that were involved in that nation--the economy of the nation, the amount of support, the honesty and integrity of the individual and things that would determine whether this man was worthy of support or not. I do think that support that is outrageous, support that is so high that it lifts him above the level of his own people, is damaging to the work and hurtful. It hurts him and hurts his influence. He will find it impossible to really work among the people. It will be a stumbling block for him or at least this is what I have observed in the places where I have seen this. I would not be for or against American support for local people. It would simply determine the local field, which field it was, the amount of support, the dependableness of the individual and other factors would have to come into play into that. I think in Indonesia I feel we are justified in sponsoring Brother Anthony Twaniconda. First of all, his income is less than what he was earning as a language teacher. It does not separate him from the people because it is of a very average kind of level, and he is a very worthy individual. He is a very useful person. He works hard and has done a lot of good.

Hacker: Would you be in favor of him or other Indonesians coming to America to raise their support?

McGee: I believe I can give a very definite answer here. It would be an unequivocal no. I don't believe this would be best for Anthony or for the local people. I think it would ruin Anthony. I just cannot feel in my heart that it is wise to bring a man from an Oriental country and send him to America. There is such a difference in the kind of life that we live here from what he is used to and accustomed to in his own city. There may be some exceptions to this, but I feel very definite about Indonesia. In fact, I don't even want to send an Indonesian to Singapore for training because there is such a tremendous difference between Indonesia and Singapore. I feel that we can train and teach him right there in Indonesia and that we can teach him as much Bible there as he would get in a school in America or the Philippines or Singapore. Let me hasten to say this. If we had to send one to train him somewhere that probably I would choose the Philippines because it is very similar to Indonesia. The people are similar, the food is similar, the weather is similar, the economy is similar, and it would not be such a great difference. I do believe that he would come back to Indonesia to work.

Robinson: What about the language and language training? Should people definitely have language training before they go or could they go without previous training?

McGee: Well, before we went, we studied the language at the University of Hawaii for three months. We felt it was imperative that we know the language before we entered the country because we were entering a new field, we were going by ourselves for the first few months and it was just absolutely necessary we felt to know the language before we went so we tried hard to learn the language. The Steve Cates studied the language also before coming. The Bob McCartys did not and the McKees did not study Indonesian but they did study Chinese before they came. They studied Chinese in Singapore for six months. I think it is helpful. In learning the language you not only learn to speak the language but you learn a lot about the customs of the people and I think you equip yourself to deal with the problem of cultural adjustment, cultural shock as we call it. You overcome a lot of these problems by being able to understand and speak the language.

Hacker: I would like to ask you a double barrel question. What has been your greatest problem in gaining support and what is your greatest problem in keeping this support?

McGee: Really, we haven't had any trouble in gaining support, but we have had some trouble keeping support. We found, at least so far, in our short three years of experience that the brethren have been very generous and very wonderful in responding to appeals in supporting the Indonesian work. In gaining the support we had \$200 above our goal that we set in our monthly income. There have been some who have fallen out by the wayside along these three years. We have had to make strenuous efforts to find other people to support us.

Keeping the support has been a problem. I don't think it was our fault that it fell out or that we did any one thing except possibly simple communication. I think that is so significant in keeping support among the brethren. We need to keep them intelligently informed about what is going on and to send out monthly newsletters, to write personal letters to them if you can and to let them know you appreciate what they are doing and that there is still a need for them to continue that monthly support.

Now, the greatest problem in gaining support, I think, is just simply for the missionary to get out and to have the proper attitude in raising the support. So many times I feel that when we go out to raise support that we go out and bawl out the brethren or we have an improper attitude which hurts us and the mission effort. If there are any problems in gaining support, I am sure there are apathetic brethren, there are indifferent attitudes. I think the missionary can overcome these by and large with a proper attitude and an informing speech about the area into which he is going and then going before the brethren with a real sensible kind of plan to give. I think they will support it and then keep them informed, and I think they will continue to support it.

Robinson: In your experience maybe you have some ideas that might be basic to a general overall improvement to our mission effort, maybe not just in Indonesia but sort of what you have learned about mission work and maybe what missionaries and brethren who are supporting mission work might do to improve the general effort.

McGee: Really, I, of course, don't feel qualified to be critical in any way or to offer any real profound kind of suggestion that I think would in any dynamic way

change what the Lord's church is doing in mission work. We are doing so much more than what we have done before. I feel that. As I journey among the people and among the churches, I feel there is a greater interest in mission work by and large.

What can we do to improve this work? There is always grounds for improvement. The Laodiceans were the only ones who said we have need of nothing and they were the ones who received the most scathing rebuke from the Lord. When we feel there is nothing that we can do to improve, of course, we are on dangerous ground. One of the main things we can do is to train and to educate the men and women that we are sending overseas. I feel that this preparation is so significant. That is why I feel what is being done here at Harding College is really important, not only your summer seminar but your day by day and week by week and semester by semester emphasis upon missions and your missions classes and then the bringing in of men from the field like Joe Cannon last year and Keith Robinson this year. This is excellent; this is wonderful. I think it is commendable of Harding College that they have this kind of support in mission work and I believe that the fruits of this will not be seen within five years but give us ten or fifteen years and you will really see the fruits of what you are doing now. Really you are pioneering, I think, among our brethren in an effort in mission work which I think is going to be very successful.

Hacker: We appreciate that, Pat. I wonder if as we close this interview if you would like to summarize what you think the future holds for the work in Indonesia.

McGee: As in every mission field, our greatest need is real dedicated trained missionaries and workers in the field. Indonesia is a ripe nation; there is no doubt about it. If we can get the workers into this country, for example the Kutaradja area in North Sumatra, I believe if we can have four missionary families who would go into the cities in that area we can have 10,000, 20,000 or maybe 30,000 people who would turn to Christianity in this area because these people are going to turn to Islam, Buddhism or denominational Christianity. If we can get there with the truth in these next ten or fifteen years, we can have that many members in the area. Of course, our greatest need is men to go out into the Indonesian mission field, be willing to sacrifice themselves to see the church established in this nation.

Hacker: We appreciate very much your taking the time to talk with us for these few minutes. We want to wish you and your family the very best in your personal relations among the people over there, in health, and in good fortune. Our prayers go with you as you return to the field.