

## CHRISTIANA ABROAD

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There are Christian women who, before they can enter what is called “full time service,” are looking for two things: They want to be Scriptural and at the same time to be relevant to their generation. The freedom for women in current society can inspire them even to do things that Christian women before them perhaps never dared venture. Of course, any woman can live for the Lord and let her Christian testimony shine “full-time,” whether she is married or single, whether in a western culture, or in a cross-cultural setting. This article will go a bit further and focus on full-time service for the Christian woman in a cross-cultural society. Let’s call her for our purpose here, Christiana, a Christian missionary.

Perhaps the alien culture in which she finds herself will forbid Christiana from being very active at all, neither secularly nor spiritually, as in the repressive Muslim societies. Perhaps the culture is not Muslim, but is heavily prejudiced against even their own women’s influence, as a means of keeping them in control. This will carry over to Christian national women, even to foreign women missionaries. Perhaps the culture is open enough to women, but Christiana’s supporting constituency at home is rather more restrictive than the culture in which she ministers.

Christiana must learn to adjust to whichever environment the Lord has drawn her. If I am to try to describe what Christiana can do in a cross-cultural setting, I will have more success if I deal with the kind of society where I work, and that is an African culture traditionally biased against women, but to a degree influenced by western society’s openness to women’s input. I have found it a place of wide open doors for such as me. I bless God for that. If I describe the kind of opportunities that are here in East Africa, it doesn’t mean I have grasped all of them, but they are there. They are avenues, they are doors, they are areas of influence—careers, if you like.

Depending on her gifts, her skills, her training and her goals, Christiana has a variety of openings to choose from. Say she is a teacher. She can enter the public school system, at any level she is trained for, provided the national immigration services allow openings for those levels. If not, there are so many private schools that want skilled foreign teachers. She can lecture at a college or university in her specialty. Even if the university is secular, she is free to speak of the Lord and to counsel students in their free time. There are so many theological schools, and so long as she does not teach theology, she can be assigned all kinds of subjects. This will depend on the men who lead the seminary, and whether she is aware of it or not, it will depend also on her attitude, on her relationships with men, on her skill to work—not attempting to work over them—but with and for them. She has to like men. A friend of mine told me she “hates men.” I was aghast. No wonder they can’t work with her. No wonder they won’t listen to any of her suggestions. No, Christiana needs as her first qualification for the mission field, a respect for, an ease with, a liking for, a willingness to co-operate with, and a desire to learn from men if she is to succeed in a male-dominated society. Let her make a plethora of suggestions,

but let her not look for, nor want, the credit for them when they are effected. There is no place for a boast from Christiana.

In fact, Christiana might be pleasantly surprised to find that the men who become her authoritative leaders on the field assign to her things to do which the Christian men in her church or organization at home would not give her a chance to do. She can be asked (dare I say it?) to preach at some poor remote church where she happens at the time to be visiting, perhaps for a Sunday School teachers' course, and where the pastor is poorly trained. She is under authority of church leaders, let her enjoy the gifts of service offered her, provided they do not go counter to Scripture which forbids her to be a pastor, or in authority in the church. She can be asked to edit magazines, papers, articles, anything, with credit or without. If Christiana is married, of course she is under her husband's authority before that of the national church leaders. I know of instances where the lady missionary here is severely limited as to speaking or making reports in the churches of her home constituency. She finds that she has more freedom in the third-world than she has at home. So be it; that is her limit.

Specialties which Christiana may have will open special doors for her. Skills in music, in the other arts, in communications, in photography, in finance, in any other specialty, will give her an entrance which her more ordinary skills might not have won for her. And since such specialized skills are much more common at home in western lands, she will find many more doors open to her on the mission field than might be available to her at home. Yes, the current fashion of equal opportunities for women in any field within western culture should grant our Christiana lots of chances to do her thing, but we are talking, not of secular culture, but of opportunities in Christian work for Christiana. I think there are more open doors for her to enter for the Lord in a third-world country than in her western homeland. There are women's conferences, youth camps, children's meetings, Sunday School classes, training seminars for teachers, lecturing, . . . . And if I hear Christiana say, well, I can do most of those things in America too! Okay, but here's one you can't do in America: learn linguistics and translate the Bible for an unreached people! There are dozens of tribes who don't yet have a Bible in their mother tongue. A final attraction is that hearts seem to be more open in the third-world developing countries; this openness makes it so much easier and fruitful to witness for Christ.

There are all kinds of needs to minister to—more than in a rich western country where such needs are already catered for. There is medical work crying for help: nursing in secular hospitals, in Christian mission hospitals, pioneering in the bush, the jungle, in the cities, in the desert—remote or centralized, primitive peoples, or urban cosmopolitans. Be she a specialist or a general practitioner, she can probably rise faster here than there, simply because the competition with equally qualified personnel is less here. Such medical experts are usually welcomed by the national immigration services, provided there is proof of qualification. And it is so easy to witness and testify of the Lord! I never heard of anyone being fired or forbidden to testify to Christ in medical work here. Of course, she might be quite horrified to see and hear what passes for medical care and bedside manners here; Christiana will need much patience and perseverance if she is to succeed in medicine in Africa. She cannot be like the American military nurse who simply could not “take” the unsanitary conditions of an African bush mission hospital, but fled homeward.

Some missionaries come here to minister to a certain nationality in the cosmopolitan east African milieu: Asians, Somalis, other Muslims, mid-easterners; look for them, they are probably here! Some come to minister to refugees, that new international “tribe.”

With the rampant advance of AIDS in Africa, a multitude of new avenues has emerged for Christiana: medical care, yes, counseling of AIDS sufferers, care of orphans from AIDS families, and following upon that, ministries to the street children. Ah! The street children! Thousands upon thousands of them; for the whole continent of Africa alone, they number in the millions. Women have come here and started child rescue centers, orphanages, medical care centers, feeding centers. Well, not foreign women alone—many Africans have themselves taken upon themselves to initiate such endeavors. Some succeed, some don’t. The armies of these homeless children and youths will never be accommodated; the vast majority of them will mature to criminality and early death from drug abuse, ill health and crime. Many are the aid organizations in the country where foreign women work, in refugee camps, in relief aid, flying into the Sudan on missions, all manner of work with which I have little contact, but I know it is there.

Christiana with financial skills might be sent to keep records for such organizations, or to help train nationals in the work. Yes, there are accounting schools here to train nationals; but missions and aid organizations need training for their staff for later management in their particular methods.

Beyond these, I think there is no need to keep listing possibilities forever. Let Christiana know that the Lord has a work place for her and her gifts, if she is led abroad. If she finds herself in a developed work, let her see it as serving the Lord with nationals as colleagues. Let her realize from the beginning she is not working primarily for the nationals, but with them; it is a fraternal relationship she should aim for, rather than a paternal one. If she is in a pioneer setting, still, although she does work for a deprived people, still, that other preposition must not be forgotten: “*with*.” Let her work on in the spirit of the Psalmist:

“Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty, nor do I deal in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother, my soul is even as a weaned child.”

And Christiana may find that with all she does, she must in addition, learn to do without, as a weaned child learns. And for a woman in a man’s world, for all the opportunities given to her, still, there is much she will have to do without. Paul says to us Christianas, “I say, through the grace given unto me, to every (woman), not to think of (herself) more highly than (she) ought to think.” Let us take that care, and we and our colleagues will be at peace in the work of the Lord, whether here in Africa or a western culture.