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Editor's Note

Among disciplines that work with words, missiology ranks high since it forever faces the challenge of communicating the one truth in various languages, cultures, and worldviews. Commissioned by the Lord, Christians and Christian churches have over the years spanned the globe with the power of the Gospel that has transformed lives, raised hopes, reshaped communities, and redefined cultures. The word “missional” is no longer strangely frowned on by Christian thinkers. Glocal perspectives have gained acceptance among those who serve their own neighborhoods and communities locally while thinking how such activities make differences for the whole world.

This is the first issue for *Missio Apostolica* to have gone digital, enabling Lutheran missiology to reach the wider world with the Gospel, which was once and for all revealed for all in one specific geographical location in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we meet veteran missionaries, theologians, and practitioners who serve with rich experience locally and globally the one Word that transforms, renews, and reconstructs peoples and communities for the fullness of life in Christ here, and growing strong in the sure hope of the Life to come. Not just flipping pages, but also by using browsers.

V. R.

Editorial

Missional Communities

Victor Raj

Almost two decades ago, I heard from a Lutheran pulpit that the church exists for those who do not belong. The preacher was calling his congregation's attention to the numerous unoccupied pews of a historic sanctuary highly disproportionate to a handful of members sprinkled into a few seats. His intent was to encourage the congregation to see the big picture of God's mission for his people that they go to the main roads and invite all whom they found to God's kingdom of grace (Mt 22:9). He had a target audience in mind for his congregation to reach out to, particularly the de-churched, the un-churched and the yet-to-be-churched new immigrants who live in their immediate neighborhood. In our world today, mission begins in our own front door and backyard.

A fundamental organizing principle of the Christian faith is that individual Christians gather together as communities centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. It has been said that Christian congregations are communities of the Holy Spirit. Enlightened by the Gospel, Christian congregations serve as welcoming centers, inviting to its fold the estranged and the lost, as disillusioned sons and daughters in repentance return to a waiting father and as the lost and runaway sheep are drawn to the secure hands of a caring shepherd who loves them to the point of giving his life for them as ransom. Redeemed children of God are his instruments that reach out to the world as his witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, and enlightens.

Faithful to its definition, *Missio Apostolica* has been for almost two decades giving voice to some of such craving for the mission of God with a view to making that theme speak specifically to various situations. Our Lord's incarnation in Jesus Christ is his ultimate witness that he cares for his world and all that is therein, lost to him in the mire of human disobedience. As his children, God has afforded his church the privilege of proclaiming his salvation to the ends of the earth for the sake of finding the lost, gathering the scattered, and binding up the brokenhearted (Isa 61:1). As another editorial of this journal read, "Christian witness draws those from outside the faith into the Christian community,"¹ enabling them to experience a strong sense of belonging. Christian congregations by design are communities. The church is the body of Christ. The Lord of the church is the true vine and his followers the branches. Branches remain lifeless and unproductive except as they are connected with the vine. Christians need to be connected with their Lord and with one another in his name.

Veteran missionary and anthropologist Paul Hiebert laments that a mechanistic interpretation of the cosmos that modernity has brought to our world contributed also to a rugged individualism that resulted in the existential loneliness most people in the West face today (more than in the East). Sharply discriminating Descartes' popular line "I

think, therefore I am,” Hiebert insists that Christians must rather think “I belong, therefore I am.”² Christians are blessed to offer our broken world a strong sense of belonging as they present themselves as people gathered in fellowships and communities.

A consumerist culture of the marketplace has only furthered our lives as lonely, independent individuals. Outsourcing of jobs aside, home computers and workstations, while allowing private space and maximizing time in our hands, are limiting our opportunities to interact with others in real-life situations. Human resources count employees and their contributions in terms of clock hours. Living in such a fast-paced, independent world is another reason for humans to crave community that brings meaning and purpose amidst life’s various challenges.

In a mechanistic world, people network globally for business and communication, which in most instances, provide perhaps the least occasion for connecting a name with a face. The mission the Lord has entrusted the Church is for the sake of his people, body, mind, soul, and spirit. Christian mission therefore is incarnational, inviting people to a gathering of others like them around the life-giving Word and the celebration of the means of grace. Mission begins from the grassroots and grows in communities from the bottom up. Mission establishes the reign of heaven on earth, enabling the promises of God to transform the social, cultural, moral, and economic realities in which God’s people have their being. The promises of God speak directly to each individual’s conscience as he or she is drawn personally to the cross of Jesus Christ which connects each person to the larger community of the faithful.

It is obvious in the Holy Scripture that from the beginning the Creator never intended human beings to lead lonely lives totally detached from everyone else. People are by design meant to live in communities of families, neighborhoods, and nations. These avenues for people to belong bring their lives a sense of security, meaning, and purpose. In close-knit societies, communities serve indeed as checkpoints. Communities enable the practice of ethics and morality holding each member accountable to the other as their social consciousness. They provide opportunities for learning and growing together and becoming productive for self-growth as well as contributing to the benefit of all. Communities built on the foundation of Jesus Christ are avenues that put into effect how people of God live with the mind of Christ and the heart of Christ (Phil 4:7), a blessing with which each pastor sends his congregation out into the world every week.

If Christians thrive in the midst of persecution, it is because they stand together as a united witness to the faith they are privileged to embrace, a faith that has only increased in the face of adversity. The church’s history is our witness to this and the Lord’s promise that he will not leave his children as orphans (Jn 14:18) stands true today. As much as our Lord is there for us, he has placed us in this world among others as his witnesses.

Endnotes

¹ Robert Kolb, “Mission in Lutheran Education,” *Missio Apostolica* 17, no. 2 (Nov 2009): 76.

² Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 35.

Articles

When a Missionary Says Goodbye: Lessons from Miletus

Daniel L. Mattson

There is no doubt that it is the will of the Lord of the church that the church be involved in mission. Faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior inevitably leads to the willingness to share that good news with others. Jesus offers the example of the lost coin (Lk 15:8–10). From the very beginning, when the shepherds found the baby Jesus as the angels had said, “they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child” (Lk 2:17). In the same way, when the Samaritan woman recognized that she had met the Messiah, she immediately felt compelled to share what she knew with the people of the village, no matter what her status in that village might be (Jn 4:7–30). This is the reason for joy that missionaries in every age have experienced when they have worked in areas where the good news of Jesus was not previously known. The message of faith in Christ and the certainty of the forgiveness of sins for his sake make a difference in people’s lives, a difference that they are happy to talk about and share with others.

This is perhaps the most effective sharing of the good news that exists. Very few people are willing to give attention to, let alone act on advice that comes from strangers. Without the sound of the mighty rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the gift of speaking in multiple languages, there would have been no crowd on that first Pentecost. Even in that very special setting, the crowds asked the inevitable questions: Who are these men? How can it be that these fellows who do not appear to have any special background or training can address our problems, using our own languages? Then come the most important questions of all. “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:12), and “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

If the proclamation of the good news in a new area or to new people does not provoke these kinds of questions, it is a sure sign that people do not feel themselves to be in an environment where it is safe to ask questions, or the message is so incomprehensible that no one knows what to ask; in either case, no change will take place. It is inevitable that the good news of the forgiveness of sins for Jesus’s sake is so different from the ordinary experience of human beings that there must be questions.

St. Paul’s experience was not different. When he spoke to crowds of strangers, especially in cross-cultural contexts, their reaction was incomprehension at best and

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rejection at worst. So, when St. Paul performed a healing miracle at Lystra, the crowd was so provincial that they spoke Lycaonian when they became excited rather than the international language of the time, Koine Greek that they had been using in talking with Paul. The crowd had no questions because they assumed that they already understood, and an old legend of the region supplied the paradigm they needed. Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes; the old gods returned to earth (Acts 14:8–15). In the same way, the Athenian Areopagus had questions about who Paul was, but they had no questions about his message, for nearly all of them were convinced that it was nonsense (Acts 17:17–34). Finally, when Paul spoke to Felix and his wife, Drusilla—even though Drusilla was a Jew and Felix understood Jewish thinking—Paul’s reasoning “about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” alarmed Felix so much that he said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you” (Acts 24:25). Paul’s message was too new, called too many things into question for Felix to deal with. He had no questions. These are not unusual reactions when strangers talk to strangers about the good news of Jesus.

From this simple sharing by individuals, matters become more complicated when the church as an institution becomes involved. Churches grow when their members rejoice in the forgiveness and life they have found in Jesus. In the rapidly growing Lutheran churches in Africa, soon to be the largest Lutheran denominations in the world, the growth is largely due to the witness of the members who rejoice in the fact Jesus has found them. They know how it feels to be lost, and they know how it feels to be found, and they have good news to share.

When this is no longer the case, when the members of the church lose their recognition of how important the work of Jesus is and no longer feel the joy that the relationship with him brings into their lives, then the good news of Jesus comes to be considered an official version of events, a story that must be told with skill, not by every member of the community, but by a cadre of specialists within the group. In those kinds of settings, especially when the Christian community has not grown for some time, and when some have concluded that the community cannot grow or that the needs of the existing community outstrip the resources needed to address the outside community or what have you, the arguments can become heated and long about the responsibility of the church toward the believing community and toward the world. Does the church have any responsibility for those who are not already its members? Who specifically should speak to those outside? Who is accountable for making sure that the message is authentically Christian and not simply a collection of hopes and dreams for a better future? If the community is blessed with an ordained pastor, how does he help the people of God and how do the people of God help him to address the unbelieving community around them?

But it is not only negative issues that raise these questions. There have been countless situations in Christian history when people’s love for the Savior made them sensitive to the needs of the world he saved, and they struggled with questions of how the good news of Jesus could be communicated. If the message is to be shared with people who do not share your language and/or culture, how can this work be done?

When issues are raised as to who should share the good news or how it can be shared, it is important to keep in mind that Christians today are not the first to raise these questions, nor has there been only one answer, nor is it likely that the answer we formulate today will be the final answer. The Christian church has not done mission work in only one way throughout its history. There is only one message. “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11–12). The church, however, in obedience to the Lord and under his direction, has used countless strategies to announce the good news of the kingdom to those who do not have faith in Christ.

The word “missionary” is problematic. A missiologist, the late David Bosch, points out that “mission” is derived from the Latin word *missio* and is not a New Testament word. Even in Latin, the sending described by “mission” was first used to describe relationships within the Trinity, the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son.¹ The thinking that a “missionary” was a human being with an official commission from a legally recognized religious establishment was provoked by the discovery of the New World by the Catholic countries of Portugal and Spain. Already in 1455, Pope Nicholas V in the papal bull *Pontifex Maximus* had given the King Alfonso and his successors the right to exploit newly discovered territories as well as organize those territories in the service of the church. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI granted similar rights and obligations to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, explicitly acknowledging the importance of the work of Christopher Columbus.

That the word “missionary” is not a word that is defined by the Bible needs to be taken seriously. This is a term that was given this meaning to describe Roman Catholics who were officially authorized by the hierarchy of the church body (and later, exclusively by the pope) to spread the gospel in new areas that were in the process of being colonized. The result, as David Bosch puts it, is that,

The new word, ‘mission,’ is historically linked indissolubly with the colonial era and with the idea of magisterial commissioning. The term presupposes an established church in Europe which dispatched delegates to convert overseas peoples and was as such an attendant phenomenon of European expansion. The church was understood as a legal institution which had the right to entrust its ‘mission’ to secular powers and to corps of ‘specialists’—priests or religious. ‘Mission’ meant the activities by which the Western ecclesiastical system was extended into the rest of the world.²

In the same way in English, “missionary” in the sense that is commonly used in church circles today: “A person sent on or engaged in a religious mission abroad. Also: a person engaged in evangelical or humanitarian work at home. Freq. with distinguishing word, as foreign missionary”³ is first used in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to refer to Roman Catholic church workers (noting also the use of “missionaries” to oppose the Protestant faith), and it is not until late in the eighteenth century that John Wesley uses “missionary” in an unreservedly positive sense.

The point of this is that the meaning of “missionary” is set, of course, by those who use the term. On the one hand, however, there is probably no more reliable source for what the general public—including most church members—understands by the term than the Oxford English Dictionary. That source understands a missionary to be “a person sent . . .” with a further qualification of the mission. This is the definition that the person on the street first thinks of when he or she hears the word “missionary.” If a change in this commonly held definition is contemplated to restrict the term to a particular class of people, it is important that clear explanations for the change are offered since there will be disagreement (and it must be recognized by those who propose the change that a specialized, technical meaning will be recognized by no more than the limited number of specialists who have been brought into the discussion).

On the other hand, if an attempt is made to redefine the term so that only a church professional who has received an official appointment can be described as a missionary, it is incumbent upon those who make this change to make it clear that it is not their intention to buy into the whole imperialist agenda of the beginning of the colonial period. There are already many countries where a person who describes himself as a “missionary” on a visa application will not receive permission to enter that country because of concerns about “missionary” intentions.⁴ It is particularly saddening when returning missionaries making their reports to congregations occasionally encounter people who know little about modern missions—and they will readily acknowledge that—but yet voice the assumption that mission work is a part of the imperialist paradigm of destroying indigenous cultures and bringing them under Western domination.

There is no one way in which mission work has been conducted from the beginning because, from the beginning, those who have done mission work well have been aware of the importance of culture and have recognized that they are guests, not masters of the people they serve. They are there because God wants them to be there, involved in *diakonia*, humble service by word and deed that shares the good news of Jesus.

Paul served in Ephesus longer than he served anywhere else. In Acts 20:17–38, Paul reflects on his work among the Ephesians. From this brief text, we can see how Paul had worked among this group of people and how he used the experience of their life together, to prepare them for further work. Of course, it does not say everything that could be said about Paul’s work, but this short report can introduce us to the way that Paul, a mature missionary who had been called to cross-cultural mission from the beginning (Acts 13:2–3), thought about his work.

Paul began his work in Ephesus with three months of work centered in the Jewish synagogue (Acts 19:8). Beginning in the synagogue was St. Paul’s customary way of beginning work in a new place (Acts 17:2 and numerous examples in Acts). He recognized that Jews (and the Gentile God-fearers who joined them) had spiritual advantages that could be used in the communication of the Christian faith. “To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). They knew the faith of the Old Testament, and, especially, they knew the covenant promises of God and his

promise to send a Messiah. Their starting point was in a far different place than the typical follower of Greco-Roman religion.

No doubt, St. Paul had learned from hard experience that under normal circumstances he could not expect to work in one place for any substantial period of time. The machinations of his Jewish opponents as well the inherent opposition of those who followed Greco-Roman traditional religion meant that he would soon be moving on. He recognized that the thought world of traditional Greco-Roman religion was entirely different from the thought world of the Old Testament, and it would likely take a long time to straighten everything out. Paul could not do mission work this way. He could not begin at the beginning. He sought people who already knew the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, people who knew the covenant promises made to Israel, including the promise that God would send a Messiah to save his people.

This is an important difference between the way that St. Paul worked and the way missionaries have worked over the past two centuries. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially, mission work could be done in a different way. Since, for the most part, missionaries lived in a world controlled by Christian colonial powers, and because they had time, they could focus their work on people who had absolutely no prior knowledge of the biblical message. Substantial numbers of missionaries did exactly that, spending their entire lives working with one language group: learning the language of the people, creating a written language for a people group, translating the Scriptures into that language, and teaching people the whole counsel of God starting from the most basic beliefs.

Whether or not it will be possible to use this strategy in the increasingly dangerous world of the twenty-first century remains to be seen, and some would argue that it is no longer necessary because of the spectacular growth of the new, young churches around the world.

In the case of Ephesus, because Paul worked there for three years (Acts 19:31), the relationships had time to develop and were strong. Paul could ask his coworkers to travel the thirty miles or so to meet him in Miletus, explaining to them that he wanted to say goodbye but did not want his farewell to delay him in reaching his larger goal in Jerusalem, and they would strive to meet him there.

This speech is difficult to outline, and my observations below will not follow one verse after another. The material is not organized in the way a Westerner would deal with the topic. It does not follow the order of past, present, and future; nor is it about Paul, then about the Ephesians, and then about their life and work together; nor is there any other consistent system that could be imposed on the material. These individual pieces are mixed in the way that is common for human beings when they speak to dear friends and coworkers during emotionally charged times. Paul could have composed a formal message, but it probably would not have had the same impact as this little speech that intertwines Paul's work and experience with their work and experience and prepares them for the challenges ahead.

Paul makes four points that are all still characteristic of the church in its missionary task. Since this is a brief farewell address, huge issues are summarized, and it

is not possible in this article to take those issues apart and treat them in detail. The value of this speech is that the reader is introduced to what Paul thought was important about the way in which he worked with the Ephesians, both in what he did and in what he said, and the continuing results that he expected from that work. The issues then and now are complicated, and this speech of St. Paul invites Christians in the twenty-first century to think again about the ends and means of their own ways of doing mission work.

- Paul modeled the faithful, committed work that he hoped to see in the Ephesians.
- He told the same complete message to everyone in a free and open manner that invited others to become a part of the Christian community.
- He created a community that was able to carry out its life and work on the basis of local resources.
- Paul, guided by the Spirit, left them with a structure that enabled them to grow in their understanding of the faith and in their ability to resist the teachers of error.

Luke reports these emphases, not only because they were historically correct, but also because they encouraged the church then and now as it seeks to find ways to address the unbelieving world.

Paul modeled the faithful, committed work that he hoped to see in the Ephesians.

Paul's emphasis right from the beginning was that he put before them an example of humble and sacrificial service directed toward the needs of others, an example that he hoped they would continue to follow.

His first point was that he did not ask the elders to do anything that he was not willing to do himself (Acts 20:18–19). There was no invocation of apostolic authority, no authoritative pronouncements about what people should or should not believe, do or not do. Instead, Paul had paid his dues, had lived among the people, sharing the same challenges of daily living and serving with all humility. His was a story, not of victory after victory, but a story of tears and trials occasioned by his enemies, very likely the continuing experience of the Ephesian elders.

In Acts 20:31, Paul states that he was continually involved in advising and admonishing⁵ the members of the congregation, regularly with tears. Paul did not invoke authority. He had no way of compelling church members to do what they did not choose to do. The power that he had was the power of persuasion, and all that Paul could offer his coworkers was more of the same.

For Paul, all of this was a part of “ministry.” On the one hand, he was following a “course” set by the Lord Jesus. Running the course in this way was not something that Paul had chosen any more than a runner in a race can choose his own course. Jesus had given him his course immediately after his conversion (Acts 9:15–17). But for him, it did not really matter, since following the course the Lord had laid out for him was all that gave meaning and purpose to life (Acts 20:24).

At the same time, there was also comfort in running this course, for the course had been planned and put in place by someone, and it would come to an end. For Paul,

life was not just one surprising thing after another, but he was living according to a plan that God had laid out for him, and he hoped that, God willing, he would successfully complete his course.

He could not take this entirely for granted, however, because the Spirit was warning him at every turn that hard days were ahead. Paul did not know exactly what would happen to him, but he knew what he had to do, and he made it clear to the elders that he was not running away from the battle nor did he expect that he was departing to receive some reward. He intended to continue the battle that he and the Ephesian elders had experienced together.

Yet another aspect of humble service involved Paul's conception of his ministry. In other contexts, St. Paul was certainly prepared to defend his apostolic authority when challenged (1 Cor 9:1ff, etc.), but in his own thinking, he thought of his ministry as an expression of humble service. The ESV (following BDAG) translates *diakonia*, the word that St. Paul uses in Acts 20:24, with the English word "ministry." *Diakonia* is, of course, the root term that is used to describe the work of Stephen and the other men appointed of Acts 6.⁶ Paul's use of the term here to describe all of his missionary work among Jews and Gentiles⁷ shows the primary emphasis of this term on humble service in behalf of others and illustrates the high importance that Paul (and his Ephesian coworkers) placed on humility as they served others.

Paul says in effect, "As you can see from my life and especially my life with you, there is no alternative to entrusting your life to the guidance of God and His Spirit. Disgrace and suffering and even death may be involved, but it is my confidence and prayer that God will bring you, my coworkers, and me to a blessed end."

In summary, Paul uses his own life and the example of his relationship with the Ephesians to illustrate the need for selfless service on the part of all those who lead the flock of God.

Paul told the same complete message to everyone in a free and open manner that invited others to become a part of the Christian community.

Luke wanted the reader to understand that St. Paul's life and work among the Ephesians was totally consistent, an authentic communication of the whole Christian message. He did not hold back secret knowledge about God and his dealings with the world, but he announced and taught all that the Ephesians needed to know (Acts 20:26–27).⁸ In the strongest terms, Paul affirms the importance of telling the whole Christian faith. He affirms that the parts of the story cannot be omitted or changed in order to accommodate a particular group of hearers. To fail to tell the whole story is to introduce the possibility of eternal death.

Throughout the message that follows, he does not get into details of the good news of Jesus, but he uses catch phrases to refer to large blocks of Christian teaching. These shorthand, summary phrases may offer an insight into St. Paul's teaching among the Ephesians. Probably, every one of his listeners would have been able to remember what St. Paul had said on a specific occasion about each one of the topics and would have

been able to explain what a concept like “repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” meant.

St. Paul speaks about the content of his message in terms of law and gospel, “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). In verse 24, he asserts that he testified “to the gospel of the grace of God.” He proclaimed “the kingdom” (Act 20:25). For St. Paul, all of these phrases together were a part of “declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Act 20:27).

As one would expect, this summary of his message implies a message strongly oriented toward the good news of God’s forgiveness rather than the communication of a new set of Christian rules for living. Religions outside of the Christian faith expect that religious teaching is largely instruction about the rules that must be followed in order to please the deity or deities. Paul’s message of “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” offered a dramatic alternative to the traditional religion and offered a freedom from spiritual uncertainty and fear that appealed to the Ephesians and led them to the Christian community.

Paul uses strong, uncompromising language to describe his action in communicating this faith. When he speaks of “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21) and “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), he emphasizes the importance of this content by using a very strong verb for “testifying” that can mean “testifying under oath.”⁹ In the same way, when St. Paul speaks about his relationship to the Ephesians and avers that he has not said or done anything that would cause any of the Ephesians to be lost, he uses a Greek verb, translated “testify” in the ESV, that comes out of the same verbal family.¹⁰ Paul wanted no doubt in his hearers’ minds about the truth of his message.

When St. Paul writes about “the kingdom” in verse 25, he uses the Greek verb that is commonly translated “preach” in English. In its historical usage, this Greek verb is used in contexts when a king or governor’s official announcement is made by his herald. Paul carried out this function when he announced the kingdom. In this work, he was also continuing the work of Jesus, whose mission had focused on announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God (Lk 8:1 and many other examples) and continuing the work that Jesus had once assigned to his disciples (Lk 9:2).

Otherwise, Paul uses “declare”¹¹ as the verb to describe his communication with the community in verses 20 and 27; and in verse 20, his action of declaring is combined with “teaching.” In fact, Greek verbs from the family that is based on the verb meaning “announce” are very frequently used in Acts.¹² This is in contrast to the Greek verb for “preach,” which is used only eight times in Acts. In Acts, the first person to “preach” was Philip, the deacon, who proclaimed Christ in Samaria during the scattering after Stephen’s death. The two references involving Paul are Acts 20:25, referred to above, and Acts 28:31, the last verse in Acts, where Paul is reported to be at work in Rome for two years, “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31). When Paul speaks about the kingdom, he acts as a herald. In other circumstances, the preferred verb is some form of “announce.” Why?

The content of the message is certainly the same whether the message is “proclaimed” or “preached.” The word is the word,¹³ but the attitude that the messenger conveys, however, has substantial effect on the understanding of the hearer. No one asks and heralds do not answer questions. They make their proclamations. Paul could certainly speak as an apostolic messenger, but his usual method of communication was to convey the good news of Jesus in a way that invited questions and led to faith.

Missionary activity in the book of Acts does not rely heavily on “preaching.” That activity is too one-way in a cross-cultural setting. It too easily creates the situation where the preacher supplies the answers to questions his hearers are not asking and fails to deal with the issues that they regard as matters of life and death. The communication of the Christian faith in cross-cultural contexts requires free and open communication by people who are not in control of the setting and are not afraid to engage in dialogue.

Since this message was intended for both Jews and Gentiles, St. Paul communicated it both “in public and from house to house.” The Greek word translated “in public” has a sense connecting it with “public places,”¹⁴ and Paul probably has in mind the tactic he was reported to have used in Ephesus (Acts 19:9) where he met regularly in the hall of Tyrannus to “reason”¹⁵ with, not “preach” to, people daily. Paul was willing to mix it up with people in the public square.

Paul recognized that he lived in a world where in the “free marketplace of ideas” religious choice was an option. If he wanted to reach people, he needed to go beyond the boundaries where the church was in control. He had to meet people where they were, listen to their arguments and ideas—much as he might disagree with them—and make his own best case for faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of the world. He found that the Lord who had called him to this task (Acts 9:15) was faithful in enabling him to complete it, as have missionaries in every time and place.

But not everything could be done in public. There are issues of Christian teaching as well as the sacramental life of the church where the meaning is not readily understood without careful instruction, instruction that would take place out of the eye of the public in private.¹⁶ In Paul’s world, there were no Christian church buildings, and the basic unit of the church in urban areas was the Christian household, the extended family centered in one house. Paul’s words here imply that there were several such households in Ephesus, very likely each with its own needs and challenges and never-ending questions.

Paul created a community that would be able to carry out its life and work on the basis of local resources.

It is important to remember that Jesus did not leave his disciples with a model constitution or congregation-planting model. If he had done that, the church would have been so tied to one way of doing things in one time and place that it would have had great difficulties making the transition to the Gentile world, let alone globalized world of the twenty-first century. What he promised is that wherever two or three were gathered together in his name, he would be among them (Mt 18:20), that the Father would send the Spirit to teach them all things (Jn 14:26) and that he would send the Spirit from the

Father, the Spirit who would bear witness to Jesus and lead them to do the same (Jn 15:26–27).

The invisible church, composed of all of those who have faith in Christ, immediately wants to be visible. It is a body (Rom 12:4ff; 1 Cor 12:12ff; Eph 1:22–23; 4:4ff; etc.). Bodies need to be nourished, and they are by Word and Sacrament. And they live in a particular time and space. They speak a certain language or languages. They have certain preferences and certain dislikes. If they sing, they deem certain styles of music to be appropriate or inappropriate in particular situations. They live within certain social-cultural contexts that they generally regard as the right way (if not the only proper way) to live. Certain styles of speaking are preferred. They have their own ideas about what leaders can be expected to do and not do. Over time, those social-cultural contexts change because the people in those contexts change. They have new rights and responsibilities and new conditions to adjust to. They learn to do some things that have not been done before, and they forget how to do others.

The Christian church over the centuries has shown itself to be marvelously adaptable. It has lived through times of horrendous persecution at the hands of deified emperors and atheist dictators. It has sought to be faithful during times of freedom and prosperity as well. In each and every age, God guides and directs his people so that the work he has given them to do can be done.

In the context of Ephesus, Paul identifies the believers as “the church” in Acts 20:17 and as “the church of God” (Acts 20:28). This is the most commonly used term in the NT (used 112 times) for the communities of Christians that the individual was a part of locally and that were scattered throughout the world. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the background and implications of the use of this term.¹⁷

Paul’s use of the term in Acts 20:28 is particularly significant, for it not only identifies the (little) group of believers in Ephesus as belonging to God, but Paul pushes it a step farther with his additional stipulation that this group of people was “obtained with his own (Son’s)¹⁸ blood.” The church did not belong to the elders/pastors but to God, who had purchased it through the sacrificial death of his Son.

It is noteworthy also that St. Paul does not describe the members of the church as sheep. When Paul speaks of them in Acts 20:30, he calls them “disciples,” the same usage found in Acts 19:9.¹⁹ In Matthew 28:19, Jesus had commanded his 11 disciples to “make disciples,” and the book of Acts—written by Luke and not containing these words of Jesus—makes it clear, nonetheless, that these first-century missionaries used “disciple” to describe the followers of Jesus.²⁰

Not only did Paul emphasize that the congregations did not belong to the elders/pastors, but he made the additional point that the men who served the congregation as “overseers” had been placed in their positions by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was the one who had given them their positions. Paul clearly was not interested in self-promoting leadership for the church. He recognized and taught that the church needed leadership by men who recognized that they were in office because they had been placed there by God rather than the kind of leadership that actively sought office as an opportunity to exercise position and authority over others.

That the leaders of the church of God in Ephesus were called “elders” probably shows that the Ephesian church modeled its structure on the structure used by the synagogue (although there were bodies of elders in Greco-Roman society as well).²¹ The text makes clear that there were a number of such people in the church in Ephesus. How they were organized or what their responsibilities were is not stated. What is important is that the structure of the new work in Ephesus followed structures with which the Ephesians were already familiar from their use in the synagogue.

The usefulness of these structures of government should not be underestimated. They had been in use since the exile, and the synagogue had much to do with keeping the biblical faith alive in very difficult circumstances. A key element was the use of multiple elders as synagogue leaders. If the leaders of a community of God’s people made their living by the labor of their own hands (Acts 20:34), and especially when the leadership was drawn from the laboring classes or others whose lives were controlled by people who may not have been members of the Christian community, the leadership needed to be in the hands of more than one person. Leadership could not be in the hands of a single individual who could be compelled to be absent for work or other activities at times when the community planned to gather for worship or for any other important activity. At the same time, when questions arise, the right answer is more likely to be found when it is discussed by a body of elders rather than addressed by an individual. The Ephesians took over and used this model of pastoral service that met the needs of their community.

What is seen here is that in Paul’s day, the church of God lived within the structures provided by its social context. Very likely the people were poor, since coveting apparel could be an issue (Acts 20:33); nevertheless, the Spirit had led them to a form of organization that enabled them to get their work done. It is significant that when St. Paul had dealt with all of the issues with people who knew and loved him (as seen from Acts 20:37), suddenly the last topic to be covered begins with, “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel” (Acts 20:33).

Two issues are involved. In the first place, St. Paul takes very seriously anything that might cast doubt on his personal integrity. He has already said in this text, “I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26–27). He did not give one group of people an advantage over another group of people by telling them different stories. The integrity of the missionary in what he says is critically important.

And in matters of money, he was also above reproach. He obtained absolutely no financial benefit, and he did not want any financial benefit. No one could say that he had misused mission money because he earned the money he used with his own labor (Acts 20:33–34).

But another issue probably is also involved. Paul goes on to say, “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:17). Paul’s example showed that the church of God in Ephesus need not be paralyzed by its poverty. Paul’s example had shown that the work could be supported by a person’s own work, and that it could provide enough for himself, for his

coworkers, and for the weak among them. For Paul, this model requiring physical labor (i.e., making a living with work recognized as such in the culture), so that he might supply the needs of others, was not just a good idea, but was based on a principle enunciated by Jesus (Acts 20:35 ESV).²²

It is a critically important lesson that each and every community of believers learns that what it does makes a difference. Mission work that is constructed on a foundation other than local people and financial resources is not likely to have lasting value.

Paul, guided by the Spirit, left the new churches with a structure that enabled them to grow in their understanding of the faith and in their ability to resist the teachers of error.

Two leadership terms appear to be used in Paul's address: elder and overseer, and the activity they are asked to perform is "to shepherd the church of God." To modern minds that have become accustomed to describing their congregations as "flocks" and their spiritual leaders as "shepherds" (pastors), it is somewhat surprising that only the title "overseer" is used, and all of the elders appear to be given this office.

Again, Jesus did not leave his people a model constitution for a congregation, and so there were no titles that could simply be imposed. Again, these are huge topics that have been debated for centuries. All we can hope to do here is provide a plausible explanation of what St. Paul means in this particular speech.

St. Paul was an urban missionary, and it is surprising to find shepherd/flock imagery playing such a central role in St. Paul's description of the relationship between leaders and the communities they led. The relationships could have been described in terms of community political structures (where the title "overseer" would have been more expected) or other structures that the Ephesians knew and used.

Sheep, shepherds, and flocks were never very far from urban areas in the Eastern Mediterranean. The average Ephesian probably knew far more about sheep and shepherds than the average Detroit, where the spiritual leaders of Lutheran congregations are still referred to as shepherds (pastors). Since it is not common to call a community of believers a flock in the New Testament,²³ St. Paul's usage here probably reflects an early development in the organization of the Christian community in Ephesus. The people of God had already been described as the "flock of the Lord" in the Old Testament (Jer 13:17 and Zec 10:3), and in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the same Greek noun was used,²⁴ and so it would not be surprising that the Ephesians used the same term.

In addition, in the first century the flock often did not belong to the shepherd. Rather, the shepherd was someone who had been hired to take care of the flock. Given Paul's insistence that the "church of God" belongs to God, who acquired it with the blood of his Son may be the very point that he is making here. The "overseer" is not to rule over the flock as though he were the owner, but rather to shepherd the flock, which is quite a different function.

Paul expected that this group of overseers would face two challenges. “Fierce wolves” would come in among the overseers with the result that they would destroy the flock (Act 20:29). In addition, men who were already a part of the elders would “arise, men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Act 20:30). That St. Paul was right is clearly demonstrated in the Pastoral Epistles, addressed to Timothy and Titus serving in Ephesus.²⁵

Already in Matthew 7:15, Jesus had warned his disciples to “beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves,” and Paul’s use of the metaphor here shows the continuing power of this image. Paul’s usage is a little different, however, in that the “fierce wolves” he speaks about will enter the community from outside (“they will come in among you”), while in Jesus’ words they arise from within the community (note especially Mt 7:16).

Some danger will come from people outside, but Paul also warns against dangers inside. Men will arise from within the elders who will speak “twisted things” to draw people away as their own disciples. The Greek verb involved has the meaning “to cause to depart from an accepted standard of oral or spiritual values, make crooked, pervert.”²⁶ All of this suggests that these kinds of opponents started from the truth and twisted it in some way to make it more palatable and increase their own following. In the modern world, one might think of the purveyors of the health/wealth gospel. Starting from the basic insight that God’s will is good and gracious, the preachers of this message twist it into a message of guaranteed health and wealth for those who follow their teaching, a serious distortion of the biblical message.

Fierce opponents from the outside and faithless overseers on the inside—clearly, dangerous and challenging times were ahead for the Ephesian elders. What did Paul see as the solution?

He advised them to be concerned,²⁷ first for themselves and then for the flock. The verb, “pay careful attention,” and the reflexive pronoun, “yourselves,” are in the plural in Greek, and so Paul is speaking to the whole body of elders and not to each elder as an individual. This is significant because, I think, St. Paul is trying to highlight the bonds that held the elders together in order to make them accountable to each other. If one elder tried to correct another, the corrected elder could never say, “It’s none of your business. The Spirit has placed me as the overseer of my church. I’ll take care of my congregation any way I want.” Paul recognized that overseers needed each other, were more likely to take good care of the flock, and were less likely to stray from the truth when they saw themselves as accountable to each other.

Secondly, Paul warned them to “be alert” and follow his example. St. Paul uses a verb which had as its first meaning “stay awake” and then the meaning “be alert.”²⁸ If these men were, indeed, following Paul’s example, they were perhaps working all day—perhaps even in arduous manual labor—and then taking care of the needs of the church of God. For men who very likely often felt bone tired, there would have been plenty of temptation to let things go and not deal with complicated issues and thankless tasks. But for three years, St. Paul had shown them how this kind of situation should be addressed.

Finally, St. Paul commends the elders to God and “the word of his grace.” Paul had no way in which he could anticipate what issues might arise, but he knew where answers could be found. In the Word “which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Act 20:32), the Ephesian elders would find the resources they needed to faithfully shepherd the flock.

And then the final moment arrived. Paul had said all he could. He had laid a strong foundation, a foundation of “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” He had spoken clearly and invitingly. Communities of believers, the church of God was in existence, and faithful overseers, ultimately placed in office by the Holy Spirit, were present to guide and guard the church. No one could tell what the future would bring, but Paul knelt down and prayed with them all, commending them into the hands of God.

In the final verse of this account (Acts 20:37), the Ephesian elders wept and embraced Paul because they were sorry to see him go, and he had told them that he would most likely never see them again. But there is not a word in the account that anyone asked him to stay. Paul had done his missionary work well. He had never given them the impression that they were an outpost of the church in Antioch that had deigned to send them an official missionary to be in control. No, he had taught them that they were the church of God in Ephesus, united by faith in Christ with the church in Antioch and with every other Christian community in their world. We would like to believe that they recognized that St. Paul had laid the foundation and now it was time for them to build (1 Cor 3:11ff).

Endnotes

¹ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, [2nd print]. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 228.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Oxford English Dictionary: 20 Volume Set and CD-ROM* ([S.l.]: Oxford University Press, 2009), s. v. missionary, n. and adj.

⁴ And in the Internet age, countries that fear outside interference are able to quickly reach conclusions about the hidden agendas of those who want to enter their borders.

⁵ BDAG: “1. to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, admonish, warn, instruct.” Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s. v. νοουθετέω.

⁶ In this chapter also, the same kind of emphasis on humble service to others is present. In Acts 6:2, the twelve say, “οὐκ ἄρεστόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς καταλείψαντας τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ **διακονεῖν** τραπέζαις, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God **to serve** tables.” In Acts 6:4, the twelve charge the full number of disciples to choose men to help with the distribution of food so, ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ **διακονίᾳ** τοῦ λόγου προσκαρτερήσομεν, but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the **ministry(/service)** of the word. One kind of service (taking care of the food distribution to poor Gentile women) was replaced by a different kind of service to the community: praying and preaching/teaching the Word of God. The term in itself does not specify the kind of service that is offered but identifies it as humble service rendered in behalf of others. Cf. BDAG: “1. service rendered in an intermediary capacity, mediation, assignment 2. performance of a service” *ibid.*, s.v. διακονία.

⁷ Louw-Nida suggests a basic meaning: “to render assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature— ‘to serve, to render service, to help, service, help.’” J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), s.v. διακονία.

⁸ BDAG: “2.b.a τὰ συμφέροντα what advances your best interests or what is good for you.” Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. συμφέρο.

⁹ BDAG: 1. “to make a solemn declaration about the truth of someth. testify of, bear witness to (orig. under oath).” *ibid.*, s.v. διαμαρτύρομαι.

¹⁰ BDAG: “1. to affirm someth. with solemnity, testify, bear witness.” *ibid.*, s.v. μαρτύρομαι.

¹¹ BDAG: “2. gener. to provide information, disclose, announce, proclaim, teach.” *ibid.*, s.v. ἀναγγέλλω.

¹² The verbal root has the meaning to announce to someone *ibid.*, s.v. ἀγγέλλω. In this passage, Paul chooses to use ἀναγγέλλω, defined in the previous footnote. This verb is used four additional times in Acts and 15 times in the New Testament. A frequently used form is εὐαγγελίζω, meaning “1. gener. bring good news, announce good news” and “2. mostly specif. proclaim the divine message of salvation, proclaim the gospel.” *ibid.*, s.v. εὐαγγελίζω. This form is used 53 times in the NT, 15 of those in the book of Acts. The form ἀπαγγέλλω with its meanings “1. to give an account of someth., report (back), announce, tell” and “2. to make someth. known publicly, proclaim” is also heavily used: 46 times in the New Testament including 16 times in Acts. *ibid.*, s.v. ἀπαγγέλλω.

¹³ This is essentially the point of Gerhard Friedrich in his article on “εὐαγγελίζομαι” in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), “It is not a word of man, but the living, eternal Word of God. The Holy Spirit, who was sought for the day of salvation, attests himself now in the time of fulfillment when the glad tidings are proclaimed (1 Pt 1:12). Hence εὐαγγελίζεσθαι is to offer salvation. It is the powerful proclamation of the good news, the impartation of σωτηρία.” Gerhard Friedrich, “εὐαγγελίζομαι,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* II (1964): 707–21.

¹⁴ BDAG “2. Pert[aining] to being able to be known by the general public, in the open, public, δημοσίᾳ as adv. Publicly.” Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. δημόσιος.

¹⁵ BDAG “1. to engage in speech interchange, converse, discuss, argue.” *ibid.*, s.v. διαλέγομαι.

¹⁶ BDAG “1.a.a κατ’ οἴκου (opp. δημοσίᾳ) from house to house i.e. in private.” *ibid.*, s.v. οἶκος.

¹⁷ BDAG offers a substantial starting point for examining the meaning of ἐκκλησία: “1. a regularly summoned legislative body, assembly 3. people with shared belief, community, congregation b. of Christians in a specific place or area (the term ἐ. apparently became popular among Christians in Greek-speaking areas for chiefly two reasons: to affirm continuity with Israel through use of a term found in Gk. translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to allay any suspicion, esp. in political circles, that Christians were a disorderly group). β. congregation or church as the totality of Christians living and meeting in a particular locality or larger geographical area, but not necessarily limited to one meeting place.” *ibid.*, s.v. ἐκκλησία.

¹⁸ BDAG: “That the ‘blood’ would be associated with Jesus would be quite apparent to Luke’s publics.” *ibid.*, s.v. ἴδιος.

¹⁹ BDAG: “2.a.γ. Even after Jesus’ resurrection those who followed him were called μ...Ac[ts] uses μ. almost exclusively to denote the members of the new community of believers so that it almost=Christian (sic).” *ibid.*, s.v. μαθητής.

²⁰ Acts 11:26, shows that the transition from “disciple” to “Christian” was a part of the transition from the Jewish to the Gentile world.

²¹ BDAG: “1.2.b. among the Christians (for their use of the word as a title one must bear in mind not only the Jewish custom, but also its use as a t[technical] t[erm] among the ἔθνη [=Gentiles], in connection w. associations of the ‘old ones.’” Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. πρεσβύτερος.

²² A quotation otherwise unknown in the New Testament (Jn 21:25).

²³ Only in 1 Peter 5:2–3, where the usage is very similar to usage here, and Luke 12:32, where Jesus speaks to his disciples and probably identifies them as a “little flock.”

²⁴ BDAG: “1. an assemblage of a specific kind of animal, flock, esp. of sheep. 2. a defined group of persons under a leader, flock.” Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ποίμνιον.

²⁵ 2 Timothy 2:17 offers a prime example of the kind of “twisted” message intended to draw Christians out of the church into a sect.

²⁶ BDAG suggests the translation for this phrase: “λάλεϊν διεστραμμένα teach perversions (of the truth)” Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. διαστρέφω.

²⁷ BDAG: “1. to be in a state of alert, be concerned about, care for, take care.” *ibid.*, s.v. προσέχω.

²⁸ BDAG: “1. to stay awake, be watchful. 2. to be in constant readiness be on the alert (cp. our ‘keep one’s eyes open’)” *ibid.*, s.v. γρηγορέω.

Luther's Theology as a Foundation for Twenty-First Century Missiology

Robert Kolb

Although Lutherans from Philip Nicolai to Georg Friedrich Vicedom have contributed significantly to the missional thinking of the church, there has been something of a reticence in the recent year among Lutheran missiologists to bring Martin Luther's insights to the challenges of translating the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the idiom of contemporary cultures. Ecumenical Christendom needs the voice of Lutheran insights into the task of proclaiming the message of Christ in this time. This essay is designed to outline some of the possible avenues which Lutheran missiologists should be exploring in the application of our heritage to the tasks at hand.

Luther stood at a point in church history at which he was called to translate the biblical message anew into a different cultural situation than its long-time Mediterranean idiom.¹ That task had vital importance for him because he was convinced that the proclamation of that message brings individuals to trust in Christ. Luther's experiments in translating his understanding of the biblical message into the central, northern, European setting of his day provide some raw material for constructing elements of a twenty-first century missiology.

The Person of our God. In the last half century, North American Christians have experienced the deterioration of an understanding of what is Absolute and Ultimate in reality as a person, a person who creates. The proclamation of the Gospel must begin with our witness to the personhood of God as Creator. Luther's understanding of reality is intensely personal. Those who grow up in Christian cultures presume that the Ultimate and Absolute reality is a person, but increasingly today, people around us think in terms of the Ultimate and Absolute in other forms: multiple semi-personal centers and sources of power and order for their lives, or a single, ultimate spirit that radiates through what we experience and perceive, penetrating our beings when we do not resist, or perhaps even when we do. Others assign as much power as there is to human agencies, often supra-personal, such as race or party or class, but often to themselves or to another individual.²

From Scripture, Luther knew that God is a person, a person who takes on personal form as he speaks, who through his speaking creates community, that is, relationships between himself and his creatures and relationships among his creatures. Luther defined reality in terms of what God says. Luther had learned that well from his Ockhamistic instructors, who emphasized that God holds total power to order and to preserve that order. Luther placed that power in God's mouth. He created the worlds by speaking. Lecturing on Genesis 1, Luther stated,

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The words “Let there be light” are the words of God . . . this means that they are realities. For God calls into existence the things which do not exist. He does not speak grammatical words. He speaks true and substantial realities. Accordingly, that which among us has the sound of a word is a reality with God.³

When the Creator said, “Let there be . . . ,” things happened. His Word fashioned the reality of all we experience.⁴ In 1535, Luther drew the implications of this mode of God’s operation for the restoration of sinners to their full humanity, centered on faith in him. Paul had referred to God’s creative commands in 2 Corinthians 4:6, where, Luther continued, the apostle was reflecting the biblical conviction that God is by nature a Creator and that he creates through the Word when he converts the wicked—“something which is also brought about by the Word—as a new work of creation.”⁵

By his very nature, as Luther saw it revealed in Christ’s suffering and death in behalf of sinners, God speaks, creates, and then cares for and is deeply concerned about his human creatures. This God of conversation and community has come personally as the Word made flesh to care for those who had missed the mark in fulfilling their humanity.

Many people do not want a person as God. They want to be able to manipulate abstractions or forces, or they have had such bad experiences with persons that they cannot imagine reliable help coming from a person. Luther shows us ways to transmit our experience with our personal God as we embody and speak his Word and his love.

For, Luther tells us, we as God’s people are the agents—the tongues and lips—through which he carries on the conversation with other human beings. He told the entire Wittenberg congregation:

Everything then should be directed in such a way that you recognize what God has done for you and you, thereafter, make it your highest priority to proclaim this publicly and call everyone to the light to which you are called. Where you see people that do not know this, you should instruct them and also teach them how you learned, that is, how a person through the good work and might of God is saved and comes from darkness into light.⁶

God comes to others through us, who are means by which his powerful Word reaches those around us, Luther was convinced.

What It Means to Be Human. Luther’s anthropology defined what it means to be human in a distinctive way, in two dimensions; and these insights are most helpful in any culture that strives to determine human worth and value on the basis of individual performance. The reformer’s intensely personal view of God meant that he defined humanity, as Jesus did, in terms of two relationships: with God, who claims our central, life-orienting fear, love, and trust—above all God’s creatures—and with the neighbor, for whom we are willing to sacrifice and give, on the model God gives us in his incarnation, in order to actualize his love in the lives of those around us (Mt 22:37–40). In his proclamation, Luther set out to bestow “passive righteousness,” the God-given identity as his children, which is the way God views us first of all. Luther also wanted to promote

“active righteousness,” the performance of God’s expectations that demonstrates and renders concrete our identity as God’s children, both in our praise and testimony of him and in our acts of love toward his creatures, human and all the rest. This distinction assists us in making clear why moral performance does not determine the person our Creator makes us to be, out of pure and unconditional love. It helps us free people from the prisons created by their viewing themselves only in terms of their success at some kind of performance. Through such a witness of a life of hearkening unto the Lord’s words about how to enjoy life to the fullest, the Holy Spirit uses us to lead others to trust him and follow him in demonstrating his care and concern to others. That means providing for their needs on the simplest and most personal level, and it means seeking justice and peace for others, respecting or restoring their integrity and dignity, because that is God’s expectation for truly human living.

Witnessing Eschatologically. On this basis, we focus our witness on the relationship between God and the human creatures to whom he calls us to witness within the eschatological context that permeated Luther’s thought. That relationship is one that lasts forever, and so it also has something to say about life everlasting. The denial of death that twists our culture, as Ernest Becker pointed out a generation ago, has not abolished death: The unpleasant thoughts we try to suppress take their vengeance when death finally bares its teeth in our own faces.⁷ However, on most days, for all of us, heaven can wait.

For Luther, eschatology was not simply a concept about the end of earthly existence as we know it. He felt the presence of God in the midst of the everyday, and he recognized the full breadth of the biblical concept of “shalom,” the order and peace which God bestows through his Word as it intervenes in broken lives and broken communities. Therefore, the first urgency that demands our witness to Christ is the urgency of bringing the peace and joy, the taste of God’s shalom, to people in the midst of the toil, tribulation, and terrors of everyday life.

Witnessing with Law and Gospel. Luther’s distinction of law and gospel concretizes Jesus’ observation that he came to call sinners, not the righteous, since those who are ill, not those who are strong, need the physician (Mt 9:12–13). Luther realized early on, as he planned instruction for Christian living, that people who do not recognize that they are ill do not normally seek a cure.⁸ The distinction of law and gospel structures this diagnosis of dilemma and conveying of cure. It enables us to analyze and prepare for our witness more effectively. It is a logical observation that insists that law in Luther’s technical sense of the word must precede gospel. This ordering of our witness is not always psychologically or theologically appropriate, however, and presentation of God’s Word to those outside the faith is somewhat more complicated than that simple dictum, but the general rule is good to remember. At best, when we give information about Jesus to people whose false gods are still functioning fairly effectively, we cannot expect to do more than add him to their pantheon.

Regarding evil, Luther first counsels that the heart of the problem lies with the human failure to place God at the center of our thinking and living: we do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. That helps focus Christian witness precisely, on

acquainting those outside the faith with their Creator and Redeemer. Luther defined humanity around the focal point created by the human creature's trust in someone or something as the absolute and ultimate source of all good and the safe place of refuge in every distress (LC, Cr, 2–3). These objects of trust function as substitutes for God; they are false gods. By this definition, all people have more than one god—over time, to be sure, and most often simultaneously. All sinners have more than one substitute for their Creator since no single creature can serve as a sufficient substitute for God. We are all polytheists.

Nonetheless, in the Smalcald Articles (III.i.3), Luther points out that the doubt of God and the denial of his lordship that separates his rebellious creatures from their Creator is not something people can sense or recognize apart from “revelation in the Scriptures,” that is, apart from listening to God himself. Sinners can perceive the existence of evil, even within themselves, but they cannot comprehend its origin in their failure to fear, love, and trust the true God apart from knowing him at least a bit. Therefore, our witness to those who do not know God must begin by speaking of him and his regard for them but cannot presume that they have a full perception of their dilemma and therefore of the way out of their predicament. Because living apart from Christ is a life copied from the deceiver, the father of lies (Jn 8:44), we cannot even presume that they are able to be fully honest with themselves about the misshapeness of their lives and their own involvement in misshaping it.

The second insight that Luther offers for assessing why others might wish to come to Christ is that their predicament—what is wrong with human life apart from him—has a wide variety of symptoms. One popular, but false, impression of Luther's diagnosis of the human condition echoes Melancthon's observation in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “the law always accuses.” Luther was indeed guilt-ridden as a young monk, but he described his quandary in a host of ways. His view of what the law does to those outside the faith is better summarized in the Smalcald Articles (III.3.1–2), where he described it as a “thunderbolt” which destroys open sinners and false saints, as a hammer that breaks the rock of human security in pieces (citing Jer 23:29). The law cracks and smashes; it terrorizes and casts into despair. Luther often enough points out that the victims of evil, as well as its perpetrators, have good reason to be on the search for a new source of identity, security, and meaning, and that is what opens people to our witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus.

That means that conversations about whatever is plaguing and oppressing our non-Christian acquaintances can help us find an opening to talk about what Jesus means to us and thereby introduce him to them. We do not have to wait for some perception of guilt or shame to creep up on them. Such feelings are seldom at the surface of human thinking, and certainly not in contemporary North American society. Guilt feelings condemn and threaten, and so it is natural for sinners to reposition responsibility for what goes wrong onto someone or something else's account.

Fears of illness and death, job loss and financial crisis, all shake the security systems, the false gods, of people's lives. So do tottering and collapsing relationships in the family, on the job, in the neighborhood. So does loss of dignity, worth, and

meaningful activities for life. Any of these kinds of distress and defeat can set people on the search for new sources of identity, security, and meaning. When they become present in the lives of the people around us, if we have built a relationship of trust with them, we become natural conversation partners and will have opportunities to introduce them to Jesus Christ as their true Lord and Savior.

Trust as the Core of our Humanity. We might paraphrase Luther's "source of all good and refuge in time of distress" by speaking of God and his substitutes as the source(s) of our identity, security, and meaning or worth. For contemporary North Americans, Erik Erikson has made the concept of our sense of who we are the equivalent of Luther's concept of righteousness: being the right person, the person that we are supposed to be. He has centered this identity on our ability to trust.⁹ The need for some sense of safety or security in daily life is clear: the physiological and psychological implications of its absence are devastating, death-dealing. A sense of dignity or worth or meaningfulness in life is critical for "keeping going;" and as the historical beings God created us to be, "shalom" is to be found in moving along the paths on which he has set us. Straying from those paths may be disastrous, deadly.

Trust empowers the movement of God's children on his paths. "Trust" and "believe" are not words that can stand alone. They take on meaning only when linked to an object, and they are words that necessarily describe a relationship when that object is a person. God is a God of conversation and community, and so the goal of his sending Christ into the world to save sinners is the restoration of the conversation he designed us to have in communion with him. Heidelberg systematician Wilfried Härle, examining Luther's disputation on justification of 1535, argues that the reformer's doctrine of justification by faith reflected the Old Testament concept of what both God and human creature are, or are supposed to be: centered in "communal faithfulness" [חֶסֶד, *Gemeinschaftstreue*].¹⁰ Therefore, bringing the gospel to those outside that community, who are living without that faithfulness to their Creator, involves the restoration of that communal faithfulness.

God Restores the Righteousness of our Humanity. Luther believed that God accomplished the fabrication of all reality through his Word in Genesis 1. He believed as well that God re-creates through his Word of gospel as it comes in oral, written, and sacramental forms. He understood justification—often labeled his favorite way of describing God's gracious action in Christ—as the doing to death of sinners through baptismal burial in Christ's tomb and their resurrection on the basis of, and empowered through, his resurrection, which leads believers to walk in his footsteps (Rom 6:3–11; Col 2:11–15).¹¹ This motif of justification by re-creation is, of course, only one of many ways Luther used to describe what Christ has done for us. When he used this motif, he was generally declaring the facts regarding the reality which God accomplishes through his word of forgiveness that fashions new creatures by fashioning new trust. When he focused on those who were preoccupied with the signs of their own sinfulness, he proclaimed away their guilt or shame by speaking of God's imputation, picking up a relatively seldom used word in order to emphasize that God reckons or regards those who

are battling the evil within themselves as his people, righteous in their identity because he judges them to be.

No legal fiction, God's judgment creates reality. Luther could speak of Christ's reconciliation to those who felt they had wandered far from their God. He could depict the gentleness and tenderness of parental love to those who felt fearful and alone, unlovable and unloved. His imagination moved out from biblical descriptions and metaphors of what God has done in Christ Jesus to similar expressions gleaned from his own situation in late medieval Germany. He models for us an agility of articulation of God's promise of new life in Christ.

The Power of God's Word. The Lutheran understanding of the means of grace that bear this promise sees them not merely as sources of information that direct our faith toward heaven. He understood them to be tools or instruments of the Holy Spirit by which God re-creates us by refashioning the trust that gives direction to our lives. Luther believed firmly that the gospel gives "the resources and aids" (Rat und Hulf) to combat sin and live the life of trust in God through various forms of his Word (SA III.v). Luther emphasized that God is rich in his grace and therefore gives his life-restoring Word to us in so many different forms, as the peasant told the priest when the priest thought absolution should be enough gospel and the peasant need not worry about going to the Lord's Supper—in Luther's *Short Order of Confession* (1529).¹² But he did not attempt to explain precisely how the Holy Spirit exercises the power to re-create sinners into trusting children of God through the various forms of the Word. On the one hand, this gospel power rests in God's commitment, his promise and pledge, that he will be faithful, even when we are not—since that is his very nature: "he cannot deny himself" (2 Tm 2:13). To have someone tell us that he or she will be with us through thick and thin, no matter what, is always encouraging, though sometimes not totally believable. To have God tell us that does evoke a reaction, sometimes of doubt, but sometimes of wonder, awe, gratitude, and the confidence and dependence that define trust.

Life comes by believing, Luther came to see, and he did not define believing as mere acknowledgement of a set of facts. Believing and trusting form the heart and basis of truly human living for Luther. And so, his preaching and teaching aimed at making people wise in truly human living—the saved life, the life made possible by Christ's removal of our sinfulness—which, he was convinced, would cause them to mature in the practice of the activities he had designed them to carry out in his world.

Though he laid out no evangelistic theory, Luther's view of human interaction reminds us that we deliver God's Word as whole people, not just with our "religious" thoughts and actions. Trust in God may be very difficult psychologically for those who find few if any human beings to trust. Therefore, when we come with God's Word, we may have to wait patiently for sufficient trust to be built in our conversation partner to enable a hearing of our witness.

These are certainly not the only insights which Luther offers to those thinking about the evangelistic task of believers in the twenty-first century. But these short

thoughts may serve to provoke our thinking as we answer the Holy Spirit's call to give witness to God's love in Christ and the re-creative power of his Word.

Endnotes

¹ James A. Nestingen, "Luther's Cultural Translation of the Catechism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001): 440–452.

² Robert Kolb, "Confessing the Creator to Those Who Do Not Believe There Is One. Part One: Varieties of Belief in a Supermarket of Religions," *Missio Apostolica* 10, no. 1 (2002): 24–36.

³ *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993 [henceforth WA]), 42:17, 15–18, *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis/Philadelphia: Concordia/Fortress, 1958–1986 [henceforth LW]), 1:21.

⁴ "Lecture on Psalm 2," 1532, LW 12:32–33; WA 40, 2:230, 20–231, 28.

⁵ "Genesis Lectures," 1535–1545, LW 1:16–17; WA 42:13, 31–14, 22.

⁶ WA 12:318, 25–318, 6, as translated in Volker Stolle, *Church Comes from All Nations* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 20.

⁷ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

⁸ WA 7:204, 13–27. Cf. Luther's *Prayerbook* (1522), WA 10, 2:376, 12–377, 14.

⁹ Erik Erikson, *Child and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: Norton, 1964), esp. 81–107, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), esp. 91–141, *Life History and the Historical Moment* (New York: Norton, 1975).

¹⁰ "Die Entfaltung der Rechtfertigungslehre Luthers in den Disputationen von 1535 bis 1537" *Lutherjahrbuch* 71 (2004): 211–228.

¹¹ Robert Kolb, "Resurrection and Justification. Luther's Use of Romans 4:25," *Lutherjahrbuch* 78 (2011).

¹² WA 31, 1:345, 9–12, LW 53:118.

These Post-Missionary Times

Victor Raj

I grew up in a mission¹ field. My basic ministerial formation took place in a non-Western culture. From elementary school through college, I was among the vast majority of classmates that spoke more than one language and were learning more. Mixing words and concepts of one language with those of another was one game we played, first for fun and entertainment, then for curious and clever rationalizing.

Religious pluralism has been for my family a lived reality. Our family property shared one of its borders with an acreage that housed the shrine of another religion. My father, a Lutheran school teacher, would have no one from his household cross that boundary, especially during the countless weekend-long festivities when temple priests chanting mantras processed through the streets accompanied by huge crowds that danced along and played drums, flutes, lutes, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets. The neighborhood was not unaware that our family was Christian; and our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his exclusive claims on our lives was all the more persuasive. They admired our Christian heritage and deemed it a privilege to have us the way we were, living as Christians in the community. For weekly worship, our family walked regularly to the Lutheran church ten blocks away. We and our neighbors shared values, mores, and customs that networked our lives together, except for the faith our family distinctively embraced: There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:6), and that God the Father has revealed himself uniquely in his Son Jesus Christ (Jn 17:21).

My grandfather was raised in what was already a century old Christian household. What made him a Lutheran was his first encounter in 1912 with what the world knows as Luther's catechism. His personal diaries show that a missionary had presented to him a copy of Dr. Martin Luther's catechism with "very important questions and answers, each supported by Bible verses." He was impressed by the fact that Luther advised the head of the household to teach the faith first to the family.

All my life I have never begun an essay with a personal story line such as this one. Nevertheless, I am doing so here for two major reasons. First, because I believe most missionaries who have served a long term in foreign lands and raised their families in another culture will have shared some of my experiences and met someone like my grandfather sometime in their missionary career. Secondly, and more significantly, the vast majority of Christians in the West today are immersed in a culture of pluralism and are constantly challenged to be a witness of the Gospel amidst the plethora of religions and spiritualities surrounding them. The neighborhood in which my family lives today, in the West, represents essentially the neighborhood of my childhood years in the East.

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Many of the methods today's churches in the West are employing with a view to reach a new generation with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and reduce the loss of congregational membership are but contextual adaptations of those that have been tested in non-Western mission fields.

Standard dictionaries define "mission" as an individual or a group of people that one country sends to another for establishing diplomatic relationships and conducting negotiations with each another. In Christian vernacular, however, "mission" has been associated with the various activities Christians and Christian churches do in the name of Christ to spread the faith among all people, especially in foreign lands, often among the poor by providing them opportunities for advancing in all aspects of life including health and wellness, education and employment, and making provisions for holistic living.

In a global context, Christian mission sadly has been sending mixed signals as popular culture has failed to distinguish politics from religion.² Historically, large-scale Christian missions and missionary agencies originated in the West and thrived in the non-Western world especially during the colonial days, insinuating to the uninformed mind that Christianity is merely an arm of Western colonialism. Christian mission has thus been implicated pejoratively as an enterprise that operates in foreign lands to serve interests other than spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians are struggling to disengage such allegation even if unsuccessfully, especially in the non-Western world.

There is in fact nothing foreign in Christian mission anywhere in the world. The Lord's commission to his church for making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that he commanded holds true today equally for the West and the East. All over the world the Christian church has existed as a community of "those who have responded to, and entered, the kingdom of God by repentance and faith in Christ, and who now seek to live as a transformed and transforming community of reconciliation and blessing in the world."³ The indictment that Christian mission serves the interests of the West in the rest of the world is destined steadily to lose credibility, especially because "today as many cross-cultural missionaries are sent from and supported by churches and mission agencies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the total sent from Europe and North America."⁴ Christian mission is the heart of God who desires all people everywhere to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2:4).

The God of the Bible is a missionary God. He calls by the Gospel people of all nations and races and gathers them in different places to worship him only and to undertake his mission. As in the New Testament, he continues to call some to plant churches and others to water with the assurance that God is the one who causes his church to grow (1 Cor 3:6). To be sure, in the modern era, missionaries from the West have planted in the rest of the world no insignificant number of churches. These plantings have taken root in native soils and, by indigenous means, multiplied and increased in number. They have raised up local leadership and established their own systems of governance and missionary service. These churches are inherently missional as they consider as of prime importance witnessing their faith in the only Savior and Lord Jesus Christ with their friends and neighbors. Individual Christians share the faith

with friends and family, and families of the faithful host small group Bible studies in the homes. The groups that cannot be contained in homes move to nearby storefronts, classrooms of neighboring schools, or to the local theaters for Sunday morning public worship.

Christian missionaries have been pioneers in developing scripts and constructing grammar and syntax for hundreds of unscripted languages of prehistoric origin. While teaching the faith to people of other cultures and languages, these missionaries were themselves learning languages, cultures, and religions they had not known before. Such factors contributed to the confession of the Christian faith in the vernacular, giving it expression in indigenous forms of literature, art, music, murals, and sculptures that conform to the native culture. From this perspective, the new generation of Christian believers walks the tight rope of balancing the complexities of the faith missionaries from the West imparted to them with the epistemological assumptions inherent in the native culture. William Dyrness has remarked that “culture is a metaphor that has come to stand for what humans have made of their particular corner of the earth.”⁵ If this is true, then the missionary who ventures the Gospel in a new culture and those who for the first time hear the Good News of Jesus Christ together build new bridges of learning and sharing, make new discoveries, learn new lessons, and struggle to unlearn previously held misconceptions.

Others think that “cultures are expressions of our attempts to come to terms with life” as they express the human need for identity, security, meaning, and the human fear of chaos.⁶ The Christian faith is life affirming and life sustaining. It speaks directly to the ultimate questions in life, including the promise of ridding the natural human fear of chaos, as it interprets life of the present and gives enduring promises for the future. When the Christian missionary’s culture intercepts those who are used to coming to terms with life in their own way, the journey is not always smooth sailing. Accidents happen. Collisions occur in intercultural communication that necessitate uninterrupted dialogue for reaching consensus. Local Christian theologies emerge as people confess Christ in the vernacular and express the faith indigenously. African theologian Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole maintains that “any intercultural communication is always transgressive, innovative, subject to bricolage, because the genuine differences can only be reconciled in dialogue, love, seduction, trade, diplomacy, ritual, ethnography and intercultural philosophy in an innovative way that is not compellingly imposed by any of the parties involved.”⁷

How does the Church witness the Christ especially in cultures that are unfamiliar to a Christian worldview? How do the promises of God penetrate the conscience of an estranged people, leading them to repentance and salvation? Contemporary missiologists have identified six types of Christ-centered communities that resulted from Gospel proclamation in cultures shaped initially by worldviews and religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. They speak of a “radical biblical contextualization” that gives rise to Christian congregations that follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in these communities.⁸

Researchers have observed that radical biblical contextualization produces these six types of Christ-centered communities, particularly in non-Western pluralistic cultures consequent on missionary efforts, especially since the Great Mission Century. The tests John Travis first conducted in Muslim communities has put these communities within a C1-to-C6 spectrum that he constructed,⁹ ranking their commitment to Christ from the least to the most. The C1-to-C5 groupings comprise people who remain legally and socially within their (non-Christian) religious systems, tightly holding on to their birth identity. Those in the C5 grouping confess Jesus Christ as their only Savior and Lord while maintaining the socio-cultural and religious structures they have inherited. C5 are called the “insider movements.” The C6 category are communities of “secret believers” or “churchless Christians” who perform among them Christian rites of passage without becoming members of publicly organized Christian congregations.¹⁰

Insider movements and churchless Christians have been on the increase, especially in the mission fields throughout the world. This development is no longer a secret to anyone. They have been warranting public attention for more than half a century. On their own, they congregate in homes and village halls for worship, Bible study, and prayer. They conduct seminars and invite Christian leaders to speak to them. Already in the 1970s, university-level explorations of these gatherings showed that in major metropolitan cities thousands of people and their families identify themselves as churchless Christians. While they acknowledge Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Savior, their Christian identity remains anonymous to the public since they are not registered members of the institutional church.¹¹ When the Word is sown, some “seeds” fall on rocky ground, others among thorns, and yet others on well-ploughed and cleaned good soil.

A similar research study on the followers of Christ outside the Church,¹² published in 2009, showed that the vast majority of churchless Christians are positively disposed to the institutional church. They would indeed join the church except for family pressures, economic insecurity, caste compulsions, and relentless ostracizing. Especially women, children, and students depend heavily on the extended families for survival. Staying connected with families and communities and quietly keeping the faith in Christ helps to penetrate strongholds that have resisted the redeeming love of Christ. These communities confess the triune God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier even though they do not join as members of local Christian congregations. They keep growing, and their faith renders powerless the persecution of the adversaries. Such happenings surpass traditional definitions of church and church polity.

Christians have been committed to proclaiming salvation in Jesus Christ, serving the needs of the community, and enabling people for transforming societies, wherever they were privileged to go as his missionaries. Christians have served as enablers and participants in the reorganizing and restructuring of the socio-economic and administrative systems of many nations where they first entered as Gospel proclaimers. Auxiliary services, such as institutions of higher learning, rehabilitating the underprivileged, and enabling the poor for more holistic living regardless of their religious affiliation have transformed these communities at all levels. Few countries and

peoples in today's world are totally strangers to Jesus Christ. If for centuries missionaries from faraway lands preached to them the Gospel of salvation, today they are hearing the same message from the mouths of Christians who were raised in their own neighborhood and share with them the same mother tongue. They are drawn to the love of Jesus through charitable and social services Christians render much of which is locally resourced.¹³ These practices continue to supplement Gospel proclamation in indigenous ways.

The apostle Paul would have every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:11). Paul was certain that confessing the faith was fundamentally a matter of the heart (Rom 10:9). As the deployed missionaries were leaving the mission fields, indigenous churches were preparing to become self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating entities. Eventually, a fourth characteristic, self-theologizing, was taking shape. Such a major step for these Christian communities meant that the local congregations of the faithful are no longer foreign, but strongly rooted in the local culture and confessing the faith fully in indigenous expressions.

Indigenous Christian theologians have desired for their communities to confess the faith in Christ in native terms, as much as possible disengaging Western moorings, including denominational identities of pioneer missionaries. They have been developing domestic expressions of the faith that best communicate the one truth to communities that have kept alive their spiritual, cultural, and linguistic inheritance and are striving for a new identity in Christ as faithful followers, while at the same time, being a living testimony of the one true faith before their friends and neighbors.

After almost two millennia of Christian mission, India continues to be the second largest mission field in the world. Modern India is home for less than fifty million Christians who are members of established churches. A majority of one billion Indians honor Jesus as one of the many gods,¹⁴ and several million Indians embrace Jesus as their *only* personal God. The Christian institutional church in India is growing in membership as more converts than ever are being baptized in the name of the triune God.¹⁵ Indian Christians organize their own mission societies and send their own missionaries and church planters within the nation as well as throughout the world, supporting them with locally generated resources.

Missiologists have identified the United States as the third largest mission field in the world of the twenty-first century. In terms of population, only India and China outnumber the United States. The United States today has in large measure an ample supply of the ingredients for a secular, yet religiously pluralistic and culturally diverse population that is increasingly becoming estranged from Christian values and biblical underpinnings. Twentieth-century America was already a melting pot, a smorgasbord and conglomeration of various lifestyles, competing philosophies and worldviews, succumbing to a plurality of religions and emerging new spiritualities. Western Christian theologians were proposing the secularization of Christianity in a culture that was gradually becoming interreligious and inclusive, while their Eastern counterparts were discovering the *secular meaning* of Christ that speaks directly to their own multicultural and multireligious contexts. Economists notice that despite the noticeable poverty, India is home of a strong middle class population that matches that of the United States.

Christian missionaries have a harvest waiting all over the world, as they interact with various religions and cultures that require a clear understanding of the scriptures of other religions.

In Jesuit scholar Francis Clooney's book, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*,¹⁶ he has exposed the challenge of reading scriptures across world religions. Clooney has called this engagement a "participatory reading" that requires of the student "the sympathy of an insider," particularly as he studies and reflects on the text of a religion that is not his own. Clooney is conscious of the limitations of this interreligious exercise, especially as it relates to the theological constructs of various religions, one of which he chose as the title of this volume. "The Truth, the Way, the Life" is a popular mantra in Hinduism with which every Hindu grows up, as it is also the substantive doctrinal statement of the Hindu religion. For the Hindu, this mantra evokes in everyone who utters it a total trust in God and inspires in him an attitude of total surrender to the Absolute.

Clooney is of the opinion that anyone can pray with this mantra, focusing on its universal meaning; but he cautions that "if we focus on the specific density of the mantra as a praise of Narayana¹⁷ as a specific divine person who is exclusive of other deities and incomparable with God as understood in the Jewish Christian traditions, then praying with the mantra becomes nearly impossible."¹⁸ Religions and spiritualities also derive meanings of words from the contexts in which they are used.

Understanding the doctrines of the world's religions is imperative for Christian missionaries. At the center of this thought is the idea that all beings by nature have a strong orientation for the divine and are, in their own way, dependent on a transcendent being. Religious people acknowledge that this transcendent being can somehow be known and is accessible in sacramental forms, that mediation between God and men is possible through a personal mediator, and that God invites everyone to surrender to him and promises liberation to those who trust entirely in him. Viewed this way, those who read the text of a religion with the mind of an insider will understand within them the human quest for interpreting life and finding meaning and purpose in that life. Religion is a way of life.

A Christian reader quickly notices that most of these thoughts resemble a Christian understanding of religion. Furthermore, except for a slight variance in the word order, the Hindu mantra that Clooney studied resembles a fundamental truth of the Christian doctrine: the very words of the Lord Jesus Christ as he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). Most practicing Hindus acknowledge Christ as a great *guru* who imparts superior wisdom and a Divine whose compassion flows out to the wider human community through the selfless love and service that he lavished on people, including his death on the cross. Jesus Christ for them is another spiritual power that gives voice to the sigh of the poor, frees the oppressed and delights in the words and deeds of those who reach out to the destitute and the abandoned in society. Jesus Christ for them is the way out of trouble and the way to peace. He stood up for the truth, and he spoke nothing but the truth. He became incarnate for his life on earth and gave his very life for others. Today's missionaries cannot remain uninformed of the religion and spirituality of others as we live as God's witnesses in a world of competing ideologies

and worldviews held by those who speak languages very similar to theirs and who engage in humane services just like them. A Christian witness must be competent to translate not just words from one language to another, but the actual Christian message into the vernacular of the listener.

Cross-cultural communicators are acquainted with the intricacies of conveying especially fundamental concepts from one domain to another. Even universal truths do not mean the same, nor are they conveyed the same way in different cultural contexts.¹⁹ Not only in theology and church matters, but in all disciplines, the struggle of relating the universal to the local or the particular persists. Life's meaning/meaninglessness and purpose/purposelessness emerge for people in the communities in which they live where the truths of life manifest in their fullness in socio-cultural and experiential realities. A full life for people, of necessity, calls for a variety of structures to meet their different "purposes and needs, small ones, large ones, exclusive and comprehensive ones. People find it the most difficult to keep two seemingly opposite notions of truth in their minds at the same time. This is a life long struggle, unending till death."²⁰ As proclaimers of the one eternal truth revealed in Jesus Christ, Christian missionaries address a culture that entertains multiple notions of truth at best, and opposite levels of truth at worst. Christians preach and teach and practice one message: the crucified Christ who saves sinners.

Efforts to comprehend the truth and its interpretation are perhaps as old as the human race. The Lord Jesus said that he was born for the very purpose of bearing witness to the truth (Jn 18:37). Yet, not everyone who met him in person, heard him speak, and saw him perform miraculous signs believed him as he really is. Scripture reports that there were among the eyewitnesses of the life and work of Jesus some who assumed he was either John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet brought back among the living. Jesus, however, pressed his disciples for an unequivocal confession of his identity as he asked them, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter spoke for those who knew Jesus as he really is, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Mt 16:13–20). The Christian missionary task shall remain till everyone says, "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3).

All kinds of people rallied around Jesus during his lifetime on earth. Peter and his cohorts were perhaps the closest to the Lord. They were with Jesus from the day he began to teach and to do things until the day he was taken up to heaven (Lk 1:2). Another group was following him closely, listening to his preaching and teaching and witnessing his miracles, many with a view to trick him and lay a trap for him (Lk 20:1–8). A vast multitude listened to Jesus' sermons, watched him perform miraculous deeds, and benefited from those deeds, but never embraced him for what he really is (Lk 17:17; 18:23; Jn 6:15). The pattern that some trust the Lord Jesus Christ for who he really is, while others doubt his person and work, forgetting all his benefits (Ps 103:2), is as commonplace today as it has ever been.

The book of Acts recounts a multitude of Jews' and Gentiles' heeding the apostolic proclamation and, in repentance and obedience to the faith, believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (6:7). Their number kept multiplying, while yet a wider group disregarded the apostolic witness (13:46). Whether in Jerusalem or in Ephesus, in

Philippi or in Rome, the apostolic preaching was thoroughly anchored in the call to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everywhere, multitudes from the neighboring towns and cities gathered to hear the apostles preach, bringing with them the sick and the demon possessed, anticipating the apostolic healing touch. Doubtless, these early mission efforts converted both Jews and Gentiles to the Christian faith. They also turned out many “hybrid pluralists” like the city clerk of Ephesus (19:35, 37) and faced the disdain and skepticism of critical thinkers such as those in Athens (17:32–34; cf. 19:9).

Christian mission is at yet another defining moment in these postmodern times. If the travel, science, and technology of modernism facilitated communicating the Gospel globally, postmodernism has accelerated the effective use of such auxiliary means in the service of the Gospel. Biblical truth is more precious than gold; and it is used to coming out clean through the baptism of fire even through the most adverse circumstances, including anti-intellectualism, irrational rationalizations, and the common pursuit of truth. Lutheran missiology has its voice in our world, lifting high the cross of Christ and proclaiming the salvation of the whole world through the One who was lifted up and now rules and reigns to eternity. Lutherans confess the one true faith for all people of all nations in ways that speak directly to the conscience of every human being.

“As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and accomplish the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10–11).

The Gospel call is a call to repentance. Repentance is a change of heart to turn one away from anything that separates him from the grace and glory of God, and to turn him to God for what he has promised in Christ for all: forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. Lutherans confess the faith as they teach its transforming power. For Lutherans in mission there is no substitute for sound catechesis, that is, no mixing of words just for the fun of it.

Endnotes

¹ There are no commonly agreed upon definitions of either “mission” or “missions.” Missiologists are aware that we will not arrive at a commonly agreed upon definition either of individual missionary or missional institutions. While some say “The Mission is Church,” other claim “The Church is Mission,” etc.

² There is hardly a company or organization that does not have a mission statement. Not only Christians, but all religions of our time have become missionary and are sending missionaries throughout the world.

³ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 43.

⁴ David J. Hesslegrave & Ed Stetzer (ed), *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (Nashville TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 12.

⁵ William A. Dyrness, *The Earth is God’s: A Theology of American Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 62.

⁶ Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 74.

⁷ Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, “Paul and Africa?,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011), doi:10.4102/hts.v67i1.888. My thanks to colleague Dr. James Voelz for sharing this paper with me.

⁸ For a comprehensive understanding of how worldviews shape people's lives, see Paul G Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2008).

⁹ J. Travis, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of 'Christ-centered Communities' ('C') found in Muslim Context," *EMQ* 34:4 (1998): 407-8 quoted in *Missionshift*, 120ff.

¹⁰ Not only are missiologists divided on this difficult and delicate issue, but also Christians who are native to traditionally non-Christian cultures, who are all the more enthusiastic about preserving for their church Western styles of worship, music and liturgy, and other practices in the West.

¹¹ Herbert Hofer, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2002).

¹² Dasan Jayaraj, *Followers of Christ: Outside the Church in Chennai, India: A Socio-Historical Study of a Non-Church Movement* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2009).

¹³ Studies show that in India, of the top ten service agencies that receive financial support from overseas, Christian service agencies rank the sixth.

¹⁴ Even the most conservative Hindu devotee addresses Jesus as God "*Yesu Devan*."

¹⁵ The Christian tradition in India has been traced back to the time of the Apostle Thomas. St. Thomas tradition is home for more than one fifth of India's Christian population. The tradition is so strong that until the seventeenth century their Bishops were sent to India from Syria. A popular saying among them is that "St. Thomas Christians are born, not made."

¹⁶ Francis Clooney, *The Truth, the Way and the Life: Christian Commentary on Non-Christian Sacred Texts*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 177.

¹⁷ A name to which 108 qualities are attributed.

¹⁸ Clooney, *The Truth, the Way and the Life*, 177.

¹⁹ One needs only to compare three different eyewitness reports of the same story, all published in English, though one in New York, another in Johannesburg and yet another in New Delhi. This writer acknowledges that English is not his mother tongue and he did not grow up in an environment where everyone spoke English. Yet today he teaches and writes primarily in English. One of the assignments I have for my students is to review a journal article that relates to the course. Recently, one student noted in the report that the article he read was "obviously not written by a native English speaker."

²⁰ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 123. Sedmak's comment that such issues are ongoing and "unending till death" is remarkable.

Your Church Is Not What You Think It Is: Four Decades of Mission in Foreign Lands

Henry Rowold

Four decades fill vocational aspirations for many, taking a person from novice to old hand, and from rookie to retired. Four decades also leave a person with a thick folder of history, filled with a variety of events, shifts, personalities, and experiences. With those come also vantage points for tracing the unlikely paths that span the four decades and link a distant then with a surprising now. The bulk of this writer's four decades (almost five) has been largely in the context of the China region, inclusive of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. The parameters of the Lord's governance, four decades and beyond, encircle the entire globe, not just one region. Since, however, the China region is both prominent and controversial in our day, and since that is the region this writer knows best, it will be the focus of these reflections. Wouldn't it be great, though, to have similar reflections by "four decade-ers" from other regions and cultures? What a spectacular expression that would be of our Lord's relentless outreach to all people and to all peoples, among whom China is but one chapter.

A. Beginnings of Lutheran Mission in China to the Cultural Revolution

Lutherans from a variety of nations and mission agencies were early participants in mission outreach to China, arriving only a few years into the opening of China through the Opium War (1842).¹ That diversity, including Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the USA, among others, served to spread Lutheran presence widely into far-flung regions of China. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), founded within five years of the Opium War, was, by comparison, a late-comer to China by some seventy years, because its early ministry focused on meeting and gathering immigrants from northern Europe. LCMS outreach to China began in 1913, with the arrival of Rev. Edward L. Arndt.²

Unfortunately, the first half of the twentieth century was a tortuous time in China's history. Just two years before Arndt arrived, the imperial system, which held China together for a millennium and more, had been overthrown, and China's next several decades were a succession of warlords crisscrossing China, and ravaging it in the process. Toward the end of those decades (late 1930s), the Japanese began encroaching, beginning the Sino-Japanese War, an early and devastating theater of World War II.

Hope for reprieve after the defeat of the Japanese Empire in 1945 was short-lived. The LCMS invested heavily in recouping and renewing mission in China, sending

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twenty some missionaries in the following few years. However, after a bitter and prolonged civil war, the Communist forces drove the Nationalist government into exile in Taiwan and, in 1949, established the People's Republic of China. Political and ideological clashes led quickly to the expulsion of Western missionaries, thus dashing the hopes of rebuilding mission outreach.

In retrospect, the LCMS mission effort had only four decades in which to work, 1913–1952. However, with warlords, famine, floods, uprisings, invasions, civil war, emerging communism, and occasional strife among LCMS missionaries, it had not even one decade of peace and stability.³ Though churches were planted and seminary and schools formed, the times were cruel, and both church and mission, together with much of the nation, seemed always on the run, with little chance to sink lasting roots. With the added context of the repressive days of the Cultural Revolution in China several decades later, former missionary Roy Suelflow not surprisingly concluded his 1971 doctoral dissertation on the LCMS mission on a despondent note:

The whole missionary enterprise conducted by the LCMS in China for about forty years, therefore, must be said to have ended in failure. . . .

The whole enterprise slipped from the consciousness of the home church as quietly as a corpse is lowered over the railing for burial at sea. It made no splash as it slipped into oblivion (334, 358).⁴

B. The Resurgence of the Christian Church in China following the Cultural Revolution

Things could hardly have looked bleaker in those days. One lesson that those four decades, reinforced by the subsequent four decades of this writer's experience, have taught, however, is that where we may run out of options, the Lord has already begun another miraculous work. For one thing, the Lord took that corps of twenty missionaries, eager to continue mission but unable to continue in China, and settled them in various countries of Asia to pioneer and shape the development of new churches: four missionaries in Hong Kong, five in Japan, three in the Philippines, six in Taiwan. Two missionaries served in the USA, one in Chinese ministry and the other in missionary formation.

For another thing, as accurately as Suelflow reflected in 1971 what anyone then knew about the Christian church in China generally and about the LCMS mission specifically, had he lived another decade beyond his death (1981), he would have seen seedlings sprouting from what was sown in the earlier LCMS mission. Later, as this writer set about tracking remnants of pre-PRC LCMS mission in China, he met several pastors, several widows of pastors, and several lay leaders who served as part of the LCMS-established church. He worshiped in one of the pre-PRC sanctuaries built by the LCMS (Shashi), visited a hospital and a nursing center established by the LCMS (Enshi), and walked around several times in the grounds of the LCMS seminary, including homes of those early missionary families (Hankow).⁵ Through several decades of disruption and dislocation, with suppression and persecution, the church planted by the LCMS, as fragile as it was and as fleeting as it appeared, not only survived the horrors of the Cultural

Revolution, but continued to shine the light of the Gospel into the darkest of dark places and to help spark the resurgence of the Christian church in China.

It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that China began to emerge from those chaotic, suffocating years. Gradually, Christians began to surface, requesting not only the opportunity to gather and to worship in safety, but also to have sanctuaries returned to them and to have leaders to guide them. From city to city, the word spread, and churches began to flourish, especially in the larger cities which had historic pre-PRC roots. Most amazing, however, is not only what happened in those large, mostly port cities, but what happened in rural, outback areas where there had never been a Christian church or seemingly even a Christian person. These were poor, barren areas where local farmers could barely eke out a living, which made those areas ideal places to send people the government felt were tainted by “anti-revolutionary” thoughts or education or lifestyles and in need of “re-education by hard labor.” Life was harsh, not just physically but also emotionally because people, large numbers of people, often didn’t know why they were there, or what was happening with their family, or what hope there was for the future. Resentment and despair were common . . . except for one group of people who served as beacons of peace and joy and even love for the motherland that was rejecting them. The faith of those Christians, bitterly repressed by the authorities, could not be stripped from them, and in fact, showed a resilience and integrity tested beyond doubt.

When the terrors of the Cultural Revolution were over and when Christians were appearing from places that had never before known a Christian church and there had never before been even a Christian, missionary or local, the government was caught by surprise. Its efforts to suppress and to eradicate the Christian church, seemingly successful, had led only to the emergence of Christians in large numbers all over China, from mega-cities to outback, from places with roots to places never heard of before. Four decades may seem a long, harsh time, especially on a day-to-day survival basis. In the hands of the Lord, however, four decades saw not only the slipping of the pre-PRC LCMS mission from life to death, but also the astounding resurgence from death to life, a remaking of the face and soul of the largest, oldest nation on earth.

C. Mission in Modern China—Education in the Lutheran Church-Hong Kong Synod

As mentioned above, some of the missionaries driven from their ministry in China settled in the (then) British colony of Hong Kong, ministering both to the local population of Hong Kong and to the numbers of refugees from the turmoil in China. One of the primary forms of both service and outreach was education, often using rooftops of rapidly built public housing for the burgeoning population. As life normalized, congregations were formed, which joined together to form the Lutheran Church-Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS) some four decades ago. Both the colonial British government and the post-1997 Chinese government of Hong Kong have entrusted the operation of much public education to service agencies such as Christian churches, including the LCHKS.⁶ As a result, the LCHKS operates—within the PRC though admittedly in a unique Hong Kong context—one international school, six secondary schools, six primary schools,

twelve kindergartens, plus four night schools and two special schools. In addition, the LCHKS has provided support for Concordia School for Special Education, a school for the deaf in neighboring Macau. Just weeks ago (September 2011), the LCHKS, together with a PRC partner, has opened a jointly operated school inside the PRC itself.

D. Mission in Modern China—International Schools

In addition to growing ministry among and by the people of Hong Kong, the LCMS began a complementary ministry among expatriates and English-speaking people in Hong Kong. As commerce began to normalize and grow, and as the international population began to grow, the LCMS responded to expatriates in Hong Kong looking for a Lutheran church and also for an English-language, American-system, Christian-based school. The bottom line is the establishment of Hong Kong International School (HKIS) in 1966, initiated by the Rev. Len Galster, pursued under the guidance of Dr. Mel Kieschnick and implemented by Mr. Robert Christian. In the succeeding four decades (and more), HKIS has grown to some 2,500 students and ranks as one of the finest P–12 schools anywhere, no matter how quality is measured.

As China was continuing to open to the outside world, especially in terms of commerce and industry, it understood the importance of providing the infrastructure to support family life in China for expatriate middle- and upper-management leadership of multinational corporations. One important piece of infrastructure is education—high quality, trustworthy, with focus on morality. With a proven and enviable track record, HKIS entered negotiations with several mega-cities in China, which led eventually to the establishment of Concordia International School Shanghai (CISS), a school that has grown from 22 students in 1998 to some 1,200 students today, with superior quality of education and superb clarity of Christian identity. In turn, as it happens, HKIS and CISS have together been instrumental in replicating themselves in the establishment of Concordia International School Hanoi, which just weeks ago (August 2011) began its first year of operation, with some 50 students.

Four decades? Where it may not be possible yet for the LCMS to establish congregations, it is possible for the LCMS to share one of the things it has always treasured and excelled at, namely Christian education.

E. Mission in Modern China Region—Concordia Middle School, Taiwan

Another shining light of LCMS mission outreach in the Chinese region, though not in the PRC, is Concordia Middle School (CMS) in Taiwan. Like the LCHKS schools in Hong Kong, CMS is a school integral to its national educational system, teaching in Chinese and subject to the Taiwan Ministry of Education, yet differs from an international school by using English and teaching an American-based international curriculum. Begun in the late 1960s—another four-decade gem!—with the vision of Dr. Mel Kieschnick and pioneered by Mr. Robert Zimmer, CMS is one of few Christian schools in Taiwan. After several initial years establishing its identity, CMS has emerged as one of the finest schools in Taiwan, known in part for its exemplary English-teaching ministry, developed by Mr. Merle Golnick, but known in part also for its clear

commitment to Christian ministry. Part of that Christian ministry is external, for instance, operating an educational program for isolated, displaced Chinese children in northern Myanmar; but another part of its ministry is internal, living and sharing the Gospel with the students and faculty of CMS—with no small help from a revolving corps of LCMS teacher volunteers from the USA. While the local church has had its struggles and difficulties, the witness of CMS to the Christian gospel has penetrated the roots of Taiwan society with clarity and vigor for upwards of four decades now.

F. Mission in Modern China—Christian Salvation Service

Dating back also some four decades is one of the strongest Christian human care agencies. Originally a spin-off from the Mustard Seed, a multifocus human care agency, pioneered by Mrs. Lillian Dickson, known affectionately as Typhoon Lil. At her death, the agency was split into various areas of expertise, and one wing came eventually to be known as Christian Salvation Service (CSS), an infant rescue ministry, providing home and medical assistance to abandoned babies, often with medical disabilities beyond the ability of birth parents to cover. Other infant-related issues also came to be part of the ministry of CSS: abortion, advocacy, home development, education, employment, adoption. The loving and holistic ministry of CSS has gained recognition from social, educational, and governmental bodies in Taiwan and has been granted unprecedented local support, financial and otherwise. (One of this writer's most touching memories is holding a very young baby, born with virtually no brain and consequently with only days to live. With tears for the tragedy, he washed her with the waters of baptism. "Come unto me, all") From Taiwan, CSS has also reached into the PRC to provide supplementary educational resources for children in remote villages.

G. Four Decades of Mission

Four decades is a major portion of an adult life, and a person doesn't get many more four decades. When this writer received the call to serve as an evangelistic missionary in Taiwan, he went with much anticipation mixed with uncertainty. From family and schools, he knew and loved the Lord, and in schools and seminary, he learned much about the Gospel, living it and sharing it. With his wife, Phyllis, he set off for places neither of them had been before. On arrival, enthusiasm turned quickly to the horrifying realization that we were virtually helpless. Without language, we couldn't speak, we couldn't make our way around, we didn't know how to go shopping, and we couldn't tell a street sign from a bus stop from an ad for soya sauce. With all our education and preparation back home, in Taiwan we were back to kindergarten, starting all over. Those four decades began, in other words, with a strange combination of superb preparation and total helplessness. All around us, however, major things were happening, and the Lord was moving history and guiding nations in ways beyond anyone's anticipation or comprehension. Part of his loving kindness was gradually folding people into his mighty deeds of grace, with intent that his Gospel and his church be planted into the fabric of the lives of people of every nation and place, foreign and national. The chance to witness the complete remaking of Chinese culture and society, the planting of

the Gospel in the educational systems of the China region, the rapid growth but also the maturing of the church in China, the interconnections and mutual witnessing between Christians of different political systems of the China region, and the opportunities for non-Chinese Christians to partner in this silent revolution have been jaw-dropping blessings.

What a four decades this has been, for foreigner and Chinese alike, but likely nothing compared to folks just at the front end of their four decades.

Endnotes

¹ Interestingly, what China and much of the world are accustomed to calling the Opium War is referred to by the main Western player, Great Britain, as the Anglo-Chinese War, “a struggle between the extreme East and the West, the East refusing to treat on terms of equality, diplomatically, or commercially with Western nations, and the West insisting on its right to be so treated.” In that view, opium was merely the catalyst, not the fundamental issue. Quoted from F.L. Hawks Pott in Harley Farnsworth MacNair, *Modern Chinese History: Selected Readings*, Volume 1, (Shanghai: Commercial Press, Ltd., 1923). No matter the name, the settlement of that war (1842) marked the opening of China to the presence of foreign commercial and military powers, as well as of the Christian church.

² There is some slippage in assigning a date to the beginning of LCMS mission in China. Rev. Arndt founded a society for mission outreach in China in 1912 and was commissioned by that society as its first missionary to China. He arrived in China in 1913, but the LCMS did not formally adopt the society and its mission until 1917.

³ The most bitter in-house controversy centered on the proper Chinese expression for the word “god,” a word used alternatively in a generic sense (god) and in a specific sense (God), whether in Hebrew, Greek, or English. The issue had split the Protestant churches some decades earlier, as well as the Roman Catholic Church centuries earlier. Eventually, it came to plague LCMS missionaries as well, leading to cessation of publication of catechetical, devotional, or evangelistic materials, and the canceling of some LCMS missionary conferences and of celebration of the Lord’s Supper at conferences that did meet.

⁴ Roy Suelflow, *The Mission Enterprise of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Mainland China 1913–1952* (Doctoral diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971), 343, 358.

⁵ Interestingly, those seminary grounds have housed a kindergarten in the PRC era, serving children of privileged families of Hankow. That privileged status allowed the grounds to escape the riotous destruction of many church facilities during the Cultural Revolution. Ironically, though the government has recognized that the Christian church in China is legal owner of that property, and the church receives nominal rent from the kindergarten, the church is not allowed access to it, and hopes for regaining full use of the facilities seem far distant.

⁶ Though this article is highlighting the educational ministry of the LCHKS, mention should be made also of the major human care ministry of the LCHKS. Like education, human care has been delegated to charitable agencies, and the LCHKS has nurtured that into a highly refined and respected ministry.

The Future of Lutheran Missiology

Robert Scudieri

“It will now be seen how it is impossible to separate works from faith, as impossible as it is to separate burning and shining from fire.” Martin Luther, WABII.98. 18ff.

It is important that the Lutheran Society for Missiology celebrates its twentieth year by devoting the fall issue of *Missio Apostolica* to the future of Lutheran missiology. The journal itself is living this “future” by publishing the first all-digital issue.

I have always understood the LSFM as “crossing the gap” between scholars and those involved in living out the mission of God daily, that is, bringing together the burning and the shining of the fire of the Gospel. Theologians and practitioners can learn from each other. Both have much to share; both have much to discover. This dialogue between theologians and practitioners via the LSFM has been going on now for twenty years. Just think how much the world has changed since 1991—cell phones were a novelty; flat screen TVs cost \$20,000; the Internet was just being born; houses held their value. I could go on.

Now we are being challenged to be prophets, see-ers into the future of Lutheran missiology. Who could have believed twenty years ago that there would be more Lutherans in Africa than in North America? Or that the day would come when the journal of the LSFM would be distributed digitally? For twenty years the primary way the dialogue between theologians and practitioners was carried on was via the paper page. Needless to say, even though the conversation in itself was an innovation it was limited in scope. We printed and distributed six hundred copies of the paper journal. Now, the dialogue will expand exponentially. The journal will still be accessed in forty seminaries around the world, but the audience will be dramatically larger. What other blessings does God have in store? Wikipedia (where were *you* twenty years ago?) tells us that one-third of the world, over two billion people, have Internet access.

The first thing we can say about the future is that the basis of our work will remain the same—we are grounded in the Scriptures and the Confessions. Our missiology reflects the Lutheran affirmations of faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone.

It should also be noted that the LSFM has had a particular missiological emphasis almost since the beginning of its history. Paul Heerboth suggested the name *Missio Apostolica* for our journal because it emphasized the apostolicity of mission work—bringing together the Latin “missio” and the Greek “apostolica,” both of which mean “sent.” My book *Apostolic Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Missionary* was

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published before the first journal, and Heerboth picked up on the theme of the book: that to be apostolic meant both continuing to confess the faith of the apostles and to “be sent” as were the apostles to communicate that faith. In other words, to say the church is “apostolic” is to say that the church itself is “missionary.” It only made sense, etymologically and biblically. The earliest Christian missionaries were called “apostles” (Acts 14:14) and were distinguished from “The Twelve” who had been directly authorized by Jesus to be his authoritative apostles. The office of the “apostle” in Jesus’ time was used to designate someone who had been commissioned to legally represent someone else (viz. Talmud, Beracoth 5).

The LSFM wanted to emphasize that the “apostolicity” of the church meant not just preserving the witness of the apostles, but also the authorized “sentness” of the church of Christ to bear their truth to the whole world. In other words, to confess in the Third Article of the Creed of Nicea that the church was “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” meant to confess a belief that the church was by its nature “missionary.”

Carl Braaten in his book, *The Apostolic Imperative*, says, “Apostolicity means doing the apostolic thing. There is simply no way for Christianity to remain Christian in the apostolic sense without establishing its identity through preaching; the gospel of the kingdom in the crucified and risen Messiah Jesus and spreading that witness wherever there are ears to hear.”¹

The second thing to say is that it is taking a risk to predict the future, as many have found out. “So we went to Atari and said, ‘Hey, we’ve got this amazing thing, even built with some of your parts, and what do you think about funding us? Or we’ll give it to you. We just want to do it. Pay our salary, we’ll come work for you.’ And they said, ‘No.’ So then we went to Hewlett-Packard, and they said, ‘Hey, we don’t need you. You haven’t got through college yet,’” said Apple Computer Inc. founder Steve Jobs on attempts to get Atari and HP interested in his and Steve Wozniak’s personal computer. We understand that the future is not going to be a simple continuum of the present. Some amazing, unforeseen advances are going to occur, God willing. While it is a bold move to try and predict what Lutheran missiology will be like in the future, we proceed with the knowledge that we live by our baptisms in the forgiveness of sins. So, what might we expect?

The first is easy—increasingly Lutheran missiology (the study of Christian mission from a Lutheran theological perspective) and mission work itself will make increasing use of digital technology. This technology is a gift from God—one that can be used in productive or misused in devilish ways. Christians should capture the technological advantage through their prayers and their imagination and find new ways to get out the good news of God’s love for the world. As has been said many times before, the Lutheran Reformation was immeasurably advanced by the innovation in printing brought to the world by Johannes Gutenberg. Used for a little over thirty years before Luther’s birth, it allowed him to “throw a lot more ink at the devil.”

But new technologies are not immediately accepted. I have heard tales of pastors who refused to use a microphone in the pulpit because “it would not be the Word of God.” Today we laugh at that—but what is it we today find crazy, ridiculous, and totally

unacceptable in studying and communicating the message of God's love shown most clearly in Jesus? How about planting churches in Second Life? No—not the heavenly realm.

Second Life is a virtual Internet world, and it is a frontier waiting to be evangelized. According to *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopedia,

Second Life is an online virtual world developed by Linden Lab. It was launched on June 23, 2003. A number of free client programs, or Viewers, enable Second Life users, called Residents, to interact with each other through avatars. Residents can explore the world (known as the grid), meet other residents, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, and create and trade virtual property and services with one another. Second Life is intended for people aged 16 and over, and as of 2011 has about one million active users.

If Second Life were a continent, we would have already sent missionaries to bring the love of Christ to the Residents.

Could we imagine that churches might be set up on this new “continent,” which now is inhabited mostly by young adults (the Mormon religion already has a large presence there)? Could our colleges and seminaries build scholarly communities of people in this Second Life world? In fact, some secular organizations already hold annual meetings, even college classes, in Second Life in “buildings” they have constructed there. It is cheaper than adding on more brick and mortar in the physical world. I know, I know—it's crazy. However, I would be surprised if one or more of our Concordias is not already in this foreign land.

Well then, let's go on to a second potential future for Lutheran Missiology. If I may be so bold—let me suggest there will be less and less distinction between foreign and domestic missions. In fact, this has been the case for some time. Dr. Ed Westcott had a vision for mission work that was two pronged: he called the two prongs the centrifugal and centripetal. In other words, the church would in a centrifugal way send out missionaries to places where the Gospel had not been heard; at the same time, God would be sending immigrants to the shores of the United States who never could have heard the Gospel in their home countries, for instance, Pakistan.

In the late twentieth century, Dr. August Mennicke came to my office at the International Center to ask what I thought of a letter he had received from an engineer in Saudi Arabia. The man, a Pakistani working for the Arab American Oil Company, wanted to know how he could come from Saudi Arabia to the United States to attend seminary—he wanted to become a missionary to Muslims. Of course, I told Dr. Mennicke to forget it—we did not know anyone in Saudi Arabia who could vouch for this person. Besides, he was not Lutheran—and at that time, a candidate for the public ministry had to have been a Lutheran for ten years before applying for entrance (sounds a bit quaint today). Dr. Mennicke, being a better see-er than I, ignored me. As a result, Mr. Farukh Khan and his brothers paid their own ways to move to Canada to work as lay missionaries among Muslims. Eventually, sixteen men were ordained by our seminary in Fort Wayne to become Lutheran missionaries among Muslims in the United States. The

preparation for ordination of these sixteen required the seminary to make innovations to its curriculum. But the Fort Wayne seminary was not alone.

Our St. Louis seminary had some years before begun a Hispanic Institute to prepare Spanish speaking men for mission work in the U.S. This became so popular that the program has crossed borders at times—bringing theological education to men in Mexico.

Out of these innovations, the Ethnic Institute of Theology was born—to prepare immigrants in the U.S. for the Ministry of the Word.

Out of EIIT came the Specific Ministry Pastors program (SMP), which allowed all residents of the U.S. to be formed as missionaries to the United States. These distance education programs challenged the idea that seminary education had to be done in a residential setting—something unthinkable twenty years ago. But these innovations have cleared a large path for the Word of Christ to enter the hearts of many who would not have heard the Word. But why rehearse the past, even if it is the recent past, in an article about the future? To suggest a next step in mission training.

The line between home and foreign missions has blurred. The heart of our international mission work is the formation of local people for the ordained ministry in specific local settings. The greatest gift we bring to other lands is the establishment of seminaries to prepare local workers, in their language, to work in their culture. This is a “God thing.” God sent his Son to earth, the Son who “did not count equality with God something to be held onto, but emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant” (Phil 2:6). Jesus is the original “missionary.” He comes to earth in our likeness, speaking a human language, dressing like one of the persons of that time—for what purpose? To be the love of God to a broken world.

When the great majority of people in the United States spoke English and were of northern European background, we could afford to bring these like cultured people together in one place for several years to prepare them to go anywhere in the United States—to use the one hymnal in order to conduct the one worship service. In the next two to three decades, we expect that northern Europeans will be only one of a number of cultural minorities, we should rethink how we prepare the public ministers of the Word.

Professor W.G. Polack in his book *Into All the World* tells the story of Missionary Johann Ludwig Krapp.² Missionary Krapp was the first Lutheran missionary prepared by a German mission society. He was sent out in 1842 under the auspices of the English Mission society to Mombasa, today’s Kenya. Lutherans pooled money to send Krapp and his wife and infant daughter by a sailing ship around the Horn of Africa. But soon after arriving all came down with “fever.” Krapp survived, but his wife and child did not. They were buried there together. The missionary wrote back to his mission society, “Tell the committee that in East Africa there is a lonely grave of the first members of the mission connected with your society. This is proof you have begun the conflict with evil in this part of the world—and the conquests of the church are won over the graves of many of its members. You may be sure the time has come when you are called to work for the conversion of Africa.” As was already noted, today there are more Christians in Africa than in North America. Who in 1847 could have seen this?

Being bold in the twenty-first century, I would suggest that seminaries see themselves less and less as physical places where most of their student body will gather. There is a much greater opportunity to bring theological resources to mission work in the United States, and elsewhere. In a way, we can return, should return, to the way most seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and even nineteenth-century pastors and missionaries were prepared for their work in the United States—through a local congregation with an ordained pastor as a mentor.

What if today local congregations would become seminaries and local pastors would become adjunct professors? Classes could be taught via Skype (or a Skype-like successor). Seminary libraries would be accessed online. Tests would be centralized for basic doctrine, history, languages—but the local context would determine the rest of the curriculum. The broader church would continue to provide recognition of the preparedness of a candidate for ordination. In the future, we might decide to sell both residential seminary properties and construct a high-tech seminary education center where there would be few residential students but thousands of distance education students preparing for Lutheran pastoral-missionary work. Call me a dreamer.

“I have traveled the length and breadth of this country and talked with the best people, and I can assure you that data processing is a fad that won’t last out the year,” said the editor in charge of business books for Prentice Hall, 1957.

A third direction for the future of Lutheran missiology would involve more competition and cooperation with other religions. New technologies have made it possible for people of other cultures to live in closer proximity. Advances in communication allow them to stay connected to their homes even as far away as the other side of the world. Rapidly fading is the time when a Muslim or Hindu might move to the United States from an Asian or African country and lose contact with family and friends “back home.” As these connections continue, it is more difficult for that person to leave behind the religion with which they came to the United States.

To bring someone from one of the other major religions of the world will be more difficult. We need to engage people of other faiths more than we have. When I was a parish pastor in East Brunswick, New Jersey, I became friends with the rabbi of the Reformed synagogue. At one point, the rabbi hosted students from the Reformed seminary in New York City—and the rabbi invited me to make a presentation to the students on the teachings of Christianity. Today, we should become friends not only with the rabbi, but with the leaders of the local mosque and Hindu temple. They should come to know the love of Christ through the lives of Christian pastors and congregations.

Julie Das is an evangelist to Muslim women in Southwest Florida. The best estimate is that there are more than two hundred Pakistani and Indian families in the Naples-Ft. Myers area, and only the families of Julie and her sister are Christian. Julie came to the U.S. as a Christian because her grandfather had converted from Islam. The way Julie tells it, her grandfather was the recipient of kindness from a British army officer. He invited grandfather Das to his home for meals, something unheard of for the social class of the Das family. The Christian British officer was seen as patient and kind, and confident in the eternal life that had been won for him by Jesus. It was the Holy

Spirit that eventually drew him and his family to Christ—but the Spirit of Christ had opened the door through an expression of the love and kindness of a Christian.

The church in the United States will recognize more than it does today that it no longer has the “home field advantage.” The church cannot wait for members of the other major religions to come knocking on its doors, but will engage with other religions in a way that will demonstrate the love of God. If we fail to do this, the Christian church, let alone the Lutheran church, will become one of the minorities of religious choice in America.

A fourth direction for the future of missions and the teaching of missions will be dealing with decreasing secularization. Yes, *decreasing* secularization. Most of you reading this article probably know that the fastest growing religious contingent in the United States has been the non-religious. The American Religious Identification Survey gave Non-Religious groups the largest gain in terms of absolute numbers—14,300,000 (8.4% of the population) to 29,400,000 (14.1% of the population) for the period 1990 to 2001 in the USA. In the 2010 census, the non-religious represented 16% of the U.S. population. So, how could I look at the future and write that this trend will change?

In November 2002, Grigori Perelman, a little known Russian mathematician, posted a solution to the Poincare conjecture on the Internet. Without going into great detail, this “conjecture” was about the shape of the universe. For over one hundred years, scientists were trying to prove this scientific idea using theoretical mathematics. As in 1492, when the shape of the earth was still debated, in the twentieth, and so far in the twenty-first century, the shape of the universe has been a hot topic in the scientific community. Is the universe flat or curved? Specifically the Poincare conjecture was that it was curved—more specifically, a dodecahedron, a twelve-sided curved shape—a soccer ball.

So what does this have to do with being non-religious?

The mathematics and the science behind the conjecture depend a lot on Einstein’s theory of relativity. Einstein’s theories challenged Newton. In effect, the physical universe was not as we had assumed: time was relative, space could be curved. Time does not go at the same rate everywhere. Later physical theorists said that if you go far enough out into space, since it is round, you will end up back where you started; there is no such thing as a straight line.

To delve into this new thinking meant theoretical mathematicians had to assume dimensions greater than the three dimensions everyone had believed were the only reality: height, width, and depth. (Einstein added a fourth: time.) To make sense of a “relative” universe, theoretical physicists had to assume five dimensions (or maybe seven, or even eleven). There is still no agreement on this. Furthermore, these dimensions were the stuff of different universes, which human beings cannot sense because we are limited to height, width, depth, and time. These conjectures are introducing into human experience new assumptions about reality.

In case I have lost any of you, let me suggest that the next time you watch a new movie on television or in the theater notice how in some pictures the protagonist is able to move from dimension to dimension, from one space to a different far away space, by just

walking through a door, or climbing through a hatch, or The reality of other universes is becoming a part of the American psyche, fueled not by theologians but by scientists, mathematicians, and movie directors. I can see that this will make space in our culture for more acceptance of religious concepts like heaven and hell, angels, demons (already a fixture in the popular culture), and miracles. These will again become acceptable to think about seriously in the twenty-first century in a way that could not be seriously contemplated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The way I see it, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were aberrations. Those centuries were a time when a full-blown belief in secularism took hold. Before this, the existence of other “dimensions,” unseen worlds, was taken for granted. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were anomalies. Before the rationalist mind-set of these centuries, human beings assumed there were other worlds which affected ours but which we could not see. All of that is changing in the present century; the belief in unseen worlds will become accepted again as a matter of course.

The challenge for Lutheran missiologists is to become more familiar with the thinking behind these ideas and to become brave in telling the story of a Creator who loves his creation so much that he entered time and space to be that love for the world.

Looking into the future is easy. Living into the future is the hard part. Commenting on John 3:7 (Jesus’ words, “Don’t be surprised when I tell you that all of you must be born again.”), Martin Luther wrote,

In order to become new, you must crawl into the gospel with your whole self. You must shed off the old skin, as a snake does. When its skin becomes old, a snake looks for a narrow hole in the rock. It crawls through it and sheds its skin, leaving it outside in front of the hole. Similarly you must go into the gospel and God’s Word. You must confidently believe its promise that God does not lie. So you shed off your old skin, leaving behind your old light, arrogance, will, love, desires, and what you say and do. You become a new and different person, who views everything differently than before.³

What rocks will Lutheran missiology have to crawl through? What skin will be required to be shed? The “skins” of culture, of lack of imagination, of being in love with the past, or of commitment to the way things are now, of material and property possession? It will be difficult to grow into the future while wearing those old skins.

Thankfully, our Savior climbed out of a hole in the ground, shedding his old body to take on the new one of eternal life. Partly he did it for Lutheran missiologists who try to see into the future. “People do not earn God’s approval or receive life and salvation because of anything they have done. Rather, the only reason they receive life and salvation is because of God’s kindness in Christ. There is no other way.”⁴

Thankfully, that way has been opened for us.

Endnotes

¹ Carl Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1985), 55.

² WG Polack, *Into All the World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1930), 90.

³ Martin Luther, *By Faith Alone*, March 17 (Iowa Falls: World Publishing, 1998).

⁴ *Ibid.*, April 19.

Some Thoughts about the Attractional, Sending, and Engaged Church

Paul Mueller

The world turns. Cultures transform. People change within those cultures. Worldviews broaden or shrink. Some values remain untouched, others adjust to fit the cultural winds. In short—change happens. And because it happens, both perceived good and bad results accompany those changes.

History is often read through the eyes of the present. Unfortunately, present historical values and cultures often color the interpretations of the past. It is important to make every effort to interpret events through the culture, values, and worldviews of those who lived in the times of the historical events being studied. Judging history based on present cultural values and norms alone may not harvest accurate interpretations. To illustrate, let me share some thoughts about the Attractional, Sending, and Engaged Church.

The Attractional Church—Intentional or Not?

As a young boy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I still remember Friday nights at church. My congregation was in a rural setting (nearest town of almost one hundred people was a mile away) as were most Lutheran congregations. Since my father was the principal of the Lutheran grade school, we lived next door to the school in the teacherage. Across the gravel road was the church and parsonage (and, of course, the cemetery). My back and side yard were corn or oats or alfalfa—depending upon what crop the farmer up the road decided to plant that year. The highlight twice a month was the drive to Green Bay thirty miles away, to shop at Shopko and eat at one of the first McDonalds.

Now, back to the church on Friday nights. At least once a month, if not more often, all the high school kids in the church would meet for Walther League. They would go on hayrides, play softball, have a Bible study, hang out, get together for whatever reason. I was never invited since I was still too young. But I surely looked forward to that age when I could join in. It was the center of activity. Everyone seemed to be there. The guys brought their cars. They would toss around a ball or football. The girls would all be in their skirts or pedal pushers. And whether or not they studied the Bible or prayed or worshiped did not seem to matter. The activity (perceived as religious or not) was centered on the church. That reality was not discussed, questioned, or pondered—it just was.

And this was not the just the case for the high school kids. Everyone came to the church for its activities. The church was seen as an integral part of the community. When

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church activities occurred, the church took the lead. However, when community events occurred, the church had its voice there as well. When something happened, the church (represented by the pastor or other “employed” leadership—often my dad) as part of the community responded.

No one seemed to shy away from being associated with the church. It was expected that you were associated with the church. If you weren’t, your personal voice was somehow weaker, less significant. And even if you were not part of the church, the voice and activity of the church organization in the community was welcomed or at least accepted; for it was expected that the church, as an organization, was a player in the community. Although the local impact of the church might have been less in a city, it was still palpable there also. Church was significant—for spiritual things, but also for physical things. The church mattered. Therefore, by its very nature, it was attractional. And as a result, very little needed to be done to make people aware of the local church. Its activity and visibility in the life of the community made it known—both for what it was, but also for what it taught.

As a result, people looking for a connection to the church didn’t have to look very far or do too much research. The church was obvious. On the other hand, the church did not need to involve itself in much “evangelism” work. They were already doing it—even if it was not called evangelism.

It must also be noted that the cultural worldview and value system in place during this season of history was quite different. For all the talk today about postmodernism, GenX, I-Gens, and a post-Christendom world, the church just described “lived” and worked within the Christendom world. Despite atheists and agnostics and even other world religions within the American context, Christianity was an accepted and highly valued worldview and posture. And the church was where Christianity resided and from out of which it lived and worked in the community. The church had a voice. And most people wanted to be a part of that organization.

This reality does not need to be rehearsed for anyone over the age of 50. Most of them lived this reality.

The Attractional Church Becomes Unattractive

However as history marched on, the church became less involved in the community and became more and more only a source for spiritual help. Lots of things changed, but one of them was that government agencies stepped up and began to provide necessary support and services. Other organizations and NGOs took on the mantle of addressing community needs. In fact, the church began to be an inhibiting factor for need-based ministry which required resources and funds. Access to those resources was limited if the organization requesting them was a church. The mix of church and state began to be closely watched and monitored. In fact, there was a clear distinction being defined between the church and state; they were headed down different roads.

Churches began to be less vocal about community issues and, subsequently, less involved in the social ministry issues in the community. They did not withdraw entirely, but their voice at the table was limited. They were the church, not the government or a

religiously unaffiliated NGO. Their role primarily became taking care of souls, not soles or hunger or housing or transportation. Yet, people still saw the significance of the church. It still had a voice, though primarily now only spiritual, in the community; for it shared a greater understanding of the things happening in the community—it brought God into the story. It gave people a theological perspective and scriptural understanding of why things happened the way they did. It described sin and its consequences—in the life of Christians and in the world. But it also shared God’s grace. People still recognized the preeminent position of God in the world and the meaning of life surrounded by his sovereign and gracious nature. And the way he was proclaimed still made sense.

But this beginning of the disconnect between the church and the community and its local issues led the church to become less relevant and significant in the community. Though the church continued to offer spiritual answers to spiritual questions, the church was seemingly not that interested in life outside the walls of the church. Let me note this clarification. I am not now describing the assessment of those who attended the church. I am describing how the unbeliever, the unrepentant sinner, the uncatechized understood the church and its message. Though faithful members still connected and recognized the invaluable service of the church, those who were unconnected or were beginning to disconnect had questions and doubts about the church’s message, voice, and its subsequent activity.

And people began to leave or drop out. The decadal statistics of the LCMS and its districts that show the trends are readily available. It was not necessarily the result of anger against the church, although those narratives do exist. People simply became apathetic toward the church and its rhetoric. Not only was the church turning in on itself (mostly serving those who frequented the church), it did not preach a relevant message as interpreted by the uncatechized community. Community issues were not addressed. The daily life and its activities were couched only in spiritual terms on Sunday mornings. Hard, palpable, relevant answers to the questions being posed once outside the front doors of the church were not being found in the sermons and worship experience on Sunday morning. The absolute truth found in Scripture being preached and sung was not connecting with the daily activities of regular folk. So, people either didn’t like what they heard, found other options to consider, or decided that what they heard was just not applicable to their situation and context. The church talk and the absolute truths it espoused were not communicated to people in ways which made sense in their live-a-day world. The attraction of the church was wearing off! Add to this a significant piece: the changing culture and worldview and value system, a worldview that was embracing experience and self-determined truth over the absolute doctrine and absolute truth found in the written Word of Scripture, and the march toward a post-Christendom era and the emigration away from church seemed almost inevitable.

Making the Church Attractive Again

As people left the church, the congregation was left offering spiritual help in a vacuum—fewer people were attending and fewer were listening. The communication of the faith—the Good News found in Jesus Christ, justification by grace through faith,

reconciliation, redemption, Trinity, Christ's two natures—was beginning to fall on deaf ears, not because it wasn't correct or true, but because the Good News was just not understood or recognized to be good news for them. The words of Scripture—though powerful and life-changing—were not being perceived through a set of worldview lenses which connected those salvific words with daily life. The congregation's message didn't connect with those who were trying to listen, with those who were taking the time to do some searching, or even with those who were still engaged.

So the church began to take a closer look at its communication of the absolute truths of Scripture. It began to use the language and styles and forms of the people in order to connect the message with the life of those who came to listen. It started to speak the unchangeable truths of God into the ears of people in ways that connected with their lives. The church changed its communication style. It revamped its look. It began to offer all types of support helps and services to meet the needs of the community that came to the church. It attempted to attract people back to the church where it then preached and taught Scripture in ways that made sense to people, in ways which required little if any translation work by the listener. It communicated the spiritual truths of God in a relevant way to the post-modern (or whatever you want to call it) world and spirituality. It is still slowly working this path.

Some congregations were quite successful (if you count growth in worship attendance or other measures you might construe as success). Of course, there are always those who question the veracity of the faith in those congregations which show this type of success, especially if they are using new or different styles or methods or strategies or forms which change practices of the past. But for all their successes and failures (assessed from both practical and theological positions), they were attempting to be a relevant voice to and for the community with the life-changing message from God in the Scripture. They focused on the spiritual formation of individuals by helping them apply Jesus' teachings to their life and subsequently living out that Christian life in the world—faith, forgiveness, walking with God, taking on life in the workplace or home as a Christian. They were attempting to connect the narrative of Christ to the narrative of life. They were helping people to be faith-filled and faith-ful Christians in our quite changed and ever-changing world. Rather than just rehearsing the stories and the truths each Sunday, they attempted to communicate the truths and stories in ways which seemed to connect and resonate more clearly with those who listened and came to hear. Once again, people were being attracted back to the church.

The New Attractional Church Becomes a Sending Church

These congregations were addressing spiritual issues and touching unchurched people in the community in spiritual ways which made sense to them as they applied that teaching in their daily lives. The truth of God's love in Christ was connecting with their daily life in the world. People began to see, as I have heard from others as well, "Jesus with a face." He was real, for his life, his death, and his resurrection connected with them where they lived and worked. All of this was punctuated with a new twist on discipleship or catechesis: discipleship applied to life—not just teaching the doctrine or theology or

facts or information about the Bible and its absolute truth and then encouraging people to live that truth in their daily life. These congregations strove to directly apply the unchangeable truths to the issues people faced each and every day. They helped people make the leap from truth to application.

But some congregations began to add an important element which seemed to be lacking. Discipleship without mission was emerging as an important conversation. The goal of a Christian is to bring God glory. Christians live their lives in worship and praise and adoration to the Trinity. This faith posture and praise practice has ultimate consequences: (1) salvation for the believer even here and now in this life, (2) salvation for the believer for eternity in heaven, but also (3) a message of salvation for those who do not believe who interact with these Christians in daily life. Let me use my personal mission statement as an example. “As an Ephesians 2:8–9 person, my mission is to accomplish Ephesians 2:10 in order that Jesus’ mission, Luke 19:10, is completed.” Notice that it starts with justification by grace through faith, which moves to active living of that faith according to God’s will and culminates in the ultimate goal—the salvation of all people.

God’s mission through Jesus Christ was slowly but surely becoming the mission of the Christians in these newly configured attractional congregations. Ephesians 2:8–9, though clearly taught, understood, and applied, had not been closely connected with Ephesians 2:10. But these congregations were working to connect the two, making the Good News found in Jesus Christ an action verb. And as these congregations wrestled with discipleship in its fullness—faith-filled and faith-ful—the good works described in Ephesians 2:10 were being seen as the works of Christian disciples that bring them into contact with unbelieving friends, colleagues, and family members for the sake of the Gospel and their salvation. Christians found an extremely important role of their Christian life in Jesus’ mission found in Luke 19:10. One congregation, named the Alley Lutheran Church after Jesus’ command to go into the streets and alleys and bring in the people, tells the worshipers each Sunday as they leave, “Take it to the streets.” Not only were the worshipers more equipped to face the challenges of daily living, they were being equipped to share the reason for their ability to overcome the challenges in life with others. They were becoming missionary. People in these congregations, though not responsible for saving all lost people, were being taught that they were partners with Jesus in his mission and that the works they were created to do proclaimed the Savior Jesus Christ to the world. Congregations were beginning to see themselves as not only attractional churches, but as sending churches.

What a refreshing turn of events in the life of the church. In the past, the missionary posture of Christians was seen active in overseas missionaries, evangelists, pastors, and other trained and professional servants of the church. Today, as the attractional congregations also see their roles to be sending congregations, more and more Christians in the pew are “taking it to the streets” and sharing the Good News. As the scattered Christians in Acts 8, the disciplined missionaries from these congregations are “gossiping the Gospel” as they leave the worship center and engage the world.

By the way, it is too easy to get caught up in a conversation which, in my opinion, is not appropriate. People draw lines—“we are missional” or “we are attractational.” “We are a Bible teaching church” or “we are a missional church.” “We are a catechizing church” or “we are a sending church.” *To say it another way, one has a clue, but no cause. The other has a cause, but no clue.* If we look at it objectively, we see churches with discipling cultures that focus mainly on the transformation of the individual self and churches with missional cultures that focus on the transformation of the world/people around us, and we often see tensions between these two camps.

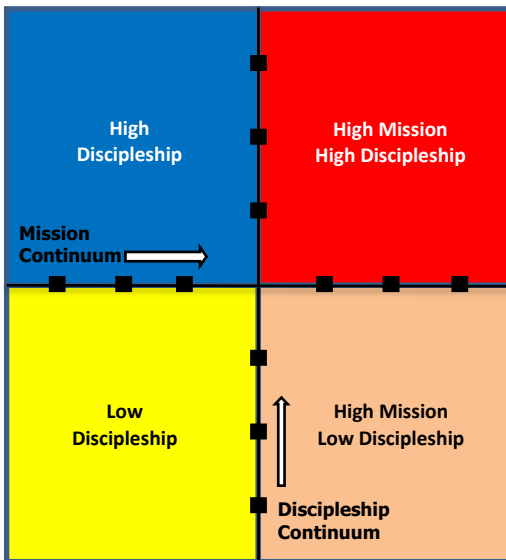


Figure 1

Look at Figure 1.¹ It helps describe this issue more clearly. Notice the continuum. Some congregations focus on catechizing the saved. Other congregations focus on finding the lost. And there is everything in between of course. In the bottom left quadrant are those congregations that don't do either of them well—for whatever reason. We hope that there are very few of those in the world, but they do exist.

In the bottom right quadrant are found those congregations which focus on mission but lack solid catechesis. These are the High Mission/Low Discipleship church cultures. They are weak when it comes to biblical literacy, theological reflection, and exhibit deficiencies in character and creed that, in the end,

sabotage the very mission they are about. Critics are rightly concerned that these kinds of churches are a hair's breadth away from heresy, with people largely not experiencing the individual depth and transformation of heart and mind to which Jesus invites us.

In the top left quadrant are the High Discipleship/Low Mission congregations. High Discipleship/Low Mission church cultures have strength in the previous issues, but lack the adventurous spirit/heart of compassion and kingdom compulsion that so stirred the Father into action that he sent his only Son to a world he so loved. Their transformation isn't leading to the place God is taking them. Critics are rightly concerned that these kinds of churches will turn into Christian ghettos, creating people who lob “truth bombs” over their high, secure walls, creating an “us vs. them” mentality. In both, something is disastrously wrong.

Finally, this conversation should not be about an attractational, Bible-centered teaching church versus a missional/sending church. There should be no dichotomy. This is a both/and scenario, not an either/or. So the High Discipleship/High Mission church in

the top right quadrant is what I endorse, as do many leaders in our Lutheran church. I enjoy Martin Franzmann's comments regarding this issue. He wrote,

"The Word of God is an arrow with a perfect tip and a shaft without flaw, check, or blemish, feathered and balanced as no other arrow is; there is no arrow like it under the sun." But Lutherans note that "This perfect arrow is aimed at you; it will kill you, in order that you may live." Lutherans cannot let the church become a Society for the Preservation of the Perfect Arrow.²

One of my profs from Concordia Seminary noted this same complete package when he said,

If you claim to be confessional, that's good! Now go out and confess Christ—openly, clearly, winsomely, in ways that reach outside our circles to all the people around us, that meet people's needs and connect them to Jesus. If you are not reaching out with clear Law and Gospel in every possible way, how can you be truly confessional? Too many "confessionalists" have turned in on themselves, and for all their confessionalism have only isolated themselves and condemned others. On the other side, if you are outreach oriented, that's wonderful—it is the command of Christ. Now be sure you have something to confess! We talk not only about principles for living, but we constantly confess Christ. He is our life. However your ministry is organized, is the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ (working through His means—Word and Sacrament) the beating heart of what you are doing? Are you not only drawing people in, but also teaching them well?

These are High Discipleship/High Mission leader comments. They find a complete package in both. No one can be a good missionary if he doesn't have a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ found through prayer, study, and worship. And no one who says he has this deep relationship with Christ can sit back on his heels and wait for God to accomplish His mission when He has so clearly asked us to participate with Him in this task.

The Attractional/Sending Church Takes Another Step

But is there a next step? Can congregations be even more? Of course, they continue to be spiritual houses of God for grace, forgiveness, sanctuary, discipleship, missionary activity and training, and safety for the community of the saved. But could they be more? Is it possible for them to be transformational voices and agents in and with their communities? Don't misunderstand—Christians who (1) have found their lives in Christ, (2) have been discipled to meet head on the issues which confront them each and every day, and (3) have found Christ's mission to embrace all people with his love and grace and is a message that they, too, can share with those who live without him realize miracles as the Word changes hearts and minds and lives toward Christ. Transformed

lives happen. But the voice of the church at the table with other community leaders as it relates to less obvious transformations, at least in the work order and vision and expectation for leadership in Lutheran churches today, is missing. Issues related to mercy and justice and community development and improvement and involvement are just beginning to be discussed and discovered. And the actual activity associated with that discovery is still in its infancy.

Let me explain. Congregations are beginning to notice the gap Christians, even disciplined missionary Christians, face between Sunday morning and Wednesday night and the rest of the week. The questions being addressed and answered in the worship center are not related to school closings, poverty, joblessness, homelessness, housing, or justice. Worshipers are being disciplined and taught to live as Christians with God's presence through the power of the Holy Spirit. They are taught to believe that no matter what issues they face, God will direct and supply. They are encouraged to be missionary agents in their communities, and they share Christ as they talk and show him as they live. But they are not given answers from the church related to these other social, seemingly "non-spiritual," topics that they read about in the papers, hear about on the news, and face every day in their work. In addition, their church is not out in the community with them addressing these issues either.

Disciplined Christians approach the social issues with Christian core values, morals, and a faith-based response, but they do so on their own—both in coming to grips with an appropriate response and as Christian individuals among many other individuals with opinions. But their church, the institution, is not in the same conversation voicing its opinion and developing answers, or present and giving support in the marketplace alongside those the church serves on Sunday morning or Wednesday night. The voice of the institutional church at the table with the community leadership, except through its members, is missing. And those members are developing their Christian voices and responses the best they can on their own with very little guidance from the church. The church simply has kept quiet on these issues.

Please don't hear that the voice of Christians in the marketplace is not relevant or powerful. Just the opposite. But as noted earlier, historically, the church's voice in the community was heard not only through members, but also on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening and during the rest of the week as well. If a local public school was closing, the church had an opinion, not only through its members, but through the organization as well.

So the next step in the effectiveness of the institutional church is for it to engage in the community in significant and relevant ways. The ongoing mantra today regarding this issue is: "If your church were to close its doors today, would anyone in the local community care or even know?" Of course the members would know and be concerned, but would those who are not involved in the church be affected? And if the answer to this question is the obvious "No, no one would really know or care," the problem is just as obvious.

Congregations as organizations, as institutions, need to voice their care and concern for the community by becoming actively engaged in the community. The

community needs to hear and see the congregation on the issues with which it wrestles on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. Without the local congregation's involvement in those daily concerns, the church will continue to be seen as an institution interested solely in souls. And though this is very important, it will be interpreted in the community by the uncatechized as work related to the spiritual and emotional lives of people, not the work of addressing the daily lives and livelihood of the people in the local community.

This next step in the life of a congregation is important no matter where the congregation is located. In rural areas, the perception that the institutional church is still a player in the community conversations exists. But it certainly is much weaker than it was in the past. And in urban contexts, the institutional church's voice is silenced because it does not engage itself in the issues which the community is addressing. In fact, congregations are often not even aware of the issues with which the community wrestles.

Theologically, this entire conversation grows out of the first article of the Apostle's Creed. The first article focuses on God the Father, Creator and Sustainer of all things. God is very concerned about his creation. He intends that his creation remains concerned about his creation as well. Of course, the ultimate goal of God's concern is the salvation of his special creation, human beings, who are just a little lower than the angels. Once they fell from grace in the Garden of Eden, his attention in Scripture and history turned to his salvation plan through Jesus Christ as it unfolds in the Old Testament, culminates in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and continues even today as noted clearly in passages such as Matthew 28:19–20 and Acts 1:8.

But God never indicated that he was less concerned with the rest of his creation and how it lived and worked together while it walked toward the cross and empty tomb. And he continues to be concerned even today. That commission is no less powerful today than it was when God first gave it to Adam and Eve. When Dr. Wil Schumacher presented at the Center for Applied Lutheran Leadership (CALL) symposium at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, in 2009, he made some comments about active and passive righteousness as Scripture knows it and Luther defines it. I am not going to give a treatise once again on this topic, but to reiterate Wil's emphasis, passive righteousness is the righteousness of faith, the righteousness which is salvific, for that righteousness is found in, and only in, Jesus Christ and what he has done. We add nothing to his work on our behalf. We are completely passive, receptive vessels of his mercy and grace—and even that reception created by the power of God's Holy Spirit. We add absolutely nothing to the righteousness that gains us entrance into the eternal presence of God. Rightly so, it is called passive righteousness.

But Christians are, of course, interested in encouraging, disciplining, and teaching people to lead decent and upright lives and to act with integrity and honesty. This is active righteousness. See Figure 2. Notice the quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. Though attributed only to King here, it actually comes from Amos 5:24, where Scripture speaks of this active righteousness. We want people to mow their lawns, pay their bills, harbor the homeless, feed the poor, care for one another. Living upright and decent lives includes how we interact with and care for God's creation—his special creation,

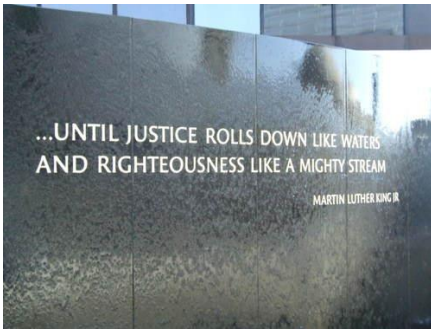


Figure 2

people—as well as our attitude toward the environment and all things created by God on days 1–6. My neighbor’s active righteousness, whether that person is a Christian or not, is part of God’s providential care for me and of mine for my neighbor. My neighbor’s concern and activity in the public debate about the closing of the local school down the street where my kids attend is important to me too. Active righteousness contributes to the overall daily provision of people’s needs or daily bread. And our neighbors are interested in these matters—they just don’t see that they

have anything to do with Jesus. And the church, by becoming interested and involved, can help them make that connection between those seemingly nonspiritual and secular issues and activities and God’s providential and sovereign concern. This position of the church—engaging in active righteousness—is very important.

Let me go a bit further. In Genesis 1:28, God tells his then sinless human creatures to take care of the earth, to subdue it, rule over it, and to fill it. The writer to the Hebrews notes the same thing when he quotes Psalm 8: “You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands. You put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas” (vv. 5–6). There often seems to be a disconnect between the church’s voice and activity and the authority given to God’s people. The church is concerned about forgiveness, grace, salvation, the sins of homosexuality and abortion (and all the other sins too), but does not say too much about the environment, global warming, deforestation, immigration, school busing, equitable taxation, homelessness, hunger, poverty, animal treatment, job creation, war, illiteracy, access to rights, and the list can go on and on. The local church continues to be a spiritual house for holy people, a place to go for conversations and activities about holy things. But rarely does the church engage itself in the “unholy” or “unspiritual” conversation or activities of the community. If issues related to theology or doctrine or spiritual living are involved—the church is there with systematic answers and teaching. And rightly so. So please do not hear me making these matters inconsequential or insignificant. Quite the opposite. It is vitally important that the church continue to be the voice, the loud voice of God’s absolute spiritual truths. But when the community meets at city hall to discuss closing a local school, the church also needs to speak. However, normally it is absent—except for those members of the congregation who are involved and wish to speak. But they speak first as Christian parents of children, not as members representing the congregation. And they speak after developing the responses themselves without guidance from the church.

We should not allow what Peter describes in his second letter to occur. When describing the Day of the Lord, Peter reminds his readers that it is too easy to fall into the

trap of seeing a world in process which continues on day after day as it has since the beginning and assume life just goes on with little that we can do or forgetting that God is still in charge. He wrote, “Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning” (2 Pt 3:4). But then he adds that even this ongoing daily process is a creation of God from the beginning. C. S. Lewis writes that there is “no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.”² And God’s word continues to sustain it. His creation is important to him even today, as it has always been from the beginning. And Peter then adds another word—in order to speed the coming of the final day of the Lord, we can participate through holy living and godly lives. Godly living and upright lives do make a difference in the world. We are called to participate in the ongoing creational work of God, to be God’s helper in executing to the end the blueprint for his masterpiece.³ Being engaged in the world and its issues and activities, though not becoming a part of it, is very important—not only as members of the Christian faithful, but also for faithful congregations.

Concluding Thoughts about My Thoughts and a Few Questions to Explore

If the church is to take seriously both the commission in Genesis 1:28 and Matthew 28:19–20, then it should reassess its ministry breadth, focus, and involvement in the community. As David Platt writes, “Anyone wanting to proclaim the glory of Christ to the ends of the earth must consider not only how to declare the gospel verbally but also how to demonstrate the gospel visibly in a world where so many are urgently hungry.”⁴

The church can be an integral, relevant, and significant voice and player in the community, but it needs to engage itself in the activities and issues of the community—both through teaching and discussing them in the worship center and through active involvement as an organization in the community. If it does so, it may be evaluated by the uncatechized as an organization, which not only voices concern about and addresses spiritual things, but as an institution which lives and is invested in the same community in which people live and work.

There is still a lot to discover and discuss in this conversation. For example:

1. Where does engagement in the community overlap with evangelism? Or does it? Said another way, how do you make the decision between sharing Jesus or sharing a cup of water? Should Christians engaged in the community prioritize meeting physical needs (food, water, social justice, development) before they preach the Gospel, or should evangelism always be given primacy? Spreading Christianity through deeds alone aligns with a quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words.” But research suggests that non-Christians often miss the message without the words. What is the right response?

2. What community activities might become a platform for a congregation’s engagement? For example, should the voice of the congregation be in city hall, at or on the planning commission, at the table when the local community development council

meets, in the rotary club? And if present, does it chime in with opinions and subsequent activities related to issues these organizations address?

3. Are there some topics and issues and activities off limits? Some are not so controversial—serving in nursing homes or homeless shelters, gathering food for the hungry, meals on wheels activities, ESL, job search and job skill services, repatriation of legal immigrants. But what about others? For example, should the congregation speak about and address gang activity, drunk driving, distribution of condoms in high schools, appropriate TV shows, violence on video games, immigration?

4. How engaged (via voice or activity) should a church become in social justice issues? For example, should it take a stand (give opinion and/or engage in activity) on immigration issues, perceived unfair housing laws, marriage laws, civil rights, war, use of government funds for any number of issues? Where does one draw the line on engagement?

Points 3 and 4 require a distinction between mercy and justice. In general, mercy is loving people, sharing what a congregation has, or being the Good Samaritan. Justice grows out of mercy living—being involved in the lives of people and then investing in changing the structures and organizations and rules and laws which govern and determine right and wrong. A short story told by Ray Bakke helps to illustrate the point. A pastor friend of his sat in a courtroom where several of his parishioners were appearing related to unfair landlord practices. After several cases involving not only his own parishioners but others as well, the pastor stood up and addressed the court. He said, “Your honor, if I may say a few words.” The judge allowed him to speak and he said, “I have been in here most of the day, and time after time you have sided with the corrupt landlords. Where is the justice in this court?” The judge politely responded, “This is not a court of justice. This is a court of law. If you want justice, change the law.”

5. Are congregations ready and willing to move past mercy activities and enter into the realm of addressing justice issues?

It is my hope that these thoughts evoke some serious thinking on these issues and help to highlight some of the ways congregations can begin to think about and address their relevance in their own communities.

Endnotes

¹ Figure 1 was developed by the author.

² Martin H. Franzmann, “Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics” (Paper, CTCR minutes, February 11, 1969), 11.

³ C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 33.

⁴ Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 114.

⁵ David Platt, *Radical* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010), 109.

Some Thoughts on Doing Mission in a Russian Context

Matthew Heise

If you are like me, you might have thought that primarily ethnic Russians populated the country of Russia. It seemed inherently logical to me too, but that is not the case. Russia is just as much if not more of a melting pot than the United States. Long the historic homeland for more than just ethnic Russians, Russia is a potpourri of people groups, tribes, languages and cultures. Historically, since 988 AD, when Prince Vladimir compelled the Russian people to be baptized en masse in the Dnieper River, Russians have been followers of the Orthodox version of Christianity. Those who chose to think differently about baptism were told in no uncertain terms that their reluctance would make them enemies of the great prince. Naturally, most valued keeping their heads firmly upon their shoulders and submitted accordingly. So it's no surprise that Prince Vladimir had full cooperation in baptismal conversions!

The history of missions in Russia has certainly reflected some of this initial history. There have been two primary models followed by the Orthodox Church, the "incarnational approach" as well as the "political approach." By moving people groups forcibly from historic lands, as well as pressuring them to convert to Christianity, this political approach followed a scorched earth policy and alienated pagan people groups like the Udmurts in north central Russia. Instead of exhorting the native tribes in their respective languages, Orthodox priests often spoke to them only in Russian. Furthermore, these priests gave material benefits to people in order to accelerate their coming to faith, while simultaneously resorting to the governmental stick by politically punishing those not carrying out the basic requirements of the Christian faith.

Force will naturally open anyone's eyes to the benefits proffered by the established religion; and, as a result, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the majority of the Udmurts accepted baptism into the Russian Orthodox Church. Their faith, though, tended to be more or less a perfunctory, unconscious acceptance of Christianity. Therefore when the first buds of political liberalization occurred under the initial Enlightenment policies of the Czarina, Catherine the Great, the Udmurts appealed to her for the right to reject Christianity and return to their former pagan beliefs. Due to the Orthodox missionaries' inability to enlighten and inform the Udmurts, this people group tended to see Orthodoxy as a foreign or Russian religion, a religion for which their own gods would punish them if they would transfer their allegiance.

When the Gospel did take root among the Udmurts, though, it was due to its

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being proclaimed in their native language and when the natives themselves were called to service in the church. These so-called incarnational methods were the fruit of missionaries following old patterns of missions established by those like the ninth century brother team of Cyril and Methodius. Saints Cyril and Methodius are considered the apostles to the Slavic peoples since they translated the Scriptures into an alphabet that they created especially for them, the Cyrillic alphabet. It is an alphabet still used by the Russians and Serbians today.

When the native language of the Udmurts was used in sermons, services, and Christian education, only then did mission work become effective in Udmurtia. In addition, when mission became more than just the task of priests and when laymen organizations like the Orthodox brotherhoods actively engaged in proclaiming the faith among the native peoples, mission achieved its greatest goals in Udmurtia. (On a personal note, in 1995, I helped found an Orthodox soup kitchen outreach on the streets of Moscow, called the Brotherhood of St. Seraphim. My Orthodox friends were very aware of the history of the brotherhoods and were excited by the potential for reviving this old laymen's tradition in the post-Soviet world.)

If we fast-forward to the present day, the Russian Orthodox and Lutherans, like many other Christian denominations, are exclusively employing the incarnational model. By reaching native people groups in their villages and where they work and enjoy leisure time in their daily lives, Christian mission has exploded across the eleven time zones of the Russian landscape. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, doors have been opening rapidly for the advance of the Gospel in all of Russia's eleven time zones.

One of my former students, Alexey Sanzheev, told me that in the early 1990s in his Buryatian village (a region surrounding Lake Baikal) Christian evangelists came showing the Jesus film. His interest was initially piqued for reasons unrelated to a spiritual search. Quite frankly, life in the villages was dull. They didn't have a movie theater in Alexey's home village, and so anyone showing a film of any kind was automatically guaranteed an audience. But through that experience Alexey became more inquisitive about the Christian faith and became a believer.

I remember that as an LCMS World Mission volunteer in 1996 missionary Douglas Reinders and I presented the classic Hollywood film "The Ten Commandments" with a local pastor, Mikish Mishin, in the central Russian region known as Mordovia. Imagine the scene. People actually stood outside a traditional Russian village home watching the video via VCR through a kitchen window. Interest was indeed great at that time to reconnect with a long-lost Christian faith and identity that had been seemingly obliterated by communism. But afterward, as we hurried toward the car that would take us to overnight in another village, I noticed that other influences were engaging the locals as well. I spied a large number of teenagers who were huddled together in a field, jumping up and down frantically to heavy metal rock music emanating from a boom box. There was a streetlight nearby, but mostly they were bouncing to the music in the pitch darkness. In the rain—pouring rain at that.

"Scratch a Russian, and you will find a Tatar" is an oft-quoted phrase in the Russian world, highlighting the multiethnic nature of Russians. A paraphrase of that

proverb, though, might also be justified when describing many Russians: “Scratch a Russian, and you will find a pagan.” I have found that in many Russians there is an inherent paganism that has never completely been extinguished. I’m certain that the same can be said of many people who came to faith in the various ethnic groups around the world. Naturally, the Holy Spirit works faith in all people, but the old customs of pagan origin die hard. They often lie below the surface of the beliefs of many Christians, rearing their ugly head occasionally in order to distort the faith or make of it a purely cultural entity.

And still, the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts and minds of people throughout the world and especially in Russia. Take, for example, the long history of paganism in Russia. The Spirit has been working in the lives of various individuals, several of whom I’ve had the honor to teach at the seminary near St. Petersburg since 1998, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria.

Slava Abdullin was a music teacher at a high school in the republic of Bashkortostan, located in the central region of Russia just east of the Volga River. Slava was a member of the Mari people, tree worshippers since time immemorial. Slava told me that he had learned all of the old rituals of this pagan cult from his grandmother. While traveling through this republic once, I marveled at the stately rows of birch trees, clearly planted with this orderliness in mind.

Slava, like so many people of the former Soviet Union, had a serious drinking problem. He also noted some lesions growing under his arms that made it extremely painful to raise them, something which became more than problematic for a music teacher whose arms were constantly in motion. At that time, Finnish Lutheran missionaries were making their way through Bashkortostan and connected with Slava. The Mari people are of the Finno-Ugric language branch, making conversation possible between these two people groups.

As these missionaries prayed for Slava’s healing, he remembered that none of his pagan rituals had healed him of this pain. But the Lord in his mercy had miraculously healed Slava of this pain. Not only that, he also began to conquer his taste for the bottle. Knowing this was more than coincidence, Slava became intrigued by this Jesus who had healed him. Slava came to faith along with his family and ended up studying at the Ingrian Lutheran seminary, where I met him and was one of his teachers. Now serving as a pastor to his people in Bashkortostan with services in the Mari language, Slava serves a people group rarely touched by the Gospel.

We once walked through his home city of Birsk, and I noted all of the drunks we encountered along our path. Slava told me how difficult it was to minister in such circumstances, but that he could never go back to his former way of life. His friends had often exhorted him to come back to the old ways, that this was his culture. I once had a rather spirited discussion (in Russian) with one of these friends. This man told me that in his world the goddess of the earth ruled. She was the true God. He never addressed my question as to who Jesus was. I realized that no matter how many years the Soviets had tried to eradicate not only Christianity but also old pagan beliefs, that the old ways were stubbornly held to by many of these people.

In the summer, the tradition of gathering in the forest continues; pagan priests place candles in the trees in order to receive a blessing. Slava often goes there to provide a witness, but he will never go back to the old ways. He has come to know the Way, the Truth, and the Life and to see how the Son of God, Jesus Christ, has transformed his life.

Likewise, my current student Erdeni Bandanov has come out of a pagan past to embrace freedom in Christ. Erdeni is a Buryat like Alexey Sanzheev, a people who are linguistic cousins of the Mongols. Erdeni's past is also not what you might expect from a future Lutheran pastor. You see, in his former life, Erdeni was a shaman. Shamans are quite common in Buryatia and Mongolia today. In fact, despite the extraordinarily rapid growth of Christianity in Mongolia, shamanism is making a comeback. Each family feels the pressure to have someone intercede in the spirit world for their relatives.

But in Russia, Erdeni's situation was a little different. He told me that he sought power—power to control people. Being slight of figure, this was one way Erdeni could command the respect and fear of people in his village. And so becoming a shaman was one way to gain the attention of people, even if it meant acquiring a demon in the process. Erdeni told me that he was aware that he had a demon but that his demon was more powerful than other demon-possessed people whom he encountered. As a result, his presence engendered fear among the villagers, just as he'd hoped.

But in the process of serving as a shaman, Erdeni told me that he became aware that he was not in control of the demon. In fact, he soon realized that he was held captive by this alien presence within him. It led him to turn to the bottle in his despair. Most might not be aware of this, but the spirit world is a very real phenomenon in Siberia. Wherever I have traveled, I have often seen prayer rags tied to trees. Hundreds of them. And those who tie them to trees are by no means simply native Siberian people groups. I have seen ethnic Russian wedding parties gather around a tree in their wedding attire, reverently tying colorful blue or white rags to a tree.

But getting back to Erdeni's story, he began to see no way out of his dilemma. Suicide was an option. But Erdeni remembered that he had an old village friend named Vladimir, who eventually became a Lutheran pastor. Vladimir had told him to pray a prayer to Jesus if he ever felt as though he could not go on. So when Erdeni had reached the bottom, he picked up the prayer Vladimir had given him.

He remembers that he had no clue what would happen, but he said, "Jesus, if you really exist, please free me from this demon." Immediately, the demon was expelled, literally going out through his foot. Erdeni now felt liberated, although no longer the powerful, feared figure he once had been. I can't recall a better example of one who came to express Paul's thoughts so clearly in his life. "When I am weak, then I am strong."

Erdeni began to boldly proclaim Christ in Buddhist temples, telling people that they worshiped false gods. In the village of Khizenga, he told his fellow Buryats that they were worshipping devils. He should know, after all. But the Buryatian people were used to such harsh rhetoric and didn't even pay attention to him. Erdeni soon realized that like the Apostle Paul among the Athenians, he would need to be more nuanced in his witness. So he began to speak more gently to them about *Geser*, the Buryatian word used for Caesar that can also be used to convey the concept of the "Son of God." Buryats have no

real understanding of God as a Savior. There is a notion of giving to a god and getting something back from him, a mutually beneficial transaction. But there is no notion of a God who gives himself for the salvation of people. Erdeni thus began to proclaim Geser, the Son of God who gave Himself as a sacrifice for the redemption of all people.

When I taught Erdeni, I learned something about communication and perspective too. He seemed to me to be rather self-righteous, condemning others for various sins and emphasizing works. I had to tell him bluntly that pride was a sin too. But amidst our very spirited discussions on faith and works, I learned to appreciate a person's background before making a judgment. We came to a meeting of the minds when I understood that Erdeni's life was under a microscope in the Buryatian villages. People had known of his shamanistic background and came to the conclusion that he had just traded one religion for another. They surmised that the Christians simply paid better than shamanism.

So while I still thought he placed too much emphasis upon works as the undergirding of one's faith, I also realized that I had been rather judgmental. He needed to show people that he was a changed person, and so his life had to be above suspicion. But in the end, we both learned something about the balance between justification and sanctification. I learned to not so easily downgrade the importance of a sanctified life, and he learned to place justification before sanctification in the pecking order.

I have come to the realization that deeply meditating upon missions is really new ground for the Lutheran churches of Russia. Being primarily a religion of foreign cultures within Russia, as exhibited by my own Russian-German ancestors, Lutherans in the past were forbidden to proselytize among the ethnic Russians or indeed among other tribes. As we saw in the example of the Udmurts, any evangelization efforts were restricted to the state Orthodox Church. In all of Russian history, only since 1991 has an ethnic Russian had the actual legal possibility to join a Lutheran church. The times have truly changed. But even in the expanded climate of religious freedom in Russia today, we need to proceed cautiously and respectfully in our evangelization efforts. Ethnic Russians, even if not churchgoers, are for historic reasons still considered the property of the Orthodox Church.

And yet, the Holy Spirit still works through imperfect witnesses, of which we all are good examples. Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German is an example of the incarnational approach of missions, one that we as Lutherans attempt to replicate as we work with different people groups throughout Russia and the former USSR. Learning the languages of people or, where that is not possible due to the extraordinary number of people groups in Russia, training and working through natives of the various republics and through the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, we can translate the message in a culturally appropriate way to people like the Buryats, Maris, and Udmurts so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

(The information on the evangelization of the Udmurts comes from deaconess Dina Korepanova's Bachelor of Divinity thesis at the seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia: *Peculiarities of Missions in Udmurtia in the 19th Century.*)

Book Review

THIEVES IN THE TEMPLE: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul. By G. Jeffrey MacDonald. New York: Basic Books, 2010. xviii + 238 pp. Hardcover. \$25.95.

The first half of *Thieves in the Temple* is like sitting in on a circuit pastors' discussion. Almost all of his laments are ones every parish pastor has made:

- Prosperity gospel (4–5)
- Church shopping (7)
- “Vacuum of authority” (25)
- Worship as “entertainment” (32)
- Music teams as “concerts” with little congregational participation (39)
- Lack of contrition in Confession/Absolution (40)
- Contributions made outside worship rather than as part of worship (41)
- Weddings and funerals out of pastor's control (78)
- Infant baptism as ritual with no parental commitment (45)
- Preaching to please the crowd (48)
- Mission trips as fun and exciting (51)
- Programs (62) and small groups (69) as cheap psychotherapy
- No sacrificial disciplines even during Lent (75)
- Participation in Holy Communion with little faith commitment (84)
- Disciplines of self-control and morality not expected (94–96)
- Development of “niche congregations” as clubs for particular interest/age/social/economic groups (104)

MacDonald sees all of these characteristics of American Christianity as expressions of the church's basic sellout to the American consumerist mentality. He lays the character deficit of American life at the feet of the church (190). Instead, he urges that pastors and congregation members together should approach church life like athletes, with discipline, intention, and sacrifice (142). He concludes with four examples of congregations in the Lutheran heartland of Minneapolis that are trying to move in that direction.

Rev. MacDonald served only briefly (four years) in a United Church of Christ congregation. He shares his frustrated efforts to address the consumerist mentality of his parishioners. However, we all know that little can happen in just four years. It takes a good five years for a pastor to gain the credibility and trust needed to initiate any fundamental change. In five years, one has had a real pastoral relationship with most

members, and one truly becomes their pastor. Only then is the soil typically ready for the Holy Spirit to work transforming faith through the seeds of the Gospel.

As part of that process, this book can be a very helpful tool for congregants to reflect on the great temptations to water down the Christian walk. Toward this end, it would have been helpful to have discussion questions at the end of each chapter, so these will need to be prepared.

Herb Hoefler



November 14, 2011

Greetings in Christ,

Twice before and biennially, Concordia Seminary has partnered with the leadership of our ethnic communities to host a *Multi-Ethnic Symposium*, held within the Epiphany emphasis of God's Light for all nations.

Those who attended have left with renewed hope. This was encouraging, since the topic in 2008 was *Expressions of Hope* and in 2010 was *Conversations of Hope*. The conversations, yes table talk, across ethnic and cultural boundaries were particularly engaging, energizing, and encouraging.

The next Multi-Ethnic Symposium will build on this foundation. Around the theme, *Gifts of Hope*, it will identify the gifts of cultural diversity that inform and enliven the fullness of the Body of Christ in a unity not bound to one culture but embodying the contributions of many cultures.

We will address the critical questions facing our church in this multi-cultural world, beginning with the intersection of theology and culture. How do we express the unity of our faith and confession within the diversities of culture? How do we allow for different cultural expressions within a common bond of faith and practice? Is diversity something to be affirmed and celebrated or collapsed into a common "meta-culture" of the church? Is the vision of Rev. 7:9 something to be found only in heaven or already on earth, and if so, how is heavenly worship expressed within the incarnational realities of God's people in space, time, and culture?

We will hear from those ethnic communities that remain a minority amongst us. What has the expression of our Lutheran theology and practice brought to these different cultures, and what gifts come to our Lutheran unity from the diversity of cultures?

Finally, we will work together toward the future. What will a truly multi-cultural LCMS look like in 2017, when we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation together? What will it look like in 2037 and 2047? Or better and in the immediate future, in the 495th anniversary year, in 2012?

We have listened and learned of commonalities and concerns amongst "minority" communities. But our gifts of hope need to cross the boundaries between "minorities" and "majorities," including the ethnic community of Anglos and the richness of leadership and laity across the whole spectrum of our church.

Please join us for the third Multi-Ethnic Symposium, Gifts of Hope, January 30-31, 2012.

Meeting Highlights:

- Begins with worship (seminary chapel) at 9:00 on Monday.
- Concludes at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday
- Multi-ethnic worship service and celebration Monday evening
- Time spent in group and plenary sharing and discussion interaction with seminary students, who will be attending

Keynote introduction on theology and culture by Rev. Dr. Leopoldo Sanchez, Center For Hispanic Studies, with reaction and further presentation from the perspective of the social sciences by Dr. Jack Schulz, Concordia University-Irvine, and from a missiological perspective by Dr. Douglas Rutt of Lutheran Hour Ministries.

Reflections from cultural backgrounds will include: Rev. William and Mrs. Patricia Main, co-directors of the Haskell Lighthouse Campus Ministry, Rev. David Kim, Rev. Kou Seying, Rev. John Deang, Missionary-at-Large to African immigrants for Nebraska District, Ms. Melissa Salomon, Mission Planting team of Concordia Lutheran Church, Chula Vista, CA, Rev. Andy Wu, among others.

Discussion on best practices will be led by: Mr. Melvin Butts, lay leader, Rev. Ron Rall, Ms. Yvette Moy, lay leader, among others.

Perspectives from district and synod leadership will be offered by Larry Stoterau, President, Pacific Southwest District, J. Bart Day, Executive Director, Office of National Mission, and Roosevelt Gray, Director of Missions, Michigan District LCMS.

The Symposium will be followed on Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m. by the 7th *Annual Lecture in Hispanic/Latino Theology and Missions*. The topic this year is “*Dealing with Culture in Theological Formation*.” The lecturer will be Rev. Gregory Klotz, Associate Professor, Taylor University, Indiana, former missionary to Latin America, professor of missiology and doctoral student in ethnomusicology. All are invited to remain for this lecture which will be held in Werner Auditorium free of charge. The lecture will be in English.

Plan now to join us for “*Gifts of Hope*”. For more information and a registration form visit www.csl.edu and go to the Continuing Education link. Local hotel information will be available and program logistics and updates will be added periodically. If you have questions, please contact Kaye Wolff at kayewolff@aol.com or Rev. John Loum at loumj@csl.edu.

Yours in ministry partnership for Christ,
Multi-Ethnic Symposium Planning Committee
Kaye Wolff Larry Stoterau Leopoldo Sanchez
Andy Bartelt John Loum Mark Kempff
Quentin Poulson Frazier Odom Victor Raj

What is the Lutheran Society for Missiology?

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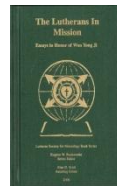
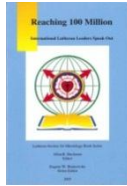
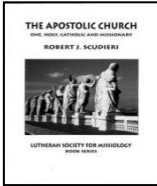
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The Apostolic Church challenges readers to consider the role of the church—is it a divine institution which cherishes the true teaching and message of Christ or is it the messenger of that gracious message or both?
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This book is a compilation of 16 essays given at a 2004 International Summit of Lutheran leaders across the globe addressing the task of reaching 100 million people with the Good News. Included are Bible studies associated with each essay.
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We welcome your participation in contributing to *Missio Apostolica*. Please observe the following guidelines for submission of manuscripts.

Missio Apostolica publishes studies of missiological issues under discussion in Christian circles across the world in the twenty-first century. Exegetical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the apostolic mission of the church are to be explored in these pages.

The editors submit every manuscript to the editorial committee for examination and critique. Decisions are reached by consensus within the committee. Authors may expect a decision normally within three months of submission.

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Professor Victor Raj, rajv@csf.edu. A submission guarantees that all material has been properly noted and attributed. The author thereby assumes responsibility for any necessary legal permission for materials cited in the article.

Manuscripts should not exceed 5,000 words. Manuscripts of less than 3,000 words will be considered for the “Mission Reflections” section of the periodical.

Authors should include an autobiographical description of not more than fifty words.

Direct quotations exceeding four manuscript lines should be set off from the text in an indented paragraph, without quotation marks. Omissions in a quotation should be noted by ellipsis, with an additional period to end the sentence.

Spelling should follow the latest edition of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Words in languages other than English should be italicized. Numbers from one to twenty and round numbers should be spelled out. Full page references (123–127, not 123–7) should be used.

The Chicago Manual of Style defines the manner of documentation used in *Missio Apostolica* and should be consulted for details beyond the following basic guidelines:

David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 243–255.

Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 184–186.

Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, et al., “Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement,” *Missiology, An International Review* 34 (2006): 431–450.

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