



LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology

Volume XXVIII, No. 1 (Issue 56) May 2020

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LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS

—Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc.—ISSN 2470-1874 (print); ISSN 2470-1882 (online)

Mr. Marcos Kempff

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Lutheran Mission Matters continues the publication of Missio Apostolica, the journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology founded in 1993.

Lutheran Mission Matters is published twice a year in the spring and fall by the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc. (LSFM), and special issues may be published occasionally. Lutheran Mission Matters serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally. The views expressed by the individual writers, however, are not necessarily the views of the editors, Editorial Committee, or the Board of Directors of LSFM.

The journal is an open-access publication and is available online at https://lsfm.global. Members of the society who contribute more than \$30 per year may choose to receive an identical paper copy of the journal.

The journal is indexed in the Atla Religion Database (online journal index of the American Theological Library Association) and its related online full-text component, Atlas (American Theological Library Association Serials). Atlas may be accessed at no charge by alumni of many seminaries upon request to the library of their alma mater.

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Inside This Issue: Missionaries on the Move

Mission in a World on the Move is the pronounced theme for this the 56th issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters*, journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology. In this issue the journal emphasizes specifically three key words: *mission, world,* and *movement*. Movement is perhaps the centerpiece, characterizing both the mission of God and the world into which He sends His people for His mission. Movement brings about change. Changes affect human beings in their lifestyles, culture, and worldview. Nevertheless, the church has an unchangeable, nonnegotiable message to proclaim in this changing world. This issue attempts to examine movement and mission for the sake of the Gospel of God in a Lutheran way. The editors pray that readers will have a remarkable experience as they interact with the essays and mission reflections presented here.

The religious authorities of our Lord's time on earth feared that the whole world was going after Him as He was ushering in God's kingdom by means of the words He proclaimed and the mighty acts He performed (Jn 12:19). Indeed, the whole world is going after Jesus more than ever as more people in our generation are finding in Him their very life and salvation. The Lord's self-giving, sacrificial death on the cross draws to Him people from everywhere as they see in Him the wonder of His redeeming love personalized for them. The Word continues to grow among all nations in an aweinspiring and unpredictable way. The Holy Spirit is calling people from everywhere and gathering them into the household of God. This movement is simply unstoppable.

Even if no dead man is rising before our eyes, the Gospel of God is moving powerfully today across languages, cultures, and nations as God's people give witness to His mighty acts in the footprints of the early disciples and the apostles of the church.

This issue begins with a very poignant story of a faithful servant of Christ in our generation. The Rev. Dr. Laokouxang (Kou) Seying has been a dear friend, brother, colleague, mentor, and professor to many of us in the Lutheran household. God raised him up in Laos and brought him to the United States at a very young age. Kou was an immigrant to this country who was able literally to achieve the American dream during the short span of life God allowed him on earth. Kou excelled as an ideal all-American Lutheran. He was trained in the Lutheran education system in college and seminary. Kou was a soccer player and coach and he flew airplanes. Kou was ordained into the holy ministry and served as pastor, theological educator, consultant, missionary, and mission developer. Kou's heart was attuned especially to the people of his native culture and the HMong immigrants spread across the nations. The Lord in His wisdom called Kou to Glory at a time those of us who knew him thought—in our weakness—that was much too early. While still grieving his loss with his family, we dedicate this issue to Kou Seying and the legacy he has left behind for the Gospel's sake. In fact, this issue begins with several reflections on Kou by those who knew him, an essay

Kou published earlier in *Missio Apostolica* (the predecessor of *Lutheran Mission Matters*), and an extract from a preliminary draft of his intended doctoral dissertation.

Other essays speak directly to the theme of the people on the move. Speaking from within, Jon Braunersreuther considers that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has been missionary from the very beginning, reaching out with the Gospel to friends and neighbors who did not belong in the same culture or share a common worldview. Himself a new immigrant, Leo Sánchez illustrates how a sanctified life guided by a Spirit-Christology can serve as a model for inviting new immigrants to Christian congregations and for accepting them with gentleness and respect as brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of the diversity in language and culture they bring with them.

This issue is privileged to publish the Rev. Robert Zagore, who directs the LCMS's Office of National Mission. Zagore explains the direction the Synod is taking to reach out to multi-ethnic populations in the country and to welcome the new Americans. Following resolutions of Synod's 2019 Convention, the LCMS confirms its intentionality to plant churches for the new ethnic groups, provide resources to districts, and offer training for leaders and church workers through distance education. As the world continues coming to America, the future is clear.

Immigration is a global phenomenon that opens new opportunities for mission. Christianity may not be the dominant religion in America anymore since American culture is becoming increasingly pluralistic. New immigrants who come to this country do not change their worldview immediately, nor do they embrace Christianity as their new religion, argues Chad Lakies. Christians must seize immigration as an opportunity for witnessing the faith with the confidence and the assurance that the church's mission truly is God's mission. Immigrants are in no way a threat, but a great opportunity God is bringing to our doorsteps to make His Name fully known among them.

The mission reflections included here show that the Gospel of God transforms people's lives and communities regardless of their geographical location, the languages they speak and the cultures that shape them, according to Jim Pressnell and Miguel Torneire. Christian mission must engage people and communities, appreciating the diversity they bring to the Church of Jesus Christ and recognizing that they contribute to the common good and the edification of God's people. In Christ, the people of God grow together, celebrating differences yet keeping the unity of faith. In the end, "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Mt 24:14) for their salvation. For that purpose, this journal is on the move.

Victor Raj, Editor, Lutheran Mission Matters



Photo credit: Concordia Seminary St. Louis

Kou Seying pictured at the 2017 HMong symposium.

Rev. Laokouxang (Kou) Seying 1964–2019

A Partial Biography of Kou Seying

Rick Marrs

Lao Kou Xang Thao (as his name is listed in the yearbook) began his career in higher education as a freshman at St. John's College (SJC) in Winfield, Kansas, in August 1983. We knew him then as Kou Thao. Later he chose to go by his surname, Seying.

He made his presence known on campus first on the soccer field. Kou had been a high school All-American. SJC coach, Neal Kaspar, had not recruited him, but Indianapolis Lutheran high school teacher, Richard Johnson, had encouraged him to attend SJC Winfield (personal communication with Kaspar, March 2020). SJC

admissions counselor Tammy Saleska (now Tammy Ferry) visited Indianapolis Lutheran on her way to visit her parents in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and convinced Kou he should "fill out an application" for SJC despite the fact that he had already been accepted into the engineering program of another university (KFUO Word & Work video interview with Dale Meyer, 2019). He quickly became the "striker" on the soccer team, the key offensive position, and led SJC in scoring for three years. He was an NLCAA (National Little College Athletic Association) All-American every year. SJC went to the NLCAA National Tournament twice under his leadership, placing sixth in 1984 and fifth in 1985. In the 1984 quarterfinals, the team took the eventual national champion into overtime. His quickness, ball handling, and teamwork skills were extraordinary and exciting to watch.

I was a young instructor and career counselor at SJC in 1983, just starting to teach at the age of twenty-five. Kou was in one of my first classes. I realized very quickly, along with other faculty members, that Kou was NOT just a skilled athlete, but also a VERY bright student. He excelled in academics and athletics at SJC. He had a bit of an Asian accent. He had to explain to us that his family was not from China or Korea, but he was HMong. He was very patient in explaining to us that the HMong were a people group from Laos, and that his family had immigrated to the US when he was twelve, after the Vietnam War and with the help of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services.

But Kou was not just a bright athlete. He was popular and active in many different student activities. He was on the Student Council. He was elected to the "Homecoming Court" both his sophomore and junior years, the only male student to be on that court both of the last two years of SJC's history. He was chosen by the student body as the last "Homecoming King" of SJC in 1985. Everybody knew and loved Kou. He was a friend to everyone.

But he was not just bright, athletic, and popular. He was also faithfully committed to the Gospel of his Lord Jesus Christ. During his sophomore year, he was still struggling with what vocation he would decide to follow. He was academically skilled and knew that he could do well in a STEM-type vocation, perhaps engineering. He sensed some cultural expectations to go into a STEM field in which he would be financially successful. He took a career development course that I developed and taught that year, and discussed the results of various interest inventories, values assessments, and skill evaluations with the class.

In the end, he concluded that studying to become a pastor was his calling. He desired to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others through the Office of Pastoral Ministry. Decades later, when we were professors together at Concordia Seminary, he reminded me how important that career development class had been in assuring him that he should become a pastor. We never know in what small ways the Lord will use us to nudge young students in faithful directions. Knowing that Kou became a pastor

partly because of a course he took with me thirty-five years ago is truly a humbling and gratifying thought.

Kou did not get to graduate from his beloved St. John's College in Winfield. The college was closed by the synod in 1986, at the end of Kou's junior year. He, along with a cadre of other "Johnnies," transferred to Concordia University Wisconsin to complete his final year of undergraduate studies before seminary; again he excelled in soccer and academics. He also got his pilot's license during that time. I remember, because he flew a small plane down from Wisconsin to Missouri to attend my wedding in June 1987. In 1993, after he had completed his studies at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and was serving as a pastor in St. Paul, Minnesota, Laura and I gladly returned the favor and drove many hours with our two young daughters to attend his wedding, when he married his beloved Maykou. Attending a HMong wedding and reception was a wondrous experience.

We stayed in touch throughout the years. We received newsletters about the various ministries the Lord called him to in Minnesota and California. While he was still a parish pastor, he would sometimes stop by my seminary office and offer advice on the formation of future pastors, especially those preparing for ethnic ministries, like in the EIIT program. When Concordia Seminary decided to call a professor specifically for urban and cross-cultural ministries, I recommended Kou be interviewed and called. In 2015, he was called to serve in that capacity, and was a wonderfully gifted colleague and professor. He would often drop by my office just to talk, and to ask my advice about how to work within the culture of Concordia Seminary. I greatly miss those conversations.

The apostle Paul said in First Thessalonians 4:13, "But we do not want you to be uninformed brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as those who have no hope." I still grieve the loss that we the church have suffered because the Lord chose to call our brother Kou from his labors among us to his rest in paradise. We give wondrous thanks for the years that the Lord chose to call our brother to serve among us and teach us so much about the importance of looking at the Gospel through the eyes of other cultures. We wish we had had more time with him here, but we look forward to that great and glorious day when our Lord Jesus will return for us all.

Words on Behalf of the Center for Hispanic Studies at the Visitation of Our Dean and Brother, Kou Seying

Morning Prayer Service Lutheran Church of Resurrection Dec. 6, 2019

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.

My name is Leo Sánchez. Through the Center for Hispanic Studies, my colleague, Marcos Kempff, and I worked closely with brother Kou at Concordia Seminary. Together, Marcos and I prepared some words that I would like to read from the two of us.

When we learned that our brother Kou was coming to serve with us at Concordia, we wanted to be among the first to greet and welcome him to his new seminary family. We wanted to do that in the best way Latinos know how, with a big hug. We wanted to encourage him the best we could.

We quickly learned that it was Kou who was the one who excelled at being welcoming and encouraging. When we ran into each other on campus, we often exchanged warm welcomes. Hugs were never in short supply. And Kou always had just the right words to make us feel encouraged in our work.

No matter how busy he was in his travels, Kou always made time to encourage others. Not too long ago, before his health started to deteriorate this past summer, I spent time with Kou at an event of the Association of Theological Schools for midcareer faculty. We were in a beautiful hotel in Newport Beach, California. I remember showing him a nice jacuzzi by the hotel pool, suggesting that he take some time off and relax a bit during a break from the day's agenda. But he was more interested in reaching out to a pastor in the area and having soup fellowship with him. So what do you think we ended up doing? Jacuzzi or soup? You got it! We had a delicious soup fellowship! Kou wanted to take time out of his busy schedule to be with this brother pastor. During his time as Dean, Marcos and I enjoyed lots of soup fellowships with brother Kou. Rich, deep, hopeful conversations. We will miss those precious moments.

When Kou was diagnosed with cancer, and we visited him at home to talk, pray, and sing hymns with him, he would say to us, with that smile of his: "Remember, I'm still your Dean!" He enjoyed receiving little reports from us about how things were going at the seminary. He was an encouraging leader. He wanted to make us feel

valued. Serving under him was a blessing. His welcoming disposition and helpful words were his way of honoring us in Christ's name.

Kou was an encourager until the very end of his life. Marcos and I visited him a day before he died. I said to him, "Jesus loves you"; Marcos said to him, "Peace be with you, brother Kou." He looked at us, first me, then Marcos, right in the eyes, and he went like this: ["thumbs-up!"]. I will never, ever forget that. Our Dean wanted us to feel valued and supported even when he was suffering. Even in the last days of his life with us in the here and now, Kou was wanting us to continue in the Lord's mission.

Marcos is in Guatemala speaking at a youth conference at the time of this memorial. He really struggled with whether he should go or stay. He wanted to be here. But then we ventured to ask, "What would Kou say?" or "What would our Dean want?" He would have given us a thumbs-up. He would have wanted Marcos to go and carry on the Lord's work, His mission.

Kou's confidence in Jesus, even in the face of pain and death, encourages us even now as we continue to run the race in this vale of tears. Our brother has died in Christ, and now rests from his labors and the pains of this life. Kou, the welcoming one, is now himself welcomed by a loving Father to be with His Son, Jesus, in paradise. With us, Kou, first and foremost a baptized child of God, now awaits the resurrection from the dead.

Still even as we miss our Dean, brother, and friend, we hold on to the hope that we shall see Kou again. We know that at the last day, we will be awakened from death so that, as the hymn goes, "these mine eyes with joy may see O Son of God thy glorious face."

Maykou, Grace, Sarah, Seth, Malachi, and all the Seying family: We grieve and hope in Jesus with you. A big hug to you all.

A Memorial for Kou Seying

Robert Holst

Concordia University, St. Paul [CSP] continues to be blessed by the ministry of Professor Kou Seying. He served as a pioneer HMong missionary in Minnesota and was CSP's first HMong professor. While Pastor Seying served as missionary-pastor of a HMong congregation at Jehovah Lutheran in St. Paul, his first connection with CSP came as coach of the men's soccer team beginning in 1992. He helped me, as Concordia's president, to understand the challenges, opportunities, and blessings of

reaching out in ministry to the HMong people. At that time and today, the largest gathering of HMong immigrants in the USA live in Minnesota—about 90,000.

Pastor Seying saw clearly that strong traditional cultural and family ties among the HMong people made it difficult for him, as pastor, to reach across clan lines. HMong congregations were "clan bound." He helped Concordia and Concordia helped him to reach across traditional barriers—a good example of teamwork in God's mission. As one example, HMong funerals were and still are important spiritual clan events. In week-long "animistic" gatherings, non-Christian families devotedly honor not only the person deceased but other ancestors as well. It would be culturally and spiritually insensitive or even blasphemous for a pastor to attend such a gathering. However, we deemed it possible and meaningful if I, as a college president and an "outsider," would briefly visit funeral gatherings of a relative of Concordia students. It could show care and share concern. We worked as a team on such occasions and word spread rapidly through the HMong community that Concordia was a caring place. It became clear that Pastor Seying, as a professor rather than a congregational pastor, might also reach more people in different clans. Today CSP professor Lee Pao Xiong, Director of the Center for HMong Studies, notes, "As pastor and pastorprofessor he played a vital role in and for the HMong community. In prayer and care, he was able to reach across traditional and contemporary issues drawing people together. His love and message of God's saving grace reached out to all including animists and shamanists."

Pastor Kou Seying also saw that the HMong immigrants, many impoverished and wounded, needed and gave opportunity for holistic ministry. They needed vocational and material support after losing all because of fighting with the USA in the Vietnam War. They needed psychological support to deal with traumatic scars from loss of loved ones and of their ancestral homeland, followed by deprivation while confined in foreign refugee camps. Some also experienced ugly racial prejudice after entering the USA. Pastor Seying knew that the Good News of life and salvation in Jesus Christ could and was giving them faith, hope, love, and peace in their new, confusing world. Dr. Lane Seitz, President of the LCMS Minnesota South District at that time, notes, "Rev. Kou Seying was passionate about sharing the Gospel with the HMong people who immigrated here to Minnesota. He was especially interested in finding ways to reach outside his own clan to the other clans represented in the Twin Cities. I thank God for him and the work God was able to accomplish through him." As an example of the fruit of his and others' labors, five HMong pastors were placed by the seminaries in Minnesota South District in 2016. About three hundred HMong students attend CSP's traditional educational programs.

Pastor Seying's mission and evangelism ministry, among many things, faced two major challenges and opportunities. First, there was little literature in the HMong language. Pastor Seying joined in efforts to translate the Bible and other literature into HMong. In partnership with other pastors and church leaders, he enabled CSP to publish several CPH Arch books and distribute them to families and congregations as another way to share Jesus with the HMong people.

The second challenge was helping HMong people in the vigorous debate on what should be their term of self-identity. [Traditionally, in various orthographies, the HMong were known as MEO in Laos, MIAO in China, H'moung in Viet Nam and Mong in Thailand.] There are several distinct HMong dialects and there is tradition, pride, and comfort in using one's own clan dialect. There arose the need to communicate with one's new neighbor in a common dialect. As the HMong moved from a pre-literate to a literate multilingual people, as pastor and professor, Kou Seying actively participated in that identity debate. "He was a bridge builder and a peacemaker. He made learning about Christianity more interesting, inviting, and comforting," according to Dr. Cheryl Chatman, Concordia's Dean of Diversity and Executive Vice-President.

For more cultural freedom and broader spiritual contact with the HMong, he became a full-time instructor at Concordia, St. Paul in 1997. Besides sharing the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ with all students, he also helped HMong students grow in proficiency in the English language and in understanding cultures of the USA. Professor Seying helped CSP administrators and professors see the need and blessing of what is now the KOOM HUM TSHAWB FAWB TXUG HMOOB [English: "Center for HMong Studies"]. What he envisioned, present CSP Professor Lee Pao Xiong planted and guided into a major cultural and educational resource. It enabled CSP to become the first educational institution [public or private] in the USA to offer a minor in HMong studies. Both HMong and some USA Vietnam war veterans have given such important artifacts and information to this Center that US government officials, scholars, student groups, and tourists come to examine the treasures. The Center for HMong Studies is now preparing for its eighth international conference, originally scheduled for April 17–19, 2020. Scholars from the USA, Belgium, Vietnam, and China have already submitted essays that they plan to present.

The life and service of Professor Kou Seying at Concordia continues as a blessing to many. As Dr. Brian Friedrich, Concordia's current president, gratefully states, "What he planted still blooms like multiple petals of beautiful flowers. As the first so-called minority member of the Theology Department, he enriched the university's perspective, experience, and love."

We in St. Paul, Minnesota, join Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in praising and thanking God for the life and ministry of Kou Seying. To God be the glory.

Rev. Laokouxang (Kou) Seying, A Missionary's Missionary in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS)

Michael Lange and Robert Newton

Missiologist Donald Larson suggests that missionary development takes place in three stages: Learner, Trader, and Storyteller. These stages well capture the person and ministry of missionary Kou Seying and the legacy that he leaves us to follow as Lutheran missionaries.

Kou the Learner

Learners are insatiably curious. Always asking questions, they desire to dig deeper in their quest to understand better a subject or, in the case of a missionary, a people group whom they seek to reach with the Gospel. Such learning requires humility, the willingness to say with St. Paul, "Now we see through a glass darkly." As an MDiv and later PhD student at Concordia Theological Seminary, Kou was always asking questions inside and outside the classroom. His was no idle curiosity. He was committed to becoming a missionary to his HMong people, first in the United States but also to others around the world. He wanted to learn all that he could about sound missiological theology and practice. Already as a vicar in Merced, California, he demonstrated a strong aptitude and passion for missionary service. "Tell me your story," was often Kou's request. This caring curiosity for people that he longed to know and to have them know the love of their Savior Jesus would never leave him.

His learning continued in earnest as he formally entered the mission field as an ordained pastor. He quickly became a student of HMong culture and faith for the sake of Gospel proclamation. Seeking to learn from HMong Christians and non-Christians alike, he explored the depths of HMong culture, social organization, family life, and faith practices. He believed that the Gospel intended to transform every aspect of HMong life, personally and communally, taking every thought captive to the heart and mind of Jesus Christ.

"But, we are HMong" is a phrase that is often used to justify overlooking behavior or practicing secrecy from people not part of the HMong culture. Kou believed that a person's Christian identity must supersede this mindset. "But, we are HMong" does not easily loosen its grip. The old Adam, demonstrated by "but we are Hmong," must daily be drowned as the new man arises. Only the Word of God, showing Christ's love and victory, can refine and purge this powerful cultural construct. For many this is a

lifelong battle. However, Jesus has already made full atonement. We are given a new identity, freely by faith.

Kou the Trader

Over time and with some experience, missionaries develop the ability to trade ideas, understandings, practices, and values with their host culture. These exchanges prove most valuable when they connect with life's joys, sorrows, successes, and struggles in both the natural and supernatural worlds.

Kou engaged the HMong people at the level of everyday life. In sharing back and forth with clan elders, religious shaman, mothers and fathers, young people and children, he developed a deep understanding of HMong life here in California and an even greater empathy for their spiritual, cultural, familial, and material struggles. Like our Lord, he was moved with deep compassion for his people, knowing that they were truly harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

While sharing common concerns and possible responses with leaders in the HMong community, Kou sought always to point to the one and only real answer to life's sufferings: our Lord Jesus Christ. Specifically, he pointed people to the cross.²

Tao Lee was a HMong shaman, who learned to know the Seyings through their radio program, "Light of life." Tao was fully aware of his bondage to Satan. He could never appease Satan adequately, saying, "When Satan blindfolds you, that's all you see. Jesus has to lift that blindfold." While stressed out and sick of the old ways, he was unable to find comfort from Christian pastors who encouraged Tao to stop serving Satan and serve Jesus instead. It seemed that he was trading one form of legalistic coercion for another. Kou's radio program had offered something different. There he heard the power of the Gospel. Jesus removed his Satanic blindfold and hopelessness and offered Tao God's light and love in Jesus. There was a trade: spiritual bondage under the law exchanged for freedom and true sonship under the Gospel.

Kou the Storyteller

Holding a position of influence, even authority, in a community, the role of storyteller, cannot be assumed by missionaries; it is only bestowed by the unreached community to which the Lord has sent them. It is only given when the community believes one has something worth hearing.

Kou became a true storyteller among the HMong in both method and message. The "Light of Life" radio program ran first in Minnesota, then in the Central Valley of California, and finally through the Internet, bearing fruit among the HMong people around the world. Beyond the airwaves, Kou shared the eternal truths of the Gospel through story in his preaching, Bible teaching, and catechetical instruction. Kou

understood God's Word as the personal story of God's love for the world and His desire that all people everywhere would know Him as their loving Father. Kou was gifted to share that story in the language and cultural world of the Hmong, knowing that the Scriptures were written for them as much as for any other group. He taught in simple yet profound ways that even children could understand. His hope was that his people in hearing God's Story would desire to enter into it personally, embracing their living Lord through faith. "This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3 NIV).

Kou also became a storyteller among us in the LCMS. He instructed us in sound missiological practices through the personal story of his own ministry.

Kou used all of his skills and learning as he moved into wider ministry and teaching. Key lessons were taught including the emphasis on planting multiple congregations simultaneously in different population centers. Knowing that he could not be pastor of them all he prayed for, identified, and trained local indigenous leaders to preach and teach God's Word. He developed leadership training modules to prepare those leaders who demonstrated spiritual and social maturity to serve as leaders and then enter seminary training to serve these young congregations.

Perhaps the greatest missionary lesson Kou shared with us was his burning passion that all people would hear and believe the Gospel. Kou's evangelistic zeal captivated the imagination and hope of Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) women and long-term LCMS members first in Minnesota and then in the Central Valley of California. While he was a champion for the HMong people, his desire to connect all races and cultures to Christ forged meaningful relationships which blossomed in his work multiculturally alongside the students and faculty at Concordia Seminary.

The three stages of missionary development don't take place in a vacuum. They grow out of the deep and personal relationships we build with others. Kou's ministry was built on relationships. Team ministry with his wife, Maykou, proved essential in opening the intimate doors of trust and relationship within HMong families. This trust unlocked hidden secrets and revealed idols that needed to be destroyed.

Kou strove to build relationships between HMong leaders around the LCMS, (no easy task), recognizing that ultimately only Christ could build the needed bonds of trust required to serve together in His Kingdom. In the California-Nevada-Hawaii District, Kou was an inspirational man of possibilities, holding out a preferred reality of serving together as a church of many cultures under one Lord to reach even more people with the Gospel. He carried that hope to the heart of our church body when he was called to serve as a professor at Concordia Seminary, a storytelling position. However, Kou often stepped back into his role as learner and trader, forging relationships, contributing to the community with tireless energy, and inspiring an

evangelistic zeal. Laokouxang (Kou) Seying was a man captivated by the Gospel and its unspeakable power to transform hearts, lives, and ultimately God's church and world. These are marks of a true storyteller. Our brother Kou was emerging as such a storyteller in our church body when he was translated from this life to the glorious presence of our Lord. We remain forever grateful for the story of his life and the Christ-centered love, wisdom, and understanding he shared with us as we live and serve in this missionary age.

Endnotes

- ¹ Donald N. Larson, "The Viable Missionary: Learner, Trader, Story Teller" in *Missiology: An International Review* VI, no. 2 (April 1978).
- ² "From the biblical and missional approach, one sees that the way of the cross, when properly applied, has all the 'ingredients' to address the question of HMong Spiritism. First of all, suffering is not something that the way of the cross avoids or shies away from. It deals head-on with suffering." Kou Seying, "HMong Spiritism," *Missio Apostolica* 23, no. 1 (May 2015): 97.

HMong Mission in LCMS

Kou Seying

Editor's Note: This is a reprint of Kou Seying's article that first appeared in *Missio Apostolica* 22, no. 2 (Nov. 2014): 309–326.

Abstract: "HMong Mission in LCMS" was a paper written in 1998 for a course in the PhD in Missiology program. It is the first comprehensive analysis and well-documented studies of the first two decades of LCMS ministry among the HMong people in America. The paper captures both the ecclesiastical and theological developments of the initial decades. Concordia Historical Institute's subcommittee for ministry to minority groups in the U.S. comments in a November 1998 letter requesting to archive it, "The paper is an original and it is a necessary piece to fit into the total picture of the LCMS World Mission today."

Introduction

HMong mission in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has over two decades of history. Two questions are often asked: Who are the HMong people? And why are they here [in America]? It is surprising. Yet, at the same time, it is not surprising that after two decades of HMong presence in America, many still ask these questions. The most widely accepted meaning by HMong scholars for the word "HMong" is free or free people. There are approximately 300,000 living in the United States of America (U.S.). Nearly half (125,000) entered the U.S. from the refugee camps in Thailand.¹

The HMong people live throughout the world. They are a nation of people without an original country of their own but who have a distinct culture and language. The earliest possible documentation of the HMong people dates to 2679 BC in Chinese annals.² Several million still live in the southern provinces of China today. In the midnineteenth century, some of them migrated to Southeast Asia, where they settled in Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), and Laos.

During the Vietnam War, HMong men were recruited by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to fight the Other Theater of the war.³ This part of the war was fought in the country of Laos. It was very much a secret war and a civil war. HMong were on both sides of the war, along with the Lao and other groups. The secret army of the CIA primarily consisted of HMong soldiers. One of its top priority missions was to contain the Ho Chi Minh Trail.⁴ General Vang Pao estimated that

35,000 HMong men were killed in the war, an astounding number when one compares it to the 58,000 American soldiers who died in Vietnam. When the war ended in 1975, many HMong fled to neighboring Thailand. Because of the involvement with the U.S. government, they were the prime target for the communist regime to destroy. Many eventually resettled in the U.S. and other parts of the world, including Australia, Europe, and South America.

Today, there are several large HMong communities throughout the U.S. The largest concentrated community is the Minneapolis–St. Paul metropolitan area, with an estimated HMong population of over 60,000.⁶ In the St. Paul Public Schools District, nearly 25% of the students are HMong.⁷ Other large communities are in Wisconsin, California, Colorado, and Georgia.

There are two primary dialects, Blue and White, spoken among the HMong people in the U.S. The traditional religion of the HMong is animism, with a strong emphasis on henotheism.⁸ The following is a brief description of HMong beliefs and worldview:

...The concept of time is vastly different from that of the western linear view. Various ages repeat themselves cyclically with no final goal. In this way, there is really no purpose to history at least not the usual understanding of the term "history." It is interesting to compare and contrast a village a century ago with another village today, often, one will see that there is virtually no difference.

There is very little distinction between the physical and spiritual realm. Spiritual power may reign over a family, clan, village, or certain localities such as a river or a mountain or any physical representation. It is the duty of human to make peace with the spirits, the terrifying and mysterious powers of nature. There is no divine guidance in the human appearament act. It relies solely upon the ability of human especially through the shaman to manipulate the spiritual realm.

The HMong people believe that there are many spirits, but it is important to have a close adherence to a certain spirit usually connected in some ways with the dead ancestors (*ib tug dlaab ib tug qhua*). This belief has been referred to as *henotheism*. It has tremendous social implication. The closeness of relation is determined by the adherence to a certain spirit. When this has been determined by any two individuals then the emphatic phrase *koj tuag tau huv kuv tsev kuv tuag tau huv koj tsev* could be exclaimed which says, "I may died in your house and you may died in my house." This is to show the ultimate relationship of families. Otherwise, it would be of great offense to the spirits to die in the house that adheres to a different spirit.

By tradition, the HMong people structure around the concept of clan and community. The communal aspect of society dictates that the survival of the group is of paramount importance. The existence of an individual is defined through the relationship to the community. An individual who lives outside of the communal structure traditionally cannot survive because there is no identity. All actions have to be for the common good of the group to ensure its survival.⁹

Most often the object of worship has been characterized by power rather than justice, love, or mercy. This carries out usually through the shaman who would perform rituals to communicate with the world of spirits. Sometimes, the shaman would enter a state of trance to participate in the life of the spirits for a short period of time. Often, power is believed to be attained through this practice of shamanism.

The HMong worldview does see that there is no escape of the human problems. Whether it is illness, social, political, or spiritual problem, the state of grace cannot be reached in any final way. There will always be new problems. Blood sacrifices of animals are the usual means of atonement in the sense that it appeases the anger of the spirits or to gain some kind of material favors from them. ¹⁰ Much of the resource is used for these various rituals and sacrifices throughout the year. Animistic rituals and sacrifices are offered in many occasions from birth to death, from marriage to New Year celebration, and so on. More often than not, it drains the family resources.

It may be concluded that there is no aspect of a traditional HMong life that can be separated from the spiritual realm. It is this bondage of the terrifying and mysterious spirits that finally led to the overwhelming success of the mission in Laos. Christianity came not as the product of European American missionaries but as it embraced the HMong in such a salvific way. The freedom from the spirits to the freedom in Christ met with great resounding. This is something that many of us who were born into Christian families may not be able to appreciate to the fullest in terms of human experience.

"Cast away the spirits" becomes the central theological theme for HMong Christians. It is at this point that becomes the crossroads for further theological development. Faith in Christ means that the spirits are cast away; the old tradition has been replaced by the new.¹¹

The First HMong Congregation in LCMS

Many families that came to the U.S. were sponsored by many Lutheran congregations and individuals beginning in 1976 through the Lutheran Immigration

and Refugee Service (LIRS) agency in New York. They resettled all across the country from coast to coast and north to south. Truman, Minnesota, was one of those places where Lutheran congregations assisted in bringing families into the U.S. Two congregations from Truman and South Branch sponsored Chia Ky Vang's¹² family. The family arrived on June 10, 1976. It was through this resettlement effort that the Vang family became Christians. Pastor Arthur Drevlow at South Branch baptized the Vang family. After two years, in 1978, they moved to St. Paul to join other Vang clan members.

St. John in Truman recommended the family to Pastor Edward F. Lutz at Bethel Lutheran Church in St. Paul. Through the ministry of Bethel, a HMong ministry began to reach out to the HMong community. As membership grew, Bethel conducted two worship services with one in English and the other in English but translated into HMong by Yia Vang, the second son of Chia Ky Vang, and other young leaders. The Vang children also attended Lutheran schools in St. Paul, both at Eastside and Central.

In 1982, HMong ministry in Minneapolis began under the leadership of Pastor Steve Kosberg, former missionary to Papua New Guinea. After six months of intensive language learning through a HMong man, he led the first HMong worship service in January of 1983. Five people came to that first service. ¹³ They held their services at Mt. Olive. Financial support for this ministry came from Mt. Zion Lutheran Church and other area congregations. Mt. Zion had also sponsored HMong families.

In this first decade, lay ministers and lay leaders (Yia Vang, Va Tou Her, Wang Kao Her, and Chang Tao Vang) served these ministries under the supervision of Pastor Kosberg. In 1986, the two ministries in St. Paul and Minneapolis decided to join together to form one congregation. On the first Sunday of June 1986, the two ministries merged and held their first worship service together as one congregation at Jehovah Lutheran Church in the Midway area of St. Paul.

Centrally located Jehovah Lutheran Church graciously opened its door, sharing the facilities with this new congregation. On September 18, 1988, the congregation was officially received into membership of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Minnesota South District with the name HMong Evangelical Lutheran Church. Thus, the first HMong LCMS congregation was born.

Due to internal conflicts in 1989, all the members from the Her clan left the congregation to form a new congregation, HMong Community Lutheran Church of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). ¹⁴ The issue was not theological but a social one that led to the exodus of the Her clan. It was difficult for Pastor Kosberg and Pastor Jeff Miller, Minnesota South District Mission, to help in resolving the conflicts. Confronted with two different worldviews, they were not exactly sure how to approach the problem. They were handicapped by the fact that neither of them knew the HMong language enough to detect the dynamics of what the members were not verbalizing. What they thought they understood was different from what the

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members were saying. The other challenge was that, out of respect for their being from outside of the HMong community and for their roles in the ministry, the members simply chose to not explicitly share every detail. Thus, it was not possible for the supervising pastor nor the mission executive to prevent the group from leaving the LCMS.

Less than two years after this break, Laokouxang Seying (Thao)¹⁵ was ordained and installed as the first HMong pastor in the LCMS on July 7, 1991, at HMong Lutheran Church. He is known simply as "Pastor Kou or *Xibfwb [Nyaj] Kub*" who served the congregation for a total of seven years. ¹⁶ During the time of Pastor Kou's ministry, the congregation grew to serve about 300 members. Today, its total membership is 282 with an average worship attendance over 100 under the leadership of Deacon Chang Tao Vang, who was commissioned by the Minnesota South District President, Rev. Dr. Lane R. Seitz, on December 1, 1996. This congregation continues to be the largest HMong congregation in LCMS today, with the majority under the age of 18.

Lansing, Michigan, and the Michigan District

The HMong ministry in Lansing, MI, began in 1978 at Our Savior Lutheran Church. Several families arrived in the greater Lansing area through the sponsorship of Ascension, Our Savior, and other congregations. Zong Houa Yang and his wife, after initially resettling in Philadelphia in 1976, moved to Lansing and were confirmed at Our Savior in 1978. Zong Houa served as a Bible study leader and translator for these families.

After completing the Lay Minister training at Concordia College Milwaukee (Concordia University Wisconsin) in December of 1981, he began serving in the following month as a full-time certified lay minister to the greater Lansing area and other areas of Michigan. Over the years, the primary focus was in Lansing and, to a certain degree, in Saginaw. His ministry was supervised by the pastors at Our Savior and Ascension and by a joint HMong Ministry Committee.

In 1989, Zong Houa began his pastoral studies through Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, in a special colloquy non-degree program. He was mentored extensively by Pastor Roy P. Schroeder and Eldor F. Bickel. While studying for the pastoral ministry, he continued to serve the ministry as lay minister.

As Zong Houa drew near to his ordination into the pastoral office, several meetings of the joint committee were held to discuss and clarify the direction of the HMong ministry in Michigan. The committee affirmed that he would continue his ministry with Our Savior, Ascension, and other LCMS congregations in the Lansing area, Saginaw, and possibly Detroit. The committee also placed emphasis on integrating the HMong into the Anglo [English] worship services. This would require

additional English language skills on the part of Zong Houa. Another point was the intensification and continuation of his theological studies. The committee recognized the need to help the transition from lay minister to student to ordained pastor. It was a concern that the proper balance be reached in the social service functions performed for the HMong along with the other pastoral duties.

As with most new ministries, financial support for HMong ministry is always a concern. The committee also cited this as a concern with the direction of HMong ministry in Michigan. Much of the support was and continues to be from outside the HMong members, posing a tremendous challenge in the long run.

In November of 1993, Zong Houa was issued a one-year, non-tenured call to serve the HMong people in Lansing and other parts of Michigan. This call was in conjunction with the Mission Board of the Michigan District. Zong Houa would be supervised by the administrative pastor and elders of Our Savior Lutheran Church. The senior pastors of Our Savior and Ascension would assign his tasks. The Mission Executive and the Board of Mission Development of the Michigan District would evaluate his ministry "at large" annually. His work would be 60% in Lansing and 40% in other areas of Michigan.

Again, a part of this call was to strive for mainstreaming the HMong people into existing Lutheran congregations and seeking advanced training in cross-cultural mission work. Finally, Zong Houa was ordained on December 19, 1994, at Our Savior Lutheran Church. His ordination was a welcomed event, for the HMong are almost non-existent on the clergy roster of LCMS. It strengthened the rest of HMong mission work.

In 1995, while continuing with the ministry in Lansing and Saginaw, Pastor Zong Houa started serving some HMong in East Detroit on a once-a-month basis through Mt. Zion Lutheran Church, an ELCA inner-city culturally diverse congregation. This was a new opportunity to serve the HMong in Detroit, where a large community exists. Strategically, Detroit was an important site for reaching a large number of HMong in a concentrated area.

A controversy arose in 1994 over the question of where the HMong should conduct worship services at Our Savior Lutheran Church. They were worshiping in their own HMong service in the gym or music room. Many of the HMong members did not approve of this arrangement. Some withheld their presence at worship because they were offended by not being able to worship in the sanctuary. In April of 1994, it was decided that the HMong would worship at the English service on the first and third Sundays of each month and would hold their own HMong service in the sanctuary the second and fourth Sundays after the English 10:45 a.m. service. This was also an attempt to assimilate the HMong into the mainstream worship life of Our Savior Lutheran Church.

It is noteworthy that worship services in the HMong language drew anywhere from 50 to 120 people. The number of HMong in the English services was usually no more than 30. By 1995, HMong membership numbered 187 in the Our Savior congregation, consisting of about 100 children, 10 to 20 high school age, and about 60 adults. As of October 16, 1996, the HMong members at Our Savior began worshiping regularly every Sunday in the HMong language. As the result, attendance has increased.

Pastor Zong Houa is the only ordained HMong pastor in Michigan. He covers a wide area of ministry and networks with other HMong pastors in Minnesota and Wisconsin regularly through meetings and conferences. Much of his time in Lansing has been in a "social work" function rather than in a traditional pastoral role. With the help of Pastors Bickel and Schroeder, doctrinal and worship materials were translated into HMong by Pastor Zong Houa. One of the desires is to eventually reach out to the HMong in Asia.¹⁷

The Wisconsin Districts: North and South

The HMong ministries in Wisconsin, as with HMong ministries in other districts, began with the sponsorship of many HMong families throughout the state by congregations and individuals of the LCMS. HMong ministries in Wisconsin emerged as the result of these efforts. The families that were sponsored provided the nucleus group to the outreach effort to the HMong community. Often, individuals in these families became the leaders for the ministry.

In the summer of 1987, James Henning, the principal of Trinity Lutheran School in Oshkosh, approached Yia Vang¹⁸ asking him to teach the Word of God to the HMong families attending Trinity Lutheran Church. During this time, Yia was enrolled at Concordia College Milwaukee (Concordia University Wisconsin) to continue his studies toward the pastoral ministry.

At that same period of time, Trinity Lutheran Church in Sheboygan and Redeemer Lutheran Church in Manitowoc also approached Yia to assist the HMong families in their congregations. While completing his college education, Yia worked with these congregations to explore the possibilities of developing ministry to the HMong people in these communities.

These ministries were not able to be developed until after Yia completed his seminary training in St. Louis. He was ordained on March 21, 1993, and called as missionary-at-large to the HMong people by the South Wisconsin District. Pastor Yia traveled to various ministry sites in both North and South Wisconsin Districts each month. This was the beginning of many HMong ministries throughout Wisconsin.

In 1995, HMong Lutheran Outreach was received into membership as the second HMong LCMS congregation. They currently worship at Trinity in Oshkosh with Copyright 2020 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

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nearly 100 members. Also, four additional mission congregations have been established in Wisconsin within the last three years. Fox Cities HMong Lutheran Church, with 25 members, is led by Pastor Yia as well. HMong Hope Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, led by Deacon Faiv Neng Her, who was commissioned on September 22, 1996, has a total membership of 125. Nou Toua Yang was commissioned on January 25, 1998, to serve HMong Redeemer Lutheran Church in Manitowoc, now with 67 members. HMong Pilgrim Lutheran Church has 75 members and is led by Deacon Kue Ly, who was commissioned in 1998 as well.

California-Nevada-Hawaii District (CNH)

The CNH District came into contact with the HMong people through its congregations sponsoring HMong families to resettle in the U.S. St. Paul in Merced is one of those congregations that sponsored HMong families. Not only sponsoring families, the congregation opened its door to HMong Christians from other denominations to use its facilities for their services. In 1989–1990, Pastor Kou served his vicarage in Merced. As he fulfilled the seminary requirement for vicarage, it was also a time to explore HMong ministry and to expose the HMong community to the LCMS.

Although the congregations in California had been in contact with the HMong community and had some peripheral ministries, there was no Word and Sacrament ministry serving the HMong anywhere in California.¹⁹ It was not until 1998 that LCMS HMong ministry was established at St. Paul in Merced. Conversations and meetings between Rev. Clarence Eisberg and Nou Vang Thao, pastor of the Lao Evangelical Church, which rents St. Paul's facilities, led to a new HMong ministry in the LCMS.

A meeting was held in Merced on April 4, 1998; among the representatives were leaders from St. Paul's congregation, Rev. Yia Vang (HMong Field Counselor from LCMS World Mission), Rev. Ed Krueger (CNH Mission Executive), Nou Vang Thao, and Rev. Clarence Eisberg. As the result of this meeting, the official process for developing this ministry moved forward quickly. Already in April, Pastor Eisberg began to instruct Nou Vang in Lutheran doctrine for adult confirmation. In order to maintain the momentum, it meant that Nou Vang had to be both student and teacher at the same time. He taught what he learned each week to the HMong families.

After sufficient preparation had been reached, it was time to recognize this new ministry publicly. The many years of establishing relationship with the HMong community culminated in a wonderful event in the summer of 1998. This statement was proclaimed:

The exploding power of Almighty God within His Church is something awesome to behold. And on Sunday morning, June 7th, 1998 that is exactly what happened at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Merced, Calif.²⁰

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On this day, 95 were baptized and confirmed 20. Along with Baptisms and confirmations was the commissioning of Nou Vang Thao and Philip Koua Thao as commissioned deacons of Word and Sacrament ministry by President Walter Tietjen of the CNH District. Today, there are 125 HMong members at St. Paul. Other areas are being developed in California through the missionary-at-large effort of Deacon Nou Vang.

Minnesota South District (MNS)

Faith Lutheran Church in Minneapolis opened its door to a new HMong ministry in the Minnesota South District. This new mission congregation began worshiping in April of 1998 and is in the process of being recognized officially in the District. Deacon Dang Thao is working with this ministry under the supervision of Pastor Rodney E. Ketcher, serving 83 people. Saint Stephanus, another site in St. Paul being developed at this time, is in the midst of a highly concentrated HMong neighborhood, Frogtown. Deacon Chang Tao Vang from HMong Lutheran Church is working under the supervision of Pastor James W. Bender.

Synodical Efforts At Large

The first HMong Lutheran Hymnal was published by Concordia Publishing House in 1991, the result of an effort over ten years by HMong leaders and pastors serving HMong ministry. With a \$10,000 grant from LCMS Foundation, it was possible to publish this hymnal. It contains 235 hymns, 109 children's songs, and liturgical materials. This hymnal was uniquely constructed to contain both dialects, placing them in an inverted back to back order into one book. In other words, there is no back cover in this hymnal. By rotating the hymnal around its horizontal axis, one goes from the cover page of one dialect to the other.

Since 1993, there have been numerous meetings and gatherings among the HMong members and leaders. Leadership conferences and ministry convocations have been held throughout the Midwest on an annual basis. These events were created to support and encourage these new ministries, drawing anywhere between 200 to 400 participants of all ages.

Several important meetings took place in late 1994 and early 1995 to discuss the future of HMong ministry. One important meeting was held at Concordia College in St. Paul at the invitation of the Rev. Dr. Robert A. Holst, President of Concordia College (Concordia University—St. Paul), on October 27, 1994. At this meeting, a HMong Mission Project was proposed. Subsequent meetings were held to discuss the mission project to include the dialogue with Concordia Theological Seminary for

possible theological training for HMong leaders and the development of the HMong Institute.

In April of 1995, Minnesota South District called Pastor Kou to serve as missionary-at-large with the specific task of developing leadership training and a mission institute. After several meetings with Dr. Holst, it was decided that the HMong Institute be located on the campus of Concordia University. Pastor Kou was appointed as the director in 1997.

Several important meetings took place beginning in August of 1995 at which all the mission executives of the various districts with HMong ministries and the HMong pastors came together to find ways to work together in expanding HMong ministry in LCMS. The first meeting was a "skunkworks" held at the South Wisconsin District office on August 15–16, 1995. Present at the meeting were four district mission executives: Rev. Earl Bleke, (South WI), Rev. Dwayne Lueck (North WI), Rev. Jeff Miller (MN South), Rev. Mike Ruhl (MI); three missionaries-at-large: Rev. Kou Seying (MN South), Rev. Yia Vang (South WI), and Rev. Zong Houa Yang (MI); and the Rev. Ron Meyer (President, South WI).

The goal of this meeting was "to create a learning team that will provide support, ideas, and accountability for the implementation of the HMong Mission Initiative." It was the first time leaders of HMong ministry in the LCMS came together to discuss one common task: how to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the HMong people in North America. Several issues were identified. The top three issues were the plan/vision, raising leaders, and funding.

It was necessary to begin the process of expanding and training workers to connect with a seminary or college. Another important part of this plan/vision was to provide a forum or national gathering for bringing together HMong leaders. There was also a need for a ministry center to process information about HMong ministry. Perhaps, a mission society could play that role. In adopting the plan/vision of HMong Mission Initiative, it was important to go beyond the immediate existing HMong ministries.

The issues of raising leaders had to do with both the long-term and immediate needs. The greatest challenge was and is that there are only three ordained HMong pastors in LCMS. It was critical to begin the identification process of potential leaders for the seminary. Leadership training by HMong and European Americans was discussed. The matter of credentialing and certifying was an important part of the discussion, along with other aspects of leadership, such as use of volunteers or worker priests, age and type of service to the missions.

The funding issue was always a difficult one. It was clear that the HMong themselves would not be able to support their ministries. It was necessary to seek external funding as well as internal. Possible granting agencies were identified: Lutheran Brotherhood (LB), Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL), Lutheran

Women's Missionary League (LWML), Districts, foundations, and mission societies recognized by the LCMS.

Another milestone meeting was held in Milwaukee on February 2–3, 1996. A vision statement included the following focus: "An expanding network of credentialed HMong leaders, mentoring and mobilizing HMong lay leaders, empowering them for indigenous, contextualized, congregation based mission work among HMong populations in America and North America." This meeting continued the discussion of leadership and funding issues.

An important step was taken at this meeting for HMong ministry in LCMS. President Ron Meyer updated the lay ministry certification discussion at the Council of Presidents as the result of the request of the last HMong Mission meeting. This step led to the certification of Commissioned Deacon by districts for Word and Sacrament ministries under the supervision of ordained pastors. This approach became the process for district presidents to place workers into situations where calling ordained pastors are not possible. While these commissioned deacons serve their congregations, they were to engage in pastoral studies through the then DELTO program or other approved alternatives that lead to ordination.

One other very significant matter at this meeting was addressed: the recognition of HMong ministry in LCMS. The Rev. Dr. Robert J. Scudieri, North America Area Secretary for LCMS World Mission, participated in this meeting. The next meeting took place in St. Paul, MN, at Concordia University on May 29–30, 1996. At this meeting, the representatives selected Pastor Kou to chair the HMong Ministry Conference, which is intended to support the existing HMong ministries throughout LCMS. With the recommendation from the representatives, Pastor Yia was appointed by Dr. Scudieri as the HMong Field Counselor to work with LCMS North American Missions. A task force was also created to support the work of the field counselor. Cher Tou Vang (a lay leader from St. Paul, MN), Pastor Zong Houa, and Pastor Jeff Miller were appointed to this task force. The field counselor is to assist districts in planting HMong ministries. These were the significant actions at this meeting.

The various meetings with officials from LCMS International Center, districts, Concordia University, and HMong leaders, ultimately led to the formation of the Upper Midwest DELTO (Distance Education Leading to Ordination) program which consists of seven districts (IW, MN North, MN South, ND, SD, South WI, North WI). Originally, it began as a HMong project. Because of the tremendous pastoral need of the church, it expanded into other groups besides the HMong, including European Americans in unique settings. The first class was held on March 5–7, 1998, at Camp Omega in Waterville, MN, with four HMong deacons at this initial class. The fifth HMong deacon joined at the second class held in St. Paul, MN. The Upper Midwest DELTO was assigned to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

Another very significant event for HMong mission during this period was the announcement of Dr. Holst on February 15, 1997, that Concordia University—St. Paul pledged to partner with the church in reaching out to the HMong community.²⁴ Specifically, in its future plans, Concordia pledged to raise endowment scholarship for HMong students, to include a HMong emphasis in its new library building project, and to provide a special Southeast Asian Teacher program (SEAT). CSP has the largest enrollment of HMong students in the synodical colleges and universities: between 40 and 50 students yearly. CSP has been supporting HMong students since 1984 with its Southeast Asian Students Program. On July 1, 1998, Pastor Kou accepted the call from CSP to be a full-time faculty member directing the HMong Institute, teaching, and networking with the church and the HMong community.

At the HMong Leadership Conference in St. Paul, MN, on August 28–29, 1998, the HMong Ministry Conference entered into a new partnership with the LCMS Board for Congregational Services. The Multicultural Department, led by Rev. Jerry M. Kosberg, will work with the ministry conference to enhance the ability to support existing HMong ministries throughout LCMS. Also, at this conference, the plan to move forward in establishing a HMong mission society was approved.

An Analysis of the Two Decades

The total HMong membership in LCMS today is approximately 1,300. It has taken over two decades to reach this point. It is important to note that the HMong people did not leave their homeland by choice. It was the result of the Vietnam War that many were forced to leave Laos. For this reason, the HMong people in America are not immigrants. Physically they are here in America, but their hearts and minds are in Asia for many that came as adults. This is in contrast to immigrants whose immigrating to the U.S. was for economic and/or religious reasons. This difference has had an impact on the work of the church to a certain degree.

The question of why it took so long for HMong ministry to expand in the LCMS may have several answers. First of all, the goal of these many congregations who sponsored families was to assimilate or integrate them into the mainstream congregations, as indicated clearly in the Lansing ministry. This goal was especially difficult to achieve for the HMong families coming from a communal society. Many congregations did not understand why after such a short period of times the HMong families moved away. The congregations felt they had done everything possible to support these families, from food to housing to employment. Yet, many families still chose to leave.

The most significant reason was that these families needed a HMong community to survive. They were cut off from their relatives. For a traditional HMong person, the relationship to the community (family, extended families, clan) defines his or her existence. Even though many families were cared for very well, they were extremely lonely. As soon as other relatives arrived, the natural thing to do was to join them. The language and cultural barriers were contributing factors as well. Thus, assimilation or integration into the mainstream life of the congregation was for the most part not possible. Once they were joined with relatives, the clan usually determined the new congregation²⁵ where they would join or they would simply return to animistic practice.

Secondly, the lack of HMong pastors in LCMS played an enormous part in the slow growth of HMong members in LCMS. There are good candidates among the HMong leaders for the pastoral office, but they do not meet the academic prerequisites for LCMS pastoral education. The following discussion is an example of theological education issues in LCMS today:

For the most part, theological education in LCMS has been very traditional in the classic western sense. It requires that there is only one appropriate level, time, place, and language. Therefore, everything else must fit into this one category for theological education. If it does not fit, then, theological education cannot take place. This is the greatest challenge for today's situation. Many leaders from the ethnic/immigrant ministries do not meet the requirements for traditional theological education. Yet, at the same time, the need to reach out with the gospel is not met by the church.

The first and foremost issue has to do with language. There is no biblical mandate that English must be the requirement in order for theological education to take place. This is a steep and rocky mountain to climb for members of LCMS whose first language is not English. The moment English is the requirement to prepare leaders for service in the church in a specific context, the pool of qualified candidates reduces to an unworkable number. This English requirement was reaffirmed in late 1997 by the DELTO Policy Board in a resolution that was passed:

Because of the value of communicating in English in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as well as in American society as a whole, the DELTO Policy Board recommends that those who enter the program make every effort to become proficient in English before entering the program or by the end of the course of study (December 6, 1997 Memorandum from Dr. Alan W. Borcherding, Board For Higher Education).

These leaders who are chosen by the congregations who do not meet the English efficiency requirement become more or less denigrated. Their abilities to lead seem unimportant. LCMS has missed some wonderful opportunities to equip leaders from various language groups due to this

prerequisite. Until this is resolved, recognition of theological education in all situations is nearly impossible.²⁶

This has been an issue all along in HMong ministry. It is not surprising, then, that after two decades there are only three ordained HMong pastors in the entire LCMS. This situation will continue to be an issue until LCMS addresses this policy adequately. Whether these current deacons will successfully complete the program leading to ordination remains to be seen. There are indications that some will not be able to continue this program because of this precise academic issue.

Another major factor today has to do with the transition in the HMong community. Many people are much more concerned with maintaining an "American lifestyle" that requires a great deal of time in the work place for both husband and wife. As the result, spiritual life is not a priority, as in many parts of the rest of America today. Many individuals are holding two different jobs. For those who own their own businesses, often, it requires many hours per day and seven days per week on site.

Two Theological Emphases

Christ as the deliverer and Christ as the healer have become important theological emphases for HMong ministry. Given the animistic background, Christ the deliverer takes precedence, since it deals with the nature of crisis in the HMong situation of spiritual bondage. To become Christian means that Christ has cast away the spirits, a bridge for Christianity to make an inroad. This action is very concrete in the HMong worldview. It leaves very little room for abstraction.

Christ the healer is also important because of the traditional role that the shaman has played in determining the causes of illness or a problem. Christ the healer must somehow replace the shaman. It is very difficult to separate this kind of healing from the traditional understanding of healing. Therefore, the risk of misunderstanding and the abuse of faith in Christ exist much more in this area. Christianity has the tendency to be a religion of efficacy for the HMong people. Often, the result is that one looks to the miracles and not the One who performed the true miracle, Jesus Christ. "Miraculous signs are important for the initial entrance to Christianity. This allows Christianity to be rooted in such an understandable way if it does not go beyond the biblical notion of miracles."

The deliverer and healer aspect of Christology are explicit in HMong ministry. All other aspects are implicit, because at the surface they seem irrelevant to the HMong cosmic reality, which cannot be defined with great certainty in the first place.

The Future of HMong Mission in LCMS

What will be the future of HMong mission in LCMS can only be speculated. There are social, political, and ecclesiastical issues facing this ministry. Filial piety is so strong in the HMong community that it can become a hindrance to the mission work of the church. It is not easily discernible what is acceptable and not acceptable culturally. This notion of honor is so deeply embedded for so many generations. To simply walk away and join a church without the consensus of the elders is shameful and must be avoided at all costs, especially for many HMong men.

Closely related to this problem is the clan issue. If the latter can be approached constructively, it may ultimately shape HMong mission in LCMS. The allegiance to the clan traditionally defines the identity and status of the individual. The clan provides support and security that no insurance policy can replace. When the whole clan embraces Christianity, it is not an issue. It becomes an issue, however, when only certain individuals become Christians. Often, when this happens, relationships suffer greatly and a tremendous struggle ensues.

Economically, the HMong people are considered to be one of the poorest and less educated groups among the Asian communities. Given this fact, the HMong mission in LCMS needs innovation. The traditional American church model may not be realistic for the HMong. Financial issues will continue to be some of the concerns for the foreseeable future.

At this point in the HMong history, there is a tension between the traditional leaders and the new leaders who are educated in the U.S. Many feel that the educated people are not relating well to the community. The fear is that their learning might alienate them from the people and tradition. At the same time, the young people feel that the older generation is not paying attention to them. This has become an important issue in many HMong congregations across the denominations.

Identity is another issue for many young HMong in America. Many are trapped between two cultures. The church has a tremendous opportunity to reach out, providing a place where they can be HMong without shame. At the same time, they can live a life under the Gospel that frees them from the guilt of abandoning their HMong heritage.

Many are asking and seeking the LCMS because there is something different about this church. *Sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia*, and the *missio dei* are foundational in the LCMS. With this strong and sound theological background, the HMong will find a unique place in this church. The HMong Christian population shows no sign of declining worldwide. In a HMong American Partnership survey, only 24% claim to prefer Christianity. Traditional animist practice is still a preference for the rest of this community in St. Paul.²⁸

Why might the LCMS be unique among the HMong Christians and community? For one reason, there are indications that the popular religion phase of Christianity is coming to an end,²⁹ which is how the Reformed churches tend to draw their members. Their legalistic theology has begun to have a negative effect on their younger members. They are in a crisis at this juncture, especially C&MA.

Secondly, the Roman Catholics, with their strong expression of Christian faith through animistic categories, seem to have a limited influence on mission development. However, their contribution of transcribing animistic rituals and ceremonies into the HMong written language is important academically for the studies of HMong people and their traditional beliefs, but it has not produced the mission results for which they had hope.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the confessional/biblical stance of the LCMS has begun to become an "attractive thing" for the young HMong Christian leaders. Both the church and educational institutions are working together to reach out to this community. In the long run, our unique Lutheran theological and missiological perspective with a HMong flavor will lead the way in HMong Christian mission developments.

The questions and issues for HMong mission in LCMS might be such as follow: What is a unique HMong identity in the LCMS in the future? As we grow in number, how will the church be structured? How will theological education be integrated into the HMong context? How will the HMong mission in LCMS deal with the issues of polygamy, foods offered in animistic settings, including blood, and other animistic matters? These are the kinds of questions and issues that will require an ongoing discussion. In light of God's blessings in the last few years, HMong mission in LCMS has the potential for a worldwide explosion. To that end,

May God Be Praised and Glorified!

Endnotes

- ¹ Ben Barber, "U.S. HMong: unsettled, unaccepted, uncertain," and "HMong People Overlooked, Forgotten," *The Washington Times*, December 1–5, 1997.
- ² Robert Cooper, ed., *The HMong* (Bangkok: Artasia Press Co. Ltd., 1995), 5.
- ³ Christopher Robbins, *The Ravens* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995), 1.
- ⁴ The Ho Chi Minh Trail was the main supply line for the North Vietnamese into South Vietnam, with a portion inside Laos. Much of the effort was poured into cutting off this supply line.
- ⁵ General Vang Pao was a HMong General in the Military Region Two (MR II) who led the HMong army to a world-renowned fighting force under the CIA operation in Laos. In his speech on May 8, 1997, at a seminar sponsored by Liberty State Bank in St. Paul, he stated these figures. Today, he continues to play a leadership role among many of the HMong in America.
- ⁶ Barber, The Washington Times.

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- ⁷ Saint Paul Public Schools Annual Report 1995–1996, 3.
- ⁸ Henotheism is a religious practice that has close adherence to a certain god (spirit) while recognizing the existence of others. *The Spirit of Truth and The Spirit of Error*, Compiled by Steven Cory (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986).
- ⁹ This notion of placing the emphasis on the group or family rather than the autonomous individual has caused a great deal of pain among the HMong communities in America.
- ¹⁰ Cory, The Spirit of Truth and The Spirit of Error.
- ¹¹ Kou Seying, "The HMong Incipient Theology" (A paper written for "Christian Theologies in Asia," G991, at Luther Seminary: St. Paul, Minnesota 1996), 10–13.
- ¹² Chia Ky Vang rescued one of the very first downed U.S. fighter pilots inside Laos during the Vietnam War.
- ¹³ Steve Kosberg, "First Hmong pastor in LCMS ordained...," *The Harvesters*, Special Ethnic Ministries Edition 8, no. 4 (December 1991), 9.
- ¹⁴ The "Her" clan members were approximately one half of the total membership at HMong Lutheran Church. The others consisted primarily of members from the "Vang" clan.
- ¹⁵ Thao is Pastor Kou's clan name, the first HMong clan to become Christian in Laos (See *Tso Dlaab Tseg Lug ntseeg Yexus* by Koua T. Thao [Brighton, CO: C&MA HMong District, 1988]). St. Peter Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, sponsored his family who arrived in the U.S. on September 14, 1976.

The usual customary addressing of a HMong individual's name is by the given elder name and the first (youth) name. For example, "Pastor Nyaj Kub" would have these designations besides the professional title: "Nyaj" is an elder name given after a man is married and has children. This name would then be attached in front of the youth name, "Kou." HMong often do not use the last name in addressing one another. These last names are usually clan names. In this writing, the HMong names follow the HMong tradition.

- ¹⁶ The ministry at HMong Lutheran Church: 1991–1995 full-time pastor, 1995–1996 vacancy pastor, and 1996–1998 supervising pastor.
- ¹⁷ HMong Ministry Report 1996, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Lansing, Michigan.
- ¹⁸ The complete name is Zong Yia Vang (*Ntxoov Yag Vaaj*).
- ¹⁹ California had the largest HMong population in the U.S. for most of the 1980s, with the largest concentration in the Fresno area.
- ²⁰ "MERCED, Calif.—June 7th...," CNH Lutheran (Summer 1998), 1, 12.
- ²¹ Skunkworks is a term for the concept of bringing the best together to think and plan, "An often secret experimental division, laboratory, project or the like for producing innovative designs or products, as in the computer or the aerospace field," (HMong Missions Skunkworks, meeting minutes, August 15–16, 1995, Milwaukee, Wisconsin).
- ²² HMong Missions Skunkworks Agenda, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 15–16, 1995.
- ²³ HMong Mission Meeting Agenda, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, February 2–3, 1996.
- ²⁴ Robert A. Holst, in a speech on HMong initiative at Concordia University—St. Paul. February 15, 1997, outlined various goals and objectives to serve the HMong community and its students.
- ²⁵ The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) denomination has the largest HMong Christian membership at 23,313 in 1994 (HMong District, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1994 statistical report, Brighton, CO). Those who came to the U.S. as Christians, the majority were C&MA members. C&MA has 50 years of history with the HMong people. Many families returned to this denomination in the U.S.

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²⁶ Kou Seying, "Theological Education Across Cultures: Today's Issues in LC-MS," (A paper written for "Theological Education Across Cultures," DMSL 910, at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, 1998), 2.

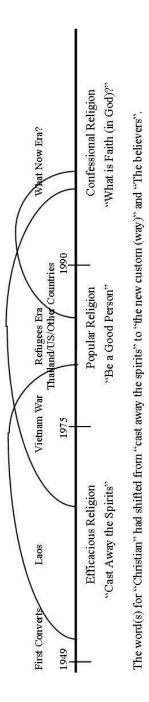
²⁷ Seying, "The HMong Incipient Theology," 15.

²⁸ Britt K. Anderson, *Frogtown/Summit-University HMong Community Assessment* (St. Paul: HMong American Partnership, 1996), 4.

²⁹ See "An Overview of HMong Christian Eras" on the following page of this journal.

An Overview of HMong Christian Eras

HMong Christianity can be identified in three overlapping eras:



When speaking with animists, the phrase "the new custom" is preferred.

cov ntseeg

kevcai tshab

lawb dlaab

Among Christians, "the believers" is preferred.

Foday, the phrase "cast away the spirits" refers mostly to the time of conversion (exorcism). Therefore, "cast away the spirits" may not necessarily mean "Christian"

HMong students (90%) in elementary level scored above the national standard despite parents being uneducated The longer HMongs live in the U.S., the higher the divorce rate (abortion rate increased proportionately too). More formal western education means less likely to practice traditional religion. Two popular theological themes are God the Deliverer and God the Healer! 25% of the students in the St. Paul, MN Public Schools are HMong. MN: Over 60,000 (Washington Times December 1-5, 1997) Filial piety is being challenged more and more. Total HMong population in the U.S.: 300,000 and poor.

The Evangelization of the HMong: Casting Away the Spirits

Kou Seying

Abstract: Prof. Kou Seying's first concern was always the evangelization of the HMong people. Among the papers found on his computer were the notes and miscellaneous, early, trial drafts dealing with this topic. This paper uses the metaphor, "casting away the spirits," as the principal term to describe the idea of conversion in HMong culture and finds support for this description of conversion in the Old and New Testaments and also in the Confessional writings of the Lutheran Church.

I. Scriptural Contribution

"Casting away the spirits" as a way of speaking concerning conversion from HMong animism to Christianity is a way of describing the change from adherence to animistic spirits to adherence to Christ, a change that requires a definite change of life. In my view, the personification of evil, the enemy of the goodness of God, may show itself as a single individual, the Devil or Satan, or it may reveal itself in the countless spirits and demons of the world of the animist. No matter the way in which evil displays itself, its purpose is to separate people from trust in God and lure them into a fearsome world devoid of love and trust, a world in which human feelings are inevitably twisted and alienation from God and from one another is a constant threat. This kind of perverted world can be described as the work of Satan or as the work of the satanic spirits and demons who accompany him and do his work. The contrast between those two worlds and the radical change involved in moving from the world of no trust in God to the world of trust in God is described in Ephesians 2:12–13 (NIV, used in this paper), "remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." This requires a change of loyalty, of worldview, of citizenship.

In the Book of Joshua, we find a very clear picture of casting away the spirits, "Throw (cast, put, or turn) away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel" (24:23). The Hebrew verb *sura* is the verb used in this text. It has the notion of turning away from false gods. This root is used often to describe the apostasy of Israel. The most common usage in the Hiphil stem has the meaning of "remove." Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God are urged, as here in Joshua, to remove or "put away" those things that will do spiritual harm to

them including false ways and false worship. The adopted Lao word, g/ud, has captured this basic meaning.

This notion of casting away the spirits for the HMong involves a power encounter as is found in other animistic contexts that have been well documented. The Willowbank Report confirms this point.

> Conversion involves a power encounter. People give their allegiance to Christ when they see that his power is superior to magic and voodoo, the curses and blessings of witch doctors, and the malevolence of evil spirits, and that his salvation is a real liberation from the power of evil and death.¹

Timothy Kamps integrates the various themes of power encounter from various writers in this comprehensive definition:

> A power encounter is a spiritual encounter that exposes and calls to account the powers of darkness in their varied forms by the power of God for the purpose of revealing the identity of the one True God resulting in an acknowledgment of and/or allegiance to His lordship by those present.²

In the HMong paradigm, the forces of Jesus are in competition with the forces of Satan. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8). The devil's work among the HMong people is their adherence to the spirits. Christ came to cast away the spirits and He is casting away the spirits today. This was done at the cross. St. Paul writes about Christ's work, "having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col 2:15). From the power

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encounter perspective, conversion is the turning "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).

This spiritual encounter requires a complete shift of the ultimate allegiance of the human heart. It is clear as the Book of Joshua points out that it requires throwing away the foreign gods. This was demonstrated publicly through the setting up of a stone at Shechem (Josh 24:27) to be a reminder, a witness, to their allegiance to God.

In the New Testament, we find the burning of magical literature in Acts 19:18– 19. This was an act of casting away the spirits. The sacred paraphernalia were cast into the fire to be destroyed forever. In HMong epistemology, it means that the old liver (heart) has been replaced by the new. In Acts 19:20, it concludes that as the result of this event, "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."

This new life as the result of this change of the liver (heart) more often than not demonstrates a form of dramatic encounter showing that the old way no longer has power over the new converts. This new life enables an individual to become the person of God as St. Paul writes, "But you, man of God, flee from all this [evil], and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness" (1 Tim 6:11). He says also in 2 Timothy 3:17, "so that the man (servant) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

For the HMong, coming to the Christian faith means that, as the outward sign of their change of allegiance, their worship paraphernalia are destroyed. This is the equivalent of setting up the stone of witness in the days of Joshua. It parallels the Ephesian magicians burning their books. These accounts were not simply about things individuals did long ago, but they are intended to encourage us now as they report ways that these ancient Christians used to strengthen each other in committing to their new life in Christ in a communal way. The psalmist says, "Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe" (Ps 107:2).

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This dramatic outward separation from the old way of life serves as a continuing reminder for people. It is an event for them to recall, memorializing the act of God's power through His love. In the Book of Joshua, remembering God's gracious acts is prominently emphasized.

In this sense, Scripture is a book of memories. Memory is an important instrument for protecting against the temptation to lapse into the old ways. This protection comes about not as the result of what someone has done in casting away the spirits, but rather in their recalling the Word of God in that significant event as the power that keeps them from reversion.

Conversion, indeed, becomes the monument of remembrance in life. Thus, conversion is the call to Christ that recalls His cross and resurrection, replacing the original monument of death and eternal damnation under the bondage of Satan, and for adults, this conversion culminates in Baptism.

In addition, the monument of allegiance, their remembrance of the enormous change they have made in turning to Christ, keeps them from falling into syncretism. Paul writes to the Corinthians who had this problem, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons" (1 Cor 10:21). This is the ultimate test in today's mission work

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among the HMong people in America. The table of demons comes to us in more ways than just the traditional religious practice of the HMong. To this must be added the American context with its materialism, secularism, and/or intellectual deconstruction.

One of the keys to understanding the HMong context is the distinction between gods and spirits. In traditional Hmong animist belief, on the one hand, gods are to be worshiped as sovereign beings since they are lords of different territories. On the other hand, spirits represent divine power that almost always can be manipulated by magic or shamanistic acts. In this way, it is clear that the HMong do not worship gods (in the plural). The concept of

One of the keys to understanding the HMong context is the distinction between gods and spirits.
... Casting away the spirits is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the HMong.
This casting away is an outward demonstration of God's grace.

deities does exist, but they rarely play an influential role in the spiritual life of the people. It is important to recognize that conversion needs to be explained in a way that is understandable in this particular context.

In this context, conversion means moving from the false belief that the power of the spirits can be manipulated to Christian belief that accepts the sovereignty of God. In other words, there is a shift from the orb of Satan to the orb of God. The difference is that in the orb of God His power cannot be manipulated. This shift is clearly demonstrated in 1 Kings 18. Clearly, the prophets of Baal desired to manipulate divine power. This is the animistic nature of their act.

It is the shift from the attempt to manipulate divine power to the worship of the sovereign God that Elijah finally demonstrated to the people. In the same way today, the HMong are coming from the realm of manipulation of the power of the spirits to the realm of worshiping the sovereign God.

II. Confessional Contribution

It is not the act of casting away the spirits that causes the conversion. It is clear from God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions that conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. Luther writes in the Small Catechism, "[baptism] effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare." Casting away the spirits is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the HMong. This casting away is an outward demonstration of God's grace. It is a necessary event to break that adherence to the spirits and to turn to adherence to Christ.

The usual process for bringing new members into the church begins with a casting away of the spirits service in the home of the family. An important act is to destroy the family's sacred paraphernalia. After this service, arrangement is made for baptism in the church service on Sunday.

Luther, in his baptismal service, has a specific order (exorcism) for casting away the devil. It begins in the collect in which he implores God

drive away from him all the blindness of his heart, break all the snares of the devil with which he is bound, open to him, Lord, the door of thy grace: So that marked with the sign of thy wisdom he may be free of the stench of all evil lusts and serve thee joyfully according to the sweet savor of thy commandments in thy church and grow daily and be made meet to come to the grace of thy baptism to receive the balm of life; through Christ our Lord.⁴

In light of the Gospel, Luther boldly and confidently speaks against the devil in a most direct way. As the order of baptism continues, we find this wonderful prayer for deliverance from Satan:

Therefore, thou miserable devil, acknowledge thy judgment and give glory to the true and living God, give glory to his Son Jesus Christ and to the Holy Ghost, and depart from this N., his servant; for God and our Lord Jesus Christ has of his goodness called him to his holy grace and blessing, and to the fountain of baptism so that thou mayest never dare to disturb this sign of the holy cross which we make on his forehead. . . .

So hearken now, thou miserable devil, adjured by the name of the eternal God and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and depart trembling and groaning, conquered together with thy hatred, so that thou shalt have nothing to do with the servant of God who now seeks that which is heavenly and renounces thee and thy world, and shall live in blessed immortality. . . .

I adjure thee, thou unclean spirit, by the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost that thou come out of and depart from this servant of God, N., for he commands thee, thou miserable one, he who walked upon the sea and stretched forth his hand to sinking Peter.⁵

This clearly shows that casting out the devil was taken very seriously in the days of Luther. In contrast, today we essentially have only one sentence in the baptismal liturgy of Lutheran worship, "Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?" Luther continues in his Large Catechism, "To be saved, we know, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever." The deliverance theme in Luther's writing is found everywhere and is compatible with the HMong concept of casting away the spirits.

Casting away the spirits is nothing else other than the "change through the Holy Spirit's activity in the intellect, will, and heart of man whereby man through such working is able to accept the offered grace." To properly understand the casting away the spirits concept it needs to be clearly rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit. Apart from this, casting away the spirits is not possible.

The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, Article II continues to discuss the point raised by the Augsburg Confession concerning free will. This, too, sheds light on the concept of casting away the spirits. Apart from Christ, without faith and the Holy Spirit, people are under the power of the devil. This is precisely why the spirits must be cast away in order to be with Christ and have faith in Him. There is no freedom of human will in spiritual matters; "man is the captive of Satan." Therefore, the power for human beings to turn to the Gospel or to Christ is the power of the Holy Spirit. This turning to Christ from the captivity of Satan means, in HMong understanding, the casting away of the spirits—that is, Satan.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession deals extensively with the theme of the devil's dominion. "There human nature is subjected not only to death and other physical ills, but also to the rule of the devil." The animists are completely in agreement. The Apology continues to explain that without Christ the devil cannot be conquered. At the same time, humans cannot buy their way out of the power of the devil. It is at this point that the idea of casting away the spirits finds common ground with the Christian confession that resisting the devil is only possible through the power of Christ. The promise to cast away the spirits is the promise that Christ gave through the Holy Spirit. 10

Luther makes a strong case for daily casting away the devil in the Large Catechism in his explanation of the Third Commandment, emphasizing that we are daily under the dominion of the devil. He emphasizes that the heart must not be idle but must hold on to God's Word in order to keep the devil away. This sheds a bright light on how conversion works from the human point of view. The heart cannot be filled with both. It is either Christ or the devil.

This helps with the notion of casting the spirits (devil) away so that Christ may fill that void. Clearly from God's point of view there is one category (Ex 20:2–6). The First Commandment basically says that apart from God Himself, every other spiritual power involves idolatry. Anything that would take the place of God is placed under this one category. It is a rebellion against God as Paul writes in Romans 1:19–25. Whether it is the high religions or the tribal religions among the HMong or any other human religion, it is against God. Casting away the spirits simply means a return to the Lord.

Casting away the spirits is surely an aspect of the Great Commission of our Lord. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). The commission requires casting away the spirits so that making disciples of all nations is possible. With the rejection of the spirits, Christ becomes the ultimate center of the new worldview.

Finally, casting away the spirits is the casting away of fear that dominates every phase of the life of an animist. It is the fear that consumes the animist's whole being, both physical and spiritual which ultimately are not separable. Casting away the spirits means, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives

Casting away the spirits is surely an aspect of the Great Commission of our Lord. . . . Casting away the spirits is the casting away of fear that dominates every phase of the life of an animist.

out fear" (1 Jn 4:18). Casting away the spirits is a change from fear to the triumph in Christ, His cross and resurrection.

Endnotes

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- ⁵ LW 53:97–98.
- ⁶ Tappert, 439:25.
- ⁷ Solid Declaration, Art. II, Tappert, 537:83.
- ⁸ Tappert, 527:30.
- ⁹ Tappert, 106:46.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Tappert, 537:83.

This article was edited for Lutheran Mission Matters by Dr. Daniel L. Mattson.

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Articles

Living among Immigrant Neighbors: How a Lutheran Theology of Sanctification Can Inform Our Witness

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M

Abstract: The author lays out a models-based approach to sanctification grounded in Scripture and Luther's writings, which yields five ways of picturing the Christlike life as a participation in His death and resurrection, struggle against the evil one, humble service, hospitality toward strangers, and devotion to God. The essay then moves on to argue that this Lutheran theology of sanctification offers a missional framework for church workers to reflect on the struggles and hopes of immigrant neighbors, as well as ways they can embody a realistic yet winsome witness in their attitudes toward, interactions with, and ministry among these neighbors.

The purpose of this essay is to reflect on how various theological models of sanctification, with special attention to the Lutheran tradition, can inform how we think about the lives of immigrant neighbors and our lives among them today, including our attitudes towards and dealings with them. Here we use the term *immigrant* not in a precise legal sense, but in a broader one to include all categories of displaced people in the world, including refugees, asylum seekers, people who are internally displaced in the same country, and people living in a foreign country either legally or illegally due to a variety of factors. Such factors include family unification, wars and natural disasters, economic need and labor demand, and forced or self-imposed exile due to various forms of persecution (political, religious, ethnic-racial, gang-related).



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Our goal is not so much to address Lutherans as residents or citizens in the lefthand realm, who undoubtedly hold various opinions (often on opposite ends of the political spectrum) on immigration law and reform.1 Rather, we seek to reflect with Lutheransespecially church workers—on how their identity as justified, baptized children of God in the right-hand realm, which deals with their common Gospel-rooted unity and mission in Christ in the world, can inform how they speak

Theological modes of sanctification . . . can inform how we think about the lives of immigrant neighbors and ... our attitudes towards and dealings with them.

of, think about, and act toward immigrant neighbors. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 70.8 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations—the largest number in history.² Given this global missional reality and the urgency in which we are asked to think about our immigrant neighbors today, this essay probes into the implications of a Lutheran theology of sanctification for an embodied witness in a world with the largest number of displaced neighbors in history.

Over the past several years, I have been thinking about a models-based theological approach to the theology of sanctification, convinced that the Lutheran tradition offers complementary ways to speak about the Christian life. This reflection on life in the Spirit in terms of models of sanctification started with the publication in Spanish of Teología de la santificación, which offers three ways of speaking about life in the Spirit from Lutheran theology, namely, baptismal, dramatic, and eucharistic.³ The number of models of sanctification grew to five with the publication in English of Sculptor Spirit; namely, renewal, dramatic, sacrificial, hospitality, and devotional.⁴ A model is a heuristic device to account for and sum up the rich variety of images used by Scripture, church fathers, Martin Luther, and contemporary theologians to describe what it means to live a sanctified life. It is a way to bring together pictures, narratives, and teachings with a thematic affinity under one semantic field. Each model also has a constructive function because it deals with different issues in the Christian life, thus making it useful for personal growth and pastoral or missional application to various life situations.

In the next section, we will briefly explore, using the lens of our five models of sanctification, what the Christian life might look like among immigrant neighbors, with particular attention to our brothers and sisters in Christ, so that we can walk with them in their struggles and hopes.⁵ In a brief conclusion, we will also suggest how these models apply to ourselves (especially church workers) as we relate to these neighbors. Our approach is framed in a doctrinal, systematic thesis with roots in Scripture and the Great Christian Tradition; namely, that life in the Spirit for the believer reflects or images Christ's own life in the Spirit. The Christian life is thus a

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Christlike life, not the same as Christ's life but reflective of it. It is a life of faithfulness to God and service to neighbor. Our models-based approach to sanctification suggests at least five Christlike ways of living in the Spirit. Although this approach is informed by a biblical, Christ-centered view of the Spirit's work in our lives, our reflections are meant to be practical and suggestive of what an embodied witness looks like.

Our models-based approach to sanctification suggests at least five Christlike ways of living in the Spirit.

When we speak of an embodied witness, we are thinking not primarily in terms of Gospel proclamation, which for Lutherans still remains the primary form of witness, but mainly of a secondary form of it in thought, word, and deed—a witness more akin to how we live our lives before others. The theology of sanctification opens for us a way of thinking about embodied witness from the side, as it were, which in the context of relationship-building, is complementary to and can even set the stage for more direct witness in proclamation. Our reflections are thus mainly concerned with the lives of immigrant neighbors and then also the lives of Christians shining the light of Christ in the world by their good works for the sake of these neighbors. Ours is an application of Jesus' words to the current situation: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

Renewal

Presenting the Christian life as one of daily repentance, the renewal (also called, baptismal) model of sanctification focuses on the Spirit's work of conforming the believer to Christ in His death and resurrection. In his catechesis on the use of Baptism based on Romans 6, Martin Luther speaks of the Christian life as a daily drowning of the old sinful creature and a daily rising out of the waters as a new creature. In addition to the image of water, Paul speaks in the language of clothing, calling believers to put off the old sinful flesh and put on the new self in Christ (Eph 4:22–24; cf. Gal 3:27).

When we consider the situation of immigrants from the perspective of spiritual care, there are immigrants who feel justified, guilty, or both for leaving their country. They often feel justified in their choice because they are looking for a better way of life for their families, especially when fleeing dangerous situations that threaten their loved ones. They can also feel guilt and shame because they have left behind their homeland, even friends and family, under duress. They wonder if they have betrayed their nation and loved ones. In the latter situation, immigrants already feel the weight of the law on their shoulders, and church workers must not accuse them further with

the law but offer words of consolation. Church workers can try to assist them (under the law) as needed to reunite with family members without putting them in danger.

In the former situation, immigrants often feel they are justified in their decision to migrate. Insofar as they are looking out for their loved ones' well-being, we must be careful not to rush to judgment concerning their intentions. If their decision to migrate or overstay their visa renders them undocumented, most immigrants might still feel that breaking the law is justified on account of the needs of their families. In this situation, church workers must be ready to share with immigrant neighbors the tension inherent in fulfilling both the law of love and the laws of the land. Such catechesis at times cuts to the heart and leads immigrants to feel guilty and ashamed for breaking laws. In such cases church workers must be ready to offer words of forgiveness and acceptance to the penitent. At the same time, one must be careful not to undermine the difficult decisions they often make in fulfilling their legitimate vocations to take care of their family members the best they can in an imperfect world. Churches must be ready to assist them in the exercise of their vocations and, as far as the law allows, with ways to deal with their legal issues.

Vigilance

Depicting the Christian life as a drama between Christ and the devil, battling for the souls of people, the dramatic model of sanctification speaks to the Spirit's work of forming theologians through spiritual attacks or struggle (Lat. tentatio, Ger. Anfechtung). When faced by such attacks, Luther advises us to be vigilant by praying for the Spirit's help, spending time in the Word, and seeking the support and intercession of the communion of saints. In the Scriptures, one thinks of the paradox of deserts, which are both places of communion with God and places where God's children face spiritual attacks (see Lk 4:1–13; 1 Cor 10:1–13).

Immigrants face many challenges in life and in many cases have a keen sense of the power of evil in the world. Many have experienced hunger, political and religious persecution, threats to their lives from gangs, wars, and other misfortunes. Although many immigrants from the Global South hold to a religious worldview (as opposed to a secular one), they still struggle with the experience of the absence of God in the midst of the reality of suffering and evil in the world. It is not uncommon for those who are Christian to describe their migrations as times of temptation and testing temptation to give up, testing to keep going. Again, church workers should not rush to judge them, but listen to their stories of spiritual struggle.

Indeed, these neighbors often portray life as an immigrant as an instance of a cosmic struggle between God and devil. When immigrants experience extended family separation, insults or hurtful words about their race, ethnicity, or accent, or people who take advantage of their vulnerabilities, they are tempted to doubt God's promises of protection, care, and provision. They can also be tempted to seek after other gods or

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idols for an answer to their problems and hurts in life. Alcohol and drug abuse, unhealthy relationships, workaholism, depression, loneliness are not uncommon. Churches working with immigrants can assist them to be vigilant about their areas of vulnerability, to be aware of their spiritual "Achilles' heel"—i.e., those areas where they are most likely to be attacked by the evil one—and walk together with them in their tough deserts by offering them support and accountability (either individually or in groups).

Sacrifice

Focusing on the Christian life as a sharing in Christ's humility, the sacrificial model of sanctification highlights the Spirit's work of shaping believers after the form or likeness of Christ's servanthood. In a treatise on the Sacrament of Holy Communion, Luther uses the analogy of a country in which inhabitants share the benefits and costs of citizenship to refer to the church as an interdependent communion of love in which, as the apostle Paul puts it, the saints share one another's burdens (see 1 Cor 12:25–26). Christians become living sacrifices as they do not conform to the world's ways, but share in the mind of Christ in acts of love and generosity (see Rom 12:1ff.).

It is not uncommon for immigrants to be portrayed in the media as a burden on society. Yet immigrants are also acknowledged by many to be hard-working people,

even sacrificial. A more nuanced picture recognizes that immigrants are not only beneficiaries but contributors to our common way of life. At times the mentality that immigrants are burdensome comes into the church in a somewhat benevolent but no less dangerous form; namely, in the idea that they are only the needy. This leads to a one-sided

Immigrants are not only beneficiaries but contributors to our common way of life.

view of neighbors as mere receivers of our generosity, mercy, or charity. However, when we think about immigrants who are members of our congregations from the perspective of our interdependent communion in Christ, care must be taken that more socioeconomically established members do not adopt a paternalistic attitude toward immigrants that might engender forms of dependency among the immigrants or an elevated view of themselves.

An interdependent view of our communion in Christ notes that we do not simply share the burdens of immigrant neighbors but also their gifts to the church, and that they, too, can share not only in the gifts of other members but also pray for them and counsel them in their burdens. This two-way approach to life together helps us to see immigrants not only as people for whom we sacrifice, but also as people who sacrifice for us. Therefore, when it comes to immigrant brothers and sisters in Christ, we

remember that Christ Himself comes to us through these saints in His needs but also with His gifts.

Hospitality

Portraying the Christian life as a sharing in Christ's marginality and hospitality toward strangers, the hospitality model of sanctification challenges us to see the Spirit's activity among and toward outsiders and forgotten neighbors. In a commentary on Abraham's hospitality toward the three strangers at Mamre in Genesis 18, Luther calls the church to be the house of Abraham in a world filled with people on the move.⁹ He praises his prince's welcoming disposition toward exiles fleeing into German lands for refuge due mostly to religious persecution. 10

Being in a new land, immigrants understandably feel out of place, like they do not belong. They have different customs, looks, and speak with distinct accents. Immigrants are strangers, the neighbor "other." Understandably, the default reaction to anything strange is suspicion, caution, and fear. "Don't play with strangers!"—we are warned from an early age. Each new wave of immigrants to the US, including the Saxon Lutherans who came up the Mississippi to settle in Missouri, has raised fears among the populace—some justified, some unjustified.

Sadly, these fears are at times expressed in the church in subtle but no less unhelpful ways: "Why do we need a bilingual worship service? When are they going to learn English? Why do we have to share our kitchen with the Hispanic ladies?" When we look at strangers through the eyes of the sinful flesh, we see them as obstacles to our way of life. But when we see them through the eyes of Abraham, the father of hospitality, we see Christ coming to us in the strangers. Immigrants already feel unwelcomed in society and have a great hunger for acceptance and belonging. They do not need to experience the same unwelcoming attitudes in church. The church is a welcoming community in a world that often thrives on division and exclusion. The church stands as a unifying catholic force in the world, a universal communion that gathers people of different cultures, languages, and ethnicities under one Lord.

Devotion

Locating the Christian life in the context of God's created rhythm of repose and activity, the devotional model of sanctification speaks of the Christlike life in the Spirit as a devoted life of labor and prayer, rest and play. Jesus is anointed with the Spirit for a life of service, and yet He does not let His mission get in the way of His time with the Father in prayer (Lk 5:15–16). We are also told that Jesus "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit," thanking and praising His Father for revealing His good news to the disciples (Lk 10:21). When we consider his extensive work of preaching, teaching, and writing, Luther was undoubtedly a very busy person; and yet he can also speak of the Word of God doing everything while he was asleep and drinking Wittenberg beer with his friends! ¹¹ In a way, he reminds us that a life pleasing to God is one that involves work, but also rest and play.

Immigrants are busy people. They understand the value of a strong work ethic and regularly do the type of labor few people are willing to do today. Due to language, educational, and visa limitations, they are often underemployed or underpaid and thus need one, two, or even three jobs to make ends meet and save a little for a rainy day. Because immigrant parents do not want their children to go through the hardships they have experienced, they tend to sacrifice greatly to make opportunities available to their loved ones that they never had. They are overworked and tired and have little time or money for rest and relaxation—and even less time for play and recreation! Churches with a heart for immigrant families need to consider this dynamic when planning activities such as home visits, English as a Second Language (ESL) lessons, Bible studies, theological education courses or leadership workshops, congregational meetings, and worship services.

Immigrant neighbors do not always have a say in their weekly work schedules, and it is not uncommon that many have to work on Sundays. If all the church's main activities take place on Sunday, then creative solutions to make space for spiritual rest in the Word of God and prayer in the context of the communion of saints need to be discussed. When working amid busy people, church workers should also model a life that makes room for literal rest (*siesta*) and enjoying God's gifts of creation (*fiesta*). Congregations might ask how they can model but also create

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Creative solutions to make space for spiritual rest in the Word of God and prayer . . . need to be discussed.

spaces in their weekly rhythm of activities for immigrant families to relax and play in the theater of God's creation. By doing so, church workers can find ways to help overworked immigrant families grow in lives of devotion through their work activity, but also through their receptivity of God's gifts in worship, rest, and play.

Conclusion

In our reflection, we have focused mainly on how church workers can live out an embodied witness today by walking with immigrants as these neighbors seek to live out lives of repentance, struggle with evil in the world, live sacrificially in our midst, hunger for belonging, and struggle with living a healthy, devotional life. Let us not forget also that, when dealing with immigrant neighbors in terms of spiritual care, we ourselves are all called to repent of our sins for times we have put the worst

construction on these neighbors (renewal), to be vigilant about the ways we are tempted to speak ill of them (dramatic), to serve and share life with them (sacrificial), to act in welcoming ways toward them (hospitality), and to thank and praise God for them (devotional).

We conclude with Luther's exhortation to the church to exercise mercy and hospitality to

We ourselves are all called to repent of our sins for times we have put the worst construction on these neighbors.

strangers—an important way in which the church can shine the light of Christ in a world with unprecedented numbers of people on the move.

> The church can and must not be indifferent to these difficulties of the brethren. By God's command and by the instruction of the forefathers it is constrained to practice works of mercy, to feed the hungry and the thirsty, to receive exiles hospitably, to comfort prisoners, and to visit the sick. 12

Endnotes

- ¹ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Bearing So Much Similar Fruit: Lutheran Theology and Comprehensive Immigration Reform," in Ronald W. Duty and Marie A. Failinger, eds. Secular Governance: Lutheran Perspectives on Contemporary Legal Issues (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 184-205.
- ² This includes 25.9 million who are refugees, 41.3 million who are people internally displaced in the same country, and 3.5 million who are asylum-seekers. See https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/6/5d03b22b4/worldwide-displacement-tops-70million-un-refugee-chief-urges-greater-solidarity.html.
- ³ Leopoldo Sánchez, *Teología de la santificación: la espiritualidad del cristiano* (St. Louis: Editorial Concordia, 2013).
- ⁴ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., Sculptor Spirit: Models of Sanctification from Spirit Christology (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019). The renewal model is the baptismal one, and the sacrificial model includes the eucharistic one.
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- ⁶ Luther, "Large Catechism IV 12," in Kolb and Wengert, The Book of Concord, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 360.
- ⁷ Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV, "Preface to German Writings," ed. Lewis W. Spitz (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 285–287. See also Luther, "Comfort When Facing Grave Temptations," in LW 42:185.
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- ⁹ Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 188.
- 10 LW 3:182.
- ¹¹ Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 51: Sermons I, "The Second Sermon, March 10, 1522, Monday After Invocavit," ed. John Doberstain (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 77. 12 LW 3:180.

Toward a "Credible Creation Account" for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Jon Braunersreuther

Abstract: What is a "missional church"? How is a missional church distinct from iterations of the church in contemporary America? Have congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod ever exhibited characteristics of a missional church movement? If so, might that history form the basis for inspiring the church today toward a more missional stance?

This brief exploration posits that the answer to the final question is, "Yes." Therefore, the purpose of this study is (1) to review contemporary literature regarding the missional church movement, and (2) to explore salient, related elements of the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, for the purpose of (3) creating a "credible creation account" containing essential missional church characteristics to inspire the constituents of the synod to similar thinking and action for the future.

The Missional Church

As King David, preparing to assume leadership of God's people in the Old Testament, enlisted "men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chr 12:32 NIV84), so today the church needs leaders who understand the current context and understand what God's people need to do to reach those who are far from Him. David Moore notes that such leaders "see their cultures and ministry settings with God's perspective." This involves cultural research, surely, but it also involves understanding how God is already at work among people before Christians even make contact with them. Therefore, for the purposes of this work, W. Rodman MacIlvaine's definition of a missional church as "a unified body of believers, intent on being God's missionary presence to the indigenous community that surrounds



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them, recognizing that God is already at work" will serve as the working definition.

A review of contemporary literature reveals two macro characteristics for the missional church: (1) a new ecclesial order, giving way to (2) a new way of being God's people in the world.

According to Walter Brueggemann, the new ecclesial order involves a prophetic "dismantling" of the power-order and an "energizing" of God's people that begins in their doxologies, as was characteristic of the ministries of Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Jesus Himself.⁴ Characteristic of the prophetic criticism is anguish, not anger, which leads the community to express its own anguish over circumstances, rather than engaging in the "numbness" that typifies the current ecclesial-social order.⁵ In doing do, the prophet "reactivates" out of the "historical past symbols that always have been vehicles for redemptive history." Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch contend that the new ecclesial order is messianic, not dualistic in its spirituality, seeing the world as Christ sees it-holistic and integrated, and is apostolic rather than hierarchical in its leadership, utilizing a flat leadership model that unleashes the gifting of all for evangelism and prophecy, along with the pastoral and teaching gifts.⁷

The new ecclesial order gives way to an incarnational way of being God's people in the world, seeking to seep into the cracks and crevices of culture, rather than simply attracting people to revered, sanctified space. 8 To do so, asserts James Davison Hunter, is to practice "faithful presence," whereby Christians incarnate Jesus in their vocations, rather than engaging in a world-changing mission that relies on coercive political power [contrary to the tenets of Christianity] and which is likely futile anyway, since Christians do not occupy the elite bastions of cultural formation. 9 Sent Christians, living their lives vocationally and submerged in their communities, ¹⁰ look for instances of God already at work in the culture. 11

For Lutheran Christians, ensconced in Luther's concept of vocation rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers, the idea of incarnating Christ in day-to-day life is not new, at least conceptually. Too often, though, Lutherans have fallen into the trap of a numbing ecclesial order that is practically more hierarchical than apostolic, more attractional than incarnational, and more dualistic than messianic. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod¹² needs a narrative with a "purpose and quest . . . calling [it toward] a specific direction and toward a particular goal."13 Such a

For Lutheran Christians, ensconced in Luther's concept of vocation and his rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers, the idea of incarnating Christ in day-to-day life is not new, at least conceptually.

narrative can be built using salient historical elements of the LCMS's history, to which this paper will now turn.

An Apostolic Church

Being creedal theologically, Lutherans stand in line with Christendom since the time of the early church—"one holy, catholic, and apostolic"—in the words of the Nicene Creed. In pursuing the growth of the church, God's people, contends Robert Scudieri, have formed an "apostolic church" in the truest sense of the term. While granting that for "Nicaea, and later for Constantinople [where the phrase was first inserted], *apostolic* meant orthodox and *apostles* meant The Twelve," ¹⁴ Scudieri asserts "there remained a clear association of the phrase *apostolic church* with the third person of the Trinity," meaning that there is a "missionary emphasis" in the phrase. "It is the Holy Spirit, continually proceeding from the Father and the Son, who is bringing the Gospel of eternal salvation to all the world. Constantine himself understood that the apostles were the 'missionaries to the world." ¹⁵ He concludes that "*apostolic church* refers to the nature of the church as continuously embodying the mission of the Savior of the world. Jesus was sent on a unique mission: to bear witness to the love of God. This is what the church is sent to do today. This is the *apostolic church*." ¹⁶

The Saxon Immigration

Such a concept of "sentness" was not lost on the early Saxon immigrants to the United States, who would form the core of what would become The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In response to the theological compromises required by the Prussian Union of King Friedrich Wilhelm III, and under the leadership of Martin Stephan, who had been invested with the office of bishop [indicating a hierarchical/episcopal church structure and understanding of church and ministry], more than seven hundred German immigrants from Saxony and surrounding areas settled in Perry County and in St. Louis, Missouri, by 1839. Before they had "completed their crude log shelters," Stephan was accused of financial impropriety and adultery, and exiled across the Mississippi River.¹⁷

The denouement of Stephan's episcopacy, with its implications of apostolic authority, caused a crisis in the new colony. With no bishop, were they still a church? Or were they simply a mob or a sect? Added to the difficulties was the disorganization resulting from the distraction caused by Stephan, so that during the first winter there "was real privation, and stark hunger was not unknown" among the Saxon colonists. 18 The disorganization and confusion bled over into congregational life, which was "a curious mixture of legalism, inherited from the Stephanite days, and of liberalism, developed as a reaction against the same experience." Many of the clergy wished to reestablish an episcopal structure for the colony, while some laymen, most notably Dr. Carl Eduard Vehse, contended that a congregational structure where authority rested in the priesthood of all believers was both preferable and biblical. 20

The issue came to a head at the Altenburg Debate in April 1841. The debate pitted 29-year-old clergyman Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther against lawyer Adolph

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Marbach. Building upon Vehse, Walther argued that the church exists wherever Christians gather around Word and Sacrament, regardless of whether there is a bishop, while Marbach contended that without a bishop "there was no church among them."²¹ The reason for Walther's position was both scriptural and pragmatic, observes Forster:

> It was abundantly clear to the young pastor that by adopting hierarchical ideas of the nature of the Church, insisting upon theories of the episcopal succession, overemphasizing the office of the ministry, or indulging a spiritual hypochondria to the point where it induced a verbal flagellantism in the group, it was possible to produce a spasm of ecclesiastical nihilism during which the Saxon colonies would, in fact, die a convulsive death.²²

Walther claimed that "belonging to an organized church body did not constitute one a Christian, but that a body of Christians could organize at any to time to constitute a church" and if so they "could exercise all [of the church's] functions; specifically, they could call pastors and teachers and provide for the administration of the Sacraments and other rites." The church, said Walther emphatically, still existed among them. Walther carried the day and "the victory in the Altenburg Debate laid the foundations for the ecclesiastical edifice which Walther was to spend his life in building."23

The Altenburg Debate was a turning point for the Saxons who "again constituted a united, compact, energetic group, once more looking forward to rendering spiritual service to their fellow immigrants, rather than looking backward at the tragic interlude of the episcopacy." The Lutheran movement expanded significantly in Missouri and, on April 26, 1847, having connected with like-minded Lutherans across the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States [eventually The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod] was founded in Chicago, Illinois, with C. F. W. Walther as its first president. In 1947, when representatives of the synod

returned to Chicago for the centennial of its founding, it was the largest Lutheran synod to have developed in the United States, comprised of 5,685 congregations (though slightly surpassed in size by the United Lutheran Church, an amalgamation of forty-five synods). Its vitality was evident in that the tenth decade of its history "showed a larger percentage growth than any other in the preceding fifty years."24

This tremendous growth was predicated on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that Walther articulated at Altenburg and expanded upon in his ministry. Indeed,

This tremendous growth was predicated on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that Walther articulated at Altenburg and expanded upon in his ministry. Indeed, Christian outreach by laypeople was not only a right or an option but a sacred responsibility.

Christian outreach by laypeople was not only a right or an option but a sacred responsibility. In an 1842 sermon (published in *Missio Apostolica*, Bruce Cameron, trans.) candidly entitled, "Bringing Souls to Christ: Every Christian's Desire and Duty," Walther declares:

Through holy baptism, every Christian has been consecrated, ordained, and installed into the ministry to teach, admonish, and comfort his neighbor. Through holy baptism each Christian has obtained not only the authority, power, and right, but also the high, holy obligation—under pain of losing the divine grace—of rousing himself to care and to help so that others may be brought to Christ.²⁵

That is not to say the Walther did not have a high regard for the pastoral office, which is divinely ordained and for the sake of good order is to administer the means of grace publicly within the congregation. He simply wished to emphasize that the "Christian church is a great mission-house. Each Christian in it is a missionary sent out by God into his own circle to convert others to Christ." Walther went so far as to say that "if a Christian comes to an area where there are no Christians, he can even step forward with confidence and preach the Gospel. . . . If his hearers accept the Word of God, they will . . . become a true church . . . [and] he is a true minister . . . a successor to the apostles." ²⁷

In the years that followed, this emphasis on the work of the laity led the synod to maintain a flexible attitude toward the preparation of individuals to evangelize the lost and organize them into congregations. The deployment of colporteurs [religious books salesmen] and *Reisepredigers* [circuit preachers] in the middle 1800s was an answer to the influx of immigrants [the synod targeted primarily German immigrants]. The colporteurs were commissioned to sell devotional and instructional books to households for the purpose of sharing the faith and encouraging families in contiguous areas to form Christian congregations. *Reisepredigers* were minimally trained pastoral candidates, sent out as itinerant preachers [but not to gather congregations—that would follow] because the need was so great.²⁸

Wilhelm Loehe recognized that flexibility in response to pleas by Friedrich Wyneken [often referred to as the "Father of Home Missions" in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod]. When Wyneken returned to Germany from the United States for medical treatment in 1841, he produced a widely distributed tract outlining the distressing spiritual conditions of the Germans in the United States and pleaded for help. Loehe's response was to send workers known as *Nothhelfer* [emergency helpers] or *Sendlinge* [missioners]. Meyer notes that "they were untrained theologians sent to alleviate the dire spiritual needs of German immigrants in America. This was a radical departure from the usual practice of utilizing only university-trained men in the . . . mission field." He goes on to observe that "the 'emergency helpers' were young men who received partial training by Loehe at Neuendettelsau [Germany] and after 1846

completed their theological education at the newly established seminary in Fort Wavne."29

The deployment of workers who were credentialed at different levels for different purposes was [and continues to be] a point of contention in The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod, with its high view of the office of the pastoral ministry. In 1865, the Western District of the Synod formulated theses regarding the Reiseprediger. Early theses affirmed the priesthood of all believers and the necessity of the pastoral office within the congregation. But the theses that followed were more controversial, among them thesis 10: "There are emergency cases in which also the order of the public office of the ministry cannot nor need be observed. Ex. 4:24-26." And thesis 11: "An emergency occurs when, through a legalistic retention of the order, souls, instead of being saved, are lost, and thus love is thereby violated."30

Yet despite the tension, or perhaps because of it, the synod grew. Nelson observes that "whether the workers were lay colporteurs, clergy explorers, assistant pastors sent by an organized church, or free itinerants, the immigrant churches were missionary churches." The approach to home missions in the middle to late 1800s was focused primarily on those with similar ethnic background, under the assumption that those with similar language and culture would be easiest to reach. As the century turned from the nineteenth to the twentieth, "the Missouri Synod founded the largest number of new congregations [of all the Lutheran bodies]." Between 1890 and 1916 [just before the start of World War I] the synod's membership increased by 120 percent. While reaching German- and English-speaking people was its primary emphasis, the synod was also more successful than other Lutherans in reaching those of other ethnicities and language groups. By 1915, the synod was reaching out to "Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles, Finns, Slovaks, and Persians in their native languages," along with outreach to Jewish people and sixty-four ministries targeted toward the deaf.31

Based upon the net number of congregations in existence noted above, for the first one hundred years of its history, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod averaged the planting of a bit more than one new congregation every week. Since that time, the synod peaked in membership in 1970 with 2,788,536 baptized members and peaked in number of congregations in 1999 with 6,220.32 Based upon the net gain in congregations from 1947 to 1999 [not accounting for closures], the synod planted one new congregation every five weeks. Despite efforts by a number of districts of the synod to plant new congregations [the Texas District planted 141 new congregations from 2004–2020³³], The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's membership dropped to 1,968,641 baptized members and 6,046 congregations by 2017.³⁴

A Credible Creation Account

These historical elements can help to form what former University of Southern California president Steven Sample calls a "credible creation story or myth." Such inspiring and powerful stories are used by organizational leaders to motivate their followers. According to Sample, "the real test is that such stories must appeal strongly to the leader's followers and to those whom he is trying to recruit." In an

Such inspiring and powerful stories are used by organizational leaders to motivate their followers.

American culture, a narrative like this would have a classic American heroic component [a "log cabin motif"—up from humble beginnings] coupled with "a few surprising facts and superlatives." The story should readily be shortened or lengthened as the situation demands, and it should ennoble the concept of change to lay the foundation for future change. Finally, says Sample, it should engender pride in the stakeholders of the organization, inspiring people "to dream more audaciously than they might otherwise have done." What follows here is a draft of a "credible creation account" for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

In 1838 and 1839, over seven hundred intrepid German Lutherans made their way across the Atlantic Ocean and up the Mississippi River, settling in Perry County, Missouri. Why? Because the Gospel in all of its grace-filled purity was critical to them and, they were convinced, to those whom they might reach. The ill-advised theological compromises of the church in Germany at the time were dangerous to people's souls and could not be tolerated.

Controversy arose almost as soon as they arrived. Their bishop, Martin Stephan, was deposed for financial and sexual impropriety. Now what? Some couldn't conceive of a church without a bishop. Maybe they should just go back to Germany. Others argued there had to be an alternative.

Enter one Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, just 29 years old at the time. In his convincing articulation of biblical theology at the Altenburg Debate, Walther argued that wherever Christians are gathered around God's Word and the Sacraments, there the church exists, regardless of whether there's a bishop. Christian congregations have the authority to elect their own pastors, Walther asserted.

At Altenburg, Walther began to articulate the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in a way that helped The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod grow to the largest Lutheran body in the United States by the time of the synod's 100th anniversary in 1947, planting, on average, just over one new congregation per week! Walther believed that pastors were not the only missionaries, but that every Christian should be one. The church in the late nineteenth century recognized that a wide variety of

types of workers with basic training could be deployed to evangelize those far from God and begin to organize them into congregations.

Germans immigrants were the object of the synod's work. But by 1916, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was more effective than any other Lutheran body in reaching out to those of other ethnicities and language groups. Our forefathers believed that God wanted them to reach people of varying backgrounds.

Unfortunately, the growth slowed as the twentieth century progressed, and gradual decline has occurred in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in these early days of the twenty-first century. But the same Jesus who promised, "I will build my church" is Lord of the church today. This church body has adapted before. It has mobilized before. It has initiated new things before. It has been flexible before. And it has done so with its people working together! By the power of God's Holy Spirit working in the LCMS—and through it—the LCMS can make a difference again. This church body can reach this generation with the Gospel in new and creative ways, while firmly grasping the biblical faith of our forebearers—deploying all of God's people as missionaries in their various vocations. And it must. The eternal destinies people for whom Christ died, but are now far from Him, are at stake!

Conclusion

An understanding of missional church thinking, coupled with an understanding of the storied history of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, provides an entry point to the hearts and minds of people in this part of the Body of Christ. This academic exercise is designed to stimulate leaders in the LCMS and others to inspire their constituencies with their own version of a credible creation account, moving God's people to greater action. The mission demands nothing less!

This academic exercise is designed to stimulate leaders in the LCMS and others to inspire their constituencies with their own version of a credible creation account, moving God's people to greater action. The mission demands nothing less!

Endnotes

¹ David Moore, "Empowered for Witness," in Spirit-Empowered Christianity for the Twenty-First Century, ed. Vinson Synan (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011), 540.

² Moore, 541. Cf. W. Rodman MacIlvaine III, "What Is the Missional Church Movement?," Bibliotheca Sacra 167, January-March (2010): 103.

³ MacIlvaine III, 91.

- ⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 115, Kindle.
- ⁵ Brueggemann, 81.
- ⁶ Brueggemann, 43.
- ⁷ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Kindle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 25.
- ⁸ Frost and Hirsch, 25.
- ⁹ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, Kindle. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 237.
- ¹⁰ Kim Hammond and Darren Cronshaw, *Sentness: Six Postures of Missional Christians*, Kindle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 12.
- ¹¹ William D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture*, Kindle (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), chap. 2.
- 12 The LCMS has continued to grapple with the clergy-centered versus congregation-centered debate carried on in the nineteenth century between Johan Grabau and C. F. W. Walther. See e. g. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, "Grabau Versus Walther: The Use of the *Book of Concord* in the American Lutheran Debate on Church and Ministry in the Nineteenth Century," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 3–4 (2011): 217–252. The ongoing nature of the debate led the LCMS "To Affirm Synod's Official Position on Church and Ministry" as articulated in Walther's *The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry* through Resolution 7-17A of the 2001 LCMS Convention. Robert Rosin referenced that resolution in the article entitled, "A Vital Relationship," in *The Lutheran Witness* (June 2002): 8–12, and then noted: "Key points on church and ministry that distinguished the Missouri Synod back then are still confessed today—and still contested" (10). The author is personally aware of a recent instance of an LCMS pastor who instructed an elderly layperson from the pastor's congregation who regularly and quietly shared her faith with friends and co-workers that she was to cease doing so because sharing the Gospel was his responsibility alone.
- ¹³ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 70.
- ¹⁴ Robert Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Missionary* (Chino, CA: R. C. Law & Co., 1996), 67.
- ¹⁵ Scudieri, 68.
- ¹⁶ Scudieri, 73.
- Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839–1841, Kindle (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), chaps. XV–XVI;
 E. Clifford Nelson, ed., The Lutherans in North America, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 152, 157, 176.
- ¹⁸ Forster, chap. XVIII.
- ¹⁹ Forster, chap. XVIII.
- ²⁰ Forster, chap. XVII; Erwin L. Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia: A Concise In-Home Reference for the Christian Family*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 22, 798.
- ²¹ Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi*, chap. XIX; Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 178; Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 22, 807.
- ²² Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, chap. XIX.
- ²³ Forster, chap. XIX.
- ²⁴ Forster, chap. XIX.

- ²⁵ C. F. W. Walther, "Bringing Souls to Christ: Every Christian's Desire and Duty," *Missio* Apostolica 6, no. 1 (1998): 10.
- ²⁶ Walther, 11.
- ²⁷ Walther, 11, 14,
- ²⁸ Carl S. Meyer, ed., Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 203–4, 206; Nelson, The Lutherans in North America, 196.
- ²⁹ Meyer, 90–91, 97–98; Cf. Nelson, *The Lutherans in America*, 157–158.
- ³⁰ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 207.
- ³¹ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 196, 264, 360–61.
- 32 Association of Religion Data Archives, "Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Denominational Profile," accessed August 1, 2015, http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/D 887.asp.
- ³³ Texas District, "Mission Starts from 2004," accessed January 31, 2020,
- https://txlcms.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Summary-of-Church-Starts.2020.01.23.pdf.
- ³⁴ Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, "The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Facts," accessed January 31, 2020, https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=0P6YfWqhIvpvei9cTSh0dBsbgoWy78VV.
- ³⁵ Steven B. Sample, *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 145–47.
- ³⁶ Though Sample utilizes the term "myth," with the meaning of an underlying narrative that is foundational to an organization, society, or culture, I am choosing to term this offering as an "account" to emphasize the veracity of the narrative.

2019 LCMS Convention Resolution

To Encourage Responsible Citizenship and Compassion Toward Neighbors Who Are Immigrants Among Us

RESOLUTION 11-05A

Reports Rl.2, R9, Rl2, R59.5 (CW, 16–71, 92–94, 95–104, 245–47)

WHEREAS, God's Word lifts up the stranger and sojourner: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:33–34), "And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart" (Zech. 7:8–10); and

WHEREAS, Jesus taught us that the neighbor we are called to serve is the person in need: "Jesus asked, 'Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, 'You go, and do likewise'" (Luke 10:36–37); and

WHEREAS, Scripture instructs us: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom. 13:1–2) even as the Fourth Commandment indicates; and

WHEREAS, Scripture enfolds our submission to the governing authorities within the mandate of Christ: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30–31; cf. Rom. 13:8–10); and

WHEREAS, In Christ Jesus all the baptized are children of God, through faith. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26–28); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) began as an immigrant church reaching immigrants with the Gospel, and continues to confess that we are sojourners here on earth: "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain

from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11); therefore be it

Resolved, That the LCMS in convention commend for study and discussion the Commission on Theology and Church Relations report, *Immigrants Among Us: A Lutheran Framework for Addressing Immigration Issues* (2012) together with the Bible study based on the report; and be it further

Resolved, That the members of the congregations of the Synod, as part of the body of Christ, be encouraged to recognize their calling to see the immigrant and the stranger as their neighbor, to share the Gospel and make disciples of all people, and to live as responsible citizens; and be it further

Resolved, That the members of Synod give bold witness in keeping with the Scriptures and Confessions against inhumane treatment and attitudes toward immigrants, war refugees, and minorities; and be it finally

Resolved, That the members of the Synod be encouraged not to allow political divisions to become church divisions and to heed Paul's words from Ephesians chapter four: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:29–32).

2019 LCMS Convention Resolution

To Strengthen Multi-Ethnic Outreach

RESOLUTION 1-05A

Reports R1.2 (CW, 40–41, 46)

WHEREAS, God our Savior "desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all." (1 Tim. 2:4–6a); and

WHEREAS, Those who have been ransomed by His blood are "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Rev. 5:9b); and

WHEREAS, God, who determines where every nation shall live (Acts 17:26), has arranged for the nations of the world to come in increasing numbers to the United States; and

WHEREAS, It is His will "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47 RSV); and

WHEREAS, His disciples of every time and place are to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19–20a) and to be His "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8); and

WHEREAS, Many congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) are located in areas that are richly diverse in cultures, races, ethnic groups, languages, and age groups. (The estimated U.S. population as of July 1, 2018, was 328 million Americans; of which 44 million were African Americans [13.4 percent], 59 million Hispanics [18.1 percent], 19 million Asians [5.8 percent], and 4 million American Indian [1.3 percent]. Each year more than 1 million people immigrate to the U.S. along with another 1 million international students, and their families, who have come to study in U.S. colleges and universities. [United States Census Bureau]); and

WHEREAS, The LCMS remains ethnically homogenous—95 percent Caucasian according to the 2014 Pew Research Center report, "Religious Landscape Study: Members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod" (https://www.pewforum.org/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/); and

WHEREAS, Jesus exhorts us to "open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35 NIV); therefore be it

Resolved, That Synod in convention thank God for the gifts of new and existing multi-ethnic populations that He is giving His Church in North America; and be it further

Resolved, That Synod encourages its congregations in communities of all sizes to continually "look at the fields" around them and seize the opportunities God provides to share the Gospel; and be it further

Resolved, That congregations of the LCMS be encouraged to seek out and welcome all multi-ethnic populations, showing the love of Jesus in both word and deed; and be it further

Resolved, That each district be encouraged to make church planting among multiethnic populations a priority of mission work in their district or in partnership with other districts; and be it further

Resolved, That pastors who serve in areas where there are prominent second languages be sensitive to the need to reach out to people in their primary language; and be it further

Resolved, That the Office of National Mission provide resources to assist districts in training workers for multiethnic ministry; and be it finally

Resolved, That Synod reaffirm the formation of church workers through the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Center for Hispanic Studies, Cross-Cultural Ministry Center, and other such programs that provide education for ministry to multiethnic groups via distance education.

Action: Adopted as read (9)

Res. 1-05A was read and introduced by the committee, with the addition of the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center to the list of programs in the final resolve. Without objection, the chair put the resolution to an immediate voice vote, by which the resolution was adopted.

The Mission Opportunity of the New Immigrants to America

Bob Zagore

Abstract: The 67th national convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted several resolutions. One was remarkable for the mission of the church in North America. In a resolution on "National Witness," Committee One gave thanks for "new and existing multi-ethnic populations"; asked congregations of the LCMS to reach out and welcome these new Americans; asked districts of the LCMS to make church planting among the new ethnic groups a priority; committed the Office of National Missions (ONM) to provide resources to districts to form church workers to help churches reach these new populations; and affirmed the work of ministries that provide distance education to workers from these immigrant groups. In his article the leader of the ONM effort, Rev. Robert Zagore, shares a strong witness to the need for such an effort. A national leader with a mission heart, Zagore details his department's plan to bring the gospel to the world (Mt 28:16–20) as the world comes to America. - Dr. Robert Scudieri, President of Mission Nation Publishing

The LCMS is an evangelizing church body. It is impossible to be a faithful church if that is not true. Over the years, the Lord has helped us to welcome many new people into our congregations. Thirty-five percent of our adult membership did not grow up Lutheran. That is among the highest rates of all Christian denominations.¹

However, most of the new adult members of the LCMS look like the old members of the LCMS. While we rejoice with the company of heaven when any sinner comes to salvation (Lk 15:7), we have more nations among us to baptize and teach (Mt 28:19–20).

According to a Pew research study, the LCMS is the third least diverse denomination in the US. It may be a Lutheran problem; the ELCA is the second least



In May 2018, Rev. Bob Zagore, most recently of Traverse City, Michigan, began serving as executive director of the LCMS Office of National Mission (ONM). In this role, he oversees the Synod's programs and resources available to congregations, districts, schools, and Recognized Service Organizations within the United States. He was a parish pastor for twenty-seven years, has a degree in accounting, and worked as a business consultant after graduating from college. He also had the experience of becoming a Lutheran as an adult. bob.zagore@lcms.org

diverse.² Some of that statistical stigma stems from the LCMS's practice of forming partner churches in other countries. Their membership does not count toward our measures of diversity. On an average Sunday morning, our pews look very homogeneous.

Our members have widely acknowledged this and are calling for action. The 2019 LCMS convention adopted six different resolutions (1-02, 1-05A, 4-03A, 4-09, 11-04A, 11-07A) that called on Synodical congregations, ministries, and the Office of National Mission (ONM) to fund and to provide more guidance and resources for outreach and ministry to immigrant groups.

- 1-02, Encourages the planting of churches and asks ONM to create resources to help.
- 1-05A, Asks Synod to strengthen multi-ethnic outreach through the development of resources and making intentional efforts to engage ethnic and multi-ethnic communities.
- 4-03A, Commends the Synod's Mission Priorities and lays out the framework of Making Disciples for Life as the Synod's triennial emphasis. Unlike former emphases this resolution comes with a programmatic framework to ensure that resources are placed into the hands of those engaged in mission.
- 4-09, Encourages the celebration of our theological heritage and encourages that this be the jumping off point for an initiative to fund mission activities around the world.
- 11-04A, Affirms the Common Humanity of All People and Ethnicities, confesses that all need a Savior and the Synod's divine mandate to bring the Gospel to all nations.
- 11-07A, Remembers the persecuted church throughout the world and encourages our prayers and activities on behalf of those who are subjected to persecution for Christ's sake.

These form a valuable outline of how the LCMS will carry out our mission particularly to the ethnic and multi-ethnic communities in our midst. The following paragraphs will outline some of what the domestic mission landscape looks like and how one-year removed from the convention the ONM is responding to Synod's call for action.

These form a valuable outline of how the LCMS will carry out our mission particularly to the ethnic and multi-ethnic communities in our midst.

The Holy Spirit is the one who brings people to the church and to faith. Nothing I will write should be taken to say that conversion is possible apart from His work through the means of grace. Only the Holy Spirit can create faith, call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify His church. He both sends the church and prepares the fields that are white for harvest (Jn 4:35). Because He is a God of order (1 Cor 14:33), when we go to all nations, we do not run aimlessly (1 Cor 9:26). Nor, do we go simply to make "evangelism conquests" (Mt 23:15). Our love for our neighbor and the stranger in our midst must be genuine (Rom 12:9), growing out of the Father's desire that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).

In that desire, the Lord has brought the nations streaming through our gates (Is 60:10–11). The US has 44.4 million immigrants, a larger number than any country on earth. At this moment, 13.6% of the US population is immigrant.³ That is the highest percentage since 1890 (record 14.8% share) when German immigrants by the millions were among the huddled masses coming to our shore.⁴

While much is (rightly) made of Hispanic immigration, the actual countries of origin of US immigrants may surprise us. Since 2010, more Asians have come to the US than any other group. Asians account for 27% of all immigrants living in the United States. By 2055, demographers project that Asians will be the largest minority group in North America. According to the US Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, between 2015 and 2018, over 293,000 immigrants have come from China alone. 6

Major cities like New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, Chicago, Seattle, Detroit, and Baltimore are the most frequent destinations for new Americans. It should not escape notice that several of these are places in which the LCMS has experienced declines in congregations, membership, and attendance over the years. Our lack of success in reaching new urban populations appears directly correlated to that decline. It is not a unique problem. No mainline Christian denomination in the US has experienced both overall numerical growth and even a 5% growth in congregational diversity. But it is a problem Christ's mission demands we address—especially when we realize that many who are coming to our shores are Christians looking for a place to worship.

Religious and social persecution has risen dramatically around the world. A study published in July 2019, "A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World," highlights an alarming increase in the amount and intensity of religious persecution. The persecution index score that explains the level and intensity of persecution in an area has nearly doubled in Europe in the last ten years. China leads the way in increased persecution. Pew notes that the number of countries that persecute Christians rose from 95 to 143 between 2008 and 2017.

The US government's response to this provides a unique opportunity for the LCMS, because of our strength in rural areas and small towns. It is tough to qualify for asylum based on religious persecution. Many who come to the country because of persecution do not enter the US under a formal resettlement program. Those who are not in formal programs tend to settle in cities near relatives and friends. But the US

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government settles those who qualify for asylum in low population density areas. Over 160,000 entered the US under the Refugee and Asylum program between 2015 and 2018 (the latest reported data). On a per-capita basis, Washington, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Vermont have received the biggest share, and these have been mainly resettled in low population counties.⁹ Even rural congregations in the LCMS are likely to have a mission field in their backyard.

Once people come to the US, how they and their descendants move within the country looks remarkably like historical patterns. First generations (1i) tend to live in major cities near family or friends and quite often near the place where they first entered the country. Within ten years, generally motivated by economic factors, people move to areas of greater opportunity. Not surprisingly, they often relocate to places that have given a welcome to family members or countrymen. 1i immigrants are frequently aware of their countrymen, and family members settled in different cities. Immigrant migration studies within the US show a general movement from areas of higher population density to lower density. That, too, means it is likely that an immigrant family will move into a suburb or farmhouse near an LCMS congregation.

Furthermore, successive generations are likely to move away from immigrant parents to establish families, seek schooling, etc. A lot of the children that could be in LCMS confirmation classes and schools are part of this population. In 2009, 23% of all children born in the US were from immigrant families, and about thirty-three million people in the US were second-generation (2i) immigrants. ¹⁰ The opportunities for congregations to welcome these new families are great.

Overall, the 2i generation is much more assimilated into US society. They are more educated (59.2% have attended college compared to 44.5% of their parents).¹¹ They are likely to have higher earnings. Likewise, they are likely to have greatly improved financial circumstances.

Studies and experience demonstrate that by the third generation (3i), people are culturally assimilated. Most 3i families no longer speak the language of their ancestors. While they may still identify culturally with their ancestry, they are statistically likely to reflect the lifestyle of their new homeland. That makes sense. A 2013 US Department of Commerce report determined that the group with at least one grandparent who was a first-generation immigrant numbered about 235 million people. 12 They look like the population because they comprise three-quarters of the population.

The last forty to fifty years of immigrant churchgoers in the US yields an important insight. In the 1970s and 1980s, the US saw the rise of large immigrant congregations of various denominations. However, the acculturation and geographical movement of the descendants of first-generation immigrants has resulted in dramatic declines in the size of these same congregations. Across denominations, the 3i generation largely do not attend ethnic congregations. They reflect the religious

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landscape of their community. Although it happened more slowly, much the same phenomenon happened in the LCMS.

What does all of this mean for LCMS congregations and the resources they need to reach out to immigrant communities? Since the convention called for the Office of National Mission to help, what resources are available or in development?

First, it means that *over time*, strictly cultural outreach will be unsuccessful. The descendants of the immigrants who made up much of the LCMS's congregations are acculturated and no longer identify with their grandparents' church based on their German (or other) culture alone. What binds these descendants to the church? In a social media study those whose grandparents were LCMS members cited biblical theology, infant Baptism, catechism classes, and Lutheran schools as the reasons they remained in the church body. In the same study, those who are no longer members of LCMS congregations said they still believed themselves to be LCMS theologically—but they could not find a congregation like the one in which they learned the faith. A strongly catechetical and theological emphasis must be a part of our mission because it endures. Heritage-based congregations tend to decline sharply in just a couple of generations.

While the means of grace set in the context of the Divine Service and the study of God's Word will be relevant as they have been for thousands of years, the setting and language of those means are a moving target. There is a rightful and needed push to develop Spanishlanguage resources for the church, but we have an even larger Asian influx. These are languages and cultures that (as a national church) we do not know well. ONM is working with LCMS International Missions, overseas partners, and indigenous domestic pastors to try to meet this expected challenge. It is vital in the

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coming years that our professional church workers be given the option of training within the cultural context of the communities they serve.

LCMS Offices of National and International Mission have been openly working to "blur the lines" between units and create opportunities for training, mission, and resource development for the mission fields internationally and domestically. For example, the Latin America and Caribbean region of the Office of International Mission has created the VDMA project. VDMA is an expanding, large, digital library of Spanish Bibles, Bible studies, theological books, journals, etc. Our missionaries are involved in creating, translating, and distributing a great number of Spanish-language resources. A Spanish language school that helps train missionaries and a Spanish-

language seminary in the Dominican Republic are also resources available to LCMS districts and congregations who wish language training. These all can help inform and equip our outreach throughout the US. The interaction between international and national mission units makes further sense because our missionaries are often reaching out to the friends and family members of those to whom our domestic congregations are reaching out.

A series of multicultural outreach grants are available through the Making Disciples for Life initiative that is being spearheaded by the ONM. Districts and congregations alike may apply for grants to enhance or begin multicultural outreach programs. The National Youth Gathering offers special scholarships to youth groups with an international component or multicultural emphasis.

The LCMS has a long history of planting churches and the need to plant them is great. But 2010 statistics show that 1,266 of 3,075 counties in the US (40%) have no LCMS presence. 13 The ONM is engaged in a study of forty years of church planting by the LCMS. ONM's Church Planting Program Ministry is also deeply involved with scholars across denominational lines regarding what seems to work and what does not. While the LCMS was highly successful in planting congregations during the times of massive German immigration, more recent efforts have not met with the same success. We have experienced very little lasting success with efforts that result from centrally managed district or Synodical planting.

It seems clear across denominational lines and is demonstrable within the LCMS that the best church planting outcomes have resulted from a mother congregation planting a daughter congregation and providing members for the effort. Aubrey Malphurs of Dallas Theological Seminary has studied the various church planting models. Interestingly, the study showed that even if the church plant failed, the planting church grew by an average of 23.7%. This appears to be because these congregations emphasize mission over survival.¹⁴

The study showed that even if the church plant failed, the planting church grew by an average of 23.7%. This appears to be because these congregations emphasize mission over survival.

Our outreach to immigrant groups and others cannot be because we need new members to sustain an institution. Outreach must be motivated by a desire to save the lost and love one's neighbor. When this is done in connection with the riches of Lutheran theology, we are calling people to a place where the means of grace can sustain them and their descendants for generations.

ONM has prepared and continues to prepare a huge treasury of resources that teach the theology and the nuts and bolts of this outreach. The tremendously popular ONM outreach program, Everyone His Witness, is now available in Spanish, as is the

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valuable *Church Planting Handbook*. Many other domestic resources are now in production. ONM's programmatic ministries: outreach initiatives, podcasts, webinars, and partnerships with LCMS recognized service organizations are being rolled out several times per month. We will be doing even more. Through the *Making Disciples for Life* initiative, regional conferences, new multicultural resource testing, grants, and an internet resource center will all be available to help with resource sharing and training. Work done together among mission offices, the Pastoral Education Office (e.g., PALS), and the districts will yield fresh, tested, and theologically-solid LCMS outreach tools and ideas.

But, among the most substantial takeaways from the analysis of our current situation is that if our outreach efforts are to be sustained, they must be robust and generationally minded. That means that in reaching out to immigrant populations we must see beyond the first generation. Congregational outreach must be theologically informed if gains are to be sustained over time.

We must actively seek to connect people to congregations that see themselves in mission to their entire community—whatever its composition. This is especially the case, since every twenty years or so the first-generation immigrants bring forth a second and third generation of descendants who do not see themselves as international immigrants, but as Americans. They all are our neighbors, and the most important, blood-bought children of God.

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The twenty-two programmatic ministries of the ONM will continue to provide expert advice; high-quality, theologically solid resources; incentives; funding; training, etc. The real work of outreach is done when neighbors love neighbors because the Lord has brought them together, when forgiven sinners share the grace they have received with those who need absolution. Churches that become institutions that seek to survive for the sake of the institution will die. But, the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's church (Mt 16:18). All of the resources of the LCMS could rightly be summarized in this way: we need to bring the means of grace, the medicine of immortality, into the lives of those who will die eternally without them.

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Mission Nation Publishing

Dan Gilbert

Abstract: Most North American Lutherans know the situation: congregations are declining; young people aren't joining; membership rolls and weekend worship services usually show only one ethnic group, and it's usually people of northwest European descent. A new mission agency called Mission Nation Publishing has some easy and engaging ideas for working to change that scenario. This article tells the story of Mission Nation Publishing, beginning with a missionary memory from the author.

When I was in about fifth grade in 1962, a missionary came to our Lutheran grade school. He showed lots of slides and told lots of stories about his work in Africa. As he was concluding, he said, "Boys and girls, when you're grown up, missionaries from Africa will be coming to America to serve us." We weren't even polite; we all laughed out loud. Ridiculous, we thought.

Fast forward to 2018. My wife and I semi-retired and moved St. Louis to be near family, and we joined Messiah Lutheran Church. Our pastor: Rev. Mike Okine, a US citizen immigrant who came to this country from Ghana. He's been at Messiah for nearly fifteen years, and he's by no means the only African immigrant pastor in this country. I can almost hear that old missionary say, "I told you so."

Since its very beginning, the United States of America has been and continues to be a nation made up primarily of immigrants. Yet our church body remains almost entirely of northern European ethnicity in general, German in particular. That's not what the Lord's eternal New Creation is going to look like. It will be an amazing and beautiful bouquet of men and women from every tribe and language and people and nation. Wouldn't it be great if the bride of Christ on earth looked like that? If *your* congregation looked like that? Or, at a minimum, if we served at least one more ethnic group along with our current members?



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This is not just a "Wouldn't it be nice?" This is, in fact, something the Lord wills as we read in Genesis 12:3 (all families); Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Deuteronomy 1:16; Jeremiah 22:3; and the "light to the nations" theme, as in Isaiah 60:1–3. Repeatedly the Lord charges His church to go with the saving Good News of Jesus to "all nations,"

literally to "all ethnic communities" (Mt 28:18; Lk 24:47), to "all the world . . . the whole creation" (Mk 16:15), and "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). More importantly, the Lord reminds us that we were all strangers and aliens, "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). We read in that same chapter, "But now in Christ Jesus you who

More importantly, the Lord reminds us that we were all strangers and aliens.

once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility" (Eph 2:13–16).

And this is all in the context of the powerfully profound bringing together of Jews and Gentiles, quite a remarkable synthesis of cross-cultural issues, and not into homogeneous groupings of "Jewish Christians" and "Gentile Christians," each with their worship styles and "like-mindedness."

We have been brought near to God by the blood of Jesus—such a cost, so freely given for us. And that payment has been made not only for our sins, "but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:2).

That's the biblical foundation for immigrant ministry. However, before getting to the role of Mission Nation Publishing itself, here's another story:

Did you know that for its first 100+ years The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was a leader in immigrant ministry? Although there were brief lulls during the two world wars, the LCMS actively sought and served immigrants to the US. These were almost exclusively German immigrants, and there were hundreds of thousands of them. For decades after the Synod's founding, congregations in port cities would check for the arrivals of passenger ships from Germany. They would then go to the dock when such ships arrived with large signs written in German saying things like, "Follow me for a free German breakfast." Often a group would gather and off they'd go, not to a restaurant but to the church. And in addition to a good meal, the new arrivals also got lots of information about where to shop, from whom they could safely rent, employment opportunities, and, of course, the message of sin and of grace in Jesus with an invitation to the church for worship

and also to the congregation's Germanspeaking school for the kids. In later years the LCMS worked with refugee agencies, especially after the wars, offering similar services. Although it was for only one ethnic group, the LCMS excelled in welcoming the stranger. I remember in grade school we were taught to say, "Gute Morgen, Herr Töbe" to our church and school janitor who had escaped Communism in East Germany after World War II.

Did you know that for its first 100+ years The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod was a leader in immigrant ministry?

The boats aren't coming from Germany anymore, and neither are many German immigrants. However, we all know that millions of girls and boys and men and women around the world want to come to this country which still abounds in freedom and opportunity.

Out of this scene in the US, an idea, a dream (not literally) came to Rev. Dr. Bob Scudieri—a deep longing to help congregations reach out to our new neighbors from other countries, other cultures, other languages. While that idea had long been in Bob's heart, it started taking shape as a movement when he wrote a biography of an immigrant pastor friend. He got to thinking that reading a story like this could help others to see wider possibilities in mission and ministry, and he began to seek other stories and other biography writers. He found plenty of both.

Thus began the idea of Mission Nation Publishing (MNP) which now has five biographies and other accompanying books published with four more in production. These books are available both in print and on Kindle.

Bob and others actively seek out stories of immigrant missionaries. As soon as one gets Bob's attention, he contacts the person, tells him or her his goal and begins to work with them. Several phone interviews lasting four to five hours are conducted and recorded. A writer listens to the interviews and together with Bob determines what the core message of the book is to be. The book is then laid out in chapters, and a draft is written and sent to Bob for editing. Finally, another editor polishes the book for publication.

The idea is not simply that people read these books, but rather that congregations promote both the books and the concept behind them, namely, the importance of welcoming immigrants in general and immigrant pastors specifically into our congregations, welcoming members and calling immigrant pastors.

While this is "the right thing to do," there's an additional factor to consider. As you know, fewer and fewer young adults attend Christian churches in the US these days. Of those who do, many will not even consider attending a church that

is made up of only one ethnic group and they actively seek churches that are multiethnic. While that's not the main motivation, it is a factor to consider.

Here are some facts:

- The church in the US is under stress and decline.
- Lutherans are among the most ethnically non-diverse denomination in the US.1
- White English-speaking churches in the US are also among those declining most rapidly.²

Mission Nation Publishing is proposing one way to work toward changing all that.

- Congregations buy MNP books at cost and sell them with a small markup to members and others.
- An economical display case is purchased from MNP and placed in the church's entry area.
- A key person, preferably a layperson, takes on the leadership role for the project.
- At key times, volunteers are at the display to engage in conversation with members and guests.

Here are benefits for a congregation doing this:

- It sends a powerful welcoming message to any immigrants or nonmajority visitors.
- It lights up members' awareness of and zeal for mission right in their own community.
- It provides small funding for new mission projects.

Mission Nation Publishing exists to help congregations to welcome and to witness to all our neighbors and to welcome and to call immigrant pastors.

One last anecdote: In the 1980s I was serving a congregation that was about one hundred years old in a very mono-ethnic community. One day an active member and friend, about my age, was driving by and stopped in to see me just for conversation and prayer. Somehow, we got into a conversation about the many immigrants coming to nearby communities from Latin America. "Well, it's OK that they're coming here," my friend said, and then emphatically added, "but they need to learn English!" I replied, "You know, Mike (not his real name), the other day I was out in our church cemetery and I noticed the gravestone of your great-grandparents. You know what language is on their stone?" Sheepishly he just kind of nodded. (Let's just say it wasn't English.) And I said, "They'd been in the US for a lot of years before they died, hadn't they?" "Point taken, Pastor," he said.

We all do well to take that point. Except for "100% American Indians," i.e., Native Americans, all US citizens are descendants of immigrants if not immigrants themselves. The Lord is bringing the nations to us—we don't even have to go overseas to participate in the Great Commission, literally. Mission Nation Publishing is here to help congregations participate in a new way.

For information on the books, on how to distribute them in your congregation and for

Except for "100% American Indians," i.e., Native Americans, all US citizens are descendants of immigrants if not immigrants themselves.

videos of immigrant missionaries, please go to www.missionnationpublishing.

Endnotes

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Confident Pluralism: Wrestling with the Loss of Christendom toward a Winsome Witness

Chad Lakies

Abstract: The church in the North Atlantic world functions in many ways out of the memory of its former role within Christendom. Having moved into a post-Christian era, the methodologies and imagination fostered by the church's habits developed within Christendom inhibit rather than advance the vocation of the church, which is to herald the Gospel to the world. This paper describes our new situation along with some of its challenges, and while admitting the church is often unprepared in terms of training for and knowledge of the new landscape in which the church finds itself, nevertheless, there is some wisdom from the past that can help the church faithfully advance the mission of God in which it is called to participate.

Introduction

It was fifteen months into one of the most iconic journeys of American history. Lewis and Clark along with their team were about to crest the highest point they had encountered thus far. Having been commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson to chart a path to the Pacific Ocean for the sake of transcontinental travel and especially for the sake of expanding commerce, Lewis and Clark were anxious for what they'd behold the next morning. They expected to see a brief descent down to a gentle plain before reaching the Pacific Ocean. Under the stars of looming excitement, they could barely sleep. No one had ever journeyed this far. No one had ever seen what they were about to behold. This is was an historical moment if there ever was one. As morning dawned and the sunrise basked the landscape in a gentle glow, they ascended the final rise with an energetic quickness that their pace had not achieved since setting off all



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those months ago. They reached the crest and took in the view and it was indeed as awe-inspiring as they expected. Yet simultaneously, one of the travelers reported, it was one of the most terrifying views he had ever witnessed. For there was no gentle slope down to the Pacific Ocean. Instead, the rolling plain before them stretched only a short distance before ascending steeply and terrifyingly. What they had witnessed for the first time as seasoned adventurers were mountains they had never dreamed of encountering. When they departed, they assumed that their path across the continent would continue very much like the plains and gentle rises that characterized the portion of North America which lay behind them. The only mountains they had ever navigated were the undaunting Appalachians. But now, before them lay a situation for which they never knew they needed to prepare. Trained to navigate waterways and tolerate the occasional need to portage their canoes, they now had massive adjustments to make. They'd leave the canoes behind. They'd find guidance and help from the Native Americans. They'd later build new canoes from burnt trees. But ultimately, they'd be making it up as they go, negotiating new circumstances they had never expected. These adventurers had to learn, as Tod Bolsinger puts it, how to "canoe the mountains."1

For twenty-first century Christians, our situation is similar. It's been over 1,700 years since we've lived in a culture where Christianity was not the dominant religion, where we enjoyed the benefits of legal support that opened a space for more than a millennium and a half of flourishing and massive global growth. But now that era is behind us. And it's scary. And out of fear, there are many moments when, in order to survive and keep going, we act in ways that are detrimental to our very goals, undermining ourselves and compromising our ability even to sustain an existence, much less consider the possibility of flourishing once again. Like Lewis and Clark, perhaps we thought that the way it was is the way it always would be. Like them, we have not been trained for this and so we are unprepared. But like them, in just the same

way, we must face down what is in front of us. Sometimes that will mean the risky move of making it up as we go, an exceedingly scary proposal given 1,700 years of doing things in more or less the same ways under the same circumstances.

In this article, I want to discuss two things. First, I want to acknowledge how the end of Christendom² affects us and our involvement in God's mission to bring the Good News to all the earth. We are struggling; and in troubling ways, we are unwittingly hampering our own efforts. Yet, prior to Christendom, there were similarities for the church to our current

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situation in the world, and so there is hope. Second, then, I want to suggest some concrete ideas that might animate how we negotiate our identity as the church with confidence in this new, pluralistic world that we haven't known for 1,700 years.

Wrestling with the End of Christendom

In an almost prophetic statement that seems truer now than at the time it was written, the preeminent American sociologist Robert Nisbet wrote in 1975 that we live in a twilight age. "Periodically in Western history," Nisbet says, "twilight ages make their appearance." He continues,

> Processes of decline and erosion of institutions are more evident than those of genesis and development. Something like a vacuum obtains in the moral order for large numbers of people. Human loyalties, uprooted from accustomed soil, can be seen tumbling across the landscape with no scheme of larger purpose to fix them. Individualism reveals itself less as achievement and enterprise than as egoism and mere performance. Retreat from the major to the minor, from the noble to the trivial, the communal to the personal, and from the objective to the subjective is commonplace. There is a widely expressed sense of degradation of values and corruption of culture. The sense of estrangement from community is strong.³

Perhaps more prescient now than forty-five years ago, Nisbet's words ring strikingly true. We Christians find ourselves in strange territory indeed, facing a landscape for which we have not been prepared.

In 2016, the Jewish political and public policy theorist Yuval Levin said that we live in a "fractured republic." He sought to diagnose how we got here and to suggest some helpful ways forward. 4 In 2018, US Senator from Nebraska, Ben Sasse, observed that we live in a culture of "us vs. them," strongly suggesting that because of the fractured nature of our republic, we find both meaningfulness and satisfaction in the various ways that we take sides, attack the other, and achieve a sense of righteousness for not being "one of them."⁵

This fracturing and fragmentation are nothing new for us Christians. One need only to refer to the history of the church since the Reformation to see how denominationalism and the myriad claims to true and pure orthodoxy reflect a familiar reality for all of us. What is perhaps a bit newer and more visible on a large scale is the internal fracturing that is happening within established church bodies like our own, their members and leaders dividing into parties, camps, tribes, and the like. Some members of these groups even imagine the possibility of future church splits and the emergence of ever more spin-off denominations.

In the 1980s, the late British missiologist and former missionary to India, Lesslie Newbigin, began to describe our Western, North Atlantic world, as pluralistic. By

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this he simply meant that there is a "manyness" that characterizes our culture, that we live in a world of competing allegiances, and that the decline of Christianity as the dominant motivating and imagination-shaping force in our culture indicates that we have moved into a post-Christian era. Many have added their voice to Newbigin's in agreeing with his assessment concerning the post-Christian nature of our time. This has caused many Christians to feel, as Nisbet described, distant and estranged from the community we once thought of as home. As recently as the 1950s, the American church experienced perhaps its zenith, enjoying wide cultural approval and exceedingly broad influence. Now, with such a drastic change over just seventy years, the church is reeling and in a state of shock, grasping for anything that might help us feel, as Nisbet said, "rooted" once again.

As the church has sought to navigate this new reality and negotiate its own identity in the midst of it, various scholars and analysts have tried to point the way forward, sometimes by pointing out trouble spots. One of the things we've learned is just how negatively many people in our culture perceive the church. We are seen as antagonistic, closed-minded, exclusionary, elitist, and self-righteous. If we consider these characteristics from a personal perspective, most of us don't like meeting or spending time with other people who exhibit them, so it's no surprise that those who are not a part of the church are often "turned-off" by it, finding the church unattractive and increasingly irrelevant. Add to this more recent data about the growth of the so-called "nones" or religiously unaffiliated (now standing at about 26% of Americans⁸), and it's no leap to see that our post-Christian era evokes a strong sense that we are trying to witness and minister amongst a people who don't need a god.

So we feel frustrated, worn-out, and confused. We feel what the contemporary sociologist of culture James Davison Hunter has called a sense of "ressentiment"—a feeling of loss because we believe something has been taken away from us. 9 In

particular he refers to this in terms of the former cultural dominance that the church experienced within Christendom. What we have lost is not just a familiar, comfortable way of being faithful Christians in our time where we could safely assume that most other people shared, if not our faith, then at least our moral values and our general view of the world in one manner or another. We also sense that we have lost our place at the table, as it were. We find that our voice no longer matters and, that in many

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senses, it is not wanted. In response, Hunter says, we scramble to blame someone—the liberals if we are conservatives and the conservatives if we are liberals. We begin to find our identity in this post-Christian age by determining who the real enemy is and setting ourselves up in standing against them, striving at times at least for their

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silencing, if not their total elimination. Hunter argues that when most other members of the North Atlantic world shared in common a similar set of convictions—often referred to as a Judeo-Christian worldview—the church occupied a space of power and influence that no longer exists. But he suggests, given the loss of comfort that comes with such privilege, the church wants it back. In order to recover it, we engage in what is often referred to as a culture war with those who are characterized as opposing our way of life. Such efforts on this warpath have further distanced people from the church and stand as a case-in-point concerning the critique of the church as antagonistic.

Complicating this matter, the internal church fragmentations that I mentioned earlier make it difficult for the church to advance the cause of the Gospel because there is too much attention focused inwardly, seeking to blame, flame, and shame those who don't take the right side. For a church body like our own, which, over and against any other body, has long believed that we are the guardians of orthodoxy, this creates the conditions for the awkward and ironic existence of various internal groups which stand in competition with one another for a kind of political allegiance, each claiming to represent the truest of true orthodoxies. This internal fetishism for who counts amongst the

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real puritans of our tribe constitutes a complete distraction from what Newbigin would call the vocation of the church, 10 referring to its missionary identity as the carrier of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. For many whose hope it is simply to believe, teach, and confess in service to the Gospel and our Lord Jesus Christ, there is a haunting fear that around any corner there may be someone lurking, seeking to castigate them. They fear having crossed some unknown line that marked the boundaries of an apparent urorthodoxy, which now functions to mark them as some kind of heretic, exiled to the island of the irredeemable. I think the historian Sophia Rosenfeld captures this phenomenon well when she observes that it is often our particular political commitments—in this case, those made to select fragments of our church body—that determine what we will accept, what ideas we will consider, and what people we are willing to associate with.¹¹ Again, this is a severe distraction from our calling to witness to the Gospel in our post-Christian world.

How do we get recruited to such a vision that this is what we ought to be doing as Christians? How do we see such behaviors are justified on the basis that the true Gospel will never shine forth unless the body is purified? To answer, returning to Hunter's analysis is helpful. In our post-Christian world where the church no longer

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enjoys its former cultural dominance, there is a scrambling to recover what has been lost. ¹² Hunter indicates that a lack of imagination plays a role here, with many believing that the only way to be the church is to be the church as it was during Christendom. Hunter disagrees. He, along with many others, see a significant problem with the alignment of the church with cultural and state mechanisms of power, a relationship of co-extensivity that has historically been the case throughout Christendom (in practice, if not in doctrine). Hunter does not believe the church should align with power in any respect, only because the very power of God is shown forth in the powerlessness of Christ in His submission to false-accusation, punishment, and death. We see it again in St. Paul's boasting in his weakness. And again, in the choosing of a rag-tag bunch of disciples whose frail humanity and finite understanding showed forth each time Jesus sought to teach them.

Yet Hunter is honest that power is attractive. ¹³ And when one loses the dominant position, the temptation to recover it is almost too much to overcome. So he suggests that, lacking a strong and comfortable sense of identity as members of the dominant bloc, we dig in our heels in order to prevent any further loss and we sharpen our vision in order to spot those people, practices, and commitments which are to blame for the loss so far. From them we craft for ourselves a new enemy. And so our identity morphs, making us not just externally antagonistic such that the world knows the church better for what it's against than what it's for. Even more, we are antagonistic internally, evermore seeking to find ourselves in the right camp, on the right side of history, and ultimately, on the side of righteousness where our own souls seem convinced that our work of protecting theology is what will finally redeem us. ¹⁴ Hunter laments our inability to recognize our complicity in perpetuating the status of the church further into the category of negative perception, seating ourselves more deeply within a post-Christian situation, while all along we believe that our efforts will get us out of this mess.

Hope in Uncharted Territory

So, what is a church to do that experiences both pluralism without as well as within? How can our witness once again be faithful and—as it often has been throughout Christian history—winsome? If the church is distracted from its primary vocation, how can we renew our attentiveness and return to faithfulness? St. Peter encourages a tirelessly winsome witness in his first letter. Perhaps one of the most referenced passages in that letter tells us to be ready to give an answer for the hope that we

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have (1 Pt 3:15b). While regularly used by those who think that apologetics by proposition and polemic is the kind of evangelistic strategy that we need in the present moment, the text is more faithfully read when we hear Peter encouraging those persecuted Christians to whom his letter is addressed to live differently. He exhorts them to live in manner that causes people to ask them questions, ones that will allow them finally to speak about the hope that both motivates and empowers their living witness. This strategy is the very kind of witness that Gerald Sittser characterizes as not just winsome, but resilient. ¹⁵ It's the embodiment of a confident pluralism. One in which faithful confession is possible, a winsome witness subversively influential, and all this without requiring compromise. The classic reference to the second-century *Letter to Diognetus*, written by an unknown author, helps us to picture the nature of what both Peter and Sittser are telling us.

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. 2 Corinthians 10:3 They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Philippians 3:20 They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. 16

So how do we exhibit this kind of winsome resilience? How can the church move toward a winsome witness in this age after Christendom? To whom do we look for help and where should we look for models?

One of things that I want to highlight in an overall way before discussing specifics is that the primary condition necessary for the Gospel to be heard and for it to spread is human

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interaction via relationships. St. Paul makes this abundantly clear when drawing on the prophet Isaiah. The prophet wrote, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Is 52:9). St. Paul rhetorically uses Isaiah's words as he seeks to persuade the Roman recipients of his letter to acknowledge the necessity that they, as members of the church, are called to take the good news out into the world to share it with others, so that everyone may call upon the name of the Lord. Paul writes,

As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom 10:11–15)

An ecology of relationships is what underlies all of what I will propose here. And I am thinking of more than just strangers bumping into strangers. Instead, what is critical are relationships characterized by at least a bit of trust, where people know about one another's lives and are mutually interested in the other person for some reason or another. The relationships need not be deep or long-term, but they must have an element of significance to them that exists below the surface of passing interactions.

What is critical are relationships characterized by at least a bit of trust, where people know about one another's lives and are mutually interested in the other person for some reason or another.

I discussed antagonism above, both as a feature of how the church (or the individual Christian) observably relates to the world, how church bodies relate to one another, and how church members sometimes relate internally to other members. First then, I want to suggest that thinking about those particular kinds of relationships is essential. And we have to think particularly about what it is we are aiming for in these relationships. I've already noted that we Christians find ourselves in a world where many view us, our institutions, and our message as irrelevant—we simply don't matter much to outsiders and thus there's not a lot of reason for them to pay attention. Yet, there's a sense of antagonism that we need to pay attention to because it hinders our witness. And that antagonism, I would argue, is uni-directional. While many claim that we live in a culture that is hostile to Christians and the message of Jesus, I think we construe the situation that way because we feel the loss and *ressentiment* that

Hunter noted, not because we experience regular hostility from most people. We are not significant enough for people to take that kind of time. Aside from militant secularists who come in various stripes but whose numbers are quite small, the only other ongoing fear that seems to be on our radar concerns religious freedom. There might be some legitimate concerns here, but we might also ask ourselves first whether the threat to religious freedom is actually our fault. With what has come to the surface of public awareness in recent decades—the scandals, moral failures, and the church's ongoing complicity with many of our culture's greatest sins: racism, pedophilia, sexism, colonialism, and more, which the church sometimes addresses with subversive attempts at cover-ups or justifications—there's more than enough reason for outsiders and even ourselves to conclude that our house is a mess, and the public knows it. Our house might not be the only one that's a mess, but we shoot our witness in the foot when our response is to try to pretend that it isn't, or to pretend that we are victims of some kind of illegitimate hostility when religious freedom is threatened, say, by suggesting the elimination of tax-exempt status for religious organizations.

All this is to say that the primary antagonist in the church's relationship to the world is the church. We are not, as the church in the North Atlantic world, experiencing persecution that's anything like that of the Early Church or present-day Christians who live in other parts of the world. ¹⁷ Hunter argues that the church should not expect to hold a dominant place in Western culture again.¹⁸ That means we have to settle with the pluralistic situation we have—the mountains stand before us and we need to find a way to navigate them.

The legal scholar John Inazu gives helpful guidance for those of us who desire, for the sake of our witness, to engage with outsiders in a way that is less antagonistic. 19 If our pluralistic situation is our situation, then how can we negotiate it with confidence, practicing a confident pluralism wherein we might participate in what he calls a "modest unity" in this world we share together without undercutting our ultimate commitments?²⁰ Perhaps his best suggestion helps us see what we ought to be aiming for in our relationships with others, allowing us to thrive in the midst of our deep differences. He recommends abandoning the effort to bridge ideological gaps and instead focus on relational ones.

Ideology is a troublesome feature of our age. The unique nature of an ideology, one which makes it quite different from a religion, is that with ideology there is no way out, no room for repentance, adjustment, renegotiation, change, or where appropriate, compromise.²¹ Ideologues are truly blind to inconsistencies and other troubles with their own belief system. They work overtime to justify and reconcile anything that might be presented as an objection. The possibility for thinking differently isn't easily evoked for ideologues.

So Inazu recommends that we not seek first to deal with the deep differences between us and others, which he suggests, lie close to the level of ideology. Instead of

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assuming that we cannot associate with someone else until we've settled our ideological disagreements, Inazu commends bridging relational gaps and bracketing out the ideological differences because we are powerless to adequately address them without relationships.²² What does this look like? Jesus models it in the sense that He never let an issue stand in the way of a relationship. Think of the woman at the well (John 4), Nicodemus (Jn 3:1–21), Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1–10), and all other sinners. And thank God that this is His default approach, otherwise none of us would be here.

Bridging relational gaps is not strange or difficult, but it is perhaps something we are out of practice in doing. The MIT researcher Sherry Turkle notes that this might be because we are often "alone together"—too easily distracted by realities that we can curate for ourselves inside the glass screens we keep in our purses and pockets. Her research suggests that our capacity for conversation and empathy take a bit more effort these days.²³ Yet, bridging relational gaps is the sort of thing any of us can do. It's as easy as having a conversation about the weather, sports, work, your kids, what you did last weekend, and so on. It happens through the simple kinds of conversations wherein people just chat and relate. These are profoundly powerful, if only because they humanize others. Before we got to know the other person, it was easy to hold him or her at a distance, objectify, or label them, which allows us (following Rosenberg's reflection) to decide for one reason or another whether we will associate with them. Perhaps through engaging with others in these basic forms of human relationality, we might slowly see that they're not so bad. But even more, because they are relating to you they might get to know a Christian and realize that you're not so bad, and perhaps trustworthy. This creates a kind cross-pressure in our relationships. The other person will bear witness to your life and character through conversation and time together, and this experience might begin to fragilize their previous commitments, whether that was some kind of negative Christian stereotype or an alternative allegiance altogether. Rather than viewing the "other" as so different from me that I can't relate, getting to know them forces me to realize that they are much more like me than I had previous imagined. Charles Taylor describes this process well as it applies to our engagements with non-Christians, but his idea can apply even more broadly, such as when applied to those with whom we disagree in our own church body. Taylor writes,

This kind of multiplicity of faiths has little effect as long as it is neutralized by the sense that being like them is not really an option for me. As long as the alternative is strange and other, perhaps despised, but perhaps just too different, too weird, too incomprehensible, so that becoming *that* isn't really conceivable for me, so long will their difference not undermine my embedding in my own faith.

This changes when through increased contact, interchange, even perhaps inter-marriage, the other becomes more and more like me, in everything else but faith: same activities, professions, opinions, tastes, etc. Then the issue

posed by the difference becomes more insistent: why my way and not hers? There is no other difference left to make the shift preposterous or unimaginable.²⁴

When we work to bridge the relational gap, Taylor describes the cross-pressure involved in this process as having a fragilizing effect. Beliefs become questionable, and alternatives considerable. To the extent that the Spirit is at work in this midst of

our relationships, the possibility that God might be drawing our conversation partners to Him is ever-present. In this way, we can refer to basic interactions like chatting and relating as forms of witness, valid evangelistic activities in our time that might not mention the name of Jesus yet, but which nevertheless create encounters where, following St. Paul's words, people might meet the Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20). In the midst of our relationships, the Christian way of life becomes plausible and our commitment to Christ persuasive. We pray in the midst of all this, that the Spirit might open a door to give the Good News.

In the midst of our relationships, the Christian way of life becomes plausible and our commitment to Christ persuasive. We pray in the midst of all this, that the Spirit might open a door to give the Good News.

A second thing for us to consider here is our commitment to all this. What I mean here has nothing to do with a gut-check on whether or not we really take seriously our membership in the priesthood of all believers. Rather, I'm asking how long we are willing to invest in what is required for a winsome witness in our time. John Inazu argues that one of the most needed civic virtues for our time is patience.²⁵ His example of patience is helpful in that he compares it to someone giving their life to a task which may not be finished before one's life come to an end. Of course, the primary example of this is Jesus, and subsequently His disciples. We could say the same for the great host of witnesses who have run the race before us. Civically, we can point to people like Abraham Lincoln or MLK on the issue of racial justice, for example. None of these tasks is finished. They require ongoing commitment and patience to engage in a long-term way.

Inazu's suggestion resonates strongly with the work of Alan Kreider, the Early Church historian who argues that the growth of the Early Church was something like a patient fermentation.²⁶ Or we can look to Rodney Stark's work, which plots out the growth of the Early Church using the best sociologically informed data available, noting that in the Roman Empire prior to experiencing the full effects of the Edict of Milan, Christianity grew at a rate of about 3.4% of the population per year, or from about one thousand Christians in AD 40 to roughly 31 million by the middle of the fourth century.²⁷ The church grew, Stark says, because of the centrality of personal

relationships and the networks that linked people who would share the Gospel with others. When we are talking about the period of three centuries, or about fifteen generations, this was not a fast process.²⁸ It was a patient fermentation that required a long and dedicated obedience in the same direction.²⁹

A third approach comes from James Davison Hunter. It helps us think about the benefits of shifting from a posture of antagonism to one that is more positive. Hunter believes that one of the ways that the church could become more fruitful in its witness throughout the coming decades might be, on the one hand, to keep quiet when it comes to criticism. 30 He suggests that our witness in this regard has been so ill-received, that he wonders if we should stop speaking critically to and about our world or culture for a season. His point might be hyperbolic, but it's worth heeding only to the extent that his reasoning for staying quiet is measurably justifiable. But he doesn't end there. One the other hand, he suggests a different posture, one that he calls "faithful presence," which imagines the church—both as institution and as a body of people as existing in a posture for others.³¹ Perhaps helpful here, would be to hear echoes of Luther's doctrine of vocation in Hunter's proposal, since he gives primacy to our local places of influence, which are often very similar to Luther's four estates or realms of serving others in vocation. Bonhoeffer's words about human life and relationships are also helpful for interpreting Hunter. Bonhoeffer views humans as "beings-for-oneanother."32 In a manner similar to how we regularly say that God and heaven don't need our good works but our neighbor does, Bonhoeffer's conception visualizes human life as aimed outward toward others in a relationship of service and care. Faithful presence, in Hunter's proposal, imagines the church as aimed externally, postured toward caring for the world in which it is situated. In this way, to riff on Bonhoeffer, the church might become known more for what it is for than what it is against.

Finally, it ought to be said that none of what I'm suggesting is comfortable. Living in a pluralistic society, particularly in an age where being aware of and concerned

about the differences between us and our neighbors has become inescapable, has caused some fragility even for the most ardent believers amongst us. I get it. Yet when I feel myself wanting to resist, complain, or wish that we could just return to some easier time, the scholar in me is reminded that no such time ever really existed; and the Holy Spirit in me goads me onward in the knowledge that in following Jesus, He never made any promises that it will all be easy. What He did promise is that He would be with us always, even to the end of the age (Mt 28:20).

There will be stubbed toes, scraped knees, and broken bones—we are feeble vessels. But God has chosen us, nonetheless. And it's for such a time as this. It always is when God does the choosing.

So we are in new territory. We aren't prepared. We weren't trained for this. But there is wisdom to be found if we are open to hearing it and learning from the past. Repentance characterizes the Christian life, and we'll have to be doing plenty of that. There will be stubbed toes, scraped knees, and broken bones—we are feeble vessels. But God has chosen us, nonetheless. And it's for such a time as this. It always is when God does the choosing.

So let me end with a blessing: May the God who called you to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth empower, energize, and equip you with patience, discernment, urgency, and boldness as you proclaim the Good News to the world. May He help you lean upon the past so that you can venture into the future. May He give you impossible frontiers to traverse so that in Him, you may believe that all is made possible. May He give you unscalable heights, so that when He brings you to the pinnacle, you make look back at the grandeur of the journey that began when He said to you, "come, follow me." May He sanctify your speech and season your actions so that all who meet you might ultimately meet Jesus, that all may hear the Good News and come to know Him and may be saved. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

- ¹ This is based on the opening illustration Tod Bolsinger narrates much more eloquently in his book Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2016).
- ² Readers should note that *Christendom* is not a synonym for *Christianity*. While *Christianity* can refer in the broad sense to the collection of Christian teachings, beliefs, practices, and traditions, Christendom should be understood in a more restricted way. Among scholars, the typical understanding of *Christendom* is that period of time in the West, extending roughly from the Edict of Milan in the fourth century to the late twentieth century during which church and state regularly exhibited evidence of a co-extensive relationship. For the purposes of this paper, the nature of that co-extensive relationship that most concerns us is how the church relied on the power of the state to exert and maintain a characteristically Christian influence in Western society. Scholars began to document, analyze, and comment on the decoupling of the church from the state and wrestling with the "end of Christendom" in the last half of the twentieth century.
- ³ Robert Nisbet, Twilight of Authority (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), xi.
- ⁴ Yuval Levin, The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism (New York: Basic Books, 2016).
- ⁵ Ben Sasse, Them: Why We Hate Each Other and How to Heal (New York: St. Martin's, 2018).
- ⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).
- ⁷ See for example David Kinnaman, You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church . . . and Rethinking Faith (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) and his earlier work unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

- ⁸ See the recent survey data published by the Pew Research Center: "In U.S., Christianity Continues to Decline at Rapid Pace," October 17, 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/.
- ⁹ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010), 107–108. Hunter explains, "Nietzsche's definition of this French word included what we in the English-speaking world mean by resentment, but it also involves a combination of anger, envy, hate, rage, and revenge as the motive of political action. *Ressentiment* is, then, a form of political psychology." Hunter, *To Change the World*, 107.
- ¹⁰ See Michael Goheen, *The Vocation of the Church: Lesslie Newbigin's Missional Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).
- ¹¹ Sophia Rosenfeld, "Truth and Consequences" in *The Hedgehog Review* 21, no. 2 (2019): 18–24.
- ¹² This is felt on both the right and left (or within conservative and progressive forms of Christianity), Hunter argues. See his description of the approach each takes in Hunter, *To Change the World*, Essay II, chapters 2–3.
- ¹³ Hunter, To Change the World, 106–107; Essay II, chapter 7.
- ¹⁴ For additional insight into this phenomenon, see Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2018), 42–49.
- ¹⁵ Gerald L. Sittser, *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2019).
- ¹⁶ Trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, from *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight, 5.1–10, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0101.htm.
- ¹⁷ The Center for the Study of Global Christianity reports that in 2016, roughly 90,000 Christians were martyred, which amounts to about one death every six minutes. See Samuel Smith, "Over 900,000 Christians Martyred for their Faith in Last 10 Years: Report," *The Christian Post*, January 16, 2017, https://www.christianpost.com/news/over-900000-christians-martyred-for-their-faith-in-last-10-years-report-173045/.
- ¹⁸ Hunter, To Change the World, 201–202.
- ¹⁹ Inazu, Confident Pluralism.
- ²⁰ Inazu, Confident Pluralism, 15.
- ²¹ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (New York: Shocken, 1971), 7. See also David Walton, *Doing Cultural Theory* (London: Sage, 2012), 77–78.
- ²² Inazu, Confident Pluralism, 121–124.
- ²³ See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); see also *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).
- ²⁴ Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Cambridge, MA: Belknap and Harvard University), 304.
- ²⁵ Inazu, Confident Pluralism, 90.
- ²⁶ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbably Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).
- ²⁷ Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperOne, 2007).

²⁸ It is important to note that Stark and Kreider are focused specifically on the effects of what we might call the congregational engagement of the Early Church, which they show to be effective in urban areas. Stark's work has been questioned however, especially in terms of its relevance to the growth of the church among rural populations. Furthermore, while congregations are essential to the mission of God, we must remember the importance of missional organizations. The missiologist Ralph Winter described congregations (and/or church bodies) and missional organizations as, respectively, modalities and sodalities. Stark and Kreider do not account for the relationship of necessity between these two—that is, that modalities need sodalities as they participate in the mission of God, as Winter convincingly argues. See Ralph D. Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission" in Missiology: A Review 2, no. 1 (1974): 121-139.

- ²⁹ Here I'm borrowing a phrase from Eugene Peterson.
- ³⁰ Hunter, To Change the World, 281.
- ³¹ Hunter, To Change the World, Essay III.
- ³² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. III, trans. Douglas Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 62–63.

Mission in the "Age of Migration"

Douglas L. Rutt

Abstract: The United Nations reports there are 272 million migrants in the world today. In spite of the situations of crises that often give rise to such a phenomenon, the impact can be positive in terms of the development of both individuals and society. Contemporary missiological literature has recognized the increasing significance of the impact of migration on the spread of Christianity as well. Since the time of the Early Church, people on the move, sometimes due to persecution, have played significant roles as the church spread throughout the Roman World and beyond. There is a need and opportunity for missiological researchers to explore the relationship between migration and mission from the historical, empirical, and theological perspectives.

"Migration" in many ways defines the twenty-first century. While migration has been a phenomena throughout the history of mankind, recent developments on the political, social, and economic fronts—combined with modern transportation possibilities and communication technologies—have accelerated the impact of global people movements on large parts of the world. The United Nations reports that the number of migrants now is growing at a rate faster than that of the world's population. Currently there are 272 million people on the move worldwide, with the United States host to 51 million foreign-born individuals, more than any other country, although, as a percentage of total population, several other countries have a larger proportion of foreign-born residents than the United States, such as Canada at 22% and Australia at 28%. The tiny country of Lebanon has received over 1.5 million refugees, which amounts to over 30% of its population.



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The Impact of the Age of Migration for the World and the Church

While migration is often motivated by crises, the United Nations states that the positive impact of migration for the economic and social development of both the host country and the country of origin "is very well established." This is true because of the transfer of remittances, but also the exchange of ideas, which make social contributions.⁴ Migration is becoming an increasingly significant field of research from the secular perspective; however, as Kari Storstein Haug has pointed out, the relationship between migration and religion only recently has become more widely recognized.⁵

Yet, when assessing historically the impact of migration on the expansion of the Gospel for two millennia, it is evident that since the time of the Early Church, global migration patterns have had significant implications for how and where the church became established and matured into a transforming influence, both for individuals and whole societies.

Latin American theologian, Samuel Escobar, in an article titled, "Mission Fields on the Move," describes how since the beginning of the Christian movement migration has been an important factor in how God carries out his mission. The apostle Paul, he notes, concludes his Epistle to the Romans with greetings to a long list of people from all around the empire who ended up migrating to Rome because of various circumstances. Like the United States today, Rome was a center of economic growth, political power, and cultural influence. It is only natural that people would be attracted to the opportunities that life in Rome presented.

The first people to whom Paul extends greetings in Romans 16 are Priscilla and Aquila. They had been refugees, having earlier been expelled from Rome because of their Jewish ethnicity (Acts 18:2–3). They met Paul in Corinth, where they became

instrumental in helping the apostle. Eventually, they would instruct Apollos, who is widely considered to have been the author of the Letter to the Hebrews (Acts 18:26). Apparently, they made their way back to Rome, where tradition says they were martyred, probably about the same time as Paul himself. In fact, it was often the case that the Christian Church grew in the early years as people boldly gave witness to the Gospel even as they were forced to be on the move because of persecution. As a result of the great persecution of the church in Jerusalem in

It was often the case that the Christian Church grew in the early years as people boldly gave witness to the Gospel even as they were forced to be on the move because of persecution.

connection with the martyrdom of Stephen, much of the church fled, and, as they went about, "they were bringing the good news of the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4).

In the contemporary world, trends in global migration far outpace what the world has ever seen in the past. Emory University historian, Jehu Hanciles, himself an immigrant from Sierra Leone, West Africa, has written a monumental study in which he demonstrates that, while mission in the past was often viewed as being from the West to the rest, mission

In the contemporary world, trends in global migration far outpace what the world has ever seen in the past.

today is from everywhere to everywhere, with missionaries traveling in all directions.

In England, considered to be the most irreligious nation in the West, the population of immigrants is the ray of hope for Christianity in that country. Cardinal Vincent Nichols stated, "Immigration is helping to bring Britain back to its Christian roots and reviving religion in a 'weary, western' culture."

In Berlin, Germany, Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church and Community has been transformed by the influx of Iranian immigrants, who have been instructed and have embraced the Lutheran faith. Pastor Gottfried Martins baptized an Iranian for the first time in 2011, and the church has since grown from just a handful of German members to some 1,500—most of whom are from Iran and Afghanistan!⁹

Examples of how the new reality has played itself out in the Lutheran Church in the United States can be found on the website www.MissionNationPublishing.com. It is dedicated to giving a voice to immigrants who have become missionaries to America. It includes biographies and videos of the amazing stories of those who, because of migration, have been able to bring the love of Christ to people here in America, as well as back to their homeland.

Need and Opportunity for Missiological Research

Clearly, migration and mission is a topic worthy of further exploration for missiological studies. When this writer began to study missiology over thirty-five years ago, the assumption was that a Westerner would go to a pristine, isolated, and insulated community in another part of the world, where he would spend decades learning the language, culture, and worldview of the local inhabitants, and gently, albeit intentionally, begin to introduce the Christian message in ways that preserved the local culture yet resulted in its transformation through the Gospel.

So much has changed since then—and was probably already changing in significant ways at that time, but we did not always immediately recognize it. Globalization and the impact of migration, rapid transportation, and instantaneous and inexpensive communication technologies have meant that many of the old missionary assumptions and methods have gone by the wayside. Now mission goes in all

directions, with "majority world missions" becoming more and more the primary mode of Christian expansion. 10

Migration has meant that the world's cultures, worldviews, and religious belief systems are bumping into each other with increasing frequency. Often this can be a cause for tension and even conflict, but it can also be an opportunity for learning, appreciation, and understanding. It means new questions need to be addressed. Nineteenth-century theologian Martin Kähler made the claim that "mission is the mother of theology."11 This is because new contexts require Christian theologians to address issues they hadn't thought about before. The context for mission today is the context of migration, and this new context is much more complex and dynamic than the functionalist and

The context for mission today is the context of migration, and this new context is much more complex and dynamic than the functionalist and structuralist anthropological approaches of early missiology can account for.

structuralist anthropological approaches of early missiology can account for. But it is a context nonetheless, and the field of migration and mission is a fertile and promising area of study. The various approaches and issues are nicely documented by Haug in her article, "Migration in Missiological Research." ¹²

Concluding Thoughts

Migration has become a sometimes-volatile political issue. While it is legitimate that nations enact just laws to ensure the security and safety of their inhabitants, Christians also remember they are a part of God's kingdom, which places higher expectations upon them. Here is where the points made by Samuel Escobar provide food for thought for us today.

First, he calls for Christian compassion and sensitivity. Lutherans have done this when they have founded organizations such as Christian Friends of New Americans in St. Louis, Missouri. This organization seeks to demonstrate Christian love and compassion by offering a range of programs to help immigrants and refugees (www.cfna-stl.org).

Second, he recommends that churches should take a prophetic stance against the injustices and abuse that migrants often suffer. Guidance can be found in a study by the LCMS's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, titled Immigrants Among Us: A Lutheran Framework for Addressing Immigration Issues. It can be obtained online at www.lcms.org/ctcr.

Thirdly, Escobar suggests that the church see the global migrant movements today as opportunities for outreach. This has been certainly the case throughout the history of Christianity and will continue to be a major factor today and into the future. Experience has shown that often as people migrate to new locations, where they cross not only geographic borders, but also linguistic and cultural barriers, their minds and hearts are opened to new ideas, new thought-patterns, and new outlooks on life. Often the old social pressures that were present in one's home country are absent; and, as people become free of these pressures, they become ready to hear and explore new notions and concepts.

That includes a hearing for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God to give people new hope and a future.

Moreover, there are almost one million international students in America, who come here to learn not only mathematics, medicine, or marketing, but also to experience American life and culture. Yet 80% of those students never see the inside of an American home during their stay. Groups such as International Student Ministry St. Louis (www.ismstl.org) and others around the country can help to bridge that gap, as well as provide a positive witness to the Gospel.

Migration is clearly having an impact on world Christianity, causing growth in directions that can only be accounted for by God's divine providence. It is *His* mission. This is a timely—even urgent—issue that merits further research, reflection, and dialogue.

Endnotes

Transformation of the West (New York: Maryknoll, 2008).

¹ Kari Storstein Haug, "Migration in Missiological Research," *International Review of Missions*, 107 (June 2018): 279–293.

² UN News. United Nations, September 17, 2019, accessed September 19, 2019, https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1046562.

http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/15/international-migration-key-findings-from-the-u-s-europe-and-the-world/ (accessed September 30, 2017).

⁴ UN News, United Nations, September 17, 2019.

⁵ Haug, "Migration." Haug points out that the seminal work on the topic of contemporary migration, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, by Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), did not include a section on the relationship or connectedness of religion to migration issues, which eventually caused the American Academy of Religion to invite scholars to present studies and papers reflecting on the topic of the "role and impact of religion on migration" (p. 280).

⁶ Samuel Escobar, "Mission Fields on the Move," in *Christianity Today* 54, no. 5 (May 2010):

<sup>28–31.

&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the*

⁸ http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11724826/Immigration-reviving-Christianity-in-Britain-Cardinal.html (accessed September 30, 2017).

- ⁹ Amy Bracken, "This Evangelical Church in Berlin is Helping Iranians Looking for Asylum," *PRI's The World*, Public Radio International, February 22, 2017, https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-02-22/evangelical-church-berlin-helping-iranians-looking-asylum (accessed September 27, 2019).
- ¹⁰ See Enoch Wan and Michael Pocock, eds., *Missions from the Majority World: Progress, Challenges and Case Studies* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009).
- ¹¹ As quoted by Ott: "The earliest mission became the mother of theology, because it attacked the contemporary culture." See Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), xviii.
- ¹² Haug, "Migration." Haug details approaches that can be used for the study of migration from a missiological perspective, such as historical, descriptive and analytical (empirical), or theological. The descriptive/analytical approach can look at how migration affects the faith and identity of the migrant; or, on the other hand, it can look at those who have not moved, but "whose landscape has changed due to migration." In other words, how has the phenomenon of migration challenged the faith and practice of those who have received migrants into their midst? She, following Stephen Bevens, talks about three broad categories for research: First, mission among immigrants; second, mission *of* migrants; and third, migration and mission theology. She concludes, "For missiological research, this is a challenge and opportunity for further exploration of the role and significance of faith and community in the contemporary fluidity of the intercultural, inter-religious, and transnational context, as well as rethinking some of its basis (*sic*) theories related to contextualization and religious encounter, meanwhile reflecting on how theology and missiology should look in the years to come" (293).

Globalization and Religion: The Influential Six-Pack

Armand J. Boehme

Abstract: This essay examines some aspects of the influence globalization has had on organized religion in general and on Christianity in particular. This study uses six areas of influence from an essay by Liselotte Frisk. That essay notes that globalization moves religion from the particular to the eclectic, from dogma to experience, from the collective to the personal/individual, from the hierarchical to egalitarian, from the theological to the anthropological, and from an other-worldly perspective to a this-worldly view. Suggestions for Lutheran Christianity's constructive response to these trends are offered for study and action.

Introduction

A recent essay by Lawrence Rast, Concordia Theological Seminary president, examined the pedagogical implications of globalization for pastoral formation in the twenty-first century. Other studies have also examined the effect of globalization on specific religions. This study will limit itself to interacting with the six points made by Liselotte Frisk in an essay about religious changes related to globalization to see



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the influence globalization has had on religion in general and Christianity in particular.³

Globalization

Though there is no consensus on the beginning of globalization, some feel that globalization began in the 1800s.⁴ Globalizing trends (increased economic and intellectual interaction by the West with the non-Western world, interest in Eastern religions, the industrial revolution, cross-cultural communication, and the rise of the Global South), already evident in the later part of the nineteenth century, continued to grow in prominence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁵ A globalized world means a "multicultural, pluralist, interdependent, and interconnected world." Our current global health crisis reminds us of how interconnected the world and all its citizens truly are!

Frisk writes that globalization is not the only factor but is "one of the key factors" and "a major cause" of religious change, along with "other aspects of modernization." Frisk lists six interconnected points relating to globalization that help to move religion from (1) the particular to the eclectic, (2) doctrine to experience, (3) the collective to the individual/personal, (4) the hierarchical to the egalitarian, (5) the theological to the anthropological, and (6) from an after-death perspective to a this-life perspective.⁷

I. From Particular to Eclectic

A particularistic view of religion distinguishes its beliefs from the beliefs of other faiths, leading to the view that only one religion—ours—is true. For Frisk, globalization helps to move people away from viewing their religion as the only true religion, to viewing other religions with "extreme tolerance." Such a view leads to the perspective that all religious and spiritual beliefs are "relative," and all have part of the truth. This eclectic view sees religious differences as "vague" and "unimportant" so that elements of various religions can be blended together often "without awareness" that this mixture has occurred. This blending of beliefs is "one of the major global trends in religion."

The mixing of different beliefs is illustrated by studies which show that in the United States "religious faith is often eclectic, idiosyncratic, and syncretistic, inconsistently . . . mixing together elements as diverse as belief in infant baptism, interest in horoscope predictions, and the collection of religious kitsch." ¹⁰

"A researcher asked a college graduate what her religious preference was. 'Methodist, Taoist, Native American, Quaker, Russian Orthodox, and Jew,' she replied. . . . Traditional scholars describe this as 'cafeteria-style' or 'supermarket' spirituality. Others, better disposed to it, prefer the more dignified term 'trans-

religiosity."¹¹ This syncretistic blending of different religious and spiritual teachings creates "a new belief system."¹²

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) interviewed 3,390 youth and adults and followed up by personal in-depth interviews with 267 youth. These interviews revealed evidence of the mixing of different beliefs. The data indicated that a majority of the respondents of all religious faiths and even of those who were not religious, believed that (1) God created the world and watches over it, (2) God wants all people to be good—an idea taught in almost all religions, (3) life's goal is to be happy and to feel good about oneself, (4) God isn't involved in the daily lives of human beings unless there is a problem to be solved, and (5) that good people go to heaven when they die.¹³

Operating specifically with the responses of the 267 teens interviewed, researchers found that of those 267 teens, only nine spoke of love for God, and fewer than nine talked of righteousness, Christ's or the Christian's resurrection, salvation, the Kingdom of God, the Trinity, God's grace, the Bible as holy, holiness, or God's justice. None of the 267 teens spoke of justification, being justified, sanctification, or being sanctified. 14 These results led the researchers to conclude (1) that the majority of the respondents had lost the experience of "Trinity, holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification, church, Eucharist, and heaven and hell," and that (2) for these respondents the language, doctrines, and ideas of Christianity had been supplanted "by the language of happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward," and that (3) Christianity was being "colonized and displaced" by a "different religious faith." These conclusions were primarily based on the responses from the number of Christian teens that were interviewed. Those responses also led the researchers to conclude "that a significant part of Christianity in America is actually only tenuously Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the actual historical Christian tradition."15

But Christianity is not the only religion being colonized and mixed with different beliefs. Smith and Denton concluded that the "popular religious faith" of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is not only stealthily colonizing Christianity, but is also colonizing many other historical religious traditions and is converting members of those religious traditions to an "alternative religious vision" which is made to appear like it is part of the religious tradition of which one is a member. ¹⁶

II. From Dogma (Doctrine) to Experience

Frisk sees globalization evident because of the "many different belief systems" that "coexist side by side."¹⁷ This is seen in the increasing number of mosques and other non-Christian religious buildings in America. This multiplicity of religions with their conflicting doctrines and practices contributes to the belief that no particular religion or spirituality is exclusively true.

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For example, one religion teaches that a person gains heaven by God's grace through faith in Christ and another teaches reincarnation. Both cannot be true. These

different contending dogmatic "truths" often lead to undermining "the plausibility of all belief systems." What have many religious people done as a result of this conflict? Often it has led them to change their "focus away from dogmas and belief systems to other aspects of religion" or spirituality. Hence, objective dogmatic teachings of the faith fade from

This perspective also promotes the idea that all religions lead to the same God.

prominence, and the subjective experience of one's faith gains in prominence, and ultimately becomes "the most important aspect of contemporary religion." This perspective also promotes the idea that all religions lead to the same God since similar subjective experiences are shared by Christians and non-Christians alike. 19

While recognizing that Christians can be a mixture of the following perspectives, Stephen Prothero classified Christians today as belonging to three basic groups: confessionalists, experientialists, and moralists. The smallest of these groups are the "confessionalists who emphasize above all else Christianity's doctrinal dimension." These Christians write doctrinal books, issue doctrinal statements, preach doctrinal sermons, argue about doctrine, and dispute doctrinal differences held by different church denominations. For Prothero, the two largest groups are the experientialists and the moralists. The experientialists emphasize "encountering God via the emotions." In this group one would find the Pentecostals, and others for whom the emotions and feelings of religion and worship are prominent—(How did the sermon/service make you feel? How do you feel about Jesus? Did you feel the music today?). The moralists emphasize Christianity's "moral dimension." These Christians emphasize the importance of social stands on subjects like abortion, the environment, homosexuality, gay marriage, saving the whales, and the like. Dogmatic theology is of little importance for those in the two major groups.²⁰

Others have observed this displacement of the Bible and its doctrines as the foundation for the Christian faith, and their being supplanted by a number of things, including the Christian's personal experience. This trend toward the importance of personal experience is evident in the increased emphasis on charismatic experience, and the rise of the importance of feelings in worship and religious practice. Scholars have termed Pentecostalism as one of the four faces of global culture. Scholars have noted that Pentecostal forms of Christianity are . . . the United States most successful global export. The Age of the Spirit is best understood as a Christianity based in an experience of Jesus. The Age of the Spirit is nondogmatic, noninstitutional, and nonhierarchical.

This experiential trend is also evident in practicing spirituality rather than religion, for true spirituality occurs when "you discover in your own experience some sliver of

the ineffable."²⁶ This movement away from an emphasis on doctrine and towards the Christian's personal experience is a shift in the history of Christianity. The three ecumenical creeds, the Canons of the Council of Trent, the Lutheran Confessions, the various confessional statements of the Reformed, and many other doctrinal statements throughout Christian history are evidence of the importance of doctrine for historic Christianity. Today's

This movement away from an emphasis on doctrine and towards the Christian's personal experience is a shift in the history of Christianity.

emphasis away from doctrine to common religious experiences across faith lines blurts doctrinal differences and leads to the perspective that all faiths are equal in validity. Pentecostalism appears to have become the dominant form of Christianity today.

III. From Collective to Personal

A traditional view of religion places greater emphasis on the gathered group (congregation, denomination), on being part of the whole, rather than emphasizing the individual.²⁷ One of the elements of globalization is the strong emphasis on individualism. Traditional religions which were formerly "a realm of the collective" have now had the collective replaced "by a spiritual quest that is more individualized."²⁸ Thus, globalization fuels an emphasis on individuals rather than on institutions. This has led to a decline in personal deference to many institutions including religious ones. For Frisk, globalization "favors the privatization" of religion, thus making it more difficult for it to gain public influence.²⁹ This rise in antipathy to organized religion has contributed to the decline in denominational loyalty, to more individualized spirituality, and to alternative religions and New Religious Movements (NRMs).³⁰ As one author noted, NRMs "sprout from globalization like plants from the earth."³¹ Antipathy to organized religion has also helped fuel the rise in independent congregations with little or no ties to a religious denomination.

Those who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious have "disdain for socalled organized religion."³² For many in the twenty-first century, the "highest good is individual freedom, happiness, self-definition, and self-expression." Institutions "of external authority" like the organized church "are rejected and personal authenticity is lauded."³³ Thus, globalization helps to fuel the trend recognized by Richard John Neuhaus already in the 1980s of the attempts at privatizing religion and relegating it to some safe place outside of the public square.³⁴

The emphasis on individualism in religious and spiritual beliefs undermines the corporate nature of the Christian faith. The balance between gathering together and

one's individual faith is disturbed in the current climate of individualism in matters of faith. This emphasis on individualism in one's faith has led to a lessening of the authority of the Bible in the Christian's life, an indifference to the understanding and knowledge of the doctrines of one's Christian denominational faith (deeds, not creeds), a downturn in fidelity to the Christian faith in contradistinction to other religions or spiritualities, and to the

The emphasis on individualism in religious and spiritual beliefs undermines the corporate nature of the Christian faith.

growth of independent non-denominational congregations.

IV. From Hierarchical to Egalitarian

A religious hierarchy is an organized ecclesiastical body that most often exercises authority from the top down. Globalization has engendered "contempt for . . . all hierarchies." It has contributed to an emphasis on "populist" spirituality and away from a hierarchical view of religion. Frisk describes this as the "liberal option" which is linked to the perspective of a global society where no one is an outsider, but all are neighbors. The liberal option in religion sees the possibility of salvation and enlightenment in all religions, a view that is seen as being both egalitarian and "democratic." ³⁶

This egalitarian position, seeing salvation in all religions, is a form of universalism. Globalization is one of a number of factors that have contributed to the dramatic rise of universalism in Christian and other religious circles in more recent times. The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* has also significantly influenced the rise of universalism.³⁷

Many Christians today believe that salvation is possible in almost all religions. Of the Lutherans surveyed in the 1998 Lutheran Brotherhood survey, 65% said that although "there are many religions in the world, most of them lead to the same God." of the Lutherans surveyed in the 1972 *Study of Generations*, 72% agreed with that same statement. Of the ELCA Lutherans surveyed in the 2008 leaders' survey, 70% believed that it "is possible for a faithful follower of any religion, including Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, to find the truth about God through that religion." However, these non-Christian faiths are not centered in salvation by God's justifying grace received through faith in Christ. What happens when Christianity becomes "just one more religion in the marketplace of religions"? Then Jesus and His justifying grace fade "into the background." What then is the basis for the salvation of those in non-Christian religions if not by God's grace through faith in Christ?

Part of the answer to that question is found in the above surveys. The Lutherans in those surveys struggled with belief in the doctrine of justification by God's grace through faith in Christ apart from the works of the law with 60% believing that the main emphasis of the Gospel is on "God's rules for right living." One other study indicated that 73% of the Lutherans surveyed believed that if a good person does "enough good things for others, he or she will earn a place in heaven."

This devaluation of the doctrine of justification is evident in the rest of Christendom as well. Of the American Christian teens mentioned above, 61% indicated they believed "that a good person can earn eternal salvation through good deeds."⁴⁴ The interviews conducted by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton led Smith to conclude that it is "unbelievable the proportion of conservative Protestant teens who do not seem to grasp elementary concepts of the gospel concerning grace and justification. Their view is: be a good person."⁴⁵

Studies by religious sociologists indicate that the majority belief of Americans today is Golden Rule religion/Golden Rule Christianity. Christians espousing this theology feel that religious experiences are important for their faith life, and have little feel for doctrine, but they believe that living a virtuous life is the essence of their faith. Being a good person will gain one a blessed afterlife.⁴⁶

This movement away from forensic justification had its modern genesis in Karl Holl's analytic understanding of justification. It has been growing since the 1973 LWF document on justification and has continued with the rise of New Perspectives on Paul (NPP), the Finnish interpretation of Luther, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and Golden Rule theology.⁴⁷

The lack of a solid grounding in the doctrine of justification by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from the deeds of the law opens the door to the acceptance of universalistic and works-oriented theology. Who needs justifying faith when all with or without faith in Christ will be saved by simply being as good as one can be, or simply by being born?

The lack of a solid grounding in the doctrine of justification . . . opens the door to the acceptance of universalistic and works-oriented theology.

As one writer noted, religion is now experiencing the decline of doctrinal orthodoxy because the focus has shifted from the corporate to the individual and from dogma to "personal ethical concerns." For many, the church has now changed into being a place where human beings can work out their own salvation.⁴⁸ Globalization has lessened the importance and understanding of doctrine for many (especially the doctrine of justification), has influenced the trend towards individualism in matters of faith, and given rise to universalistic theology, a study of the influence of globalization on the doctrine of justification appears necessary.

V. From Theological to Anthropological

Frisk sees globalization leading people away from the theological to a more anthropological view of religion and spiritual beliefs. Matters of salvation are viewed as "more of an inner realization than related to an outward divinity." This is a "self-sacralization" trend which is characteristic of popular spirituality. This "radical emphasis" on human beings makes religion and spirituality more secular. ⁴⁹ Some scholars note that most NRMs hold the human being sacred and "sanctify things human," using Enlightenment teachings which make "the human being and the material world the starting point of all else." ⁵⁰

This trend has also led to attempts to redefine religion and spirituality in ways that do not involve a deity. The emphasis on spirituality without God arose at "the end of the nineteenth century," and has gained ever greater influence to the present day.⁵¹ This type of spirituality includes "systems of thought and practice that cover much of the ethical, intellectual, and experiential ground of religions but reject [the idea of a deity,] religious dogmas and institutions."⁵² This idea was emphasized by the death of God movement also known as Christian Atheism, which has had a recent revival. Schilling notes that one of its theologians, Thomas J. J. Altizer, holds that the "sacred has been replaced by the profane, the God of grace by the gracious neighbor."⁵³

The influence of globalization is evident in modern Christian universalism which is "a religion of humanity," having reconstructed "the doctrine of God in this-worldly terms." Scientism and sometimes science have their own spirituality, and for some, a quality almost like religion. At least six science-fiction-based religions have arisen in the last fifty years. Science-Science have their own spirituality, and for some, a quality almost like religion. Science-Science-Science-Science-Science have their own spirituality, and for some, a quality almost like religion.

The emphasis on life in this world leads to understanding of reversing global warming, saving the environment, advocating for universal health care, engaging in politics, and the like, as spiritual quests and even as secular substitutes for religion.⁵⁷ These may be good things for Christians to do, but the question remains: are they truly spiritual quests? Are they worthy replacements for religion? Today spirituality seems tied to everything—there is the spirituality of photography and anorexia, as well as the quest for spirituality in higher education and much more.⁵⁸

Lutherans and other Christians have an incarnational theology. God was clothed in human flesh in the birth of Jesus Christ. The triune God created the physical world in which we live. Christians are to celebrate and thank God for the physical blessings He gives. However, an overemphasis on the earthly and physical blessings leads to viewing people and the created world as sacred. The fact of Christ's divinity is easily lost with an overemphasis on His humanity. Christians should heed the advice of S. Paul Schilling that Christians need "to resist the temptation to make God wholly secular or human."⁵⁹

VI. From After-Death to This-Worldliness

According to Frisk, globalization has contributed to viewing religion as being much more about this world rather than about the world to come. Nature and "intimate relationships are seen as sacred." Hence an emphasize on the concept of holy mother earth. Popular spirituality allows for personal gratification and has set aside "subjects like punishment, hell, damnation, and demonology." This trend is also visible in institutionalized religion. Frisk notes that a this-worldly view of religion and spirituality has made it much more difficult to identify what is good and what is evil, thus "undermining" and "relativizing" extant moral codes.⁶⁰

Ross Douthat has also written about the influence of globalization, recognizing it has led to this-worldly "theologies that emphasized the divinity of the self," and to Christianity's "turn from the supernatural to the natural, from theology to anthropology, and from the Kingdom of God to the City of Man." Douthat wrote about theologians who taught that the Gospel was a call to "secularity," and that God wanted each human being "to be interested not in Him but in his fellow man." Globalization's this-worldly view has thus led to making sacred the "profane" and making profane the "sacred."

Globalization's tendency to emphasize the sacredness of close personal relationships has led to concepts like the spirituality and sacredness of sex.⁶³ Other aspects of life are increasingly seen as religious. One scholar has described contemporary sociology as a secularized religion because it has established the "emancipation, equality, and moral affirmation of all human beings as autonomous, self-directing, individual agents."⁶⁴

Frisk sees globalization leading not to the death of God but rather to "the death of the devil." In light of the previous section and the rise of religions and spiritualities without a deity, it would perhaps be more accurate to note that globalization can lead both to the death of God and to the death of the devil (right and wrong). Further study of Frisk's perspective should be pursued.

The two-kingdom theology of Lutheran Christianity is a hedge against the excessive emphasis on the things of this world. Christians live in two kingdoms: the state/world and the church. Christians have duties and responsibilities in both. The calling and vocation of the Christian occurs in both kingdoms and helps provide a balance to offset any overemphasis on things material.

Conclusion

For those viewing religion through the lens of emotion or experience, who believe that all religions lead to the same God and to the same end, the above trends, influenced by globalization, will be viewed in a positive light, as will the rise of new religious movements and spiritualities, and the movement away from organized religion. The trend toward viewing all religions as capable of granting salvation has led to a dramatic rise in the acceptance of religious universalism even among more conservative Christian denominations and theologians. Adherents of these ideas will view these religious trends positively.

However, these trends will be viewed differently by religious believers and church denominations still holding specific dogmatic religious beliefs, denominations like the LCMS.

This study has shown that globalization has, in the six areas noted, significantly impacted organized religion and Christianity in particular. This study has not attempted to explore the religious backlash against globalization, nor has it attempted to study any other aspects of globalization's influence on religion aside from the six mentioned by Frisk in her essay.

Recognition of globalization's impact is important for Christianity's continuing mission. Christianity is a global religion and has always had to adapt to meet changing circumstances and to address differing theologies and spiritualities with the faith once delivered to the saints.

How should the Christian Church, with God's help, address and hopefully offset the changes in religion noted by Frisk in her essay? That task begins with the teaching that Christ died to save people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. God's justifying grace in Jesus Christ needs to be at the center of our faith for it will empower our response.⁶⁶

Christians need to study globalization's effect on the church's theology, and the teachings and trends which have given rise to alternative religions, so that they can more effectively address these trends, witness boldly to those who hold faulty beliefs about Christianity, and who follow the tenets of alternative religions. These studies are important because the above-mentioned faulty beliefs are held by some of the parishioners in church bodies that adhere to fixed theological beliefs like the LCMS. Members and clergy of LCMS were also among those surveyed in a number of the Lutheran surveys noted above. Members of the LCMS have also been influenced by globalization.

Courses on globalization and its positive and negative effects on religious beliefs should be taught at our LCMS seminaries to offset globalization's negative effects on the students.⁶⁷

Bible studies addressing the influence of globalization need to be produced, along with books, articles in religious and lay journals, and perhaps several CTCR documents. Conferences on globalization and a Christian response to it should also be held. Sound doctrinal studies on the basics of Christian doctrine and the importance of doctrine should be written as a foil to the negative effects of globalization. Biblically

sound apologetic, witnessing, and evangelism tools need to be developed which are aimed specifically at the issues noted above.

Special attention should be given to the doctrine of justification, the Christian's social responsibilities in the world, Christian ethics, the uniqueness of the Christian faith, the

Biblically sound apologetic, witnessing, and evangelism tools need to be developed.

Christian's role as a steward of the planet, the proper place of experience in the Christian's life, the doctrine of the Church, the importance of both the corporate nature of the Church, the Body of Christ, and the individual Christian's faith and the proper balance of the two, studies combatting universalism, a proper distinction between the sacred and the profane, an understanding that the Christian's life in this world is a holy calling and vocation in two kingdoms, studies on charismatic Pentecostalism, and a sermon series countering the six points in this essay. Our Synod continues to produce comparative religious studies and evangelism materials that address specific belief systems. Such materials will continue to address the need for resources which respond biblically to beliefs and ideas associated with globalization in order to increase the Church's ability to effectively share the gospel of Christ in a global world on the basis of confessional Lutheran theology and God's Word.

Endnotes

- ¹ Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., "Pastoral Formation in the 21st Century: The Pedagogical Implications of Globalization," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 83, no. 1–2 (January/April 2019): 137–156.
- ² Steven M. Studebaker, ed., *Pentecostalism and Globalization: The Impact of Globalization on Pentecostal Theology and Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010); Mikael Rothstein, ed., *New Age Religion and Globalization* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2001); Birgit Shaebler and Leif Stenberg, eds., *Globalization and the Muslim World: Culture, Religion, and Modernity* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2018).
- ³ Liselotte Frisk, "Globalization: A Key Factor in Contemporary Religious Change," *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies* 5 (2009): i–xiv. Also available at http://files.asanas.org.uk/005Frisk.pdf.

For some of Frisk's other work in English on these subjects, see Liselotte Frisk, "Globalization," in George D. Chryssides and Benjamin E. Zeller, eds., *The Bloomsbury Companion to New Religious Movements* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 273–278; Liselotte Frisk, "Globalization or Westernization? New Age as a Contemporary Transnational Culture," in Rothstein, *New Age Religion and Globalization*, 31–41; Liselotte Frisk and Peter Nynas, "Characteristics of Contemporary Religious Change: Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Interpretative Tendencies," in Peter Nynas, Mika Lassander, and Tehri Utriainen, eds., *Post-Secular Society* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 47–70.

This is an exhaustively annotated essay. For that reason, we have posted the remaining endnotes on the Lutheran Society for Missiology's website (https://lsfm.global).

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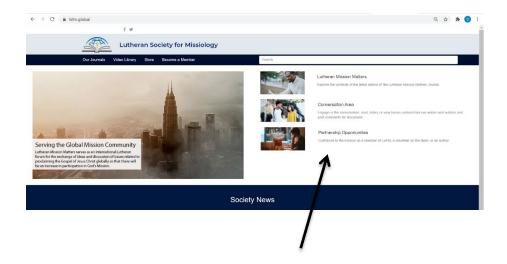
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Encountering Mission

Ethiopian Immigrant Children: What Church Fits Them?

Tesfai Z. Tesema

Abstract: The alienation Pastor Tesfai's sons felt in the Ethiopian congregation he served drove Tesfai back to school. What kind of Christian ministry might reach second-generation immigrant children? This excerpt from his forthcoming book tells how his interviews with twenty-five young Ethiopians and Eritreans in America revealed youth who are proud to be ethnically Ethiopian and Eritrean but say they are American inside. A majority say the Ethiopian church of their parents doesn't fit them. Tesfai concludes the immigrant children need their own new kind of church plant; a multiethnic English-speaking church which has broad reach into the host society.

This story starts with a conversation between my wife, Abby, and our eldest son, Abel. Abel, our first child, was born in Khartoum, Sudan, during our two-year flight from Ethiopia during the Ethiopian Civil War, via Saudi Arabi and the Sudan, to North America. Although we brought him to the United States as a child, Abel's Amharic language skills were limited, and he refused to use Amharic in public. Abby enrolled him and his younger brother Daniel in the Sunday School of an American church to supplement the spiritual education they were getting at the ethnic Ethiopian church I pastored in San Jose.

"Are you ready for church?" Abby asked Abel that particular Sunday morning. "Which church?" Abel said. "Your church or my church?" Abby was horrified. "How can you say, 'your church'? Your father is the pastor!" "So what?" Abel said. "I don't understand what my father preaches. How can it be my church?" That's when it hit us. We were building a congregation of Ethiopians in America and we were happy. Unfortunately, our kids were not.



Rev. Dr. Tesfai Tesema pastors the Addis Kidan Ethiopian Church (Lutheran) in San Francisco, California. Tesfai and his wife escaped Ethiopia in the late 1970s during the war. This article is an edited excerpt from his forthcoming book (tentatively titled For Such a Time), which tells the story of the Tesema's thirty-year quest to build a relevant ministry for the children of Ethiopian immigrants to North America. tesfaizt55@gmail.com

During this period of discovery, I met Robert Newton, the pastor of a Lutheran church a few miles from ours in downtown San Jose. I shared our challenge with him. Dr. Newton is an educator. He had worked on the mission field in the Philippines for several years. "Your problem is cross-cultural," he said. "Right now, the church you pastor is one culture—Ethiopian. But your children are more American than they are Ethiopian. Consider developing a ministry that reaches across the culture gap, across the generation divide."

With Dr. Newton's encouragement, I enrolled in the Doctor of Missiology program at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne,

"Right now, the church you pastor is one culture—Ethiopian. But your children are more American than they are Ethiopian. Consider developing a ministry that reaches across the culture gap, across the generation divide."

Indiana, in 2003 to pursue that challenge. I spent three years at Concordia, researching the children of Ethiopian immigrants and writing my PhD thesis on them. This article chronicles that research, the results of which contain what I believe is a message that God's Spirit has given to the pastors of the Ethiopian Church in diaspora across the US and to the perplexed parents of immigrant children. The message is this: Be hopeful! Our children are not victims of American racism, or a generation gap, or any other crippling social malady. The Lord intends that they bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to this country. They are equipped to do that because they are bicultural. The mission passion of the Global South, where the Church of Jesus Christ is growing rapidly, flows through their veins as they walk the streets of the North, where churches are dying and faith seems to be growing cold. Your children trade in the values of two cultures because, among the most successful immigrant children, they are truly bicultural. Their ability to live simultaneously with two identities is a mighty weapon in the arsenal of the Church of Jesus.

I developed a set of points to use in interviews with the immigrant Ethiopian second generation, in order to address my primary research questions: What are the immigrant children, the 1.5 and 2.0 generations, really like? How can we build Christian ministries to reach and retain them?

- 1. Describe your experience in America as the child of Ethiopian immigrants and how you identify yourself today.
- 2. Describe how the Host Society (meaning the American culture, in most places equal to White America) has shaped your identity.
- 3. Describe how your Ethnic Community (meaning the Ethiopian culture of your family, your church, and any friends) has shaped who you are today.

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4. Describe how your experience as a Christian or your childhood in a Christian family has shaped you.

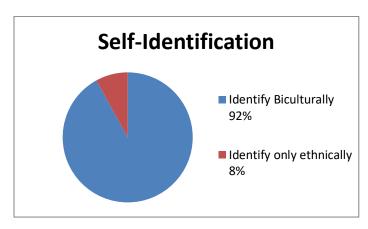
From my initial conversations, I developed additional questions to help my interviewees better characterize their self-identity.

- Describe who you are ethnically.
- Describe your relationship with the Ethiopian community.
- Describe your relationship with the host culture (American non-immigrant community).

I recruited twenty-five young Ethiopians, children of immigrant parents. Seven were born in the US, representing Generation 2.0; eighteen were born in Ethiopia, coming to America before age twelve, thus represent Generation 1.5. At the time of my interviews with them in 2008-09, fifteen were aged eighteen to twenty-four, ten were twenty-five to thirty-three.

Bicultural Identities and Challenges

All twenty-five interviewees self-identified with pride as Ethiopians. They each described some piece of the culture that they loved. As they spoke about their parents and Ethiopian people, they expressed positive feelings overall. However, they also talked frankly about negative aspects of their ethnicity, culture, and the challenge of relating to their first-generation parents and the first-generation immigrant community. We could characterize their outlook as a "love and hate" relationship with their Ethiopian-ness.



One American-born young man stated, "I don't feel comfortable in an all-Ethiopian setting." He attended an American church and said many of his best friends were out-group people (people who are not Ethiopian) although some of his friends are second-generation children of recent immigrants, like himself. His lack of Amharic

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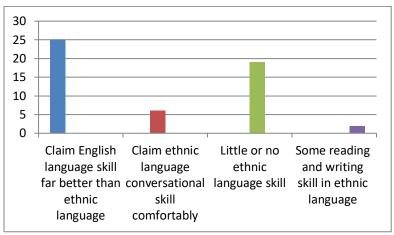
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language skills and cultural incompetence contributed to his sense of discomfort. He grew up in a city with a fair-sized Ethiopian community and an Ethiopian church as well. His brothers were both Gen 1.5, immigrating at age eleven and eight. Both brothers spoke only the Amharic on their arrival. Furthermore, his grandmother, who spoke only Amharic, practically raised him while his parents worked. Nevertheless, despite growing up with a first-generation extended family in a heavily Ethiopian home environment, this young man didn't speak Amharic and preferred to hang out in American settings, rather than Ethiopian settings.

More than a third of the twenty-five participants said they felt misunderstood or not fully accepted by their parents, the first-generation population. However, most asked me not to quote them on this. Did they not want to say negative things about their culture which might get back to their parents?

Although Gen 1.5 and Gen 2.0 youth self-identified as Ethiopians and appeared proud of their ethnicity, many said the Ethiopian community didn't fully embrace them. According to my readings of the social literature on the immigrant experience, feelings of non-acceptance stem from cultural difference and incompetence in the ethnic culture. The most critical cultural incompetence, according to my interviewees, was lack of skill in the ethnic language.

One interviewee stated, "I no longer speak the language fluently; the English language won out. . . . It has been very hard for me to maintain my Ethiopian-ness. I lost the language. It is very hard to maintain both; one almost always wins." This young man immigrated at age two and half. Although he spoke minimal Amharic as a toddler, his skill has decreased since then. Currently, the language he uses daily is English. Orozco and Orozco, in their book *Children of Immigration*, say, "In reality, very few people can be considered 'balanced' bilinguals. Most bilinguals are in fact dominant in one language."1



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Finally, interviewees said ethnic identity issues led to conflict in their families. Nineteen of the twenty-five participants described conflict at home as they grew up. They characterized their parents (Gen 1.0) as overly strict.

Conflicts surfaced around the issues of freedom, friendship, dating, cultural understanding, and so on. This may appear to be the natural conflict that exists between generations in any culture. However, the interviewees believed their parents were driven by fear of life in a strange new culture. These young people felt that Gen 1.0 immigrants not only saw themselves as outsiders, but to them, the host culture (American) people and their practices were unusual and mysterious. In response, they became afraid and overprotective, responses their children viewed as overly strict and controlling. When we consider how children are raised in the Ethiopian setting, this makes sense. Ethiopia is community-centric—relatives and neighbors, as well as parents, look after and correct children. Concerns about gangs and missing children are not common. Immigrant parents who hear about such issues in the US react with fear. On the other hand, their children, who have grown up in this culture, understand American society better and American culture does not intimidate them. Parents attribute the comfort level of their children to the naiveté of youth. This misunderstanding on both sides complicates home life for both generations.

My interview data shows that the Gen 1.5s and 2.0s also harbored negative feelings over the way America, the host culture, treated them. Nineteen out of twenty-five interviewees reported derogatory treatment and put-downs because of their ethnic identity. I conducted my interviews in 2008 and 2009, twenty-five years after the Ethiopian drought and famine of 1984–85. Many of the interviewees had grown up in the US, attending school here, and Ethiopia was prominent in the nightly news when they were in elementary or junior high.

One young woman told me her classmates would ask her, "How did you get so big? Who fed you? I heard everybody is dying over there." A young man reported that schoolkids called him by the name of a TV character. "On the TV show *South Park* the character Starving Marvin is an Ethiopian; I have been called that a lot of times."

Spiritual Identity of Immigrant Children

Central to my research was better understanding the social and cultural awareness of Gen 1.5 and 2.0 Ethiopian children. I hoped to find clues that might lead me to develop a socially and culturally relevant ministry that could reach them with the Gospel. One of the important findings of my research was that twenty-four of the twenty-five participants said spirituality or religion was important to them.

Of the twenty-five interviewees, seventeen affiliated or identified as Protestant, six identified as Orthodox, one was Catholic, and one was a self-declared atheist. The Protestants divided further. Eight attended an Ethiopian Protestant church, while nine

said they attended American churches. Those who claimed Orthodox faith all belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Of the eight interviewees who attended an Ethiopian Protestant church, seven said they took their faith and religious identity very seriously. Describing her religious faith and experience one young woman said, "I am 100 percent committed to my religion. I practice daily and weekly activities. I witness my faith and serve in the church. I spend six hours a week in church-related activities. Religion is important to me because it is a source of my happiness in all of life." Still another said, "Religion gives me a strong foundation. . . . My identity is in Christ. . . . To me race is just about the color of one's skin. It is not about identity. Identity is not about the way your parents raised you and what culture you have; your identity is now in Christ."

Nine of the seventeen Protestants said they attended a host culture church (American). The religious commitment of this group varied sharply from that of the eight who attended an Ethiopian Protestant church. Of the nine who said they belonged to an American Protestant church, two were highly committed, four were semi-committed, and three were not committed.

The highly committed ethnic church Ethiopians and the highly committed American church Ethiopians appeared very similar in their inside-the-church activities and attendance level. However, on the topic of communicating one's faith, a sharp difference emerged. When I asked members of the Ethiopian Protestant church about sharing their faith with unbelievers, they responded by talking about their activities within the church and de-emphasized reaching out to people who are not Christians. "I am a youth leader in my church," one said. "I witness my faith and serve in the church with the youth group," another one said. A third interviewee responded to the question of communicating the faith by saying, "Those of us that are here meet on Saturday and help the youth and the children on Sunday."

On the other hand, members of American Protestant churches with the same degree of religious commitment said, "At my work I will make every effort to let my light shine. I welcome conversations about religion in the break rooms. Spreading the Gospel makes my day." A second person said, "I... make an effort to reach out to non-believers with the intent to convert them."

How do research group participants describe their experience in the Ethiopian church in America?

Interviewees viewed the spiritual ministry of the first-generation church as a mixed bag. Twelve expressed negative opinions of the ethnic church's ministry to the Gen 1.5 and 2.0 immigrant Ethiopians; ten had mixed feelings about the church's ministry. Only two expressed positive feelings, and these two were not committed to the church.

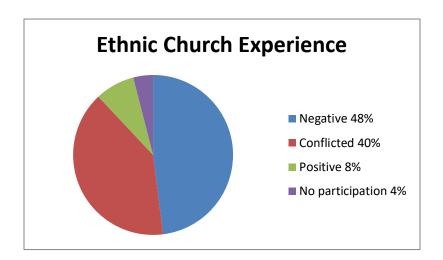
A young man who was highly committed in an American church stated, "I left the Ethiopian church because of cultural barriers. There was no benefit there for me, since I hardly speak the language. Many people of my generation feel the same way. Those who were born in Ethiopia and have Amharic language skills stayed. Most people who attend the Ethiopian church in America attend for cultural reasons."

One other young man who had better Ethiopian language and cultural abilities also explained his reasons for leaving. "I left the "I left the Ethiopian church because of cultural barriers.

There was no benefit there for me, since I hardly speak the language.

Many people of my generation feel the same way."

ethnic church where I used to go because my friends left. They went to American churches for better children's ministry programs. Language and culture were also issues for me. It was difficult."

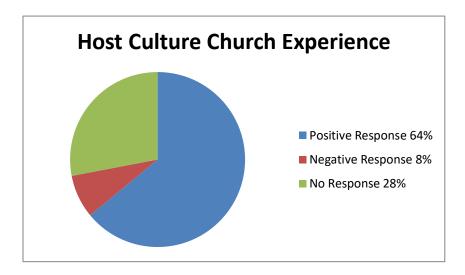


One young man offered his solution, "We need a church for us. . . . At my church, I would like to think there are no boundaries and everyone is welcome; but the truth is, it is for Ethiopians only. Even in the youth group where we do stuff in English we rarely see people of a different ethnicity or race."

A church for them! A church that is not limited to their own ethnicity! These young people were articulating the solution they hoped for.

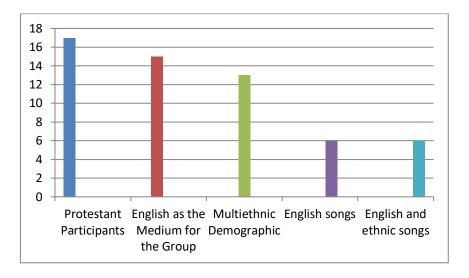
How do research group participants describe their experience in American, non-ethnic churches?

Many of the respondents held membership in an Ethiopian Protestant church but talked about the contribution of American churches to their spiritual development. They pointedly stated they did not rely on or even expect the Ethiopian church to meet their spiritual needs. They said this was especially true when it came to the teaching of God's Word and resources for the church's ministry to children and the youth group. One who served the youth group in the Ethiopian church stated, "American churches have contributed to my spiritual development and religious knowledge. Christian media, TV, radio, recorded materials and books have also helped. I have never depended on my ethnic church entirely for my spiritual growth."



What would a ministry that feels socially and culturally relevant look like, according to the research group participants?

This was not an easy question for the participants to answer. Most of them, Protestant and Orthodox, had not seriously thought about it before I asked the question during our time together. But they made a brave stab at answering the question. Fifteen of the seventeen Protestants said such a ministry must use the English language as its medium. They gave responses like, "My choice is a multicultural church that uses English as its language medium." Twelve of the fifteen stated the population or demographic of their ideal church should be multiethnic or multicultural.



A second-generation respondent said, "[The] 1.5 and 2.0 church must be one that reflects our assimilation." A Gen 1.5 interviewee, who attended an Ethiopian church, described what this might look like.

I enjoy Amharic worship and preaching in the English language with an American approach. The church for the Gen 1.5 and 2.0 population has to have (1) Worship that mixes Amharic and English, (2) Preaching in English, (3) All communication within the church has to be in English, and (4) A mixture of ethnicities, not just Ethiopians. We are so hungry for that.

He seemed to be describing a church that started out with a core of Gen 1.5 and 2.0 Ethiopians and evolved into a multiethnic congregation that reached out to people of many ethnicities. This, he said, was "what we are hungry for."

I believe my research calls for the launch of a full-fledged church that ministers to the immigrant children, now adults, with the potential of ministering to the immigrant children of Ethiopians, non-Ethiopians, and even to the American population of their generation. Unlike the Gen 1 Ethiopian church of their parents, this church's ministry will connect with new generations, language-wise, culture-wise. Like the first-century church in Antioch, this church may introduce a powerful and promising revival to the American Christian landscape.

Endnotes

¹ Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*, in The Developing Child series (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 137.

Overflowing with Hope: Refugees on the Move

Jim Pressnell

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13 NIV

Abstract: The refugee camps of Rwanda provide an excellent example of the way God uses great movements of people for His mission. This is the story of six young men—Jean Paul, Claude, Eric, Kamali, Benson, and Iranzi—whose families fled ethnic violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo only to spend more than twenty years in a refugee camp. Their faith in Jesus sustained their hope even in the midst of hopelessness. Finally, the Lord answered their prayers, moving them from Gihembe to Portland, Oregon, to begin a new life in the United States. Bringing their faith and hope with them, God has used them to share the love of Jesus in ways they never could have imagined years ago in Gihembe.

Rwanda is a tiny country in the heart of East Africa, roughly the size of Oregon. To the north is Uganda. To the east is Tanzania. To the south is Burundi. And to the west is the Democratic Republic of Congo. All of Rwanda's neighbors are significantly larger. Yet what happened in Rwanda in the spring of 1994 is anything but small or insignificant. On April 7, the genocide against the Tutsi erupted in all its horror. In just one hundred days, over a million people were brutally slaughtered. This genocide against the Tutsi is second only to the Nazi holocaust. Twenty-six years later, the bodies are still being found.

Although Paul Kagame, now Rwanda's president, and his Rwandan Patriotic Front were able to stop the violence, those committing the genocide fled into the



Jim Pressnell brings a wealth of experience to his role as Executive Director of These Numbers Have Faces, from his time as an LCMS linguistic missionary and Bible translator in rural Nigeria, to working as a management consultant for several years, and to executive leadership roles in higher education and faith-based organizations. Jim is thrilled to be serving These Numbers Have Faces because it combines his passion for working with young adults with his deep love for Africa. To learn more about These Numbers Have Faces and their work, see their website: www.thesenumbers.org. Also, please feel free to contact Jim directly at jim@thesenumbers.org.

Democratic Republic of Congo. where thev continued murdering the Tutsi citizens of that country. People fled by the thousands into Rwanda, where they were settled into five refugee camps. Because the violence continues in their home country, this is where they continue to live more than twenty years later.

In addition to the violence that continues in the Democratic Republic of Congo, there has been and continues to be political insecurity and unrest in Burundi, just south of Rwanda. Over the past two



Rwanda Map - Wikipedia - Public Domain

decades, thousands of Burundians have fled into Rwanda, the majority of whom live in the Mahama refugee camp, Rwanda's largest camp.

Rwanda is now home to more than 145,000 refugees.³ The vast majority have lived in camps for more than twenty years. Children have been born. Children have grown up. Most have known no other life than life in the camp. Here is just one story of many.

These Numbers . . .

70.8 million people

The number of individuals who, by the end of 2018, have been forcibly displaced worldwide because of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations.

We are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. The number of displaced persons in 2018 grew by 2.3 million people over the previous year, and the world's forcibly displaced population remains at a record high. This includes 25.9 million refugees in the world—the highest ever seen; 41.3 million internally displaced people; and 3.5 million asylum-seekers. New displacement remains very high. One person becomes displaced every two seconds—less than the time it takes to read this sentence. That's thirty people who are newly displaced

every minute. One in every 108 people globally is either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee.⁴

145,740 people

The number of refugees living in Rwanda.

Of this total 75,740 are people who fled the ethnic violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. All but about 1,200 of these Congolese refugees live in five camps scattered across Rwanda. More than 70,000 refugees from Burundi have fled into Rwanda, with 58,552 living in a single camp—Mahama. The remaining 12,000 Burundians live in Rwanda's urban centers.⁵

5 years

The median stay in a refugee camp worldwide.⁶

20 years

The median stay in a refugee camp for those who have been in camps longer than 5 years.⁷

25 cents per person per day

The daily living allowance provided to refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees.⁸

... Have Faces

Meet "the boys"—Jean Paul, Claude, Eric, Kamali, Benson, and Iranzi. All of them are faith-filled Christ-followers. All of them arrived at the Gihembe refugee camp in northern Rwanda as toddlers. All of them grew up there. Life was not easy. The camp, with more than twelve thousand residents, was overcrowded. The homes were small—two rooms—a tiny sitting room and an even smaller bedroom, where whole families of five or eight or ten slept on a single mattress. Cooking was done outside on a small charcoal stove and toilets were a community latrine.

There was a school in the camp, but it only went through the ninth grade, making it virtually impossible as a refugee to graduate from high school. All six of "the boys" were extremely bright. They excelled at school; and through their common passion for learning, "the boys" quickly became the best of friends and inseparable. All too soon they completed their nine years of schooling, the only education available within the camp. All of them finished at the very top of their class. How they yearned to graduate from high school, even though it seemed way beyond reach! Inside each of them also

grew a dream even more impossible than graduating from high school—the dream of someday also graduating from university. But it all seemed so utterly impossible.

Then one day, out of the blue, news came that the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which has a large presence in Rwanda, had learned about these six very bright boys and was offering to provide scholarships for them to attend the Adventist high school outside the camp. And attend they did! All six graduated at the very top of their class, and all six scored very well on Rwanda's national high school graduation exam.

In fact, Jean Paul had the highest score of anyone on the national exam, which earned him a full-ride scholarship to an American or European university. Jean Paul was overcome with excitement and joy! His impossible dream of attending university had just become a reality. But when Jean Paul went to the capital city of Kigali to receive his award and scholarship, the officials from the Ministry of Education told him they didn't realize he was a refugee; and since the scholarship was intended for Rwandan citizens only, he was ineligible to receive the scholarship. Excitement and joy quickly gave way to hopelessness and despair.

And what was true for Jean Paul was true for all these boys. As refugees, they had no legal status. They had no access to scholarships to attend university in Rwanda. They had no chance to find good jobs. They had no ability to change their circumstances at all. From their perspective, all of their dreams had been shattered. Life for them would never be more than this refugee camp!

So, what should six hopeless boys do with their lives in this refugee camp? Together, they talked about trusting God's mercy and grace, even in the midst of their hopelessness. As they looked around them, they talked about the need for a good primary school within the camp to serve their refugee community. These six hopeless boys decided they wanted to give their refugee community a hope and a dream. So, in the midst of their own hopelessness, they founded Hope Primary School. They divided up the teaching responsibilities according to each of their strengths. This is how Hope School began.

About this time, These Numbers Have Faces learned about "the boys" and what they were doing. We visited them at Gihembe. We saw their school and how excited the children were to have them as teachers. We saw their heart and passion. We heard their dreams, even in the midst of their hopelessness. And we invited them to become part of our University Leadership Program. At first, they thought we were lying, that none of this could be real. But it was indeed very real. Through These Numbers Have Faces, all six boys were able to attend university in Rwanda. Through our monthly Leadership Development Workshops these six boys learned what it means to be an effective Christ-following servant leader who makes a transformative difference within their communities. Hopelessness soon gave way to renewed hope and revived dreams.

But the Lord had even more in store for these six boys than what even they could ever dream or imagine. Over time, five of these six boys and their families were resettled to the United States by the United Nations. In fact, all five were resettled in Portland. Unfortunately, because of a technicality, Benson was unable to be resettled with the rest of his family. He hopes one day to be able to rejoin his family.

Jean Paul and Eric were the first to arrive. Their resettlement came before they were able to graduate from university in Rwanda, which meant they would have to start their university education all over again in the United States. One of These Numbers Have Faces' board members became their advocate with the University of Portland, a Roman Catholic school. The university president agreed to provide a full-ride scholarship for Jean Paul and Jean Paul thrived. In June 2018, Jean Paul graduated summa cum laude with a degree in electrical engineering. He now works for Intel. His job has opened up a whole new world for him, taking him to Mexico and China. He never could have imagined this when he was teaching math in Gihembe's Hope School! The University of Portland's experience with Jean Paul was so positive that they decided to create a full scholarship just for resettled refugees. Eric is now attending the University of Portland. He will graduate in June 2021 also with an engineering degree.

Claude and Iranzi were the next to arrive in the United States, Claude with his mother and Iranzi with his family. Both Claude and Iranzi had graduated from university in Rwanda before being resettled. Iranzi had graduated with a degree in finance. He is now working in the finance department of a Portland lumber



JEAN PAUL



ERIC



CLAUDE

company. Claude was hired as a social worker with Lutheran Community Services Northwest, helping newly resettled refugees make the transition to life in the US.

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Unfortunately, Claude's mother became seriously ill and he had to quit his job to be her caretaker. But as she recovers, he very much hopes to return to his job working with newly arrived refugees.

Kamali was the last to arrive. He came with his father, mother, and nine younger siblings. Kamali had also graduated from university in Rwanda with a degree in finance. He currently is working as an intern with an accounting firm in Portland, which more than likely will turn into a full-time job at the end of the internship.

All five of these boys and their families have been welcomed into a very strong Rwandan community in Portland. All of them have found worshiping communities they call home. To be sure, it is much more difficult for the parents of these resettled families to integrate fully into American life. Often, they come not knowing any English. Typically, their circle of friends is limited to other Rwandans and Congolese. The children, however, arrive speaking at least a little English. Those who go to school quickly become proficient and quickly develop a broader circle of friends. Those who are out of school now work in jobs

through and among these refugee families.

that also help them to integrate well into American society.



IRANZI



KAMALI

Resettled refugees are people on the move. They are people whom God has moved away from their countries of origin as part of His plan and purpose—not only for these refugee families, but also for the new communities these families will now call home. In a very real way, the Lord is calling us to keep our eyes wide open to what He is doing through these massive migration movements of refugee families. Then, with eyes wide open, the Lord is calling us to join Him in mission and ministry as He works

How to Participate in God's Refugee Mission and Ministry

There are abundant opportunities for congregations and individuals to participate meaningfully and wonderfully in God's mission and ministry with and through refugee families. The first opportunity is to be part of God's work "over there." Congregations and individuals can partner and support nonprofit organizations working with refugees

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living in camps, whose time in the camp seems open-ended and unending. Refugees typically are not told they are being resettled until just days before they leave. And typically, they are not told where they are being resettled until just hours before they leave. So, life in the camp is the only sure thing they know.

Do some research on the various nonprofit organizations serving refugee communities abroad. Are their ways to sponsor a refugee child's education in the camp? Can you as a congregation or individual members adopt a university student—awaking hope and helping a dream become a reality? Can you volunteer your heart, time, and energy to participate in a short-term mission trip that serves refugee camps in some way?

The second opportunity is to be part of God's work "right here." Get involved with your local communities of resettled refugees. As a congregation and as individual members, reach out to those agencies in your communities who, like Lutheran Social Services across the country, work with resettled refugees. Can your congregation host and staff classes for resettled refugees to learn English? Can you come alongside a resettled family, serving as a resource and advocate as they transition into life in America? This is sometimes challenging, but always rewarding. Critical for a successful relationship is managing expectations.

As Americans, we often see our role as connecting resettled refugees to various social service agencies who will help them with their needs. But typically, resettled refugees come from countries that have no social service agencies. Needs are met through personal relationships, an intimate circle of family and friends. If you are my friend, you will, as you are able, give me what I need; and when you are in need, I will, as I am able, give you what you need. So, it is easy for these differing expectations to create conflict and frustration. But if we manage these differing expectations openly and honestly, then deep, meaningful relationships can develop that bless all involved in ways that are truly wonderful.

It is also important for congregations and individuals to keep their eyes, ears, and hearts open as learners when serving communities of resettled refugees. Be careful with your assumptions. For example, do not simply assume all resettled refugees need to be evangelized. Rwanda is 95 percent Christian, more Christian than we are here in the US. On Sunday morning, the churches are full. In fact, the Anglican bishop in Oregon, an American, was consecrated and commissioned for ministry by the Archbishop of Rwanda, an African!¹¹ They know Jesus as Savior and Lord. It is absolutely impossible for Rwandans, and other Africans, to separate sacred and secular. All of life is sacred. All of life is spiritual. All of life is to be lived spiritually aware. Life simply cannot be compartmentalized. As Christ-followers here in America, there is much we can learn from our resettled refugee brothers and sisters about living the Christian life together.

Conclusion

There is a Kinyarwandan word I have come to love deeply. The word is *ubumuntu*. Loosely translated, it means "I am because you are, and you are because I am." This word is sometimes translated as "humanity." But it really means so much more. It is a word that emphasizes our *shared* humanity. It affirms a very biblical reality that we are most fully human, most fully reflecting the image of God, when we are connected to each other through deep, holistic, and meaningful relationships. In the words of St. Paul,

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all of its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body. . . . God has put the body together . . . so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it. (1 Cor 12:12–14, 24–27 NIV)

This is God's heart, God's design for our life together as Christ-followers, including our life together with those newer members of our communities who have come to us as resettled refugees. God is indeed on the move—in their lives and ours. Without a doubt, the Lord uses the great movements of people for His mission. As we welcome and integrate refugees into our faith communities, we learn from each other in ways that enrich our faith and deepen our commitment to God's mission among us.

Our eyes see mission opportunities we never saw before. Our hearts are eager to participate in God's mission in new ways never before possible until we join hand in hand—African and American and others too. He brings us together to accomplish His mission, both here and abroad, expanding our networks and our reach exponentially. Together, hand in hand, we lift high the name of Jesus in all the neighborhoods of our communities around the world, proclaiming the One who turns our despair into joy and transforms our hopelessness into sure and certain hope. This is good news for those of us here long and for those of us newly arrived. Indeed, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13 NIV).

Endnotes

¹ Ted Dagne, *Rwanda: Background and Current Developments* (Congressional Research Service: June 1, 2011), 3, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40115.pdf.

² A display at the National Genocide Museum and Memorial in Kigali, https://www.visitrwanda.com/interests/kigali-genocide-memorial/.

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Refugee Statistics," accessed on January 20, 2020, https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/.

- ⁴ UNHCR, "Statistics."
- ⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Rwanda Country Refugee Response Plan 2019-2020," May 23, 2019, https://reliefweb.int/report/rwanda/rwanda-country-refugee-response-plan-2019-2020.
- ⁶ Xavier Devictor, "2019 update: How long do refugees stay in exile?" December 9, 2019, https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/2019-update-how-long-do-refugees-stay-exile-find-out-beware-averages.
- ⁷ Devictor, "2019 update."
- ⁸ First-hand testimony of Claude, Jean Paul, Eric, and others.
- ⁹ We recruit very bright students from poor, rural, and post-conflict communities who otherwise would not have opportunity to attend university. We provide tuition, room and board, books, and school fees—whatever is necessary for our students to access a university education in Rwanda. In fact, 94 percent of our students will graduate successfully. Indeed, 58 percent of our 2019 graduates graduated in the top 10 percent of their classes!
- ¹⁰ We facilitate monthly Leadership Development Workshops, all through a Christian lens, to grow the professional skills of our students so that they can be successful, Christ-following servant leaders who make a transformational difference in their communities. In Rwanda, only 41 percent of university graduates get paying jobs within two years. However, 94 percent of our graduates get paying jobs within two years. In fact, 70 percent of our 2019 graduates had jobs within six months!
- ¹¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglican_Diocese of the Rocky Mountains and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglican_Diocese of the Rocky Mountains and https://en.wikipedia.org.

Is Islam True Because It Is Logical?

Herbert Hoefer

Abstract: Islamic advocates and defendants have been highly successful in promoting the logical character of Islam. They contrast Islam's clear, simple logic with the "fantastic and illogical" claims of Christian theology. In order to evangelize the faith and protect our believers, we must clarify the role of logic in every intellectual enterprise, and specifically in religion. Our faith comes from the mind of God, who is above all logic. In fact, it's very fantastic nature can be viewed as a demonstration of its non-human origin.

Muslims love to debate with Christians.

- You sit beside a Muslim on a train or bus in a Muslim country, and he will open a religious debate with you.
- You Google Islam/Christianity, and you will find many videos of Muslims debating Christianity.
- At the LCMS World Mission conference on outreach to Muslims in 2008, the
 former head of dawah (witnessing) in the USA spoke. He described their very
 successful tactic of having a Muslim scholar challenge a local pastor to a
 public debate when they want to move into a new town.
- In 1985, there was the famous—and catastrophic—debate between Jimmy Swaggart and Ahmed Deedat.

What is behind this Muslim desire for public debate? The reason for their success is that Islam is logical. We humans are very proud of our ability to think logically, and we see this capacity as the best path to determine truth.



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Determining Truth

Through History

A common path to determining truth is historical evidence. Both religions are historically grounded and founded. They do not claim truth from some ecstatic revelation or from myths or dreams or philosophy. They claim truth from facts of history. However, this approach is problematic for both sides, as they have conflicting claims:

- Both Islam and Christianity claim the accuracy of their founding scriptures, but each disputes that about the other.
- They both look to the excellence of the original community of their faith as paradigmatic of their truth claim, the early Jerusalem church described in Acts 2 and 4 and the community Muhammad formed as governor of Medina.
- The Quran incorporates much of biblical history, but interprets it differently.
- Both claim to be a religion of peace; yet, in history they have been perpetrators of violence and injustice, often against each other.
- Both can point out good that they have done in society through the centuries.
- Both have used political and military power to promote and enforce their religion.
- Both have violently suppressed reform movements.

Through Logic

Historical evidence is not a convincing/persuasive path for either religion. However, Muslim polemicists have found solid ground in theological argument. They can point out that Islamic dogma is clear and simple, very logical. Christian dogma, in contrast, demands the suspension of common reason.

Islamic tenets are clear and reasonable and useful:

- God is one.
- God is the Creator and therefore also the one rightful Judge, Authority, and Lawgiver.
- There is one authoritative book conveyed by one author.
- This book claims to have no contradictions and prophetic predictions of scientific facts.

- There is a record of their final prophet's life in the four traditions of the Hadith, which provide an inspired, concrete model for all facets of personal, social, political, and economic life.
- Through the Quran and the Hadith, clear moral and ethical tenets are provided for righteous, healthy, and prosperous living.
- The confession of faith into the Islamic fold is clear and simple: "Allah is God, and Muhammad is his prophet."
- Finally, and often most convincingly, you get what you deserve in life and in eternity. Your good and bad deeds are fairly weighed, and a just God provides punishment and reward accordingly.

All of this makes total sense. It is clear and simple, realistic and understandable. It can be presented and argued quite logically, even by a common layperson.

Christian Dogma as Illogical

In contrast, the dogmas of Christianity often demand the suspension of logic. Things are complex and confusing and incomprehensible, easily susceptible to incredulity and mockery:

- The obvious one is the doctrine of the Trinity. This description is easily subject to mockery and logical reasoning. It is illogical that three can be one.
- Next is the Incarnation. It requires a suspension of reason to accept that God
 can and would become man. How can the eternal become the temporal? How
 can a holy God become part of a sinful world? The logical questions go on
 and on.
- How about the sacraments among the sacramental churches? Does God need and use material items to convey forgiveness and grace? Why wouldn't (and doesn't) He just do that directly? Are the sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism some kind of magical, shamanic acts performed by divinely empowered priests?
- How is one accepted into the Christian fold: by the rite of infant baptism, by an ecstatic spiritual moment, by a "born again" experience? It's all very complex and confusing and contradictory.
- And then there's the Bible, written over many centuries with different cultures and worldviews and times and authors and types of literature. A belief is required that all of this was inspired by God in so many diverse ways. A book with many apparent contradictions from one age and author to another, yet inspired by God?

- Such a book is not directly accessible by laypeople. Interpretations of this
 scripture require scholarly knowledge of all these complexities, and often
 differing from each other. All very complex and confusing, and requiring a
 leap of faith rather than clear reason.
- For Christians, the one moral/ethical tenet is to love. But what does that mean in practice? How is that applied in political and economic and social and military contexts? The command is vague and subject to innumerable subjective applications and interpretations.
- Finally, the one dogma that requires the greatest suspension of logic and common reason: you get what you do not deserve. The Christian belief is that God can and did pay for our sin, and we are totally and freely forgiven. It is unjust and unfair and unrealistic and incomprehensible, totally illogical.

It is no wonder that Muslims love to argue religion. Their faith is clear and simple and logical. Our faith is complex and vague and illogical.

Is Logic the Path to Truth?

Philosophical Questions

The great caveat to all this is if logic can determine truth. For one thing, logical systems differ in different cultures. Logical thought processes are culturally determined. Buddhist, Hindu, and Taoist philosophical systems and practices, for example, differ radically from our Western forms of logic. What we see as contradictory, they see as profound and insightful, such as the Buddhist koans, Hindu mystical allegories, and the Taoist yin-yang principle.

Secondly, even in Western philosophy, the ability of the mind to determine a single truth through logic is questioned. Cultural relativism was strongly emphasized in the twentieth century with its view that there is no absolute, universal standard of truth because our interpretation is always shaped by our worldview.

The great twentieth century analytic philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, calls into question virtually every philosophical system in his famous *Tractatus*.¹ At the end, he concluded that truth of belief can only be approached with a leap of faith. In his final, inimitable words: "At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded."²

Christian Humility

Yet, we are rational beings, and we need to understand things with our reasoning powers. In Christianity, we do intellectual theologizing. The faith is not irrational. It can—and must—be discussed rationally. We must make sense of it. We must apply it to life. We do not determine our theological truth through logic, for we recognize the

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serious limits of human reasoning to determine truth. We are humble and obedient in our intellectual theologizing.

We can draw this intellectual humility directly from Scripture:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Is 55:8–9 ESV)

No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Cor 2:11b)

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" (Rom 11:33–34)

Therefore, as we attempt to present our dogma, we do so with great humility. The ways and thoughts of God are beyond our understanding and comprehension:

- The nature of God is ultimately a mystery. It is beyond any human understanding. Our doctrine of the Trinity is the best we can do in piecing together the evidence of Scripture. However, we know it is not a description of God. Certainly, our vision of God in eternity will be far beyond what we were ever able to formulate while on earth.
- Similarly, our statement "God is love" is an anthropomorphism. God's being and works are divine. Love is our human explanation, based on our human experience and language. His ways are beyond our comprehension, but we understand that they are always good.
- Love needs an object to love. If God is love from all eternity, that love is expressed and experienced, first of all, within the godhead. In Christian understanding, it is the love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Love is the reason for the creation, for each of us, a material object of God's love. It is this fulfilling life of love which He desires to work in us to share in His joy now and in eternity.

Witnessing among Muslims

Nature of God

Here is where our humility intersects with our witness among Muslims. In any witnessing, we begin our discussion within the worldview of the other person. We begin with what he or she believes is true. In the matter of the nature of God, we agree with them that God is totally free and almighty. If that is true, He can then do whatever He wills:

- If He wills to become a human person, is it impossible for Him to do?
- If He wills to become a perfect sacrifice and payment for sin, can He do it that way?
- If He ordains to use material means to relate in grace to people, might He?
- Is it possible for Him to inspire many different authors in many different cultures and times, if He decides to?
- If He desires to love and forgive people purely by grace, may He?

Ethic of Love

Furthermore, the Christian ethic of love gets to the root of moral and social goodness.

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander" (Mt 15:19).

Instead of using commands and threats and punishments to control evil and enforce goodness, the Christian ethic espouses a personal transformation. We desire to do good because we are filled with God's love for all.

Let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. . . . If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 Jn 4:7, 12)

If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. (Gal 5:18, 22–23)

The Christian ethic seeks to uplift people into goodness. We recognize the possibility of goodness for people. They can be inspired and transformed by the presence of God in them, not just controlled and enforced by human threats and punishments.

In conclusion,

- Christian beliefs may not be logical, but they can still be true. Indeed, a manmade religion would be logically constructed. A divinely worked religion would be a work beyond human comprehension and understanding. It would be one to be accepted in humility and reverence.
- A religion rooted in the works and ways of God would accept the ways in which He sovereignly wills to act, whether by incarnating Himself or sacrificing Himself or using material means to reach material people.

- An ethic inspired by a God of love and grace would be one in which love is the governing principle. It would aim for the transformation of people He loves.
- A theology would humbly try to put into the limits of human language and thought the sovereign works and ways of God.

Christian faith is not blind belief. It is grounded in historical events and records of divine activity. It is not determined by the relativism and limits of human logic. However, it is reasonable and sensible and practical.

Islam is simpler and clearer and more logical. But that may well be the indication that it is not of divine origin. It is a reasonable conclusion, then, that it is not true. As our people are exposed to logical attacks by Muslim advocates, they need to be assured that logic is not the source or determination of truth. Our faith is grounded on the facts of history recorded in Scripture, revealing actions of God that are beyond our comprehension.

Similarly, in our witness among Muslims and all others, we have a faith that is humble and illogical, but does make sense as originating in God, who is beyond our understanding. And so we follow the direction of our Scripture in carrying out this testimony, intellectually: "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pt 3:15 RSV).

Endnotes

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922, 1955; Mineola, NY: Dover ed., 1999).

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Proposition 253," in *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright eds., German and English ed., paperback (NYC: Perennial/Harper & Row, 1972), 33.

The Application of Holistic Community Development: A Case Study among the People of Vivares by Developing Our World

Miguel Torneire

Abstract: This article first focuses on analyzing literature to provide various perspectives on the position of man in the universe and reality and his relation to the triune God. The four vital connections human beings have in life are then explored to illustrate that the conventional wisdom regarding poverty is erroneous and that poverty can come to communities through various manifestations. These manifestations are ultimately a result of people's displacement from reality towards an ill-advised life that is not suitable for achieving inner peace. Only through a connection with God and His creation can an individual be fully content.

Introduction

The world around us is changing at a rapid pace; gone are the times when a particular status quo would remain dominant for an extended period. This is reflected in the way people are living their lives—on the move in search of jobs, personal growth, exploration, or as a necessity. This necessity has become a major issue in recent times, as war, religious persecution, and poverty have displaced countless people. Those who are forced to abandon their homes try to migrate to other regions,



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a process that is rarely easy. Displaced individuals can and do find the church as a means of living a better life, dedicated towards nearness to God.

Identifying and Dealing with the True Problem

Fikkert and Corbett provide a great insight into poverty and how it manifests itself within society. While poverty is normally thought of as a scarcity of material resources, these authors contrast this perception with how others in different regions of the world describe their poverty. Those countries with a higher earning status tend to lean towards material items, while those who are lower on the income scale lean towards a more psychological indication of unwellness. This is marked by instances of shame, humiliation, lack of self-worth, etc. These observations play an important part in helping the poor because they represent the roadblocks that must be overcome to empower the people and uplift them from their predicament. These obstacles are listed on the table below from the Fikkert and Corbett book, *When Helping Hurts*.²

If We Believe the Primary Cause of Poverty Is	Then We Will Primarily Try to
A Lack of Knowledge	Educate the Poor
Oppression by Powerful People	Work for Social Justice
The Personal Sins of the Poor	Evangelize and Disciple the Poor
A Lack of Material Resources	Give Material Resources to the Poor

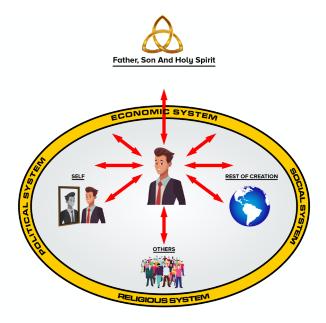
Table 1. Poverty Causes and Solutions

The book provides an example of a needy person coming to a church for help to pay his bill. On an initial analysis, the problem may seem to be material. However, a closer inspection may reveal this to be merely a symptom of the individual lacking the self-control to maintain a job and budget accordingly to pay his bill. This shows that in many cases, people end up treating the symptom of poverty rather than the cause. Merely treating the symptom is also responsible for worsening the condition of both the helper and the person receiving help. The good-willed individuals who help end up wasting their effort and having the opposite effect. The one who receives the help becomes more dependent, instead of being able to rise and face his actual challenges.

Most essential is first recognizing the cause of the problem before attempting to resolve the issue. In the case presented above, the book states it would have been much better to let the person go without helping them financially, as this would only hurt

them further. It would also negate the duty of the church and waste resources. People cannot help themselves unless they are taught to recognize the source of the problems they face. People are usually convinced they lack enough resources, while in many instances, their problem lies within their thinking framework, which has become that of a victim.

Bryant Myers states that as human beings, created in the image of God, who has created the entire system in which we live, one must understand the reality and the creator.³ The relationships of human beings are complex and multifaceted, and there is a problem when one loses an optimal connection with any of them. The diagram below shows the structural nature of such relationships.⁴



Adapted from Corbet, S. & Fikkert, B. When Helping Hurts: How to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor-and yourself (Chicago, IL: Moody Publisher, 2009), 57

Figure 1. The Relationship of Humans with Reality

Based on this figure, humans have four main relationships that ultimately define their existence based on their design and creation.

Relationship with God; this is the most important and fundamental of all the other relationships. Humans have been made to praise God and glorify Him in all aspects of their life through their actions, thoughts, and words.

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Relationship with Self; as human beings are created in reflection of God, they are unique and enjoy a higher status and position than all of creation. This also presents us with certain responsibilities that we must bear.

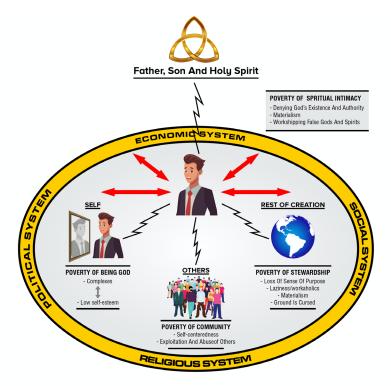
Relationship with Others; as humans are created to be social, they must interact and assist one another in achieving the higher calling of a closer connection to God. It is only through helping others that we can help ourselves and achieve our greater collective purpose.

Relationship with Rest of Creation; as beings created in the image of God, we are tasked with the responsibility of acting as stewards for creation. We must maintain and take care of the system that God has provided us, both to praise God and to sustain ourselves by the fruits of our labor.

The imbalance or breakage of these relationships can cause stress and problems in the life of an individual, both in the physical and spiritual sense. Figure 2 shows that when the self is abused, it can lead to inflated egos or low opinions of the self. Being disconnected from society leads one to become self-centered, exploiting others. A disrespect of creation leads to not knowing one's place in the universe. The lack of a spiritual connection leads to materialism and idolatry.⁵

When taking these observations into account, it can be easily seen that everyone in the world is disconnected from these relations in one way or another, suffering from some sort of poverty. What seems to be a problem of resources based in materialistic terms is ultimately found to lead back towards these four principles. Every individual is trapped in the cycle of one form of poverty or another. This may be solved by resolving the issues as outlined in Figure 1, working towards reestablishing the relationships of the person in harmony with nature and their place within the universe. This is seen as a major point within the book *When Helping Hurts*, which criticizes the western approach of simply dumping physical resources into society and hoping it resolves poverty. The problem lies in the fact that an incorrect approach is being applied; a materialistic approach is being used to solve the immaterial problem. This can render efforts of the helper wasted, and in many cases, cause the problem to worsen. The West, which so prides itself on its development, is also shown to be subject to poverty. This lies more in the death of spirituality than in lack of the material, but is properly labeled as poverty, nonetheless.

A book entitled *Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People* demonstrates how the work of God and His people is not limited to a particular scope or area. God, and by extension, His people seek to remedy and uplift all of creation for the glory of the Creator, for there is no better task than serving God. As God is the one who created the heaven and the earth (Gen 1:1; Is 45:18; Col 1:16–17), the seen and the unseen; it ultimately falls on to us to trust His judgment and wisdom, for He has fashioned us all. Based on this perspective, it is only through the grace of God that we can better



Adapted from Corbet, S. & Fikkert, B. When Helping Hurts: How to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor-and yourself (Chicago, IL: Moody Publisher, 2009), 61

Figure 2. Result of Poor Relationships

understand ourselves and seek peace and salvation. It is important to note that salvation cannot be earned and is only gifted through connection with Jesus (Eph 2:8). Fikkert and Corbett mention⁷ that traditional missions involved significant personal sacrifice and devotion to spreading the word of the triune God and inviting people to accept⁸ Jesus into their hearts. Only by shedding the burden of sin through the acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice can mankind hope to be endowed with peace and salvation.⁹

While the material world looks towards the physical reality of the universe, it ignores the spiritual and unseen side by deeming it superstition and a sign of archaic times. The view of God and His people is not this myopic view; it instead embraces the multidimensional nature of existence. Human sensibilities are limited in their nature and cannot comprehend the grand design of the universe that God has created

or judge it objectively. It is the task of God's people to tend to the mind, the body, and the soul of the individual. A problem in one area can create complications in another.

God (working sometimes through His people) has been serving the needs of humanity long before secular institutions established welfare foundations to care for the needy and the poor. It is the people of God who stepped forth to bring peace and balance into the life of individuals—in spite of times being despised for playing such a positive role in the community. While the secular organizations seek to resolve what they see as the problems that keep people down, they ultimately only remedy problems that lie within the material. The lack of spiritual healing and empowerment ultimately leads individuals towards a more materialistic lifestyle that is self-centered and cares only for one's desires.

The people of God, acting on His will, however, seek to free the individual from poverty of all kinds through restoring their connection with God and with reality. Christian churches, Mission Societies, and Christian NGOs around the world have been established as a means of catering to the diverse set of requirements of each region. This is done in the service of God, and no rewards are sought in return, whether material in nature or the promise of higher stature in society. It is only through this approach that the complete eradication of poverty can occur, for the multidimensional approach heals the person both on the inside and outside.

Rebecca Waweru, in the article, "Integral Mission," explores the ways in which the essential reasoning behind a problem can be explored in light of the Christian context of things. She observes that the problems within the social sphere stem from the deviation from the guideline provided by the Christian Church and swaying away from the directions provided by the Lord for Christians: to live a just life, to practice kindness, and to be humble. The issues within society can all be traced back to the deviation from the ascribed message. It can be difficult for people to realize the actual sources of the problems that they are facing unless they have the right guideline to show them the way. Her article explores the way the Christian message serves as that guideline and traces back the existing problems through an understanding of the integral mission.

The different areas of the mission touched upon within the article by Rebecca Waweru are the areas of evangelism, demonstration, and their subsequent paths to realize the mission of the Lord and of Christians. By following four models, she illustrates how they lead to find a way out of problems and move towards development. The article ultimately explores the ways in which the core mission reaches back to the social, emotional, physical, economic, spiritual, and political needs of people, and how problems result without having the guideline from the Lord. ¹⁰

The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ serves as a comprehensive guideline towards adopting a global approach and considering every person an important member of the global community. The view of the world as a global

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community is essential in the expansion of the mission of the holistic missionary. The holistic approach draws light from the explicit guidelines stated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ to convert the world into a positive habitat for the global community guided by the virtues of love, kindness, compassion, and empathy. The Gospel is the central guiding light for mission with holistic community development objectives.

Holistic Community Development in Vivares

The concept of Holistic Community Development speaks to the involvement of every element of the community in the improvement and growth of the community. The concept itself has been around for decades going back to the days of Jesus Christ. The concept speaks towards the involvement of the community to create a mutually beneficial social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental condition for every member of the community. Holistic community development focuses upon the creation of a society that has involvement from every element of the community to increase engagement and promote dialogue. The vision is the promotion of the community and the creation of a prosperous future.

An essential aspect of development can be observed in the context of Vivares which has grown into a central community hub with a strong focus on the guidelines given by the Lord. It works to improve every aspect of society with involvement from every member of the community coming together to take mutual actions and provide solutions to the problems faced by the community. Given the Christian nature of the region, it is critical to promote the guidelines of Christianity to reach the optimal solution to issues within the region.

The interaction between secular and religious differences is also bridged with the implementation of the community approach to reach solutions to existing problems. Holistic community development creates a mutually dependent community that coexists on the basis of cooperation and mutual facilitation to achieve harmony and wellbeing. The mutual reliance of the people within the community is central to the community's stability and growth. Every aspect of the community plays a role in the growth of the community's functioning as an integrated unit.

The core spirit of the holistic approach in Vivares stems from Micah's Challenge¹¹ with its initiative promising internal justice, increasing kindness, and alleviating poverty within the region. Micah's Challenge guidelines with the region are all centered in the Scriptures and are guided through the Holy Spirit with emphasis on prayer and coming together as a community to address potential challenges.

A central aspect of holistic community development is the increase in social harmony and integration despite the presence of differences and diversity in beliefs and cultures. The capacity to absorb differences and function in a mutually beneficial manner serves as a key feature of any holistic community. Aside from mutual

coexistence, a holistic community features central mechanisms to allow the exchange by individual support mechanisms. It allows community growth and development with shared resources from individual contributions in every aspect of the community. Holistic community development focuses on the inclusion of every social group into the process of determining critical areas and working towards productive community results.

This mutually inclusive process was derived in essence by the guideline of the church with its core messages: speaking towards togetherness in the region, adopting a uniform front against issues like poverty and adversity, and taking action to help the most challenged individuals within the society.

The central message of kindness and love is followed with the guidelines of Micah's Network to ensure that the rights of the destitute and socially challenged individuals are protected by the decision-makers and influential leaders within society. It is important to protect the weak and needy from the challenges of dependency and poverty to ensure that the society stays strong as a whole and follows the steadfast guidance given by the Lord and seconded by religious thought leaders. Despite the central guideline coming from the Christian Scripture, the secular segments of society are also integrated and included within the decision-making process to ensure the security of everyone's rights, as advised by the religion.

With the application of core Christian virtues, the community has made rapid progress in preserving the rights of the weak and the needy. Progress that has been made in devising the just system is based on the guidelines of Jesus Christ for godly living. Results of the community effort have improved the social living experience of the individuals within the community. Love, kindness, justice, and equality preached in a holistic manner are evident in the community. The guiding light of the church ensures that society does not decay to the distractions of evil.

The Missional Identity of Christian Development Organizations

The mission and the identity of Christian development organizations have been evolving and changing from early history to the modern era. This reflection is based upon the changing needs of society as it grows and changes. ¹² The church and its mission must reflect this by creating different priorities to meet the demands of the people. This is because the church is a tool used by the people of God to serve His creation. It must adapt to changing needs. While older, more orthodox approaches to mission focused on creating individuals who would please God by increasing the number of converts, this approach has been called antiquated. Rather than trying to primarily spread Christianity based on the services and duties of the church, it is better to serve the community, using a holistic approach.

Bringing God to the people during missionary work is somewhat a redundant task, especially if you are going to serve among people who were reached by the Gospel long before. God has been in the lives of these people. It is up to God to convert heathen people to believe in Jesus and, with the help of God's people, to recognize the role God has been playing in their lives all along. The church, the people on the move, are sent to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel. The triune God is in charge to do the rest.

Sometimes the path towards salvation is not straightforward, and the person must undergo a series of trials and hardships, which will ultimately recast their personality and self in the light of the Gospel. Suffering has been one of the ways towards enlightenment. For when individuals reach their low point, they drop their ego and preconceived notions and are more agreeable to contemplation and change.¹³

To function effectively, faith-based organizations must make the best use of the skills, talents, and resources that they have at their disposal, with the organizational structure of communities as a secondary concern. Their main focus should be the core tenets and guiding principles. These will ultimately serve the purpose of furthering God's mission, and as such, are much more important factors than the efficiency of an organization. This is not to state, however, that structure and efficiency are merely details for hindsight; rather, they are the tools to achieve a purpose. The tools should not distract from the purpose of God's mission.

Putting faith into action requires a consistent commitment to God's will and a renewal and strengthening of faith. ¹⁴ As the human being is fragile and subject to deceit and self-sabotage, it is only through regular self-cleansing, both spiritual and physical, that one can maintain the journey on the path of righteousness and service to God. One will not always find the complete range of resources needed to resolve problems. This merely acts as a test and a trial that has to be overcome through trust in God's plan.

Analysis and Synthesis of the Literature

One particular feature which stands out in almost all the books I have referenced is that of limited human perception and cognitive capabilities. Humans, being a part of the created order, are subject to limitations imposed on them due to their design (Gen 3:4–19). It is not possible to comprehend the glory of God or His works completely. It is precisely because of these limitations that a man cannot declare himself to be master of the universe or have a complete connection to his Creator.

This lack of understanding regarding design and purpose is what ultimately drives people towards the material plane. When people cannot perceive the glory of the grand design, they isolate their attention to what they can see and put all their focus and energy on that element. It is this approach that ultimately dooms them towards a path

of folly and self-destruction, even as they seek to recreate their connection to restore harmony and peace—perhaps unconsciously. Their incapability to recognize the source of their troubles (Ps 51:5) prevents them from solving the problems that actually cause their suffering. Such suffering cannot be solved until a balance is created within man, which returns him to working in an optimal place in God's design of the universe. Like a machine with different parts, a man is a part of a greater system in which he desires purpose and belonging.

When such things are taken from him, he becomes restless and irritable, eventually going towards a path of self-destruction because his inner nature is not satisfied within his place (even if he denies this or is unaware). For those who believe in Jesus, it becomes their responsibility (2 Cor 5:14–15) to guide and assist these lost souls in finding their connection with God, themselves, others, and the rest of creation. Often the most straight forward or apparent means of helping the person will not be successful and may even cause harm. It is prudent that help is given through appropriate means, and such help should seek to empower the individual rather than making him or her dependent.

The tools and organization serve only as a means to an end. They help on the path to the final destination: ultimate realization of God and serving one's purpose in service to God. Even for the believer, challenges lie ahead when seeking to serve the will of God. Distractions from the material world and temptations seek to lead an individual astray. By the renewal and strengthening of faith through God's Word, asking for forgiveness, performing prayer, and worshiping God, a Christian can hope to become strong enough to resist the temptations that have driven astray those whom he seeks to help.

Case Study Data

The Vivares Village was established back in 1869. It is full of natural wonders and the beauty of nature. There are countless trees in the area and a diverse set of animals and vegetation, serving to beautify the area. The village is small and has a modest population of 223 individuals; this humble existence is further illustrated by the information about it in the municipality of San Manuel Chaparrón. The village is located 37 kilometers from the Jalapa Department Headland and 7 kilometers from the Municipality of San Manuel Chaparrón, Guatemala. The road leading to the village is in good condition as well. This provides a reliable means to travel to and from the location in all weather conditions.

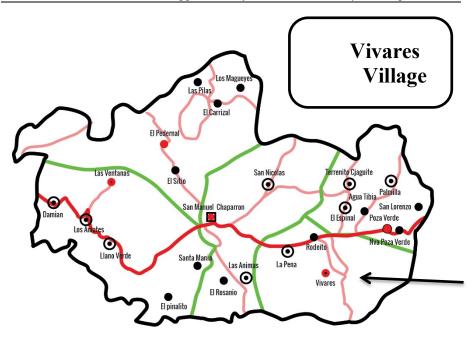


Figure 3. Aldea Vivares, Municipality of San Manuel Chaparrón, Department of Jalapa Source: Development Plan San Manuel Chaparrón 2011–2025, year 2019.

The village may be readily accessed by three roads on the northwest and two on the southwest. The last access point is not suitable for vehicles. The administration of the village is structured around a simple hierarchy responsible for setting priorities for each of the tasks that must be done to support the community and ensure smooth operations on a day-to-day basis.

Despite being a small village with a modest population, the village does not lack the modern necessities of human life. The streets are paved with cobble, with only 5% of the roads being made of dirt. The most important streets and avenues of the municipality are these:

- Main entrance, Colinda, to the northwest with San Manuel Chaparrón.
- Second Avenue southwest, entrance by El Rodeo Asunción Mita.
- Second Avenue southwest, exit to Asunción Mita.

People live in modest adobe and brick houses, and most of the residents own their own homes. Only 10% of the population lives on a rental basis. Modern utilities are included, and the village has a clean supply of drinking water. Even an education

system is present at a primary and basic level. Modern luxuries such as electricity, security, internet services, cable, sports, and recreation are also present, in addition to reliable health services and a means of garbage disposal.

The population of the village is divided as follows:

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
101	122	223

Table 2. Vivares Village, Municipality of San Manuel Chaparrón,
Department of Jalapa

The village has an economically active population and works in the following sectors:

ACTIVITY	QUANTITY	PERCENTAGE
Agriculture	89	45%
Construction	30	25%
Commerce	23	16%
Services	18	14%
TOTAL	160	100%

Table 3. Aldea Vivares, Municipality of Jalapa, Department of Jalapa

Case Study Analysis

Based on the case study above, the settlement represents a small village that is focused on keeping its roots and is proud of its heritage. The fact that people work with their families to make their own homes shows how they work with each other to build a self-supporting and thriving community. The limited population means that such cooperation becomes an even greater necessity, as individuals can only rely on each other to help build a better community. The small yet active population that works in a diverse range of business sectors shows a willingness to work for and earn their keep.

The village is humble and seeks to live a basic lifestyle. This is seen from the houses being constructed from adobe and bricks, materials that are commonly associated with areas that have a greater rate of poverty. The lack of modern, more expensive building materials demonstrates an approach towards life that is less reliant on materialism and focuses more on utilitarianism. Furthermore, the extensive facilities within the town that relate to infrastructure such as roads, a garbage disposal system, reliable education, etc. shows that while the life lived is basic, it is not primitive by any means, nor cut off from the rest of the world.

The capability of possessing modern-day amenities, while still retaining the essence of humbleness serves as a great point to show how one can live a simple and modest life while not being stuck in the past, as is often stereotyped.

Results, Discussion, and Recommendation

Based on the information gleaned from the literature examined and the case studies observed, several elements have come to light. One of the most important insights is that people should seek to help each other through assistance focused on returning an individual to their rightful place in relation to reality. Helpers should seek to empower others and create independence rather than creating a system of individuals who cannot help themselves. One cannot help others if he cannot help himself. It is only through restoring the natural balance with nature, themselves, reality, and God that people can find the inner peace that does not rely on material possessions.

Establishing a network of support is based on combining both short-term missions (STM) and long-term missions (LTM). As mentioned, merely relying on STMs is a popular trend today, but it can be detrimental if not conducted correctly. ¹⁵ Both short-term and long-term solutions have to be created; the most important of which is creating a connection to the triune God. By becoming connected to the source (God), the real healing process can begin. Then external worldly matters will start resolving through the blessings of Jesus. As an example, STMs can be used by the church to scout new souls for salvation; missionaries can provide temporary support to create

interest and establish contact with those who need guidance. Based on the data collected, LTMs work toward establishing a more permanent presence in the community to continue the proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Individuals, organizations, churches, schools, universities, mission societies, and NGOs should visit communities to learn about their assets and use wise judgment to ascertain what is the correct approach. Practically everyone in the world suffers from poverty in one form or another; it is only the question of which of the four areas they are suffering in. So many people have driven their focus on the material and neglected the spiritual but building positive and constructive relationships is a starting point towards beginning the healing process. By establishing a strong network across different communities, partnerships can be built that cross boundaries. It is through this approach that the work of God may be done on a global scale.

Endnotes

- ¹ Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett, When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 52–53.
- ² Fikkert and Corbett, *Helping*, 55.
- ³ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011, 1999), 60–62.
- ⁴ Fikkert and Corbett, *Helping*, 57.
- ⁵ Fikkert and Corbett, *Helping*, 61.
- ⁶ Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma, eds. *Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People*, vol.
- 5 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 56.
- ⁷ Fikkert and Corbett, *Helping*, 71.
- ⁸ The Scriptures reject all kinds of synergism toward salvation. We are saved by grace through faith. So, there is no problem in saying that we "accept" Jesus as long as we know that Jesus "accepted" us first (See Rom 1:17; 1 Cor 12:3; Eph 2:8; 1 Jn 4:19).
- ⁹ Brian Fikkert and Kelly M. Kapic, *Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn't the American Dream* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 139.
- ¹⁰ Rebecca Waweru, "Integral Mission: An Overview of Four Models and Its Role in Development," *International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1, Novelty Journals (2015): 15.
- ¹¹ Micah's Challenge or Network is a coalition of Christian development agencies, organizations, churches, and groups, mobilizing UK Christians against global poverty. Waweru explores a lot of its principles in her paper.
- ¹²Andrew F. Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).
- ¹³ Susan Rans, Hilary Altman, and Dan Erlander, Asset-Based Strategies for Faith Communities. Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 2002), 81.
- ¹⁴ Matthew C. Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 21.
- ¹⁵ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions: Leader's Guide* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 27.

A Blockbuster Story

Dale Hedstrom

Abstract: People have likened the COVID-19 pandemic to a "God-ordained wake-up call" for our nation. Awakenings require seeing the past with greater clarity. Winston Churchill once said, "Those who fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it." While the Church of our day finds itself in unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we can still learn from our past and be careful not to repeat our mistakes. We can also learn through the mistakes of others like Blockbuster Video, and with God's guidance find new ways to bring the eternal gospel to a changing world.

In our congregation we ask God to lead us to people in our community who are not comfortable in church, that is to say, have not found the peace and joy that Christians have found in faith in Jesus—and then to show us how to pour God's grace into their lives as we walk with them. While we hope that they will eventually start attending worship services, become a part of the community of believers, and receiving the Sacraments, our goal is not that they become churchgoers who help pay our bills. No, our hope is that they come to faith and begin to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

When we think about reaching out to people who have no faith in Jesus, we usually spend much time and effort thinking about the changes that outsiders will need to make, and this is an important consideration. Equally important, however, Christians need to think about the changes we need to make, both in our personal lives and in our congregational life in order to play our important role in the Holy Spirit's work of calling people to faith in Jesus through the gospel.

I recently came across a great story—a blockbuster of a story—that is also instructive. And it wasn't about who won the Super Bowl this year . . . or about the COVID-19 pandemic, though these are worthy of consideration. I'm thinking here of the blockbuster story of Blockbuster Video.



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Some readers will remember going to video rental stores like Blockbuster on Friday evenings and loading up on great movies to watch over the weekend. Beginning in 1985 with one VHS rental store, Blockbuster eventually grew into a multibillion-dollar, worldwide corporation that peaked in 2004 with over 9,000 stores in the United States and more than 84,000 employees worldwide.² Blockbuster began with amazing foresight into where society and technology were heading, and they capitalized on it. They were a phenomenal success.

But past success never guarantees future success. Society and technology are continually changing. Ongoing foresight is critical, which means constantly (and sometimes quickly) adapting the way in which mission and purpose are achieved.

We usually spend much time and effort thinking about the changes that outsiders will need to make. . . . Christians need to think about the changes we need to make, both in our personal lives and in our congregational life . . . to play our important role in the Holy Spirit's work of calling people to faith in Jesus through the gospel.

This is a challenge for any organization. The more drastic the changes, the harder it is to quickly adapt. The more unfamiliar the territory, the murkier foresight becomes. Think only of the many changes required in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. My favorite phrase has been, "We're just making this up as we go."

As society and circumstances change, organizations must adapt the ways in which they achieve their mission and purpose, but that requires clarity on mission and purpose—we will come back to that thought later.

There is an interesting twist in the Blockbuster story. As technology changed, DVDs replaced VHS tapes. In 2000, a fledgling company approached Blockbuster. They were struggling financially and asked Blockbuster to buy their startup business for \$50 million.³ This new company wanted to offer a unique service to the massive Blockbuster customer base: mailing DVDs to their customers, saving them a trip to the video rental store. The customers could keep the DVDs as long as they liked—with no late fees—but knowing they could not rent another video until they returned the first one.

Laughing at the startup company executives, Blockbuster refused the offer. Why? There were three major reasons. First, they lacked their usual foresight. Jim Porterfield, who ran one of Blockbuster's many franchises, described the corporate attitude this way: "So you're telling me that a through-the-mail system—the U.S. Postal Service—is going to eclipse my business? That's really hard to stomach."

This startup company had a hunch (we could even call it foresight) that people would prefer browsing movie rental choices online in the privacy of their homes instead of making a trip to the store. This method also eliminated the disappointment of finding an empty spot on the Blockbuster shelf. This new company also suspected that people wanted the convenience of getting those DVDs delivered right to their homes—without ever having to pay a late fee.

Blockbuster, however, was convinced that their customers would faithfully come to their video rental stores—stores conveniently located in high-traffic retail areas, with a friendly atmosphere and a movie-loving staff ready with recommendations,⁵ Blockbuster assumed their stores would continue to be the "go-to" source for movie rentals. However, their inability to see that changes in technology had made their service less convenient reveals that they had lost sight of how society was changing.

The second major error was that Blockbuster had lost sight of its mission and purpose. They thought they were in the brick-and-mortar movie rental business—they weren't. They were, in fact, in the much broader home entertainment business. At the time, Blockbuster was too busy adding more stores across the country to think about the bigger picture.⁶ But this startup company saw where home entertainment was headed and offered a service to meet that need.

The third main reason why Blockbuster refused to buy this startup company was that their organizational health prevented them. Blockbuster's business model depended on the late fees, which brought in as much as \$800 million a year.⁷

Actually, Blockbuster had never been in great financial shape, ending most years in the red. Some of those losses were due to changes beyond their control (e.g. when the movie industry changed its pricing structure, making it only slightly more expensive to purchase a DVD from Walmart or Target than to rent it from Blockbuster). But fixing the blame does not fix the problem. When the opportunity came to purchase the startup company, Blockbuster did not have the financial resources. Their lack of organizational health prevented them from adapting to a changing world.

The decision to pass up this deal proved to be one of their many fatal mistakes. Ten years later, in 2010, Blockbuster filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. And the financially strapped startup company? Well, they somehow survived. In fact, they posted over \$20 billion in revenue this past year. ¹⁰ Perhaps you have heard of them? This little startup is called Netflix.

It's interesting to note that after the decision to decline Netflix's proposal, Blockbuster realized their mistake and consequently initiated a number of sweeping improvements that included discontinuing late fees and creating an online platform. Franchises, however, resisted the changes and investors balked at the financial costs. ¹¹

Massive transformation of a mammoth corporation is a monumental task, ¹² and it was too late.

So, why am I telling you all this? Blockbuster's story parallels our own as the Christian Church in the United States.

Our numbers swelled in the 1940s and 1950s as we responded to the needs of wartime and peacetime society. But, just like Blockbuster, our past success does not guarantee future success. The Christian Church as an organizational structure is declining across our nation, leading many local churches to close their doors.

I suggest that this decline is taking place for the same three reasons that Blockbuster's did.

First, we lack foresight. I am not just talking about the new territory in which we find ourselves now with stay-at-home mandates and social distancing guidelines. I am referring to a problem that started generations ago—back in the 1950s when churches were at their peak. People back then never imagined how society would change in the 1960s and how rapidly it would decline morally and spiritually. They never envisioned courts removing the Ten Commandments and school-led prayers from public schools, or legalizing abortion and homosexual marriage. Gender confusion was

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simply not in their realm of societal possibility. Churches lacked foresight.

Second, churches in the 1950s lost a clear vision of their mission and purpose; they became more focused on meeting the felt needs of their existing members. Congregations wanted to be successful, which they thought meant building bigger facilities, establishing parochial schools, and increasing the number and variety of programs. While that seemed to be right at the time, they ended up making the Blockbuster mistake of getting distracted by a brick-and-mortar mindset that focuses on the means and not the mission and purpose.

Our purpose is to be salt in this world. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet" (Mt 5:13).

The taste of salt is distinct from the food it flavors; so we Christians are called to be noticeably different from the world around us. As society continues its moral decline, the gap between Christians and the surrounding culture should be widening. Christians should be known for their unwillingness to follow practices reflecting ungodly values in the culture that surrounds them. The increasing moral gap should be

unsettling, as the apostle Peter describes the situation: "they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you" (1 Pt 4:4).

But that clear moral contrast between Christians and non-Christians is lacking today. Despite over 70% of people in this nation self-identifying as "Christian," the first article in the February 2020 edition of the *Lutheran Witness* points out that "American Christians have the same rate of single parenthood as the religiously unaffiliated. The U.S. is also among the world leaders in other marks of family breakdown." This is but one example where there is little distinction between Christians and non-Christians; I will share more when I address the organizational health of Christian churches in our nation. Churches have lost their saltiness. We've lost sight of our purpose.

Our mission is to do good works that stand out amidst the darkness of the world as Jesus commanded us: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:14–16).

Jesus clearly states that our good deeds are to be shining forth in our world, drawing attention not to ourselves but to our Father in heaven. We are struggling to

follow that command. Whenever we care for our own by having fundraisers for congregation members with health expenses, or caring for elderly members by cleaning up their yards or running errands, this is part of what we are called to do as the Body of Christ.

But the challenge is that many Lutheran congregations have become detached from the unchurched community around them and are not even aware of the needs of those outside their fellowship, let alone involved in action to serve them. Those who take our Lord's instruction seriously, struggle to answer these

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questions and others: What, for example, is our church doing to care for the poor and underprivileged in our community? Do we even know their names?

Jesus reminds us that our purpose and mission is to use our lives, shaped by God's Word, to flood our world with good deeds which draw praise to our Father in heaven. Luther echoes this purpose in his explanation of the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer. "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His Holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity" (emphasis mine). ¹⁵

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As the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith in the work of Jesus Christ in our place, the natural result is greater obedience, as it says in the Book of Concord: "It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works and that

we must do all such good works as God has commanded, but we should do them for God's sake and not place our trust in them as if thereby to merit favor before God."¹⁶

Using our distinctively Christian lives to do good deeds and call people into God's kingdom—that is the task we have been given. We must not lose sight of this mission and purpose.

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The third way the church's story has often paralleled Blockbuster's concerns the relationship with our "customers." Blockbuster was using an unhealthy business model that assumed that customer loyalty would remain strong and which expected them to make mistakes and profited from those mistakes (i.e. the late fees) of those same customers. Greg Satell said Blockbuster's "Achilles' heel" was profitability dependent on "penalizing its patrons." In the same way, churches have become organizationally sick.

All over the country it is clear that congregations made assumptions about their futures that now are unlikely. Success was measured by the ability to build bigger facilities and still pay our bills, all the while assuming organizational loyalty would keep our doors open. It was assumed that the next generation would remain loyal to the Church. It was assumed that the Word and sacramental ministry of the church was understood and valued so deeply. Of course, parents would want to baptize their children and bring them to Sunday School! Of course, they would keep coming every Sunday and contributing money into the offering plate! But they didn't, which undermined congregational longevity and vitality.

Second, churches built their success, like Blockbuster, on the mistakes of their customers. Five hundred years ago, Luther taught in the Small Catechism: "the head of the family should teach it [the Catechism] in a simple way to his household." For this to work, the church would have to equip parents for their task of raising Christian children. But since parents were struggling with that task, the church thought it could help our "customers" by offering to do the teaching for them in Sunday School, confirmation, and Bible classes. Unfortunately, the Christian faith is not usually adopted as deeply and effectively when it is taught and learned in isolation outside the family circle.

Churches presumed that more members and more programs would make our congregations more successful. But Jesus defined success quite differently. Recall when Jesus said this: "Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and

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teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:19).

Did you catch that? Jesus just told us that success as the Church—what makes us great—is practicing and teaching the commands of Jesus. A healthy church is made up of healthy individuals who practice and teach God's Word. When people call themselves Christians and yet starve themselves with a minimal diet of Scripture—they become sick. Disease and dysfunction will follow.

How else can we explain the fact that some Christians are not bothered by profanity or living together before marriage? By disregarding the authority of the commands of Jesus, we lose sight of the fear of the Lord and find plenty of other things to do on Sunday mornings. We get lured into spending our money on the material goods and entertainment which this world offers. As a whole, Christian churches in our nation are organizationally unhealthy because many individual members are spiritually unhealthy.

So, are we doomed like Blockbuster? Thankfully, no. The true Church is built by Jesus Christ Himself. He promises that His Church will advance and that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). And perhaps Jesus is using, in a way that only He can do, the drastic changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic to build His Church.

Since Jesus still uses people to build His Church, let us give careful consideration to what the true Church looks like. Jesus told us that the Church ("the kingdom of heaven") belongs to those who are "poor in spirit"—those who humbly recognize that they are weak, ignorant, and easily led astray, who have nothing to offer God. These are the ones who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" who "shall be satisfied" as Jesus promised (see Mt.5").

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"shall be satisfied" as Jesus promised (see Mt 5:3, 6).

Jesus also told us in Matthew 5:17 that He came to earth to fulfill God's Law—perfectly. Those who hunger for—and trust in—the perfect righteousness of Jesus receive His righteousness as a gift: a "righteousness [that] exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees," which allows them to "enter the kingdom of heaven" (see Mt 5:20). This is the true Church.

The Augsburg Confession tells us that the True Church is that which gathers around Word and Sacrament—where the gospel "is taught purely and the Sacraments are administered rightly." But what does that look like? And how do we do that during a pandemic like COVID-19 with social distancing guidelines and restrictions

on how large a group gathering can be? Our fundamental question is: "Where do we go from here?"

Part of the answer lies in growing healthier as an organization—which in turn means becoming spiritually healthier as individuals. Trusting that the righteousness of Jesus has fulfilled the Law, we first gladly gather around the Sacraments and the pure Word. We seek to become great in the kingdom of heaven by following the instruction of our Lord: learning, practicing, and teaching the commands of God.

With social distancing guidelines and group size restrictions, my two congregations have taken on the challenge of how to continue Word and Sacrament ministry. Online streaming began immediately, with almost weekly updates to our technology in order to produce a higher-quality worship experience for people watching online. The leaders also came up with a way to do "drive-by" Communion in a safe, hygienic manner. It has been very well-received by congregational members.

While these changes are positive and necessary given our current set of circumstances, they do nothing to correct the problems I identified above. Our "customers" must reclaim their calling to learn the Word of God. Every Christian needs to study the Bible—on their own, as a family (with parents teaching their children), as well as in church (whether that takes the form of in-person gatherings or online weekly Sunday School and Bible classes). No exceptions. With these stay-athome restrictions, I encourage parents and grandparents to step into the role of being the primary faith-teacher for their children and grandchildren.

Furthermore, we aggressively reassert the authority of Scripture over every area of life. The very reason we have become spiritually unhealthy is that we capitulated to society's "demands" to relax the clear moral teachings of Scripture. Mary Eberstadt said it this way: "The churches that did the most to loosen up the traditional moral code of Christianity are the same churches that have ended up suffering the most for that effort—demographically, financially, morality-wise, and otherwise." ²⁰

And so, those in the Church who are called to preach or teach must become more application oriented. We should not simply give a law–gospel exposition of a text but explore ways to apply it to daily life and challenge people to bring this before God in prayerful consideration. Given the morally lax mindset in which some of our hearers are approaching Scripture, we must carefully "walk the line" of avoiding a "Bible-thumping" demeanor while at the same time maintaining the unyielding authority of God and His Word over our lives.

This leads us to our second responsibility: diligently praying that God would deepen the work of life transformation through His Word and Spirit—the "good work" which He already began in us when He gave us the gift of faith (see Phil 1:6).

This transformation comes through the renewing of our mind as we intentionally and daily place ourselves on the altar as living sacrifices (see Rom 12:1–2). It requires

us to "make every effort to supplement [our] faith with virtue" so that we do not become "ineffective or unfruitful" in our knowledge of God (see 2 Pt 1:5, 8). We work diligently, not because we are hoping to qualify for heaven; rather, trusting that we are covered by the perfect righteousness of Jesus, we "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" as God works in us (see Phil 2:12–13).

In this way, our fruitful choices become saltier and more distinct from the moral choices of the surrounding culture. This will affect every aspect of life: the language we use, our attitudes toward possessions and money, our views of living together before marriage, our involvement in sports, and our entertainment choices. We will become noticeably different people. All this is driven and empowered by the Holy Spirit as the Word of Christ dwells richly in us (see Col 3:16).

This, in turn, drives us to a third duty: begging God to show us how to use good deeds to shine our light into the unchurched world. Since March of this year, we have found ourselves in very unfamiliar territory. Now, more than ever, we seek God's wisdom and guidance about the best way to flood our world with the light of Christ through good deeds. We continually pray for improved foresight, which leads us to continually adapt the means by which we achieve our mission and purpose.

Both congregations I serve are seeking to let the light of Christ shine brighter in our community. One congregation had planned to offer a free monthly community dinner in our town at the local VFW. Area churches, and civic and community organizations would be invited to join in serving and providing meals, but representatives from our congregation would be there each time with the purpose of meeting people in the community and building relationships with them. Those plans are on hold as we anticipate the lifting of restrictions. If the restrictions are not soon lifted, we will prayerfully seek other means such as offering free "drive-by" meals.

The other congregation I serve had planned to organize a free community sweet corn and brat feed at the local city park later in the summer. A fall weekend campout at a local state park was also in the works—to enjoy fellowship together as a church, but also to invite unchurched friends to come along—building relationships as we enjoy together the beauty of God's creation. We will continue to seek God's direction.

Transformation takes time. To become organizationally healthy, we need to become spiritually healthy as individual parishioners. Changing the culture of congregations is like steering a large ship with a small rudder. Altering the trajectory of the churches in our nation will take time, because massive transformation of mammoth organizations is a monumental task.

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Our Lord Jesus will build His Church. As His people strive to practice and teach the Word of God, focusing on the right mission and purpose and adapting their ways, the gates of hell will not prevail. May God grant this to us all.

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Too Small a Thing

Sermon by Joel Biermann

Isaiah 49:1–7 Epiphany Lutheran Church, St. Louis January 19, 2020

The good news is that there is still time. It may be the third week of the new year, but it's not too late, not yet, you can still get started on that resolution for the new year—or maybe you can even get around actually to making one. For weeks the gyms and health clubs have been blitzing us with their great deals thoughtfully timed and designed to make it easy for those motivated by the arrival of a new year to get after those 2020 resolutions. Yes, we are now into the "last chance" extension period—but there is still a sliver of time. You can still do it. Or, maybe not.

Personally, I'm not much of a new year's resolution person. I can't remember ever having made one. You can chalk it up as one of the negative-tilting aspects of my phlegmatic personality if you like, but I have a hard time grasping the attraction of making resolutions. Even to come up with a resolution requires some degree of reflection and then effort and eventually, if it is kept, change—all of which implies that there is something wrong with the way things are. No, the making of resolutions has never held much attraction for me. But, that's not true for everyone, of course—that's evident by the influx of new people awkwardly competing for the exercise equipment at the gym. Apparently, the advertising and great deals were not in vain. I can only say, "Good job, keep it up . . . just don't stay standing on that leg lift contraption while you rest between sets—others are waiting."

Actually, this whole new year's resolution thing does raise an important question—one that often plagues me, and one that I'm not eager to confront . . . simply



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because it has the potential to upend so many of the settled conclusions that comfortably guide my life. The important question is simply this: when does being content become being complacent? Contentment, of course, is a wonderful gift and a virtue that is repeatedly encouraged in the pages of Scripture. "Godliness with contentment is great gain;" what more needs to be said? Learning to be content with what God gives is a critical aspect of Christian maturity. Discontentment is the breeding ground for a long list of very nasty problems—including a few of the seven deadly sins. Greed, envy, and lust are all rooted in a failure to learn to be content. So, it's understandable that we elevate the virtue of contentment.

But, when does contentment extend too far and give birth to its own nasty sins like apathy, and self-centeredness and even the deadly sins of sloth and pride? When does being content stop and being complacent start? That's not an easy question, is it? And if we are honest, we are forced to admit that it's all too convenient to shake off a challenge to do something new, chart a different course, or strive for something more all in the name of being content with what you already have. How many extraordinary things were never accomplished simply because the one who was appointed to do them, being content with what he had, never got started? How many bad habits were never challenged, virtues never attained, and lives not changed for the good because someone who had learned to be content had also learned to be complacent?

You can see, then, how the annual emphasis on new year's resolutions has a way of highlighting this old question for me. Well, and so does today's Old Testament Reading. It's right there in verse six. Isaiah gives us a powerful prophecy of the work that the Messiah, that Jesus would one day accomplish. From the womb, God calls His Servant, His chosen Messiah, to do the special work that has been prepared: the Servant is going to bring back to God and honor exiled Jacob and seek out and restore the lost people of Israel. God's chosen people would be saved and glorified—all through the work of the Servant. Pretty heady stuff—there's plenty in the Messiah's job description to celebrate and savor.

But, apparently, it's not enough. No, not by a long shot. "It is too small a thing," says God, "too light, too insignificant, too flimsy a thing for my chosen servant to save only Jacob and Israel. No, His work is bigger than that. His salvation is going to stretch out to every single nation and reach to the very ends of the earth." Wow. That's ambitious. And so, the challenge becomes acute. If God is not content with anything less for His Chosen Servant than worldwide salvation, does God have similar grand aspirations for His Church? If He sets an extraordinary goal for His Messiah, then what does He ambitiously expect from all those who follow that Messiah? It seems that there is no room here for contentment with modest achievements, realistic goals, or manageable job descriptions. "It's too small a thing!" would seem to be the rallying cry that God would have on our lips.

So, maybe we need to take this to heart, embrace the challenge, and take up the shout. "It's too small a thing!" It's too small a thing that a church built to seat four hundred people can lure scarcely eighty on any given Sunday. It's too small a thing that the faithful who gather in God's church hear and know God's truth while the neighborhood just outside the doors still languishes in confusion and death. It's too small a thing that my own immediate family is carefully nurtured and formed in the faith when other families lurch about aimlessly and breed futility. It's too small a thing that our little synod carefully teaches God's truth while so many Christian groups in America are overrun with accommodation and compromise to a godless culture. It's too small a thing that in one small corner of the church the mission is clear and the doctrine is solid. It's too small a thing that neighbors can exercise their dogs and their children on our campus without ever encountering God's gospel. It's too small a thing that we can meet the physical needs of neighbors but fail to bring them the wonderful good news of forgiveness and grace in Christ's gospel. It's too small a thing that only a handful of the world's people actually know God's grace and faithfully follow Christ. It's too small a thing that your spiritual life is sanctified while the rest of your life is normed by your peers on social media. It's too small a thing that you are content with a narrow, denominational, parochial, and spiritual salvation when Christ came to save the whole creation.

It's too small a thing! It's too small a thing! Even a status quo phlegmatic like myself can admit the thrill and inspiration of that cheer. It tugs at me like gravity. It's too small a thing! . . . but, is it? Is it true? Is it really too small a thing when God's people are doing what God has given them to do even if that thing appears unimportant, inconsequential, and is all but unnoticed? Is it really too small? Is it too small a thing when the ninety-year-old whose life has contracted down to the space of an industrial bed daily prays for the pastor who in duty to his vocation does the even smaller thing of bringing her the Lord's Supper once a month? Is it too small a thing? Actually, today's Gospel Reading allows us to move out of theoretical speculation and well beyond merely rhetorical questions. The reading from John brings us into concrete reality and actually gives us a definitive answer to these questions—it even answers that nagging question about when being rightly content becomes being wrongly complacent.

In the story from John's Gospel we hear about Jesus' very first disciples. Andrew and another nameless follower of John were the first two to follow Jesus. After that initial meeting and a day spent with Jesus, Andrew's next move was to find his brother Simon and bring him along to meet Jesus. And the rest, of course, is history. Simon became Peter, the Rock and the spokesman and the leader, and Andrew . . . well, Andrew faded into the background—not even included as one of the inner circle of the twelve disciples. Was it too small a thing when Andrew brought Peter to Jesus? Was it too small a thing when later, in the last week of Jesus' ministry, Andrew brought

some earnest Greeks to meet Jesus? Did Andrew lack ambition? Was he aiming too low? Did Andrew become complacent while Peter kept striving for more? No, there's nothing in the Bible or church history to suggest such a notion. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Andrew simply did what he had been given to do, and God used that faithful work for His purpose. And that's the key. To do well what God has given you to do is exactly what it means to be content; and whether or not the thing you do is too small a thing . . . well, that's entirely up to God to decide. I don't know what Andrew thought about his place in God's plan or whether he ever felt any dissatisfaction with his small role of bringing another person who would end up with a lead role. I don't know if Andrew ever felt like his part was too small a thing—but I know for sure that it wasn't. What Andrew did was not too small a thing, because what Andrew did was the thing God had given him to do. That's never too small a thing.

It's fine to ask the question, in fact it's probably a good idea to ask pointedly about whether what you're doing is *all* that God has given you to do. There is always a temptation to settle and to aim low. It's good to aim high. It's very good to seek ways that allow you to use the gifts and resources that you have been given. It might even be all right to pray for greater opportunity to serve or use your gifts. But, until *God* gives you a bigger thing to do, you can be content to do the thing you've already been given to do. Let God be the one to decide it's time for a new resolution. Let God be the one to resolve that what you're doing is too small a thing and that He wants from you more than what you're doing. That's *God's* call.

Listen for that call—and be careful: don't let complacency keep you from hearing when God has resolved that what you're doing is too small a thing and it's time for a new thing or another thing that needs to be done. God makes the resolutions; you make every effort to fulfill them. Keep listening . . . and keep doing what you've already been given to do. That thing God has given you to do is never too small a thing; because God uses that thing for His purpose—to deliver His grace in a certain place. That's how it is with God's plan. When grace comes, it cannot ever be too small a thing. For the one who is touched by God's grace, the thing that brings that grace cannot possibly be too small a thing. Whatever extraordinary things are yet to unfold in the continuing work of God's chosen Messiah—and there are some incredible things still to come—I'm grateful that it was not too small a thing for His grace to come even to me. And be certain of this, neither was it too small a thing when God's perfect grace came even to you. Amen.

Review

A MULTITUDE OF ALL PEOPLES: *Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity*. By Vince L. Bantu. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2020. 240 pages. Paperback \$35.00. Kindle \$16.99 (from Amazon.com).

It happened. Just like Jesus said it would.

The Holy Spirit arrived, and nothing would stop what Pentecost had displayed. The Spirit moved as an unstoppable wind and fire (Acts 2:1–4), empowering the disciples to preach in every language present in Jerusalem at that time.

From there, the Word of the Lord Jesus spread. Peter preached. The other Apostles preached. Many continued to preach. Peoples and nations received the Gospel. This is the nature of the Spirit and the Word—unstoppable. And as Jesus said it would be, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:7–8 NIV).

The Book of Acts shows that this expansion was evident as believers joined together—men and women hearing Jesus' story, communing and praying constantly together. They became unstoppable, as described in Acts 2, after the whirlwind events at Pentecost. We are told over and over again that the believers came together, having everything in common and giving to those who had need.

Then came Acts 6. A disagreement broke out between two different groups of Jews: the Hebraic Jews and the Hellenistic Jews. Gossip. Dissension. Jealousy. Marginalization. All of these things came as a result of the Hebraic Jews deciding that the Hellenistic Jews were different. Though they were Christ-followers, and even Jews, the Hebraic Jews drew a line and put the Hellenistic Jews outside of it, leaving their definition of *together* to include only those who looked, thought, and acted exactly like they did.

How often do we, whether intentionally or unintentionally, find ourselves creating or believing lies about certain groups of people? Casting ourselves as better or more deserving than someone else simply because we come from a certain cultural, economic, or religious background? Seeing ourselves as better than the rest of the world?

It's almost natural to set rules and draw lines to build ourselves up and/or protect ourselves from something different or unknown. It's a sin called pride that Scripture constantly reminds us to keep in check. But the radical vision God had for creation was that *together* would mean all of us—every tribe, every tongue, and every nation.

The restorative ending to this story gives us something to hope for. Under the leadership of the disciples, the Hebraic Jews and the Hellenistic Jews chose a group of leaders to oversee the fair distribution of food to the widows. But the real miracle? Together, they selected a group of leaders made up entirely of Hellenistic Jews. Together, they saw a need to give a marginalized group greater power and a greater voice. And together, they spread God's love further as the newly empowered Hellenistic Jews began teaching in Jerusalem and taking the message of Christ to the Gentile communities from which they came.

This is the Church we belong to and the Church we get to keep serving—a church filled with uncountable differences that move us together in Jesus' name, bringing a message of forgiveness, peace, and hope to all who will hear it.

But maybe, just maybe, we have fallen into the trap of "tip-toeing" or "selective stone-stepping" through the history of Christianity to arrive to our present day's context in our limited lifetime. A limited view of history, for many, is just that, it begins with "me without a historical global context." Maybe we are barely conscious of the existence of the Church.

The Christian Church has almost two thousand years of history and it cannot be reduced to some significant events in Europe in the sixteenth century that somehow "leaped" into what we know as the "Christian Church" of the Western cultures, more specifically on the American continent.

There are people who give the impression with their comments that the Christian Church came into existence when they became active participants in their own congregation, and from this point on, somehow had the responsibility to "take the Gospel to others around the world." It seems that the knowledge of church history is almost nonexistent, or perhaps it is simply a small collection of data on some outstanding events in history, rather than a mighty process to "build onto what has already been built."

In A Multitude of All Peoples, Vince Bantu argues for a very different view: Christianity is not in the process of becoming global. It has always been global.

Bantu gives us a condensed ecclesiastical history on the expansion of the Christian faith. Although it does not offer depth, it does provide a summary of important events and characters in the history of the Church of Christ. This book offers an excellent opportunity for theology students to explore a global overview of early centuries of ecclesiastical history in order to encourage them to delve into this fascinating discipline.

Bantu surveys the geographic range of the early church's history, revealing an alternate, more complete narrative to that of Christianity as a product of the Western world. He begins by investigating the historical roots of the Western cultural captivity of the church, from the conversion of Constantine to the rise of European Christian

empires. He then shifts focus to the too-often-forgotten concurrent development of diverse expressions of Christianity across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

In the process, Bantu removes obstacles to contemporary missiological efforts. Focusing on the necessity for contextualization and indigenous leadership in effective Christian mission, he draws out some lessons for intercultural communication of the Gospel. Very briefly, here are four lessons, relating church history to mission and missiology:

- a. Be responsible to "recount and validate the cultural roots of global Christianity" without relying solely on the traditional Western view of missions. All of us can and must learn from each other.
- b. Respect, teach, and promote the "missiological primacy of contextualized theology." This means we prioritize theological formation in the context of the cultures to be reached by developing an intentional cultural sensitivity and awareness of the realities of those with whom the Gospel is being communicated.
- c. Have "strategic indigeneity." This means we aim primarily to enable and empower indigenous leaders within their own communities, making their presence and position viable, worthy, and legitimate.
- d. Treat missions as a "cultural sanctification" process. Evangelism is not implanting the Gospel wrapped in outside cultural trappings, but is translating the Gospel appropriately into a vernacular idiom. Evangelism respects the prevailing cultural framework, both embracing and transforming culture, while sustaining intercultural partnerships.

Bantu insists that healing the wounds of racism, imperialism, and colonialism will only be possible with renewed attention to the marginalized voices of the historic global church. The full story of early Christianity makes clear that, as the apostle Peter said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:34–36 NIV).

Our challenge today, as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and missiologists, is to continue to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus with boldness, love, and humility, embracing the challenge of joining the nations and of making disciples of all peoples.

Marcos Kempff

Lutheran Mission Matters Call for Papers: Nov. 2020

Dear Colleagues in Mission,

The editorial committee of *Lutheran Mission Matters* (*LMM*), formerly *Missio Apostolica*, invites you to submit an article for the November 2020 issue on the chosen theme, "Theological Education in a Missionary Age." This topic has been widely discussed, even debated, for several decades especially since the 1970s with the advent of the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) movement. Seminal essays such as Berquist's and Manickam's in *The Crisis of Dependency in Third World Ministries* and Harvie Conn's "Theological Education and the Search for Excellence" raised several critical questions that still invite thoughtful responses that reflect sound educational, contextual, and biblical understanding. Theological education in a missionary age needs also to be a global conversation, as we no longer serve in the missional or educational paradigm of the "west reaches the rest."

In this missionary age, let the global church and missionary community contribute to the theological education conversations in the "west" as its churches and seminaries face profound challenges posed by "post-Christendom" realities. Residential seminaries are experiencing reductions in students preparing for pastoral ministry; many have closed or consolidated. Seminary graduates, seemingly well equipped for parish ministry, express woeful inadequacy in serving the ever-increasing mission field surrounding their congregations. Can theological education models that have proven highly effective on once and current foreign mission fields shed helpful and hopeful light on these challenges?

Please share with us your interest in contributing to this issue at rajv@csl.edu. Articles are generally 3,000 words; shorter or longer articles, however, will be considered. *LMM* is a peer-reviewed journal, published twice yearly by the Lutheran Society for Missiology (LSFM). LSFM was founded over 28 years ago with the purpose of providing a Lutheran perspective in the theological and practical working out of Christ's mission to and in the world. Our publication is indexed in the Atla Religion Database on the EBSCO platform, along with the full text of the articles. *LMM* articles are available also under the "Publications" tab on the Society's web page at lsfm.global.

Our Lord's words "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" remain as true today as when He first voiced His heart's concern for the lost and broken world. They call us to pray that He raise up faithful laborers for His harvest and that we be faithful in equipping them in every way possible to proclaim His saving Gospel to the nations. Our Lord's mission has inspired and shaped Lutheran theological education in Europe, the Americas, and around the world. We have much to share with and much to learn from the larger Christian community. Please join us.

Sincerely, Dr. Victor Raj, Editor

Submission Guidelines

We welcome your participation in writing for *Lutheran Mission Matters*. Please observe the following guidelines for submission of manuscripts.

Lutheran Mission Matters publishes studies of missiological issues under discussion in Christian circles across the world. Exegetical, biblical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the apostolic mission of the church are explored in these pages. (See the mission statement below.) While issues often focus on a theme, the editorial committee encourages and appreciates submissions of articles on any missiological topic.

Contributors can familiarize themselves with previous issues of *Missio Apostolica* and *Lutheran Mission Matters* at the Lutheran Society for Missiology's website (https://lsfm.global). Click on Our Journals to view PDFs of previous issues.

Book reviews: LSFM also welcomes book reviews. Submit reviews of no more than 500 words. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto (lsfmissiology@gmail.com) if interested in writing a review.

Mission Statement

Lutheran Mission Matters serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally.

Formatting and Style

Please consult and use *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition for endnotes. See basic examples below and/or consult the "Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide" (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

- ¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 243–255.
- ² Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 184–186.
- ³ Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," *Missiology, An International Review* 34 (2006): 431–450.

References to Luther's works must identify the original document and the year of its publication. Please use the following model.

⁴ Martin Luther, Ninety-five Theses (1517) in *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 31:17–34.

Quotations of or allusions to specific texts in the Lutheran Confessional writings must be documented. The use of modern translations of the *Book of Concord* is encouraged. Please use the following model.

⁵ Augsburg Confession V (Concerning the Office of Preaching) in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran* Church, ed. R. Kolb, T. J. Wengert, C. P. Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 40.

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 a sentence, as appropriate.

Spelling should follow the latest edition of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Words in languages other than English should be italicized.

Preparation and Submission

Length: Concise, clear articles are preferred. Manuscripts should not be more than 3,000–4,000 words although longer pieces may be arranged by the editor.

Content: Lutheran Mission Matters is committed to addressing the academic community as well as pastors and people throughout the church and involving them in the theology and practice of mission. Use of terms or phrases in languages other than the language of the article itself is discouraged. The use of complex and long sentences is discouraged. Attention should be paid to paragraphing so that the article is easy to follow and appears inviting on the page.

Use of call-outs: *Lutheran Mission Matters* frequently uses call-outs to break up blocks of text on a page and to emphasize important points being made in the article. The author is invited to use Word's Text Highlight Color to suggest words or phrase that may be included in a call-out. The final decision will be made by the editor.

Format: Please submit articles in single spaced Times New Roman 10-point font with 0.25" paragraph indents.

Submission: Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Professor Victor Raj, rajv@csl.edu. Submission of a manuscript assumes that all material has been carefully read and properly noted and attributed. The author thereby assumes responsibility for any necessary legal permission for materials cited in the article. Articles that are inadequately documented will be returned for complete documentation. If the article has been previously published or presented in a public forum, please inform the editor at the time the article is submitted.

Review: 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. Before publication, articles are copy edited for style and clarity, as necessary. Major alterations will be made available to the author for review.

Additional Submission Information

Bio: Authors should provide, along with their submissions, an autobiographical description. Please write 2–3 sentences introducing yourself. Please include your title(s) you would like LMM to use, the form of your name you want to be known as. Tell your present position and/or your education or experience that qualifies you to write the article. If you have a head-shot photo that you would like to provide, we will try to use it. Please provide the email address at which a respondent could reach you.

Abstract: Please provide up to a one-hundred-word abstract of your article. The abstract will serve as a first paragraph to provide the reader with the basic intent and content of the article.

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Submission Checklist:

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