

# ***Lutheran Mission Matters***

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# Trends In Missiology Today

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**Abstract:** Dr. Bunkowske originally presented this paper at the inaugural banquet of the Lutheran Society for Missiology in Fort Wayne on October 20, 1992. In it, he discusses twelve trends that he sees as changes in the theology and practice of missions. He explains how changes in the cultures of countries that send missionaries (The West) and in countries that receive missionaries require a new way of thinking and acting. The world is no longer so unbalanced that the Western world can think of itself as the giver of Christian faith, and the rest of the world indebted to the churches of the West for this gift. Rather, it is necessary to recognize that the young churches meet the historic churches as equals, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Together, they share the same task and search for ways to communicate the Good News of Jesus with the world.

## *Introduction:*

Today, Tuesday, October 20, 1992, marks the inaugural banquet of the LSFM (Lutheran Society for Missiology). This banquet was scheduled to commemorate the first anniversary of the birth of the LSFM. This birthing took place at Concordia Theological Seminary on Friday, October 25, 1991, with 15 people in attendance.

Much has happened during this first year. The Society has been organized with officers in place and membership increasing day by day. Tomorrow morning, God willing, the Articles of Incorporation including the constitution and bylaws of the Lutheran Society for Missiology will be discussed and formally approved.

Soon after this meeting we look forward to receiving the first issue of the LSFM journal. Like most new babies, it will almost certainly be unpretentious at its first viewing, but that will not bother us. Rather we will be filled with joy in the knowledge that a new missiological child has been born. Once birth has taken place we can, with great delight, follow the growth and development that will quite naturally occur. Particularly as each of us is willing to make our contributions in terms of time and articles.

Hats off to the publication committee and to the editor who will have the privilege and the rare responsibility of getting our LSFM journal rolling.

Now to the task at hand, “Trends in Missiology Today” as we together move into the second year of the LSFM’s history.

*Trend One:*

**A dawning realization that Christians should no longer be divided up into “sent ones” and “receiving ones,” but rather that all Christians are “sent ones” (missionaries).**

As late as 1960 when Bernice and I left St. Louis for Africa, there was a pervasive idea afloat that all cultures should be categorized on an evolutionary scale, with some at or near the top and others lower down. This led to the idea that it was the singular duty of the Christians in the “developed” cultures with a “civilized” and “technologically advanced” way of life to share the “gospel” (often interpreted primarily in terms of western lifestyle) with the “primitive pagans” in the rest of the world.

God used sickness in Africa to clear my mind very quickly of this totally biased way of thinking. It happened like this. I was down with hepatitis, covered with depressions, doubt, fear and low self-esteem. God did not send me a fellow missionary from America, but a brother African Christian. The Holy Spirit had worked faith in his heart not even a year before on the basis of God’s Word spoken through me.

This man with but six years of formal schooling came into my room. I thought of him as a very young and immature Christian. Yet there he was ministering to me by turning to relevant passage after passage in all parts of the Bible. His way of prayer was straightforward, Trinitarian and in the name of Jesus Christ. It was directed to the throne of Grace as though God were right there in touching distance.

God’s ministration through Lawrence Ajegi on that day did wonders for my depression, doubt, fear and feelings of worthlessness. At that moment I realized that Lawrence Ajegi was not a “primitive pagan” or even a “primitive new believer.” He was the man whom God had sent to me with healing.

Then and there I realized that Lawrence had marvelously and almost miraculously come to know intimately many parts of the Scripture, in fact all of the Scripture that was needed to be a sent one, a Christian missionary. And that is what he has been ever since that day when God sent him out on one of his first missionary assignments, to a sinful and sick missionary.

I realize now as I stand before you that on that day in 1961, after only nine months of Christian faith, Lawrence Ajegi by the Grace and Spirit of God knew more of the Word of God and how to apply it meaningfully in the lives of others than many pastors here in the USA who have had a full seminary training.

Today there is no east or west, no geographic area that has exclusive rights to witness and Gospel outreach. Rather, every Christian is a “sent one” because every Christian has received God’s free grace and as a functioning member of His body has been commissioned with the privilege and power to pass it on to others.

The fact of the matter is that missionaries from everywhere are crisscrossing the globe to bring the good news of God's Grace in Jesus Christ to others. These missionaries are not just people from the English-speaking or European world, but they, in many cases, are people from a variety of cultures and social classes. Many are Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America who speak four or five different languages, of which English may well be fourth or fifth or not there at all.

In fact, the increase of non-European missionaries is phenomenal. Between 1980 and 1991 the following missionary increase from so-called third world countries is as follows:

- |                  |                      |                 |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Asia          | a 272% increase from | 6,048 to 22,497 |
| 2. Africa        | a 236% increase from | 5,689 to 19,097 |
| 3. Latin America | a 169% increase from | 1,127 to 3,026  |
| 4. Oceania       | a 63% increase from  | 374 to 610      |

(Source: *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, April 1991)

By comparison, the increase in North American missionaries for the 16-year period between 1975 and 1992 (sic) is as follows:

- |                  |                     |                  |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 5. North America | a 17% increase from | 57,212 to 66,840 |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------|

(Source: *AD 2000 Global Monitor*, September 1991)

*Trend Two:*

**A return to the Biblical reality that all moments, places, words and actions count in mission witness.**

The traditional approach in the West assumes a systematic separation between sacred and secular time and location and also between private and public time and location. This way of organizing reality has also deeply affected Christianity. In the past and, unfortunately, even often today western Christians have quite naturally left the Sunday morning worship service to kick off their "Christian shoes" and put on "private and secular sneakers" which, by definition, rule out Christian witness.

Today things are changing. Christians, particularly many "boomers," are saying that Christianity needs to be all or nothing. That, at least for Christianity, time and place cannot be divided. That Christianity is either all the time and in every place or it is hypocrisy. That whatever a Christian does or says is Christian witness. It may be good, faulty or bad, but it is witness. It does count, and it either leads people to Christ or away from Him. In fact, actions often do speak louder, or at least as loudly as words when they are naturally linked to appropriate Gospel talk.

Much of non-western Christianity heartily agrees that all moments, places and actions count in mission witness. As this trend catches on in the West we would do well to look to our non-western brothers and sisters for positive models and advice as to how this kind of mission witness is done.

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*Trend Three:*

**A growing movement toward energizing the "priesthood of all believers" for dynamic, while you live and work, mission outreach.**

Two decades ago there were fewer than thirty "closed countries" in the world, that is, countries in which it was impossible to be a full-time professional missionary. Today that figure has risen to between 70 and 80 countries containing well more than 50 percent of the world's lost souls.

What are we to do?

What is needed in many places today is not more and more professional Christians (full-time missionaries), but more and more Christian professionals. Those are Christian people who know God's Word well and are committed to a natural, witness-while-you-work, approach to Christian witness and outreach. People who have made it their business to get prepared for this life in missions by equipping themselves with the professional skills that are marketable in the closed and closing countries of this world.

Sometimes we call such missionaries "Christian professionals," "tentmakers," or "bi-vocational workers." People like St. Paul or Priscilla and Aquilla and the thousands of other witnesses who, by the way, lived in a world that was for the most part totally "closed." A world in which during the first three hundred years after Christ professional Christians (full-time missionaries) had short life spans. Even bi-vocational witnesses found life very unpleasant especially as they placed their witnessing vocation well forward in their life priorities. They did, however, tend to survive especially if they were ready to move when things got too difficult.

*Trend Four:*

**The "a-ha experience" of recognizing mission as unified and holistic Good News communication instead of defining it as a compartmentalized tug of war between "evangelism gospel" and "social gospel."**

Jesus went about doing good as well as preaching and teaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He mandated the disciples to heal in His name, and He commissioned them to make more disciples, to baptize and to teach the people to obey everything that He had taught. He said that "in His name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed to all peoples of the world beginning from Jerusalem." Jesus' approach was to heal both spirit and body together by administering the forgiveness of sins and raising people from their physical infirmities.

During the segmented, compartmentalized, atomized, specialized period in the West it has been usual to choose up sides and decide to do missions either as "social

gospel” or as “evangelism gospel.” It has also been fashionable to condemn those who took the other part and even to look with suspicion on those who wanted to follow Christ’s example and put it all back together again.

Now, at least in some quarters, there is a move to try again to take the inspired and inerrant, revealed Word of God in the Bible absolutely seriously by doing mission holistically, to treasure the Scripture not only for right doctrine, but also for right life and mission outreach. This means rightly dividing Law and Gospel so that all people in their terrible inherited sinful condition can be found and saved.

At the same time it also means that an important part of rightly communicating Law and Gospel has to do with God touching people in all of their parts and doing that all at once by ministering to them in body, mind and spirit. Mission is God’s chosen method of doing that through us, not just part of it but all of it. We are the means for bringing His full “means of grace” to human beings in all their parts for forgiveness of sins, salvation and life (now and forever).

*Trend Five:*

**A growing understanding that parochialism and traditionalism must give way to a realistic understanding of rapid cultural change and diversity if meaningful mission communication is going to happen today.**

Before World War II most people died in the same community in which they were born. That community was the lens through which they understood the entire world. Since World War II many people, especially in the western world, have come to understand themselves in global terms, including some 7,000-plus languages and some 23,000-plus people groups (cultures). A veritable explosion of facts and figures about this globalized diversity has made it impossible to “know it all” even in any one field of study.

The spooky factor is that things do not remain constant. Languages and cultures are constantly changing and at an increasing speed. Some years ago linguists spoke about dating the time when two languages separated from each other on the basis of a supposed “constant rate of change” factor. Now linguists say little about that part of language study because they know that there is no “constant rate of change” factor against which such measurements can be made. The same thing is true in culture change.

At times, like in our present century, change takes off at what seems to be an impossible rate. In such times people are faced with the hard reality of accepting almost unacceptable cultural diversity and change. For decades people have expected the rate of change to slow down or to be reversed, but that has not happened. There is no going back.

There is a trend in Biblical Christianity today to keep a sharp focus on the

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Scriptural message, but at the same time to give up parochialism and traditionalism and accept the cultural change and diversity that God in His divine sovereignty has allowed. This opens the way for Good News communication to many who are ready to receive God's message as long as they are not forced to accept too much "archaic cultural baggage" with it.

*Trend Six:*

**The realization that Spiritual and Biblical formation is basic if mission outreach is to produce productive growth.**

Darwin and Huxley (1860) suggested that life could best be explained without reference to the spiritual dimension. Next, science that was originally practiced by theologians was divorced from the concept of a sovereign creator. In time the West developed a religion without the supernatural, which new religion Christianity unwittingly or wittingly (Bultmann, 1950s) adopted.

Missiologists like David Barrett have contended for a decade that Christians who hold a high view of Scripture and communicate a balanced Trinitarian message that features a Sovereign Creator God and an active Spirit of God, together with a strong emphasis on salvation in Jesus Christ, will experience growth. They also predict that Christians who view the Scripture as man's word and communicate a message that naturalizes the supernatural and glosses over the Biblical accounts that focus on the powerful activity of the Spirit of God will decline. Statistics since 1982 in *The World Christian Encyclopedia* and in the annual statistical tables of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* continue to demonstrate the truth of these predictions.

Now as Christianity has plateaued and even declined in the West, more and more Christians are recognizing that productive mission outreach and the attendant growth of the Church depend on the communication of a solid Biblical and spiritual witness.

*Trend Seven:*

**The developing insight that the fourth self (self theologizing) is more important and basic to indigenous church planting than the well worn three-self concept that includes self support, self governance and self propagation.**

In the mid-1800s Henry Venn (Church Missionary Society) and Rufus Anderson (Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) suggested that young churches should be allowed independence when they are able to govern themselves, support their own work and engage in mission outreach.

No mention was made of interacting directly with the Scriptures to work out how the Gospel related to indigenous cultural traditions. In most cases non-native missionaries insisted on handling that key theological task, doing their exegesis primarily through the filter of foreign cultural traditions. This approach almost universally excluded an informed, Spirit-of-God-guided application of Scripture to the not-before-exegeted, indigenous traditions being confronted.

The result was that the indigenous leadership of new self-supporting, self-governing, and supposedly self-propagating churches was almost universally ill prepared to bring an enlightened Law and Gospel application to bear on difficult indigenous cultural questions. By the same token these indigenous leaders, in many cases, were ill-equipped to share a full, pure and relevant Gospel communication with their own kith and kin.

The good news is that today there is a growing emphasis on Bible translation into all languages so that indigenous Christians can get directly into the Scriptures at the earliest possible moment. This intimate interaction with the Word immediately brings the Spirit of God to bear on the process. It naturally opens the way for a full, pure and relevant confrontation between the Word of God and the traditions of a given culture right from the start. It also greatly assists in the development of relevant patterns of mission witness and Biblical church planting.

*Trend Eight:*

**A reawakening to the fact that Biblical witness and outreach is basically congregation- and people-centered rather than institution (seminary, synod, etc.) and program-centered.**

The New Testament gives us the congregational models of Antioch (Acts 11:19–26 and Acts 13:1–3), Thessalonica (I Thess. 1:6–8) and Rome (Rom. 1:8). It tells us of Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26–40), Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48), Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–9), Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42), plus a multitude of other examples. There is no doubt about it, the Biblical witness models are certainly not one-for-all-times, assembly line approaches. They are not repackaged programs that can be dictated from above. Rather, the Biblical models are Bible based. They take people and each individual situation seriously. The Biblical models concentrate on bringing the never-changing Word of Law and Gospel to bear in ways that make people and their context central to the witness occasion.

The good news is that today individual Christians and the congregations to which they belong are more and more seeing the circuit, district, synod, seminary and institutional mission people as resources, as idea people and as facilitator and helpful coordinators, as those who can help with logistics and training, instead of

seeing them as those who *take over* and do the mission for the congregation or the individual Christian.

*Trend Nine:*

**A decided movement toward short-term and volunteer mission involvement.**

Career missionaries were in focus three to five decades ago. Today people are not so ready to make that kind of commitment without a close-up look at what is really involved. Things have also changed for overseas missions and partner churches. Today they are primarily interested in expatriates who can give a competent assist to get things going until such a time as there is a fully trained national to take up the work.

The dramatic nature of this trend is pointed out by the contrast in the increase of career missionaries over against short-term missionaries during the 12-year period between 1973 and 1985, a trend that continues today. In career missionaries there was an 18-percent increase, while in short-term missionaries there was an 848-percent increase.

The actual statistics are as follows:

	<u>1973</u>	<u>1985</u>
Career missionaries	33,000	38,976
Short-term missionaries	3,000	28,224

(Source: Hesselgrave, David J., *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission*, Academie Book, Zondervan, 1988, p. 40)

*Trend Ten:*

**The dawning awareness that Christianity and particularly Christian witness and open Gospel outreach may well be moving out of the Constantinian age back into a second Apostolic age.**

During most of the first three centuries after Christ it was dangerous to be a Christian. Persecution and martyrdom were commonplace. Gospel witness and worship was often done in private homes, in catacombs or on the road, and in open country places. Christian witness was continually done in a “closed country” atmosphere with no assurances or governmental protection or assistance.

In the first half of the 4th century Emperor Constantine and his successors adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and everything changed. Christian witness and Gospel outreach was in favor, and there was governmental protection and often governmental assistance. The Apostolic age had

given way to the Constantinian age. In a certain sense Christianity has, in at least some parts of the world, lived in the favored status of the Constantinian age ever since the 4th century.

In the past four centuries (AD 1500 onward) as the age of antisuper-naturalism, sacred-secular division, man-as-godism and now a new pagan supernaturalism has set in, things are radically changing. As a critical mass is reached in post-Christian thinking we may well find ourselves back in a second Apostolic age. Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in a very formal way, have already gone through such an age, and China is, for all practical purposes, still in the midst of such an age. In most parts of the West the new Apostolic age is coming in by fits and starts through a variety of legislations and legal interpretations without any sweeping formal declarations.

*Trend Eleven:*

**The slowly growing recognition that the primary pattern of mission support today is quite different from the timeless Biblical patterns of mission support.**

In the 20th century the primary pattern for supporting mission outreach has been through fully salaried missionaries. In most cases this salary has been provided by sending Christians either through mission societies or through church-sponsored mission boards. Rarely has anyone asked if this pattern (sending salaried missionaries) fits the primary Biblical patterns.

In terms of the Biblical evidence “sender-based support” does not show up as a primary pattern. Rather, three very different Biblical mission support patterns are well documented. They are the following:

- 1). Recipient mission support (I Tim. 5:17–18; Rom. 15:26–27; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 9:1–6, 10:1–12; I Cor. 9:7–14; etc.).
- 2). Self support (Acts 18:1–4, 20:32–35; I Thess. 2:6–9; II Thess. 3:6–13).
- 3). Unsolicited gift support (Acts 16:15; II Cor. 11:7–9; Phil. 4:10–19; III John 5–8).

People justify the present sender-based pattern with the argument that things are different today. It is suggested that there is a wider gap in the standards of living, that it is not possible for Christians with a “high standard” to sacrifice their “developed” way of life in order to evangelize. Others say, “What about Paul and the others of his time? He was most probably a well-to-do Roman citizen who found it essential to be ‘all things’ for the sake of communicating the Gospel to ‘all people’ (I Cor. 9:22–23).”

It is obvious from Scripture that Paul did not insist on a certain living standard. His approach to the living standard question was “when in Rome do as the Romans

do.” To the Philippians he wrote, “I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstance, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that God gives me” (Phil. 4:12–13).

Paul often worked to support himself and others (self support). At times he received an unsolicited gift. While not soliciting gifts for himself he did solicit gifts for other needy believers (Acts 11:29–30; Rom. 15:25–28; I Cor. 16:1–4; II Cor. 8:1–4; and Gal. 2:10), especially for the needy in Jerusalem and Judea.

It appears that prayer (Acts 13:3) was the major support of his sending congregation in Antioch, plus their willingness to receive him back at the end of each tour of duty and minister to him and receive his ministrations (Acts 14:27–28 and 15:35).

Now with the rapid surge of volunteers and self-supporting short-term missionaries noted above (an 848-percent increase from 3,000 to 28,224 in twelve years), the Biblical patterns of missionary support are also coming back into focus, and their relevance for today’s world witness and outreach are being more fully recognized.

#### *Trend Twelve:*

#### **A growing agreement that missiology is an important theological discipline with powerful implications for the teaching of all other theological disciplines.**

Living in a specialized and compartmentalized world it is only natural that “more and more” theological disciplines will come into focus. The new kid on the block during the last 100 years with its Apostolic and Old Testament roots is Missiology. Missiology is about the Son of Man (Jesus) coming to “seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:9). It is about God using human beings as His instruments or vehicles for getting His “means of grace (oral, written and visual Word of God)” to the many “lost and dying people” of this world. It is about every “saved person” getting involved in communicating God’s love and power in Christ to other people, both saved and lost ones.

At this point in time Missiology has been established as a special “set of eyes” (a theological discipline) through which we view and do theology. It is somewhat like, but not exactly like, the disciplines of pastoral theology, exegetical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, etc.

Not exactly like these disciplines, however, because Missiology is much larger and more far reaching than a single theological discipline. Missiology is, from a Biblical perspective, more like a “mother hen” under which all of the theological disciplines—including also Biblical anthropology, sociology and linguistics—live

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and move and have their being. God's desire to "seek and to save the lost" (Missiology) gives all of theology a "reason for being." Thus Missiology (God's gracious desire and actions to save) can be understood as the "glue" that holds all of the theological disciplines together, as the "central essence" of all of the "knowledge about God" (theology) and its parts or disciplines.