

# *Lutheran* **Mission Matters**



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# **Christian Ministry Across Cultures: “Not by Birth But by Rebirth”**

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**Abstract:** This essay proposes that “missiology is theology done right,” a theme I am working further on in the form of a book. Christian mission is founded on Scriptural warrant that all human beings may know that Jesus Christ is God’s Son and those who believe in Him will have eternal life. To make this truth known to the whole wide world, God has set part a people, a holy priesthood, and a prized possession for His mission. All institutional churches and church establishments are the products of the missionary activities of the past. In the modern era, Christian theologians have acknowledged that missiology is the mother of theology. Revisiting the Christian Church’s history and theology enables Christians of our time to return to their roots, to the Lord Christ who sends them out into the world on His mission. Mission is nothing other than God’s heart reaching out to those who are lost in sin and death, offering them forgiveness, life, and salvation in His name. God’s mission has no boundaries.

Whether it is “From Greenland’s icy mountains to India’s coral strand” (LW 322) or “Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, Till all the world adore His sacred name” ( LSB 837), the historic Christian church’s hymnody naturally is steeped with global missional themes. The unbiased eye simply cannot find in any traditional Christian hymnal a composition that does not include a stanza or two that clearly evidences or implies missional overtones.

Missional intentions are not lacking in the church’s historic lectionary readings either. They constantly bring to the forefront God’s desire and the commissioning of God’s people to bring all people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Stimulated and encouraged by the traditional liturgical worship experience, the active participant in the church’s conventional worship will not be able to leave the sanctuary unmotivated to share the faith with friends and neighbors outside church walls.



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The Introits, Propers, and Collects of the church generally are exhortations for the congregants whenever they gather for worship to go out into the world and witness the mighty acts God has done in Christ for all God's people. As the church sings with joy and thanksgiving the post-communion canticle, "Thank the Lord and sing His praise, *tell everyone* what He has done," or prays that "the word may not be bound, but have free course," the worshipers are agreeing with the rest of God's people that the church has a mission to spread the word to the ends of the earth. Just like Christian worship and liturgy, mission is rooted in Scripture and sustained in the historic traditions of the church.

Holy Scripture is testimony that God has set apart a special people to tell the world His mighty acts. In His wisdom, God chose a people to be His light to the nations, proclaiming to the whole inhabited earth the blessings He first promised Abraham (e.g., Gn 12:1–3; Is 42:6).<sup>1</sup> These promises were fulfilled uniquely in the life and ministry of God's incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, climaxing in His death and resurrection. The church is God's instrument to let the world know that in Jesus Christ everyone has a place in God's kingdom.

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The prophetic word was Jesus Christ's ministry platform, ushering in through His life and service God's rule and reign on the earth. Jesus brought healing and wholeness for all people, demonstrating in word and deed that in Him God's heavenly rule and reign has become real for those who trust Him as Savior and Lord (Lk 4:18). Entrance to God's kingdom, however, is only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, whose innocent suffering and death paid for the sins of all people. At His ascension, Jesus bestowed on His disciples the privilege of proclaiming to everyone the unmatched message of salvation that God calls all people everywhere to repentance and forgives their sins in Christ's name (Mt 28:18–20; Mk 16:15–16; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:19–23). This only underscores the Lutheran core doctrine, "Where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation." God forgives freely everyone who believes in His Son, Jesus Christ, and His righteousness.

## Galilee: Jesus' Ministry Headquarters

It may very well be that Jesus chose on purpose the district of Galilee as a major hub of His public ministry to demonstrate that He came to save sinners of all ethnicities, cultures, and language backgrounds. Historians concur with what Matthew's Gospel<sup>2</sup> references in 4:15, that first-century Galileans were of a mixed race, of Jews and Gentiles. The Israelites conquered Galilee under Joshua's

leadership, and later the Assyrians invaded this region. In the post-exilic times, Galilee was repopulated with Gentiles and cultivated an ethnically diverse and religiously pluralistic culture. Galilee, nevertheless, was not an ideal place where a traditional Jewish person wanted to reside. By choosing Galilee as a center of His activities, Jesus showed that God's church is His people, from wherever they call their home on earth.

Jesus' ministry headquarters was Capernaum in Galilee, and His first disciples were Galileans. Galilee was home for Peter and Andrew. Jesus invited Philip, a Galilean, to follow Him, which Philip did. Philip introduced Jesus to Nathaniel, a certified teacher of Judaism, for whom Cana in Galilee was home. Conservative Jews did not favor their Samaritan neighbors any more than Galileans. Some Jewish fundamentalists denounced Jesus by saying that He was a Samaritan and demon- possessed for the way He spoke and performed miraculous signs (Jn 8:48; cf. 8:20; 7:20). Jesus countered His Jewish opponents by saying that in fact *they* were the devil's progeny, even though they claimed their pedigree to Abraham.

For Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans, God opens the door to His kingdom only through repentance and faith. "The call to repent is a call to conversion, to move from sin and unbelief to repentant faith and salvation."<sup>3</sup> From a distinguished scholar of the Jewish religion and member of the Jewish council, such as Nicodemus (Jn 3:5), to an outcast woman from the obscure Samaritan village of Sychar,<sup>4</sup> the Gospel is God's invitation for everyone in the world to believe in God's one-of-a-kind Son (Jn 3:16). God favors neither the

Jerusalem insiders nor Roman citizens simply because in the world's eyes they might be enjoying privileged status. God in His own right shatters all man-made cultural and racial fortifications and gathers into His kingdom men and women from everywhere who turn to Him in repentance and faith, trusting solely in the merits of His Son Jesus Christ. Human destiny is sin; salvation is God's gift.

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## Ministry Across Cultures

The missionary *outburst* of the Gospel's reaching out to both Jews and Gentiles was instinctive in Jesus' ministry. That the Gospel by design targets both Jews and Gentiles is made clear by James Voelz as he interprets the two feeding miracles in the Gospel of Mark.<sup>5</sup> In Mark 6:30–44, twelve baskets full of bread were left over from Jesus' feeding five thousand men and thousands of women and children. Voelz translates the Greek word for baskets in this narrative as "Jewish baskets," pointing to the inward focus of Jesus public ministry. In Mark 8:1–9, however, Jesus likewise feeds the four thousand, after which enough broken pieces were left to fill "seven creels/Roman baskets." Voelz argues that Jesus performed this miracle in Gentile lands to show that the consummation [of God's rule and reign] will be inclusive, so that "the feast of Yahweh for 'all peoples' (Is 25:6) will comprise both Jews and Gentiles alike."<sup>6</sup> Voelz says, "There is no greater indication of the Creator's/Redeemer's generosity—also to the Gentiles!"<sup>7</sup>

The prophets foresaw a Jew-Gentile conflict arising at the coming of Christ, which had far-reaching consequences. Isaiah, for example, forecast a "framework that portrays Judaism and Christianity in conflict, along with God's decision to take the kingdom from his ancient people and give it to those who produce fruit."<sup>8</sup> At His coming, God's incarnate Christ was rejected by His own people (Jn 1:11). The world, into which God sends His people bearing Christ's name, faces rejection likewise. Tensions, controversies, discord, and racial and cultural conflicts continue to exist even within the church, ironically in the name of Christ and for His Gospel's sake.

Just as God created all people equal, Adam's sin made all human beings equally sinful before God and neighbors, and the God who is righteous demands all people everywhere to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to be saved (Acts 2:38–39). The Jews are as much in need of repentance as non-Jews.<sup>9</sup> Himself a Jew by race and upbringing and a Roman citizen by birth and cultural heritage, Paul undercut the holier-than-thou Jewish pride as he argued that in the new creation "the Israel of God" is the new identity God gives freely to those who trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. In Christ there is no Jew no Greek, no slave no freeman, no male no female (Gal 3:28). Repentance and faith in Christ creates a new people for God.

Apostolic ministry since Jesus brought the Christian faith beyond the Jewish and Judaic boundaries as far as Rome, the center of the secular world of the time. Himself a born Roman citizen, the apostle Paul was God's choice to proclaim the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. Like Jesus, Paul began his missionary preaching in the synagogue, if there was one in the cities and villages he visited. First-century Synagogue membership consisted of devout Greeks who converted to Judaism and Jews whose mother tongue was Greek.<sup>10</sup> Acts shows how Paul reached out to both Jews and Gentiles, proclaiming Christ from house to house and in public (Acts

20:20). Acts concludes with the narrative of Paul preaching and teaching the kingdom of God while Rome kept him under house arrest (28:30). Already from the formative years, the people of God have been an inclusive community, a cross-cultural mix of races, languages, manners, and customs.

As an institution, the church has never been free from conflict since its inception. The Judeo-Christian leaders of the Early Church saw that God was accepting non-Jews into the family of faith as the Spirit was calling, gathering, and enlightening a people with the Gospel of Christ. They found no reason to put on the Gentiles' neck a yoke that the Jews themselves knew was unbearable. They realized that the Jew/Gentile distinction had no value before God, as both will be saved only by believing in Jesus Christ (Acts 15:1–11). Other narratives in Acts show that the Jewish adversaries were accusing Christians of plotting to sabotage Caesar's empire in the name of Jesus, a rival king.<sup>11</sup>

Paul articulated the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of *everyone who believes*, to the Jew first and to the Gentile (Rom 1:16). God bestows on all believers a new identity bathed in the baptismal waters, disregarding their racial and cultural heritage. Frictions, mistrust, and hostilities do not cease even within the church if not anchored solidly in Christ, its cornerstone, head, and defense. In Christ, the transforming power of the Gospel shatters the dividing walls of human creation by “a process of cultural cross-trading” in which a Jew continues to be a Jew but ceases to be a Jew, and a Gentile continues to be Gentile but ceases to be a Gentile simultaneously, purely because of Christ.<sup>12</sup> The church lives in the very midst of cultures that are shaped by very different visions of life. The Christian church must forfeit “the protection of cultural isolation that ancient Israel experienced. . . . Our new situation means that *missionary encounter will be for us the everyday experience of life.*”<sup>13</sup>

Whether they be Jew or Gentile, God recreates a people for Himself not by birth but by rebirth. Entrance into God’s kingdom is not by inheritance, but by repentance—not an inalienable right, but a gift by adoption. God *adopts* children for Him from all peoples and cultures and languages. The popular adage, “God has no grandchildren,” is appropriate here. God’s children are a holy people not merely born, but “twice born”; not simply begotten, but begotten of water and the Spirit. They are a peculiar people, glorying exclusively in the cross God put in place for their sake.

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In Jewish theology, “God’s ‘holiness’ is his ‘otherness,’ that which would keep God at a distance, were it not His desire to make us a holy people by His grace and through the sacrifice that forgives sins and empowers holy lives,” according to Andrew Bartelt.<sup>14</sup> God imputes His holiness upon humans purely on His Son’s merits and sets apart for His holy purposes a holy priesthood, a people from all nations solidified by His grace and forgiveness (1 Pt 2:5). The signs and symbols with which God first designated His “covenant people” now apply directly to all who belong to Him in Christ.

Bartelt further notes that “the whole earth is to be full of [the] glory of God, which we now know, fully, in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6).” The prophetic words in Isaiah speak of “the centrality of Zion as the ‘magnet’ for all nations” (2:2–4), signifying that the “‘earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea’ when the ‘resting place’ of the root of Jesse will be ‘glorious.’”<sup>15</sup> In the new age, God has in Christ set apart a holy people for His holy purposes to attract all people to His mountain, the mountain on which His Son was lifted up for all people to behold and be saved (Jn 12:32).

## New Directions, New Expressions

Christianity has its roots in Palestine, where God’s Son walked the face of the earth with His first disciples, “living, moving and having their being.” The Church first began as a peoples’ movement situated in Israel in Asia that later Christians in Europe identified as “the holy land” in the [Middle] East. In God’s grand design, however, the disciples of Jesus would span the globe with the Gospel as His missionaries. The Acts of the Apostles show that Jesus called Paul, who was not one of the first Twelve, to be an apostle especially in the Gentile world. Paul and his companions were the first missionaries to bring Christ and the Gospel to Europe, beginning with Philippi. The Light that first shined so brightly in Asia became the beacon that enlightened Europe through Christian missionary work, giving birth to the European culture. Over two millennia, the rest of the world presumed that Christianity is a Western religion and all Westerners are Christians.

## Mission Is a Joint Endeavor

Nevertheless, “mission” became popular among Christians of the modern world, especially since the nineteenth century. It began in universities and college campuses where Christian young men and women gathered in small groups for Bible study and prayer. They caught the vision to organize mission societies, volunteer missionary organizations to travel the world with the Gospel of Christ. Thousands of men and women risked their lives for Christ’s sake, leaving behind their comfort zone and reaching out across the seas over the globe. Volunteer missionaries became examples

for institutional churches to see the big picture and set up committees, commissions, and boards for missions under their denominational banner. The boards simply were coordinating the services the volunteers had already set in motion. The Church needs its membership to learn from them as they engage God's mission.

Conversely, in these postmodern times the twenty-first-century church establishments are becoming post-missionary institutions, distancing themselves from missionaries, mission organizations, and missional thinkers. While a plethora of volunteer missionary organizations are mushrooming everywhere, church establishments are requiring that missionaries and mission enterprises must be self-funded and self-sustaining, although they must be serving under the banner of institutional churches.

At the same time, universities and seminaries of our generation are upholding mission as a principal component of theological education in the twenty-first century. "Missional" and "glocal" are but examples of the vocabulary theological educators have introduced in this discipline.<sup>16</sup> Darrell Guder surmises that "missional" is a kind of scaffolding that holds up our ecclesiology, theology, interpretation of Scripture, and theological education. He has proposed that "the apostolic mission was to form gathered and sent communities who would continue the witness to God's salvation in Christ that had brought them into existence in the first place."<sup>17</sup> Guder maintains that the first apostolic community empowered the disciples to go out and become community-founding missionaries.<sup>18</sup>

Stephen Neill was born of missionary parents in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1900. Neill received training in linguistics and became a theological educator and missionary in India, following the footsteps of his parents and siblings. In 1927, the Church Mission Society in Tinnevelly in Tamil Nadu ordained him deacon, and a year later his home church ordained him priest. Neill became a career missionary in India, taught in theological schools, got involved in inter-church conversations at the global level and served as Bishop of the Church of South India.

In his 1957 Duff Lectures, Bishop Neill made the famous statement, "If everything is mission nothing is mission," pointing directly at the tension between missionaries and the institutional churches.<sup>19</sup> The bishop was speaking from his heart as a cross-cultural missionary and coordinator of various Christian denominations wrestling with the challenge of giving a united witness of Christ in a world bereft of unity and singleness of purpose. At the same time, church establishments and missionary organizations will benefit from biblical scholar and mission coordinator Christopher Wright's observation that "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God's mission."<sup>20</sup>

## Missional Theology

Missionaries and missional theologians have been from early on scholars in biblical and systematic theology. Gustav Warneck (1834–1910) held the first university chair of missiology in Halle and was instrumental in the formation of the International Missionary Council. For Warneck, individuals converting to Christ should not be separated from the community to which they belong in the first place. Instead, Gospel proclamation should be aimed at the conversion and baptism of whole communities rather than of individuals.<sup>21</sup> Martin Kahler has argued that “mission is the mother of theology.” Theology for Koehler “is an accompanying manifestation of the Christian mission” and not a “luxury of the world-dominating church.”<sup>22</sup>

Georg Vicedom was a pioneer missionary in the highlands of central New Guinea.<sup>23</sup> Vicedom was raised in a farmer’s family in northern Bavaria and trained in ethnography and anthropology at Hamburg and in theology at Neuendettelsau. Vicedom insisted that the church must get to know peoples and cultures thoroughly before it can engage the world with the Gospel of God.

Arguably, Vicedom simulated the Ziegenbalg model of cross-cultural mission, who preceded him by two centuries. Bartholomew Ziegenbalg (1682–1719), also from Halle, was the first Protestant missionary who went to India in 1706. While studying at the seminary in Germany, Ziegenbalg had a vision to reach the people of India with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He would not settle as a home grown, “most wanted” preacher in his hometown, including the congregation that baptized him. The auspicious words of his seminary professor, Abbot Franke, resonated within him, “When one leads one soul of such nations [as India] righteous to God, that is equivalent to winning a hundred souls in Europe since these daily have sufficient means and opportunities.”<sup>24</sup> Ziegenbalg had a rough road ahead of him already aboard the ship, including from the captain and the crew, who were on business and hardly had any inclination for converting the heathen to the one true God.

Ziegenbalg began his India mission in Tharangambadi (Tranquebar), roughly one hundred kilometers east of Chennai (formerly Madras). In Tranquebar, the young Lutheran preacher was appalled by the scarcity of Bibles, hymnals, and devotional books for the European colonists and their families in India. His first assignment therefore was to set up a theological library that held volumes in English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish. Ziegenbalg studied linguistics for India under eminent scholars who were not Christian. His mastery of Tamil in such a short time amazed everyone, to the extent that the Tamil lexica he pioneered is referenced as authoritative even today by native Tamil scholars.

Ziegenbalg served the Gospel in the context of religious pluralism and fought against the dehumanizing and oppressive forces of the Indian caste system and socio-economic disparities. He engaged in intellectual dialogue with Brahmin scholars of

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the Hindu religion and posited before them the new identity God bestows upon all people on the grounds of the work God accomplished exclusively in Jesus Christ. Ziegenbalg obtained an ordinance from the (Portuguese) governor that “all new-born children of slaves [were] to be brought for Lutheran baptism, and the heads of families [were] to make their servants available for two hours daily so that the missionaries could instruct them in the fundamentals of Christianity.”<sup>25</sup>

Ziegenbalg insisted that Indian men must be trained in Bible and theology so that they can speak the Gospel directly to Indians in their mother tongue, which is much better than hearing it from foreign missionaries from an entirely different world. For a fact, “The idioms of speech and conduct by which the evangelist grasps and expresses the gospel are themselves shaped by the evangelist’s culture.”<sup>26</sup> As a Ziegenbalg biographer wrote, “Against bitter opposition and stupidity, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg paved the way for foreign missions. He gave his life for the work. It is one of God’s mysteries that He performs His great deeds through suffering witnesses.”<sup>27</sup>

Since Ziegenbalg, Lutherans have not lacked in conversations on missions and missional theology. That theology and ecclesiology work together with congregations and Christian believers as Christ’s witnesses is evidenced in Robert Kolb’s life, scholarship, and mission. Translator and editor of the Book of Concord,<sup>28</sup> Kolb continues his research, writing, and teaching on all continents at all levels. Kolb finds time to lead Bible studies for congregations, witness workshops, and speaks gently with anyone who crosses his path at home and abroad—simply because the love of Christ compels him.

Kolb reiterates that “theology is the original cross-disciplinary field of study, the original inter-disciplinary exercise in the field of human learning. For the theological task demands listening to voices from every field of human endeavor to bring God’s Word to all the corners of His world.”<sup>29</sup>

Making the transforming power of Jesus Christ known to all people is the modest, unpretentious goal of Christian mission. Kolb writes, “Always at the heart of God’s transforming message is His revelation of Himself in the glory of suffering, in the splendor of the cross, in the triumph of death. Glory, splendor and triumph lie concealed in the likes of suffering, cross and death.”<sup>30</sup> Christ is the center of our lives, and so His cross is at the center of the church’s mission in His name.

Just as God created humankind without compulsion or condition, as a free act of love, so he has re-created humankind without compulsion or condition, as a free act of love. This act of creating anew may be described as salvation or reconciliation or liberation. It is best described as “justification,” even though for unbelievers in our culture this usually means something quite different than the biblical understanding of the word.<sup>31</sup>

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Gospel proclaimers must therefore take into serious account the listening capacity of their intended audience. Christian mission knows no geographical or cultural boundaries—East, West, North, or South.

Kolb reiterates that justification implies righteousness and justice; biblically it defines the right relationship between God and his human creatures. It tells how God restores fallen sinners to that right relationship with himself, rescuing them from sin and death, “restoring them to life itself. . . . Righteousness in God’s sight is life itself.”<sup>32</sup>

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Genuine biblical teaching, doctrine, is not correct if it is merely flawless in content. It must also be presented, aimed precisely at the situation of the contemporary hearer. It must be as effectively spoken by us today as it was effectively delivered to the prophets and apostles two millennia and more ago. The practice of theology, the conveying of the Christian teaching, is not beyond the reach of the “average” Christian. It is neither the sole province of professionals nor an optional activity for any Christian witness.<sup>33</sup>

For Kolb, theology is for proclamation that empowers each Christian to believe, teach, and confess Christ as Savior and Lord. Missiology is theology done right!

## Christ Reigns and Rules Across Cultures

Four decades ago, veteran missionary, missiologist and Bishop of the Church of South India, Lesslie Newbigin wrote, “At the heart of mission there must always be the call (of the Christian) to be committed to Jesus Christ in his community.”<sup>34</sup> Newbigin detected that especially in the Western tradition, Bible reading has been primarily an interaction between the reader and the text. In theological education as discipline, when studying the Bible as literature, much emphasis is given to gaining a clear and comprehensive understanding of the sociohistorical and political context of the author of each book and the specific situation of the intended audience. Anyone who tries to explore a text without carefully studying also the original context in which the text was written will gain only a partial knowledge of the author’s intentions as he was composing the text. In reading therefore, the reader must be given the opportunity to “read the mind of the original author,” as well as the mind of the audience the author may have had in his mind as he was composing the text, to be able to comprehend the full meaning of the author’s intention. This third aspect, that is, the context of the text, has been a missing piece in Western theological education. Readers of texts also read *for* an audience, if the goal is to communicate

what they read (and understand!) to others who are new to the author and the composition.

Newbigin noticed that in the “mission field” those who communicate the biblical message in a new context must respect and honor the culture, religion, and socio-political and economic background of their particular audience. Newbigin called this a “three-cornered relationship” among the “receptor’s culture,” the Bible and the culture of the missionary.<sup>35</sup> In this case, the receptor is the native in the “mission field” and the missionary is the foreigner from a different land. Christians engaging the “world,” however, acknowledge that the reader’s culture has as much a place as the text and the culture of the missionary in this exercise. The text’s meaning does not become clear to the reader (and listener) unless their culture also is taken into serious account as Scripture is read and interpreted. Missional reading of Scripture necessitates a respectful recognition of the listeners whose idioms of speech, conduct, and culture are shaped differently than the traditional Western readers of the Bible.

In the missionary context, in the East or in the West, therefore “A three-cornered relationship is set between the traditional culture, the ‘Christianity’ of the missionary, and the Bible. The stage is set for a complex and unpredictable evolution both in the culture of the receptor community and in that of the missionary.”<sup>36</sup> However, whether in the West or the East, students of Scripture must not fail to involve a third element in the exercise, that is, the language and culture of the interpreter. The text’s meaning does not become clear to the reader (and listener) except when *their* language, idioms, figures of speech and cultural expressions are given respectful recognition and put to their proper use in interpretive process.

In the twenty-first century, Christian presence is recognized more in the majority world than in the traditional homelands of Europe and America. In the new millennium, Lutherans in Africa outnumber all Lutherans in North America put together. It may be true that Christian influence is declining in the Western culture because the institutional churches do not regard mission as a principal component of their service to the church and world.

It is possible that the Western voice in the global church will become increasingly muted—and even insignificant—in the decades to come. . . . This could be a cause for rejoicing—if it indicates the growth and strength of the world church. However, if this happens because the church in the Western settings ceases to have any relevance or voice in world Christianity, it will be a cause for sorrow for all Christians.<sup>37</sup>

The prophetic word of our time could be that God is taking away His kingdom and offering it to those who bear more fruit.<sup>38</sup>

Mission and ministry paradigms have shifted.<sup>39</sup> Missional thinkers lay before us a new challenge, that of *becoming the Gospel*, in such a way that we embody in our daily living our Lord Christ's words and actions as the first-century Christians did more realistically. Christians of the twenty-first century do face the challenge of becoming facsimiles of the first-century apostolic model, especially as our contexts, cultures, and patterns of behavior are distinctively different from the first Christians. Yet, we "participate in the very life and mission of God, through proclamation, praxis and even persecution."<sup>40</sup>

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In mission and in ministry, risks are involved and tensions, especially for Lutherans, remain unending.<sup>41</sup> Giving due diligence to the mission God has entrusted His people enables us to live through tensions, empowering the church to take risks for the Gospel's sake, and to sing with proper confidence, "Let every race and every language tell, Of Him who saves our lives from death and hell" (LSB 837:5). This is much cause for joy for each follower of Jesus.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> That God is on a mission for all people is in fact the theme of the entire Scripture. The Old Testament model is that the people of God are a light to the nations. See the detailed analysis of this theme in the Old Testament by Henry Rowold, "Where Are You?" in this issue: 243–251.

<sup>2</sup> See Jeffrey G. Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary: Matthew 1:1–11:1* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006). Gibbs observes that the population of northern Galilee had large Gentile population with whom Jewish population intermingled, resulting in religious syncretism. Gibbs further states that "the promised light will shine in the darkness" probably refers to both Jews and Gentiles, but "the explicit mention of the Gentiles/nations surely invites a connection with Matthew 28:18–20," 204–5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 214–15.

<sup>4</sup> Samaritans were taboo for the Jews, as they were a mixed blood of Jews and Gentiles since the time of the exile. When traveling from Galilee to Judea and back, Jews intentionally avoided Samaria by choosing the alternate route on the east side of the Jordan River.

<sup>5</sup> James W. Voelz, *Concordia Commentary, Mark 1:1–8:26* (St. Louis: CPH, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 500.

<sup>8</sup> R. Reed Lessing, "Preaching from Isaiah 56–66," *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 52.

<sup>9</sup> Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser (ed.), *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History* (Kregel, 2008). See also the earlier volume by David Filbeck, *Yes, God*

*of the Gentiles, Too: The Missionary Message of the Old Testament*, A/Bgc Monograph Series (Billy Graham Center, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> This pattern is obvious in the Book of Acts. In Thessalonica, for example, Paul (and Silas) on Sabbath days went into the synagogue, as it was the custom, and reasoned with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17). Some Jews were persuaded by the apostolic witness about Jesus Christ, and so were many devout Greeks and many of the leading women in the city.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 17 alone is a textbook example of the apostolic experience, of acceptance and rejection. In Thessalonica, Paul and Silas' witness in the synagogue made some Jews jealous. They dragged Jason and other followers of Jesus to the court because they began to believe in Jesus Christ, "another king" (vv. 5–9). Then in Berea, as Paul and Silas preached, many Jews and many prominent women and men believed, just as it was happening in Thessalonica (vv. 10–12).

<sup>12</sup> Roji George, *Paul's Identity in Galatians: A Post-Colonial Appraisal* (New Delhi: Christian World Prints, 2016), 198.

<sup>13</sup> Michael W. Goheen (ed.) *Reading the Bible Missionally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew H. Bartelt, "Isaiah 6: From Translation to Proclamation," *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 17.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Darrell L. Guder (ed.), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Darrell L. Guder, "The Implications of a Missional Hermeneutic for Theological Education" in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. Michael Goheen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 288.

<sup>18</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 289.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension: The Duff Lectures* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1958).

<sup>20</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2010), 24. The LCMS's own Mission Blueprint for the Nineties document addresses these tensions and shows that the whole world is God's Mission.

<sup>21</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 141.

<sup>22</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Reading the Bible Missionally*, 295.

<sup>23</sup> To his credit, Vicedom published over four hundred essays primarily on anthropology. Among his dozen books, Lutherans are most familiar with *The Mission of God*, English translation (CPH, 1955). Vicedom familiarized the church with the concept of *missio Dei*, emphasizing the theocentric character of Christian mission. See also Hans-Werner Genischen, "Vicedom, Georg Friedrich," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Erich Beyreuther, *Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg: A Biography of the First Protestant Missionary to India* (Madras: CLS, 1955), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>26</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 146.

<sup>27</sup> Beyreuther, *Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Kolb (ed.) *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000), 200. Google Robert Kolb to browse the hundreds of essays he has published over the years and the dozens of books his pen has produced. Kolb rivals Vicedom in that if Vicedom's research publications had a major focus in anthropology, Kolb's volumes speak substantively on *confessing* the Christian's faith in every age.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 157.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>33</sup> Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 120.

<sup>35</sup> This is a very important issue that deserves serious attention. Missionaries and Bible translators have been working on these challenges for several decades now. My essay shares some seminal thoughts that in the future I will call “Missiology is Theology Done Right.” As I have been thinking about such project, I came across a volume titled, *Global Mission: Reflections and Case Studies in Contextualization for the Whole Church* (William Carey, 2011), a collection of articles by expats as well as those natives to the mission field. Some essays are translations to English from another original language. Demonstrating the translator’s challenge, one author uses five book-size pages to explain the word “faith” in another language.

<sup>36</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 147.

<sup>37</sup> A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2012), 320–21.

<sup>38</sup> Christian witness is for the whole world. The twenty-five-year history of *Missio Apostolica* (now *Lutheran Mission Matters*) is testimony to this fact. This is the one-of-a-kind journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology that addresses the challenge of presenting Christ to people of all walks of life across nations and cultures as a living testament of Christ’s ongoing mission on earth.

<sup>39</sup> For an appraisal of the paradigm shifts in mission, see David Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Mission Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kreger Academic and Professional, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 297.

<sup>41</sup> For an off-the-cuff yet in-depth and unbiased coverage of the tension that the Missouri Synod faces in mission and ministry, see Andrew H. Bartelt, “Office of the Ministry: Keeping Our Balance,” *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2013), 10–12.