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Editor's Note

More than a quilt or a kaleidoscope, this issue of *Missio Apostolica* is a painting in the works, a joint endeavor of numerous artists of differing tastes in a process of negotiating which brush to use and what stroke to highlight. Lifelong missionaries and missiologists are with great zeal and innovative spirit engaging the challenge of interpreting the bedrock of their vocation—missiology—for the sole purpose that Christ may dwell in peoples' hearts through faith (Eph 3:14–19).

What we are about to read is an interspersing of Scripture, theology, culture, and communication as the one Gospel is confessed in varying contexts and different times. The writers also share how people respond to the same Gospel in variety of ways. While a united witness of the biblical revelation to all nations is the premise of these essays, a uniformity in that endeavor is neither assumed or claimed.

St. John has exhorted the church (in Sardis) to remember what they received and heard, to keep it and to repent (Rev 3:1–6). He also promises that Christ will confess before the Father those who have faithfully lived the Gospel. That all tongues confess Jesus is Lord drives missiology to new vistas and directions.

V. R.



Photo taken by: Gwen Ragno

Courtesy of Affton-Shrewsbury Patch

Alleen and Paul Heerboth

Rev. Dr. Paul M. Heerboth 1921-2012

From the LCMS World Mission Blog of June 10, 2011, when Paul Heerboth received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis: *Rev. Paul Heerboth* was one of the first candidates called to serve in the LCMS's mission to Japan, serving as a missionary there from 1949 to 1961. He was the assistant executive secretary for the LCMS Board for World Missions from 1963 to 1966 and the executive secretary for missionary personnel at the LCMS Board for Mission Services from 1967 to 1981. Paul then served as the assistant executive director of LCMS World Mission from 1981 to 1995. After 1995, he continued to work part-time as director for administration for LCMS World Mission and serve as the associate editor of *Missio Apostolica*—Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology. While in Japan, in addition to starting mission stations, Paul developed Sunday school literature in Japanese, which was used by many Lutheran groups there. He also taught in the Tokyo Lutheran Center Bible School, which later became a seminary. Paul and his wife, Alleen, have five children, Jonathan, David, Joel, Ann and Steve. They have been blessed with 11 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Rev. Dr. Paul M. Heerboth: In Memoriam

Dan Mattson

The first issue of *Missio Apostolica* lists the members of the editorial committee as Won Yong Ji, editor; Paul M. Heerboth, associate editor; Willard L. Burce, book editor, and Robert J. Scudieri. A guest editorial in that volume was contributed by Eugene Bunkowske, founder of the Lutheran Society for Missiology. These are important names in LCMS mission history: the beginnings of mission work in Korea, Japan, and Papua New Guinea connected with Ji, Heerboth, and Burce; the recognition of the United States as a mission field connected with Scudieri and the recognition that mission work in Africa required new ways of working in the post-colonial era connected with Bunkowske.

In his own article in the first issue, “Missouri Synod Approach to Mission in the Early Period,” Paul concluded,

As we look back on more than a hundred years of synodical mission history, there are several points that cry for attention. One that might well be noted . . . is the fact that our major mission advances have never resulted from mission board initiative or creative, centralized planning, but have rather taken considerable, consistent pressure from the outside, from the bottom up, as evidenced particularly by the beginning of foreign work in 1894–95 and in China, 1913–17. Yet in all this we can thank and praise God for many blessings. The Gospel was preached and taught. His Word, as promised, did not return without results. Many blood-bought souls for whom Christ died and rose again were brought into the Kingdom of God. All glory be to God above.

After stating his own conclusion on what can be seen in LCMS mission history, Paul adds yet one more paragraph containing the characteristic line: “For more background the following partial list of references can be helpful . . . ,” followed by the names of eight authors with their books and articles. For Paul, his own word was never the last word. There were other people who needed to be heard, other people who could teach you things that you needed to know—even though they might disagree with Paul.

In his quiet and unfailingly polite way, Paul Heerboth worked for and supported change in Missouri Synod missions. His entire ministry was devoted to the mission of the church, always seeking better ways to share the Gospel, first in the field, and then for many years in the administration of the Board for Mission Services, which became LCMS World Mission. Through personal example, he demonstrated that God would guide his people so that through quiet, patient, and consistent efforts over time, always trusting God and keeping eyes fixed on His goal, seemingly impossible challenges could be overcome so that the Good News of Jesus could be heard in every corner of the world.

Those of us who worked with him in the last decades of the twentieth century have learned the lessons of the constant endeavor to learn more in order to serve better and the humility in all tasks—great and small—that Paul modeled in his

life. We rejoice in all that God accomplished in and through him. We rejoice in the faith that we share, in the hope of the resurrection in Jesus that gives meaning and purpose to our lives. And Paul would want us to rededicate ourselves to the task that remains unfinished, the task of sharing the Good News of Jesus so that all find forgiveness and life in Him.

Editorial

“Missiology”

Victor Raj

Conversations on connecting and properly sequencing the disciplines of Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology have escalated significantly in recent years among Christians and Christian service organizations. Among Christians there is little disagreement that the Church has a mission to the whole world, that is, to make the love of God in Christ known to all people. But not all Christians agree on a common definition of mission, who should be identified as missionaries, and what methods might be appropriate for accomplishing that mission. In common parlance, missionaries are those sent to faraway lands to *do* mission work. For some, mission is a strong Christian presence in communities and nations, that is, faith active in love; for others, nothing short of boldly proclaiming the one true faith suits the mission paradigm. Bishop Stephen Neil’s famous dictum, “if everything is mission, nothing is mission,” now half a century old, speaks perchance far more eloquently today than ever.

Historically, both Christology and ecclesiology were articulated as doctrinal statements after generations of preaching and teaching the Gospel. If Christology is a systematic study of the person and work of Christ, ecclesiology is concerned with the history and theology of the church. The following editorial shows how both Christology and ecclesiology are defined in the English dictionary. The Gospel is God’s remedy in His own terms for a fallen world resulting from Adam’s sin. That Jesus Christ came to this world to save sinners and to redeem His creation from the curse of sin is the one true Gospel.

During His earthly life, our Lord demonstrated in word and deed that, in Him, God’s gracious reign in its fullness entered the world. By His life, death, and resurrection Jesus validated for all who confess Him as Messiah forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation (Acts 2:22–24). With boldness, the apostles passed on to others the same message they had received from the Lord. In their lifetime, they saw how this one Gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 28: 31; Rom 15:19) and how in Jesus Christ both Jews and Gentiles became fellow heirs of the one Gospel promise (Eph 3:6). St. Paul called this a profound mystery, which is the pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim 3:15, 16; cf. Eph 5:32).

Recently, the study of missions has risen to a level of prominence in institutions of higher learning. Missiology has been gaining ground as an academic discipline, incorporating the wisdom of cultural anthropology, sociology, behavioral sciences, communication, and world religions, going beyond the simplistic way of equating mission with evangelism. As a combined discipline, missiology serves both Christology and ecclesiology, facilitating Christian witness across cultures, worldviews, and religions. Missional thinking opens new windows of opportunity for

the servants of the Gospel and builds bridges with those who are by nature alienated from the kingdom and have become strangers to God’s covenant.

God’s sending His Son into the world to save His people shows His missional character. In today’s context, mission calls for a credible witness of the Gospel that transforms the thinking, patterns of behavior, and experience of those who are brought to the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. Missiology must enable all God’s children to confess the faith in theologically deep, culturally relevant, and vocationally natural ways. The introduction of mission professors in the four major disciplines of theological education and the integration of mission across the curriculum at Concordia Seminary demonstrate that missiology is vital to ministerial formation in our church. Today missiology has found its place at the global mission table. The churches in the East are sending fully-funded missionaries to the West, matching those who go from the West to the East. Distinctions are diminishing gradually, and mission paradigms are shifting dramatically.

Cross-cultural communication and critical contextualization are themes that *Missio Apostolica* plans to explore in the immediate future in two different issues. This editor calls the current volume an experiment in missiology. The essays presented here are in nature more descriptive than prescriptive, enabling the reader to reflect on how mission happens in different parts of the world. David Berger starts out with the semantics of Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology in the editorial “On Trichotomies.” Robert Kolb asks the church to “practice its sentness” in love, repentance, and forgiveness of sins for the sake of her mission. Eugene Bunkowske presents a rather lengthy case study on mission that is rooted in Scripture and saturated with personal experience. Most other contributors are describing mission as it is happening in specific contexts. Awe and wonder overwhelm each reader who meets the authors of these pages.

We can only repeat after Paul that we do not account our lives of any value nor as precious to ourselves, if only we may finish our course and the ministry that we have received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

Editorial

On Trichotomies

David Berger

A matter of definitions:

- Christology: (1673) theological interpretation of the person and work of Christ
- ecclesiology: (ca. 1837) 1. the study of church architecture and adornment; 2. theological doctrine relating to the church
- missiology: (1924) the study of the church's mission esp. with respect to missionary activity

(Historical dating and definitions from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1986. In general, the suffix “logy” refers to the study of the subject identified in the root word.)

Language lives, however; it is not static, and so one might expect that as words come into common usage they “morph” to include different, if related, meanings. Or, more precisely, the word stays the same and the meaning changes. Thus, we find the term “ecclesiology” referring to the *work* of the church, to its *functions*, or even to its *organizational* characteristics. “Missiology” is used to refer to missionary *activity*, *strategy*, or *practice*. The variety is understandable. We can expect such variation in common, informal usage; but for those involved in studying and critiquing how the Good News of Jesus Christ is communicated to a world in need of it, i.e., in missiology, for the sake of clarity and precision, it is probably best to stay with standard usage.

A recent focus of the LSFM and its publication, *Missio Apostolica*, has been on the functional relationship of a trio of “ologies”: Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology. The focus may be framed as questions: How are Christology, missiology, and ecclesiology related? Which precedes and shapes the other(s) and why? Note that the terms are here used in a way that implies “practice of” rather than “study of.”

The articles in the present number of MA suggest questions that may be helpful both to clarify the issues involved and to keep in mind when reading the articles. For the sake of clarity, we employ standard terminology:

1. What is the place and function of the church as an organized body of believers in communicating the scriptural messages of sin and grace and of the person and salvific work of Jesus Christ, i.e., what is the place of the church in mission?
2. How does an understanding of this work as God's mission (*missio Dei*) affect the role of the church in mission activity?
3. How do recognition of and respect for cultural diversity affect / relate to the way that mission is carried out?

4. How does / should the unique culture of the church relate to / influence the variety of human cultures and cultural and religious beliefs and practices?
5. Is it better that the church “get out of the way” to let God effect His mission in whatever way He will?
6. How do the Lutheran scriptural emphases on Word and Sacrament (baptizing and teaching, in Matthew 28 language) as primary marks of the church relate to the work of mission?
7. Does not Lutheran teaching recognize that all mission is *missio Dei* in a most fundamental sense? That is, the Holy Spirit works through Word and Sacrament to create faith when and where He will.
8. Is an increase in church membership and attendance to be, even in part, understood as a measure of success in the *missio Dei*? Why or why not?

While a trio of abstract “ologies” may be helpful shorthand for exploring issues related to mission, we need also to be cautious of creating a false trichotomy—artificial distinctions that mask the underlying unity of Christ-church-mission. Has the church, historically and in specific manifestations, e.g., LCMS World Mission, been inflexible or ineffective in its mission practices such that the *missio Dei* has been hampered, even impeded? If so, how? in what specific ways? Do solutions exclude the role of the church in mission in favor of individualistic, “incarnational” mission? Is *missio Dei* more effectively accomplished outside a community of believers, i.e., an ecclesiastical structure (a church body)? Or are solutions to be sought within the ecclesial context, employing flexibility and adaptability relative to cultural contexts? Does a key expression “following Jesus” (cf. writings of Frost and Hirsch) have a clear, common referent in today’s doctrinally diverse church bodies? in the world? A recent feature in *Newsweek* (April 9, 2012) by Andrew Sullivan suggests not. With an eye-catching cover title (background of Jesus in casual modern street dress), “Forget the Church: Follow Jesus,” the article mentions neither sin nor grace. Rather, following Jesus, i.e., being a Christian, is “simply living each day doing what we can to fulfill God’s will.”

Regarding the work and writing of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch—*The Shaping of Things to Come* (Alban, 2004), *ReJesus* (Baker, 2008), *Faith of Leap* (Baker, 2011)—especially the first, which seems to have been background reading for authors of several of the articles, one will find a wealth of discussion, both affirmative and critical, on the Web and in theological journals. One might also compare and contrast their writings with an earlier work by Georg Vicedom: *Mission of God* (CPH, 1965); originally published in German as *Missio Dei* (Chr. Kaiser, 1958).

In this context, it will be helpful to draw attention to Ingemar Öberg’s 1991 study, *Luther och världsmissionen*. Later translated by Dean Apel, it was published as *Luther and World Mission* (St. Louis, CPH, 2007), a well-documented, 522-page treatment of Martin Luther’s theology of and perspective on world mission. To my knowledge, the English translation has not been reviewed, either in *Missio Apostolica* or in any standard theological journal. Of the original Swedish work there has been at least one review, focusing on a specific aspect of the book: “Luther’s Approach to Islam: Ingemar Öberg’s Search for Mission Praxis in the Weimar

Edition of Luther's Works" by Dean M. Apel (*Currents in Theology and Mission*, 26:6, December 1999, pp. 439–450). Pukka Huhtinen has also summarized the original Swedish work in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (65:1, January 2001, pp. 15–29). An extensive review essay of Apel's translation of Öberg's work would be a worthy and most relevant contribution to a future issue of *Missio Apostolica*. At this writing, the book is in print and available from CPH.

Finally, we cite two other works relevant for readers of this issue of MA:

- *Lutheran Contributions to the Missio Dei* (Geneva, Department of Church Cooperation, Lutheran World Federation, 1984).
- *"Missio Dei": an Examination of the Origin, Contents and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* by H. H. Rosin (Leiden, Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, Dept. of Missiology, 1976).

Both are available in the Concordia Seminary Library, as is the English Öberg volume.

While it behooves us to analyze in constructively critical ways the ongoing work of Lutheran work in mission, we remain vigilant and aware of the diverse doctrinal perspectives that underlie the wide variety of publications about mission and of "how to" mission manuals, workshops, etc. We observe in passing that Paul, the quintessential missionary of the early church, had little to say about process, i.e., the methodology, of mission and much to say about the importance of pure teaching and of Christian living as witness. At the same time, we recognize that the church is "incarnational" in a radically biblical sense: it is the Body of Christ (Eph 4, 5). In its various visible (organizational) manifestations, it will have the human failings and shortcomings of our sinful nature, and it is to these that we prayerfully and persistently attend.

Articles

Those Who Are Sent: Christ and His Church Christology, Missiology, and Ecclesiology in the Gospel of John

Robert Kolb

“In the beginning”—God created (Gn 1:1), and the Word was—the Word, who is God, was already there—and through that Word all things came to exist (Jn 1:1–4). The clear parallel with Genesis 1, which John employed in beginning his gospel of Jesus Christ, affirmed Him as Creator of the universe. In his account of Jesus’ sending of His disciples (20:21–23), the evangelist drew a similar parallel, this time with Genesis 2. The creation of the new people of God at the end of the gospel echoed the creation of the human race in Genesis 2. Both John 20 and Genesis 2 speak of God’s breathing and thus bestowing first human life and then new life in Christ through the forgiveness of sins.

Throughout the fourth gospel, the Evangelist intertwines Christology, missiology, and ecclesiology; a vital part of his understanding of the person of Christ is His sense of His sentness and His sending of the people whom He calls and gathers as a loving community and propels them on His mission to the world. Christology is our understanding of the person of Christ. John begins his gospel describing Jesus as the Word made flesh, which the church later codified into the doctrine of the hypostatic union of Christ’s two natures. John exhibits the inevitable tendency of all Christians to move easily from Christ’s person to His work as the one who atones for human sin and who gives sinners new life through His resurrection. His understanding of mission, of the sentness of His people on the basis of His own being sent by the Father, originates in his conviction that human beings have met God in Jesus because the Father sent His only-begotten Son into the world to redeem the world. Jesus then sends His followers into Samaria, into Judea, into the entire world with the forgiveness of sins. The world opposes them, but the world is the object of their proclamation of their Savior. For that purpose and for the purpose of loving one another and supporting one another in the struggle against the Deceiver and murderer, Jesus created the new Israel. More ecclesiology (description of the church) than that John does not offer. In his first chapter, John sketched the setting for his report on the life and work of Jesus by affirming that He is God’s creative Word made flesh (1:14), thoroughly and completely human—the light that comes to enlighten the world (1:9), the one who has made the Father known (1:18). His making the Father known continued to be a theme through this gospel. In his first epistle, John also insisted on the unity of the Father and the Son but also on the true

*Robert Kolb is an editor of *Missio Apostolica* and Missions Professor Emeritus of *Systematic Theology of Concordia Seminary St. Louis, Missouri.**

and full humanity of the Son (1 Jn 2:21–22; 4:2–3). He came into the world to demonstrate God’s love for His human creatures, to reveal Himself as the source of renewed human life through His own death and resurrection. That Jesus’ death and resurrection served as the evangelist’s focal point is clear in that a little more than half his gospel falls in the section that begins with the raising of Lazarus from the dead as prelude to Jesus’ own death and resurrection. That section details His words of departure (Jn 12–17) as well as the report of His arrest, suffering, death, and coming back to life (Jn 18–21).

At the beginning of his gospel, John continues beyond what is usually defined as his prologue into the rest of chapter 1 by identifying Jesus as the one whom John the Baptist identified as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise of the Servant (1:23), the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (1:29), and the Son of God (1:34). John’s disciple Andrew then identified Jesus as the Messiah, that is, Israel’s Deliverer and Lord (1:41). Jesus identified Himself as not only the messianic Son of God and King of Israel but as that Son of Man whom contemporary Jews identified as the One whom Daniel had identified as a person “like a son of man” (1:47–51, cf. Dan 7:13–14). That mysterious person “like a son of man” possessed “dominion and glory and rule, so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is everlasting and shall not pass away; his kingdom shall not be destroyed” (7:14)—all characteristics which Daniel could ascribe only to God Himself. Once the evangelist had established the identity of this man as the Creative Word who reveals the Father and who fulfills the prophecy of the one like a son of man with the characteristics of God, and thus must be God, he could go on to relate the first of the many signs that Jesus did, in Cana in Galilee (2:1, 11).

What purpose did these signs serve? Echoing Martha’s confession that Jesus had come into the world as the Messiah who brings life (11:27), John intended them to bring his readers and hearers to faith. Note also his account of Jesus’ sending of His disciples to trust that Jesus is the Messiah, God’s Son, that they might have life in His name through their trust in Him (20:31). This, John’s concluding statement of purpose, follows Jesus’ words defining Himself when He first came to the disciples after departing from His tomb. He came to them as the one whom the Father had sent (20:21). John’s entire gospel depicts Jesus on the move, on the mission on which the Father sent Him. He came into the world to enlighten it (1:9); God sent Him to save the world (3:17). From Cana in Galilee Jesus went down to Capernaum and then up to Jerusalem (2:12–13). He modeled a life on the road for the disciples whom He was making into a pilgrim band.

The evangelist emphasized this “sending” of both the Father and the Son throughout his gospel. We can see “mission” as its theme. God sent John the Baptist to testify to the light (1:6), giving him his message from heaven and sending him to prepare the way for the Messiah (3:27). The Baptizer’s message referred to Jesus as the one whom God has sent to speak the words of God (3:34); Jesus Himself noted that He had come from the Father and was going back to the Father (16:28). Indeed, a major motif which John reports that Jesus used to describe His relationship with the Father is that of “mission.” Jesus often lent authority to His own words and actions with a reference to the Father as the one who had sent Him (5:24, 30, 36–38; 6:29, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28–29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42, 44–45, 49;

14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25). In these passages, John used both the more general word for “send,” *πέμπειν*, and the word that adds a sense of commissioning, *ἀποστέλλειν*, interchangeably.

This sense of sentness is indicated in Jesus’ perpetual restlessness. He went to Jerusalem in order to walk to Golgotha, to the cross, and He left it for the tomb. But then He deserted the tomb for the company of His disciples once again and finally departed to the right hand of the Father—so that He could send the Holy Spirit. For John, Jesus was God on the move, on a mission, a mission to restore His people, who had strayed from Him, returning them to the trust that defined their relationship with Him as it was in Eden.

In this execution of His mission Jesus created a renewed humanity, a new Israel, His church. In John 20, the One whom the Father sent announces that He had come to send His disciples. He breathed on them, as He had breathed on dust in Genesis 2, and that breath of new life propels them into the world with the mission of forgiving sins, or, if necessary retaining them, that is, the mission of—as He said it on another occasion—proclaiming repentance to turn people away from false gods and forgiveness of sins to restore them to new life (Lk 24:46–49).

Jesus had gotten into the habit of putting people in motion before Easter night. His conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria propelled her back into town with her report of her encounter with one who claimed to be the Messiah. Many came to Him because of her words (Jn 4:7–30, 39–42). Into this story John interjected an interlude that came from Jesus’ reflections on the encounter with the woman. It led Him to direct the disciples to the harvest of the fruit for eternal life (4:31–38). Into that harvest He had come to send them. Likewise, the man at the pool of Bethsaida felt sent and went to give testimony to what this Jesus had done for him (5:2–15).

In the wonderful mystery of God’s exercise of total responsibility for all that He has created, while insisting on the total responsibility of each human creature for all that the Creator has given him or her to do, God’s mission becomes the mission of His people. Already in John’s report of Jesus’ interaction with His disciples, there is something of this paradox. God Almighty has the whole of His people’s mission in His own hands, in the re-creating breath which the Holy Spirit breathes into His people. At the same time, He insists that the mission is ours, for He has commissioned us to make disciples throughout the world, to preach repentance and forgiveness to all nations, to forgive and retain sins so that people may trust in the Messiah and find life in His name.

Indeed, having created His new Israel out of the Twelve, and having given them their mission, at the end, Jesus left this earth; but He did not leave His people alone. He remains the way to the Father (14:6–11), who sends the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who proceeds into this world, sent by the Father (14:16–17, 26; 15:26). The Spirit bears witness to the truth, which Jesus is and brings. The Spirit leads the church in the witness for which it was created. God sends all His people to communicate the message and the person of Christ to the world, just as the original apostles were commissioned to do (15:26–27; 16:7–15) since we have their word made, by the Spirit’s inspiration of their scriptural reports (2 Pt 1:19–21), more sure.

John pays little attention to the details of church life. The evangelist and the Holy Spirit left much to the wisdom of successive generations to adjust to new times and new cultures. Nonetheless, the gospel makes it clear that Jesus did not leave them without a clear idea of what He expected their life together to be in the community He was establishing. Most of what Jesus had to say about His disciples and how they would fare in the world after His departure focused on His actions in their behalf, the sound of His voice (10:16) and His protection of the sheep (10:1–18, 27–30). But He also said that they would be by definition a loving community, demonstrating the kind of love He had had for them in their own actions toward one another (13:34–35). In his first epistle, John reaffirmed that God had sent His only Son into the world to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1:7, 2:2), so that we might live through Him and show His love to each other (4:9–14). He presumed that this community would be bound as tightly to Him and be as dependent on Him as branches to the main vine (Jn 15:1–11). Those cleansed by Christ's Word would bear much fruit as His disciples, and they would practice the love that the Father and the Son demonstrate to each other (15:5–17).

He who is the first fruits from the dead (1 Cor 15:20) seeks as the first fruit of His disciples that they bring those dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1–10) to life again. If the head of the body and the firstborn of the dead is on the move to reconcile all things to Himself (Col 1:18–19), then the members of His body are naturally heading toward those estranged from God and hostile to His Word, whom He came to reconcile to Himself, so that He might create for them the peace with which He greeted His disciples on Easter evening (Col 1:20–22; John 20:21). He granted them that peace in the very same breath with which He sent them into the world to find others who are estranged and hostile and in need of the gift of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Yet His gathered people would experience the same conflicts that He had endured with the Adversary (8:42–47) and with his minions (e.g., 8:31–41, 48–59). Since the world hated Jesus, its hatred toward His followers should not surprise them (15:18–25). Yet John did not envision them fighting alone. In His prayer in John 17, Jesus reaffirmed His commitment to protecting His people in the midst of the world and their call to commitment to mutual support in His church. God is our mighty fortress; the church is not. To be sure, the church does provide haven and sanctuary for the bedraggled and desolated of this world; but the church is able to do that because the Holy Spirit accompanies it as it is engaged on the battlefield of Satan's attack on God's truth and the life He gives His human creatures (Jn 8:44). When the church circles the wagons and turns in upon itself—as Luther described our sinfulness—it may offer protection of the temporal kind and defense like that of the Gentiles (Mk 10:42–45), but it has then forsaken the One who alone is its fortress.

Christ presumed that His disciples would remain united; that was Jesus' wish and will, as He expressed it in John 17. His prayer that the church might be one is embedded in a longer prayer that places this unity in the service of the goals which Jesus set for His followers. Perhaps because He knew that Satan would most cleverly combat the truth and weaken the church by fostering division among its members through untruths about His Word and untruths about each other, He emphasized the need for them to seek unity in love toward each other. In His prayer in John 17, He

expressed His joy that those whom the Father had given into His charge had kept God's Word, and that they were keeping His Word, the truth that Jesus gave them, believing in Him as the one God had sent (17:6–8). He prayed for them because the world would hate them and they needed protection from the Evil One (17:11–16). He prayed that they would be made holy, that is, dedicated to God, and that would happen through God's Word, the reliable truth of the faithful Creator (17:17). This Word, its truth, and the very nature of this Creator were to be reflected in their oneness (17:20–24). The relationship of Father, Son, and Jesus' people had as its result and goal that the world would believe that Jesus was this one sent by the Father, so that the world might acknowledge the love of the Father for the Son (17:21, 23). To that end He was sending those who trusted in Him into the world.

The rather ragged band of disciples did not get off to a good start, losing one member before Jesus even set them on their own and the Holy Spirit's mission (13:21–30; 18:2–5), and with another openly and emphatically denying that he knew, to say nothing of loved, Jesus (18:15–27). It seemed indeed that His church, like His saving actions and the word that delivers them to His people, would be—from the standpoint of outsiders—weak and foolish (1 Cor 1:17–2:16). There were, of course, those ready to risk open adherence—the women at the cross, the evangelist John himself (19:25–26), and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (19:38–42). They had a sense of their mission, and it overcame their fears. But many in His church deviate in word and/or deed from the path on which He propels them. Why the church is, as Israel in the Old Testament narrative was, in such a sorry state—ever again tending toward trying to govern and guide itself rather than letting God be God—is a theodical problem and thus not to be solved. Why the Holy Spirit is not more efficient in keeping His house in order according to our prescriptions remains a mystery, one of those “why” questions He answers only obliquely. Jesus did make it clear that the struggle against the Liar and Murderer (8:44) would never cease.

What is also clear is that the church ceases to be all that it can be according to Christ's command and expectation when it does not practice its sentness, in love. For to the end of time, it is called to give witness that Jesus is the Messiah who delivers people trapped in the sinfulness of this world, that He is the One like a son of man who has everlasting and indestructible dominion, glory, and kingships, whom all peoples, nations, and languages serve, yet who came Himself to serve and to be a ransom for many.

Before the incarnation, the Father was sending the Son. Before Pentecost, the Son was sending His people, to forgive sins according to John, to make disciples through baptism and teaching according to Matthew (28:18–20) and Mark (16:16), to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins according to Luke (24:45–49). The mission of God—in the Father's dispatch of the Logos into human flesh with the gift of life and light, in the sending of Christ's people into the world of sinners with the gift of forgiveness and life—creates the church, and the church is always to be understood as the agent of this mission of God, which calls people trapped in sin out of their darkness into His marvelous light.

As the Father Has Sent Me

Henry R. Schriever

For decades, church leaders have faithfully instructed the people of God to bear witness to the Gospel primarily on the basis of Jesus' Great Commission to go into all the world and "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19, 20a). That this must be emphasized and encouraged goes without saying; it is the Lord's commission. In the process of encouraging this evangelism, however, it seems an important aspect of this ministry of God's people has not received sufficient emphasis. In John's reporting of Jesus' commission, Jesus tells the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (Jn 20:21–23). What does Jesus mean? What did that mean for this first community of followers? What does that mean for modern communities of followers called Christian congregations? An exceedingly great deal, especially in our day and age. We explore the message and implications.

It was on the evening of that first day, John tells us, that Jesus stood there among His disciples. They were still afraid. They had locked the doors. Suddenly, they see Jesus in front of them! Is it He? Is it a ghost? (Cf. Lk 24:37) Jesus, knowing their hearts and minds, quiets them with "Peace be with you" as He shows them His hands and His side. It is He! They rejoice. He greets them again with "Peace be with you."

Following this greeting, Jesus goes right to the point and tells them, "As the Father has sent me, I am also sending you." In this "commission," He compares what He is doing with them with what the Father was doing with Him. Earlier on, Jesus has told Nicodemus: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Jesus had also told His disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love" (15:9). In His High Priestly Prayer, our Lord prayed, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world," as He consecrates Himself "so that they also might be sanctified in truth" (Jn 17:18, 19).

The disciples are to be like the Son: sent into the world out of love for the world to be as He was in the world, in the same relationship He has with the Father! Even as the Father who loved His Son and bound Himself to Him, sending His Son into the world that the Son will also love, so now Jesus, who loves His disciples and has bound Himself to them, sends them into the world in the same way.

What is of first importance here is the intimacy of the relationships. Jesus often spoke of His "oneness" with the Father, of the Father being in Him and His being "in" the Father (Jn 17:21). He also spoke of that same relationship of intimacy

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between Himself and the disciples, a oneness for which He prayed (Jn 17:21), and which He saw already accomplished as He compares this relationship with a vine and its branches (Jn 15:5ff). We conclude therefore that as the Father sent a “part” of Himself in Jesus, so Jesus sends a “part” of Himself in the disciples (cf. the Pauline image of the Church as the Body of Christ—1 Cor 12:12ff.). But to what end? To what purpose?

John turns our attention to another action of Jesus. He tells us Jesus “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:22). John gives the impression that Jesus momentarily ceased speaking and deliberately “breathed on” the disciples. Why emphasize Jesus’ “breathing”? The fact that this action of breathing precedes Jesus’ words “Receive the Holy Spirit,” and that the words for “breath” and “spirit” (also “wind”) are the same leads naturally to the conclusion that Jesus is giving His “Breath,” His “Spirit,” His “inner life” to the disciples. One cannot help but recall Genesis 2:7: “The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living creature.” It appears that John is telling us that Jesus was giving new life to His disciples, a new “breath” of life, a new spirit, His Spirit, making them, as it were, beings with a new life who carry His Spirit (breath) as He sends them out. They are now the bearers of the Spirit of God, of the Father, via the Son and, of course, the Son Himself. (One could call this the Johannine Pentecost.¹)

Jesus’ next words confirm this as He says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” He then bestows the Spirit and they are to “breathe” the Spirit in. It is reminiscent of His invitation to the thirsty to come to Him to drink and have rivers of living water flow from their hearts. John adds, “Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn 7:39). Drinking in the Spirit and breathing in the Spirit are one and the same action, resulting in the recipients’ becoming sources of “living water,” that is, of new life for themselves and others.

Earlier in John, we learned that the Spirit gives birth (with the water, Jn 3:5–8) quietly and gently and without measure (cf. also Jn 6:63). The Spirit is also the Paraclete (Helper, Supporter, Advocate, Encourager), who will teach and lead into all truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13).

Jesus is giving the disciples a source of new life that enables them to bring refreshment and new life to others, and He will help, support, and lead them into all truth. As the Father sent Him, so He now sends them fully equipped with the new life of the Spirit *in* them.

To what end? What purpose? What is the task or mission?

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone it is withheld” (Jn 20:23). The forgiveness of sins is at the heart of Jesus’ mission. The Baptizer saw it clearly when he declared, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).

What is this “sin”? It is something the world has that Jesus takes away (Jn 1:29), something Jesus’ opponents will die in unless they believe in Him (Jn 8:21–24), something to which people are enslaved (Jn 8:34), and of which no one can accuse Jesus. Sin is that which the Pharisees say the blind man was born in, causing

his blindness, and which the Pharisees would not have if they were physically blind, but which remains in them because they say, “We see” (but do not). Sin is having seen Jesus and in spite of (or as a result of) it now hating Jesus and the Father (Jn 15:23–25). Sin is also something about which the Paraclete will prove the world wrong because they did not believe in Jesus (Jn 16:8, 9). Sin is also that which the one who delivered Jesus to Pilate has the greater of.

In sum, “sin” is primarily the unbelieving hatred, characteristic of the world in general. It opposes Jesus and the Father, causes slavery to itself and ultimately death. This is what Jesus has come to take away (Jn 1:29). Jesus now gives His disciples power to release people from the slavery of this sin. He gives them the authority to forgive, cancel, free from this unbelieving, hateful opposition to Him and the Father. He sends them out with the Spirit and authority that create a totally new situation, joining Him in taking away the sins of the world.

Or not. For He adds, “If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.” Jesus is aware that this mission will not always be “successful” and that there will be those who choose to continue in sin. He authorizes the disciples to do what they have to do: let the old situation of hatred and opposition to Him and the Father continue as it is. There is nothing more they can do. Forgiveness of sins obviously means nothing then. Yet it is clear from Jesus’ whole mission and ministry this is the least desirable alternative. The bringing of the forgiveness of sins is first and foremost.

So, as the Father sent the beloved Son out of love for the world, now the beloved Son sends His beloved disciples with the same life-giving Spirit into the world on a mission to forgive sins and create a whole new situation in the world.

How are they to do this? As He did, obediently doing the Father’s will. As He had already told them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (Jn 4:34; 5:30; 17:4; 19:30). Jesus’ “food”—that which sustains Him and keeps Him alive, that which He cannot do without, His whole life and purpose that keeps Him going—is bringing His Father’s work to completion. What that work is we learn in John 19:30: “When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” He finishes the work of Him who sent Him when He dies on the cross. Then we see that the work He was sent to do ultimately called for dying a criminal’s death by execution on a cross—the ultimate in willing obedience (Phil 2:6–8)! As the writer to the Hebrews describes it, He *learned* obedience through what He suffered. He learned what obedience to the will of the Father meant for a human being—the hardship of suffering that can and often does lead to the kind of death He died.

What stands out immediately in Jesus’ way of fulfilling His mission is His submissive obedience and determination to accomplish the work of Him who sent Him, no matter the cost, even to death. So then also for the disciples. As the Father sent Jesus, so He sends them as obedient servants submitting to the will of God to continue His work, even to dying if necessary.

What this entails we begin to see already in John’s prologue, as he tells us about the Word who is God becoming flesh and “tenting” among us. In the words of Paul, this Word “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant (slave)

being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:6, 7). The work called for Him to fully identify with human beings, especially with those who were “people of no account,” servants or slaves. And it was in this state, John continues, “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

What, then, is the nature of that glory they beheld? First, it is full of “grace and truth.” It is a glory that abounds in good will, graciousness, freely giving of itself, revealing the reality of how things truly are embraced in the love of God. Jesus declares, “Your word is truth” (Jn 17:17). If He is the Word, then the truth is all about God so loving the world in Jesus.

John also tells us about the signs of this glory. Especially interesting is the first of those signs, the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Jesus begins to manifest His glory at a celebration. He turns a potential disaster into a joyful delight by keeping the party going. It would appear that this act of turning water into wine is a sign conveying the truth that an important part of Jesus’ mission (the first thing He does) is to be seen in the context of joy and celebration. Indeed, later on He tells His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” The glory of His grace and truth is suffused with joy! To be sent as the Father sent His Son then also means being sent to bring joy!

He also shows that glory in healing an official’s son (Jn 4:54), in feeding 5,000+ people (Jn 6:14), healing a blind man (Jn 9:16), raising Lazarus (Jn 12:37), and in various other ways of bringing help and healing to people. In the end, He will be fully glorified by being betrayed and crucified (Jn 13:31, 32). Jesus reveals His glory in grace and truth (not primarily in majesty and might) as He lives among human beings and becomes their Servant unto death. So it must also be with those He sends.

We conclude that when He tells His disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” He is sending them out to identify themselves fully with all humanity, especially the lowliest, to put aside any pretense and become joy-filled servants as was He when He dwelt among them. They are to reveal the same glory of grace and truth.

But how? Jesus’ High Priestly prayer (Jn 17) gives direction. In this prayer, in which He not only intercedes for the Twelve, but also for all who will believe in Him through their word (Jn 17:21), Jesus asks, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us *so that the world may believe you have sent me.*”

Their being *one* is fundamental to the mission. This passage is often cited as the prime motivation for church unity on a worldwide, ecumenical level, which is certainly relevant. However, these words of our Lord often seem neglected when local congregations consider what it means to be a “missionary, evangelizing congregation.” Do we not here in the Twelve have the very first “local congregation,” and is it not relevant that what follows must also be applied first to the local congregation and then to the worldwide, ecumenical movement? It is clear the unity of the disciples (the local congregation) is of utmost importance to the mission of God in the world. The congregation members are to be one with each other as the Father and the Son are one with each other and are also one with the

congregation.

But what does it mean to be “one”? First, it is just like the oneness the Father and the Son share, “just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us” (Jn 17:21). The picture is of close, intimate intertwining, as depicted in the vine and its branches metaphor (Jn 15:1–11), and especially in Jesus’ breathing on them as He bestows His Holy Spirit. For the disciples, being in this relationship with the Father and the Son, like the Father and the Son, binds them together also with each other. This oneness becomes an essential element for their mission. For, Jesus adds, “that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:21). The oneness of the disciples for which Jesus prays is the key to the world’s recognizing Jesus as the One the Father sent because of His love for the world!

Jesus has already equipped them for just this purpose. He has given them the glory which the Father had given Him so that they might be one as He and the Father are one (Jn 7:22). That is the glory of grace and truth (see above) and has little to do with majesty and might, power and dominion (although that will come in the future, cf. Jn 17:24), but everything to do with Jesus’ love, His deep concern for the world in faithful obedience to the Father. Together with reflecting the unity of the Father and the Son, the disciples are to be deeply concerned for each other and their obedience in serving each other. All this “so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them as you loved me.” Their relationship with each other is basic and crucial to their witness in enabling the world to know the Father’s love.

How are they to express this love for one another? Jesus provides the answer as He celebrates His last meal with them (Jn 13:1–20). It is the time of Passover, and Jesus knows that “the hour” has come for Him to depart from the world to be with the Father. He also declares that He loved His own to the end.

Then Jesus does a rather unusual thing. He gets up takes off His outer garments, wraps a towel around His waist, pours water into a basin and begins to wash His disciples’ feet and wipe them with the towel. When it is Peter’s turn to be washed, he questions what Jesus is doing and refuses to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus tells Peter if he does not allow Him to wash his feet Peter will have no share with Him. Jesus is about washing feet!

Why He has done this Jesus makes clear when He finishes the washing. He tells them, “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (Jn 13:13–15).

“As the Father has sent me....” The Father has sent the Son to wash feet, to perform the most menial task of the household slave. So the Son now sends the disciples to be servants to one another, even to doing the lowliest task of washing each other’s dirty feet. It all begins there. To this, Jesus adds, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Jn 13:17).

Jesus then tells the disciples of His imminent betrayal by Judas. He gives them what He calls a “new commandment”: “that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (Jn 13:34). Loving the neighbor as oneself is surely not a new commandment, but loving that begins with washing feet and runs the gamut going through betrayal and ultimately to crucifixion opens

up a whole new perspective on the love of which Jesus speaks and which He demonstrates. That is most definitely “new.” In the light of “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” it is *radically* new for Jesus’ followers. It is that love which will distinguish them from all others and testify to the fact that they are indeed Jesus’ people. As He told them “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).

That is what their “being one” is all about. It is that for which Jesus fervently prays and for which He has united them to Himself and to the Father. It is the foundation stone of their “evangelism.” They are to go out into the world embodying and teaching this Word, first of all demonstrating its (His) grace and truth (glory) in their life together, in their loving each other, in their “oneness.”

How can mere humans possibly do this? We go to John the Baptizer’s proclamation: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29). If one understands that this image of the Lamb of God refers to the paschal lamb (which John most likely does), it is clear that among the many facets of this image that of “liberation” looms large. As the blood of the Passover lamb provided the “cover” that protected Israel from death and provided for their release from bondage in Egypt, so the blood of the Lamb of God would cover His people, protecting them also from death and providing them release from the bondage of unbelieving hatred (sin) toward the Father and His Son permeating the world.

How? Nicodemus wondered the same in his meeting with Jesus (Jn 3) as he pondered Jesus’ words about being born again (or born “from above”). Jesus told him, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (Jn 3:14–15). In Moses’ case, the people were in rebellion against him and the Lord. They were suffering the consequences with an infestation of poisonous snakes in their camp. The cure presented them was in looking at a bronze snake placed in their midst at the Lord’s command. When they believed this was the means by which the Lord would heal them, they were healed. Jesus points to His being lifted up and dying on the cross as the means whereby the Father brings about liberation from the bondage of sin and the healing of new life.

This lifting up of the Son of Man in the “wilderness” of the world opened the door for the healing of “eternal life.” It brought forgiveness, freedom from the bondage of sin, and protection from its power—a totally new situation bringing about a new creation (Rev 21:5), first for the disciples and then for the world into which He sends them. As the Father had sent Him . . .

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to *condemn* the world but in order that the world might be *saved* through him” (Jn 3:16–17). To that we may surely add that “Jesus so loved the world that He sent His disciples to tell the Good News that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” Jesus sends the disciples just as the Father sent Him. It begins with their intimacy with Him who breathes His Spirit into them, giving them the source of living water to bring them refreshment of joy, peace, grace, etc., in new life. He sends them into the world out

of love for the world just as He was sent. He sends them into the world to bring forgiveness, pardon for past unbelief, freedom for true faith that brings about a totally new situation and in effect takes away the sin of the world. They are to do this as He did in obedience to the Father. For them that means their maintaining intimacy with Him and the Father and their intimacy with each other. They are called to express a “oneness” demonstrated in washing each other’s feet, running the gamut of mutual ministry through possible betrayal and even to giving their lives for each other that the world may thereby see God Himself working in and through them and as a result come to believe that He has sent them. In doing so, they join Him as His instruments for taking away the sin of the world as did the Lamb of God. They become the ones given by God, using His means to save the world as they lift high the cross. The world can now see the glory of the grace of God at work in, among, and through them.

The implications of this for the *missio dei* (mission of God) and the local congregation are significant. If we consider the disciples gathered around Jesus as the first of the “Christian congregations” and remember that He is talking to them as a group, the first question a congregation need ask itself is: How do we see ourselves? As a club to which we belong? As some sort of religious service organization? As a close family? As a body of disciples called together in obedience to the Father’s will to bring the grace of God to the world after the manner of Jesus?

Are we truly aware of the importance of our oneness (which goes from washing feet to giving our lives for each other) in the revealing of God’s grace among us?

Do we truly reflect the grace and truth of the Lord in the humility and joy that is the glory of God?

Are we really *with* people and concerned about their spiritual and physical welfare?

Can it be said of us by those outside that God is really working among us?

In a day and age when people are seeking the peace and joy of being really “connected,” it would seem that congregations connected to the Father, Son, and Spirit and truly connected also with each other in the self-giving intimacy of the love of God would be a very powerful witness indeed!

Endnotes

¹ Cf. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, vol. 29A of Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), 1036–1039.

Lutheran Churches Drive Lutheran Missions

Markus Nietzsche

Recently, posts commenting on photos and “likes” by Lutheran friends on Facebook by other friends from the U.S., South Africa, and Germany have occasionally employed a phrase to describe mission work from a Lutheran perspective: “Lutheran Churches do Lutheran missions” or “The Lutheran Church does Lutheran missions.” I wish to reflect a bit about using this phrase to describe mission work. For some, the German phrase “*Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission*,” usually translated as “Lutheran Churches do Lutheran missions” (my own suggested translation will be provided a bit later), rings a familiar note when the topic of Lutheran missions is touched. Why? This sentence has been used since the founding of the “*Lutherische Kirchenmission—Bleckmarer Mission*” 1892 (Mission of Lutheran Churches—Bleckmar Mission Society) and in this context coined the self-understanding of this agency.

The history of the Bleckmar Mission has been dealt with before and more intensively by scholars than I shall do now. The above mentioned phrase has been around since 1889. It is still used today to describe mission work done by missionaries from the Bleckmar Mission. As good, solid instructed scholarly Lutherans we know to expect the next question: What does this mean? Both English translations quoted in Facebook (or maybe elsewhere) are used to translate the sentence into English. If you desire to use the phrase “Lutheran Churches do Lutheran missions” and post it with a “like” on Facebook, I would like you to know what really was meant, at least when this (originally German) phrase was coined. I say this because I am not quite sure what lies behind the current usage on Facebook and elsewhere: Are you just complimenting the posting of a few (exotic-looking) pictures? Are you appreciating or just “uplifting” (isn’t this quite a charismatic phrase?) the work done by a Facebook “friend”? Or are you really expressing admiration for the people locally witnessing Christ in their context, most of the times not even connected to Facebook? Or none of these contexts?

I am wondering why this phrase suddenly pops up and becomes more commonly used in our day and time. It seems to me that since the introduction and use of this phrase increasingly becomes a way to define or distinguish the “liked” posts on missions from others’ thoughts about missions or missional approaches within their own church body or of other denominations, the term “Lutheran” then becomes the so-called proof of a certain quality (which is not defined more closely). The “Church” actually seems to mean “those like me” (birds of a feather flock together) and the term “Lutheran missions” is used to underline this way of thinking: “It’s nice that you do things the way I think it is right to do and in accordance with

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what we always have done.” No need then to reflect on the relationship between missiology and ecclesiology, nor to think about the doctrines on Christology. Such an understanding and use of the phrase by some users on Facebook is, in my opinion, all wrong and really a perverted adaptation of a sentence formed at a time when confessional Lutheran churches began to develop and spread in the Western world. Naturally, this has to be discussed in detail. We are continuously challenged by *The Shaping of the Things to Come*.¹

I take up this discussion from my background as a Lutheran pastor from a rural place called Hermannsburg in Germany, serving, since 2009, a two-point parish there and in another small little rural village called Bleckmar. I also come to the discussion from a clearly non-English speaking context in the formerly western Transvaal in South Africa, where I was born, went to school, grew up as a young adult and lived for almost twenty-five years. I have been working effectively as a Lutheran missionary in a Germans-from-Russia context in Germany in Gifhorn, a city near the Volkswagen Plant in Wolfsburg, and surrounded by churches from at least fourteen different denominations, reaching out to young, urban Russian- and German-speaking migrants and starting the fifteenth church: St. Philipp’s Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Ten years ago, I was called to serve as the Mission Director of the Lutherische Kirchenmission–Bleckmarer Mission, established 1892, which has been the Mission-Agency since 1892 for Lutheran Free Churches in Germany and the former offshoot of the Buffalo-Synod (1892–1930) in the United States; for confessional Lutherans in Denmark, France, and South Africa (until about 1980); and since 1972 as the Mission-Society for the SELK (Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church) in Germany, which is working mainly in southern Africa but also has been serving in Australia, Brazil, and Congo, and lately taking up new endeavors in Germany among real Germans as well as migrants from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. One of the duties of the Mission Director was exploring missions from a theoretical background. It may seem amazing that this has not been done on a forgotten, barren outpost in Bleckmar somewhere in northern Germany’s lowlands, but rather within an ecumenical setting, discussing ecclesiological, missiological and practical approaches with Lutherans and Christians from other denominations. I have had the privilege of working with leading scholars of the day in Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Baptist circles. We debated how Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology relate to each other in an ecumenical setting and perspective, looking at the best way to communicate Christian teaching and (if you’ll excuse the word) content to post-modern Germans. Why is that of any importance? I am again taken by surprise and realize more and more how much the denominational multitude of churches and mission agencies that I have met and been surrounded with have shaped some of my own perception of what Lutheran missions are all about, from day one continuously onward. What makes the Lutheran understanding of missions in such a context exceptional, if, indeed, it is? I’ll try to explain.

What makes me wonder about how to treat this subject appropriately is when the talk about Lutherans in mission implies that only Lutherans—identified by some kind of criteria and selection—can do good and proper mission work. Implied, but not publicly stated, by such talk is that others do their work with some kind of

missiological or ecclesiological defect or even in bitter despair and in vain. I'd like to challenge this hidden agenda. When using the expression "Lutheran churches do Lutheran missions," are you saying that only a few exceptional Lutheran pastors or missionaries or congregations within larger church bodies like the LCMS or the LCC in northern America, SELK in Germany, or the LCSA in southern Africa are included? It makes me wonder if only those select few would do the right kind of specialized Lutheran missions somewhere in this world. The fruits and effects don't really show in comparison by numbers to others, do they? Yes, the numbers game again! I know that we should not compare missions in numbers and results . . . but has this not always been the attitude of small minorities? Face it: I wonder what we would have said and argued in discussions about the relationship of Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology if the situation for Lutherans in missions would have been reversed: that is, if the majority of Christians living today were Lutherans! Just imagine! So please, let's be honest with one another on these topics: How can we even think of "Lutherans in missions" as only those few doing just the right thing in their mission work or approach to mission? It is time to say good-bye to this non-theological, superficial, imperialistic, and arrogant way of thinking. Therefore, my answer to the described kind of blind understanding of Lutheran missions or missional approach to today's challenges is a clear "No!"

Maybe it only is my own heritage that lets me doubt this in a certain sense. Growing up in southern Africa as a child of a missionary, I experienced with all the mission work being done by several denominations an underlying common bond with other Christians (non-Lutherans), as we met for funerals or church dedications, Sunday services, or even on visits with homebound people. These "other" Christians (I do not mean this in a negative, arrogant way!) were just as well doing their missional thing, whether from a Dutch-Reformed context and all its *derivata*, or the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist ("Wesleyan"), Charismatic churches or even the Church of the Nazarene, Apostolic Faith Missions, and various others. I do not remember one service at the Lutheran mission-stations or outposts where there were not a number of people and members of other churches joining the special service by the Lutheran pastor. Common sense prevailed.

Although there were a number of very serious differences in the theological and ecclesiological (and, by implication, missiological) approaches, we all proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior and the Redeemer from our sins and transgressions. That we belonged to different denominations or churches did not hinder this belief. In those days, one could certainly describe the relationship between Christology, missiology, and ecclesiology as follows: The witnessed contextual Western European Christology shaped the ecclesiology of these denominations on African soil, and that shaped their local missiology. But this did not stop Christians of one denomination (e.g., Lutheran) from accepting the fact that the other denominations and mission agencies from different countries were also trying to reach out to the lost people with the Gospel of Christ. It seems to me that the Christology was commonly understood and shared; the issues at hand were rather, most of the time, ecclesiological or missiological. But this was an issue only among the mainline churches. Even then, early in the twentieth century, other churches (so-called African Independent Churches or indigenous churches) were

already challenging the missiology, ecclesiology (and, I suspect, the Christology as well), and accompanying worldviews brought forward by English-, Dutch-, German-, or Swedish-speaking Lutheran or Reformed or Anglican missionaries. It seems to me as if almost every Lutheran mission by Germans, Swedes, or Americans had in one way or another indigenous offshoots, usually not for theological or missiological reasons, but more for sociological and even political reasons.

Let me try to illustrate this: A small rural township in South Africa, for example Tshing (Ventersdorp) where I grew up, a town with five thousand inhabitants in days gone by, already hosted a multitude of churches. Close to the Lutheran church with its German missionary, just a few blocks away, an elder of a congregation that had split off from the same Lutheran church led his worship service. But just next door to the local Lutheran church with its brass band, church choir, pastor, and evangelists, a small group of people belonging to the Zion Christian Church, ZCC, (considered a syncretistic indigenous independent African church) were celebrating their worship with drumbeats and rhythms quite strange to European Luther-, Bach-, Beethoven-, and Mozart-bred ears almost at the same time that we Lutherans were worshipping there. The ZCC's reaction to the approach by Western-driven missions and churches most certainly shaped their own understanding of missiology, ecclesiology, and, without any doubt, also their Christology. And that differed quite a bit from the terms on which Lutherans were doing their thing!

To return now after this excursus to the initial point of discussion: Lutheran churches do Lutheran missions. So what did the Lutheran forbears who coined the phrase "Lutheran churches do Lutheran Missions" really mean in 1892? My personal translation for the German phrase "*Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission*" is "The Lutheran church drives Lutheran missions." This was one of the two leading principles when the Bleckmar Mission was established in 1892: "*Wir wollen dieses Missionswerk als ein kirchliches, d.h. als Missionwerk unserer Hannöv. ev.-luth. Freikirche betreiben.*"² These go back to earlier similar statements at confessional Lutheran synodical conventions in northern Germany as early as in the year 1889.³ Once the Mission of the Hannoverian Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, soon called the "Bleckmarer Mission," was established in 1892, different Lutheran churches (*id est* church bodies) followed suit and joined the common cause to drive Lutheran missions, whether in nearby Hessia, far off South Africa, or even in the new world countries, when in 1902 the Buffalo Synod declared the Bleckmar Mission to be "their" Mission-Society as well. In the case of the Buffalo Synod (a leftover, as I understand it, of an earlier merger with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod), this arrangement lasted till around 1930, when the Buffalo Synod merged with the American Lutheran Church. I would like to point out that these churches at large, not just a few congregations or donors, decided to support the Mission. In the Advent season of 1898, Conrad Dreves, Pastor in Hermannsburg, announced the forthcoming publishing of the *Journal and Newsletter of the Bleckmar Mission (Missionsblatt der Hannoverschen evangelisch-lutherischen Freikirche)* [MHELF] in January 1899 with these words:

Diese so beschriebene Art und Weise des Erscheinens des Missionsblattes kennzeichnet unsere Mission auch äußerlich als eine kirchliche, d.h. von

*unserer ganzen Kirche getriebene und getragene. [. . .] so leben wir damit auch den nicht minder wichtigen und richtigen Satz nach: Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission.*⁴

In the context of a description of where Lutherans are supposed to partake of Communion (a major theological and practical issue for confessional Lutherans at that time both in Germany and the mission fields in southern Africa), a second related issue was crisply addressed: Lutheran missions are never done only by a few, spontaneously selected congregants, donors, or sponsors, but by the Lutheran Church at large, in this case founded as a local northern-German established and recognized church body with several congregations, pastors, and missionaries in the field. By that was meant that Christian witnessing, or mission work, was to be done by Christians who define themselves, sometimes in denominational categories like “Lutheran.” It is never the work of a single missionary or a single congregation or a group of people who think similarly or join in a common cause: no, not just a core group of Lutherans, but the church body at large. Conrad Dreyes then continues to say:

*Kirche und Mission sind ja wie Mutter und Tochter innigst miteinander verbunden. Und immer wird sich herausstellen, daß Liebe zur Kirche eifrige Missionsfreunde, und hinwiederum fleißige Missionsarbeit immer lebendigere, dankbare Kirchglieder macht, weil wir den klaren Missionsbefehl und die köstlichen Missionsverheißungen des erhöhten Hauptes der Kirche immer im Ohr und Herzen haben und andererseits der Heiden grenzenlose Noth und bittere Armuth uns stetig an die Fülle der Gnaden erinnert, in die wir Christen förmlich eingetaucht sind.*⁵

Note this: “The church and its mission are like mother and daughter, closely bound together, and the love for the church will always bear fruit of friends of missions; and mission work will cause vibrant, thankful congregants because the great commission and promises by the Head of the Church are in our hearts and ears and the utter need and bitter poverty of the heathens remind us of the blessings of grace in which we as Christians are bathed.”

As I understand it, there is not a clear linear pattern: Christology → ecclesiology → missiology, but more a sense of these three topics interwoven. At least ecclesiology and missiology would seem to be closely knit together, influencing and shaping each other. Characteristics or distinctives of renewal movements⁶ are also to be considered: a thirst for constant energetic and dynamic renewal (church and mission are influencing each other), even the ministry to the poor, the uneducated and socially outcast (the utter need and bitter poverty of heathens). Were we to look at the reasons for the existence of the local Lutheran churches and mission in a broader context, we would find the institutional-charismatic tension, the concern for being a counter-cultural community and segmented, cellular organizations. All of these distinctives can be observed in the early history of our church and its mission. How much of that still is in effect today can be debated, but understanding the founding of the Bleckmar Mission as a renewal movement is not so far from the truth as one might first think. The point I want to stress, nevertheless, is that the establishing of a Lutheran church and its mission by our forebears should not be understood as a cause in itself, only to serve the people of God, but also to

reach out to the “lost” around them. Yes, the notions of a church and its mission certainly shaped their sense of people and mission! I think this is crucial: That is also why theology matters! The Lutheran church understands itself as a congregation of *lost* people, that is, sinners, gathered by the Means of Grace through the mercy of God. But is this then necessarily only a purely “Lutheran” topic? I am quite happy to say, fortunately, no!

I shall have to explain this. The Augsburg Confession speaks in Article 7 not of a particular *Lutheran* church but of the one, holy, Christian (catholic) and apostolic church. In this one, holy, Christian and apostolic church are gathered those who can be considered to be the “lost,” or sinners, if you will. It is here where the means of grace are shared and administered; it is into this church that non-baptized are baptized. We as Lutherans teach, believe, and confess this one, holy, Christian and apostolic church. Maybe, therefore, it is helpful to find some consolation in the Latin, *ne desperemus* (so that we should not doubt), as Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (a former Mission Director of the Bleckmar Mission) states in his essay: “*Lutherische Kirche treibt Lutherische Mission*” 1967.⁷ Hopf points out that this Article of the Church also includes the teaching of Lutheran missions. Since the days of St. Peter’s proclaiming Christ on Pentecost, calling “lost” people without Christ to repent—and which the Lord provides for (isn’t that observation remarkable!)—most certainly in, with, and under the witnessing of missionaries and the administration of the Means of Grace, people are called into God’s Church all over the world. The ceremonies and traditions are not always decisive, right? But frankly speaking, for Hopf this was the decisive point he made: Although the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church is hidden and not always to be found easily, it is always larger than what we see or have at hand. Even in today’s Lutheran churches, the church is clearly distinguishable by the pure proclamation of God’s Word and the right administration of the Sacraments. Exactly that is the point.

The question at hand would then be how to decipher what the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church is all about and what the pure proclamation and the right administration of the Sacraments are. This adventurous task cannot be taken away from existing churches that can trace their roots to Pentecost or the Reformation or whatever date in history, nor from newly found churches in storefronts just around the corner, nor from underground churches or whatever small communities of faith, wherever found in this world. Therefore, these crucial questions about the Church and its Means of Grace cannot be left out in discussing or addressing the relationship between Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology. The Lutheran church as a shareholder (I’ll go that far and stretch this word in this sense) in the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church is, as a matter of fact, always doing mission work since it always shares the grace of God with people who are not yet or are no more part of Christ’s Church. Again: our notions of church and mission shape our sense of people and mission! Yes! Lutheran churches driving Lutheran missions will reach out to those who are not or who are no longer a part of the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church with the Means of Grace. That will always be decisive!

“*Lutherische Kirche treibt Lutherische Mission*”: The Lutheran church drives Lutheran missions. For Conrad Dreves, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, and our

Lutheran forefathers this was not just an issue, and never an easy one, but the decisive reason to start and continue and build what they called Lutheran churches doing (or “driving,” as I suggest) Lutheran missions—missions, I believe, built to last.

Endnotes

¹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of the Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003).

² “Die Synode der Hannöv. ev.-luth. Freikirche 1892. II.” in: *Unter dem Kreuze. Kirchliches Volksblatt aus Niedersachsen nebst Kirchl. Anzeiger für die Hannöv. ev.-luth. Freikirche. XVII.*

³ *Geschichte der Hannoverschen evangelisch-lutherischen Freikirche. Herausgegeben von dem Pastorenkonvent. Druck und Verlag von Otto Romberger (vorm. W. Großgebauer), Celle, 1924, 35–36.*

⁴ “Missionsblatt-Anzeige” in: *Unter dem Kreuze. Kirchliches Volksblatt aus Niedersachsen nebst Kirchl. Anzeiger für die Hannöv. ev.-luth. Freikirche. XXIII. Jahrgang, No. 50. Celle, 11. Dec. 1898, 397.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things*, 204f.

⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, “Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission” in: *Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission* ed. F.W. Hopf (Hermannsburg: Missionshandlung, 1967), 15.

How Does God Build His Kingdom? A Case Study Approach

Eugene Bunkowske

Introduction (Motivation):

This article reports on a case study that can help us evaluate the observations and opinions of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in their 2003 book *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. In their “You must read this bit first,” Frost and Hirsch make it abundantly clear that they are committed to the classical, historic, orthodox, Christian faith with Christology at the center of the circle.¹ For them this means that Jesus the Messiah came into the world to spread the Good News about the Kingdom² and to restore the relationship that the triune God and human beings enjoyed before the breaking of that relationship in the Garden of Eden.³

Their findings, stated in a number of different ways throughout the book, are that the church, as a human institution, from the eleventh century until the end of the twentieth century has not only dominated European society but has also become the limiting, inflexible, and controlling default structure for doing mission. The contention of the authors is that the sociopolitical reality called Christendom has moved Christianity away from being communities of faith representing an ongoing, dynamic, and multiplying encounter between God and human beings to a weighty, non-organic tradition that lacks agility, energy, and exponential fruitfulness particularly in the West.⁴

The suggestion of the authors is that a revolutionary Einstein-like, paradigm-busting break from the sociopolitical limitations of institutionally dominated ecclesiology is needed. They contend that if God’s purposeful sending (the mission of God) is to flourish in the twenty-first century and beyond it will need a different ecclesiology that functions in ways that open the doors for agile, flexible, and dynamic community-of-faith witness and work free of unhealthy ecclesiastical rigidity, limitations, and ethnocentric human controls. This new ecclesiology must, in the view of the authors, always be open to the ways of doing the mission of God that are logically suggested by the various social settings into which the Good News of Jesus the Christ is being introduced on the basis of the Word of God to make way for the work of the Spirit of God in creating faith, worldview change, and new life in Christ.

In addition, Frost and Hirsch contend that Scripture teaches that missiology should shape ecclesiology and not the other way around. In other words, if you want to place Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology in linear order, Christology should be first, missiology second, and ecclesiology third. The purpose of this case

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study is what the field experience of kingdom planting and kingdom building in Nigeria, Africa has to say about the relationship of Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology from the Yala society's culture, language, and worldview change perspective.

Introduction (The Coming of the Kingdom):

This factual case study is about God's bringing His kingdom of grace to the Yala people in Nigeria. God's means for bringing His kingdom was the Good News of His life-changing call out of darkness to light. God's goal for His Good News was to move the Yala people from separation and wrong relationship to restoration of right relationship, from control by sin to the forgiveness of sins and from unrighteousness into the paths of righteousness and temporal and eternal peace.⁵

The Kingdom of God/heaven is purposeful and dynamic.⁶ It is a kingdom that is present in heaven as well as on earth.⁷ It is a coming kingdom that is near.⁸ It is not marked by physical borders but is within those who believe the Good News about Jesus the Messiah.⁹ This kingdom is under the direct authority of Jesus the Messiah and brings salvation and separation from the accusing activity of the devil.¹⁰

It is a kingdom in which people have power over demons, are sent out to tell the Good News about Jesus the Messiah and to heal.¹¹ It is a kingdom of righteousness received from God. It is characterized by peace, joy,¹² blessings,¹³ greatness, power, and splendor. It is rooted in the glory of God and brings good for His creation.¹⁴ It has one integration point which is God Himself.¹⁵

This kingdom belongs to those who are born of water and the spirit of God. It is from above.¹⁶ It is for those who trust like children,¹⁷ the spiritually helpless,¹⁸ the persecuted,¹⁹ the humble,²⁰ and those who do what God wants them to do.²¹ It is like a field in which good seed is planted,²² like a mustard seed that grows into a great tree,²³ and like yeast that spreads throughout a lump of dough.²⁴

Introduction (Initiation and Definitions):

Development of this case study has been going on for fifty years in the missionary life and thinking of the author. This writing addresses the relationship between Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology. Since this study is designed to evaluate the observations and opinions of Frost and Hirsch, it will be helpful to use their definitions of Christology, ecclesiology, missiology as a practical starting point for the study:

1. **Christology:** Essentially Christology comprises the biblical teaching of and about Jesus the Messiah. When we say Christology must inform all aspects of the church's life and work, we mean that Jesus must be first and foremost in our lives and self-definition as church and disciples. When the adjective form Christological is used, it simply means that the element being described must be referenced primarily by our understanding and experience of Jesus the Messiah.²⁵
2. **Ecclesiology:** Classically, this refers to the biblical teaching about the nature, life, and practice of the church. We believe that our ecclesiology should emerge from our missiology, which should in turn derive from our Christology.²⁶

3. **Missiology:** Missiology is the study of missions. As a discipline, it seeks to identify the primal impulses in the Scriptures that compel God's people into engagement with the world. Such impulses involve, among others, the *missio Dei* (the mission of God), the Incarnation, and the kingdom of God. It also describes the authentic church's commitment to social justice, relational righteousness, and evangelism. As such, missiology seeks to define the church's purposes in light of God's will for the world. It also seeks to study the methods of achieving these ends both from Scriptures and history. The term *missiology* simply draws off these meanings.²⁷

It is our expectation that these definitions will help us do our case study in a way that objectively evaluates the observations and opinions of Frost and Hirsch. In addition, they may help us identify some of the dynamics that make way for kingdom movement when the understanding of the spiritual dimension of one set of people comes into creative contact with the understanding of the spiritual dimension of another set of quite different people. Finally, they may also help us develop our own definitions, particularly of missiology, which is in the process of becoming a recognized scholarly discipline.

Introduction (Approaches):

This case study will be presented as much as possible from a balanced and holistic perspective that features both unseen and seen reality²⁸ and divine and human communication in both its verbal and nonverbal usage. It will respect divine communication through nature²⁹ and revelation.³⁰ It will consciously recognize that each society has its own worldview that acts as a filter through which the people of that society manipulate and communicate their understanding of reality.

Secondly, the missionary involved in this case study is a Christian who spent the first twenty-five years of life primarily in a Western twentieth-century worldview setting. Although his comfort zone was greatly expanded during the following fifty-one plus years, the reality is that his early Western worldview with its biases and predilections still has a profound influence on his thinking and understanding. This means that his desire to present from a fully balanced and holistic point of view will not always be achieved perfectly.

Thirdly, the essential starting point from which this case study proceeds is the Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology of a society with a Christian worldview. Some of the key cultural components of this society that are revealed in the Bible are the following:

1. God created the world out of nothing³¹ with a good and very good perfectly organized operating system³² for sacrificial, patient, kind, and truthful communication and relationships between Him and all parts of His creation, including the human part.³³
2. God created humans in His image and likeness for communication with Himself and each other.³⁴
3. God also created all the stuff³⁵ needed to make it possible for humans to function as His image-reflecting vice-regents and managers on earth.³⁶ Being created by God sets human beings apart from God the creator and

also from the many other beings and things that God created out of nothing but not in His image and likeness.

4. Not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was God's quality control mechanism for evaluating the needed human ultimate relational allegiance to God in His perfectly organized operating system for the world.
5. Eve and Adam fell for Satan's lie and by eating the forbidden fruit marked themselves and their descendants as disobedient human participants in God's perfectly organized operating system. This imperfect condition is defined as sin (original, manifested, and inherited)³⁷ that brings with it death³⁸ and relational separation from God.³⁹
6. The message of the rest of the Bible unfolds God's commitment to restoring the broken relationship⁴⁰ with human beings as well as closing the door on eternal death by making a way back to eternal life through trusting faith in Jesus the Christ.⁴¹

Fourthly, we will engage with the following questions as we proceed:

1. What does it take to build the Kingdom of the God described above in the society of the Yala people with their own way of thinking, understanding, and acting?
2. How does kingdom building proceed through the process of making disciples who make other disciples and communities of disciples in the society of Yala people?
3. In what order are things done and why?
4. What does all of this have to say about the relationship with each other of Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology as they function together in God's plan of seeking and saving the lost?⁴²

Eugene and Bernice Bunkowske faced these questions, if not altogether clearly, at least implicitly, in the summer of 1961 when they were sent north in Nigeria by God through the Lutheran Mission. No explicit instructions were given; but, in the mind's eye of the missionary, he and his family were being sent to develop a strategic plan for doing comprehensive kingdom building (missionary work) among the 60,000 Yala people in Nigeria.

I. Kingdom Worldview Foundation:

Kingdom building starts with an appropriate and solid foundation, a foundation that can be systematically built upon through the years. God used St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:5–11 to designate that foundation and how it should be put in place in a way that could spontaneously develop exponentially through the work of experienced builders with a variety of spiritual gifts.

The text reads as follows:

Who is Apollos? Who is Paul? They are servants who helped you come to faith. Each did what the Lord gave him to do. I planted, and Apollos watered, but God made it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is important because only God makes it grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have the same goal, and each will receive a reward for his own work. We are God's coworkers. You are God's field.

You are God's building. As a skilled and experienced builder, I used the gift that God gave me to lay the foundation for that building. However, someone else is building on it. Each person must be careful how he builds on it. After all, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that is already laid and that foundation is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:5–11)

Jesus taught Christians to pray: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."⁴³ The point is that as God acts to develop His kingdom in the various societies on earth in the image and likeness of His heavenly kingdom⁴⁴ the incarnate Christ is basic and foundational to everything in this kingdom.

2. Theological Considerations (Missiology 101):

Theology, in general, is the study of god(s), the understanding of god(s) and the knowledge of god(s), especially of the triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit. The God of Christianity is all about orderly and organized right relationship, communication, seeking, saving, calling, and sending. Relationship is not only who God is, but also what He thinks and does.⁴⁵ His creation is the movement from disorder (chaos) to order.

Satan successfully reintroduced chaos (broken relationship) into the world through Adam and Eve's eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God's action in the cool of the evening showed his strong commitment to ongoing relationships.⁴⁶ It also showed that God cared enough for humankind to reorganize in a way that separated Adam and Eve from eternal destruction,⁴⁷ gave them significant roles in life and constructive work to do,⁴⁸ as well as the promise of victory over Satan and full relational restoration with God in a promised descendant.⁴⁹

We must also recognize that God is spirit.⁵⁰ That is, He is a being with both mind and will but without body. He is without beginning or end.⁵¹ He does not change.⁵² God is all-powerful.⁵³ He is all-knowing.⁵⁴ He is present everywhere.⁵⁵ He is sinless.⁵⁶ He is fair and impartial.⁵⁷ God keeps His promises.⁵⁸ He is the giver of undeserved love and kindness.⁵⁹ He is the God of compassion.⁶⁰

Above all, the Christian God is love.⁶¹ The field of meaning that the English symbol "love" points to is very broad. It includes (1) an honorable, yet unemotional, feeling of fondness for another, such as between siblings in a functional family. It involves (2) natural affection as a parent has for a child. It also embraces (3) passionate desire and longing for another person. Finally, it also incorporates ways of thinking that lead to (4) sacrificial unconditional giving to others.

The original Greek of the Bible divides this broad English field of meaning into at least four parts. In 1 John 4,⁶² the part of the meaning that the Greek word *agape* connotes in the phrase, "*God is love,*" is the love that leads to *sacrificial unconditional giving to others*. The degree of this love of God is made clear in the context of John 15:13: "No man has greater *agape* than that he lays down his life for his friends."⁶³ This *agape* of God means that He has a total commitment to good for humankind.⁶⁴ He wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.⁶⁵

God works out this great love for His human beings through means. That is God used what He created first as His means for further creation⁶⁶ and for His ongoing work of building His kingdom. His primary means often called means of grace are His Word⁶⁷ and Sacraments (Baptism⁶⁸ and the Lord's Supper⁶⁹). His

secondary means are His instruments for purposefully seeking and saving the lost.⁷⁰ This case study features the primary means of God's Word in oral and written form and a significant number of God's secondary ecclesiological means.

Wright, in his book *The Mission of God*, says, "The whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of God's mission."⁷¹ In this light, God's most basic means is the sending of His Son⁷² Jesus to build His kingdom of believers on earth. God the Father sent God the Son not only to be the foundation of the kingdom⁷³ but also to be the foundational architect and builder through others.⁷⁴

Jesus did this by making disciples and sending His disciples, including all of His present day family members, into the great continuation of multiplying disciples and communities of disciples. The theological point to be noted especially for this article is that God is a big God and that He wants to do big things through the human beings that He has created. Those that receive and respect His saving purpose become co-workers⁷⁵ in God's family business of seeking and saving the lost.⁷⁶

3. God's Early Preparation among the Yala People (Missiology 201):

Early contact for the Yala people started with the coming of six Igbo speaking Nigerian traders from the South who wanted to make money by buying and selling yams. They came to Yala by way of the junction town of Yahe in the 1950s. Their continual presence depended on making enough money for a good living. The Yala people wondered about them because they did not make sacrifices or seem to have physical objects of worship. The Igbos did not bother with learning the Yala language but they did hire some Yala boys to help them in work and in language interpretation.

The inquisitive Yala boys soon learned that the Igbos mysteriously worshiped secretly every seventh day in the home they had rented. This secret worship caused the Yala people to wonder about blessings and worry about the curses that this new type of worship might bring and how to control this alien spiritual power that did not fit into the Yala spiritual power system.

In 1961, an intentional religious intervention happened as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod sent a young white man and his family to live in Yahe. The Yala people immediately observed that these white people also did not sacrifice and did not seem to have any physical objects of worship. They also did not seem to need to work for a living. They had plenty of stuff and were interested in the Yala language and in helping children escape from early death. These white people also rested every seventh day. This was strange for the Yala people who rested every fifth day.

Next some Muslim Hausa traders from the North of Nigeria came to Yahe to make money by trading on kola nuts. They lived in the market. They did not take much interest in the Yala language. They did not sacrifice, but they did worship out in the open several times each day by falling flat on the ground and praying in the Arabic language, a language that no Yala person understood. This worship was easy to see but mysterious. The Yala people wondered if this strange Arabic language might have special powers for blessing and cursing.

4. Sociological Issues (Missiology 301):

Strategic planning for kingdom building should include not only theological considerations but also the key social issues involved in the undertaking. Identifying the social issues among the Yala people produced the following:

- The centrality of unseen (spiritual) realities.
- A much lower standard of living than others in Nigeria enjoyed.
- Shortage of food.
- Little formal education.
- Walking as the major way of transportation.
- Many deaths especially among children.
- No written language with the attendant inability to read and write.
- Great fear of evil spiritual powers.

The multiplicity of significant social issues made it necessary to prioritize. Several attempts were made. The results were not helpful. The problem was that the *uhu* (spiritual stuff) that interlaced all of Yala life was not being taken seriously by the secular Western missionary. Finally, it was recognized that taking the Yala point of view absolutely seriously was necessary. The key to anticipating the Yala way of thinking about *uhu* (spiritual stuff) had to be properly factored into the planning. With this realistic understanding of the Yala people's spiritual worldview in place, and after much prayer, the following issues were given top priority:

- Great fear of evil spiritual powers.
- Many deaths especially among children.
- No written language with the attendant inability to read and write.

5. Getting Started (Missiology 401):

In the 1960s among the Yala people, the highest manifestation of fear connected with evil spiritual powers was the death of one out of every two Yala children by the age of five. With this in mind, infant mortality was selected as the first social issue to be tackled. Building a fifty-bed medical center seemed to be the right way to proceed. The designated missionary approached the Yala chiefs and elders for talks. The talks were cordial but the request for land to build a medical center left the Yala chiefs and elders full of wonder, worry, fear of unexpected consequences, and hope for good results.

During the talks, the idea of project partnership between the Yala people and the missionary and his supporting mission was discussed. On the basis of conversation, negotiation, social and political bartering, a positive consensus was reached. Key to the arrangement from the Yala point of view was the giving of responsibility and authority to a trusted Yala man who would represent the Yala side of the partnership. The Yala man designated was Lawrence Ajegi.

Once this part of the negotiated consensus was in place, it was agreed that land would be supplied by the Yala people. Work on locating the medical center site took place in due course. A square mile of Yala land was designed. In close cooperation between the missionary and the Yala people, the site was prepared for building, a well was dug, and the first buildings were constructed. At the beginning of each day's work, the missionary intentionally began with an hour of spiritual

preparation that included Bible reading (at first through interpretation), spiritual conversation, and prayer as an extension of the missionary's family morning devotion.

At this point, the missionary was informed by the controlling mission authorities that it would be necessary to measure and legally designate the land before the project could proceed. In order to keep the work moving efficiently, survey work was done, legal papers were drawn up and cement corner-stone pillars were placed. Unfortunately, this happened without further consultation or communication with the Yala chiefs and elders. Next a maternity ward was outfitted and a nurse was in place. However, no pregnant Yala women came to deliver.

The honeymoon period had come crashing down. Conflict and misunderstandings erupted, seemingly about everything. What should be done? The reaction of the white tribe was one of annoyance, frustration, and at times, anger. The typical reaction was to "writing off" the Yala people as: uneducated, uncivilized and pre-literate. In the midst of this "palaver,"⁷⁷ the missionary tasked with building the medical center became highly inquisitive about the potential causes for the strange effect that had occurred related to maternity non-usage.

He concluded that the palaver had occurred because he had not fully communicated, negotiated, and taken time to reach consensus before acting. He recognized that he had been impatient and that his Yala language ability was not good. After three months of little forward progress on any front including language learning, the missionary was reduced to despondency and despair. Finally, he turned to God in a daily pattern of prayer that focused on casting all his cares upon the God who promised to care for him.⁷⁸

In the midst of this new stance of patience and persistent prayer with hope, Ferdinand Ouji, a young Yala man thought to be dead by the Yala people, appeared. He had experienced some traumatic years in the West of Nigeria in intense political activity and in great physical danger. He had come home for peace and security. His dedicated work with the missionary provided a totally new and productive life not only for himself and the missionary and his family but also for the Yala people.

Ferdinand gave tremendous assistance to the missionary with language learning and Yala language analysis for Bible translation. The daily habit was for Ferdinand and the missionary to spend at least one hour each day and sometimes much more in one-on-one study of the spiritual mysteries that the Yala people were so interested in knowing about and in prayer. Every book of the Bible, in part or in totality was carefully studied during these Spirit-directed sessions. Ferdinand's inquisitiveness about the mysteries of the Christian faith was totally productive. The faith of both men grew exponentially. In the midst of this study, the missionary learned much about how the language and culture worked and also how to speak the Yala language. In due time, preliminary Bible translation work was started.

Early on in their work together, the missionary on the basis of his sociological training at UCLA asked Ferdinand some friendly social and cultural questions. Ferdinand answered by teaching the missionary about the Yala understanding of *uhu* (spiritual stuff). He pointed out that unless *uhu* was properly controlled many bad things could happen. Key for the present palaver was the fact

that the Yala spiritual stuff (*uhu*) was localized from the Yala point of view. That is there was Yala *uhu* and white man's *uhu*.

This *uhu* also had physicality. *Uhu* was made physical through *echekas* (physical representations of unseen spiritual power). Sacrifices to these *echekas* were a most important part of Yala culture and life. This Yala *uhu* was personalized at every level of society since each person, each family, each extended family, each town, each clan, and the entire tribe had its own *echeka* and, in many cases, *echekas*. Every person, family, extended family, town, clan, and the entire tribe could trust only the *uhu* that they had learned to control.

Since the medical center land had been surveyed and the solid cement pillars had been put in place, the land inside the pillars was, from the Yala point of view, controlled by white man's *uhu* and not by Yala *uhu*. This meant that it would be totally dangerous for a non-white woman to deliver a baby in the maternity ward of the white tribe's *uhu*-controlled medical center. This was especially true since, from the Yala point of view, pregnant women were especially susceptible to the effects of *uhu* that they and their family did not control. The local Yala elders had assessed the situation and announced that a Yala woman and her baby in such an out-of-local-*uhu*-control situation would both surely die.

6. What Next (Missiology 501):

It took humility, a number of months, and much open discussion in the Yala language—open to good suggestions and constant prayer for Holy Spirit direction to come up with a reasonable next step. The solution was to build a maternity village with round Yala mud-and-thatched homes and attached cooking areas on Yala land near the medical center. Here a pregnant woman, together with some of her close family members, could set up housekeeping during the last month or two of her pregnancy. A friendly and hospitable Yala person whose worldview had been transformed by the Good News of the kingdom of God was also a permanent resident of this village.

From time to time, a female nurse, white at first and Yala later, would come to visit and build relationships with the family and particularly with the pregnant woman. When the time for delivery came, the nurse from the medical center would come down and help with the delivery in the woman's own familiar and comfortable environment. Later local girls from various villages were sent by their villages to come for training as medical assistants. When trained, these local medical assistants were supported by their villages to come home and help with child deliveries and child care in their own local settings.

This more socially sensitive approach succeeded magnificently, and in the ensuing years, nine out of ten babies lived beyond the age of five. A positive side effect was that an atmosphere of trust grew up between the relatives and friends whose children were now surviving and the local medical staff including the missionary family and the first Yala Christian medical chaplains. Another result of this medical work was that the Yala people increased in number from approximately 60,000 in 1961 to approximately 200,000 in 2000.

7. The Process Proceeds (Missiology 601):

Once the social issue of infant mortality was being meaningfully dealt with, it was time to turn to the unwritten Yala language situation. Conversations with the few Yala people that could read and write in English proved very helpful. The common wisdom was that the Yala language was inferior to other languages, especially that it had no grammar and so could not possibly be reduced to writing. The resident missionary tried to enlist help for language reduction from the most educated Yala person available. The man refused to help since he secretly believed that the missionary wanted to prove that the Yala people were inferior because their language was inferior.

With the help of Ferdinand Ouji, the brilliant young Yala man with little formal education mentioned above, and others, the missionary determined to go ahead anyway. In time, the Yala language was successfully reduced to writing, and Bible translation began. Ferdinand was especially gifted in Good News communication. In the evening after a full day of Bible study and translation, initially without the knowledge of the missionary, Ferdinand would use his Yala musical ability to put key parts of the Bible into Yala songs.

These songs very quickly became popular with Ferdinand's children and others. They were freely and spontaneously passed on to other singers and hearers. In this way, the Good News was moving out in a highly transferable, reproducible, and sustainable fashion,⁷⁹ based not on money but on unselfish sharing and satisfying relationships.

In 1960, since the Yalas were a non-book people, they were limited to the oral medium of learning. In the 1970s, as parts of the Bible were being translated, many new dimensions of reality began opening for the Yala people. One of those realities was a fuller understanding of *uhu* (spiritual stuff) as explained in the Bible. This happened as the very talkative Yala translation team members "could not help but tell/gossip positively about what they had seen and heard."⁸⁰ The Yala people immediately identified *Ouwouicho* (the unseen god on high) of their language and oral tradition with the one God that the Bible so clearly described as the creator of the entire universe and the Father of Jesus the Christ.

It amazed the Yala translators and their families and extended families that *Ouwouicho* is all-powerful, loves them, and wants to have a direct and positive relationship with them without demanding sacrifices. As we have noted above, the Yala people also believed in and greatly feared many other spiritual powers (*uhus*) that were not as powerful as *Ouwouicho* but, from the Yala point of view, were very real, nasty, malicious, vindictive, and destructive. These lesser gods were the ones that caused the Yala people much trouble and pain and demanded many sacrifices. The Yala member of the Bible translation team, as well as their families, extended families, and others, soon identified these many lesser *uhus* with the idols that are so prominent in the Old Testament of God's Word and with the devil and demons so clearly described in the New Testament.

It soon became evident that certain parts of Scripture, not always those most appreciated by the white tribe, were very important to the Yala people. The book of Jonah was of first importance because it pointed out that: (1) God is one over all the

earth; (2) God can be worshiped by all people; (3) God has a purpose for everyone's life; and (4) God is ready to forgive.

Since *uhu* (spiritual power) is key to all of Yala life, the Yala people especially appreciated the following sections of Scripture: 2 Kings 6:8–7:20; Mark 5:1–20; Luke 10:17–20; 1 Peter 5:7–11; 1 John 4:1–4; Ephesians 6:10–20; John 8:42–44; Revelation 12:7–18; Genesis; Hebrews, especially 3:1; 7:16 and 27 as well as 10:10; Luke; Acts; 1 Corinthians 10:16–21; 11:23–25; 2 Corinthians 5:14–6:1; Mark 16:16; John 3:3–17; Acts 2:28; Romans 6:4; 1 Peter 1:3–4; 3:21; and, as already mentioned, Jonah. Also, since the Yala people learn best through stories, the four Gospels were quickly absorbed into Yala narrative reality.

As work progressed on the Yala Bible translation, a crisis came up. The name of the Word of God made flesh in the New Testament is Jesus.⁸¹ Yet the Yala translators would invariably translate the name Jesus as Orede. They insisted that Orede is the Yala name for Jesus. Thus, it became necessary for the missionary time after time to make the correction and insist that the name for Jesus is Ijesusi in the Yala way of writing. After making the correction to Ijesusi many times, the missionary began to wonder, "Is there another social issue at play in this matter of Orede?"

Again, it took much open discussion to find that in Yala oral history there was a man who was the only one in Yala to ever to be called the Ouyi yi Ouwoicho (son of the unseen God on high). More research uncovered that Orede was not born in Yala and did not die in Yala. In addition, Orede never did any bad, was filled with *uhu* (spiritual stuff/power), performed miracles, and was kind and good. No matter how hard the missionary tried, no more details about the life of Orede could be learned from anyone.

Additional research also revealed that no Yala-related languages have such a name for Jesus in their vocabulary or in their cultural history. The amazing fact is that there is nothing in the limited understanding of the Yala people about Orede that conflicted with the biblical narrative of Jesus the Christ, who is the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

Over time, the Yala people orally heard more and more of the Word of God from the Yala members of the Bible translation team. The Yala medical center workers, as part of their training, learned to read and write. They immediately read the parts of the Bible available in their language and joyfully shared what they had learned about God and worshiped with their families and extended families at home.⁸² This new way of worship no longer focused on animal and human sacrifices and on the *uhus* (lesser gods of the Yala people), but rather on the God of the Bible. It did not feature fear of evil spiritual power and frightening curses. Rather it focused attention entirely on the God who had blessed all people by sacrificing His own Son for all the sins of the world for all times and all people, including the Yala people.

Meanwhile the missionary, in daily conversation, became aware that Orede was a very important person in Yala cultural history and that people were inquisitive about Orede. It also became clear that people immediately identified Orede with the Jesus of the Bible and that they wanted to know more about His life, His purpose, and His importance for the Yala people.

Slowly but surely it dawned on the missionary that God in His divine wisdom had graciously embedded the name Orede in the cultural history of the Yala people. Furthermore, God had attached just enough unique meaning to this name that the Yala people would be highly inquisitive for more meaning and ready for the Good News of God's love and salvation in Jesus the Christ. While it was agreed that, for consistency with translations of the Bible in other languages, the name Jesus would be translated as Ijesusi, in the Yala Bible, Orede was and still is used in the oral transmission (teaching and preaching) of the Good News among the Yala people with powerful effect.

For the Yala people, the full, positive, and integrated understanding of *uhu ounehehi* (good powerful spiritual reality) happened as Orede ouyi yi Ouwouicho (Jesus the Son of the unseen God on high) brought Ouwouicho (the unseen god on high) close and revealed his heart of love.⁸³ This understanding exploded for the Yala people in their restoration of a close relationship with Ouwouicho through Orede's coming to earth as a man. The reality came ever so near and clear as the Yala people more fully understood the purpose of Orede's life, death, and powerful resurrection: that they and all other people, for that matter, might have new life in Jesus the Christ for now and for all eternity.

In the discovery process that grew out of language analysis and Bible translation, it became clear that the Yala language had a very logical and organized grammar that in some places is more intricate and communicative than English, Latin, or Greek. The result was that the educated man who early on did not want to be involved in the language reduction process became very inquisitive, got involved, became a great proponent of reading in Yala and distributed half of the copies of the first printing of the Yala New Testament.

One who in God's good time really got the message was Ougipoule, the paramount chief of the Yala people. From the beginning, the missionary and the paramount chief were good friends. Over the years, the missionary had shared the message about Ouwouicho, the unseen God on High who loves everyone and does not need our sacrifices and who desires to relate to everyone and help everyone. Nothing seemed to get through. Then one day, the missionary's wife told the chief the Good News story in very simple Yala words in a way that opened the door for the Spirit of God to work faith in the paramount chief's heart.

Next, the chief appointed the missionary as one of his three executive counselors. Several months later, as part of this duty, the missionary accompanied the paramount chief to the installation of a sub-chief in Eastern Yala. Five thousand Yala people and visitors from other tribes were there. The paramount chief, in his official installation address for the new sub-chief, said that the new palace that would be built for him would not include sacrificing altars and *echeka* shrines.

The people were shocked. Then Ougipoule went on to explain that he now knew that neither Ouwouicho (the unseen God on High) nor any of the lesser *uhus* need sacrifices from human beings, but rather that Ouwouicho had sacrificed His own Son once for all⁸⁴ so that we humans do not ever need to sacrifice again. He also pointed out that when he, Ougipoule, would go on his final hunt (die) and not return, he would not go as everyone believed to Ayeku (the place for departed ancestors) but

would go to be with God on High and His Son Orede (Jesus the Christ) for all eternity.⁸⁵

Ougipuole, with his formal installation instructions to the new sub-chief, gave the Yala people permission to view their world from a new divinely revealed perspective and to take delivery of that biblical life-changing kingdom worldview. The explosive power of that event in the hand of the Spirit of God has since that day in Eastern Yala become ever more and more apparent to the missionary author.

It is this kingdom worldview that continues to be received by means of the Spirit of God-inspired trusting faith in Orede (Jesus the Christ) by most of the Yala people until today. Orede certainly continues to be the ready-made “insider connection” for the Good News message of Jesus the Christ in the heart of the Yala language and culture.

In a sense, evangelism among the Yala people was not bringing Jesus, but it was unpacking the full meaning of the name Orede: the name that was quietly waiting, for who knows how long, for the Word of God to come in order to explode the Good News of God’s love and salvation among the Yala people. Truly, Orede is a redemptive analogy (an inside-the-culture pointer to Jesus) as described in Don Richardson’s *Peace Child*.⁸⁶ In fact, the name Orede is the bridge and Gospel handle⁸⁷ of the mission of God for the kingdom of God among the Yala people.

Some would say that the name Orede has been an even more powerful means for opening the Good News of God’s love in Jesus the Christ to people than was the altar for the unknown God for bringing the Good News to the Athenians.⁸⁸ Certainly Orede and all that that word means now in the Yala language and culture is one of the most important secondary means that God used to restore the relationship between Himself in Christ and many—yes, we can now say most—of the Yala people by the year 2010.

8. Connecting the Relational Dots (Missiology 701):

As evangelism among the Yala people unfolded naturally, often without the missionary’s full or even partial understanding, God was totally in charge and at work. Through persistent prayer and patient observation, more and more of the Yala way of thinking, understanding, and doing began to make sense to the missionary and his family. As the relational dots came together, the following understandings consciously surfaced:

1. To be Yala is to be born into shared communal relationships.
2. Shared communal relationships, authority, and responsibility is, by definition, hierarchical within the family, extended family, clan, and tribe.
3. Each Yala person is automatically in a position with fixed privilege and fixed responsibility in the overall communal hierarchical structure.
4. Thinking, organization, attitudes, and actions in Yala life must automatically follow tribally approved Yala relational patterns.
5. The unseen realities of life are more important in Yala life than the seen realities.

6. There are somewhat independent relational social structures for the unseen and seen parts of reality, but all of these structures ultimately reach final authority in the person of the tribal paramount chief.
7. Independent individualism is the shattering of what it is to be Yala and human.
8. Creative pattern innovation in all spheres of life is possible and important.
9. Innovation in creative patterning may be initiated by any Yala person.
10. Innovation is patiently and persistently considered and approved on the basis of conversation, negotiation, social and political bartering and consensus.
11. Innovation is set in motion only after consensus has been appropriately stated publicly by the properly designated person in the Yala relational hierarchy.

9. Stepping forward toward Sustainability (Missiology 801):

“Be wise in the way you act toward those who are outside the Christian faith. Make the most of your opportunities. Pray that God will give us an opportunity to speak the word so that we may tell the mystery about Christ. . . . Pray that this mystery may be made as clear as possible” (Col 4:3–5).

It does not take millions to make it work. It just takes one who wonders to get it going and others who wonder to keep it going. Westerners hear millions as money. They hear one as personal. Sustainability is not primarily about money but about motivated people. In the case of Christianity, some of these motivated people have been political assassins. St. Paul started out as a political assassin. Ferdinand Oужи, the apostle to the Yalas, started out as a political assassin. Both had to experience a 180-degree change in life. God changed Paul on the road to Damascus. God changed Ferdinand through translating the Word of God after a near death experience.

God changed many Yala people through a special partnership between the missionary and a few Yala people. They formed with the missionary a third kind of people with a unique culture different from either that of the missionary or the ordinary Yala person.

The fourth culture at the table in this cultural mix was the Word of God. The Spirit of God prepared the Yala people in this unique four-culture context to go back to their own people with the Good News of the transforming biblical-kingdom worldview. The Spirit of God also walked with the Yala people as His worldview took deep root in many Yala hearts and still lives today through the natural conversation in families, extended families, and beyond. As more truth was received, more was shared; and the change from darkness to light continued to transform the entire Yala worldview: their awareness, thinking, understanding, and doing.

In the process of this four-culture exchange, the desired partnership between the missionary and the Yala people became a living reality. This reality still flourishes today, even though members of this four-culture exchange are at times far

apart in physical distance. It is a kind of relational reciprocity in which the Yala people and the missionary family received a sense of meaningful partnership and mutual ownership, not only in physical matters, but also in spiritual matters. In theological terms, this is called the Body of Christ in action.

This happened as the Yala people provided the land for the medical center, as well as the sand, gravel, and their own people to learn and grow into the kingdom work. Without even consciously recognizing it, the Yala partners in the medical center work, whether in the missionary's home or in the center, were absorbing the habit of morning worship and taking it home to replicate in their families and extended families.⁸⁹

At the same time, the missionary family was absorbed into the Yala families, extended families, clan, and tribe as full members through open hospitality and conversation about the most intimate matters of Yala thinking and living. This relationship of trust and partnership was cemented by giving Yala names and membership in the appropriate age companies of the tribe to each missionary family member.

In terms of sustainability, the arrangement to work in partnership was vital and strategic. It also meant that operating efficiency would not automatically be defined from a Western perspective but would always carry a Yala flavor as the partnership functioned effectively without relational breakdown. It also meant that resources would not be measured primarily in money, but in people, labor, and barter, with monetary resources being vital but secondary.

From the vantage point of over fifty years, it is evident that the continued existence of an integrated and holistic Christianity among the Yala people depended very much on the flow of Good News through the relationships of families and extended families from generation to generation. These relationships are evidenced in many ways. One of the most profound evidences is the development of the Yala Christian Club, made up of some three hundred well-educated Yala men and women.

This club could not have existed fifty years ago when the Yala language had not been reduced to writing and when there were very few Yala people who could read and write. Today the club does all kinds of good works, from personally gossiping the Good News to leading in eliminating head hunting, slavery, and all kinds of discrimination in their midst. They are also formally organized to support God's Good News outreach to neighboring people groups, across Nigeria and into other parts of the world.

A more personal piece of evidence is that Josephine Ajegi—the daughter of Lawrence Ajegi, the Yala man whom the Yala people set apart at the beginning of the joint venture in developing the medical center—is matron of the center to this day. She keeps the holistic habit of seeing the sacred and secular as together in all that the medical center stands for and does. God's Word is still very much the fourth culture at the table. Josephine also serves as the first vice president of the Women's Association for the entire Lutheran Church of Nigeria.

Another joyful testimony is the witness of a top Yala official in the federal government of Nigeria, who, as a young man, worked closely with the missionary partner in the Yala Good News enterprise. Recently, he said, "When you first came, my father and our whole family were animists who feared the Yala *uhus* and spent

much of our substance on pagan sacrifices. Today all fifty of us are Christians.” He went on to say, “When you came, the Yala people called themselves pagans. Today we all say that we are Christians, and in fact 75 to 85 percent of us really do believe in Jesus the Christ as our personal Savior.”

10. Reflecting on the Findings and Conclusions:

This case study has been written while looking down on the beautiful Table Rock Lake in the Ozarks of southwestern Missouri. The lake is always there, but the scene is ever changing. It all depends on the openness of the sky, the presence or absence of the morning fog, and the angle and brightness of the sun. At times, the entire area is enveloped in fog. This morning puffy little blue, grey, and black clouds float above the lake as the lake fog slowly disappears and the full grandeur of the azure blue water comes into view under the early rays of the warming and shimmering sun.

In the author’s mind, the permanence of the lake stands for the consistent and continuing purposefulness of God. Purposeful relating on God’s terms was there from the beginning in the Godhead.⁹⁰ Creation was organized and beautified for the purpose of expanding relationships to include humans, fashioned in the image and likeness of God.⁹¹ Because of the invasion of the human sickness of sin,⁹² God immediately related honestly with humankind—confronting, enlightening, and protecting them.⁹³

In Old Testament times, God’s plan for restoring His relationship with humans featured calling, sending, revealing, correcting, and reorganizing. The New Testament makes God’s love very concrete by connecting in Jesus, relating perfectly, sacrificing sufficiently, forgiving and rebuilding the human family of God through Spirit of God-inspired trusting faith in Jesus the Christ. This new family life manifests explicit restoration and daily forgiveness. For human beings, it also includes acting out God’s purposeful sending by being about the family business of “gossiping in every possible positive way” the Good News of God’s merciful forgiveness, loving renewal, and gracious blessings.

Thinking about the purposefulness of God in parallel with the ever changing views of Table Rock Lake puts more than three quarters of a century into meaningful perspective. God’s purposefulness happens in a multitude of ways through a multitude of means if it is to be natural and effective. That is to say, God’s purposeful Words and ways are unchanging but they play themselves out in different configurations of Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology. It all depends on which linguistic, social, economic, educational, and relational patterns of awareness, thinking, and living are currently being practiced in physical place after place and in human generation after generation.

Then, as we found ways to employ unique features and vocabulary of the Yala language to communicate the Good News, the knowledge of God’s love in Jesus the Christ brought dynamic change in the worldview of the Yala people as a group. This happened as explicit linguistic and cultural forms meaningfully attached biblical concepts to one person after another, and in this way, a sustainable movement of the Good News spontaneously took place.

This case study also focuses on the importance of Bible translation in any effort that works for and expects biblical kingdom worldview transformation. Doing Bible translation as an integrated part of evangelism is like wiring a house with the electrical current on. Every once in a while one gets a hit of enlightenment in which the Spirit of God marvelously brings about significant transformation.

Also it is important to take note of the awareness, thoughts and actions of the original Yala worldview made explicit in the eleven principles and practices mentioned above under the major section 7 “Connecting the Relational Dots.” These principles require a change in worldview on the part of missionaries who come out of the ecclesiastical environment of Western Christendom. The Yala worldview presupposes that the seen and unseen (the secular and the sacred, physical and spiritual) must be understood as parts of an integrated and holistic reality. In contrast, the Western worldview presupposes a basic separation between the sacred and the secular, the physical and the spiritual, and the unseen and the seen.

Western ecclesiology as worked out in practice understands these pieces as building blocks that, when cobbled together, make up the reality of the Western worldview. The very fact that the English-speaking part of the West has the term “ecclesiology” in its church vocabulary and the terms “organization” and “management” in its secular vocabulary shows a direct clash with the Yala linguistic worldview already at the manipulation of meaning level.

With this in mind, we must conclude that this case study has something important to say about the relationship of Christology, ecclesiology, missiology, and theology. In the worldview of the West, it is at least theoretically possible to place these concepts in linear order. This theoretical possibility does not exist in the many parts of the world that have a more Yala-like worldview.

In such places, the practice of what ecclesiology studies must be understood as a cyclical event that moves along through all parts of what Christology, missiology, and theology study and the actions that naturally follow. That is, the practice of what ecclesiology studies must be recognized as a function that operates in, with, under and around the practice of what Christology, missiology, and theology study that should and often does lead to evangelizing holistic relationally minded people. This is especially true if that evangelism process is to be natural, relevant, noninvasive, reproducible, transferable, and sustainable.

At this point in the unfolding of the case study, the following definitions may be helpful as we draw the findings to a conclusion:

1. What Christology studies is made manifest by Jesus the Christ, as revealed in the Bible, and thus becomes Good News to be accurately communicated in ways that are indigenously appropriate for each society on earth.
2. What ecclesiology studies that is made visible in practice is not one but many. The practice of ecclesiology is people in community and the appropriate organizational and institutional means that God uses to get His purposeful goal of evangelizing the world for kingdom building into action. The various practices of ecclesiology are never to be imposed from the outside. Rather such practice is to be discovered from the inside. It is to be appropriately developed and indigenously employed for the effective

translation of the Good News of Jesus the Christ into all the different ways of thinking, understanding, and acting in the world.

3. What missiology studies that is made visible in practice is God's purposeful creating, sending, and continually acting to build His kingdom on earth centered on right relationship between humankind and Himself.
4. What theology studies is not actualized through human creativity and imagination but made evident by the divinely revealed Good News in oral, written, and visual form to be accurately and relationally communicated appropriately by all disciples of Jesus the Christ.

To put it in paragraph form, we can say that from the beginning the mission of God was purposeful sending centered on right relationship between Himself and humankind. He sent His Spirit to hover over the water in the original state of total disorder (chaos). Change in this disorder proceeded step-by-step as God used His perfectly ordered operating system to create things out of nothing. In this purposeful process of God, human beings were created for right relationship with God and each other.

When right relationship broke down, the triune God promised and in good time sent Jesus the Christ to restore right relationship. The WHAT of God's continuing mission on earth is the right knowledge of God, His purposes and His ways (doctrine and teaching). The HOW of God's mission is the knowledge of the suitable people and appropriate organizational means that God uses in diverse social settings to get His good and gracious purposes done (the local expression of the Body of Christ in action). The study of the Body of Christ in action locally and worldwide is called ecclesiology.

A succinct way of stating the relationship between mission and church is that the church of God (ecclesiology in practice) does not have a mission in the world. Rather the God of mission (God's mission in action) has a church or, shall we say, many organizational arrangements in the different communities of believers in the world.⁹⁴

Finally, it will be interesting to look back at the definitions originally posed by Frost and Hirsch for Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology. Do our case study and final perspectives lead us to agree or disagree with these definitions or to suggest any additions or corrections?

Regarding Christology, we received the following from Frost and Hirsch: Essentially Christology comprises the biblical teaching of and about Jesus the Messiah. When we say Christology must inform all aspects of the church's life and work, we mean that Jesus must be first and foremost in our lives and self-definition as church and disciples. When the adjective form "Christological" is used, it simply means that the element being described must be referenced primarily by our understanding and experience of Jesus the Messiah.

In reacting to the Frost and Hirsch definition, we conclude that, from a narrow definitional point of view, what the authors say is fine. In more holistic terms, we may want to include the fact that Jesus is an integrated part of the triune God and also something about the relationship of the person and nature of Jesus to the person and nature of God the Father and God the Spirit.

Regarding ecclesiology, we received the following from Frost and Hirsch: Ecclesiology classically refers to the biblical teaching about the nature, life, and practice of the church. We believe that our ecclesiology should emerge from our missiology, which should in turn derive from our Christology.

In reacting to the Frost and Hirsch definition, we may suggest that it will be helpful to specify that the church actually means *congregation/community of believers*. This is especially necessary where the default meaning of church is a building or institution rather than a community of faithful believers whose ultimate allegiance is to the triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Regarding missiology, we received the following from Frost and Hirsch: Missiology is the study of missions. As a discipline, it seeks to identify the primal impulse in the Scriptures that compels God's people into engagement with the world. Such impulse involves, among others, the *missio Dei* (the mission of God), the Incarnation, and the kingdom of God. It also describes the authentic church's commitment to social justice, relational righteousness, and evangelism. As such, missiology seeks to define the church's purposes in light of God's will for the world. It also seeks to study the methods of achieving these ends both from Scriptures and history. The term *missiology* simply draws off these meanings.

To summarize our reaction to the definition of missiology offered by Frost and Hirsch, we find it very comprehensive but too long. The following, still long but hopefully more regimented, definition may be helpful: **Missiology is the systematic study of God's purposeful sending of His Word (personal, oral, written, and visual) for relational restoration of separated human beings to Himself. Missiology is multi-disciplinary and explains how the triune God reaches out through Jesus and His body of believing disciples to all people in all the societies in which they live to accomplish full and free restoration.**

The End — To God be the Glory

Endnotes

¹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1–3.

² Matthew 4:23; 5:19–20; 6:10, 33; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; John 3:3–5.

³ Genesis 3:1–24.

⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things*, 6–11.

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:1–24.

⁶ Matthew 4:17.

⁷ Matthew 6:10.

⁸ Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 10:11.

⁹ Mark 1:15; Luke 17:20–21

¹⁰ Revelation 11:15; 12:10–11.

¹¹ Luke 9:1–2; 10:9.

¹² Romans 14:17.

¹³ Matthew 6:33; Mark 10:28–30; Luke 12:31; 1 Timothy 4:8.

¹⁴ 1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalm 145:11; 2 Timothy 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

¹⁵ Exodus 20:3; Isaiah 42:8; Matthew 4:10 and Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1971), 126.

¹⁶ John 3:3, 5.

¹⁷ Matthew 18:3–4; 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16–17.

- ¹⁸ Matthew 5:3.
¹⁹ Matthew 5:10.
²⁰ Psalm 34:18; Matthew 11:29; Acts 2:46; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:1–13; James 1:9; 1 Peter 3:8.
²¹ Matthew 7:21.
²² Matthew 13:24–30; Mark 4:26–29.
²³ Matthew 13:31–32.
²⁴ Matthew 13:33; Galatians 5:9.
²⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things*, 227.
²⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.
²⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.
²⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 57.
²⁹ Romans 1:20; 2:14–15.
³⁰ 2 Timothy 3:15–17.
³¹ Genesis 1:2.
³² Genesis 1:1–31.
³³ Genesis 2:16–25; 2 Corinthians 13:4–8.
³⁴ Genesis 1:26–30; 2:16–25.
³⁵ Genesis 1:3–31; 2:4–25.
³⁶ Genesis 1:26–30.
³⁷ Genesis 3:1–7; Jeremiah 31:30; Romans 5:14; Galatians 3:22.
³⁸ Romans 5:12; 6:23.
³⁹ Genesis 3:22–24.
⁴⁰ Galatians 4:4–5, 7; Romans 5:11; Philippians 2:15; 1 John 3:1.
⁴¹ Roman 6:23.
⁴² Luke 19:10.
⁴³ Matthew 6:10.
⁴⁴ Matthew 3:2; 4:17, 23; 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 6:33; 9:35; 10:7; etc.
⁴⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.
⁴⁶ Genesis 3:8–9.
⁴⁷ Genesis 3:23.
⁴⁸ Genesis 3:16–19.
⁴⁹ Genesis 3:15.
⁵⁰ Genesis 1:2; John 4:24.
⁵¹ Psalms 90:1–2; 93:2; 102:27; Jeremiah 10:10.
⁵² Numbers 23:19; James 1:17.
⁵³ Genesis 17:1; Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37.
⁵⁴ Psalm 139:1–4; John 16:30; 21:17.
⁵⁵ Jeremiah 23:24.
⁵⁶ Leviticus 19:2; Ephesians 4:24; Revelation 15:4.
⁵⁷ Genesis 18:25; Deuteronomy 32:4; Ezra 9:15; Psalms 7:11; 119:75, 137; 145:17; Revelation 15:3; 16:7.
⁵⁸ Numbers 23:19; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Romans 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:13; Titus 1:2.
⁵⁹ Exodus 34:6–7.
⁶⁰ Psalms 103:3–5, 13; 145:9; Isaiah 63:7; Lamentations 3:22–23.
⁶¹ Zephaniah 3:17; Ephesians 2:4; 3:18; 1 John 2:5; 3:16; 4:8, 10, 16.
⁶² 1 John 4:8, 16.
⁶³ John 15:9–13.
⁶⁴ Genesis 50:20; Psalms 73:1; 145:9; Ecclesiastes 3:13; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; Romans 12:2; 1 Timothy 4:4.
⁶⁵ 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9–10.
⁶⁶ Genesis 2:7.
⁶⁷ Genesis 1:1–31; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18.
⁶⁸ Mark 16:16; John 3:5–6; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 3:21.
⁶⁹ Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–25.
⁷⁰ Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:21; 19:10.
⁷¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 51.
⁷² John 3:17; 17:18–20; 20:21.

⁷³ 1 Corinthians 3:10–11; 15:57–58.

⁷⁴ John 17:18–20; 20:21; 1 Corinthians 3:9–11; Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:4–9.

⁷⁵ Mark 16:20; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:1.

⁷⁶ Matthew 28:19–30; Mark 16:15, 20; Luke 47:47–48; John 20:21–23; 2 Corinthians 5:17–20; Hebrews 3:1.

⁷⁷ A long drawn out discussion between people of different cultures especially in Africa.

⁷⁸ 1 Peter 5:7.

⁷⁹ 1 Thessalonians 1:8–10.

⁸⁰ Acts 4:20; 22:15.

⁸¹ John 1.

⁸² See endnote 71.

⁸³ John 1:14; 8:19; 12:45; 14:7–9; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3.

⁸⁴ Hebrews 7:27–28; 10:10.

⁸⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:9–10.

⁸⁶ Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1974), 182, 234, 288.

⁸⁷ Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts* (Regal Books, 1981).

⁸⁸ Acts 17:22–31.

⁸⁹ 1 Thessalonians 1:8–10.

⁹⁰ Genesis 1:2, 26.

⁹¹ Genesis 1:28–30; 2:16–23; 3:8–24.

⁹² Genesis 3:1–7.

⁹³ Genesis 3:6–24.

⁹⁴ Tim Dearborn, *Short-Term Missions Workbook* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 8.

“Gifts-Offices” from Our Ascended Lord: Toward a Christological Balance

Anthony Steinbronn

I. Introduction

It was over fifteen years ago, while serving as a field missionary in Botswana and South Africa, that I began to reflect upon how Christology, and the five “gifts-offices” of the ascended Lord, informs and forms “the ministry of the Church” (AC V) thereby granting a **Christological balance** to our missiological and ecclesiastical labors.

God’s people, if they are to be equipped for *their work of ministry* and become mature disciples attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, must *receive the counsel* and *embrace the practices* of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph 4:11–16). Anything less than this “whole counsel of God” diminishes and reduces the Gospel from having free course for the evangelizing of the nations and the edification of the Church.

The primary purpose of the article is to understand how these five “gifts-offices,” expressed through their respective counsel and practices, inform and form our ministry endeavors. In order to accomplish this, the article will explore these core convictions:

- A. Christ is the Head of the Church and, when He ascended, He gave five “gifts-offices”¹ to His people (“gifts-offices” essential for *the Christological balance*) so that they might become mature, built up in the Christian faith, and equipped for their work of ministry within the body of Christ and in their mission to the nations, as His evangelizing, edifying and missionary priests and people.
- B. Immaturity within the body of Christ and being unable to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (by an inability to acquire and/or keep the Christological balance) redefines, limits, and hinders His mission and ministries through various forms of reductionistic thinking and practices.
- C. The Church is always in need of receiving the correcting, reforming, and revitalizing words of Jesus so that they can, in every age and context, be a mature, fully informed, formed, and equipped body of Christ as an **apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and teaching church**.

II. The Five Gifts-Offices from Our Ascended Lord

There is not sufficient space in this article to present a comprehensive examination of the counsel and practices that the gifts-offices provide for “the ministry of the

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Church” but only a partial and cursory introduction into their wisdom for our evangelizing, edifying, and missionary endeavors:

A. The **prophetic office** has blessed humankind, and God’s people, with these essential gifts:

1. Providing the root narratives² regarding the origin of the humankind and God’s design for the *coram relationships*, that is, how each human being is to live *coram Deo, coram meipso, coram hominibus, coram mundo*—it is God’s “blueprint” for humankind’s being and existence
2. Relating stories and narratives that help us understand “the human condition” and “God’s response to that human condition”; the sacred Scriptures “gift” us with two kinds of wisdom so that we can make sense of our story in light of His story and His promises of salvation in Jesus Christ:
 - a. **soteriological wisdom**...to make us wise unto salvation which is by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ (2 Tim 3:15)
 - b. **hermeneutical wisdom**...to help us make sense of life’s story in light of His story/stories (Mt 13:11, 16–17, 51–52; 2 Tim 3:16–17)
3. Helping God’s people remember “who God is” and “what He has done” for the salvation of us and all people and to remember “who they are” and “why they are in the world”
4. Warning of idolatry and evil ways of living—convicting national, congregational, and individual sins—and communicating a living hope in the Promised Messiah
5. Revealing the counsel of God that he has received from Him; historically, the topics often dealt with impending judgment upon Israel’s infidelity or with a nation’s sin. The prophet declares the will, purpose, and judgment of God—the recital of God’s judging and saving actions for the sake of His people and as a witness to the nations with the hope that they, too, might embrace His promises of salvation
6. Along with the apostolic office, providing the foundation upon which the Church is built (Eph 2:19–22), as the source and norm of all theology and practice . . . and to answer the “big questions” that every human being has in life³

B. The **apostolic office** has blessed humankind, and God’s people, with these essential gifts:

1. Showing how the Messianic prophecies connected with God’s promised remedy for our sinful human condition were fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus Christ—He is, indeed, “the Right Man” (Martin Luther)
2. Laying the foundation,⁴ along with the prophets, upon which the Church is built, with Christ being the Cornerstone
3. Instilling and teaching the apostolic faith

4. Establishing churches as they evangelized, edified the saints, and appointed pastors to oversee “the ministry of the Church” in those places (Acts 14:21–23)
 5. Serving as stewards of the mysteries of the Gospel; many of these “mysteries” were explained by Jesus in His teaching on the parables of the Kingdom so that they could be “wise scribes”
 6. Examining and discerning the condition of the “lampstand”⁵—and writing missionary letters to guide, admonish, and counsel the saints in their *coram relationships*
 7. Equipping and sending workers into the harvest field (Mt 9:38); appointing overseers, elders, and deacons so that His people might prosper the Master’s business
 8. Advocating a missionary posture by God’s people as they interact with the nations so that they might become all things to all people and bring some to a saving knowledge of God’s grace in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 9:19–23)
 9. Fostering and engaging in the formation of indigenous churches, led by indigenous leadership
- C. The **evangelistic office** has blessed humankind, and God’s people, with these essential gifts:
1. Proclaiming and heralding the Good News to people who believe in, and have embraced, non-Christian narratives and false ways of salvation in the hope that they will make sense of their story in light of His story and promises of salvation
 2. Equipping God’s people to be able to understand and interpret the “text” of another person’s life in light of His “texts,” the sacred Scriptures (with its Law and Gospel), especially the saving “text” of the Gospel and Word become flesh (Jn 1:14–18, 29; 3:1–18; Rom 3:10–28; Eph 2:8–10; 1 Jn 5:11–12)
- D. The **pastoral office**⁶ has blessed humankind, and God’s people, with these essential gifts:
1. Feeding God’s people with His Word and Sacraments and caring for their souls as one who has to give an account
 2. Doing the work of an evangelist—being an example to the flock—able to guard, keep, and teach the apostolic faith
 3. Forming and equipping God’s people to be able to test the spirits because not every spirit comes from God, for many false apostles and prophets have gone out into the world
 4. Guiding, exhorting, and equipping God’s people to be faithful and fruitful stewards of the Gospel and of His many physical blessings so that they might be a blessing to the nations through their Gospel proclamation and their deeds of love and compassion within the body of Christ and in the world

5. Cultivating a biblical spirituality⁷ in God's people, a spirituality that consists of prayer (*oratio*); meditation upon God's Word (*meditatio*); and trials, struggles, and temptations (*tentatio*)

E. The **teaching office** has blessed humankind, and God's people, with these essential gifts:

1. Informing, forming, and equipping disciples of Jesus Christ so that they might be conformed to the image of His Son and also be His servants, witnesses, priests, stewards, salt, light, ambassadors, temples of the Holy Spirit, living letters, etc.
2. Communicating His Word and modeling His way of life to inform and form the believer's entire existence through the daily socialization of the Christian faith as it is both taught and modeled in Christian homes and in the ministries of the Church
3. Defending the faith and equipping the saints to always be able to give the reason for the hope that lives within them, yet with gentleness and respect
4. Teaching all that Jesus has commanded—being taught of the Spirit and able to teach others

The ascended Lord has greatly blessed His people through the counsel and practices of the gifts made known through the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching offices of the Church. It is His intention that the counsel and practices connected with these "gifts-offices" be incorporated and integrated into the life and ministries of His people, as His body, so that they might become a mature and fully equipped people of God for their individual and corporate labors as His evangelizing, edifying, and missionary people.

III. Reductionistic Thinking and Practices

This section identifies a few, select examples of reductionistic thinking and practices that limit and hinder His will for "the ministry of the Church."

A. Discipleship reductionism: church membership

In order for His people to properly understand "the ministry of the Church," it is essential that we "name"⁸ things as they are according to God's will and purposes so that the Church can, with greater clarity, understand "who they are in Christ" and what kinds of ministry endeavors He has called them to do, both corporately and individually. Personally, one of the *least* helpful words that we use in the Church to understand "who we are in Christ" and "why we exist as His people" is the term "church member."⁹

B. Ministry reductionism: the ministry of the Church (AC V) is to be done only by ordained clergy (AC XIV)

There are some within the LCMS who possess the very narrow view that only those who occupy the *Pfarramt* (AC XIV) are to be engaged in the *Predigtamt* (AC V) since they alone have been entrusted with the Word and Sacraments. Yet article V of the Augsburg Confession clearly states that in order "to obtain such faith

God instituted the office of the ministry,¹⁰ that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel” (Tappert 31:1–2).¹¹

All Christians have been entrusted with the Gospel and are to, like the two good and faithful servants of Matthew 25:14–30, immediately go to work in order to prosper the Master’s business. And what is the Master’s business?

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Mt 28:18–20).

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be *preached* in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Lk 24:46–47).

The essence of His mission is that His people, both clergy (*Pfarramt*) and laity (*Priesteramt*), are to go and make disciples of the nations, and that is what we see taking place in the Book of Acts as God scattered His people like seed who went about sowing the seed of the Gospel in the lives of others.

For example:

“And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles . . . now those who were scattered went about *preaching*. Philip went down to a city of Samaria and *proclaimed* to them the Christ.” (Acts 8:1–5)

“Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, *speaking* the word to none except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, *preaching* the Lord Jesus. **And the hand of the Lord was with them**, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord.” (Acts 11:19–21) (The priestly office, *Predigtamt* – AC V)

In these verses, we have three different ways of God’s people engaging in the *Predigtamt* (AC V): *preaching*, *proclaiming*, and *speaking* the Gospel. And, as Luke notes in Acts 11:21, “the hand of the Lord was with them” as they engaged in the *Predigtamt*, with a great number turning the Lord. In this instance, we clearly see “the priesthood of all believers” at work—preaching, proclaiming, and speaking the Gospel—and the Holy Spirit’s working faith “when and where He pleases in those who hear the Gospel,” just as Augsburg Confession, article V, declares.

C. A “soma” and “form”al reductionism

1. Church leaders must be formed and taught by theologians from the West

Early on, during my days of service in Botswana and South Africa, as a field missionary and theological educator, I was disappointed by the view that the national church leadership were not capable of forming their own leaders but must depend upon theologians and church leaders from the West if they were to become a mature and fully formed people of God. It was “our” assessment and judgment that they were incapable of forming themselves for “the ministry of the Church” but must be taught by theologians and pastors outside of their culture if they were to be properly credentialed and equipped for their theological, missiological, and ecclesiastical leadership. Even after they had done all the things that we had asked of them, they still were required to serve under our careful oversight until they successfully completed a very lengthy probationary period. (In the eyes of some, they would never “measure up.”)

2. Only Western forms of worship and liturgy are to be used by God’s people universally

One of the most disheartening experiences that Carol and I experienced when we arrived in Botswana and attended weekly worship services in the Setswana language is that we knew 90% of the tunes that the people were singing. Now, this familiarity was helpful in the sense that we could quickly join in the congregational singing, but often the worship experience was “lifeless” and “stoic” from an African point of view since nearly all of the hymns, and their tunes, came from foreign musicians and hymn writers.

D. Church planting reductionism: Once the local congregation is properly established, with the bills paid, the mission has been completed

Lyle Schaller observed that only 10% of congregations intentionally think about, and ever work toward, planting another congregation. Instead, the operating practice is that once a congregation has its own worship facility, a full-time pastor, and the ability to pay all of their bills without being dependent on outside financial resources, *the mission* has been completed. All that remains is to have enough baptized and communicant members to maintain the status quo; if there is a “mission,” it is to gather dollars to support the mission work of others since the work of the congregation has been completed.

III. Counsel and Practices that Restore Christological Balance to Our Missiological and Ecclesiastical Endeavors

Many, many years ago, one of the world’s wisest men, by the name of Solomon, observed that “there is nothing new under the sun.” The “second skin” (the specific cultures in which people are socialized and enculturated) of people might be different, but their “first skin” (sinful human nature—*inherited, original sin*) is the same, since the fundamental human condition is the same for all people. Each human being is a sinner and sins *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*. Consequently, we can find biblical examples that illustrate, and acquire counsel and practices that address,

the ministry situations in which we find ourselves in the twenty-first century because “there is nothing new under the sun.”

A. Disciples, not church members

What are the biblical words that God has revealed to us that name and define “the baptized life”? The primary word used to name the life of a Christian is “disciple.” A disciple is a believer in Jesus Christ who bears two distinctive marks as one of His disciples. Jesus said: (1) if you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples (Jn 8:31–32); and (2) if you love one another, then all people will know that you are My disciples (Jn 13:34–35). A disciple is always chosen by Jesus Christ (Jn 15:16) and is an active student of God’s Word, building his or her life upon **the words and practices of Jesus** (Mt 7:24–27). A disciple does more than just master the Word, a disciple is stamped and fashioned in the mold of Jesus Christ and is a living witness to Him.

But there are other words that Jesus used in His teachings to help His disciples understand “who they are in Christ” and “why they are here.” As His **stewards**, they seek to use all of the gifts that He has given them to prosper His business of making disciples and showing mercy to one’s neighbor; as **witnesses/fishers of men**, they seek to speak and live in such a way that others can easily see that they have been with Jesus and they bear witness that He alone is the world’s Savior and is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; as His **priests**, they pray for believers and non-believers before the throne of God frequently and fervently and, as they face others in their daily contacts and relationships, they become His instrument of counsel and consolation and blessing in the lives of others; as His **servants**, they empty themselves as did their Master and Lord (Jn 13:2–17; Phil 2:5–11) so that others might be served; as His **salt**, they are to live in such a way that this corrupt world is challenged with His will as expressed in the Ten Commandments and convicted to embrace a living way filled with hope; as His **light**, they have been sent to do good works so that others may see these caring and loving works and glorify the Father who is the giver of every good gift and the Father of all light; as His **living letters**, they desire that their words and actions are read in such a way by others that they would see Jesus living in them (Acts 4:12–13; Gal 2:20).

What kind of formation process should be designed and implemented within the body of Christ so that *mature disciples* are equipped for their work of ministry—believers who exhibit the distinctive marks of being one of His disciples and who are also His stewards, witnesses, priests, servants, salt, light, and living letters?

B. Everyone is to be equipped for his or her work of ministry

If you want to see a lot of blood pressures quickly rise to near life-threatening numbers among LCMS clergymen, just ask them: what do you think of Oscar Feucht’s book *Everyone a Minister*? Granted, Oscar could have chosen a different title, maybe something like *Everyone a Disciple Equipped for His or Her Work of Everyday Ministry*; but he choose to use some bold language to have us understand that all of us are His priests, having been placed into our priestly ministry in the waters of their baptism, and are engaged in “the ministry of the Church.”

This topic of the “priesthood of all believers” and the “office of the pastoral ministry” has been an active topic in the Lutheran Church since the beginning of “the Lutheran conversation.” Luther’s bold comment that a “simple layman armed with Scripture is more powerful than all the popes and councils” certainly says something about the nature of Scripture but it also says a great deal about the role of the laity in “the ministry of the Church.”

Early on in our lives we are incorporated into this priestly office as the newly baptized is greeted with the words: “through Baptism God has added this child to His own people to declare the wonderful deeds of our Savior, who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.” This action of God immediately commissions the baptized to a ministry in the world—to proclaim the Gospel as they declare His wonderful deeds of salvation—to condemn sin and share His forgiveness.

This understanding of “the ministry of the Church” is contrasted with the prevailing view of the Roman church that only the “religious” have been called to the ministry of proclamation while the laity are called to a life of prayer, worship, and obedience to the church. In Roman thinking, church and ministry were embodied and entrusted to the office of the bishop. Lutherans, however, have always understood that “the ministry of the Church” was given to the “priesthood of all believers.”

It is important that a balancing voice be lifted up in the church that encourages, supports, and validates “the ministry of the baptized”; for it is a ministry that involves more than handling the “temporal business” of the church but is, in fact, the spiritual office of witness and service in the cause of the Kingdom as the baptized proclaim the Gospel message in their neighborhoods, schools, athletic fields, civic organizations, workplaces, and affinity communities. They have been sent there by the same Spirit that called them into this ministry; but they have this ministry in partnership with those who occupy the pastoral office as both offices (priestly and pastoral) labor to witness and proclaim the wonderful deeds of the Gospel with people dwelling in darkness.

C. Indigenous church formation

1. The formation of indigenous churches and indigenous leadership

The apostle Paul planted and established churches. He was sent forth on a mission, but he stayed in a place only long enough to identify the natural, indigenous leaders and establish churches indigenous to that cultural context. A few defining characteristics of an indigenous church would be:

- a. It is culturally a part of its own world with its message and its way of living; moreover, its way of believing and living is relevant and meaningful in addressing the needs of the congregation and the world about it
- b. It understands itself as the church, the body of Christ, in that place, mediating His mind and word and demonstrating His love, mercy, and compassion for others

- c. The various parts of the body of Christ, despite their different gifts, perform their respective functions for the common good as they interact with and serve each other
- d. Its leadership and decision-making patterns fit its local social structure and it is able to determine its own affairs
- e. It carries its own financial burdens and adequately finances its own service ministries
- f. It propagates the faith as it sees itself as being directly addressed by the words of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations
- g. It exercises itself in facing and alleviating the social needs and problems of the local world in which it lives

Paul preached in a place for several months and then left behind him a church, not free from the need of guidance (for he often wrote missionary letters to admonish and counsel), but capable of growth and expansion. Paul, by leaving the believers quickly, gave the local leaders the opportunity to take their proper place.¹²

The training of the first converts is critical especially in terms of their dependency upon Christ and His Spirit’s work, in their lives and through their lives. Paul believed that the same Spirit that taught and guided him would also teach, guide, and form those whom the Spirit had converted through his preaching and teaching ministry. Yet many of us from the West have long accustomed ourselves to the missionary practice that converts must be submitted to a very long probation and training, extending over generations before they are permitted to stand alone.¹³

By not allowing the local congregation of believers to direct their own religious life, we produce the impression that their religious life ought to be directed by “foreign missionaries and theologians.” However, the training which the apostle Paul laid the greatest stress is the training that God alone can give—the training of life and experience; and yet the training that we lay the greatest stress on is the training we can give—the training of the school. The training we stress is almost always intellectual; whereas the training the apostle laid stress on is almost wholly spiritual, moral, and practical.¹⁴ We are so enamored of those qualifications that “we have added” to the apostolic that “we deny” the qualifications of anyone who possessed only the apostolic (1 Tim 3:1–12 & Ti 1:6–9); meanwhile, we think a man fully qualified who possesses our qualifications.¹⁵

So what was the apostle Paul’s model of establishing a church? In the New Testament, the moment converts were made in any place pastors were appointed from among them. For their life together, and for their ministry in the world, they were given the apostolic tradition, the Gospel and the Sacraments.¹⁶ They needed the apostolic tradition so that they might have a standard by which to “test the spirits” (Eph 2:19–22; 1 Jn 4:1–6); the Creed became their touchstone by which they would know whether any teaching they may hear is to be received or to be rejected (Trinitarian foundation). In order that others might obtain this “justifying faith,” and that they also might be nourished and strengthened in their faith, they were given the Gospel and the Sacraments (AC V). Thus Paul left his newly-founded churches with a simple system of (1) Gospel teaching and two Sacraments, and (2) a tradition of the

main facts regarding the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and of the Old Testament.

2. Indigenous worship

In terms of worship, this example is most illustrative¹⁷:

- a. the people were called by the beating of the native drum . . . before the service they chanted the catechism in the pre-Christian indigenous liturgical manner . . . they sat as they would normally sit in a culturally oriented gathering . . . the sermon, hymn singing, and Bible reading were in the vernacular language . . . the leaders, according to their different functional roles, welcomed the members, receiving the offering and made the announcements . . . they were all indigenes and their appointment reflected the social structure of the worshipping community
- b. the foreign missionary kept the key, unlocked the church, rang the bell, led the service, read the lessons, gave the announcements, called for the offering, and blessed it . . . the music was led by a foreigner and they sang Western tunes . . . the message was delivered by a foreigner with minimal language proficiency in terms of content and style . . . there was no participation except for half-hearted hymn singing

D. Each congregation is the lampstand in its local ministry context and is a light to the nations of the earth

The Scriptures ascribe only one intention to God: to save humankind. Therefore every task of the Church makes sense and has a purpose only as it leads to His mission of making disciples of all nations. Moreover, God is working out His saving plan in and through His chosen and redeemed people, and *each believer* has a responsibility for advancing the saving purposes of God in the world. Furthermore, each lampstand must realize that it is the Church, the body of Christ, in its locality and must corporately fulfill its mission and ministry in that place (and to the ends of the earth).

Critical to the matter of church planting, and extending His Kingdom into many diverse cultures, sub-cultures, and places is the mandate that no one among the heathen is to be excluded—the Gospel is to be proclaimed in the entire living space of the nations. Every nation presents a unique environment for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the cross-cultural communication¹⁸ and contextualization¹⁹ of the Gospel.

IV. Conclusion: The Church is Always in Need of Receiving the Correcting, Reforming, and Revitalizing Words of Jesus, the Head of the Church

“...and in the midst of the lampstands one like the son of man . . . now write what you see, what is, and what is to take place hereafter” (Rev 1:13, 19).

These words record the time when Jesus was walking among the lampstands of Asia Minor, commenting on what He saw and what was taking place. After describing these things, He offered words of correction, advice, and promise. Each brief encounter closed with these words: **he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

In order to properly hear the ascended Lord of the Church, and what His Spirit has to say to us as His evangelizing, edifying, and missionary priests and people, we would be wise to receive the counsel and embrace the practices of His “five gifts-offices” so that we might acquire and experience “the Christological balance”—and be fully informed, formed, and equipped for our mission and ecclesiastical labors and ministry endeavors.²⁰

Endnotes

¹ Christ Himself manifested these same five “gifts-offices” during His earthly ministry, for He was an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-shepherd, and teacher. The very “gifts-offices” that Jesus gives His people to bless humankind in our time were the very “gifts-offices” He used to bless people in His time.

² The Scriptures also record the root narrative regarding the origin of the universe, why it was created and for what purpose.

³ Who is God and what is God like? How does God feel toward me and the rest of humankind? How did this world come into existence and for what purpose was it created? Who am I and why am I here? Why is anyone here; what will happen to me when I die? What kind of “righteousness” is required on the day of judgment and how is this “justifying faith” made known and acquired? What is true and what is false; what is right and what is wrong; etc.?

⁴ There is only one foundation upon which a person can build one’s life now and for eternity, and that one foundation is Jesus Christ; consequently, apostolic counsel and practices are concerned with the kind of foundation to be built upon (Mt 7:24–27) and what kind of building will be constructed in a person’s life (1 Cor 3:10b–15).

⁵ Jesus, in His visitation of the seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev 2–3), refers to them as “lampstands.”

⁶ The elements of the evangelistic and teaching offices are to be included within the pastoral office since those who occupy the “pastoral office” are to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5) and are to be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2; see also Ti 1:9; 2 Tim 2:2).

⁷ The human condition is filled with tribulations, trials, and temptations (*tentatio*); and these drive us to prayer (*oratio*), asking God for His help, counsel, and strength; and these also drive us to His Word (*meditatio*) for counsel, wisdom, and consolation. This kind of spiritual formation and biblical spirituality comforts and guides us in our baptized life; but it also is intended to equip us to be messengers of His Holy Spirit as He brings us alongside others, among Christians and non-Christians, who are also experiencing their own trials, struggles, and temptations. As His priests, we turn to God in prayer on their behalf but also seek to bring a comforting and consoling word based upon our meditation of God’s Word so that they may be helped and blessed in the midst of their trials, struggles, and temptations.

⁸ During the time of *The Warring States*, an era of intense conflict and social dysfunction within sixth century BC China, Confucius searched China’s ancient past to find a better way of life for the Chinese people. His solution began with the premise that for a society to experience “good days,” it must understand how life is properly ordered and designed; that is, how to “name” things as they really are, especially the major relationships in life such as husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, society and the individual. Moreover, in order to help the Chinese people understand what this ideal Chinese man or woman would look like, he identified the key character traits by *naming* them in ways that the ordinary Chinese person could understand and begin to embrace. This was also the practice

of Martin Luther during the time of the Reformation. Time and time again, when discussing theology with friends and foes alike, Luther advocated the need to use biblical language and biblical definitions so that we can properly understand the will and ways of God for the *coram relationships*.

⁹ A church member can be someone who attends worship every Sunday, participates in a leadership position, regularly studies God's Word through a daily devotional life of Word and prayer, and seeks to use his or her gifts and talents to extend His kingdom through a life of personal witness and service. A church member can also be someone who was baptized many years ago, put in a couple of years of instruction in order to become a communicant member of a church when they were young, and has not attended worship in God's house for several years. Both individuals, in many of our churches, are *church members*.

¹⁰ The title for the fifth article of the Augsburg Confession is "the preaching office" in the German and "the ministry of the Church" in the Latin. As correctly noted by Theodore Tappert in *The Book of Concord*, "this title would be misleading if it were not observed that the Reformers thought of 'the preaching office' in other than *clerical terms*" (See Tappert's fourth footnote on page 31).

¹¹ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 31.

¹² Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 93.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 145.

¹⁵ For example, a young student fresh from a theological seminary lacks many of the qualifications which the apostle deemed necessary for a leader in the house of God: the age, the experience, the established reputation; yet we do not think him unqualified. The man who does possess all the apostolic qualifications is said to be unqualified, because he cannot go back to school and pass an examination. *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁶ Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1962), 147.

¹⁷ Alan Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1987), 91.

¹⁸ A missionary, in a cross-cultural setting and before a cross-cultural target audience, needs to learn to communicate Christ, and the Scriptures, in terms of the hearer's **way of viewing the world** (sources must assume the responsibility of encoding messages with the worldview of the respondents in mind) . . . **way of thinking** (people in different cultures tend to arrive at conclusions through different thought processes) . . . **way of expressing themselves in language** . . . **way of acting** (an inventory of cultural behavior is essential for missionary activity) . . . **way of interacting** (the conventions of social structure dictate which channels of communication are open and which are closed—who talks to whom, in what way, and with what effect) . . . **ways of channeling the message and of deciding future courses of action** (the ways in which people of various cultures think of decision making and the ways in which they arrive at decisions are very diverse).

¹⁹ In contextualization, the communicator takes the initiative and moves into the receptor's frame of reference. The idea of contextualization is to frame the Gospel message in language and communication forms appropriate and meaningful to the target culture. The communicator preaches two sermons: (1) the first sermon is the preaching of the Law so that the sinner might come to a condemning and convicting knowledge of his or her sin; and (2) the second sermon is the preaching of the Gospel that a person is saved by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ. The communicator accords to the Word of God its rightful primacy, that is, its power to penetrate every culture and speak within each culture, in its own speech and symbol, the Word which is both judgment and grace. Finally, it is the receptor's specific culture that will determine the language and manner in which the Gospel should be communicated and also the patterns in which one's new life in Christ is nurtured and exercised.

²⁰ God's people have been entrusted with four kinds of ministry endeavors: (1) **evangelistic ministry endeavors**, as they evangelize large numbers of non-Christians through their life of witness and Gospel proclamation and bring them, by God's grace, to faith in Jesus Christ; (2) **maturational ministry endeavors**, as they grow up into Christ, who is the Head of His body, and become mature disciples of Jesus, who are also His stewards, servants, priests, witnesses, salt, light, and living letters; (3) **organic ministry endeavors**, as they are connected to each other in relationships that live out the "one another" admonitions of the New Testament, e.g., "love one another," "pray for one another," with each believer using his or her gifts for the building up of the body and for the common good; and (4) **incarnational ministry endeavors**, as they live out their life of faith and do the good works that God has prepared for them to do (Eph 2:8–10) so that, wherever they go and with whomever they come into contact, other people are able to see that they are His disciples—stamped and fashioned in the image of Jesus and are a living witness to Him (Gal 2:20; 1 Jn 2:6).

Reflection on the Mission of God

Norb Oesch

God is in mission. Or maybe another way to say it is that from before the foundations of the earth God set forth on a mission, a mission of His initiative, His design, His motivation—thus totally His own. The fullness of that mission is surely enwrapped in mystery, for who can comprehend the mind of God or know fully all that He conceives, except He who was with Him from the beginning and was sent by God to reveal Him to humanity (Jn 7:29)?

Nevertheless, as He has chosen to reveal His mission, we who have received the mind of Christ (the mind of Him who was with Him from the beginning) and to whom has been given the Holy Spirit, can see by faith various elements of His mission; for He has revealed them through Holy Scriptures. For “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pt 1:21).

What we can know and comprehend by faith is that God created the world and all that is in it for relationships. The crown of His creating was humanity—man and woman, uniquely created to reflect Him to the rest of creation with specific tasks to perform (Gn 2:15) while flourishing in such close harmony and fellowship with the Creator that the inspired writer can only express it as “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” to commune with what He made, especially Adam and Eve. God was reigning in His creation and through His human creation. With eyes opened by how Jesus lived and labored we can get a glimpse of the Kingdom of God with no dysfunction, no broken relationships.

And just how did that Kingdom function? It functioned around the Word of God. The radiant nexus was the Word. Even as the Creative Word spoke and all came into being, so all that came into being found not only its source of life in the Word; but its orientation for life, its direction for life, and its boundaries emanated from it in positive terms—“you are free to eat from any tree of the garden,” and in negative terms, “but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Here was the principle of life—the Word, God’s Word. Around it, symbolized by the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden, life itself was oriented. (We could say that the relationship with God was grounded in the center). From it life was (and still is to be) given direction. And the boundaries beyond which no one was to go or live were also given. By living with such an orientation, knowing and acting in accordance with the direction given, and staying within the boundaries separating the Creator from the creature, life could be experienced in all its fullness. The mission of God was being realized. A perfect fellowship between God and humanity existed. Until . . .

The Fall . . . that tragic moment when another word, another voice was heard—a voice that offered a different life principle around which to live—making the Creator’s voice sound dull! How much more exciting would it be to orient one’s

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life around pleasure and power and beauty! And how much more exciting to set one's own orientation, direction with no boundaries; for each would know both good and evil! What it seems was not realized until it was too late is that life with a different voice, a different word, is a life torn apart in all aspects, most particularly in relationships. The relationship with God—torn apart; the relationship with created matter—torn apart; even the relationship of husband and wife, of family—torn apart. God searches for humanity and humanity hides, filled with shame. And so the story goes. Except for . . .

Except for God, who will not give up on His mission!

We could reflect on many aspects of the mission of God to restore His kingdom that are found in the Old Testament, especially as He creates a nation, a people for Himself to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6; 1 Pt 2:9). This act reflects God's desire to carry out His mission through Israel; but how they failed. It would be good to trace His Kingdom's actions throughout the Old Testament, for God never gave up, nor does He give up, on His mission. However, for the purposes of this reflection, we move to the New Testament where we see the epitome of God in mission, namely, in the life and being of His Son, Jesus.

Born “to save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21), God Incarnate is restoring the lost relationship. And even as a lad, Jesus knew that His life was to be lived around the orientation of the Word, for He said, “Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?” (Lk 2:49). Confronted at the opening of His mission with “another voice” saying, “If you are the Son of God, command...,” He would not be allured to the more exciting principle of life, but countered with “It is written...it is written...it is said...” (Lk 4:4, 8, 12). The Word of God was His orientation, His direction and His boundaries. Now He could live in full relationship with the Father, and the Father said, “You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased” (Lk 3:22). Here we see the Kingdom of God with no dysfunction. Yet . . .

Yet, the Kingdom of God, His reign in and through His people, could not stop with Jesus. Thus Jesus, fully endowed with the Holy Spirit, invites disciples to be with Him, to live in relationship with Him and to prepare to carry out the mission the Father first gave to Him, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (Jn 17:19). Indeed, He breathes on them as the Resurrected Christ and says, “As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you” (Jn 20:21).

The mission of Christ is now the mission of His followers—not that it is owned by them, for it still belongs to the Father. But the followers of Jesus are invited into the Father's mission and are commissioned by Jesus to “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” (Mt 28:19–20); and yes, He, the very Son of the Father, will go with them in this mission, “And behold, I am with you to the end of the age” (v. 20b).

True, the early disciples did not quite get it—not at first, for it appears that they thought the Kingdom would contain only the “chosen people” of the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6, for example). They would locate God in a city (Jerusalem) and a building (the temple), just as people in our day still will say that it is the mission of the church to bring people to where God is and where the Holy Spirit is, namely into a church building where there is an altar, pulpit, and font. But God, although He will

be in such a place if the Word is proclaimed there, is not to be contained in “houses made by hands,” as Stephen so eloquently stated it, but for which he was also stoned! And the mission cannot remain in a city, even the holy city of Jerusalem, as the Apostles seemed to desire; and so a persecution breaks out (Acts 8:1) and all the believers except the Apostles are scattered throughout the then known world. And where they went they preached the Word of God (Acts 8:4), and the Holy Spirit was there, and people believed and the Kingdom spread, even without the Apostles’ knowledge, let alone approval and blessing.

Even Peter did not take seriously the command of Jesus when He said, “Go . . . to all nations” (in Greek, *panta ta ethne*—all the ethnics or ethnic groupings), for he would not go into Cornelius’ house until a mighty vision is given to him—and even then he was hesitant, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but . . .”

But he begins to get it, and declares to the other Apostles, “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17). Peter begins to clearly see that it is God who is in mission; the mission is God’s and He can invite anyone He wants to into His kingdom! Let us note this carefully—it is God’s mission and He can invite anyone He wants into His mission! In fact, as we see in Jesus’ life when He associated with the “low lifes” of His time, He often invites those whom we would shun (like Peter) and think are not fit for the Kingdom—or at least should not be with us in the Kingdom! (But it’s not quite time yet to apply all this to ourselves; we still need to see how God opened the eyes of the early church, namely in Acts 15.)

In the controversy of Acts 15, we have the issue of whose mission this is and who is to be invited into God’s Kingdom coming to a climax. Some brothers were saying, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). In other words, the custom of Moses was to dictate who was allowed into the Kingdom, not God and His Word. The debate ensued, and in the end, God’s plan became clear—all the Gentiles were being invited into the Kingdom. *Panta ta ethne*—all ethnic groups were welcome. All can become disciples and can be invited to participate in Kingdom work; only “abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:20). Why? Because these things were just too offensive to Jewish brothers and sisters, and for the sake of conscience they can be abstained from (1 Cor 8; 9).

Now the mission of God can go where the Father wants it to go, and go it does. Barnabas, not an Apostle (or at least not one of the twelve), finds the Kingdom is sprouting up in Antioch. Prophets who did not have hands laid on them by the Apostles were preaching and teaching there. He gets Saul, who becomes Paul, another non-Apostolic person in the eyes of many, to help out. And then the Holy Spirit calls for them to be set aside for work among the Gentiles. They will go to the edges of society, and indeed to the edges of the world, inviting people into a relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ, and into the Kingdom of God. God’s mission will go on and on and on—past the age of Apostles and past the ages of the early Church Fathers, and on to the time of Constantine. But then it seems to stop—or maybe, better said, the mission gets put into a secondary or even tertiary

place. The Church and the Church's decrees begin to shape the mission rather than the mission's shaping the Church. And by the time of the Reformation, even Christ (Christology) is placed behind the Church. No longer is it the priority, namely, the Father's mission given to Christ; Christ's mission given to the Apostles; the Apostles' mission given to believers who are the Church. Now the Church as a structure and a governance becomes first. It is no longer Christ, mission, and then Church; but it is now Church, and that's it.

The Reformation restored Christ to His rightful first position, but it failed to put the mission next. It just didn't seem to be the issue at the time. So it is hardly mentioned in the writing of the Lutheran Confessions or even those of Martin Luther himself.

And, to some degree, little has changed among the life of some Lutheran Christians. Some of us would still think the order is not Christ, mission, and lastly, Church. Some would put doctrine before the mission. Some would put church order and governance before the mission. In our own LCMS, we turn to the Commission on Constitutional Matters to decide how a pastor and a local congregation can carry out the mission of God in their area. We look to resolutions of Synod in order to decide to whom we are to go and what is a mission field, who we can commune with, and with whom it is "unlawful . . . to associate with or to visit" (Acts 10:28).

But let us remember that it is God's mission, not ours. God is the one who is inviting all kinds of people into His Kingdom—even non-Lutherans (even Lutherans of a different sort!). And if it is His mission, and we are only invited to be a part, are we not to be as cautious as Peter was and say, "who am I that I could stand in God's way"? Do we not need to think carefully about church relationships and communion practice, to say nothing about who can preach and who can share the Sacraments, if it is God's mission and we have only been invited to join Him and those of His choosing? As was said earlier, "It is God's mission and He can invite anyone He chooses into His mission."

He has invited me; He has invited you. It is a privilege to be so invited. Now I want to be open to others that He has invited and join them as best I can in the work set before me. May God's Holy Spirit help me! Amen.

The Economic Ecclesiology and the Costly Christology of the “Missio Missouri”: a Pastoral Memoir from Hispanic Ministry

Steve Morfitt

I made the visit on a very hot south Texas August afternoon in 1995. Shortly thereafter, I wrote down a brief reflection on the experience:

“The screen door was crudely homemade. The belt hung on a nail in the wall. It was much better than government housing anyway. There was no more harassment, no more humiliation. The dogs did not come to sniff for drugs . . .”

I am not sure why that event drew attention. I had been in ministry for 13 years by that time. Perhaps it was because the visit itself was a poignant reminder of my ministerial context to some extent—not all together typical but suggestive of all the recurrent issues in many ways. And it was a situation which underscored all the perennial dialogue about Hispanic ministry in this Circuit of south Texas and far beyond.

The ongoing support for Hispanic Ministry—Spanish-speaking ministry—in Brownsville, Texas, by the Texas District of the LCMS dated back to at least the 1930s and continued to my arrival in 1982 and has been uninterrupted for my 30 years in Brownsville. An enormous financial commitment to the support of a full-time pastor at El Calvario has been made in my case. In 1993, the Texas District was also willing to support additional staff. El Calvario, in light of that additional financial commitment, called a DCE who served until 2001. In 2001, the Texas District even supported a call to a bilingual deaconess who served until 2004.

This is my appreciation for the “economic” ecclesiology of the LCMS. There can be little doubt that this aggressive posture is based upon our understanding of the revelation of the “Economic Trinity”—the triune God who is in every way for us and for our salvation. God the Father sends His only begotten Son into the world for the sake of the world. God the Father and the Son send the Spirit to create and sustain the Church in the world for the sake of the Great Commission—the “economic ecclesiology” of the *missio Dei*.

This “economic ecclesiology” of the LCMS includes the very thorough and comprehensive preparation of her pastors and all of her professional workers. Our Confessional Lutheran heritage makes this aspect of our “economic ecclesiology” a virtual necessity. The Church is to be found where the Word and Sacraments are proclaimed and distributed according to the teaching and institution of our Lord. There the Holy Spirit works faith when and where He will.

That was my Call to El Calvario, and that has been my ministry to preach the Gospel and administer those Sacraments given by the “Economic Trinity” for the

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sake of the world and our salvation.

The mother of the family from that very hot afternoon visit in 1995 was in church this last Sunday—a regular worshiper. She came into the church office immediately after the Divine Service. Shedding tears of great anguish, she described with evident emotional duress the life of her 35-year-old son who is now living on the streets of Brownsville. He stays with a group of the homeless who sleep under a highway overpass. I know her situation is somewhat better than 17 years ago but still so very difficult. She cares for another mentally challenged adult son, who requires her constant care, as well as her older son, who makes constant appeals for her help and clandestine visits to shower at her apartment and get the food he can.

But why dwell on this? The “economic ecclesiology” of our faith brought the Gospel with depth and clarity to Brownsville by providing support for full-time pastors and additional church workers at El Calvario. But the questions were always there when visits were made to the many places and conditions like those described above. What could be provided locally to sustain the Office of the Public Ministry and auxiliary offices? And that is the main issue under consideration. For there is no “*missio Missouri*” without the Office of the Holy Ministry and congregations, even as there is no *missio Dei* without the Word and Sacraments according to the instrumental means of the Lord and His Spirit.

My ecclesiological experience strongly influenced my missiological and Christological understandings. The “*missio Missouri*” confesses the need for the Office of the Holy Ministry as the *sin qua non* for the Gospel and Sacramental life of the congregation. And her “economic ecclesiology” was willing to take the Word and Sacrament to the place of need and support her pastors in that place of need. This “economic ecclesiology” trained and sustained the Office and made practical both the missiology and Christology of the “*missio Missouri*.”

But that one representative summer afternoon in 1995, the look through the crudely homemade screen door with the belt hanging on the nail, and the homeless 35-year-old in 2012 continue to present those relational questions to be taken up in this May issue of *Missio Apostolica*. Our “economic ecclesiology” knows the central role of the Office of the Holy Ministry, but has this ecclesiology in any way limited the most exhaustive examination of Christological and missiological considerations of the faith we believe, teach, and confess?

As a “pastoral memoir from Hispanic ministry,” some observations from experience of parish life can be offered regarding these matters. A few weeks ago, I sat in the living room of some members waiting for a Bible study to begin. I knew the home setting and the family quite well. For almost 30 years, I have lived and shared ministry with this immediate and extended family. I sat on the couch and waited for the arrival of those who would attend. Six Mexican and Mexican-American women would attend that night. No men but myself were present. In all fairness, it must be said that some men had been present on other occasions. But women were clearly predominant. As I was driving home after the study and considering this very common aspect of my pastoral ministry among Mexican and Mexican-Americans at El Calvario, it was not hard to take note and feel very deeply the significance of this pattern.

I sat in the living room with the six women for the study; the pattern had been exactly the same for our weekly prayer meetings which have been held for years. The only other man who ever attended was a trained deacon (a certified worker from the Hispanic Institute of Theology which began in 1987, now the Center for Hispanic Studies at CSL) from Chicago who had retired in Brownsville. This would be the case also, by and large, for Advent, Lent, and any other special services. Women, in general, and mothers and grandmothers, in particular, compose the vast majority of the practitioners of the faith in the parish and domestic forms of practical and applied piety. In a similar vein and demonstration, in a very recent Sunday worship service, a baby was brought to church by an aunt. Aunts, grandmother, and other women from the congregation carried the baby forward and gathered to pray for the baby and his family at the communion rail. No men were present or involved with this activity. That same Sunday another mother had come to worship an hour early in order to speak to me about her son in his late 20s and make an appointment for him to see me and answer some of his questions. The young man was in worship that morning but did not make these arrangements for himself.

The predominant, prominent, and paramount role of women in parish, domestic, practical and applied piety in this “pastoral memoir from Hispanic ministry” suggests many things.

It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that the “costly Christology” from this cultural and ecclesiastical context will take on much of feminine characteristics and, more specifically, maternal qualities. That may bring many, many images to mind, but this stands out to me: Jesus Christ is the suffering Son of the Father, but also of Mary, His mother, in the mystery of the Incarnation. “Costly Christology” in this “pastoral memoir from Hispanic ministry” has so often been felt deeply and expressed profoundly to me in all of those terms familiar to a mother’s concern for her children.

The maternal pathos of this Christology is directly related to missiological understandings. The “lost” are most often identified immediately and intimately with the literal sons and daughters who are estranged or wayward to some degree, in some form or fashion. Christology here, again, is closely associated with and interpreted by many aspects of a mother’s loving care. Missiology is felt most keenly, personally, and practically, as a mother looking out for her lost and wayward child. This Christology is always very caring, compassionate, longsuffering. And the missiology is most directly related to the immediate family and the maternal role and its manifold responsibilities.

All of this cannot be without significant implications. The “economic ecclesiology” of the “*missio Missouri*” with an active and aggressive missionary posture through the “costly Christology” offered to all through the Office of the Holy Ministry will continue to consider the significant role of deaconess as auxiliary office. From the deaconess role formally understood, so much may be developed and demonstrated in the understanding of Christology as it shapes missiology and ecclesiology. Especially here one may find an “economic ecclesiology” in the pattern of the “kenosis,” humiliation and passion of our Lord with few human parallels, however faint, even close to the common sacrifice and abnegation of motherhood in spiritual vocation.

And the “economic ecclesiology” and the “costly Christology” of the “*missio Missouri*” are not left with only implications for the Office of the Ministry’s deaconess auxiliary. Certainly not in this “pastoral memoir from Hispanic ministry.”

The primary place of Christian discipleship is the family and extended family. Noteworthy in the Hispanic cultural context, Christian piety and practice, duty, and sacrifice are observed primarily in care for the family. Here is an opportunity and challenge for our “economic ecclesiology.” How can we build on the very deep awareness of home and family being the primary place for the practice of formative piety—most often maternal piety practiced and applied—to become the place of intentional mission with that very special character of the “costly Christology” already understood and embraced?

One additional piece of information as it relates to what is to follow: my role has changed in the last two years. In late January 2010, I resigned my Call from El Calvario and took a position with the Texas District, termed as of this date, “Co-Director of Missional Worker Training of South Texas.”

There are many aspects to this work, but one area of my concentration has been the missiological implications for the priesthood of all believers in the *vocatio* of Holy Baptism. One area where I have spent considerable time derives from a text in John 15 on the “friends” of Jesus. My principal resource for this perspective has come from John W. Kleinig’s work, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today*. Most of my insights in this regard come from Chapter 3, “The Mystery of Prayer,” in the section titled “Friends of the King.” Kleinig elevates the believer’s position enormously in light of this friendship with Jesus: “We are, if you like, all members of Christ’s royal cabinet, ministers in His heavenly administration.”¹

But since this is a “pastoral memoir from Hispanic ministry,” there is an aspect of this privileged friendship which in particular strikes me as being very relevant to our “economic ecclesiology” in this cultural context. As I was thinking about this topic, another verse from the Gospel of John in the account of the Wedding at Cana came to mind: “They have no wine. . . . Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:3–5). The believer—all believers—have in their Baptismal Covenant this compelling “maternal prerogative.” We certainly don’t tell Jesus what to do. But since we are so closely related, we make observations and recommendations. As Kleinig writes, “We do not merely work for Jesus by carrying out His commands; we work with Him by passing on the love that we have received from the Father through Him.”² And again, “Through our union with Jesus we have access to the Father’s presence and have become co-workers with Him (I Corinthians 3:9).”³

In Hispanic culture, there is a profound respect and appreciation for the “*fe de las abuelitas*” (faith of grandmothers), as it is commonly understood. I think this is something that can be built upon with tremendous import for our “economic ecclesiology.” We must more fully develop this “*fe de las abuelitas*” (grandmother faith) through sound catechesis on the full nature of the Baptismal Covenant with its “costly Christology.” We can come to understand it as position or office, as Kleinig writes, “members of Christ’s royal cabinet”; or, as I would like, the Baptismal Covenant which abides the maternal prerogative of “They have no wine. . . . Do whatever he tells you.” That is most truly an expression of our “costly Christology,” in which the justified are given the tremendous privileges and full responsibilities of

grace in mission. If this "pastoral memoir from Hispanic ministry" would portray the prodigal son returning to the arms of the waiting mother in cultural terms and experience, then might this not be so for the sake of "economic ecclesiology" and "costly Christology" in the missiology of the "*missio Missouri*," which takes the Gospel to the place of need from the place of understanding and compassion?

"They have no wine. . . . Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:3-5). The guests didn't bring their own wine or plan for their own provisions. This was a wedding feast. They were guests. The hosts would provide for all of their guests. That is exactly the expression of our "economic ecclesiology" and "costly Christology" in the historic commitment and sacrifice of the "*missio Missouri*." But this "pastoral memoir from Hispanic ministry" would suggest that congregational structures and identification and mission responsibility focused on and through the Office of the Ministry with the dual obligation to both call and care for a well-trained clergy and additional workers are still a very long way off. A lingering stare at the crudely homemade screen door makes this abundantly clear. But if there is no demonstrable "economic ecclesiology" or "costly Christology" in the formal structures of congregations with financial and organizational wherewithal to call and sustain full-time, seminary-trained pastors for the Office of the Holy Ministry and auxiliaries, yet there is still more, much more to know, understand, encourage, and appreciate.

If Christology shapes missiology, which in turn shapes ecclesiology as per Frost/Hirsch, then John Kleinig's baptized "members of Christ's royal cabinet" must all be taken with utmost seriousness. And as I would suggest in this "memoir from Hispanic ministry," the "motherly prerogative" in the maternal expressions of the pathos of our "costly Christology" of the Baptismal Covenant must be fully explored, understood, developed, and deployed for the sake of the missiology of the "*missio Missouri*" and the glorious *missio Dei*.

This "motherly prerogative" functions largely on a personal and domestic level, but if understood correctly and adequately prepared and encouraged even here, our "economic ecclesiology" and "costly Christology" may be powerfully witnessed and demonstrated in these committed, involved, sacrificial, incarnational, and intentional relationships for the sake of the "*missio Missouri*."

"They have no wine. . . . Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:3-5) is, I am persuaded, a biblical passage related to an adequate understanding of Christology, missiology, and ecclesiology that can hardly be exhausted. And it takes place in a domestic setting with the maternal instincts of Mary, the mother of God and the "first believer," as many are quick to point out, at work. "They have no wine. . . . Do whatever he tells you." In these comments of Mary, the "costly Christology" of our glorious redemption is not reduced or confused but rather they are a very faithful testimony to that "economic ecclesiology" in the *missio* which will take the Gospel to the very place of need with all the godly maternal compassion and urgency of the "maternal prerogative" given in our Baptismal Covenant.

When I wrote the topic sentence in much haste last December, "The Economic Ecclesiology and the Costly Christology of the 'Missio Missouri': a Pastoral Memoir from Hispanic Ministry," there was the tongue in cheek aspect of the expression. For thirty years, I have been in ministry among the people of God who could not materially provide for me and my family according to the

arrangement for modest income and benefits. That reality in itself has nothing to do with Hispanic ministry, per se, since one could possibly identify places where Hispanic ministry is conducted among the materially comfortable, affluent, or even wealthy. But my experience and contacts across the country in various Districts and the Synod as a whole indicate that my pastoral memoir represents the vast majority of those who have been called and still serve, with this exception: I am aware that many men and women serve and have served as pastors, deacons, and deaconesses, with low pay or no pay in their respective offices in Spanish-speaking congregations for long periods of time and currently.

My own pastoral memoir should include a lengthy consideration of the issues relating to ministry among the poor. But for this issue of *Missio Apostolica* I was asked to speak primarily from the perspective of a pastor in Hispanic ministry. As you have read above, I cannot maintain a clear distinction, since in all of my pastoral experience, poverty and Hispanic ministry have been closely related or inextricably intertwined.

And so there have been many temptations along the way to curse the darkness. To render the verdict and describe what normally happens, as one of my own daughters put it rather too tersely and pointedly: “Church is for the rich.” I am not a contrarian, and I am not sure how to best render a pastoral remark on the studied consideration of “God’s preferential option for the poor” in good Lutheran parlance; but I do believe after these thirty years in the Office that I find myself in sympathy with Hermann Sasse’s observation found somewhere that if it took 1,500 years to get Article II of the Apostles’ Creed in order, Article III, on the Church, may yet demand a great deal of work!

I have sat with Augsburg V and XIV open on my lap often, aware of the profound biblical precision and insight that our Confessions provide as they direct our attention again and again to the Office of the Holy Ministry and its central location in the *missio Dei* for the proclamation of the Gospel and the distribution of the Sacraments. But as I have preached and taught and prayed and served to and with so many of these tender, suffering, compassionate, and so often broken-hearted mothers in Hispanic culture—who look for, and long for, and wait for, their children lost, wayward, or in need—that I will continue to explore their relationship to our “costly Christology” and the glorious implications of their “cabinet level” positions in the Baptismal Covenant from the perspective of the writings of John Kleinig and others which take note of the place and power of this “maternal prerogative” in the life and witness of the church. And in this Hispanic cultural context, I will continue the study of the expansive implications of verses like, “They have no wine. . . . Do whatever he tells you” for our Christological, missiological, and ecclesiological understandings. May the “*fe de las abuelitas*” (faith of grandmothers) be much more adequately understood, equipped, and deployed for ever greater joy in the heart of the “Economic Trinity” over one sinner who repents through the work of the “*missio Missouri*” in the fullness of our “economic ecclesiology” and “costly Christology” in and through these dear sisters, mothers, “friends” of Jesus.

Endnotes

¹ John W. Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 155.

² *Ibid.*, 155.

³ *Ibid.*, 155.

A Case for Romans 1:16 . . . Again!

Steve Cohen

There are *thirteen million* Jewish people alive today. 99% are unsaved. There are over *seven billion* gentiles, 80% unsaved.

What shall we do?

This article is accompanied by far better theologians than I addressing the implications of whether Christology impacts our ecclesiology which then impacts our missiology, or vice versa. In light of those discussions, I invite you to consider the historic ramifications of the rise, fall and re-evaluation of Jewish missions over the past two millennia.

I am Jewish. I grew up surrounded by Christians. For the first twenty-three years of my life, none of my “Christian” friends ever spoke to me of Jesus! Finally, one caring Lutheran prayed for my salvation daily for three years and personally risked our friendship to speak to me of Jesus. I am eternally grateful that he did. He lived in view of Romans 1:16—he was NOT ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for this is God’s power for salvation to all who believe . . . to the Jew first.

When I was a new believer in Jesus, my late wife Jan invited me to tag along to the Lutheran congregation where she was an organist. I had many questions, and one day during the Sunday Bible class, I asked, “If you have a friend who does not yet confess Jesus, how do you begin a conversation?” One of the members said, “Mr. Cohen, we are Lutherans, we wouldn’t do that!”

A Brief History . . .

The first followers of Jesus were Jewish. They went to the synagogue first and concluded from the Scriptures that the Messiah had come as promised in the Law and the Prophets. It was the norm to be involved first in Jewish culture and then to follow the Jewish Messiah. It was outside the norm for a gentile to follow Jesus.

The missiological hot-button of the day was “Can a gentile follow Jesus without first becoming Jewish?”

Acts 15 revealed that those who called for a “pure” Jewish community insisted that gentiles convert and become Jewish. The “grafted-in” community understood that wild olive branches (gentiles) can remain gentile-ish and Jewish believers can remain Jewish. The “mystery” of the church is that the body of Christ is made up of Jews *and* gentiles. When the number of gentiles in the church became greater than the number of Jews, faulty views of Scripture, prejudices, and anti-Semitic attitudes infiltrated the church.

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Institutional changes included:

1. The rejection of the literal meaning of Scripture in its context.
2. The subjugation of Scripture to the authority of a gentile (anti-Jewish) Church hierarchy.
3. The determination that church doctrine and practice would be in opposition to the Jews.
4. The establishment of compulsory conformity in practice.
5. The acceptance of the State and the sword as the means of maintaining purity in the church. (The cross was transformed from a means of victory over sin for the individual to a means of victory over sinners by the society.)
6. The acceptance of the sword of the State, instead of the Sword of the Spirit, the blood of the Lamb and the blood of believers, as the means of triumph in the world.
7. The acceptance of the State support of the Church in exchange for the Church support of the State. (The Church surrenders its own prophetic message toward the State.)¹

By the fifth century, any Jewish person seeking baptism and entrance into the church had to renounce everything Jewish:

I renounce all customs, rites, legalisms, unleavened breads and sacrifices of Lambs of the Hebrews, and all other feasts of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers, aspersions, purifications, sanctifications, and propitiations, and fasts, and new moons, and Sabbaths, and superstitions, and hymns and chants and observances and synagogues, and the food and drink of the Hebrews; in one word, I renounce absolutely everything Jewish, every law rite, and custom. . . . and if afterwards I shall wish to deny and return to Jewish superstition, or shall be found eating with the Jews, or feasting with them, or secretly conversing and condemning the Christian religion instead of openly confuting them and condemning their vain faith, then let the trembling of Cain and the leprosy of Gehazi cleave to me, as well as the legal punishments to which I acknowledge myself liable. And may I be anathema in the world to come, and may my soul be set down with Satan and the devils.²

Mah kerah (What happened?)

Most Christian clergy have studied church history without ever being introduced to this shameful aspect of the church's story. The Jews, however, do know about it. They know about the anti-Jewish polemics of certain church fathers; about the forced baptisms, especially of children; about the church council decree that sanctioned the removal of such children from their parents; about a papal edict encouraging raids on Jewish synagogues by the faithful; about the expulsion of all Jews from a country like Spain; about Luther's hate language directed against Jews when they did not convert according to his timetable; about the prohibition against Jews living in Calvin's Geneva; the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem set ablaze with Jewish folk trapped inside while Crusaders outside sang, "Christ we adore Thee."

Christians have felt justified in perpetrating atrocities against the people they called “Christ-killers.” Is it surprising then that, to so many Jews, conversion came to mean “joining the enemy”?³

What started a very Jewish *movement* evolved into an *institution* that removed all vestiges of things past to become the Church.

So what is the church’s stand on Jewish evangelism today?

It depends on to whom you are talking. Let’s take layman John Q Smith, for example. He was born into a Lutheran family, brought for baptism as an infant, went to VBS as a child, then to confirmation class starting at age 11. Following his confirmation, he attends with his family until he heads off to college, where he is contacted by a Lutheran campus pastor and joins up for an occasional meal and service. He does not want to rock the boat, and so he never speaks openly of his faith unless someone asks; and today, no one is really asking. He is back to church for his wedding and again when his firstborn arrives, and so the cycle continues. Yes, he knows someone Jewish through school and business. But never is there a thought that he should, would, or even could speak to that person about eternal damnation due to sin and hope through faith in Jesus. That is the pastor’s job. They have the training . . . etc.

Then there is Jane R. Liberal Christian who is focused on social justice. She accepts her church’s position that there are two covenants, one for the Jewish people, in which salvation is available apart from faith in Christ, and the other for the gentiles, for whom Christ came and offered His life. Thankfully, the LCMS rejects the Two Covenant Theory.⁴

If you are talking to John V. Pastor, you find a serious individual besieged on many sides for his time and attention: Bible studies, new member classes, church meetings, annual preaching schedules, church meetings, special holiday services, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, caring for the infirm, shut-ins and dying, funerals, grief groups, (did I mention church meetings?), divorce groups, counseling, pastoral meetings, circuit, district, and synodical gatherings, LWML, budgets, building new buildings, keeping the school running, family concerns and, to be sure, visiting those who have visited the church in the past week. It is not that they are disinterested in reaching out; it is rather that they are not prepared to struggle to make the time and have little energy to invest in yet *another* endeavor. Just keeping the day-to-day operations maintained is more than a full-time job.

It is no wonder that, in the past decade, the adult conversion rate for our 6,000+ congregations is less than one adult per church per year! This is a tragedy of immense scale.

In 1932, the Synod affirmed the Brief Statement. Section 42 under *adiophora* rightfully rejects millennialism, but in my opinion, wrongfully rejects a mass conversion of Israel:

42. With the Augsburg Confession (Art. XVII) we reject every type of millennialism, or Chiliasm, the opinions that Christ will return visibly to this earth a thousand years before the end of the world and establish a dominion of the Church over the world; or that before the end of the world the Church is to enjoy a season of special prosperity; or that before a general resurrection

on Judgment Day a number of departed Christians or martyrs are to be raised again to reign in glory in this world; or that before the end of the world a universal conversion of the Jewish nation (of Israel according to the flesh) will take place.⁵

A quick review of Romans 9–11 shows Paul’s passionate plea for the church to include Jewish people in the mission of the church. This runs against the tide of Romans caring at all for the Jews, since they are such a peculiar people: they did not work on the Sabbath and did not serve in the Roman army; their gifts went to the Temple in Jerusalem; their diet was different, holidays foreign, manner of dress strange; and they worshiped only one God. *Secular anti-Jewish attitudes prevailed in the culture.* Even so, Paul sought to win the Roman hearts to pray for and speak to the urgent need of salvation for the Jewish people.

Romans 11:24-26:

After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.

Dr. Martin Luther himself held out great hope for the mass conversion of Israel:

With the spread of Protestantism, Luther naively looked for mass conversions by the Jewish populations, which were not forthcoming. . . . Luther saw the Jews as a people that had not embraced Christianity and he believed that he now knew the REAL reason that they had not embraced Jesus as their Messiah. Luther concluded that the Jews all along had seen the corruption of the Church in Rome and would have never agreed to become part of that unrighteous body. BUT NOW that the Reformation had addressed this corruption and come against it, any barriers to Jewish conversion had been removed and Luther believed that the Jews would come to faith en masse.⁶

The Authority of Scripture

The 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center surveyed 1,926 adults in the United States that self-identified as Lutheran. The study found that 30% believed that the Bible was the Word of God and was to be taken literally word for word. Forty percent held that the Bible was the Word of God, but was not literally true word for word or were unsure if it was literally true word for word. Twenty-three percent said the Bible was written by men and not the Word of God. Seven percent did not know, were not sure, or had other positions.⁷

I recently received a letter from a concerned former LCMS member who had read my personal story of coming to faith. He viewed the efforts of The Apple of His Eye Mission Society as misdirected in reaching our people and equipping the church to do the same because of the missteps of past history.

“The LCMS should build bridges to the Messianic Jewish community and learn how to interface with Jewish people. . . . Why does not the LCMS participate in the Walk of Remembrance, or in activities commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day, or why does not the LCMS contribute to the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross? . . . It seems to me that instead of trying to convert Jews, the LCMS would better gain the ear of the Jewish community by more active condemnation of past sins of omission.

Y’shua said that . . . he who would lose his life for My sake will gain it. And Y’shua said . . . he who would be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven must be the least. ***Likewise, to reach the Jewish people, Christians must stop trying to reach the Jewish people.*** I know this doesn’t sound like something the LCMS would support. But as a congregational leader at a Messianic Jewish congregation, I believe to educate the church in the Jewish roots of Jesus and align the gospel with its Hebraic foundation is a message that will also reach Jewish ears - and do so without threatening ‘conversion.’”⁸

Since the Holocaust, many have shifted from Jewish missions by substituting Dialogue. Dialogue can never replace the biblical mandate to go and make disciples as some have in this post-Holocaust era..

In 1973, the LCMS, through an omnibus resolution, established a Task Force on Witnessing to Jewish People. Dr. Erv Kolb, then Secretary for the Board for Evangelism, was the point person. He assembled a team of well-intentioned pastors and lay leaders. They produced a *Workbook on Jewish Evangelism* for congregational use. One of the appendices included a horrible caricature of Mr. Stereotypical Jew—a man with a large hooked nose.

That caricature caught the attention of Rabbi Rudin, recently retired from serving as the American Jewish Committee’s Senior Interreligious Adviser. In order to express his concerns, he asked for a private meeting, no media involved, with Dr. Kolb and a few LCMS leaders. Following that gathering, Rabbi Rudin held a press conference denouncing the efforts of the LCMS to include Jewish people in the mission of the church. For the next couple of years, LCMS pastors responded by avoiding involvement in reaching Jewish people for fear that someone might take notice, take offense, and raise a ruckus.

Jewish leaders still complain about witnessing bodies under the flag that “the Holocaust had removed the right of the church to speak to Jewish people about Jesus.” They propagandize by claiming, “Now the church seeks spiritual genocide by making Jews into Christians.”⁹

Perhaps we have our priorities upside down? Perhaps for the sake of being good neighbors, we respect co-religionists by eschewing Gospel proclamation?

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt 5:10–11)

Jesus said we would be persecuted. That is to be expected in our sinful world. I believe we must intentionally be vulnerable and available to those who are lost.

In Acts 4, we read:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. . . . “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.” . . . But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (13–17, 19–20)

We are in a war. Not for oil or money or territory, but for souls. Millions of Jewish people and billions of gentiles born in sin are facing a Christ-less eternity. *If we continue the status quo of less than one adult convert per church per year, are we fulfilling our mandate to reach the world?* Are we taking God at His Word by going to the Jew first or even at all? Or are we lulled into arguing among ourselves over this or that issue which has absolutely no eternal value at all? The enemy of our souls has succeeded in dividing Christians over issues of no *eternal* import. We must resist the enemy and proclaim the Gospel!

21st Century Mission Strategies?

Mission strategists hold that some people groups can be reached by piggybacking the Gospel on a medical mission, an agricultural mission, an educational mission, or Bible translation. Not so when it comes to reaching the Jewish people today. Jewish medical professionals lead in advances; Jewish people are literate; the Scriptures were given in their language, Hebrew. There can be no piggybacking. We must be lovingly direct! Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. The only strategy, if it can be called that, is to give God’s Word a hearing that His Spirit might convict of sin and work faith in unregenerate hearts.

Conclusion

Our present day ecclesiology has muted and subjugated our mission zeal. I believe we must urgently refocus the stewardship of the saved to care for the lost through prayer, witness, and personal involvement. In 1973, one gentile reached me, a Jew. Now this Jew is urging the church to get back to the Bible and reach those who are lost before it is too late. There are great opportunities available with God’s help!

We pray for His blessing on this important work. He has said that He would bless those who bless the Jewish people (Gn 12:3), and there is no greater blessing than the blessing of the Gospel. Never before have we needed so desperately God’s blessing on our work. As has so often been the case, the answer may well be with how we respond to God’s call to reach the Jewish people.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for this is God’s power for salvation for all who believe, To the Jew first . . .

Endnotes

¹ Dan Gruber, *The Church and The Jews—The Biblical Relationship* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Serenity Books, 1997), vii.

² James Park, *The Conflict Of The Church And The Synagogue* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 397–398.

³ Isaac C. Rottenberg, “Should There Be a Christian Witness to the Jews?” *Christian Century* (April 13, 1977): 352–356.

⁴ For a seminal article on this issue, see: Joseph P. Gudel, “‘To The Jew First’ A Biblical Analysis of the ‘Two Covenant’ Theory of the Atonement,” *The Apple of His Eye*, last modified 2012,

<http://www.appleofhiseye.org/Questions/FAQs/ToTheJewFirstTheTwoCovenantTheoryExposed/tabid/760/language/en-US/Default.aspx>.

⁵ “Of the Holy Scriptures,” *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (1932) <http://www.creeds.net/lutheran/missouri.htm>.

⁶ Jeffrey Gutterman, “The Reformation and the Jewish People: Part VI” *Scofield Prophecy Studies*, last modified 2012, <http://scofieldprophecystudies.org/Columnists/Gutterman6.htm>.

⁷ “Pew Research Center” *Answers*, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://www.answers.com/topic/pew-research-center>

⁸ Alan T., personal correspondence to author, February 18, 2012.

⁹ Since anti-Semitism is universally condemned by Christians, it is useful to ask about the connection, if any, between evangelism of Jews and anti-Semitism. Are evangelistic efforts among Jews anti-Semitic? The answer to this question hinges upon how Judaism and the Jewish people are viewed. It has been said rightly that Judaism is the religion of the Jewish people, but the Jewish people is not defined by Judaism. Unlike with Christianity and Christians, it is not necessary to practice or even “believe” in Judaism in order to be a Jew. On the other hand, Jews who become committed Christians are considered by Jews to be apostate, that is, they have abandoned the Jewish people and are lost to it. The conversion of Jews is therefore seen as “spiritual genocide,” for if it succeeded on a large enough scale, the Jewish people, as Jewish people, would cease to exist. Allan R. Brockway, “Should Christians Attempt to Evangelize Jews?” accessed April 22, 2012, <http://www.abrock.com/Attempt.html>.

Our Innovating God

Herb Hoefler

As I read the biblical narrative, I see mission as the starting point of everything. In reference to the paradigm proposed by Frost and Hirsch in the final chapter of *The Shaping of Things to Come*,¹ I would suggest that the sequence be Missiology, Christology, and Ecclesiology.

The biblical narrative is the unfolding of the heart of God in history. In that history we see the work of a God of love. Already in the Garden of Eden, we recognize His attitude of love. Everything was “very good” (Gn 1:31). With the Fall, we see the unfolding of this love in all the vicissitudes of history. He is working to restore the joy of the Garden, both provisionally and eternally. Viewed from this perspective God is in His mission of love, and the Incarnation and the Church are expressions of that fundamental work.

A way we might unpack this reality is to trace this history, both as it is recorded in Scripture and as God has guided it through His Spirit up to the present day. At the heart of this narrative is mission, and at the heart of mission is innovation. This is the work and attitude of God into which God calls His People.

Frost and Hirsch’s next-to-last chapter frames this perspective in terms of “Imagination and the Leadership Task.” With the Fall into sin, God’s mission begins “with the end in mind,”² the end of restoring Eden. In the freedom that God built into the natural world, His mission work is continually adapting and innovating as He works toward His goal, the “lateral thinking”³ that the authors describe. This missional innovating is the central theme through the story.

The Biblical Narrative of Innovation

Innovation of Creation

The very creation of the universe was an innovation. We have no idea what God did in all eternity before the creation of our universe, and we have no idea what He might be doing outside our little planet. We do know that sometime in eternity, God moved in His Spirit over the void and said “Let there be” (Gn 1:1–2). The very beginning of the story is one of an innovating God.

With the Fall into sin and the beginning of His mission, we see God adapting to the new reality. He recognizes that the worst development now would be that Adam and Eve take from the “tree of life” and live forever in their fallen state. In love He drives them out so they might eventually die and be restored to the joys of Eden in heaven (Gn 3:22–24).

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Innovation in Pre-History

We have no way to date the biblical developments prior to the call of Abram. However, in the two major historical events described, we see God continuing to pursue His goal through the vicissitudes of history. Scripture records that in the misuse of his freedom mankind had totally corrupted the world. God's adaptation was to begin again, with one righteous family. The cataclysm was so great and unwelcomed that God vowed never again to wipe out the world with a Flood, giving Noah the sign of the rainbow as confirmation (Gn 9:12–17). He would approach the tragedy of human sin in a different way.

The second major event is the Tower of Babel. What to do when man misuses his freedom to waste time and resources on “a tower that reaches to the heavens”(Gn 11:4)? God had mandated mankind to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gn 1:28), “taking care of it” (Gn 2:15) as good stewards on God's behalf. His innovation, then, was to confuse their languages so that they were forced to scatter and fill the earth. God pursues His mission to restore the goodness of Eden through mankind, provisionally at best now.

Innovation of a Called People

The call of Abram (Gn 12:1–3) is universally recognized as a fulcrum point in salvation history. God innovates with the call of a particular people to carry forward His mission effort. Twice He has seen mankind divert from His original call. Now He resolves to develop and work with one agent as His new approach to bless “all peoples on earth.”

We see evidence in the biblical narrative that God “did not leave himself without witness” (Acts 14:17) among other peoples. We find the mysterious Melchizedek (Gn 14), the Midianite priest Jethro (Ex 3), and the Moabite prophet Balaam (Nm 22), all of whom know the true God. However, God's clear focus is now with one people to “show (their) wisdom and understanding” (Deut 4:6) from the Lord to the nations.

Unfortunately, God must deal with the fallenness of this single people, as well, throughout the Old Testament history. God must make many innovations and adaptations along the way, but He keeps His mission goal clear and guides history onward through His educative laws and saving works. Yet, the prophets were inspired to recognize that a major new turn was necessary if God was to carry forward His mission (Is 42:9; 62:2; Jer 31:31; Ex 18:31).

Innovation of the Incarnation

That “new thing” in God's salvific work was the astounding event of the Second Person of the Trinity's becoming man. It was the mission innovation above all others, the greatest fulcrum point in history. In His divine foreknowledge, God knew “before the creation of the world” (Eph 1:4) that this point must come “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4). His mission work through fallen mankind to date could accomplish only a provisional restoration of Eden. Coming directly Himself to “take away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29), God purposed now to make that restoration complete and eternal.

As Frost and Hirsch discuss in their book, such radical innovation will face serious opposition.⁴ From child Jesus' first escape to Egypt to the adult Jesus' final resolve to the cross, His story is one of the Light coming "into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light" (Jn 3:19). In carrying forward God's mission, Jesus experienced what Frost and Hirsch describe as resisting the new thing "because they have invested much of their sense of selfhood in the current paradigm and so receive their legitimacy from it."⁵

Innovation of Church

As indicated at the start of this essay, this salvific history moves from the mission work of God throughout history into the "once for all" (Heb 10:2) event of Christ and on into the playing out of that event in His continuing salvific work through the Church, "Christ's Body" (1 Cor 12:27) on earth. We see some continuity with the previous approach, as once again we have God's work through "a chosen people" (1 Pt 2:9). However, now this people is envisioned to be beyond one ethnicity.

With the spectacular event of Pentecost, God's innovative vision of this people is inaugurated. He had laid "the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph 2:20). Jesus had trained His apostolic corps to carry forward God's mission as His "light" and "salt" and "yeast" in the world (Mt 5:13-16; Lk 13:21). The innovation now, then, was to send His People out "to make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

The Church's Narrative of Innovation

Innovations through St. Paul

The mission work of St. Paul, of course, is part of the biblical narrative, but he exemplifies the innovative call of God through His people. As an itinerant preacher, Paul carried on the Jewish tradition of a traveling rabbi, just as Jesus had. His innovation was to appoint elders in each place to carry on the teaching and supervising.

A further innovation inspired by God was Paul's letters. As St. Paul attempted to guide the new congregations from afar, he wrote epistles to them. God inspired those writings so that they would become normative for all generations to come.

God used the work of St. Paul to establish another new gift of His grace: the Sacraments. God had used the old Jewish rite of initiation as a new event, a baptism "with the Holy Spirit" (Jn 1:34), initiated by Jesus. He used the traditional Seder Meal to initiate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, once again for the "forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). Primarily through St. Paul's teachings and letters, God solidified these innovations as His ongoing work to initiate and energize His People for His mission.

Pre-Reformation Innovations

As Jesus faced severe, life-threatening opposition in His mission effort, so the church faced it for the first centuries. They were persecuted by Jews and Romans

for challenging their religious worldviews. They were promoting not just an improvement or addition to the existing religions. Theirs was a revolutionary, threatening alternative, in the terminology of Edward de Bono advocated by Frost and Hirsch, a “lateral” move.⁶

Once Emperor Constantine accepted and legalized the faith, conditions changed. God had to inspire new efforts to maintain the purity and focus of His mission. Monastic movements developed, beginning with the Desert Fathers. These movements questioned the developing forms of Christianity as vacuous and self-serving. They provided an alternative path for those who wanted to lead a life focused on God’s call and service. To the credit of the Roman Catholic Church, these movements were not rejected as threatening but enfolded as necessary sources of ongoing renewal in our fallen world.

Reformation Innovations

Our innovative God never gives up on His mission or His Church. In the terms of Frost and Hirsch, He inspires “imagination” in responsive devotees, and they lead His People into a new future of His mission work.⁷ We are well familiar with the innovations God inspired and renewed through Martin Luther: worship and Bible in the vernacular, salvation as God’s gift of grace, priesthood of all believers, congregation-based church, etc.

Other reformers also had holy imaginations, of a society ruled by biblical law or of a church willing to lead a pacifist lifestyle or of a church led directly by God’s ongoing inspiration. Each of these innovations had its weaknesses and perversions, but they took up part of God’s salvific work. Each was opposed by the established church.

The result of all these innovations was the development of denominations across Christendom, each carrying forth part of the total work of God. Roman Catholicism had channeled these movements into the various monastic organizations, under the general supervision of the Pope. The vitalities of the Spirit had burst through these structures. The directions of the Reformation movements became diverse and unregulated by any institution. Yet, God worked with His people as He had all through history to carry forward His salvific will.

Post-Reformation Innovations

The Reformation churches eventually became established churches. Society changed, and God needed to alter His mission work accordingly. When the church became mired in rationalistic theology, God raised up the Pietist movement as a corrective. These movements generated the first significant foreign mission outreach from the Reformation churches. When the established churches became almost totally inwardly focused, God raised up separate, Pietist groups such as the Moravians to move forward with His mission. Mission societies proliferated as a response to the Gospel call, though quite separate from the established church.

On the intellectual side, the church was confronted by Enlightenment and Darwinistic challenges. Liberal theology developed to respond to these critiques, attempting to develop a message that had credibility with the Western intelligentsia. This movement generated another facet of the Gospel, what became known as the

Social Gospel. The credibility of the faith would be expressed and demonstrated through the church's positive effects on the society. A more conservative expression of this same movement was expressed in Methodism. As the context of the church changed, new dimensions of the Gospel and new approaches arose.

Contemporary Innovations

The Spirit of our innovating God has continued to move among His People dramatically yet today. In the history of our own LCMS, God raised up C.F.W. Walther to innovate the congregational structure of church order, rather than the Episcopal among the German immigrants. This innovation has enabled the denomination over the years to creatively support varying styles of ministry as different contexts might demand.

Overseas, "Insider Movements" among Muslims and high caste Hindus have arisen, generally opposed by the established church both in those lands and in Western circles. The basic rationale of these movements is that they can be devotees of Christ while still remaining in their communities, separate from membership in an established church. They do not call themselves "Christians" because of the long-standing antagonism between the culture and the Western church.

Among Muslims, these devotees' worship practices and lifestyles are rooted in the culture, while their faith is in Christ alone as Lord. Among high caste Hindus in India, new worship forms have been developed, quite distinct from traditional church worship, as well as ashrams (retreat centers), "sanyassis" (wandering teachers in saffron robes), pilgrimages to holy sites, family worship, and meditation practices. Both groups identify themselves, within their societies, as "devotees of Jesus."

As the church has lost relevance and credibility in the West as well, God has raised up several new expressions of the faith:

- Cell group-based congregations, where the functioning church is in homes
- Mega-churches that provide staff and programs catering to a wide variety of needs and interests
- "Emerging Church" expressions which see themselves continually changing forms of worship and ministry to meet developing contexts of ministry
- Movements such as Imago Dei and Mosaic, reaching disaffected youth and alienated parts of the society
- Congregational ministries organized around occasional task forces rather than established boards
- "New Monasticism," whose participants seek to bring a simple lifestyle and a "yeasty" presence into the surrounding community
- Television evangelists—of varying quality—reaching a wider audience than regular church structures ever could

Almost all of these developments have been questioned by the established church, which desires forms and practices to be rooted in their traditions. As the established churches lose members, particularly among the youth, the Spirit of God has raised up these alternative forms.

Keeping Up with an Innovating God

As we have surveyed the biblical narrative and the history of God's Church, it is evident that innovation is the *modus operandi* of our missionary God. It is not to be opposed, but expected. Certainly, we must keep a focus on orthodox theology, but the ways it is expressed and implemented will change as the context changes. Such innovations are a sign that the church is alive and well and responsive to the Spirit's leading.

As mentioned above, our LCMS has a polity that has supported innovations in ministry. We have supported unique approaches among youth, urban poor, ethnic groups, campus ministries, foreign missions. We must build on this tradition to respond creatively to our new post-Christendom context. The established congregations will recognize that there are developments and subcultures of the society that they will be unable to reach with their structures. They will, then, support those moved by God's Spirit to experiment with new forms.

The fact is: God will push forward His mission with or without the cooperation of His Church. He has done that all through history. Our challenge today is to gain the humility, dedication, and wisdom to be helpful in His cause, not detrimental. Responding creatively to our new context has been in our church's tradition. We need to see such responsiveness as central to following our innovative God faithfully in His salvific mission.

In the words of the subtitle to Frost and Hirsch's book, we commit ourselves to "Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church."

Endnotes

¹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsh, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2003), 209.

² *Ibid.*, 187.

³ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 182–200.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 183–191.

Theological Progression in the Process and Strategy for Appalachian Mission Work

Kevin Wilson

This article explores the theological progression that undergirded the Ohio District-Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's (LCMS) strategy to start 20 new congregations in West Virginia by 2017. It will specifically provide analysis of whether the underlying theological progression more accurately reflects an emerging theological progression or what is considered the LCMS theological progression. It will close with observations about how the emerging theological progression might influence the LCMS theological progression.

Theological Progression

The term “theological progression” refers to the order that different theological disciplines inform and shape other theological disciplines. The three primary disciplines under consideration are Christology, ecclesiology, and missiology. In this article, the following definitions are utilized.

Christology: Biblical teaching about the person and work, teaching and directives, of Jesus.

Ecclesiology: Biblical teaching about the life, nature and practices of the Church. While local congregations are part of the Church universal, its focus is the Church.

Missiology: Biblical understanding of the *Missio Dei*. Included under this broad umbrella are such concepts as the Kingdom of God, Great Commission, incarnation, etc.

The issue of theological progression was brought to the forefront of theological discussion by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in their book *The Shape Of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Frost and Hirsch posit that, in order to engage the post-modern world in mission, the theological progression must follow this order: Christology > Missiology > Ecclesiology.¹

Frost and Hirsch maintain this was the progression in the early church until the Edict of Milan.² After the legitimization and institutionalization of Christianity in

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the eleventh century, theological progression fully shifted to the following: Christology > Ecclesiology > Missiology. Undoubtedly some LCMS theologians would resonate with this theological progression and declare it accurate. Others would maintain that such a progression is too linear. Instead, they would posit that Christology actually informs and shapes both Ecclesiology and Missiology. What matters for this article is that few if any LCMS theologians would argue that historic Lutheran theology has followed the Frost and Hirsch theological progression: Christology > Missiology > Ecclesiology.

A Brief History of Mission Work in West Virginia

Of the 1.7 million West Virginians about 70 percent claim no church home while 60 percent do not claim a specific religious affiliation.³ Between 1969 and 2009, only four new LCMS churches were planted in West Virginia, none of which exists today. This left three LCMS congregations in West Virginia. These congregations had a combined baptized membership of fewer than 500 and average worship attendance of about 200 people each weekend. Four primary reasons underlie the struggles of the LCMS in the Mountain State.

First, there were basic ethnic differences. West Virginians are largely descended from Irish, Scottish, and English immigrants. While there were German immigrants, they came to work temporarily in mines, soon leaving to find more sustainable livelihoods. Second, the dominant forms of Christianity in the Mountain State are fundamentalist and holiness. As such they are theologically in opposition to a number of key LCMS doctrines. Third, there are significant cultural differences from the Lutheran Midwesterners, especially those descended from northern Europeans. Appalachian society is primarily closed and very distrustful of outsiders. Appalachian culture strongly values loyalty, individualism, and self-reliance and is notably anti-hierarchical. Finally, there are practical challenges. The terrain is mountainous, isolating communities from one another. West Virginia is one of the most impoverished states, whether the measurement is total wealth or average family income.

Within this cultural context, LCMS congregations and the Ohio District had tried a couple of strategies for starting new congregations. One was forming a partnership among the few Appalachian congregations to fund and start a new church. The partnership raised funds from inside and outside Appalachia. This strategy included calling a pastor to gather people and start the church. Another strategy was a single church starting a daughter congregation by sending its own pastor to do the initial mission work. At least two churches asked members to join the new church. Ultimately, a pastor was called to develop the mission congregation. Both closed within five years of launching public worship. There were some commonalities in all four mission congregations that ceased operations.

1. The pastors were from outside the local community and from outside of Appalachia. In every closed mission, there were discussions of how difficult it was for outside pastors to gain full acceptance and trust from lifelong residents.

2. The new congregations almost exclusively gathered Lutherans who were transplanted into West Virginia by their work. When these Lutherans were transferred to new locations, or when their work places closed, they left the community. With very few lifelong local residents as members, the churches were not sustainable.
3. The sense of isolation from other Lutherans was very difficult for pastors and leaders. Even where other Lutheran congregations were within a 45-minute drive, there was a sense of isolation that made developing the congregations difficult.
4. The final lesson learned was that West Virginia's Appalachian culture is so different from the Midwestern Lutheran culture that traditional church planting will not work. Appalachia must be approached as a cross-cultural mission.

Process and Strategy for Mission Work in Appalachia

A majority of cross-cultural mission work engaged in by the LCMS is done among internationals, whether overseas or among first generation immigrants in the United States. So processes and strategies for mission work among internationals were studied to see if one was suitable for Appalachia. The process adopted was learned from LCMS missionaries who had served in Africa. It followed a simple formula:

Step 1: Review the *Missio Dei*.

Step 2: Learn the local culture.

Step 3: Develop and implement a mission strategy to make disciples of Jesus that fits within the local culture.

Step 4: Review the results of the mission strategy and adjust as necessary.

The mission strategy that flowed from this process called for locating Lutherans who were living in communities across West Virginia. These Lutherans were engaged in discussions about the *Missio Dei*, Appalachian culture, and starting new congregations as local mission work. If they were open to starting a new congregation, they would start a Bible study in their community. That Bible study would ultimately develop into a mission team that would expand to a medium-sized group. This group would ultimately form the launch team for a new congregation.

Research had demonstrated that local pastors—or at least pastors from Appalachia—were needed to serve the local areas. So as the mission work moved from Bible study to Launch Team, the strategy called for identifying one to three local potential bi-vocational pastors. These men would be mentored and trained. Ultimately, a partner church would send qualified men through the Specific Ministry Pastor program.

The Ohio District's role in this process was to identify and train leaders in the local community, ensure mentoring and theological training for potential pastors, and form partnerships with churches to support the local mission work. Churches in Appalachia would serve as training centers, while churches outside Appalachia would provide support for the mission work.

Discerning the Theological Progression

When the process and strategy for mission work in Appalachia were formulated, theological progression was not considered. Deconstructing the Appalachian mission process and strategy reveals that a case could be made for either the emerging theological progression or the LCMS progression.

Argument for the Emerging Theological Progression

Although not stated as a step in the process or a stage in the strategy, theologically, Appalachian mission work started with Christology, because there would be no knowledge of the *Missio Dei* without the person and work of Christ. Likewise, Christology is the source and foundation of historic Lutheran theology and practice. Thus began the theological progression: Christology >

The mission process started with a thorough review of the *Missio Dei*, salvation history, and Lutheran doctrine. Next the Appalachian culture was given serious consideration. Both reviewing the *Missio Dei* and studying local culture are part of the discipline of missiology. The theological progression continued to model the emerging progression: Christology > Missiology >

The final litmus test for the emerging progression is whether missiology informed and shaped ecclesiology. The answer is yes. For example, after studying the *Missio Dei* and Appalachian culture, seven principles were established as guidelines for mission work.⁴ One was called "Modest Architecture." Appalachian people are not impressed with items that are expensive or excessive. These are seen as prideful, wasteful, or arrogant and militate against Appalachian core values. So mission teams were trained to keep the sanctuary simple and avoid monolithic or gothic structures for worship. Another was called "patient discipleship." The combination of Appalachian society's being distrustful of outsiders as well as of outside beliefs and its having very different belief systems meant that the usual LCMS adult instruction must change. When applying this principle, pastors expect adult instruction to take a year or more of relationship building followed by a year of formal instruction. From this perspective, it seems obvious the emerging theological progression was followed: Christology > Missiology > Ecclesiology.

Argument for the Established Theological Progression

Just as an argument of silence was used for starting with Christology, so the same form of argument could be utilized for ecclesiology. It was argued earlier that there would be no process or strategy without the person and work of Christ. So also then it could be argued that there would be no process or strategy without a church structure (or ecclesiology). The process and strategy start with the *Missio Dei*, but people had to establish the process and strategy. Those people were Christians. As such they are part of the Church and already have an ecclesiology. It is logical then

that the ecclesiology would inform and shape the process and strategy. Therefore the underlying theological progression is as such: Christology > Ecclesiology > Missiology.

Appalachian Mission Theological Progression Deconstructed

There is a biblical concept that one can fulfill the letter of the law without fulfilling the spirit (intent) of the law. Utilizing this concept as an analogy, we can distinguish between the above competing theological progressions. The LCMS theological progression fits the letter of the law. Technically, the progression does flow from Christology > Ecclesiology > Missiology. However, this progression does not fit the spirit of the law. The intent of the process and strategy was to change the standard and established strategy for starting new congregations, which would include the standard theological progression. So the process intentionally went from missiology to ecclesiology. The process and strategy thus better fit the emerging theological progression: Christology > Missiology > Ecclesiology.

The LCMS and the Emerging Theological Progression

While the Appalachian mission process and strategy followed the emerging theological progression, it is important to remember that pattern or process came from an LCMS international mission field. Historically, the strategies for starting new LCMS churches in the United States seem to follow the LCMS theological progression. From the mid-nineteenth century through the late twentieth century, new Lutheran churches were started by gathering local Lutherans, whether it was German-speaking farming communities in the 1850s or new ring suburbs in the 1970s. The local Lutherans were then expected to reach into the community. This is Christology > Ecclesiology > Missiology.

The fact that Lutheran theology is sacramental also seems to affirm the ecclesiology's informing missiology. The two focal points for conversion in Lutheranism historically are Baptism and the proclamation of the Gospel. Baptism is treated as a corporate event in public worship. The context of the discussion of theological progression makes the Baptism of infants a key consideration. The proclamation of the Gospel is also most often associated with the preaching of the Gospel, which takes place in the Divine Service. These focal points imply the progression of Christology > Ecclesiology > Missiology.

The most important issue highlighted by the emerging theological progression might not be whether the LCMS follows the emerging progression. Instead, the issue may be whether the LCMS truly values missiology the same as it values Christology and ecclesiology. LCMS churches rarely examine the local culture to understand how to engage and evangelize the local community. Preaching and teaching in LCMS churches is overwhelmingly focused on biblical beliefs, Christian doctrine, and the Christian life. The themes of missiology are usually found as applications to a handful of themes associated with the broader categories.

A similar argument can be made in examining LCMS theological priorities. Missiology is such a relatively new discipline that the Lutheran Confessions do not directly address it. A cursory review of documents by the Commission of Theology and Church Relations suggests that ecclesiology and Christology do have great

relevance to the LCMS. Although other doctrines are respected as scriptural—such as soteriology, eschatology, and missiology—they do not garner the same attention. Certainly, dogmatic textbooks in LCMS colleges and seminaries do not accord to missiology the same level of importance as Christology or ecclesiology.

Thus, the greatest benefit of the emerging theological progression to theologians, pastors, and lay leaders could be the elevation of the missiology within the LCMS. The practical justification for this elevation is first and foremost biblical. The LCMS confesses that the inspired Scriptures are the ultimate source and norm for Christian belief and life. The *Missio Dei* is not just biblical; it is a thread that weaves together the entire biblical narrative.

Another vital driver for elevating missiology is the post-Christian age. It is well accepted among LCMS leaders and members of LCMS churches that the percentage of Americans who are Christians is steadily declining. In fact, the LCMS has declared that the United States is the third largest mission field in the world.⁵ At the same time, it is estimated that 80 percent of LCMS churches are on a plateau or declining in worship attendance. All of these trends illustrate the benefits of elevating missiology.

Conclusion

The emerging theological progression is not the norm for the LCMS yet may benefit the LCMS. The Appalachian mission process and strategy demonstrates that this progression can be utilized in the LCMS within the LCMS scriptural and confessional framework. If in fact missiology is not at the same level of as Christology and ecclesiology, then discussion around the emerging progression may well inspire the LCMS to elevate it.

Endnotes

¹ For the full treatment of the emerging theological progression, see the section “Jesus at the Center.” Michael Frost and Alan Hirsh, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2003), 206–210.

² For the full treatment of the historical develop, see the section “Christendom—Get Over it!” *Ibid.*, 8–9.

³ For more complete information on West Virginia as a mission field, see Kevin Wilson “Case Study: LCMS Mission Work in West Virginia,” Ohio District LCMS, last modified May 23, 2009, <http://oh.lcms.org/Home/FanintoFlame/FIFResources/tabid/560/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/543/Case-Study--LCMS-Mission-Work-in-West-Virginia.aspx>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵ Samuel H. Nafzger, *An Introduction to the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2009), 4.

Book Review

THE SHAPING OF THINGS TO COME: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church. By Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2003. 236 pp. Paperback. \$19.95.

The Shaping of Things to Come by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch has become a work of significant influence in evangelical circles. Frost and Hirsch are recognized scholars and practitioners, and so their radical analyses and proposals are not dismissed lightly. Giving credibility to their proposals is the way they both have implemented experimentally many of the ideas they have proposed.

The book is the result not only of scholarly analyses but of on-the-ground research across the Western world. What the authors find in common through the West is that the established church has lost its credibility and vitality. The fundamental critique is that the church has not mobilized the faith to transform the culture.

The authors trace this weakness to the separation of the church from the world, the sacred from the profane, from the earliest days. “God is experienced as a church god and not the God of all life, including the church” (158). Hirsch is a convert from Judaism, and several chapters draw on the Jewish heritage to provide a biblical basis for understanding the faith as a practice, not just a belief—an orthopraxis, not just an orthodoxy. Both individual Christians and congregations need to see their call to make a difference in the world, specifically in the community in which they are situated.

Hirsch and Frost advocate that we move beyond the “Christendom model” of church centered around buildings and clergy and doctrine and membership rolls. The old “attractational model” of evangelism must give way to incarnational outreach into the community. The approach must be completely contextual, envisioning different kinds of churches rooted in different subcultures.

The need today is to plant new churches that will look totally different, ones that will bring “intrinsic value to their communities” (26). They will be in the world and part of the world, and the authors provide several examples of how they have found this taking place, even in seminary training. They point out congregations that have used their buildings as community centers.

For pastors, these analyses and proposals can be particularly threatening. In a footnote on page 172, they comment:

We simply have to break the power of *clericalism* if we are going to see new movements start and flourish. Why? Because clericalism (the dominance of the ordained clergy class) serves to enshrine the old system and has too much to lose in the new—it will resist the change that disturbs the system that legitimizes it.

Instead, the authors point out the post-modern desire for shared leadership and egalitarian community. Youth want to learn from their peers who understand their life, not from remote experts. In specific, the authors build on the five-fold Ephesians

4 model of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (using the acronym APEPT) as the proper team for every ministry.

My favorite chapter in the book is the next-to-last one titled, “Imagination and the Leadership Task.” The authors challenge us to envision new kinds of churches and to support experiments in ministry outreach: “Will they give permission for experimentation and space to emerge or will they seek to further marginalize the fragile emerging churches popping up in the strangest places?” (223). We should expect renewal to come from the fringes, as it has throughout church history.

One analytical tool that they propose (192–193) is three excellent diagnostic questions that promote imagining:

- “Is the church still a church if it doesn’t function like a church anymore?”
- “If you could start all over again (now), would you do it the same way? (If not), why are you doing it the same way now?”
- “What would your experience of church be like (a) if you no longer had a building? (b) if you no longer meet on Sundays? (c) if you had no pastor or clearly identifiable leadership team?”

This book can be useful both in academic circles and in parish settings. Even youth could connect with much of the discussion, as the authors frequently use films to illustrate their points. The authors bring a unique combination of mysticism and existentialism, frequently citing Buber and Kierkegaard.

As with any prophetic book, there is much that readers will find “over the top.” But there is much also that rings true—perhaps uncomfortably so. The lingering uneasiness is whether we really have the courage and zeal to push forward into these new, unclear horizons.

Herb Hoefler

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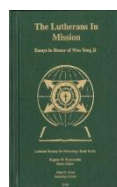
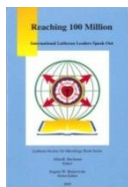
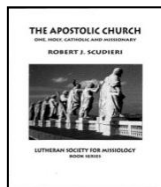
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The Chicago Manual of Style defines the manner of documentation used in *Missio Apostolica* and should be consulted for details beyond the following basic guidelines:

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

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

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

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