

The 35th Annual Reformation Lectures

Lutheran Missiology

Bethany Lutheran College
S. C. Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center
Mankato, Minnesota
October 31 and November 1, 2002

Lecture Two: Lutheran Missiology for the 21st Century

The Rev. Prof. David Haeuser
Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Peru
Lima, Peru

If the Church instead of theorizing and speculating will improve her opportunities, facilities and resources, it seems entirely possible to fill the earth with the knowledge of Christ before the present generation passes away. With literal truth it may be said that ours is an age of unparalleled opportunity. "Providence and revelation combine to call the Church afresh to go in and take possession of the world for Christ." Everything seems to be ready for a general and determined engagement for the forces of Christendom for the world-wide proclamation of the Gospel. "Once the world seemed boundless and the Church was poor and persecuted. No wonder the work of evangelizing the world within a reasonable time seemed hopeless. Now steam and electricity have brought the world together. The Church of God is in the ascendant. She has well within her control the power, the wealth, and the learning of the world. She is like a strong and well appointed army in the presence of the foe. The only thing she needs is the Spirit of her Leader and a willingness to obey His summons to go forward. The victory may not be easy but it is sure."¹

We are only a century removed from those heady words of optimism spoken by John Mott predicting that the entire world could be evangelized in a generation. An influential magazine from the early 20th century adopted the name "The Christian Century" with the same spirit of optimism. At the close of the 20th century the talk is of the multiple billions who do not know Christ, many of whom are in lands which are presently closed to gospel preaching. Voices are heard, some filled with glee, others with dismay, proclaiming the post-Christian era. Many large church bodies can only be described as apostate. Christian missiologists extol the benefits of interfaith dialogue with the representatives of non-Christian religions so that Christianity may benefit from the testimony to God's work among those outside the Church. Paganism and non-Christian religions are enjoying a resurgence in many parts of the world, including what has been the heartland of Christendom and the base from which missionaries have traditionally been sent. The heralded spirituality of the new and postmodern age, rather than a benefit for Christianity, presents Hindu paganism under a new and seductive guise.

How are we as confessional Lutherans in the 21st century to view our mission task and opportunity? How shall we react to the challenges and difficulties of the new century? How applicable are the principles which have guided Lutheran mission practice in the past? These

¹ John Mott in *Classical Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, Norman A. Thomas, editor, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, p. 76.

are some of the questions which confront us as we consider Lutheran missions in the 21st century.

In his book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, South African missiologist David J. Bosch lists the following historical paradigms of mission: those of the Eastern Church; Medieval Roman Catholic; the Protestant Reformation; Post-enlightenment. Taking the central Bible passage of each paradigm, Bosch compares the first three in this way: "If the 'missionary text' of the Greek patristic period was John 3:16 and that of medieval Catholicism Luke 14:23, then one may perhaps claim that Romans 1:16f is the 'missionary text' of the Protestant theological paradigm in all its many forms."² Among the many aspects of mission theology in the Reformation which remained from the medieval period Bosch lists an insistence on the correct formulation of doctrine and the idea of a Christian state in alliance with the church. As new aspects in the reformation paradigm, he lists the centrality of the article of justification by faith, the *articulis stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* (the article by which the church stands or falls). People are to be seen "*from the perspective of the fall*, as lost, unable to do anything about their condition". A third point is that the Reformation stressed the *subjective dimension of salvation*. God confronts the individual with the message of salvation. A fourth aspect is the *priesthood of all believers*. Bosch interprets this tenet as an affirmation that "the believer stood in a direct relationship with God, a relationship that existed independent of the church." He feels that Luther, under pressure from the Anabaptists, was "forced to fall back on to a more rigid understanding of office: he denied the validity of any office that was not linked to the existence of geographically defined parishes and rejected the idea of anybody appealing to the 'Great Commission' for the justification of an extraordinary and non-territorial ecclesiastical office." Finally, Bosch considers the *centrality of the Scriptures* in the life of the church a contribution of the Reformation Paradigm of mission.

While we may question some of Bosch's assertions, we shall give special attention to the question of the lasting validity of the first, second and last points as a foundation for Lutheran mission also in the 21st century. We shall look to Scripture as our foundation, from there we will affirm the conviction that humans are lost without Christ, or *the need for missions*; we shall see God's inexplicable love for a lost world as the *basis for missions*; we shall see the message of justification by faith alone as the central message of our proclamation, *the means of missions*. Along the way we shall briefly examine several modern mission theories in the light of these fundamental presuppositions of Lutheran mission. Finally, we shall take a look at the situation that confronts Christian mission at the beginning of the 21st century, or *the context of missions*.

The Need For Missions

What are some of the basic theological convictions which will need to guide our mission work as confessional Lutherans in the 21st century? As we consider the need for missions, the first crucial conviction is that since the fall of Adam into sin mankind is totally enslaved by sin and bound to destruction. Mankind is by nature under the wrath of God, he is hostile toward God, he cannot take even one step in God's direction through his own power or efforts.

² Donald Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. 1991. p. 240.

Though man is fundamentally religious, his natural religion is in fact an affront to God and is in opposition to God's own plan for man's salvation.

Since Adam fell into sin, mankind is totally enslaved by sin. This is the teaching of the entire Scripture, both in the Old and the New Testaments. Though Adam was created in the image of God, in communion with him, holy like him and with an intimate knowledge of God, after the fall he engendered a son after his own image, sinful like him (Gen. 5:3). God destroyed a sinful mankind in the flood because "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gn. 6:5). Though Noah and his family were saved by faith during the flood, the natural condition of their heart was no different from those who had perished: "every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood" (Gn. 8:21). Luther comments concerning this passage: "Careful note must be taken of this passage, since it clearly shows that the nature of man is corrupt. This knowledge of our corrupt nature is necessary above all else; without it the mercy and grace of God cannot be properly understood."³ David confesses that this was his nature in the words of the 51st Psalm: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5).

Jesus reminds us of the same truth in John 3 when he says "flesh gives birth to flesh" (Jn. 3:6). He means that parents who have a sinful nature produce children whose nature is also sinful. Paul tells us the same thing, applying it personally to all of us who are Christians: "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath" (Eph. 2:6). By nature we were children of wrath, that is, we are born into this world subject to the wrath of God, before we have done anything good or bad. As a result we were "dead in ... transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

However, we should not misconstrue what we have said as if this were simply a passive condition. On the contrary, every fiber of our being is by nature hostile to God and fights against him and his intentions for us. Paul tells us: "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Ro 8:7-8). In 1 Corinthians 2:14 he reminds us: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

In keeping with these statements of the Scriptures Luther exclaimed:

By nature all hate God and the things that are of God. This is not felt except in temptation. The whipped son is angry with his parent. No one likes discipline, not even God's. Natural man would prefer that there be no law, because he is not able to perform what it demands. The sin that has been committed is the second tyrant, and it brings forth the third, namely, death and damnation. Who could be happy when he is answerable to these three?⁴

In the Smalcald Articles he wrote: "This hereditary sin is so deep and horrible a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be learned and believed from the revelation of Scripture" (*Concordia Triglotta* 477, I, 3).

Since man cannot accept the things of God by nature, since he is spiritually incapable of understanding them, it is evident that man is helpless to take even the first step toward God. No one can be saved on his own initiative or using his own natural powers. If God did not

³Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960. p. 120

⁴Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969. p. 98.

provide the initiative and the way, no one would be saved. You and I who are here today would not be saved.

We repeat that the whole thesis of those who deny the fundamental conviction that all religions apart from that which God has revealed in the Bible are roads to damnation take the very heart out of missions. When one ecumenical proponent of dialogue with the non-Christian religions states that the goal of dialogue is to make the Christian a better Christian and the Buddhist a better Buddhist, mission proclamation has been effectively destroyed.

Part of man's rebellion against God is his refusal to admit that his own ideas and religious strivings are in reality idolatry and rebellion against God. Luther, commenting on Isaiah 65, says:

Who can believe this, that our ideas apart from the Word are evil? The ungodly do not want to believe that their life is without the Word, but the fathers and the Holy Spirit say much that is not in Scripture. This is what they have found. To them I reply: We must not believe holy men, because their words can be opinions. Scripture says (John 14:6), Christ is 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' The best ways traveled in human religions are here called *ways that are not good*.⁵

This places us squarely before one of the great challenges to Christian mission in the 21st century. Religious tolerance can be a great blessing. No government today is called to be a theocracy as was the government of ancient Israel. Force and government decrees are not the way to win people for Christ. However, in our day tolerance has come to mean that no one can claim that his own religious ideas or beliefs are truer than any other, that each religion offers a variant road to the same place. This is not only false, it is deadly to mission.

According to the Scriptures, other religions are not different roads to the divine, they are in opposition to God, the product of a corrupt human understanding. They are an expression of rebellion against the true God, and lead only to condemnation. This is an unpopular stand to take in this age of post-modernism, yet if we take God's word seriously we can arrive at no other conclusion. "For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens" (Ps 96:5). "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen" (Rm 1:19).

Many voices in Christendom today reject this testimony. And with it they reject missions in the sense in which we have understood them. Karl Rahner, a Roman Catholic scholar, speaks of "anonymous Christians". These are people who follow the light that is available in their own religions, do what is right, and therefore are saved even though they may never have heard of Christ. Others claim that God has worked in a saving way among the Jews with the result that the Judeo-Christian tradition is valid for us, but that he has also worked through other religious traditions, so that those religions are valid for those who hold to them, and salvation is available to them through the tenets of their own religion. J. van Lin in his article "Models for a Theology of Religions" summarizes this position.

God can and does meet people outside the revelation in Jesus. For all these reasons non-Christian faiths can be viewed as ways of salvation just as the Christian faith is a way of sal-

⁵Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). St. Louis: Concordia, 1972. p. 377.

vation, since in such traditions people are attempting, each in his or her own way, to respond to God's active presence among them.⁶

According to Catholic scholar Schillebeeckx, quoted in the same article:

Religions, churches are the *anamnesis*, i. e. the living recollection among us, of this universal, 'tacit' but effective will to salvation and the absolute saving presence of God in the history of our world. By virtue of their religious word, their sacrament or ritual and their life-style, religions — synagogues and pagodas, mosques and churches — prevent the universal saving presence from being forgotten.⁷

With this conviction, it is not surprising that mission is reduced to dialogue with non-Christian religions, an attempt to discover and celebrate the varied ways in which God has made himself known in the different traditions. In an article in *Theology and Mission*, David Hesselgrave quotes a participant in dialogue.

Dialogue does certainly involve first and foremost from the Christian side the rejection of the impatience and polemics and partisan controversies of the past — largely because the Christian theological foundations on which these once rested have now been widely revised. Once this point has been passed, and once it has been accepted that there is a common ground between believers, dialogue may turn in any one of a number of directions — intellectual, personal, secular or contemplative. Its advocates almost all assume, however, that the causes of past intolerance have to do with the doctrinal and other constructions that men have built around their central religious commitment, and seek for areas of common concern in which those constructions are transcended, penetrated or avoided.⁸

A Buddhist participant states:

Although there is general agreement that theologically oriented and action oriented dialogue is most desirable in a situation of religious pluralism, for the purpose of mutual understanding and enrichment, for dispelling suspicions and prejudices, and for harnessing moral and spiritual values to eradicate social evils and promote and foster social justice, the Buddhists strongly feel that 'evangelism' is most undesirable and incompatible with dialogue.⁹

In reaction to this pluralistic approach to world religions, we may point out that the *opinio legis*, the idea that salvation is essentially a result of the works of the law, has penetrated large segments of Christendom. This idea is idolatry, an expression of rebellion against God and his plan of salvation, whether it is presented in an ostensibly Christian garb or whether it appears in a non-Christian system. Where this opinion holds sway, it is not surprising to hear that all the religions are merely different masks for the same path of return to God. The idea that man himself has a religious capacity, that he can by his own efforts find God, that a noble life of faith in whatever god he may believe in will save him, contradicts directly what Scripture states is the only way of salvation.

Hans Werner Gensichen comments on Romans 3:9, ("We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin"):

It is important to realize how radical Paul's argument really is. Recent Roman Catholic theology has prided itself on eliminating precisely that radical note by admitting that all good people, within and without the church, will necessarily be saved. The difference between heathen and believers would thus be reduced to a value judgment on degrees of goodness in men. But

⁶ J. van Lin, *Models for a Theology of Religions*. In F. J. Verstralen et. al. *Missiology: An ecumenical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1995, p. 191.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ David Hesselgrave, "Interreligious Dialogue—Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives". In David Hesselgrave, ed. *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation No. 1*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975., p. 228-229.

⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

that is not the point at all, although such differences are not meaningless. The point is that even the good man, Jew or Gentile, religious or non-religious, is not justified before God by being good, and it is that basic predicament of man which is most clearly manifested in the missionary situation.¹⁰

Because these ideas form a part of our own nature they present an especially dangerous challenge to our sense of urgency for missions and evangelism. Paul Hiebert comments:

Most Western Christians have yet to develop epistemological foundations that enable them to affirm the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to salvation and life eternal, and to boldly witness to the truth in winsome ways... Today Western Christians ride to work with Muslims and Hindus who are good people, often better than some Christians they know. How can they declare that these people are lost? The easy solution is to stress tolerance, to live our own lives and let others live theirs, and to hope that communities can somehow coexist in peace in the same nation and world. One of the greatest challenges to the Western church is to lay again the theological foundations of the uniqueness of Christ, and to train its members how to proclaim this with humility and love.¹¹

If we are to be active in missions, we need to learn to see others as the Bible sees them, as “lost and condemned creatures”, as people in need of a Savior, as people who by themselves and by their own lights, including their religious light, are bound only for hell.

The Reformed missiologist, J. A. Bavinck, summarizes well this first basic presupposition of missions:

In its deepest essence biblical anthropology recognizes that man is a sinner, a rebel, an exile, a displaced person. Within his deepest nature, man is ever concerned with God. God makes him anxious, man seeks to escape God by shoving him aside beyond the horizon of his experience. Man feels assaulted, hunted, and oppressed by God, and he rebels. Such is the awful mystery in the life of every man, the drama enacted in his most hidden parts. It is an integral part of his fallen human nature, a part of his being a son of Adam. This is what man is, this is his existential basis, the ground on which he stands.¹²

It was the consciousness of this predicament when Luther knew God only as the severe judge that led him to cry out: “Love God? I hated him.”

The Grounds For Missions

When we see the utter helplessness of mankind without the Christian message, we have seen the need for missions. We turn our attention now to the grounds for missions. God in his inexplicable mercy determined to save a lost humanity by sending his own Son into the world in our flesh to redeem us through his death on the cross.

God sent his Son. In that sense, Christ himself is the true missionary. It is he who came first to bring about our salvation, then also to proclaim that salvation throughout the world. According to Psalm 22, the Christ who was forsaken by God and crucified for our sins, after his resurrection would praise God in the midst of the great congregation (Ps. 22:25).

God himself provides the ground for missions. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn

¹⁰ Hans Werner Gensichen, *Living Mission: the Test of Faith*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966. p. 46.

¹¹ Quoted in Miriam Adeney, “Telling Stories: Contextualization and American Missiology”. William Taylor. Ed. *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*. p. 386-387.

¹² Bavinck, J. A. *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed. 1960. p. 122.

3:16). Despite our total lack of ability, despite our active enmity against God, without our being able to take a single step to make amends or merit in the slightest this attitude of God, he loved us. “If God had not been a missionary God, all of us would have been lost. But God was willing to pay the price to bring about reconciliation with mankind, which includes people of all tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations, until he comes again.”¹³

This is also a theme which runs through the entire Scriptures. Already in the Garden of Eden when mankind had forfeited its blessed communion with God through disobedience, God announced to the first couple, and thus to all mankind, that the Seed of the woman would come and crush the serpent’s head. When mankind even after the terrible judgment of the flood had once again abandoned God’s promise and the nations had turned to their own ways, God called Abraham and repeated the promise to him. Even though the nations had abandoned God, and he would for a time let them walk in their own ways, God promised to Abraham that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3) and “through your offspring” (Gen. 22:18).

Isaiah proclaims that “In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’” While the picture is of the nations streaming to the house of the Lord, the temple in Jerusalem, the way in which this will actually take place is that “The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Is 2:2-3). The message of salvation (“law” in the general sense of “instruction”) will be proclaimed among the nations so that they too may know their Savior and walk in his paths.

Luther comments:

The Gospel will be published among all nations, and some will be converted everywhere. For the Gospel sanctifies in every place and bears fruit, as Paul says in Col. 1:6 and as Isaiah says below in ch. 55:11: ‘My Word ... shall not return to me empty.’ Therefore all nations shall come to this mountain, that is, to the church, which is called a mountain. To this place the souls gather through faith; for when the Gospel is heard, hearts grow soft, rejoice, and come running.¹⁴

In the New Testament the risen Christ speaks to his disciples: “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, — and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:46-47). God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4), and in keeping with that desire the apostles are sent as witnesses to the crucified and risen Christ “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8). Indeed, this is essential if God’s own saving will for mankind is to be carried out, for “there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, — for, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Gen. 10:12-13). But then Paul goes on to point out that if this will of God is to be carried out, the church must faithfully fulfill the mission which God has given her. “How, then, can they call

¹³ Antonia Leonora Van der Meer. “The Scriptures, and Church, and Humanity: Who Should Do Mission and Why?” In William Taylor, ed. *Global Missiology for the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids: Baker. p. 152.

¹⁴ Martin Luther. *Luther’s Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969. p. 29

on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Ro 10:14-15).

Returning to John 3:16, we observe that the fundamental ground for missions is the love of God, a love directed toward the world: “For God so loved the world”. This love is all the more inexplicable when we consider that the object of God’s love is the very world that has been disobedient, the world which continues in its unabated hostility toward God, the world which had absolutely nothing lovable about it. “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn 4:9-10).

God sent his Son. Jesus is in fact the true missionary, even as he is the content of our missionary message. “He gave his one and only Son.” This Son of God has not only taken our flesh and blood and become fully man, he also took upon himself the burden of the sin and guilt of the entire world of sinners and has paid the frightful penalty for the sin of all mankind on the cross. That is what it means to say that God “loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”. He is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). His sacrifice was made not only for a limited number. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 2:2). It is because “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:19) that the church has a missionary message to proclaim. This is the true “universalism” of the Christian message.

Nevertheless, the missionary message of the church must also be an exclusive message, for “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Ac 4:12). Christ alone is the Savior. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Ti 2:5-6).

This message of Christ being the exclusive Savior of mankind is another of the bedrock convictions which must guide Lutheran mission for the 21st century. It again runs counter to the broad flow of post-modern thought. We have seen that many reject that God’s saving work for mankind comes to people only through the proclamation of Christ as the one who died as our substitute and rose again as the divine declaration that mankind has now been justified before God through the death of that one who “had no sin” but who was “made... to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). We have seen that many wish to find a saving presence of God also through the message of the other great world religions. Thus, J. van Lin summarizes the position of those who espouse what he calls a “theocentric pluralistic approach”. He states: “That which took place in Jesus and which the first Christians experienced of God’s involvement in human lives in him can possibly happen also in other saviors and in the experience of their followers.”¹⁵ He continues his summary:

Jesus cannot reveal God in his fullness. However unique the relationship was between Jesus and God, Jesus remains only a contingent phenomenon. The historical Jesus-event does not

¹⁵ J. van Lin, *Models for a Theology of Religions*. In F. J. Verstralen et. al. *Missiology: An ecumenical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1995., p. 190.

close off other roads to God and therefore cannot be absolutized as the sole divine norm for human conduct, including religious conduct.¹⁶

However, Jesus himself said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). And Paul in 1 Cor 15:5 states clearly that “as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive”. Christ is the exclusive Redeemer and Savior of mankind, and must be proclaimed as such.

As another participant in the Iguassu Dialogue stated: “To relativize Christ is to deny him.”¹⁷ He points out that this false Christology, the very basis of post-modern religious pluralism, which reduces Christ merely to another human point of contact with the divine among many, is to accept as correct the very thing that Judaism and Islam since the beginning have alleged against Christianity. “The most serious charge which Jews and Muslims have leveled against Christians all through the centuries would actually be true: we have elevated a human being to the place of God and have worshipped him there.”¹⁸

Alongside the conviction that men are helpless, lost and condemned by nature, totally unable to take even the first step toward their salvation, we also affirm and maintain that in Christ God has provided the full and complete remedy for the tragic condition of mankind. In him mankind has full and complete redemption, but only in him, so that “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mk 16:16).

Without this fundamental conviction we would have and could have no mission. Hans Werner Gensichen reminds us that

for Paul the message of justification by faith in Jesus Christ is not merely one possible topic of missionary preaching but in itself validates all efforts to cross the frontier between faith and non-faith. Precisely because the Gospel of Christ is the good news of salvation, of peace between God and man, it cannot be domesticated but presses out into all the world. Conversely, no mission to the nations could be justified which offered less than the full content of the saving Gospel message.¹⁹

He also reminds us that

The entire New Testament knows of no *missio Dei*, no mission of God, except through Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate. And just as ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (II Cor. 5:19), God continues to be active in the proclamation of Christ’s lordship in order to save all mankind.²⁰

The great missionary commission which the risen Christ has given to his church must be seen in the light of God’s earnest desire for the salvation of mankind which led him to send his own Son to take our flesh and become the sacrifice for the sins of an entire world of sinners. It is for this reason that Christ on the first Easter Sunday told his disciples: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (Jn 20:21). As he brought about the reconciliation of mankind, the disciples were to announce to sinners that reconciliation in the message of the forgiveness of sins. “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven”.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Chris Wright, “Christ and the Mosaic of Pluralisms”. In William Taylor, ed. *Global missiology for the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, p. 89.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁹ Gensichen, p. 32-33.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 35-36.

Shortly before his ascension, he reminded his disciples that he held all authority. He then authorized them to be his agents in continuing his mission for the salvation of mankind. “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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20).

They had been made disciples, called by Jesus himself to faith in him as the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world, “the Christ, the Son of the living God”, the only one who had “the words of eternal life”. Now they were to make disciples of “the nations”, of those who had been redeemed by him, through the word of the same Christ. This is not to be understood as a legalistic command, a danger against which Gensichen warned,²¹ but rather as sweeping up his church in his own exalted mission of bringing salvation to the nations.

The sweep of this commission is world-wide. They are to make disciples of “all nations”. Thus the mission which Christ commended to his church embraces the full extent of the promise once made to Abraham, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him and through his seed. As all have been redeemed, disciples should now be gathered from all the nations. The glorious church of the Book of Revelation, a church composed of “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7:9) will be the result of the church’s carrying out of this commission.

John Stott well summarizes this global sweep of the Christian mission:

I pray that these words ‘all the families of the earth’ may be written on our hearts. It is this expression more than any other which reveals the living God of the Bible to be a missionary God. It is this expression too which condemns all our petty parochialism and narrow nationalism, our racial pride (whether white or black), our condescending paternalism and arrogant imperialism. How dare we adopt a hostile or scornful or even indifferent attitude to any person of another colour or culture if our God is the God of ‘all the families of the earth’? We need to become global Christians with a global vision, for we have a global God.²²

The Means Of Missions

The means which the church is to use to carry out this mission are baptism and the word. Disciples are to be made by “baptizing ... and teaching”. Lutheran mission in the 21st century will need to continue to be centered in the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. While it is true that Christ has once for all died for all mankind on the cross, the benefit of that death comes to us in word and sacrament. “But we know that Christ has died for us once, and that he distributes this death through preaching, baptizing, the Spirit, reading, believing, eating, and in whatever way he wishes, wherever he is, and whatever he is, and whatever he does.”²³

We will continue to prize Holy Baptism, and to rejoice over every adult or child who is added to Christ’s church through this means of grace. We will consider it to be a “visible word”, as Augustine called the sacraments, the powerful word of gospel promise individual-

²¹ Ibid., p. 29.

²² Quoted in Tokuneh Adeyemo, “Profiling a Globalized and Evangelical Missiology”, in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*. Edited by William D. Taylor. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. 2000, p. 265.

²³ Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 37: Word and Sacrament III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961. p. 192-193.

ized as water is applied “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We will take seriously that in this sacrament God himself is active, bringing to faith or strengthening faith, granting forgiveness of sins, a new birth, and a new life in union with Christ. A missionary from another church commented when I had recently arrived in Peru that on the foreign field all the petty differences which separate the churches back in the USA pale into insignificance in comparison with the great themes that unite us. I mentioned baptism and the Lord’s Supper. “Yes”, he said, “differences on baptism and the Lord’s Supper are so peripheral as long as we have the gospel.” “For us Lutherans,” I responded, “baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not peripheral, they are the gospel!” There God proclaims to the individual, “Your sins are forgiven”, and with that declaration conveys his forgiveness. That is the heart of the gospel which we are called to proclaim to the nations.

Gensichen reminds us of this central role of baptism in our missionary practice and theology.

The church’s uncertainty about the relationship of baptism to the mission always indicates not only an inadequate understanding of baptism but that the sense of mission has been weakened. If the mission is to be governed by the universal lordship of the living Christ, it must aim at conversion; if it aims at conversion, in the sense explained earlier, then it aims at nothing less than the kind of believing participation of the whole man in the living Christ. Baptism is not just an optional symbol of such participation but the effective initiation into it, instituted once and for all by Christ himself.²⁴

But together with baptism must go teaching if we are to make disciples in the sense in which Jesus uses the term in Matthew 28. “The *kerygma* [missionary proclamation] aims at baptism while the *didache* [instruction of the disciples] presupposes it.”²⁵ Those who are won are to be taught “everything I have commanded you”. This implies that one of the tasks of the mission must be the study of the Scripture at every level, from the home Bible class and church-centered Bible class to the training of workers who will be able to carry on the mission of the church without the missionary.

But it is precisely at this point where mission work presents some of its greatest challenges. How do we communicate the message to peoples of diverse cultures and worldviews? How can we be sure that what we are saying is also what is heard by the person receiving the message? These are fundamental questions for the practice of missions in the new century.

We correctly maintain that as Christ has redeemed all mankind, the gospel message of the forgiveness of sins has universal application. Nevertheless, the gospel must be proclaimed in specific and widely varying human cultures. Those who are engaged in Biblical studies know that for a correct understanding of the Scriptures it is necessary to be aware of the differences in culture and worldview between the various periods of writing of the Biblical authors and our own age and culture. Only thus can the same message be proclaimed in appropriate terms to those of our age and culture.

In the same way, for the faithful proclamation of the gospel across contemporary cultural boundaries and teaching to observe all things that Christ has commanded his church it will be necessary to be aware not only of where the Biblical worldview differs from our own cultural

²⁴ Gensichen, p. 56.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

understanding and practices, but also of where both differ from the third culture. While in one sense it is true that “the Bible is all you need”, Norman Ericson points out that

Such a statement fails to recognize the many factors which create distance between the modern reader and the ancient literature. Among these factors are historical setting, socio-cultural setting, ideological environment, geography and demography. While we appropriately emphasize the timelessness of God’s message through His Son and the apostles, we must also recognize that it was delivered into an environment, a context. And it cannot be fully understood or transmitted into another context or environment without a full comprehension of the original context.²⁶

It is this difficulty which led Bengt Sundkler to define mission work itself as essentially “translation”.

Mission is translation, in its widest meaning: interpretation into new thought-forms. But mission implies, too, a task of translation in a more specific sense: the translation of the message of salvation into more than a thousand languages. According to the teaching of the Bible, the vast variety of languages of man is not only beauty and richness: it is also a curse. It is the task of mission to break the curse and replace it by understanding and unity.²⁷

This obviously implies a knowledge of the people with whom the gospel is to be shared. We must know what their fears are, what form the idea of salvation by works takes concretely in their system of thought. We need to understand what connection their customs and practices have with their beliefs. All this requires that the person who wishes to communicate the gospel to a person of another culture must first be a listener and learner.

Sundkler laments that often little opportunity is given to gain a profound knowledge of the context in which we must make our gospel proclamation.

It is probably true to say that the areas of contact between the Church (or the mission) and the non-Christian religions are more circumscribed now than they were a mere thirty years ago. Too few missionaries are given the opportunity of getting to know the non-Christian religions, and of taking an active part in the real missionary task of confrontation between the Gospel and the religions. This is a serious matter. The demands of love are such, that before witness can be borne to the Lordship of Christ over men of other faiths, the messengers must know—and know intimately—the people concerned. Knowledge of the social and religious milieu in which the service of Christ is to be fulfilled is an absolute necessity, quite apart from the interpretation the missionary places on the relationship between the Gospel and the religions. This has been made abundantly clear in the experience of the young churches. If it be true that Christ is Lord over men of other faiths, and the Answer to the questions raised by the religions, then to bear witness to Him requires close knowledge of the situation of those religions. For the Final Answer cannot be accepted as a real answer until it becomes the answer to a real question and a real desire, the answer to the concrete questions asked by real men and women.²⁸

He points out that Augustine recognized the difficulty of using the church’s terminology to communicate with the pagan Romans of his day. “Two persons meet, and in the course of the conversation both use the word *salus*; the Christian means ‘salvation from evil’, the non-Christian still uses the term in its classical sense of ‘good health’.”²⁹ When the early Wisconsin Synod missionaries began their work among the Apaches, they looked for an Apache term for God. After diligently inquiring of the people concerning their beliefs, they found *Bi*

²⁶ Norman A. Ericson, “Implications from the New Testament for Contextualization”, in David Hesselgrave, editor, *Theology and Mission*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978, p. 72.

²⁷ Sundkler, p. 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

k'ehko ihi dnán, the “one according to whom life is” or the Creator. When the first missionaries to the Navajos began their work, they simply used the English word God. The word itself was incomprehensible to the people, until Christmas time, when the missionaries brought a Christmas tree into the church. “Now we know what the missionaries are talking about”, said the Navajos. “We are supposed to worship the cedar tree.” In Navajo, the word *gad*, pronounced much like the English “God”, is the word for the cedar tree. David Hesselgrave reports of an evangelist who was going to India. He asked him what he was going to preach on. His reply: “What else? You must be born again.” Hesselgrave reports that he told the individual: “Please go some place else other than to India.” He explains. “For Indians, that’s not good news, that’s horrendous news. You’re reinforcing their great problem, that is, their attachment to samsara, to reincarnation. In fact, they hear this and they will say, ‘Oh, no, he says it too. You’ve got to be born again’.”³⁰ Their cultural background and worldview cause them to hear the term with a completely different meaning than that which the speaker thinks he is communicating.

This does not mean that we will omit anything that Christ has taught us, only that we must do the hard work of finding terminology that will permit us to speak in a way that will be understood by the audience.

Sundkler reminds us that not only must we understand the target culture, we must also understand thoroughly the message to be communicated.

The message of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour is a message of repentance, conversion, change and newness of life. This means making a radical break with the past; ‘The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come,’ 2 Cor. 5:17. It follows that in order to be able to translate at all, the would-be translator must know his original text, through and through. *In order to preach the Gospel in Zulu you have to know the Gospel, and not merely Zulu [italics mine]*!³¹

Of course, as he points out, he must also “know not merely the Gospel; he must know Zulu, Zulus and Zululand”, but it is essential that the missionary know the unconditioned message of the free forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ and proclaim that message, and not a confusion of law and gospel that gets passed off as the gospel.

What role do the Lutheran Confessions play in our “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”? There are those who insist that to use such documents from the history of the Western church is to stifle the contextualization of the gospel in the young churches, to impose foreign categories on other cultures. However, one thing that can be observed in all of church history is that Satan isn’t all that original. He’s a brilliant packager; he’s good at making the same old goods appear new and fresh and attractive, but he generally uses variations on the same old errors to attempt to deceive the church. The same attacks on the Trinity which the early church faced in Arianism and against which she responded in the Creeds have been revived today both by cults that have spread to the worldwide fields from America and in home-grown heretical movements. The same attacks on the sacraments that Luther and the Lutheran church faced in his day confront the newer churches of our day, with even more force. The same false teachings on free will, the same idea that man must do something to merit at least partially his salvation are widespread in the spiritual surroundings of the mission churches of today. Not to use the clear statements of the Creeds and the Cate-

³⁰ In Eugene Bunkowske and Richard French, eds., *God’s Communicators in Mission*. Fullerton, CA: Great Commission Resource Library, 1988, p. 147.

³¹ Sundkler, p. 58.

chisms to arm the young churches against the attacks of Satan would be to fail in a great duty of love toward our brethren of the new churches.

E. H. Wendland, the veteran Wisconsin Synod missionary in Central Africa, comments in this regard:

There are even those people who claim we must dispense with all confessional statements because they come out of foreign cultures. We don't believe that the Apostles' Creed, however, is any more or less expressive of American culture than it is of African. To deprive national churches of some of the important truths which historic Christianity has expressed in its confessional formulations is in our opinion considering them to be intellectually inferior as well as culturally insensitive.

Just to give one example: the "Watchtower Movement" (Jehovah's Witnesses) has had a greater impact on Africa than anywhere else in the world. Not to make full use of the Nicene Creed in places where Arianism has resurfaced in such a crass form would be a dereliction of Christian duty.³²

I recall reading someplace that F. Dale Bruner, a Presbyterian I believe who at that time was teaching at the Union Theological Seminary in Manila, the Philippines, used Luther's Large Catechism as the textbook for his dogmatics course. He found that the concreteness and down-to-earth-ness of Luther resonated with his students and made theology something that spoke to their everyday lives and concerns. Certainly, historical texts like the confessions also need to be "translated", that is, the cultural and historical situation out of which they sprang needs to be taken into account, but doing that sort of work will help the members and leaders of the new churches to see and evaluate parallel movements and errors in their own context. As they compare the confessional writings with the Scriptures, they too will confess these doctrines not as a matter of denominational distinctive doctrines, but because they are Scriptural doctrine. Every layperson who learns from Luther's Small Catechism will have more knowledge of Biblical sacramental doctrine than the graduates of most seminaries in the developing world.

Once again, E. H. Wendland observes:

There is no more valuable instrument in the missionary activity of our Lutheran Church, both at home and abroad, than Luther's Small Catechism. Next to the Bible it is the first book in need of translation in our world mission fields, whether in Indonesia or Central Africa. It presents the teachings of God's Word, as Luther himself declared, "in the simplest way." It gives us an especially favored position, one might say, among all Protestant churches which are engaged in Christian teaching and in outreach to others.³³

Bengt Sundkler also reminds us of the role which the liturgy can play in instructing and strengthening the younger churches.

The church year and the liturgy are factors which the missionary church ignores at its peril. The threat of syncretism from the sects has prompted churches in Africa to stress the dogmatic and catechetical function of the liturgy: a richly developed Evangelical liturgy is able to convey solid instruction in the biblical drama of salvation.³⁴

This, of course, is one of the roles which Luther assigned to the liturgy in his preface to the German Mass.

³² E. H. Wendland, "An Evaluation of Current Missiology" in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 79, 1982, p. 183.

³³ E. H. Wendland, *Luther on Missions*:

[Http://www.wls.wels.net/library/Essays/Authors/w/WendlandMissions/WendlandMissions.rtf](http://www.wls.wels.net/library/Essays/Authors/w/WendlandMissions/WendlandMissions.rtf)

³⁴ Sundkler, p. 212.

The new churches will also need solid training for their pastors and teachers. They will face not only the traditional beliefs of their own peoples, cults and sects imported from the West, and the other great missionary religions such as Islam, but sects such as the African Independent Churches, the Israelite sect in Peru, and many other homegrown syncretistic movements. They will have to be able to stand on the Scriptures and the Confessions and say: "Thus saith the Lord". *Lehre und Wehre*, Doctrine and Defense, Walther named the theological journal of the Missouri Synod in a day of great religious confusion in our country with its dangers for the Lutheran German and Scandinavian immigrant populations. The future leaders of the mission churches will also need to be able to teach Biblical doctrine faithfully, and defend their flocks against the erroneous teachings that surround them. For that they will need a thorough theological education.

The work of carrying the gospel to all nations is to continue to the end of time. Christ's promise to his apostles implies this. He told them: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

We must be very clear, however, that the gospel is the only means of building up the church of Christ, something that is as true on the foreign field as it is at home. Gensichen warns us:

There is no lack of worthy substitutes which easily take the place of the missionary concern—a sudden outburst of ecumenical enthusiasm, intensified social service, or an active interest in aid to underdeveloped countries. All have something to do with the mission of the church. But can they replace the sharing of the saving faith with those who have never heard of it?³⁵

Christian missionaries will live their Christianity also in the form of help given to those who are in need. They may even aid in the formation or construction of schools, hospitals, drug treatment centers, or other institutions. Nevertheless, they dare never convert these projects into the means of grace which are to build the church. Only God can build his church, and he has chosen to do it only through the proclamation of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. Gensichen also warns of the danger of confusing *kerygma* and *diakonia*, the mission and the ministry of the church. He points out:

But this does not mean that *kerygma* and *diakonia*, the mission and the ministry of the church should be confused, or that Christians should attach to their acts of serving love the intention to predispose people to believe. "When service is no more and no less than the expression of real love, it is a witness to Christ and what he can do for men; but if it is given in order to be a witness, then it fails." Nor should Christian service introduce justification by works through the backdoor, as it were. There is a world of difference between what Luther called the "pious" works in which man seeks himself and his own righteousness perhaps even by giving them a deliberate evangelistic purpose, and the "good" works which, as Luther put it, are good because in them God "accepts his own mercy." ... When all is said and done, there is no substitute for the outgoing proclamation of the gospel; there is no substitute for the mission which is intended to bring Christ to those whom he has called; and there is no substitute for the communication of a faith which is prior to the fruits which it is meant to produce lest it be perverted into a means of self-assertion.³⁶

Luther also reminds us of the centrality of Christ crucified for our mission proclamation when he says:

³⁵ Gensichen, p. 78-79.

³⁶ Gensichen, p. 86.

So this is the work of Christ: He made us the freest of all with the true freedom. All other teachings make each one bear his own burden. All sects, ceremonies, and laws are institutions of the world. Only this teaching of Christ frees us from our burden. One has sinned, another bears the punishment. Therefore all self-righteous sects are opposed to this teaching. If they themselves discharge their debt by their own works, Christ makes satisfaction by His hand in vain. This, then, is the Christian religion: One has sinned, Another has made satisfaction. The sinner does not make satisfaction; the Satisfier does not sin.³⁷

He also asserts: "Before God this alone is religion: the forgiveness of sins. Outside of this He knows nothing."³⁸

The Context Of Missions

Finally, we give attention to the context of missions for the 21st century, the situation which confronts the church and its mission. We are confronted with a world in which European and North American Christianity for the most part has lost its first love, a world in which Southern Christianity is growing rapidly in numbers and influence, a world where non-Christian religions show a new militancy, nevertheless a world in which the gospel will still bear fruit, a world where the former missions will become mission-sending churches.

Northern Europe and the United States have been the primary sending countries for the past several centuries. Increasing secularization and the theological breakdown in many of the churches will almost surely decrease the European and North American contribution to the evangelization of the world in this century.

Some statistics from the Netherlands illustrate what has been happening. In 1849 only 10% of the Dutch population reported that they had no church on the census forms. A recent figure is 57%. Today there are 566,000 Muslims and 71,000 Hindus in the Netherlands.³⁹ Mainline churches in the USA have also been losing members at a fairly rapid pace since the highpoint was reached in the 1950s.

We live in a cauldron of religious pluralism, with institutionalised (as well as popular) opposition to claims to the uniqueness of Christ as the only truth and the only Saviour. We live in cultures where Christianity has been so marginalised that most people could not articulate clearly the core beliefs of the Christian faith, and indeed increasing numbers of men and women live out their lives without ever encountering the gospel in coherent form.⁴⁰

While this quote refers to the European scene, it increasingly characterizes North America also. The consumer mentality of our country has extended also to the religious scene so that

young Americans prefer 'designer religions.' Individuals select the components that appeal to them, even if they draw from several religions. If they commit to one, they tend to emphasize those parts that they like. 'I'm comfortable with that,' is a common phrase. A conversion may be profoundly felt but transient. Since religion is individual, it is poor form to intrude one's own religion on others unless they ask about it. A person may share his story, but should not push others to follow.⁴¹

³⁷Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972. p. 99

³⁸Ibid., p. 112

³⁹J. Van Raalte, "Western Europe — The Netherlands: Emancipation and Pluralization". In F. J. Verstraelen et al., *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. p. 39.

⁴⁰Rose Dowsett, "Dry Bones in the West", in Taylor, p. 452.

⁴¹Miriam Adeney, "Telling Stories: Contextualization and American Missiology", in Taylor, p. 383.

To a great extent, the media and academia attack Biblical Christianity, so that for many Americans, Christianity is suspect. They think it has contributed to patriarchal sexism, ecological rape of the earth's resources, racism, the fostering of low self-esteem because of an emphasis on people being sinners, and repression of emotions. Politically, they identify Christianity with right wing extremists.⁴²

Two conclusions appear inescapable from the foregoing. First, far fewer missionaries will be going to foreign fields from Europe and the USA in the 21st century than in the 20th. Nevertheless, churches which still hold to the theological truths we have outlined in the first part of this paper will continue to have a vital role to play in carrying out God's commission to his church. Second, our own land will more and more become a mission field. The rapid increase in adherents of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and neo-paganism with their radically different worldviews from Biblical Christianity will also present our congregations on the home front with formidable challenges of cross-cultural communication of the gospel if some of these neighbors are to be won for the Savior. Add to this the waves of immigration, and even the challenges of cross-language communication on the foreign field will not be able to be evaded by congregations within the USA if we are to be faithful to the mission which our Savior has commended to us.

A second aspect of the context of 21st Century missions is that we face a world in which southern Christianity is growing rapidly in numbers and influence. One author points out that "in 1900, most Evangelical believers were in North America, England, and Northwest Europe. Today, these regions comprise perhaps only 25% of the world-wide Evangelical Church."⁴³ Philip Jenkins, in the current issue of *The Atlantic* states: "During the past half century the critical centers of the Christian world have moved decisively to Africa, to Latin America and to Asia. The balance will never shift back."⁴⁴

Mr. Jenkins gives the statistics and draws a conclusion.

In the global South (the areas that we often think of as the Third World) huge and growing Christian populations—currently 480 million in Latin America, 360 million in Africa, 313 million in Asia, compared with 260 million in North America—now make up what the Catholic scholar Walbart Buhlmann has called the Third Church, a form of Christianity as distinct as Protestantism or Orthodoxy, and one that is likely to become dominant in the faith. The revolution taking place in Africa, Asia and Latin America is far more sweeping in its implications than any current shifts in North American religion, whether Catholic or Protestant.⁴⁵

Lest we think that with a sigh of relief the growing number of third world Christians can allow us to rest easy, we ought to consider what kind of Christianity is growing so rapidly particularly across Latin America and Africa. A very high percentage of these new Christians are Pentecostals. Jenkins states:

Pentecostal believers reject tradition and hierarchy, but they also rely on direct spiritual revelation to supplement or replace biblical authority. And it is Pentecostals who stand in the vanguard of the Southern Counter-Reformation. Though Pentecostalism emerged as a movement only at the start of the twentieth century, chiefly in North America, Pentecostals today are at least 400 million strong, and heavily concentrated in the global South. By 2040 or so there

⁴² Miriam Adeney, in Taylor, p. 383.

⁴³ Alex Araujo, "Globalization and World Evangelism", in Taylor, p. 68.

⁴⁴ Philip Jenkins, "The Next Christianity". *The Atlantic* Vol. 290 No. 3 October 2002, p. 55.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

could be as many as a billion, at which point Pentecostal Christians alone will far outnumber the world's Buddhists and will enjoy rough numerical parity with the world's Hindus.⁴⁶

David Bosch, the South African missiologist, points to the same phenomenon. In the 20th century “a novel and virile version of Christianity, the Pentecostal Movement, made its appearance and has since grown to become the largest single category in Protestantism, outstripping the Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican movements.”⁴⁷

Many of the movements which have developed and are growing in Africa and Latin America are syncretistic and legalistic. One observer reports that

besides the usual statistics, in which the available 100 percent is divided among the various religions and denominations, one also encounters surveys reporting, for instance, that “100 percent of the country is animist, and of those 33% have been Muslimized and 11% Christianized.”⁴⁸

I recall a conversation after a Bible class in one of our new groups in Lima. A visiting neighbor from one of the Pentecostal churches asked what we did if one of the members fell into sin. I replied that we tried to show him his sin and bring him to repentance, and that if he repented he was told that his sins were forgiven. In his church, he said, if someone fell into sin he was simply booted out. Conversion was considered to be from sin to sainthood. There was no concept of being converted from sin to “*simul justus et peccator*”, both saint and sinner at the same time. There is a proliferation of churches in Lima where the gospel is that if you accept their message and discipline, suffering will end in your life. Despite the outward growth, multitudes are still in need of a plain presentation of the law of God and a clear presentation of the unconditioned gospel of the forgiveness of sins.

We also face a resurgence of traditional religions. Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, which some observers a century ago thought were destined to disappear, are now growing in militancy. The syncretistic nature of Hinduism and Buddhism are attractive to those who espouse pluralistic post-modern ideologies, and doctrines such as reincarnation and a search for God in the inner self are becoming common. The exclusiveness of Biblical Christianity is not only offensive, it is incomprehensible to many.

Sundkler describes the tenets of the Hindu Ramakrishna Movement.

(i) That all religions are true and good, and that there is therefore no reason why any man should change his religion. (ii) That God reveals Himself everywhere, in all men, in all gods, and supremely in a number of *avatars* (incarnations)... It was, of course, easy on this view to incorporate Jesuswami into the system. (iii) That the Hindu people are a spiritual people, while the civilizations of the West are materialistic. Hinduism is the most spiritual of all religions.⁴⁹

Regarding Islam, Bertil Engqvist informs of an Islamic World Festival in 1976, where an Islamic spokesman proclaimed:

Islam doesn't belong to East or West. It is God's message ... to each man whatever his background, nationality, color, race or language might be ... Man is looking for a new future.... Islam is today offering mankind ... a new alternative as a foundation for the order of life and society.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴⁷ Bosch, p. 352.

⁴⁸ J. P. Heijke, “Africa: Between Cultural Rootedness and Liberation”, in F. J. Verstralen et al., *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. p. 265.

⁴⁹ Sundkler, p. 238.

Engquist then goes on to say:

As we enter the 21st century, that vision of the Muslims has not faded but developed in such a way that we today have over 15 satellites and hundreds of radio stations broadcasting Islamic teaching. Scores of publishing houses, university courses, and cultural centers around the world exist with the purpose of sharing their message. TV stations are focusing on the demands from an ever-increasing Muslim population as they claim their rightful say in the development of the nations.⁵⁰

All across Sub-Saharan Africa Islam is growing nearly as rapidly as Christianity, and in many areas where it has achieved dominance, such as Northern Nigeria and Southern Sudan, the result has been persecution of Christians. Nor is Islam's spread limited to the areas contiguous to its traditional bases in the Middle East, Northern Africa, Central Asia and Indonesia. Bengt Sundkler reminds us:

Islam is certainly not static, having no missionary will of its own—least of all in these days. The 'immovable block' is on the move, in the whole of Africa and Indonesia; at the same time Islam is at present experiencing a mighty ideological renaissance. Its leaders now look upon Islam as a world religion, a faith, too, for what they are convinced is the irreligious West.⁵¹

There are growing numbers of Muslims here in the USA, and even some Peruvians have embraced the message of Mohammed.

Nevertheless, Sundkler feels that Lutheranism has unique resources for confronting the attraction of Islam. He writes:

The preaching of the Gospel by means of humble, self effacing service creates contact and bears its fruit. True, the usual way is to meet the legalism of the Quran with Christian moralism, but that particular way is not quite as effective as some people imagine. Sacramental Christianity, on the other hand, is able to express a more radical theocentricity than any Muslim legalism, particularly when combined with the message of the boundless forgiveness which is in Christ. The encounter with Islam gives the Christian preacher a new joy in forgiveness, and the contrast with Muslim legalism exhibits the breadth and depth and height of the Gospel.⁵²

The challenges to mission work in the 21st century will be great. Nevertheless, we can expect that God will continue to bless our efforts to reach people of other cultures, languages and nations with the gospel of salvation. God himself has assured us that the word that goes forth from his mouth "will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Is 55:11). We have seen that God is a missionary God, who has sent his own Son into the world to save it, and who then sends his church into the world with the saving word. Relying on that word and proclaiming it, we can also trust that God will bring his elect from every nation and tongue into his kingdom.

Considering the natural opposition of mankind to the gospel, perhaps any mission "success" ought to surprise us. Nevertheless, solely through God's blessing of the use of his means of grace, people are won, sometimes at a frustratingly slow pace, sometimes in what seem to be massive movements. Where the results seem to be slow in coming, we will patiently trust that God nevertheless is carrying out his purpose through our proclamation of the gospel. Where there seem to be abundant visible results, we will attribute all the glory to God, and not to ourselves.

⁵⁰ Bertil Engqvist, "A Vision From the World Beyond: Islam". In Taylor, p. 441.

⁵¹ Sundkler, p. 218.

⁵² Sundkler, p. 233.

Bavinck states:

And what is striking here is that for Paul God alone can open the door. The missionary is confronted by insurmountable obstacles; by himself he can find no opening in the wall of opposition. But the strong unwillingness that first greets the missionary breaks down under the gracious working of God's presence and blessing. For this reason missionary work borders on the miraculous; by its very nature it depends wholly upon the divine working of God.⁵³

This is a fact which we must remember. Church Growth theology seems to glorify success, and perhaps is more a reflection of the North American cultural worship of success and visible short-term results than a Biblical theology of missions. We are told that we must concentrate on "responsive populations" and occupy "resistant fields" only lightly. Nevertheless, there are no populations where natural man is favorably disposed toward the gospel. Only God, through the gospel, can create responsive hearts. E. H. Wendland states:

One critic suggests that "church growth people assume you can make Christians the way you make cars and sausages." The missionary becomes a professional agent geared to the philosophy that success is the *sine qua non* of church work. The Bible does, of course, contain success stories. But it also records places, especially in the General Epistles, where scattered little groups are called upon to face the world's hostility without losing hope. One could point to places in Africa where missionaries waited years before winning the first convert. Today these same areas are witnessing the most rapid church growth in all the world. One wonders what might have happened if the early pioneers had not been willing to bear the heat and burden of the day! Had they pursued church growth strategies, they would not have persisted as they did.⁵⁴

Our participation in the church's mission task is a venture of faith. It relies on God's promises and trusts in his blessing. We will neither despair when in some fields the results are few nor will we become proud when glowing reports can be sent home. As Gensichen puts it:

Here as elsewhere the testimony of the Bible does not appeal primarily to our determination and skill or efficiency but to our faith. Only faith can dare to enter into the theological dimension of God's mission and leave the beginning, the end and everything to him and yet stand ready to be used for God's purposes in history. Only faith can obediently and actively pursue the missionary intention, trusting that in, with and under its own work—inadequate as it is—God's work is being done. Only faith can grasp the missionary dimension by looking out to the vast universal horizon which God himself has opened up by sending his Son into the world and for the world. Only faith can be certain that its own going-out into the world of unbelief does participate in God's concern for the world—even though this infinitely exceeds any human planning and acting.⁵⁵

Luther reminds us that

God's Word bears fruit mainly where this is least expected and, conversely, produces least where most is expected. Here we find the heathen of Nineveh coming to faith, though they had not heard the Word of God before; and we find that the Jews, who heard the Word of God daily, abandon their faith. From this we must learn, on the one hand, not to despair of anyone and, on the other, not to place undue confidence in anyone.⁵⁶

He also reminds us that "The majority are always hardened. Few are they who tremble at the judgment of God, and yet on their account the promises of God must be proclaimed."⁵⁷

⁵³ Bavinck, p. 44.

⁵⁴ E. H. Wendland, "An Evaluation of Current Missiology", *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 79 (1982), Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, p. 175.

⁵⁵ Gensichen, p. 41.

⁵⁶ Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis, 1974. p. 96.

⁵⁷ Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969. p. 46.

Finally, the 21st century will be a time when the former mission churches will become mission sending churches. This is not something new. Sundkler nicely summarizes the progression of gospel outreach as it forms the church in other lands in the following:

She has not grown up of herself, by virtue of her own natural resources: she is sent by others, from other lands, incorporated as a link in the long, holy chain created by the Holy Spirit in and through the tradition and history of the Church, sent from Jerusalem and Antioch to Greece, Italy, Gaul and Ireland; from the country of the Franks and Saxons and Angles to the country of the Swedes and Goths; from Sweden to Zululand, from Sweden to Minnesota, and from Minnesota and Kansas to Tanganyika and Hong Kong. The Church in Africa is not a spontaneous growth; she has been sent by others, planted like some exotic shrub by the emissaries of missionaries of other churches.⁵⁸

Already a large percentage of the missionaries working in Asia are sent from Korea. Our own churches owed much to the German mission societies of the 19th century or to the Norwegian state church's recognition of its responsibility to those who had emigrated. In the 20th century our synods became mission-sending bodies, both to evangelize the heathen and to help German emigrants in other lands. Now some of those bodies are sending missionaries across national borders or even across oceans, as in the case of the former LCMS mission in Argentina sending missionaries to Spain. That trend will likely continue.

How important, then, that we establish churches which will be faithful to God and to the Scriptures, who together with us will joyfully confess the doctrines of the Lutheran Confessions and will in their turn bring the pure and unconditioned gospel to still other peoples. Our efforts may be weak and plagued by sin and mistakes. Still, God has deigned to use the mission outreach of sinners and weak people such as us to bring the glories of salvation to many throughout the world. Stephen Neill has said of the missionaries that have gone out into the world: "[They] have on the whole been a feeble folk, not very wise, not very holy, not very patient. They have broken most of the commandments and fallen into every conceivable mistake."⁵⁹ Nevertheless also here God's strength is perfected in our weakness. As another writer states: "Critics of mission work in Africa usually give up on mission when they come across the manifest display of human weakness. But this is a gross failure to understand that God uses the weak things of this earth to manifest his glory. A lot has been done by weak missionaries to establish the church of Christ in Africa."⁶⁰ In spite of our failings and mistakes, God has planted his church in new lands and other cultures. The missionaries that a church of redeemed sinners sends out are also sinners, sent to proclaim the same message that has saved and comforted them in their sins. And through them still other souls by God's grace receive the comfort of the good news of their own redemption.

As we respond to our privileges as the redeemed children of God by taking the message of his redemption to the ends of the earth, we will in fact be fulfilling one of the purposes of our redemption. We shall let some final thoughts of Dr. Luther close this presentation.

He is saying that Christians are not only such as praise God, but they will also produce others and be concerned about their enlightenment and conversion. These are the two tasks of the Christians, to glorify God and to convert others. He who converts an ungodly man brings the best sacrifice, not offering an ox but a living sacrifice. This is the sum of the prophets, to at-

⁵⁸ Sundkler, p. 58.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Bosch, p. 519.

⁶⁰ Yusufu Turaki, "Evangelical Missiology from Africa: Strengths and Weaknesses", in Taylor, p. 279.

tribute to the Christian these two sacrifices: to praise God and to convert sinners, instead of all the endless ceremonies of the Law.⁶¹

May God bless our participation in his mission for the salvation of many throughout our land and the world.

Bibliography

- Bavinck, J. H. *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed. 1960.
- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis. 1991.
- Bunkowske, Eugene W. and French, Richard, eds. *God's Communicators in Mission*. Fullerton, CA: Great Commission Resource Library. 1988.
- Gensichen, Hans-Werner. *Living Mission: The Test of Faith*. Philadelphia: Fortress. 1966.
- Hesselgrave, David J. *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation No. 1*. Grand Rapids: Baker. 1978.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works, American Edition*. St. Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress. 1955-1976.
- Sundkler, Bengt. *The World of Mission*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1965.
- Taylor, William, ed. *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. 2000.
- Thomas, Norman E., ed. *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis. 1995.
- Verstralen, F. J. et al., eds. *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1995.
- Wendland, E. H. "An Evaluation of Current Missiology", *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 79* (1982), Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House.
- Wendland, E. H. "Luther on Missions":
<http://www.wls.wels.net/library/Essays/Authors/w/WendlandMissions/WendlandMissions.rtf>

⁶¹Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972. p. 336.