

God's Mandate To His Church To Communicate The Gospel

[WELS World Mission Seminar, East Fork Lutheran Mission, Whiteriver, Arizona, Aug. 1984]

By Harold R. Johne

When our Lord came to his disciples in the evening, on that day on which he had risen from the dead, he told them, "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. You are witnesses of these things (Lk. 24:46-48). Our Lord wanted his disciples to understand that by his suffering, death, and resurrection, he had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. He had fulfilled them up to a point. Something remained to be fulfilled. Something wonderful remained. The prophets had also said that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all nations. This is the mandate that he was giving to them. He wanted them to see their mandate as the fulfillment of prophecy. He wanted them to understand that through them God was about to carry out the things that he had promised through His Old Testament prophets.

Through this recorded word, Luke and the Holy Spirit still are directing followers of the Savior to prophesy today. When speaking about prophecy, however, the time of the fulfillment is critical. Can we apply these prophecies to what is happening about us today? Can we apply them to what we are doing today? Before going into some of the prophecies themselves, let's take up this critical question. Is the Lord fulfilling these prophecies today?

With regard to the fulfillment of his prophecies, the Lord had for some four thousand years been saying, "Not yet." When Eve gave birth to Cain, it seems that she hoped, or even thought that her son would be the promised, "Seed," Who would destroy the power of Satan and reconcile men with their Creator once again. Before long she realized that God was saying, "Not yet" (Genesis chapter 4).

So the waiting, the longing, the hoping continued. Through the long Old Testament Era the Lord kept saying, "Not yet." And then one day, literally thousands of years after that first prophecy, while he was serving in the temple in Jerusalem, an angel appeared to an elderly priest named Zechariah, and suddenly the Lord was saying, "Now." It seems that those people who were, "Waiting for the consolation of Israel," those who understood the prophecies as the Lord wanted them understood, those people realized that with the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah, would come also the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the gathering in of people from all nations. As Simeon holds the infant Messiah, the fulfillment of those first prophecies in his arms, he says that the Lord has prepared this salvation, "In the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk 2:28-32). Simeon sees both prophecies, the prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah and the prophecies regarding the gathering in of the Gentiles, coming into fulfillment.

The Apostles Paul and Peter realized that they were living and working in God's "Now," in the time of fulfillment. In Ephesians 3:5,6 Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ, "Which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." He has a similar statement in Colossians 1:26,27. In Titus 1:3 Paul writes more specifically of his own ministry when he says, "At his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior." Think also of how Paul sees the Galatians coming to faith as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 54. "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband" (Gal. 4:27). He refers to this woman in the prophecy as, "Our mother" (Gal. 4:26). Paul understood that through his ministry God was fulfilling his promise to bring the Gentiles into the Kingdom.

Peter leaves no doubt that he and his people are living in the time of fulfillment. He says that the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to them searched intently, trying to find out the time and the circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing. He says that even angels long to look into these things (1 Pe 1:10-12). In his Pentecost sermon Peter states that what was happening at that moment was a

fulfillment of what the Lord had prophesied through the prophet Joel, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Ac 2:17).

The Lord used Paul and Peter and the other apostles and disciples of their generation to fulfill his prophecies to bring his Gospel to people all over the earth. They were living in the time of the fulfillment of these prophecies, but what about us? Is the same true of us? Are we still living in the time of fulfillment? We certainly are. Is the Lord using us to fulfill these same prophecies? He certainly is. This time of fulfillment will not end until our Lord returns in glory. He has said, "This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt 24:14).

These are facts. This is what is happening now. God is carrying out the fulfillment of his prophecies, the prophecies in which he said that he would extend his Kingdom to include people of all nations. Do you see where that puts us? God will continue to fulfill his wondrous prophecies whether you or I accept a mission call or not, whether you or I serve faithfully or not. He will continue to fulfill his prophecies, continue to bring his Gospel to all nations no matter what resolutions the Wisconsin Synod may pass or not pass at its next convention. He is not saying, "If you don't do it, no one else shall." Rather He is saying, "If you don't do it, someone else certainly shall." I think Luther expresses this in his explanations of the second and third petitions, "God's kingdom certainly comes by itself.... and again, "God's good and gracious will certainly is done without our prayer...." These prophecies shall be fulfilled. He is calling us, giving us the opportunity to participate in this wondrous fulfillment. What a privilege he is granting us! Who would think of refusing? If we know these facts, how can we help but serve with joy?

Luke and the Holy Spirit chose not to record what specific portions of Scripture our Lord explained when he spoke to his disciples that evening in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit is really inviting us to search all of Scripture, to search these things out for ourselves. Let's look at just a few of these prophecies to see if we can get a clearer insight into what our Lord is doing now, in these last days, in this last great period in the history of this world. This is of special interest, all-consuming interest to us, because he is fulfilling these prophecies in part through us.

The prophecies regarding these last days certainly tell us that our Lord is extending his kingdom. For example, think again of Isaiah chapter 54, the prophecy to which Paul alludes in Galatians 4. Here the Lord says to his beloved wife, his Israel, "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities" (Isa 54:2,3). August Pieper interprets this passage: "As the possessor of her own tent (Wives of the more prominent persons each had their own tent, Ge 24:67; 31:33) she is now exhorted to extend her tent widely and to fasten it firmly, to make room for the multitude of children that have been promised to her" (*Isaiah II* page 463). That multitude of children that was promised to her then, is being given to her now in these last days in which we live.

The Psalmist prophesies: "The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted." (Ps 47:9). At times in the midst of a Bible class the disconcerting thought still passes through my mind. "What am I doing here? I am an American of European extraction speaking in dead earnest to a group of Japanese people about a Jew named Abraham who lived about four thousand years ago in a tiny country about half way around the world from here." But it is true. Through the foolishness of such preaching the Lord is causing Japanese people, people everywhere on this planet to become, "People of the God of Abraham." The Lord is fulfilling his prophecies.

Ezekiel speaks of a stream of water flowing eastward from the temple. It becomes a strange river indeed. Although it has no tributaries, it does not gradually dry up, but continues to get deeper. A thousand cubits out from the city gate it is ankle-deep. At two thousand cubits out it is up to the prophet's knees. At three thousand cubits out, it was waist-deep. At four thousand cubits out, it was too deep to cross. This river flowed into the area of the Dead Sea and wherever it flowed it brought life. When it empties into the Dead Sea, the waters become fresh and swarm with fish. Fruit trees of all kinds grow on both banks of this river because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. He says that where the river flows, everything will live. That "Water" still is

flowing from Jerusalem and where it flows, it gives life, eternal life to mortal men. The reality, the fulfillment, that which is happening now, is far more wondrous than the fantastically beautiful picture that the prophet used in his prophecy so long ago (Ezekiel chapter 47).

The book of Daniel tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar saw a dream in which a rock cut out not by human hands struck down an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. That rock became a mountain and filled the whole earth. Daniel then interprets the dream. "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (Da 2:44). Through the proclamation of his word to men everywhere, also through you and through me, our Lord is establishing that eternal Kingdom now.

These prophecies are not limited to the Old Testament. I believe that Jesus is prophesying when he tells his disciples, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Ac 1:8). That prophecy is still being fulfilled now. Many of our Lord's parables are prophetic. They tell us what is happening now. The sower is sowing his seed, but that seed does fall on different kinds of soil. The yeast is being put into the lump of dough. The mustard seed is being planted. All kinds of fish are being taken into the net.

The Revelation to John gives us not only insight into what is happening now, but it also gives us a glimpse, only a glimpse, but a thrilling, breathtaking glimpse, into the completion of it all. The Lord is now gathering the 144,000 who shall stand before the Lamb on Mt. Zion and sing a new song, a song learned only by these chosen ones who had been redeemed from the earth, who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev 14:1-5). The Lord is granting his saints victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name so that they may hold harps given them by God and sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. Part of that song resounds with the words, "All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed" (Rev 15:1-4).

Our Lord is now, in these troubled last days of this planet, preparing for a wedding, and what a wedding celebration that will be, when the Lamb comes to claim his beloved bride, his Church! There will be shouting like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters, and like loud peals of thunder. (Have you ever heard 10,000 people or more shouting for joy, shouting the same thing at the same time?) They will be shouting, "Hallelujah. For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear" (Rev 19:6-8). No wonder that after John had seen and heard this, the angel said to him, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb.'" Think of it! Our Lord has called you and me to help deliver these invitations. He has called us to take part in something that has cosmic dimensions, called us to take part in that which brings incomprehensible joy to his people for all eternity.

When we think about our mandate to communicate the Gospel, I believe that this is where we need to begin. We need to begin there where our Lord took his disciples that evening of the day on which he rose from the dead. We need to begin with prophecy.

Before considering the specifics of our mandate itself, I believe that there is one more important area that we must consider. That is the person, the people involved. Who is it that issues this mandate? What is he? Who are these people who receive this mandate? What are they? What is the relationship between the one that issues the mandate and the one who receives it? These considerations are extremely important in any such communication. They affect the mandate itself.

Look at the men who first received this mandate. Our resurrected Lord came to them on Sunday evening. Look at them three nights before. On that night one of them denied with an oath that he had ever known the Lord. Matthew tells us that when they saw what was happening in Gethsemane, they all, "Deserted him and fled" (Mt 26:56). Luke tells us that earlier that same evening when they were gathered together in the "Upper room," where our Savior washed their feet, where he instituted the Lord's Supper, where he ate that last Passover with them, there of all places, at that time of all times, "A dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest" (Lk. 22:24). In spite of this he permitted himself to be nailed to a cross for

them, sacrificed his life for them, and now even calls them to be his witnesses to carry the salvation he has won, to men everywhere.

The Apostle Paul had the same experience. He deserved only to die as he lay there on the road to Damascus, most likely expected to die the next instant, but the Lord let him live. The Lord let him get up from the road and walk. The Lord let him go to Damascus and be baptized there. And then the Lord even called Paul to be his chosen instrument to carry his name especially before the Gentiles.

Has our experience been any different? Who are we that the Lord should give us such a mandate? Without going into a long list of possible sins, let's think for a moment only of those that beset the apostles that Thursday night. Aren't we too, all too often guilty of cowardice? (At times I still find it a bit difficult to pray before my meal in a public restaurant.) Don't we again and again tend to slip into stupid arrogance and pride? Don't we sin against our Lord daily? And still He calls us. Still He gives us this mandate to communicate his Gospel.

Like Paul and the other apostles we are called to proclaim the grace that we have received and continue to receive ourselves. When someone who loves you that much tells you to do something, when someone who has gone all the way, sacrificed his life for you gives you a command, you can't help but obey. You obey, however, not out of fear or force, but out of love. His love compels you to do what he commands. Because it is our Savior who died for us, our Savior who forgives our sins against him, our Savior who chose us to live with him for eternity, because he is the one who gives us this mandate, it no longer is a command. His love takes our hearts captive. Doing his will becomes our greatest freedom, our highest joy.

This mandate to communicate the Gospel comes to us not only as a command, but in other forms as well. Let me cite a few examples:

In Romans chapter five and 2 Corinthians chapter five the Holy Spirit tells us that our Savior redeemed all mankind. If he redeemed them all, then certainly we want to do all we can to help tell them all.

Jesus of Nazareth is the only Savior. "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). If there is no other Savior, then we certainly want all men to know about him.

God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). He has said, "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6). Since this is our heavenly Father's will, we certainly want to do all we can to help "Bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

This mandate to communicate the Gospel comes to us also in the form of the example of those apostles and first disciples, as well as the example of believers of all times, who told the good news wherever they went. As co-heirs of eternal life with them, we can't help but strive to do the same.

In all of these various ways the mandate to communicate the Gospel is not forced upon us. We communicate the Gospel not out of fear. Rather we communicate the Gospel because of what our Savior has done for us and what he has made us to be. He gave his life for us so that we might be his own and in love serve him in time and in eternity.

But what is it really that our Savior's mandate tells us to do? The verbs that the Holy Spirit uses to express this activity are many. We are to "Teach." We are to "Be witnesses." We are to "Feed." We are to "Command and teach." We are to, "Correct, rebuke, encourage with great patience and careful instruction."

Actually our mandate requires us to do things which are impossible for mere men. We are to, "Make disciples" (Mt 28:19). We are to forgive and retain sins (John 20:23). I believe that it is significant that according to all four of the Gospels, our Lord not only gives us this mandate to do the impossible, but he also assures us that we will not be alone in this. He will be with us always until the end of time (Mt 28). "I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke Chapter 24). According to John, on that same evening of his resurrection day, "He breathed on them and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit.'" It was then that he said, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are

forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn. 20:22,23). Even in Mark where apparently there is serious doubt about the authenticity of the text, we have the same pattern, the same assurance. We hear our Lord saying not only, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation, " (Mk 16:15) but he also adds, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands..." (Mk 16:17,18).

Our mandate requires us to do the impossible, but it is really our risen Lord, who is with us, and his Holy Spirit working through us, who do that which is impossible for us. They make men to be Jesus' disciples. They place upon the individual God's forgiveness or God's condemnation. What an awesome thing to be used as his instruments for this impossible task!

Because the work is impossible, because only God can do it, prayer for the growth of his Kingdom, prayer for the conversion of Gentiles and Jews, is also a part of our mandate. Isaiah writes, "You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth" (Isa 62:6,7). Our Lord says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Lk 10:2).

We might add that we are to communicate the Gospel not only with words, but with our entire life. "Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16). By this shall men know that you are my disciples indeed, because you love one another" (Jn 13:35).

We are to communicate in the most effective way possible, in the way that reaches a person there where he actually is. "To the Jews, I became like a Jew to win the Jews to those not having the law, I became like one not having the law, so as to win those not having the law" (1 Co 9:20,21). Or think of the special injunctions to Timothy in regard to older men, older women, younger women, etc.

This mandate demands our all. It demands the best that we can develop. It demands that we do it all in love for sinners, as he gave his all in love for sinners.

What is it really that we are to communicate? I think that a good place to look for the answer is Paul's letter to the Romans. Like Paul we are to, we want to, we are not to be ashamed to, proclaim the Gospel, because it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. To see what that Gospel is, look to the letter itself. Proclaiming the Gospel means proclaiming the wrath of God upon men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. (Ro 1:18-3:20). It means proclaiming the righteousness, the justification that God gives freely through the redemption that was carried out by our Savior Jesus Christ (Ro 3:21-4:25). It means leading those who have come to faith to a fuller understanding of what they have, what they are, what they can expect as people who have been justified by faith (Ro 5:1-8:33). It means expressing special consideration for the people of the Jewish race (Ro 9-11). It means setting an example both in eagerness to reach more people with the Gospel, as well as in personal love and concern for those who already are our fellow believers (Ro 15:14-16:27). This, I believe, is the Gospel that we are to communicate.

To whom are we to communicate this Gospel? Our Lord makes that pretty clear. According to Matthew he says that we are to, "Make disciples of all nations." Mark has Jesus' followers going into all the world and preaching the good news to all creation. Luke tells us that our Savior reminded the disciples that evening that the prophets had said that, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Lk 24:47). And in Acts Luke tells us that our Savior said that his disciples would be his witnesses, "To the ends of the earth" (Ac 1:8). It is not as simple, however, as it probably sounds.

Look at Paul for a moment. He is a man who you might say literally went to the ends of the earth proclaiming the Gospel, but at the same time he did not overlook the individual who was within reach of his voice at the moment. When you are in jail, convert your jailer—Paul at Philippi. When you are in court, try to convert your judge—Paul in Caesarea before Festus and King Agrippa. When you are in a restaurant, try to convert your waiter, if you can do so without being obnoxious. When a bill collector comes to the door... We are to try to communicate the Gospel to all men, everywhere, far and near.

I do believe, however, that the mandate our Lord has given us includes a special concern for bringing the Gospel to the Jews. He has not said that he shall convert all the Jews who are living on this earth at some

given time close to the end. Our Lord has said, however, that he shall use his believing Gentiles to bring many of the Jewish people back into his Kingdom. Consider Isa 49:22: "See, I will beckon to the Gentiles. I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders." In regard to this passage August Pieper says, "It is the converted nations who bring back the converted Jewish 'Golay' (captivity) to Zion, (cf. Chapter 60). ... See Romans chapter 11, especially verses 14, and 25ff. The Christian mission among the Jews has been assigned to the church among the nations as a task that continues till the Day of Judgement. ... 'In the bosom,' and 'At the shoulder' shall the children be carried to Zion, a picture of gentle and loving devotion. The interpretation misses the mark entirely that takes these returning children to be only the spiritual children of Zion, that is, gentiles who have come to the faith. Gentiles and Jews are too clearly distinguished here to permit of that explanation" (*Isaiah II*, page 379). In connection with Isaiah 60:9, "Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your sons from afar..." August Pieper interprets Romans 11:11,12,15 as follows: "Through the stumbling and fall of the Jews, we gentiles who have fallen heir to the promise of salvation, 'To provoke them to jealousy,' bring Zion's physical children from all corners of the earth to their spiritual mother Zion, the church of Christ. According to the Lord's promise, our preaching of the Gospel to them shall not be in vain." Isaiah 66:20 speaks of the Gentiles bringing, "All your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord." Again August Pieper interprets this as Gentile believers bringing members of the Jewish Diaspora into Christ's church (*Isaiah II*, page 700).

In Romans chapter 11 Paul reminds us that the Jewish people are the "Natural branches" of our Lord's olive tree. He speaks of their coming acceptance as being like life from the dead. It is through the fullness of the Gentiles, but also through the conversion of a remnant of the Jews that God's Church will become complete. In that way, "All Israel will be saved" (Ro 11:26). See also August Pieper's comments on Isaiah 59:20, the passage Paul quotes here.

I believe that if we take these words of prophecy in Isaiah and in Romans 11 seriously, it may not mean that we shall immediately send missionaries to the Jews. I do believe, however, that we should be constantly watching for opportunities to communicate the Gospel to the Jews. Who knows, perhaps the Lord shall choose to use us to bring some of these, his beloved people, back into his Church. He has said that he shall use Gentile believers for this purpose. When considering our mandate to communicate the Gospel, I think that we also need to ask whether we have any other mandate. Again, I believe that the answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem at first.

Rather than saying that we have another mandate, it might be better to say that there is another side to the coin. If we have the mandate to communicate the Gospel, then we also have a mandate to expose and condemn false religions and false teachings. The New Testament gives us ample examples of both. In his sermons at Lystra and Athens for example, Paul exposes the emptiness of false religions. Think of how much of the New Testament is exposition of, condemnation of, warnings against, false teaching. Think for example of Paul's warnings to the elders at Miletus, or 1 Corinthians chapter 15 in response to those who denied the resurrection, or the letter to the Galatians condemning the Judaizers, or the warnings in 1 Timothy chapter 4 against those who would abandon the faith. We could go on and on. I believe that this negative side of the matter is a part of our mandate too.

By example and by admonition Paul makes us aware of another aspect of our mandate to communicate the Gospel. We need to enlist others to communicate the Gospel the way Paul enlisted men like Timothy and Titus. His admonition to Timothy to, "Entrust these things to reliable men who will be able to teach others," applies also to us (2 Ti 2:2). Remember this is 2 Timothy. Paul is approaching his own death. He is concerned about having men to communicate the Gospel after he is gone. We should have the same concern. Inviting, selecting men to proclaim the Gospel publicly developing seminary programs, all this is part of our mandate too.

Some say that we have an additional mandate besides preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins to the unbelieving world about us. They feel that the Lord wants us to reform the unbelieving world. I don't

believe that this is true. The prophecies regarding the last days certainly do not teach that the Lord is now in the process of making this world a better place to live in and that he is using his believers for this purpose. The book of Revelation for example, seems to speak of the injustice, cruelty, and hatred of the unbelieving world growing worse. Jesus did not strive to put an end to the political and social injustices imposed upon his people by the Roman Empire. Paul does not try to abolish slavery, but rather admonishes the slaves in the congregations to be faithful, and even returns the converted runaway slave Onesimus to his Christian master.

Before we go any further with this, however, let us take note of the fact that we do have a mandate to love. John says, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love, remains in death" (1 John 3:14). Remember that Jesus deliberately put that Levite and that Priest into his parable about the Good Samaritan. He is telling us that no matter how religious you may be, if you do not have love, you are nothing. And John again reminds us that our love must be more than words. "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

I personally feel that we still need to give much thought to this entire matter of our relationship to the unbelieving world. There is no doubt, much that we can learn from the Old Testament in this regard. Think for example of the Canaanites' horrible practice of burning their children in sacrifice to their god. I don't think the Lord commands his people to stop the Canaanites from doing this, but he does say that he does not want them, his Holy People, to ever do such things.

I personally believe that our Lord in his word has, so to speak, set the limits for us. We are not to try to reform the world. We have no such mandate from him. On the other hand we are not to become so professional as to lose our love for our fellow man in his need, whatever that need may be. What are we to say or do about such things as abortion, nuclear weapons, starvation, racism, torture of prisoners, profanity on television programs? When is a person simply acting or speaking out of love and when is he trying to reform the unbelieving world? There probably are many instances where the only ones who really know are the individual himself and our Lord who sees the heart.

Another thing that I believe complicates this matter of our relationship to the unbelieving world, is the blessing of freedom that we enjoy. When or where in the history of this planet have men experienced the political freedom that common people in some countries at least are enjoying now, freedom that has been theirs for only about two centuries or so? The New Testament was written under very different political and social conditions. I doubt whether the Roman government tolerated any criticism from its people, just or unjust. What could a Christian do or even say about the unjust practices that were prevalent in government and society? At the time of the Reformation, church and state were still so intertwined, that again we frequently lack concrete directives that fit our situation today.

I believe that we need to search the Scriptures more diligently in regard to this matter of our relationship to the unbelieving world about us. I believe that we also need to rely upon the continuing presence of our risen Lord and His Holy Spirit to grant us the ability and the courage to see and do his will.

Finally as administrators of our synod's world missions, I would like to direct your attention to one of the great administrators of the early church, James, our Lord's brother, the pastor of the mother church at Jerusalem. When Peter and Paul and Barnabas had given their reports concerning the conversion of the Gentiles to the council at Jerusalem, James spoke up. He said that what these men were reporting agreed with the words of the prophet Amos. He quotes Amos 9:11,12 at this point. After that James brings his recommendation about sending a letter to the Gentile believers.

Since you invited me to give this essay, I think I may be so bold as to encourage you, the administrators of our synod's mission work, to follow the example of James, to see and understand what is happening now, in the light of what our Lord through his prophets and apostles said that he would do in these later days. This involves reading the Bible, the entire Bible again and again. See what is happening, what we are doing, first of all as the fulfillment of our Lord's prophecies. I believe that if you approach your work in this way, our Lord will give you a clear understanding of what he is actually doing in our times, and will equip you to make decisions and provide leadership that are in accordance with his will.

