

# The WELS Identity As A World Mission Church

[Delivered to the Manitowoc Pastoral Conference at Manitowoc, Wisconsin, on April 24, 1995.]

*Ernst H. Wendland*

Our synod has begun its second century of world mission activity. As it does so, its global interests are directed toward 23 countries on five continents, with resident missionaries in 16 of these countries. A task force of 100 missionaries, teachers, nurses, vicars, and volunteer workers is involved. What a vast change from those modest beginnings of a century ago, when two raw recruits were sent to Apacheland!

Our synod's Division of Fiscal Services estimates the present budgetary needs of the World Mission Division to be approaching \$7,000,000 a year. This includes revenues received from trust funds and special gifts. I go back far enough in ministerial experience to remember the synod convention of 1951, when we took the bold step of adopting for the first time a budget in excess of one million dollars for all of our synod's needs. It was with quite a bit of trepidation at the time that this step was taken. I can remember how all the district presidents were asked individually to give their opinion on the convention floor. Only one, Oscar Naumann of the Minnesota District, came out strongly to "go ahead with it."

World missions, in other words, has become big business. Can we still handle it as a synod? Are we, perhaps, overreaching our capacities? A recent report from our synod's Board for World Missions refers to requests for expansion "in four or five major exploratory areas," with additional appeals coming "from six other countries with expansion opportunities" (Administrator's Report, 1994, p 1). This in spite of the fact that synod's mission offerings for regular budgetary purposes (SMO) continue to fall below the projected amounts needed, and "are not increasing at or near the rate of inflation" (WELS Report to the Twelve Districts, 1994, p 143). If we are thinking in terms of world mission expansion, it follows that there will have to be a considerable increase in SMO offerings, or an ever greater reliance on "specially funded programs." Will this mean more "Reaching Out" or "Lift High the Cross" undertakings, and stronger appeals for special gifts? Is this wise?

No doubt the pastors of our synod have been faced with questions relating to how far we can go with mission expansion plans in comparison with the giving potential of our people. It's the local pastor, finally, upon whom much of the responsibility seems to lie. That ogre called "money" enters into the picture, whether we like it or not. The latest Financial Report of WELS Twelve Districts (NL, Jan. 95, p 29) indicates that the congregations of this district are having problems meeting their goals for SMO. Is this because we here are suffering economically more than in other parts of the country?

As a pastor agonizes in his study over the news that his church roof has sprung another leak, or that last Sunday's offering has again fallen below the budgetary requirement, he may be faced with a multitude of questions, yes, even troublesome doubts when confronted with needs which lie beyond those right at home. Are we as a synod, perhaps, spreading ourselves too thin? Is our presence in Cuba or in Thailand really all that important? Aren't we becoming somewhat overenthusiastic about those "new opportunities" in Eastern Europe and Russia? Shouldn't we perhaps be concentrating more on places like Central Africa, where we've been enjoying more outward success?

Why keep on plugging away in places like Japan, where the work is becoming so expensive and the prospects for growth are seemingly small?

Let's take this a step further. How can we possibly keep up with our Christian day schools, Lutheran high schools, expensive worker training establishments, and at the same time carry on with this worldwide mission expansion? Doesn't our forte as a church seem to lie more in the field of education rather than mission expansion?

One could go on and on with queries of this kind, but to me it finally comes down to the basic question as to whether or not we have a real identity as a church in world mission work. And if we do, how far does that extend? What principles should guide us in promoting this identity? "To be, or not to be?" to borrow from Hamlet's soliloquy.

Actually I much prefer the German word "*Existenzberechtigung*." Is there, in other words, a real justification for our presence in Lusaka, or Tsuchiura, or Porto Allegre? Should we be continually concerned about extending this presence further on a worldwide basis, to places like Sofia, Bulgaria, or Novosibirsk, Siberia, or the Hopi Indians?

I feel that it's important to struggle with questions of this kind as we in our synod face another century of world mission activity. We've come a long way in the previous century. This way was historically reviewed in *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People*, as we celebrated our world mission centennial in 1993. We've established certain mission principles and policies and tested them over a period of one hundred years. We've done this in a world which has confronted us with new opportunities and changing conditions. We've not done this in a vacuum, but have been surrounded by all sorts of mission theories and movements and policies coming from others engaged in the same effort. What has been our basis? What has been our course of action? Wherein lies our future?

In struggling with questions of this kind I realize that I do this primarily out of a background of work in Central Africa. Whether or not my conclusions will always be in agreement with those of others who have been active in other parts of the world may be open to question. I would like to think, however, that many of my thoughts and experiences will apply quite generally as we review:

## **THE WELS IDENTITY AS A WORLD MISSION CHURCH**

### **I. Our basis II. Our course of action III. Our future**

#### **I.**

The basis for our identity, I believe, lies primarily upon three components which have characterized our entire work as a Lutheran Church, and which give us a unique quality as a church, no matter where we are or what we are engaged in. We are uniquely EVANGELICAL, uniquely CONFSSIONAL, and uniquely SCRIPTURAL.

\*\*\*

What do I mean by "uniquely EVANGELICAL"?

I simply mean that we base our entire work upon the proper use of the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacraments. In the use of these we are unique, set apart from the growing liberalism and anti-conservatism of the world of today. I'm not going to go into a lot of explanation here at a pastoral conference in order to substantiate that opinion.

We in the WELS together with our sister churches have a unique identity in our attitude toward Scripture. This includes our emphasis upon the total depravity of a humanity lost in sin, in our use of the means of grace as mankind's only hope, in our total reliance upon these precious gifts of the Holy Spirit to do what our Lord has commanded us to do. This involves the proper use of law and gospel. This establishes our identity, our foundation, gives us our *Existenzberechtigung*, sets us apart as a church in the world today. This has given us a reason for being in Lusaka, Zambia, as well as in Watertown, Wisconsin.

I sometimes wonder if we're as fully aware of this as we should be. Let's not be so naive as to think that we as a church exist out there somewhere all alone in our world mission activity. There may be a few isolated pockets here and there where we can touch people with the saving gospel message of Christ for the first time. For the most part, however, we are as fully surrounded by other denominations and sects of every possible stripe in Lusaka as right here in America.

In fact, in many world areas where we are working WELS Lutheranism has arrived rather late in the day. In addition to all the sects which have originated in America, Africa has developed its own versions of sectarianism, combining forms of traditional witchcraft and spiritism with Christian terminology. This "Independent Church Movement" has developed into literally thousands of splinter groups proliferating under their own charismatic leaders. One African location in which we are working, namely Matero outside of Lusaka, has at least 80 of these independent sects. According to David Barrett's statistics in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* the "African independent churches" (AICs) include 50 million adherents, or 16 percent of the continent's population.

Many of the mainline church bodies which came into Central Africa nearly a century ago from Europe have been greatly influenced in their biblical studies by the theories of historical criticism. This cancer hasn't been confined to the sophisticated universities of Europe. It has penetrated the theological studies of the seminary of the Lutheran church in Tanzania, the largest Lutheran church body on the continent. In a pre-Easter panel discussion on a Lusaka radio station, three out of the four participating pastors of the local Christian Council waffled miserably when asked whether or not Jesus actually arose physically from the grave.

We add to this the fact that the practical work of these mainline churches in Central Africa has been greatly influenced by social-gospel projects, often to the extent that they occupy most of their attention. The African people have been given the impression that the chief purpose of the church is to establish educational and agricultural projects. The Lutheran World Federation has practically limited its work in Zambia and Malawi to relief projects and refugee camps.

Interdenominational mission agencies, very popular in Central Africa, have been primarily engaged in what they call "discipling," but have done very little "perfecting." I once asked some members of the Christian Mission in Many Lands (CMML), the oldest and most prominent mission agency in Zambia's Northwest Province, a few basic questions pertaining to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Their answers were vague, revealing an appalling ignorance of the true way to salvation.

Those who seem to be the most interested in "outreach-evangelism" are the charismatic and apostolic churches, introduced more recently from America. They are constantly organizing huge rallies and healing crusades. They outdo anything that a Jimmy Swaggart or an Oral Roberts could have devised. Their numerical growth has been nothing short of phenomenal.

So there we are, speaking with all the authority of Scripture, and working with all the saving power of the sacraments. After forty years of work we are still very much needed. We are EVANGELICAL in the true sense of the word. If the precious gospel in Word and sacraments won't do it, nothing else will. We have what it takes. We say this not boastfully, but in full realization that this is a special trust from the Lord.

What we have, in other words, in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, is essentially the same as what we have in Lusaka, Zambia, or Lilongwe, Malawi. It gives us our identity, our "*Existenzberechtigung*."

\*\*\*

Secondly, what do I mean by "uniquely CONFSSIONAL"?

I referred previously to the many religious sects working feverishly in an African location outside of Lusaka. They all profess to be "Christian," but give a peculiar twist to biblical terminology. It's interesting to note how their doctrinal aberrations correspond closely to the religious quackeries which we learned about in our study of the Lutheran Confessions. We referred to them there as the false dogmas of the Arians, Nestorians, Manichaeans, Pelagians, Anabaptists, and Sacramentarians. We saw them perpetuated later by the followers of Zwingli and Calvin. The roots of these heresies have brought forth abundant fruits in places like Matero, Zambia, as well as Dourados, Brazil. Satan has simply placed new labels on old heresies, and "there is nothing new under the sun."

This was of special interest to our students at the Lutheran Seminary in Lusaka. They discovered that Lutheranism was no "American innovation." They were happy to learn that we in Central Africa, like the Lutherans of the 16th century, were continuing "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the

saints" (Jude 3). In fact, eventually my most enjoyable class at our Lutheran Seminary in Zambia was teaching Confessional Lutheran Theology, beginning with the Ecumenical Creeds and continuing on through the entire Book of Concord. Our study of the *Epitome of the Formula of Concord* was alive with questions coming from the students. I'm sure it was historically and confessionally reassuring to them to realize that we were not just another one of those sects mushrooming up all over the country.

Most missionary agencies in the world today maintain that these confessional writings are "antiquated documents coming out of another historical era," and that we "should not impose upon national churches complicated doctrinal formulations coming out of a different cultural context." We should "let these churches start afresh and formulate whatever confessional statements might arise according to their own peculiar needs."

I look upon this as an insult to African sensibilities. Why deprive these people of a history which goes back to the earliest times of the Christian Church, and of a heritage which clearly teaches what it means to be "Christian" and "Lutheran"? Why imply that the nationals are so "culturally different," perhaps even "intellectually inferior," that they should not concern themselves with the history of a body of believers that the Lord has sustained throughout the ages? It was reassuring to me to learn that the Bleckmar Mission of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa had translated the entire *Book of Concord* into the Zulu language!

Our mission assignment as a synod is to sow the seeds of a Lutheran Church which can stand by our side regardless of where it may be found in this world. We are not asking too much of our African ministerial candidates to subscribe without reservation at their ordination to the Lutheran Confessions of the Book of Concord. We are happy that in April of 1993 there were delegates present from the Lutheran Church of Central Africa when the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference convened for the first time in Germany.

Germany's *Bekennnisfront* leader, Herman Sasse, once declared that the entire scope of Lutheran missiology rests upon faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions. How right he was! We as a church are "uniquely CONFSSIONAL." This gives us our identity both here as a WELS in America as well as an LCCA in Africa. That is an important part of our world mission activity.

\*\*\*

What do I mean, finally, by "uniquely SCRIPTURAL"?

I believe that our presence is of importance in Central Africa because of the way in which we make use of Scripture and have become associated with Scripture.

Here in America we in our synod place a high priority on the study of Scripture on the basis of its originally inspired languages. We emphasize the use of Greek and Hebrew texts in our exegetical studies. We continue to do this because biblical integrity and clarity rate high among us. We hold fast to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, convinced that in the Word of God lies his almighty power and his inscrutable wisdom. Our faithful use of this word influences our entire way of preaching and teaching.

When we began our formal worker training program in Central Africa in 1964 with the establishment of a Bible institute, we debated as to whether or not we should attempt a study of Greek and Hebrew in our educational program. The first language of our students was of Bantu origin. Since many of them came from different language areas, we had to use English, their second language, as a common medium of expression. This created some difficulties, and so we concentrated more on the use of English to begin with.

But as the program developed and a seminary was added to the Bible school, we decided to give at least a preliminary study of Greek and Hebrew a try. We soon found that it's a sad mistake to underestimate the Africans' intellectual and linguistic abilities. In many ways they took to a study of these languages with a greater interest than we find among many of our students here in America. It was interesting for me to hear recently that a revamping of our Bible institute curriculum now includes the introduction of Greek, with three full years of the study of Hebrew in the seminary curriculum.

This doesn't mean to say that we're going to make Greek and Hebrew experts out of all of them. In Africa, as in America, one has to play the percentages. All graduates, however, will be able to make better use

of critical commentaries and other reference tools. We do have an added incentive in our linguistic program in that we have become the hub of Bible translation work in all of Central Africa.

The original translations of the Bible into Bantu languages came from the country's first missionaries many years ago, who worked as best they could with limited knowledge and resources. As these are now being translated anew and revised, the LCCA has taken the lead in Scripture translation. The LUSAKA TRANSLATION CENTRE is based on the campus of our Lutheran seminary. Pastor Salimo Hachibamba, one of our seminary graduates, is the Manuscript Coordinator. Dr. E. R Wendland is the Translation Consultant.

A new translation of the full Bible into Chewa will be completed sometime this year. Chewa is the major language of Central Africa. The same progress has been made in the Tonga Bible, the leading language of southern Zambia. This has been referred to as "the Hachibamba Bible," since he was the coordinator and stylist of this project. Translation teams are working in Bemba, Lala, Lenje, Luvale, Lungu, Mbunda, and Tumbuka. Students at our seminary who speak these languages are serving as "reviewers" of all draft manuscripts. What a blessing both for us as well as for the church at large!

This emphasis upon scriptural integrity has characterized our work in Central Africa. It has definitely stamped us as the "Bible Church."

\*\*\*

I don't want this report to sound as though we in Central Africa have somehow managed to attain a sort of utopian dream. We've made our share of mistakes, and there have been times when we've wavered. It's been a long battle over a period of more than 40 years, and we still have a long way to go. God has remained faithful to us in spite of our weaknesses. His blessing has done it all. All I'm trying to say is that the longer we are there, the more compelling the urgency of our being there.

What is worthy of repeated emphasis is that our goals, principles, and policies have been the same in Central Africa as they have been in America. They apply in Blantyre, Malawi, as they do in Omaha, Nebraska. We are a unique church body among churches in the world today. We have a *raison d'etre*, whether here or abroad. We are EVANGELICAL, CONFSSIONAL, and SCRIPTURAL.

That's why we're here as a church in America. That's also what our world mission work is all about.

## II.

Our goals, principles, and policies have been formulated and maintained during a century when we have been surrounded by a variety of world mission emphases. We have no doubt been influenced by some of them. But we have basically held to our own course and maintained our identity throughout this century of mission development. The mission movements which during this century have had their greatest worldwide impact have been those influenced by the principles of INDIGENEITY, CONTEXTUALIZATION, THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION, and CHURCH GROWTH. We shall review each of these briefly.

\*\*\*

I'm sure we've all heard more than once about the INDIGENOUS CHURCH PRINCIPLE. This was introduced by mission strategists in the nineteenth century, primarily Henry Venn of England (1796-1873) and Rufus Anderson of America (1796-1880), and implemented first by John Nevius in Korea (1829-1893). These men saw how the big mission establishments planted for the natives on foreign soil were not raising up a church which could stand independently. They emphasized the three principles of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation, and that these should be insisted upon from the very beginning. This policy soon became the leading "shibboleth" of mission organizations throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

We in our synod have not been unaware of this movement. Under the guidance of Pastor Edgar Hoenecke our Board for World Missions studied it carefully. When our synod adopted its "underlying princi-

ples and policies" for guiding our world mission activity in 1965, it resolved among its objectives "to plant indigenous churches rather than long-dependent missions." Following a paper presented by Pastor Richard Lauersdorf to the third World Mission Conference in 1979, we added a fourth "self to the previous three, namely "self-disciplining." This is in line with our synod's own emphasis on preserving purity of doctrine and practice if we wish to maintain our identity as a church body.

We've tried to follow the principles of indigeneity on the whole, remembering at the same time that these are general principles and not legalistic rules. Many questions pertaining to indigeneity, of course, remain. Just how rigid must one be in the implementation of the three or four selfs? How soon should a national church be expected to support itself entirely? When is one too paternalistic? When legalistic? To what extent should the subsidy of national workers play into the picture? How long must we continue to support worker training and publications programs in a world mission field? When, if ever, should we place a "cap" on sending missionaries? Discussions on questions such as these can go on and on.

As with other adiaphora there have been extremists on either side. On the one hand I've seen some men argue that all subsidy to national workers is wrong, that a "tentmaker ministry" is the only way to go. The same protagonists have maintained that all building of churches must be done strictly on a "loan basis," etc., etc. On the other side of the fence it has been argued just as vehemently that in order to produce men who can stand on their feet theologically we have to continue their support for a time, at least, so that they can be thoroughly trained. It has also been pointed out that in order to remain in competition with other churches, especially in urban areas, we should help with building projects without demanding the full repayment of every dollar.

In general, however, when the dust has all settled, I think that our synod has used sound judgment in pursuing a safe course between the Scylla and Charybdis of extremisms relating to this policy. I attribute much of this to the maturity of the men who have guided our synod's work on its boards and committees. The economic areas in which we are working certainly differ. Central Africa is not Japan. The implementation of certain principles must be carried out evangelically, not legalistically. It's good that we still have men on these boards who sit on separate executive committees and also represent the "grass roots" of our congregations.

Personally I sometimes wonder if we should ever want to congratulate ourselves that we no longer find it necessary to be helping national churches with their needs. Someone once said that the goal of a missionary is to work himself out of a job, so that he can go elsewhere. I seriously question this aphorism. Working interdependently with world fields is a blessing in itself. We often receive more than we give. This may be spiritual as well as physical. Those who have given the most have been the missionary veterans who have devoted the best part of their lives to the field in which they are working and would perhaps feel out of place most anywhere else. The churches in the apostolic age didn't hesitate to share men and means with congregations in other areas wherever help was needed. Why not continue to work together instead of separately?

Our chief business is to cooperate evangelically, confessionally, and scripturally. Policies may be helpful, but are secondary in importance, and often subject to prevailing economic and cultural conditions.

\*\*\*

In the 1970s another movement came upon the world mission scene which caused quite a stir. It's called CONTEXTUALIZATION.

Despite its abundant literature I've never been able to run across a precise definition for this word. Its leading theorizers seem to hate being pinned down by definitions, so I've tried to formulate my own as follows: "Contextualization is the mission principle which emphasizes that the message of the Word of God should be related to the culture of the society to which it is proclaimed." Perhaps my definition is an oversimplification, but for us to go into all the ramifications of various theorists here would take us too far afield.

Apparently it became too disturbing to some mission experts around the 1950s that the term "indigenous" doesn't sufficiently stress the importance of a church expressing itself in its own culture. Contextualists argue this way: "The very word 'indigenous' presupposes that a mission church has been 'planted' by a parent organization. Anything 'planted' is in danger of having a paternalistic flavor and comes

out of a colonialistic era. Cultural overtones reflecting such a background must be avoided. In no way should Christ still be looked upon as anyone 'foreign.' The gospel in context brings Christ as both Savior **and** 'Brother.'"

This involves the entire cultural development of a mission church, they claim. A national church can be ever so self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, yet if it remains a carbon-copy of some Western church, it hasn't attained its own freedom of self-expression. This applies to ways of worship, modes of government, and anything else reflecting its own peculiar customs and traditions. It involves the whole field of anthropology.

Those of our synod working in cross-cultural areas in this country will have some idea of what's involved here. How does a Lutheranism which has developed chiefly out of a Germanic background relate to African-American, Hmong, or Hispanic communities? How can these people feel "at home" in our churches? Imagine how this problem can be intensified when introducing a Lutheran church into a foreign country!

There is wisdom and logic connected with this concern about contextualization. But there are always extremists, and, as mentioned before, these extremists of the contextual school are the ones who have discarded all creedal formulations and confessional statements "arising out of Western theology." "Africans and Asians need to start afresh," they state, "rather than tagging along at the tailend of the long history of Western embroidery" (Charles R. Taber, *Gospel in Context*, p 10). Scripture is interpreted "in the light of cultural experience." Bible stories are allegorized to make them "culturally palatable and understandable."

It can hardly be said that such extremes have been a problem in our own circles. At the same time we need to be aware that a "cultural gap" exists and to make every possible effort to accommodate to cross-cultural needs wherever possible. Our Board for World Missions' statement of principles emphasizes that our missionaries are to be "thoroughly trained in the language and culture of the people whom they are to serve" (*Proceedings*, WELS 38th Convention, 1965, p 244). I am truly amazed when I hear some of our missionaries carrying on fluently in Chewa or Tonga as though they've lived in Africa all their lives.

Our church services have been accommodated to the African scene in a wonderful way, especially in the musical adaptations of the liturgy. A real effort has been made to make use of the Africans' abilities to express themselves in song. I hope you have taken the opportunity to read Pastor Paul Soukup's description of an African church service which he experienced on his recent visit to Malawi (*This and That in WELS: "Mission Work Works,"* Office of Communication and Financial Support, January 24, 1995). Many others have told me they can attend one of our church services in Africa, follow its various parts without understanding a word, yet find the experience to be "pure joy." Our church fathers expressed it well when they said, "Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike" (*Augsburg Confession*, Article VII).

We've had our questions at times as to how to handle matters pertaining to church government. Should we follow constitutional procedures similar to those in America? Should *Robert's Rules of Order* be used when conducting synodical meetings? Practically all African countries have adapted their governmental procedures to forms which have arisen in the Western world. We have gradually done the same with introducing methods of church government patterned after systems which came from other parts of the world. These were adopted and adapted, and after many years of patient effort our African brethren are finding their way in working through various boards and committees. Parliamentary rules of conducting meetings have been simplified. Fortunately the people haven't been taken in as yet by all the intricacies of "substitute motions" and "points of order."

Yes, we've been aware of the need for contextualization in our world mission activity, aware with a culturally sensitive Paul that the gospel message itself is a foolishness to the Greek and a stumbling block to the Jew. God's power and wisdom are in the message itself.

\*\*\*

Another movement which has had its effect on mission work both at home and abroad has been the CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT.

This was fathered by Donald McGavran several decades ago, nurtured by men like C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Theological Seminary, and has affected evangelically-minded church bodies to a greater or lesser degree ever since. Many mission strategists have taken favorably to McGavran's proposals, adapting his strategies to their own systems of multi-conversion methods. Others have reacted negatively to his ideas of "harvest theology," "people movements," "homogeneous units," "winnable souls," "measurable growth," and distinctions between "perfecting" and "discipling" the nations. His shoddy exegesis of the Great Commission has come in for special criticism.

Although our own synod has shown more interest in recent years in evangelism programs, it cannot be said that we've been taken in by the supersalesmanship of the Church Growth Movement, as well as by the many questionable emphases connected with it (revivals, decision theology, interdenominationalism, etc.). Attention has been called to the dangers of this movement in several articles in our *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Vol. 78, 1981, pp 104-120; Vol. 79, 1982, pp 174-176).

Some of my own negative feelings toward Church Growth may have been influenced by its questionable methods of propagandizing. Some years ago I was working close to the same area in Africa in which a Church Growth enthusiast was active. He claimed his methods could convert the entire Sala tribe in five years' time. He caused quite a stir with his boasts of success, but after a short stay returned to America to have his doctoral thesis published (*Profiles for Victory*, Max Randall, Wm. Carey Library, Pasadena, CA). This, I discovered, was cited as one of the glowing examples of Church Growth's success. Randall never returned to the field to carry out his theories. The Salas are still struggling; we're still working among them. Enough said!

Let it be emphasized, however, that while I'm by no means a disciple of Church Growth theology, I do feel strongly that we **should** be imbued with a positive attitude toward reaching out to the world with the gospel. **We should** be encouraged by the Lord's repeated promise of a harvest which is "plentiful" (Mt 9: 37), and "great" (Lk 10: 2), and "white" (Jn 4: 35). **We should** be busily concerned about reflecting Christ's light into a world of darkness "as long as it is day" (Jn 9: 4). **We should** make use of every gift that the Spirit gives us to gather his precious harvest in, whether that be one by one, or with bounteous results. Sometimes one gets sick and tired of being pejoratively placed into the Church Growth camp whenever a serious effort is made to promote an evangelism program. The Lord of the church wants us to reach out confidently to others, following his command, and trusting in his promise.

This means using energetically and wisely the precious means of grace which he has entrusted into our hands, not worried about spectacular results, but in full assurance that he will bestow his blessing on whatever is done in his name. His word will not return to him empty.

\*\*\*

The final significant movement in world mission circles within recent years has been THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION (TEE).

This began in Guatemala with James Emery and Ralph Winter about twenty-five years ago. These men devised a plan for training national leaders on an extension basis. Lessons were worked out for home study so that the student could prepare on a self-help basis, meeting periodically with his instructor for consultation. The objectives of the program were to train more mature men who were already committed to serving the Lord, men who could "learn by doing," who would not be uprooted from their cultural environment, and who could be expected to serve the church without subsidy. The claim was that expensive in-residence training could be dispensed with, and that the program was even superior to anything which could be achieved in a residence program.

It all sounded good. Winter claimed it to be "a new way of developing leadership that may literally save the church." One supporter called it "the most exciting thing to hit the mission scene since the indigenous church policy."

Although for a time a veritable wave of TEE programs flooded missions in various parts of the world, the original excitement and enthusiasm has cooled off considerably. Like everything else, this program was

found to have had its faults and limitations. Problems arose with the preparation of adequate materials to meet the need. It was also found that some kind of institutionalized work would be needed anyhow to keep the program moving. In the end, to expect that an in-depth theological training could be accomplished without a "teacher-classroom situation" somewhere along the line was found to be impractical. At best it was found usable chiefly in places where resident missionaries were not always available, but where church leaders still could be given some kind of preliminary training on a sort of correspondence-school basis.

To what extent TEE is being used in other mission fields of our synod I'm not in a position to say. In Central Africa we've adapted it in order to keep in touch with local congregational leaders on an extension basis, also finding it useful in the testing of ministerial prospects before recommending them for further institutional training. That it will never succeed in eliminating the need for a more intensive kind of residence training is quite clear. If our worker training goal is to train pastors who can work independently and stand on their own feet theologically, we're going to have to rely on the more in-depth kind of study that a residence program offers. There are simply no two ways about it.

\*\*\*

This pretty well exhausts the major movements which have surrounded us during our first century of world mission activity. I hope we haven't become too esoteric in this presentation so as to lose some of you in the process. I think we have to know something about what's going on round about us to know what can and what cannot be done, what to adapt, and what to avoid. New programs haven't prevented us from holding to a course necessary to maintain our identity as an evangelical, confessional, and scriptural church wherever we might be.

### III.

This brings us, finally, to a look at the future. As we do so, our past experiences offer both words of caution, as well as encouragement.

First, the words of caution. If there's anything I've learned about world mission work from my own experience and from the experience of others, it's that there are no shortcuts. This applies to us particularly if we want to retain our identity as an evangelical, confessional, and scriptural church body.

There's no "quick fix" in the word "**indigenous**:" I once heard a presentation on the floor of one of our synod conventions which strongly suggested that after our initial expenditures in Africa we could look forward to diminishing budgetary needs. After all, we could train the "natives" to do their own thing and then we could gradually pull out of the picture. It just hasn't worked out that way. Establishing a worker training program and publishing doctrinally sound materials in the language in which we are going to be doing our work is going to take more time and money than we often realize.

When all is said and done, let's not forget that we have more at stake than wanting to "plant an indigenous church on foreign soil," as most other church bodies look at this. We should want our mission offspring to be truly evangelical, confessional, and scriptural. That's something that doesn't happen overnight, or even in a few short years. It takes time, patience, love, working in partnership, finally by God's grace arriving at that spirit of true fellowship which Scripture encourages. We build on this for as much time as the Lord grants us. In whatever time-span this may be, we dare never lose sight of these goals.

There's no saving of time and effort on our part when we think of "**contextualization**." The very opposite is true. In fact, it wouldn't be a bad idea if missionaries could spend **more** time learning the language and the culture of the people before beginning their work in a foreign field. Charles Lavigerie, Roman Catholic pioneer of the White Fathers in Central Africa, insisted that missionaries sent to that area must spend at least five years just living and learning before doing any kind of preaching and teaching. His strict rules were followed by his order, and with good results.

The men who have borne the brunt of our work among the Apaches and overseas are those who have been there a quarter century or more, who have reached the point where they have become more at home in East Fork or Blantyre than in Milwaukee. They speak as one. They confess as one. They deal with Scripture as one. They are the men who really begin to appreciate what a joy it is to work together with an African or a Native American as spiritual "brother." Again we are looking at goals. But without goals we are in a vacuum.

We've already said enough about "**Church Growth**," perhaps too much. If we're only working overseas for mass conversions, accomplished as "quickly" and "efficiently" as possible, we can let the Church Growth enthusiasts do it. They're much better at bringing in the numbers than we are.

The uses of "**Theological Education by Extension**" are limited when thinking of the kind of worker training program which fits our needs. Let's use this educational method in whatever way we can, but not think of it in terms of quick, inexpensive long-range results. A solid worker training program may take more time than we would like to see before realizing our goals, but may we never lose sight of those ideals which characterize our identity as a church. God has graciously given us these to share with others. Not to do so would be trying to make mission churches something less than what we ourselves are.

But where does that place us as we look to the future? If there are no shortcut methods to be found, either in time required or in money expended, how can we hope to carry out any expansion plans? Haven't we reached the very limit of what we can possibly hope to carry out successfully?

I'm sure that the men on our Board for World Missions are aware of these problems. They are wrestling with them constantly. They know how much time it takes to get a new mission field to get properly situated by sending capable men, getting them established in a new environment and trained for specialized work, preparing doctrinally sound materials in the languages needed, setting up programs for the worker-training of nationals, and seeing them gradually take hold and work together with missionaries in establishing a national church body. It's taken forty years in Central Africa to make our presence felt to the point where we can reach out further with nationals to new areas and other countries.

But is this to be looked upon negatively? Is the fact that in Zambia and Malawi we can expand more intensively into other parts of these countries, as well as from there into Mozambique and Zaire and Angola, something depressing? Should we put a "cap" on our Central African activities because the Lord has blessed us there so abundantly and with so many added opportunities?

At the same time there are all these opportunities developing in places which at one time seemed closed to us. Who ever thought that we could be in Sofia, Bulgaria, and Novosibirsk, Siberia, with teams of missionaries and promising opportunities. India is showing signs of new life, and Thailand looks like a possibility. Although the People's Republic of China will be taking over in Hong Kong in a few years, will the work there which has been progressing so well come to an end? Is this "bad news," or "good news"?

When one realizes how much work still lies before us, it must be frustrating to sit on boards and committees of the Board for World Missions and wonder at times where the money will be coming from to take care of all this. Yet amazingly, special funds seem to have come forward to embark on new ventures. Whether or not it's always the best stewardship to work with designated gifts rather than with regular budgetary offerings is a valid question. It must be giving sleepless nights to those charged with the responsibility of this work. But if the opportunity is there as well as the need, should we refuse to go ahead?

If anyone expected any ready answers or quick solutions to be coming out of this paper, he will be disappointed. When I raised all those questions in the early part of this paper, questions which face the pastor who sits in his study and wonders where all the money is coming from to take care of all of our needs, I hope somebody didn't expect that I would pull out a magic wand somewhere toward the end of this presentation.

I don't really know what to suggest other than to continue to look less to ourselves and more to God for the answers. How often have we taken this matter to him in prayer? He has entrusted his precious means of grace into our hands. He has commissioned us to share these gifts with all creation. He has assured us that his presence and strength lie behind all that we do in his name.

As I sit in my own office and look for strength to overcome misgivings concerning going forward with our synod's world mission program, I like to turn to Scripture.

I like to think of Moses at the Red Sea, telling a complaining Israel, "Do not be afraid....stand firm...the LORD will fight for you....Tell the Israelites to move on" (Ex 14:13-15). I like to think of this same Moses at Kibroth Hataavah, telling the same Israelites complaining about food, "Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you" (Nu 11:2-3).

I like to think of Joshua, saying farewell to a people ready to occupy a new land, yet still surrounded by warlike nations, "One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the LORD your God" (Jos 23:10,11).

It's always so encouraging in these passages to note the reference to "the LORD" (capital letters). As Prof. Carl Lawrenz would always emphasize, "This is the God of free and faithful grace!"

I like to think of that little band standing before Jesus on Galilee's mountain, commissioned to go into all the world and to preach the good news to all creation (cf. Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15). As Pastor Raymond Zimmermann, chairman of the Board for World Missions, declared when speaking to our synod on this passage at its 1970 convention: "The world is so very large. There are so many—so tremendously many—people in this world. How can a comparatively small church body such as ours make even a dent in this challenge? Rather than to let ourselves be awed into a complacent kind of inactivity by the immensity of our task, let us follow the example of the apostles, who had an even greater task, and go to work!"

Did Paul think he was "flooding the market," "overextending," when he kept going from place to place? "Therefore," he declared, "since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart....But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor 4:1 and 7).

We surely remember "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" to the church in Philadelphia: "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know you have a little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name" (Re 3:8).

Do we sometimes react like Moses, perhaps, when people don't always respond as we think they should, discouraged at times to the point of exasperation? Remember Moses standing before a new generation of Israelites at Meribah, striking the rock in anger instead of speaking to it as the LORD had commanded (Nu 20:7-13)?

Remember Elijah, after that stunning victory on Mount Carmel, running away from the threats of a Jezebel, moping in the cave at Horeb, the mountain of God. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" the LORD asked. Revealing himself not in the wind, not in an earthquake, not in the fire, but in a "gentle whisper," the LORD assured Elijah that he had reserved seven thousand in Israel whose knees had not bowed down to Baal, and simply told his prophet to go ahead and get busy.

Yes, there was also a Jonah, who became displeased when God did not carry out his threat to destroy Nineveh. This was a Jonah who then also became angry and fretted when God caused that protective vine to wither away. "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" God asked Jonah. "But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people," God continued. "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (cf. Jonah 4). I like to recall Thomas Carlisle's words in this connection: "God is still waiting for a host of Jonahs in their comfortable houses to come around to his way of loving!" Yes, "One greater than Jonah is here," Jesus later said to his disciples as he came to seek and to save that which was lost (Lk 11:32).

Maybe God needs to shake us up at times, reminding us sternly that we need to be more busy about his business, reminding us who we are and who he is, and that the answer lies more with him than it does with us. How beautifully he has demonstrated that to us through the years! Our Apache mission didn't get off to a promising start. Two inexperienced young men were sent off with critics calling the idea "dogmatism, with a streak of pietism." Yet 100 years later we still marvel over all the blessings the Lord has granted this mission in Arizona. William Schweppe, a young unmarried pastor of our synod in Osceola, Wisconsin, accepted a call to the Synodical Conference mission in Nigeria after many older, more experienced men had refused. He served as the head of a mission undertaking which grew to over 33,000 souls under his leadership. Edgar Hoenecke and Arthur Wacker, driving in a Dodge Power Wagon for 4,000 miles through trails and deserts and forests, searched for a mission field. Synodical leadership at the time seriously questioned the advisability of that trip.

Yet they came to Lusaka, where they could sit under a baobab tree and dream about a rich harvest of souls, a harvest which God also granted. A WELS synod convention in 1971 unanimously passed a resolution to begin work in South America with no funds in the treasury to do the job! The Lord provided the funds through a generous donor. Again and again those words come true, "The LORD will fight for you!"

When I think of what's happened in Africa, I can always thank God that he has been there to answer our needs whenever they arose. They say that miracles never cease. This is true. There is no way that we could have been humanly responsible for what has happened there, developing from a few struggling congregations into a church body of nearly 30,000 souls. This is still his work, done at his command, and carried out according to his blessing. How often haven't we been made aware of that!

The challenge to enter new fields has invariably been accompanied with its share of problems, questions, yes, even detractors. But I'm convinced that we do have a place, an identity, in Sofia and in Novosibirsk and in Nayadupeta. I'm convinced of this especially when I read Scripture. When I recall what God has done for others in times past as well as for us in present times, I believe that he will continue to do the same through us in future. As Paul said to Timothy, "He cannot disown himself (2 Tim 2:13). At the same time let's also add the words of father Polonius to son Laertes, "This above all: to thine own self be true." To compromise our identity is tantamount to losing it all.

Someone once said, "The Bible in its totality ascribes only one intention to God: to save mankind." I believe, therefore, that a church without a mission is dead. I know that the Lord has uniquely equipped us to carry out his worldwide mission assignment.

May we continue to look to our gracious Lord for strength and find that strength by clinging to the promises of his Word. May he help us to see clearly that unique and wonderful mission which he has placed before us.