

# Lutheran Missionaries Today

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## Introduction

In Christian perspective every generation of people and every people group in each particular time or era has a **FORMATION**. That **FORMATION** (sociological situation) is a mixture of Scriptural reality and worldly reality placed in the context of a particular cultural skin that reinforces both the Scriptural reality and the opposing or at times overlapping but not totally congruent worldly reality.

That, however, is only half the picture or rather, we could say, a passive, snapshot-like view of total reality. The moving picture view adds the every present third dimension of ongoing change to which **FORMATION** is always subject. This total view of reality includes ever changing language labels and usage with the associated underlying reshaping of individual concepts and concepts in pattern. It also includes our ever changing life ways and their associated meaning in the overall pattern of a given society. These changes are what, over time, creates subcultures and finally entirely separate cultures. It also creates the rise and the decline and destruction of countries and empires.

Into this turbulent and ever moving **FORMATION** comes **DE-FORMATION** and **RE-FORMATION**. **DE-FORMATION** like in the breakdown and repair of an automobile is the process of taking something apart, of dismantling an existing situation so that it can be **RE-FORMED**, that is, put together in a new way with new parts. Ideally this repair will bring about a more perfect function or result, a getting back to the original **FORMATION** of how God intended and intends man to be.

In the midst of this mix of **FORMATION**, **DE-FORMATION**, and **RE-FORMATION**, God continues to be very active. He is the Creator God. He is the communicating God. He is the just, loving, compassionate, redeeming, seeking and saving God. He created not only the very special communication system that humans enjoy in relation to God but also, at least, the substructure in the human being that makes patterned existence and sociocultural context mandatory as part of what it is to be created in the image of God<sup>1</sup>

Our God is not far away but near. He is very much involved in the daily on-going processes of **FORMATION**, **DE-FORMATION**, and **RE-FORMATION**. It is His good pleasure that in the midst of these processes His Spirit be given free reign to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify on the basis of the **HEARD WORD**. The desired results from God's perspective is that the humans that He so loves be "not conformed to this world" and its realities but that they be **RE-FORMED** by the renewing of their minds.<sup>2</sup> Yes, **RE-FORMED** and thereby led to **RE-ACT** by pouring out their lives as a living sacrifice in missionary worship service, and witness like Dr. Martin Luther so Scripturally and naturally did.

The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the **DE-FORMATIONS** in our own time that stand in the way of **HEARING THE GOOD NEWS**. It is our hope that such knowledge will lead to enlightened Christian witness on your and my part. Witness which in turn will be useful to the Spirit of God in ushering in the kind of **RE-FORMATION** (repair and correction of an

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:18-25 and Genesis 1:26-28

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:2

existing structural fault) that by God's powerful grace will lead to a spiritual a renewed mind and heart and quite naturally to personal witness, outreach, and missions on the part of new and reclaimed members of the body of Christ.

My approach will be to take you to West Africa to relate how worldly DE-FORMATIONS which are outside of Scriptural reality pose large barriers to hearing our Good News witness with understanding. On the basis of these unbelievable but easy to understand examples, I would like to come back to the very believable but possibly more difficult to accept and understand examples of communication barriers from our own life here in North America. Barriers which I believe, at least or some, pose equally large obstacles to hearing the Good News witness with understanding.

In both cases we must understand that it is the HEARD WITH UNDERSTANDING WORD of God through which the Spirit of God works faith in people's hearts.<sup>3</sup> It is our duty not to proclaim in Russian to English speakers or to take monotheism for granted when attempting Gospel communication with polytheists. Rather it is our duty to identify the barriers that keep people from hearing with understanding and further to build the communication bridges which will make possible hearing for full understanding.

### **Traditional West African Formation<sup>4</sup>**

What does it mean to work for RE-FORMATION in Africa today? How does a Lutheran missionary help people hear the Gospel for full understanding in that situation?

In 1960 my wife and I started work among the Efik-speaking people in Nigeria. My first assignment was to be responsible for a district of 25 churches and 20 parochial schools. Each Sunday it was a different church with a full service including preaching through an interpreter, Lord's Supper, Baptism, confirmation and often weddings and burials. Imagine doing that after having been in a country for just four weeks. In addition to that you do not speak the language and you have to do everything through an interpreter.

I, for one, like to be able to understand what people are saying. Maybe I have always been a bit of a communicator and so that was one of the most frustrating things I have ever experienced - to work through the interpreter. Imagine what it meant to me on a day down in Ekeya when a man came to me and he spoke English. What a joy to speak the Gospel directly to that man in English. I asked him, "Can you read English?" He said, "Yes!" I knew that I had a New Testament in my car. I got it. I gave him the New Testament and said, "This is the power of God unto salvation! Use it!" The man took the New Testament and we left. It had been a long day already with six hours of service.

It was twenty-five Sundays later that I got back to Ekeya. The first thing that I could think of was "I wonder about that man to whom I gave that English New Testament." As I went through the service, I saw him sitting out there and I was very happy. When the service was over, I could not wait for him to shake my hand at the back of the church. I wanted to talk to him about the New Testament. As he approached me, I saw that he had the New Testament with him, and I said to him, "I see you have the New Testament; was it helpful to you?"

"Oh," he said, "It was very, very helpful. You told me it was the power of God unto salvation." Then I took the New Testament from him and I looked at it. Immediately I saw that

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 10:13-17

<sup>4</sup> Bunkowske and French, God's Communicators in Mission, Ft. Wayne, Great Commission Resource Library, 1988, pp. 72-76

the cover was gone, Matthew was gone, and even part of Mark was gone. I said, "You really have used your New Testament, haven't you?" He said, "Yes, just like you told me. You see, I am a trader. I travel almost every day in my work of buying and selling. Each time I get into a transport vehicle I prepare for a safe journey by tearing out one page from this New Testament and putting it down on the seat before I sit down on top of it. Truly, just as you said, I was perfectly protected at all times. This book is powerful and I am counting on you to provide me with another one when this one is used up."

What a shock to me! That is not what I had said! My eyes filled with tears because I realized that he had heard with different ears. That he had a different FORMATION, a different set of presuppositions, a different set of lenses through which he perceived everything that I had said and done. It was at that moment that I learned that the word: ANIMISM meant - the belief that spiritual power is real. But most especially that extraordinary spiritual power is always mediated by a physical object such as a tree, rock, river, mountain or a New Testament as a physical entity. Not the power of a living God who loves and promises and saves in Christ but a passive but powerful component of a physical page.

This experience taught me that not everyone sees reality in the same way that I do. Not everyone has the same FORMATION, or should I say DE-FORMATION, as I do. It helped me realize that people do not always perceive or understand what I intend for them to perceive and understand when I speak or act. They give different meaning to my words and actions than the meaning that I have so carefully hoped to associate with those words and actions.

Not long after that I was given a second chance. I was asked to go to Ogoja to build a hospital. I remember thinking, "This time I will do better!" I determined only to hire men who could speak "pigeon English" so that I could communicate the Good News to them without the help of an interpreter. Sorry, but that is the way I came to think of all interpreters. And communicate the Good News we did. It was the first thing on the agenda each morning for at least one hour. We faithfully did the Bible study each day and within about four months every single one of the workers had received Christ as His Savior. Bernice and I rejoiced in seeing them "saved."

After about a year, the first building at the hospital had been completed. At that time, we had run out of money so we had to close down the building operation. This meant that the men had to go home. As I thought about it, I felt for the men, but at the same time I saw it as a tremendous opportunity for them to witness to their families. In order to prepare for this, we spent the last several months before we closed down the building operation working through the book of Acts in order to teach these men about reaching out to others and witnessing.

After the workmen went home, I went down to Obot Idim, our mission headquarters, for sometime to attend meetings. About two weeks later I returned and immediately went to visit the men to see what God had done through their witness. In my typical American style, I was expecting "instant mashed potatoes." The first man that I visited was Odo. Odo and his family were very cordial. They invited me to sit down and enjoy food and fellowship. Odo was still unmarried and so he lived in his father's compound together with the rest of his extended family. When I had a chance to get up and look around I checked to see about the family shrine. It was my hope that it would have been dismantled and destroyed. To my chagrin, it was still there. I was disappointed. I wondered what Odo had said and done. Maybe he had neglected to witness. Instead of asking a lot of questions, I recognized that it had been a short time and that being dependent on his father he might not have been in a very good position to make his points of

witness stick. I went home with a heavy heart and the determination to see how some of the other men had done.

Next I decided to visit Odama, since I knew that he was a somewhat older man (about thirty) with more respect and on the verge of getting married. I recalled that he had been saving the money which he had earned at the medical center with the idea of putting it together with the money which his father would provide to pay the dowry for a wife. When I got to Odama's father's compound, I was informed that Odama no longer lived there but that he had married and had set up his own compound nearby. I immediately surmised that here would be the ideal situation since Odama could now set up his own separate life and obviously he and his new bride would be model Christians. With this in mind, we walked out of the father's compound toward Odama's newly built home. As I approached the house I could not believe my eyes. There right in front of the newly-built house was also a newly-built pagan shrine and altar. I thought, "How can this be?" I said, "Odama, what have you done? Why do you have that shrine in front of your house?"

Odama said, "Ada, I have no choice. If I do not build this shrine, my new wife will never have children and the yams that I plant will not grow. Christianity is all right at the medical center, on the land that the Yala gods released (after many sacrifices) to you for the white-man's god, but out here among the Yala people in Yala land there are different spiritual powers. If I don't put up a shrine for them and make the sacrifices that they require, I will die."

Again I was brought up short. With tears in my heart, if not in my eyes, I realized that the Yala people hear with different ears and see with different eyes. They have a different FORMATION which I cannot overlook or pretend does not exist. All at once I understood the point. I knew the words. I could give the right definitions at the seminary but here things were different. It hit me when Odama said, "We gave the land to you, that's where your God is. This is the land of our gods." All at once I understood POLYTHEISM. Many gods, each connected with a certain land area, each controlling his own space. How different it is here in North America with MONOTHEISM in place. This is true even of the atheists and the agnostics in North America. Although the atheist or the agnostic would reject the idea of a personal God or gods yet, if for the sake of discussion, you postulate the idea of God and ask, "How many gods are there?" The answer from the atheist would be "One!" His underlying basis for understanding reality is MONOTHEISTIC. For the traditional African, it is just the opposite. He has POLYTHEISM as a basic part of his FORMATION from his mother's breast. How then do we break through with clear Gospel communication when the basic presuppositions and assumptions about reality are so different?

But does a man ever get a third chance? I knew if it ever came I would have to move into a rented home which was in Yala land and not "set apart" by the surveyor's lines and pillars. It would have to be like Mount Carmel where the conditions would be equal and the Gospel communication would be done in a context where Odama and the rest of the Yala people would see that it could also work for them in their own land. Yes, a situation in which the context and conditions under which I and my family lived and worked were no different or at least as similar as possible to those of the people to whom we wished to communicate Christ.

God was good to us. The third chance came in 1967 as we moved into a Yala home on Yala land in Okpoma, the capital city of the one hundred thousand strong Yala people. Okpoma was the residence of Chief Ogipwole who was, at that time, the paramount chief of all the Yala people. Okpoma was a town of sacrifice. We soon learned that, from the point of view, every activity and action and especially sickness, death, planting, harvest, pregnancy, childbearing,

marriage, burial, etc. was connected with different spiritual powers, different gods. Each situation and god required sacrifice if there was to be peace, harmony, success, and progress. It soon became apparent that twenty-five per cent to forty per cent of people's meager wealth, about \$100 - \$150 per capita income a year, was spent on a multitude of fortune tellers, sacrifices, images, shrines, altars, charms, etc.

### **West African DE-FORMATION and RE-FORMATION<sup>5</sup>**

ANIMISM, POLYTHEISM, SACRIFICE: These three were key parts of a basic DE-FORMATION (structural faults) that stood in the way of communicating Christ for understanding. Identifying these barriers was important, but how would the Spirit of God break through? What kind of a witness approach would God use for His good and gracious purpose of carrying objective redemption through to personal salvation in West Africa? Who would be the first to hear with understanding and how would that happen?

Bernice and I had tried many approaches. We had spoken to many people in English. Finally, after a good number of additional difficult experiences and after the hospital was built, Bernice, our four children, and I found ourselves (as I just mentioned above) moving to Okpoma. This move was made because we had finally accepted that we needed somehow to communicate to the Yala in a way that they could understand. We now knew that to COMMUNICATE FOR HEARING it would have to be done from the inside of their own language and culture.

Okpoma was in central Yala. We moved into a rented house so as not to set ourselves aside on "white man's land." We recognized that the first step was to learn, to become insiders, by living with the people as they lived and by using language - their language - as they used it in their everyday life and work. We accepted that a major task was to reduce the Yala language to writing and to do Bible translation and literacy work in that language.

One of the first people that we met in Okpoma was Chief Oqipwole. He had been chief for forty-seven years. He was very kind to us and arranged for us to have a place to stay right in the center of the city among some of the most respected families. I immediately saw Chief Oqipwole as a key person from whom to learn about the inside of the Yala "way of life" and also as someone for whom I should pray on a daily basis. It was my prayer that God, in His own time and way, would help him hear the Good News with understanding, so that the Spirit of God would lead him to believe and call upon the Name of the Lord for salvation in Jesus Christ.

From the start the Chief and I became good friends. We spent time together and from the very beginning I tried my best to share my faith with him. It was frustrating because he never seemed to understand what I was talking about. He always seemed to be preoccupied with so many "more important" things.

Almost daily Chief Oqipwole would go to the court, which was approximately a mile from his palace. In order to reach the court, Chief Oqipwole would pass our house and we would share a friendly morning greeting with him. The people were always waiting for him as he approached the court. They knew that if they treated him well they would get the judgments that they wanted. This meant that often before the court session started he would be well-lubricated and easily prompted to make the desired judgments. After the court session was over the Chief would normally find his way home in a kind of erratic fashion. He normally stopped at our

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<sup>55</sup> Bunkowske and French. God's Communicators in Mission, Ft. Wayne, Great Commission Resource Library, 1988, pp. 67-72.

home. He would come in and say, "Note! (Greetings) Ada! (Respected One)." Then he would promptly sit down and fall sleep. After an hour or two, he would wake up and go home.

My wife and I had a disagreement about this situation. I remember Bernice saying, "Gene, you know, how can this be a good witness. The Chief comes everyday; he is drunk every time. What kind of a witness is this anyway?" So we had a little difference of opinion about Chief Ogipwole. I insisted that we should be hospitable to the Chief and Bernice yielded.

Time passed and one day the Chief came to me and said, "I was known as a very wise chief when I was young. Now it is different. I know that people are laughing at me behind my back. What should I do?" I thought for a moment and then said to him almost immediately, without really considering it, "Chief, you and I need to make a covenant with each other, a bargain that we will no longer drink any kaikai." Kaikai is the most alcoholic drink in Yala. You can use it for lighting a fire. Then I repeated, "I think we should make a bargain not to touch kaikai at all." The chief agreed and said, "I will try!" This single action changed things for Chief Ogipwole in a tremendous way. Now when he went to the court he was clear-minded. He had forty-plus years of experience behind him, and once again he gave correct and just judgments.

He continued to stop by each day. One day instead of sitting down where I was working with Ferdinand Oji on Bible translation, he went around and sat in our living room. My wife, Bernice did something that was normally never done. She went in and talked directly to the Chief before he had a chance to greet me or I had a chance to greet him. All at once, she burst into my study. She took the little brass cross off of my desk and the next thing Mr. Oji and I knew she was speaking to Chief Ogipwole and she was saying, "You know there is a God that made all the world and all the people in it. He took His own Son and He put Him on the crossed-stick (that's the word we use for the cross of Christ in Yala) and He sacrificed Him there so that we never, ever, will have to sacrifice again."<sup>6</sup>

About that time Ferdinand and I realized what was Bernice was doing. As she concluded her brief witness by saying, "The Son of God was put in the ground but after three days God raised Him back to life again," Ferdinand and I joined them in the sitting room. I read from the Scripture that Ferdinand and I had just been translating and we spoke more about the meaning of the Gospel. When we finished the chief said not a word. He just got up and went home. As far as I knew, nothing at all had chanced, and nothing had happened.

Life continued to proceed quite normally at Okpoma. Sometime later the chief took the unlikely step of appointing me as one of his counselors (a very responsible position among the Yala people). About three weeks later, Chief Ogipwole came to me and said, "You are my counselor, aren't you?" I said, "Yes!" He said, "I am going out to install a new sub-chief in eastern Yala. Will you come with me?" I agreed and we went.

There we were sitting under the trees. Around us were about 5,000 people, including the district officer, government officials, and many visitors from the neighboring tribes. There were many speakers, the last of which was Chief Ogipwole. He spoke last because he was the oldest and most respected of all the chiefs in that area. He got up and said, "You all know that I am going to give the genealogy of this young man whom we want to make chief today. You heard about that earlier today. How very, very important it is that this man comes from the right family. But, contrary to your expectations, I am not going to go through the genealogy again today. The elders have already carefully checked his family tree and we all know that we would not be here today if the man we are about to crown as a sub-chief were not from the right family. I am not going to repeat the genealogy because I have something that is even more important to say."

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<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 10:10.

This then is the chief's speech: "The new sub-chief will not build all of the big shrines in front of his palace that I did when I became a chief. He must know, as I now do know, that there is only one God that made all the world and all the people in it. That God is the Creator of all the nations. Not only of the Yala's, but of also the Kukelies, the Bokis, and even of the people of the United States where this my counselor comes from. This new sub-chief and all of you people must realize that this God loves us and that He has sent His Son into this world. You must also realize that this great God sacrificed His only Son on the crossed-stick so that we would never have to sacrifice again. After God's Son died, He was put in the ground."

What a joy it was for me to hear these words. You can be sure that I was listening and that I had tears in my eyes. Then the chief went on and said, "This Son of God was put in the ground and after seven days - I was about ready to say, 'Chief, three days' but I guess the Lord put a cork in my mouth - He came out of the ground and came back to life." The chief then said, "When I go hunting, I'm going to go and be with the Son of God who died for me and rose again. Those shrines or sacrifices are not needed now because God has done it all for us in His Son."

The reason the chief spoke about going hunting is that it is believed that a Yala chief never dies but that he goes hunting and just never returns.

And there it was! There was the explosion for the opening of the Gospel among the Yala people. The RE-FORMATION had taken place by the activity of the Spirit of God in the mind and heart of one man. POLYTHEISM (the concept of many localized gods) had been rejected for the idea of one Creator God who made all of the universe and all of its people (MONOTHEISM). The ANIMISTIC idea of spiritual power being localized in physical objects had by the activity of the Spirit of God on the basis of the heard Word of God given away to the concept of the GOD WHO WAS EVERYWHERE PRESENT. The consuming passion of the hungry gods who always needed to be fed with MORE AND MORE SACRIFICES had by the enlightenment of the Spirit of God given way to the joy of knowing the God of justice and mercy who love, humankind enough to pay the total cost of sin for all people in the once-for-all-times SACRIFICE OF HIS SON Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Truly the communication barriers had come down and on the BASIS OF THE HEARD WORD the ever ready Spirit of God rushed into the human heart and mind with the Good News of life in Christ. SACRIFICE, which initially was a MAJOR OBSTACLE now in the crucified, resurrected and ascended person of the Son of God, became the BRIDGE or LINK POINT back to a loving Creator God. Ogipwole the prime minister of Satan who had kept the Yala people in the powerful grip of ANIMISM, POLYTHEISM and UNENDING SACRIFICES had now become God's powerful Spirit-driven hand to open the door before the Yala people to eternal life and joy in Christ.

That was in 1972. We had been among the Yale people for 11 years by that time. We had talked and talked. We had witnessed and witnessed but the Yala people had not heard with understanding. We had not recognized the human barriers to communication. We never did consciously recognize them but God in His grace led us around them. He got us out of Yahe where we were building the hospital and into Okpoma. He opened our minds to learn from the Yala people themselves where they were and how to build bridges around and over the communication barriers of ANIMISM, POLYTHEISM, and SACRIFICE in such a way that the beautiful Good News of love in Christ could be communicated in words and actions which made hearing for understanding a possibility.

The point that I want to make here is that it comes in God's time and not according to our timetable. We may expect results in six months or in six days but it may rather be eleven or

twenty years. The point is that in Yala it took time but it was worth it. At times we were tempted to leave but God still had work for us to do, so we learned the language, translated the Scriptures and witnessed through word and deed and in God's good time the time of harvest came. Our joy is that the harvest is still going on today in Yala and in Africa with 22,000 new converts every day, 150,000 a week, 8,000,000 every year in what was once called the "Dark Continent".

### **Traditional North American Formation**

Now we shift the scene to the Northern Hemisphere. What does it mean to work for RE-FORMATION in North America? How does a Lutheran witness help people hear the Gospel for full understanding in the typical North American situation?

In 1982 my wife and I returned to North America with our two sons after a 22-year missionary assignment in Africa. Our two daughters came back somewhat earlier since they were already in college. Talk about the Rip Van Winkle affect! What happened? In to what kind of a "black hole" did the world we were born in disappear? How does one witness for Christ in such a changed situation? What are the barriers for Gospel communication here in North America? How does one go about building communication bridges so that the Good News of Jesus Christ can actually penetrate and get a hearing with the multitude of lost souls that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death in North America - yes, at times in "Christian homes" and "Christian Churches."

Early on in our readjustment to North America, I found myself on a plane headed from Chicago to Los Angeles, a four hour flight. After an hour of delightful conversation with a man next to me, I suddenly sat bolt upright with the realization that I had never mentioned Christ to him. Why? He was dressed in a suit and tie just like I was, a fellow American with what seemed to be a very similar lifestyle and value system. I had just taken for granted that he, too, was a Christian.

After witnessing to the man, I fell silent and slowly began to turn it all over in mind. Why I hadn't I talked to him about Christ right away? Why? Because he was an American! In 1960 when we were about to go to Africa, I had revved myself up for missionary witness with the thought that Africans were different. And especially that the big difference was that while Americans are Christians, Africans are all pagans and need of Jesus Christ. No wonder that I was so ready to witness in Africa.

So there is the number one BARRIER. The mistaken idea that there is no need to witness to Americans since AMERICA IS A CHRISTIAN CONTINENT or saying it another way, "There are NO NON-CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA." The strange thing is that I was operating as if this slogan was true even though I consciously knew that only 49.7% of the U.S. population are church members.<sup>7</sup> And that 250 of the U.S. population believes in reincarnation with a vast majority questioning at least many of the details in connection with the Creator God of Genesis 1-3 in favor of an evolutionary idea of beginnings.

What a relief to have gotten that out of the way! Now to the task at hand. But it was not such an easy task because no matter how I brought up the Gospel of Jesus Christ, people either did not want to hear, claimed that they had already heard it or just plain didn't seem to understand what I was talking about.

Why? What?

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<sup>7</sup> "U.S. News and World Report" October 11, 1982.

The next insight that occurred to me was that if a person is to bear the Gospel of Jesus Christ his or her communication channel has to be open. OPEN COMMUNICATION CHANNELS. That is what we need. But how do we get the channels open? What are the BARRIERS that stand in the way of hearing?

God began to answer my question about BARRIERS through an experience at one of our Christian colleges. I had been asked to give a series of lectures on missions. The date was January 1933. On the second day of the lecture series, the president of the university had a special luncheon for all of the international students at which I was asked to speak. After the lunch was over an Igbo man from Niger by the name of Chinedu (God is always with me) Emeka stayed behind. He waited until everyone was gone before he spoke.

Chinedu began by saying, "Dr. Bunkowske, you have been in Africa 22 years. Surely you understand my people and you will be able to help me." I assured him that I would do my best. After getting settled in two chairs, Chinedu continued by saying, "My question is about Christianity. I am confused as to what it really is! You see, my father was a powerful priest for the traditional Igbo gods. About fifteen years ago, he and I became Christians. We understood it as a change in LOYALTY, that is, we had always known that spiritual matters are at the very center and heart of all life and reality. For my father and me receiving Christ and becoming Christians was taking our belief in *Jujus* witchcraft and charms out of the center of our life and putting the Triune God (FATHER-SON-HOLY SPIRIT) in the center of our life. For us it was giving our complete loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. But now I have been here at the university for five months and I am confused. As I talk to my fellow students, it looks like my father and I got it all wrong! That Christianity is not a matter of changing LOYALTIES but rather that it is a matter of changing PARADIGMS, of changing basic MODELS of reality!"

At that point I broke in and said, "Chinedu, what do you mean? What do you mean by talking about changing PARADIGMS instead of LOYALTIES." Chinedu said, "What I mean, is that here at the university Christianity is not about who you give your loyalty to but about what the center of your life really is." Again I said, "Chinedu, what do you mean?" He said, "I mean that the model of Christianity in focus here at the university does not have a spiritual heart or center. Rather spiritual or supernatural things are like a helium balloon way off on the outside of life that is held lightly in a student's hand and only pulled back into the center of life in times of utter crisis. The working center of true Christianity here at the university is: SPECL."

At that point I was totally confused and said, "SPECL, Chinedu, what do you mean by SPECL?" He said, "I mean that, at least as I see it and please correct me if I am wrong, the working center of American Christianity is SPECL. That is, the most important thing for everyone is SUCCESS. In order to get success there must be PROGRESS and the key that opens the way to progress is EDUCATION to the highest possible level. For SUCCESS to be real it must be visible and that is done through acquiring material things, through a housefull of COLLECTIBLES and also through LEISURE time activities and the places and things that go with that."

At this point Chinedu turned to me with a pleading voice and said, "Dr. Bunkowske, did I get it wrong? Is true Christianity a change of PARADIGM rather than a change of LOYALTY?"

What could I say? Once again with tears of sadness in my heart for my own people in North America I had to say, "Chinedu, you got it right. Christianity is LOYALTY to Christ. Christianity is putting the Creator God first and recognizing that Spiritual things are the very heart and center of life. You got it right! Don't be confused and misled!"

Chinedu had taught me that another GREAT BARRIER to Gospel communication in North America is the basic belief that SUPERNATURAL-SPIRITUAL MATTERS ARE PERIPHERAL for most everyone and that for many they are UNREAL-UNNECESSARY IRRELEVANT and at best have a very LOW PRIORITY.

The next breakthrough in BARRIER IDENTIFICATION came on the plane between Chicago and Ft. Wayne. I was seated next to a mature woman. She must have been in her 30's. Our conversation opened with the fact that I had been a missionary in Africa for twenty-two years who was now carrying out my missionary activities as a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. She responded exuberantly by saying, "I'm a Christian, too!" Then she went on to share with me the story of David and Goliath followed by a number of additional Old Testament Bible stories. Without even taking a breath, she introduced the idea of Jesus being born of a virgin, his life of love and kindness and his death and resurrection. After a good ten minutes of listening, I was convinced that she was, indeed, a Christian who looked only to Jesus Christ for her salvation.

When it was my turn to talk, I wanted to introduce the concept of Christian witness so I enquired about her reason for going to Ft. Wayne. It opened up perfectly as her son and daughter-in-law and their three children immediately became the focus of our conversation. It soon became apparent that she considered them Christians but that they rarely, if ever, went to church or Sunday School because their lives were absolutely full of work, school and leisure time activities.

Now it was my turn to speak. How could I move the conversation to witness? I thought of heaven. I thought of her age and mine and I said, "I am over 50 years old and soon you and I will be in heaven!" Immediately the woman cut in with, "Oh! No! Science has disproven all of that! When I die I go to the ground!"

I was thunderstruck. How could it be? She knew so much about the Bible and God and Christ and yet she had rejected the Creator God. When it came right down to it, Darwin and his religion of evolution had her ultimate loyalty.

It was all so clear to me at that moment on the plane. The man who makes Fords has the right, yes, the duty to say how Ford should run. He sets the norms and standards for Ford. If God made mankind then He sets the standards and has the right, yes the duty, to norm our moral and ethical behavior. He tells us what is sin and what is not sin. If there is no Creator God then there are no norms or standards. There is no one to whom mankind is accountable. If there are no norms or standards, then who is to say what sin is or whether it even exists? Problems, mistakes, errors, but not sin. If there is no sin, then why do we need a Savior?

No doubt about it another GREAT BARRIER to Gospel communication is the basic notion that there is NO CREATOR GOD.

This NO CREATOR GOD belief, for many, is based on a slippery piece of misinformation. This piece of misinformation is that creation is religion and that evolution is science. The fact is that evolution is a BELIEF about the past and that creation is also BELIEF about the past. Thus the evolution-creation debate is really a debate between the science of one religion and the science of another religion. It is also important for Christians to note that evolution is a religion without revelation while Christianity is a religion with revelation. Jesus says in John 5:47, "If you do not believe the writings of Moses (Gen. 1-12 - God the Creator - are the key parts of the writings of Moses); how will you believe in Me (Jesus Christ)?"

A key question for the world today is: Are you living in an EVOLUTIONARY WORLD or are you living in a world SEPARATED FROM ITS CREATOR GOD? These two views of

reality are in strict opposition to each other. If you reject the latter you have lost the first article of the Apostles' Creed. Once you have lost the first article of the Creed is there a need for the second article? If there is no *CREATOR GOD*, no sin, no life after death is there a need for a *SAVIOR*?

It is also useful to realize that what one does is normally consistent with what one believes. The confusion, conflict, family breakdown, child abuse, etc. etc. that we experience in the western world today are not a result of animal ancestry but a **RESULT OF SIN and SEPARATION**. Our problem is a **REJECTION OF GOD AS CREATOR**. Having rejected the God who created us we quite naturally also reject God's redemption in Christ. I Corinthians 1:18 says, "The message about Christ's death on the cross is nonsense to those who are lost. But for us who are being saved, it is God's power." To reject the **CREATOR GOD** is to be lost.

Another breakthrough in **BARRIER IDENTIFICATION** came during a quiet conversation with a woman who is the mother of two small children. She got on the plane in Dallas hoping for a separate seat for herself and her five-month old son, Matthew. It was not to be. And I was the one assigned to the other one of the two seats on our side of the aisle.

I identified myself to this lady as a missionary with twenty two years of service in Africa. She immediately responded by saying, "You must be glad to be back in the good old U.S.A. after all those years in a hardship area." My response startled her. I said, "It wasn't all that bad! In fact, many things are better in Africa than they are here in America." She said, "What kind of things?"

By this time I had her dear little Matthew on my lap and quite naturally said, "Why the way people in Africa love children. The way everyone wants to have children and see children as a great gift from God. The way they care for children and sacrifice themselves for children." I went on to add, "I find the situation here in North America quite different and at times disgusting with many people not even wanting to have children." The woman immediately argued with me and said that it wasn't so, that North Americans love children and care for them better than any other people in the world.

The conversation drifted to other things and after about an hour the mother of Matthew came back to the topic of children. She said, "You were right when you spoke about our attitude in North America toward children." She then shocked me by saying, "I was one of the worst. I made my husband promise that we would never have children. I was so selfish. I just wanted my own career. Joel was an accident four years ago. It changed my life. I don't know what I would do without Joel and Matthew now. I just love being at home with them. My career can wait, maybe forever."

With that openness, I felt moved to share the Gospel with her. I went straight to the Second Article, to Christ. When I mentioned Jesus she folded her arms and as I talked on I could sense a real tension developing. I stopped and said, "This is stressful for you, isn't it?" "Yes," she said, "To me Jesus has always been a judge. I have known from youth that He looks down on me and has no time for me. Most Christians are like that, too. I can never be as good as they think they are, so why try?"

The more I pursued it the more it became clear that my lady friend did not see the earth as God's creation but thought of Christianity, and religion in general, only in terms of ethics and morality. In this pattern of thinking, which is very prevalent among western people, there is a strong predisposition to hear the Law when the purist Gospel is being shared. . We are at once reminded of Martin Luther whose world view led him to be totally predisposed to understand Christ as a judge, to hear the Second Article of our creed as **LAW**.

The point here is that another GREAT BARRIER to Gospel communication for the Lutheran missionary today is the western predisposition to hear the Gospel that we proclaim but to UNDERSTAND THAT GOSPEL AS LAW. The problem for the conscientious witness today in the west is that if the Good News of Jesus Christ is UNDERSTOOD AS LAW one has nowhere to go. There is no Gospel left to present if the GOSPEL HAS BEEN UNDERSTOOD AS LAW.

The medicine for this situation is to present the LAW in terms of the First Article and when it has had its full affect in bringing the sinner to his knees then and only then will the Good News of God's love in Christ be sweet and be understood as the loving, giving and forgiving heart of God.

### **North American DE-FORMATIONS and RE-FORMATION**

NON-SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION, NO CREATOR GOD, "AMERICA - A CHRISTIAN CONTINENT" (NO NON-CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA): These three are at least some of the key components of the basic DE-FORMATION in North America that stands in the way of communicating Christ for understanding. IDENTIFYING THESE BARRIERS is important as a first step. The next is to identify more fully additional barriers such as a move back from the SACRED MONOTHEISM that used to be taken for granted in the West to a type of SECULAR POLYTHEISM which is normally spoken of as PLURALISM in the literature of our day.

Then comes the important process of RE-FORMATION. This process, for many in the West, just like for our friend, Oga Ipwole of Okpoma, Yala depends almost entirely upon a Spirit of God-inspired paradigm shift. This shift, however, takes place on the basis of the HEARD WORD OF GOD which you and I are called upon to communicate for FULL UNDERSTANDING.

For Oga Ipwole, it was a shift away from POLYTHEISM to MONOTHEISM, from ANIMISM to CHRISTIANITY, from SACRIFICE AS A WORK OF MAN to SACRIFICE AS A WORK OF GOD in Christ.

For people in the West, it is to move beyond intellectual and propositional knowledge to a Spirit of God inspired PARADIGM SHIFT away from a NON-SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION to a SPIRITUAL/SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION, from EVOLUTIONARY or QUASI-EVOLUTIONARY BELIEFS to BELIEF IN THE CREATOR GOD, from "AMERICA AS A CHRISTIAN CONTINENT" to AMERICANS AS SINNERS WHO NEED A SAVIOR.

### **Conclusion**

Chinedu Emaka calls on all of us in the West to realize that we as a total people group need a basic PARADIGM SHIFT in our worldview orientation. We need to PUT THE SPIRITUAL/SUPERNATURAL BACK IN ITS SCRIPTURAL PLACE. He also reminds us that when the spiritual center is in place it is still very possible to be idolatrous. The right LOYALTY is also key. It is not just any belief that will do. But belief in the Christ, the Messiah of God.<sup>8</sup>

As Lutheran missionaries today, we know that it is the Spirit of God who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John 14:6 and Acts 4:12

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, Luther's Small Catechism, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1943, p. 123.

As Lutheran missionaries today, it is our privilege to be God's communicators who consciously **RECOGNIZE THE BARRIERS IN OUR CULTURE SITUATION** and **SEARCH DAILY FOR THE BRIDGES** which will make it possible for **LOST NORTH AMERICANS** to hear the **WORD OF GOD**, yes the full *SKANDELON* of the Gospel, with full understanding. This is essential since it is the **HEARD OF WORD OF GOD** that the Spirit of God uses to create faith in the human mind and heart. And it is on the basis of that Spirit-inspired faith that people call on the Name of the Lord and are saved<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 10:8-17