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# “Were the Reformers Mission-Minded?”

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The subject “The Reformation and Missions” might well suggest a very short paper indeed. Both theologically and practically, the Reformation period is notable chiefly for its lack of missionary emphasis.

The fact, however, that scholars like Karl Holl, Gustav Warneck, and Walter Holsten have written extensive treatises — with characteristic German thoroughness and profundity — on “Die Reformation und die Mission” indicates that this subject is not wholly sterile in terms of theological research and analysis. It should be observed, however, that most of what has been written in this area is either an apology for or a criticism of the lack of missionary concern on the part of the Reformers and their followers. The exception to this general observation is Karl Holl, who, in a lengthy essay, discovers a full-blown theology of missions in Luther’s writings and pictures the great Reformer as a missionary strategist of rare insight and flexibility. It should be observed, however, that this is one facet of Luther’s theology that has escaped the notice of most Reformation scholars and that has been left conspicuously untouched in most of the voluminous Luther literature that the past 4½ centuries have produced. Holl’s picture of Luther as a foremost missionary theologian therefore deserves respectful but not uncritical evaluation.

The early church took the Great Com-

mission, Matt. 28:18-20, with utmost seriousness and wrote an impressive chapter in missionary history as the apostles and their co-workers sought to bring the Gospel to every part of the then-known world. The fact that most of the Twelve are reported to have laid down their lives for the Gospel’s sake on foreign shores bears eloquent witness to the fact of their missionary concern and to their concept of the universality of the Christian message. And the missionary outreach of the apostolic era laid the foundations for churches that exist to this day in such far-flung regions as India and Ethiopia.

The thousand-year period before the Reformation was an era of ever-widening missionary outreach and the extension of the church’s domain throughout large areas of Europe, together with the establishment of missionary outposts in Asia and subsequently also in the newly discovered Americas. There were three reasons for the progress and effectiveness of the Roman Catholic missionary program.

The first was the concept of papal supremacy as encompassing the whole world. This concept became more concrete in the era of geographical exploration and expansion in the immediate pre-Reformation century, under the aegis of Roman Catholic nations. Thus, for example, in 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued his well-known decree, dividing the continents of the Western Hemisphere between Spain and Portugal, not only for commercial expansion and colonization but also in terms of missionary responsibility. The colonists were

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ordered to convert the heathen in their respective domains, even at the point of the sword. While this approach to evangelism was somewhat deficient in spiritual motivation, and in "fruits meet for repentance," the results were bound to bring delight to the missionary statistician.

Second, from the very outset the monastic orders were a natural and extremely effective channel for the task of evangelizing the heathen. The monks were the bearers of the Christian message as the church pushed back the forces of paganism on the widely flung frontiers of the steadily expanding universe. It was the establishment of the Jesuit order in 1540, however, that enabled the Roman Catholic Church to achieve its most effective and penetrating missionary thrust, particularly under the leadership of Francis Xavier, in hitherto unreached areas of Asia. So widespread had the missionary operations of the church become that in 1622 the *Congregatio De Propaganda Fidei* was established to supervise these activities.

A third reason for the expansion of the Roman Catholic missionary enterprise was that the colonial powers were themselves Roman Catholic, and their rulers, loyal sons of the church, lent their full support and protection to the missions that were established in their respective territories. As they expanded their domains, the sword and the cross proceeded on together. It was a dubious partnership, but unarguably effective, at least in terms of outward results.

None of these three elements was to be found in the Protestant establishment. The Reformation was devoid of any concept of a supreme ecclesiastical authority; it not only lacked but even denounced the monastic orders that had provided the re-

sources for the Roman Catholic missionary strategy; and it was not associated—at least for the first 150 years—with any colonial power.

It is against the background of this historical situation that the missionary theology—or lack of it—of the Reformers and their age must be evaluated. It will be most instructive for our purposes to deal at some length with the missionary outlook of Martin Luther himself.

To begin, it should be emphasized that Luther did not associate himself with the scholastic viewpoint, later revived by Lutheran orthodoxy, that the Great Commission had been fulfilled by the apostles and therefore had no further relevance to the church of later times. Luther did not accept the interpretation of Ps. 19:5 and Rom. 10:18 as signifying that the apostles had literally penetrated into every country and region of the earth. Luther rather understood these words in a more general sense, a position that he believed to be empirically supported by the recent discovery of America. The New World gave no evidence whatsoever of any exposure to the Gospel, whereas the apostolic endeavors in India, Persia, Ethiopia, and other regions were still bearing fruit.

Luther compared the progress of the Gospel to the ever-broadening ripples that are caused by a stone tossed into the water, growing ever wider until at last they reach the shore. Thus, said Luther, the missionary task is incumbent upon the church in every age. As the voice of the Gospel is heard, its scope will become ever greater until, at the end, the last of God's elect are gathered in. Every age, therefore, including his own, had received from God the mis-

sionary imperative so clearly expressed in the Great Commission.

Now, who were to be the objects of the missionary outreach? Luther wrote a tract on the conversion of the Jews, and it is generally agreed among Luther scholars that the Reformer did exhibit a genuine concern for bearing the Christian witness among the Turks. Thus, for example, he writes:

I do hope that our Gospel, now shining forth with a light so great, will before Judgment Day make an attack also on that abominable prophet Mohammed. May our Lord Jesus Christ do this soon.<sup>1</sup>

Some commentators, however, charge Luther with a very myopic missionary outlook just on this account. According to these scholars, Luther's concept of mission work among the Turks, for example, was confined to the Christian witness that should be borne by those who were taken captive by the invaders or who had other chance contacts with the Moslem world. He never envisioned any kind of missionary task force to be sent abroad, either into the realm of Islam or anywhere else. It is certain that America and Asia never directly or specifically engaged his missionary concern.

Holl, however, far from blaming Luther for having too provincial a missionary outlook, finds in his attitude towards the Turks a noteworthy and commendable example of Luther's missionary zeal. He writes:

Luther views specific mission fields which are to be cultivated, and by no means only newly discovered America or East Asia,

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Sämmtliche Schriften*, ed. Joh. Georg Walch, 2d ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880—1910), XIV, 305 (hereafter cited as *SL*).

which only nowadays seem to be the most important missionary areas. Luther recognizes a much closer, more urgent mission field: the Turks. He is severely critical of the Pope, who was concerned only with promoting crusades against the Turks instead of sending preachers of the Gospel to them and showing a vital concern for their conversion. This is actually what the Pope's office demands of him (but in this he has failed). Luther includes the conquest of Islam by the Gospel among the results which he hopes to see accomplished before the coming of Judgment Day.<sup>2</sup>

Holl cites to good effect a remarkably advanced concept of missionary strategy on Luther's part in the following passage:

Luther considers it to be an indispensable precondition of all mission work that the missionary should actually know the people to whom he is sent. This includes first of all the mastery of the language. . . . In addition, Luther would require a thorough knowledge of the religion and culture of the people, to be acquired through a study of their history, literature and customs.<sup>3</sup>

In this connection, Holl points to the interesting statement in Luther's discussion of the *Deutsche Messe* where he stresses the importance of training young people who may serve Christ by learning the language and customs of the people in foreign lands. In other places Luther underscores the importance of acknowledging the civic virtues and exemplary personal traits of the Turks, as well as of other heathen nations. This attitude, too, belongs to the essential strategy of the foreign missionary.

Holl dwells at length on Luther's readi-

<sup>2</sup> Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928), III, 236.

<sup>3</sup> Holl, III, 239.

ness to accommodate himself to the customs and culture of the foreign people to whom he, as a missionary, might be sent. He identifies Luther's position with Saint Paul's avowal of being "all things to all men." Since, however, Luther never went out as a missionary to foreign lands, Holl's assumptions must remain somewhat academic. For example, his categorical statement that if Luther had gone as a missionary to China he would have assuredly worn a pigtail would seem to require somewhat more tangible proof than Holl is able to muster.

The noted Reformation scholar is on much safer ground, however, when he asserts that Luther's theology established the basic principles, guidelines, and motivation for the Protestant missionary enterprise, which in the course of time came into vigorous and effective realization. These principles, guidelines, and motives are to be found preeminently in Luther's doctrine of the church. The church, according to Luther, is not a static or authoritarian institution but a fellowship of universal dimensions. In and through the church men are brought to Christ, and this redemptive mission will continue until the end of time.

The prosecution of this missionary task is incumbent upon every congregation. Indeed, it is of the very essence of the Christian fellowship that it should seek to extend itself and gather others into its midst; and for this task no external authority or legalistic compulsion is needed. Obviously, the idea of a religious crusade or any type of forcible conversion is repugnant to Luther. What is more, Luther discerns the missionary imperative in the very concept of the universal priesthood. Every Chris-

tian, by virtue of his relationship with God, has the vocation and responsibility of serving as a priest to and for his fellowmen—which includes bearing the Christian witness to those who are without. In this regard he cites the example of the Ethiopian eunuch, who after his conversion presumably helped spread the Gospel in his own country.

Despite Holl's enthusiasm for Luther as a missionary strategist, however, one searches in vain in Luther's writings for extensive references to what is commonly known as "foreign missions." Luther did, indeed, give expression to sentiments like these:

The very best of all works is that the heathen have been led from idolatry to the knowledge of God.<sup>4</sup>

And again, in connection with Rom. 10:14:

If all the heathen are to praise God, He must first have been made their God. If He is to be their God, they must know Him and believe on Him and let go of all idolatry. . . . For one cannot come to faith or receive the Holy Spirit before one has heard the Word, as Paul says (Rom. 10:14): "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" . . . If they are to hear His Word, preachers who proclaim the Word of God to them must be sent to them.<sup>5</sup>

And in regard to Matt. 28:18, he declares in a sermon for Ascension Day:

Their preaching has gone out into all the world, though it has not yet come into all the world. That outgoing has been begun and gone on, though it has not yet been fulfilled and accomplished; but there will be further and wider preaching until the

<sup>4</sup> *SL VII*, 1170.

<sup>5</sup> *SL V*, 1139.

Last Day. When the Gospel has been preached, heard, published through the whole world, then the commission shall have been fulfilled, and then the Last Day shall come.<sup>6</sup>

In the same vein he writes:

Before the Last Day comes, church rule and the Christian faith must spread over all the world, as the Lord God foretold that there should not be a city in which the Gospel should not be preached, and that the Gospel must go through all the world, so that all should have the witness in their conscience, whether they believe it or not.<sup>7</sup>

Warneck discounts these and similar expressions in Luther's writings, since Luther never translated them into effective action. (To this one might fairly counter that, under the historical and political circumstances prevailing at his time, how could he?)

Holl's appraisal of Luther as a missionary theologian is not shared by most other Luther scholars. W. R. Hogg, for example, charges Luther with complacency over against the missionary task of the church, inasmuch as "his part of the world," at least, "had received the Gospel."<sup>8</sup> He is critical of Luther's statement that after the apostles "no one has any longer such a universal apostolic command, but each bishop or pastor has his own appointed diocese or parish."<sup>9</sup> This seems a bit unfair, however, if one understands the context in which Luther made this statement.

It cannot be gainsaid, however, that Lu-

ther's expositions of such great missionary passages as Matt. 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15 are usually devoid of any missionary emphasis. Moreover, there is a good deal of validity to the contention that Luther's concept of "mission" dealt primarily with the correction of the unchristian conditions prevailing within Christendom at his time.

There has been much dispute among Luther scholars as to whether the Reformer's doctrines of election and eschatology inhibited his concept of and zeal for a worldwide missionary outreach. Obviously, a hard-rock conviction that Jews, Turks, and others are obdurate unbelievers, beyond the possibility of conversion, does not lend itself readily to any burning missionary fervor. By the same token, the expectation that Judgment Day is imminent might well discourage any far-flung and long-range program of missionary expansion.

Warneck and others attribute such attitudes to Luther and find in these theological concepts a ready explanation for his presumed lack of missionary concern and of any strategy for evangelizing the heathen in the outlying regions of the world. Holl, on the other hand, rejects these interpretations of the Reformer's theology. In his defense of Luther, he points out that Luther simply lacked the means of carrying out any extensive missionary program. Indeed, his hands were full with the task of proclaiming the Gospel and reestablishing the church on a sound and pure evangelical basis in his own arena of activity. The task of doing "mission work" in nominally Christian Europe fully absorbed the energies of Luther and his co-reformers. And indeed, that task remains unfinished to this day.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1901), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Warneck, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Hogg, p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

We are personally inclined to agree with Holl in the matter of Luther's doctrine of election but to concur with his critics in the appraisal of Luther's eschatology. Even Calvin's theory of double predestination did not deter his followers from undertaking a vigorous and effectual missionary program. Much less can Luther's broader and more evangelical concept of election be adduced to account for an alleged lack of missionary zeal on the Reformer's part.

On the other hand, Luther, together with most of the other Reformers, believed firmly that the end of the world was imminent. There seems little room for doubt that this eschatological concept was an actual deterrent to any far-reaching missionary strategy on Luther's part. Warneck writes:

Luther and his contemporaries were persuaded that the end of the world was at hand, that the signs of the nearness of the Last Day were apparent, Antichrist in the Papacy, Gog and Magog in the Turks, so that no time remained for the further development and extension of the kingdom of God on earth; and it becomes quite intelligible that a regular missionary institution lay entirely outside the circle of the ideas of the Reformers.<sup>10</sup>

There is nothing derogatory to Luther in this evaluation of his eschatology and its effect on his missionary outlook. It seems to be supported by the weight of evidence as adduced from his writings.

The other Reformers exhibit a lack of a theology of missions to a greater extent than Luther. Melancthon understands the Great Commission as applying only to the apostles. He believes that from the beginning God has provided for the Gospel to

be known and spread in various nations through individual believers down through history. He writes: "Everywhere there are some who teach truly, in Asia, Cyprus, Constantinople. God marvelously stimulates the voice of the Gospel, that it may be heard by the whole human race."<sup>11</sup> It is therefore not necessary that the church should undertake an organized missionary program.

Zwingli acknowledges the fact that the twelve apostles did not cover the entire earth with the Gospel and that the work of the Great Commission must somehow be continued. He says nothing, however, of the church's duty to send out missionaries. He rather declares that "if in the present time messengers are willing to go at their own risk beyond the bounds of Christendom, they ought to be certain that they have the call of God to their mission."<sup>12</sup> This is not a stirring missionary imperative.

Bucer, the reformer of Strasbourg, occupies a position similar to that of Zwingli. He does indeed pray:

So may now our only true and good Shepherd Christ grant that His churches everywhere may be staffed and provided with right faithful and diligent elders who will neglect nothing in respect of all men, even Jews and Turks and all unbelievers, to whom they ever may have any access, so that all those among them who belong to Christ may be wholly brought to Him.<sup>13</sup>

This is only an oblique summons to mission, however. And although he concedes that even today there are messengers "who carry the kingdom of Christ from one

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Warneck, p. 16.

place to another, like legates of the supreme Lord,"<sup>14</sup> Bucer does not connect this fact with any direct missionary responsibility on the part of the church as such or of the individual Christian. His conclusion is: "Christians require to do nothing else than what they have done hitherto; let everyone occupy his station for the Gospel, and the kingdom of Christ will grow."<sup>15</sup> This static concept of missionary work is hardly conducive to a dynamic missionary outreach.

Calvin maintains that the apostolate was an "extraordinary office,"<sup>16</sup> which was not perpetuated as such in the church. He nevertheless rejects the idea that the Great Commission applied only to the Twelve or that they actually brought the Gospel to the entire world. The extension of the Gospel, therefore, is still in progress and will continue until the end of time. Nevertheless, it is characteristic of Calvin to state: "We are taught that the kingdom of Christ is neither to be advanced nor maintained by the industry of men, but this is the work of God alone; for believers are taught to rely solely on His blessing."<sup>17</sup>

According to Calvin, the work of promoting the Gospel was the responsibility not of the church but of Christian rulers. This theory gained ever greater currency in the course of time, as the emerging Protestant colonial powers emulated their earlier Roman Catholic counterparts. Calvin, therefore, does not draw the conclusion from Matt. 28:18-20 that this commission of our Lord enjoins any concerted missionary program upon the organized

church. As we have previously noted, however, it is unfair to charge that Calvin's doctrine of election vitiated any missionary concern on the part of the Geneva reformer. Calvin's own statements do not permit this interpretation, and the entire subsequent course of the Calvinist movement proves that the Calvinistic theory of predestination in no wise hampered a vigorous missionary program on the part of the Reformed churches.

The episode involving the group of French Huguenots who established a colony in Brazil in 1555 as an asylum for French Protestants is sometimes erroneously cited as an example of Calvin's missionary outreach. This idea stems from the fact that the leader of the colony, de Villegaignon, wrote a letter to Calvin asking him to send preachers to the new colony. Unfortunately, neither this letter nor Calvin's reply is extant. Four Geneva clergymen, plus a group of artisans and workers, did go to Brazil, however, to work in the new colony. This offers no proof, however, that Calvin actually sent them, or in any case that Calvin envisioned this as a mission to the heathen. In any event, the whole undertaking ended in a fiasco after scarcely a year. One of the clergymen wrote that the language barrier prevented communication with the natives, and that "although they had proposed to win the native heathen for Christ . . . their barbarism, cannibalism, their spiritual dullness, etc., 'extinguished all . . . hope.'"<sup>18</sup> After great difficulties, the settlers returned home.

One Protestant clergyman, however, did raise his voice in behalf of an aggressive missionary policy on the part of the Prot-

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.



estant churches. This was Adrianus Saravia (1531—1613), who served as pastor of Reformed churches in Antwerp and Brussels, later taught theology at the University of Leyden, and capped his career by moving to England, where he became dean of Westminster. He, therefore, had distinguished credentials for the work he published in 1590 under the title *Concerning the Different Orders of the Ministry of the Gospel, as They Were Instituted by the Lord*. Although this was not a missionary treatise *per se*, he does deal with the subject of missions in a special chapter. In this he adduces proof that the apostles could only have carried out the Great Commission to a limited extent. The missionary command, moreover, applied not only to them but holds good for the entire church for all time.

This treatise by Saravia evoked a spirited reply in 1592 from Theodore Beza, who followed Calvin as leader of the church in Geneva. Among other things, Beza disputed Saravia's interpretation of Matt. 28:18-20, maintaining that only the apostles were commanded to go to all nations. This does not apply, he said, to Christians in general, who are simply expected to bear witness in their appointed place and circumstances. Beza, however, remains vague on the question of mission work among the heathen. His attitude, it appears, is characteristic of his times.

In the same vein, the interchange between Count Truchsess of Wetzhausen, a prominent Lutheran layman, and the theological faculty of Wittenberg is illuminating. The count had written the faculty about certain scruples that were troubling him: "Since faith comes alone from preaching, I would know how East and South and

West shall be converted to the only saving faith, since I see no one of the Augsburg Confession go forth thither . . . so reasonable must it surely be to obey the command of Christ, 'Go ye into all the world, etc.'" <sup>19</sup>

In reply, the faculty issued a threefold rejoinder. First, they maintained that the Great Commission applied only to the apostles and that this commission has already been fulfilled. Second, they argued that although it is indeed true that the church of the Augsburg Confession had sent forth no missionaries to convert the heathen to the Gospel, nevertheless "no man is to be excused before God by reason of ignorance, because He has not only revealed Himself to all men through the light of nature (Rom. 1 and 2; Acts 17: 27); 'but also in different ages, through Adam, Noah, and the holy Apostles, He has been preached to the whole human race.'" <sup>20</sup> The faculty opinion adds the observation that if the heathen now sit in darkness, that is exactly what they deserve; it is the just reward of their heedlessness and ingratitude. This was not the only time that the faculty expressed this opinion. Third, it is the duty of the state, not the church, to provide for the preaching of the Gospel in the non-Christian lands that may come under their sway.

The great dogmatician, Johann Gerhard, goes beyond even the Wittenberg opinion in rejecting the concept of the missionary obligation of the church. On the one hand he gives a long array of curious, naïve, pseudohistorical "proofs" that Egypt, India, and the Americas had already been "Christianized" in early times. The task, he ar-

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 27—28.

gued, had already been completed. Moreover, he argues that the authority for mission work had ceased with the apostles. Under the pall of such astigmatic dogmatism, it is small wonder that the church of the Reformation was gripped for so long by missionary passivity and sterility.

Nothing, however, better illustrates the attitude toward mission work in the age of orthodoxy than the experience of Baron Justinian von Weltz (1621—68), an intensely mission-minded Austrian layman who pleaded and wrote extensively in behalf of foreign missions. He adduces the following reasons for his missionary appeal: (1) It is God's will that all men should be saved and come to knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4); this requires that missionaries be sent forth to preach the Gospel to all men. (2) The example of godly men down through Christian history, who have suffered and died to bring God's Word to the heathen. (3) The petitions in the church's liturgy for the conversion of those who are in spiritual darkness and error; if these petitions are not to remain mere words, they should be transformed into action by sending men to work among the heathen. (4) The example of the Romanists, who in their *Congregatio de Propaganda Fidei* carry out a systematic missionary program and who justly reproach the Protestants for their lack of missionary zeal.

At the same time, von Weltz effectively refutes the standard orthodox objections to practical mission work: (1) that the Great Commission was confined alone to the apostles; (2) that the Gospel may not again be preached in those places where it has already been rejected; (3) that no preacher has the right to go to the heathen

without a direct call; (4) that Christianity should first be more firmly implanted at home before work in foreign lands is undertaken.

Von Weltz goes farther, however, in outlining a detailed plan for carrying out mission work in foreign lands. First, a missionary society should be organized; this should comprise both supporters of mission work at home and a corps of missionary volunteers who, after intensive training, should be sent out to work among the heathen. Second, the potential missionaries should be well trained in the language, culture, and religion of the people to whom they will be sent and should devote themselves to gathering congregations among them. Third, such work should be undertaken in the Danish, Swedish, and Dutch colonies, since these are governed by Protestant rulers, who have the preeminent responsibility for evangelizing the heathen in their domains.

Von Weltz concludes his third treatise with a sharp admonition to church authorities:

I set you before the judgment seat of Christ. . . . Before this strict tribunal ye shall give me answer to these questions of conscience. . . . I ask, Who gave you authority to misinterpret the commandment of Christ in Matthew 28? . . . I ask, Is it right that you annul the apostolic office which Christ Himself instituted? . . . I ask you why you do not show yourselves as light of the world . . . that Turks and heathen may see your good works. . . . Wherefore do ye persuade princes and lords that the conversion of the heathen is not practicable in this age, while you have neither yet tried it nor suffered it to be tried in any land? Say, ye hypocrites, where do ye find in the Bible the word "impracticable"? Woe to

you clergy, who act contrary to the Word of God and to your own conscience! <sup>21</sup>

And there is much more in the same vein. Not surprisingly, von Weltz's urgent challenge fell on deaf ears. Indeed, he was dismissed as a "missionary fanatic" and was accused of blasphemy and self-conceit. Unable to secure any positive response from the church authorities and theologians, the baron set out for Dutch Guiana to undertake his own missionary program. There, unhappily, he found an early grave.

The official refutation of von Weltz's program was given by Johann Heinrich Ursinus of Ratisbon. Briefly stated, his points were the following: (1) The conversion of the heathen is such a difficult task that few people will be found to undertake it. (2) The heathen are so depraved that there is little hope of converting them. "The holy things of God are not to be cast before such dogs and swine." <sup>22</sup> (3) There are plenty of Jews and heathen at home to whom we should first bring the Gospel before going to the pagans in far-off lands. The God-given call is: Remain at home! (4) Almost invariably, some Christians will be found in every heathen territory. It is their responsibility, not ours, to make the Gospel known in their non-Christian surroundings.

Warneck summarizes Ursinus' position with what must surely be the classic epitaph for foreign missions: "Where there are Christians, missions are superfluous, and where there are no Christians, they are hopeless." <sup>23</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions may be searched in vain for any specific "theology

of missions." The confessions have much to say about the doctrine of the church, about the universality of redemption, about the preaching of the Word. If "mission work" is identified with these broad theological concepts, then, of course, the confessions can be regarded as "missionary" documents. But they provide no elaboration of the missionary imperative in their references to Matt. 28:18-20, Rom. 10, and other Scripture texts that are relevant to the concept of missions. And they outline no strategy for "mission work" in the commonly accepted sense of the term.

It may be useful, at this juncture, to summarize the reasons for the lack of missionary consciousness and missionary activity in the Reformation period and its aftermath in the age of orthodoxy:

1. For the century and a half following the inception of the Reformation, the Protestants were completely absorbed in the struggle to establish and secure the principles of the Reformation within their own domain. Thus, the possibility of mission work abroad was actually not a live option for them.

2. The recurrent wars of religion, and particularly the Thirty Years War, 1618 to 1648, disrupted normal church life, devastated large areas within Protestant northern Europe, and rendered difficult, if not impossible, any coherent strategy of foreign mission work.

3. The eschatology of the Reformation period indicated that the world would soon come to an end—a prospect that seemed to be supported by the apocalyptic nature of the times. This made the idea of a long-range and far-reaching foreign mission program seem futile and irrelevant.

4. The principle of *cuius regio, eius*

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Warneck, pp. 36—37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

*regio* prevailed in the post-Reformation period. When the Protestant rulers were indifferent to the task of spreading the Christian faith beyond their own boundaries—as was often the case—this attitude was bound to abort any latent missionary concern on the part of the church.

5. The Protestant church lacked the kind of effective missionary machinery, the monastic orders, that served the Roman Catholic Church so well.

6. The predominantly Protestant countries had little contact with non-Christian peoples and regions overseas until the latter part of the 17th century. Indeed, as long as such Roman Catholic powers as Spain and Portugal held the monopoly on the exploration and colonization of the lands beyond the seas, no Protestant missionaries would have been allowed to enter those regions, even if there had been the will and resources to send them.

7. These geographical limitations were strongly reinforced by both the theological and psychological concept of the *Landeskirche*, the territorial church. This proved to be an effective deterrent to any genuine missionary outreach.

8. The cold and sterile dogmatism of the age of orthodoxy led to the kind of theological self-righteousness and introspection that effectively dampened any possible spark of missionary zeal and vitiating the practical application of Christian doctrine to individual human need.

It was only with the advent of Pietism (beginning ca. 1670) that Lutheranism

received its first real missionary impetus. Emerging as a reaction against the dead orthodoxy of the times, Pietism emphasized fellowship, Bible study, and Christian experience. Inevitably, it felt deep concern for those, both near and far, who were still strangers and foreigners to the Christian Gospel and its covenant of redemption. Hence, under the aegis of such leaders as Philip Spener (d. 1705) and August Hermann Francke (d. 1727), and with its center at the University of Halle, Pietism provided the resources for the Danish-Halle Mission, which sent out the first Lutheran foreign missionaries, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau, to the Danish colonies in India in 1705. This intense and practical missionary concern, in turn, influenced Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the establishment of the Moravian missionary colonies in many parts of the world. And so, with the rise of Pietism, the modern history of Lutheran missions began. But that is another story.

For us, the important lesson is that, even though the Reformation period itself is almost barren of any effective missionary outreach, the principles that have guided and motivated the whole subsequent course of Protestant mission work are implicit in the Reformation theology. And that, to be sure, is the great contribution of the Reformation to the Christian missionary enterprise.

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