

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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# The Biblical Basis of Mission

ROLAND E. MILLER

"The Biblical Basis of Mission" is a subject that no individual Christian dare avoid. Rather than being a matter for which he cannot "find time," it is one that must frequently be in his thoughts. This, after all, is the subject that in many ways determines the entire pattern of the Christians' life.

In these days very much is being said about the mission of the church, the missionary nature of the church, and so on. Fifteen years ago it would have been difficult to find as much material on these subjects as we find now. But the real source for the study of mission, as we have indicated in our title, is the Bible. This is the source available and understandable to every Christian. To it we return for inspiration and knowledge about our mission. Mission lives from studying and feeding on the Bible. As Bishop Newbigin says, "In every age we have to go back to God's revelation of Himself, to learn afresh, by the guiding of the Spirit, what is our duty for today."<sup>1</sup> By going back to the Bible

we safeguard the objective content, the authority and the inspiration for our mission.<sup>2</sup> Although thousands of Christians lived their faith in Christ and died in courageous faith, "slain for the Word of God," without ever having seen a New Testament, the Scripture is now our Spirit-given testimony as to the basis of that faith and witness. It is the testimony of why we should believe and witness also. The Bible came into being as witness to the mission of God and of His church. "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31)

When we go to the Bible, seeking the basis of mission, we therefore go expectantly. Our expectations are fulfilled. The Bible does provide the basis for mission. But it does so in a way that may prove startling to any who are accustomed to handling the Scriptures only as a collection of prooftexts, wise sayings, and commands. True, there are commands about the mission of the church in the Bible, and they are important. We will be thinking of

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Andersen, "Further Towards a Theology of Mission," *Theology of the Christian Mission*, edited by G. H. Anderson (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., Inc., 1961), p. 306., from M. A. C. Warren, *Mission Under the Cross*. This symposium by a distinguished group of theologians under the editorship of Dr. Ander-

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son, though uneven in quality, is a thought-provoking and extremely useful contribution to the subject.

<sup>2</sup> T. A. Kantonen, *Theology of Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), pp. 14 f. I am deeply indebted to this deceptively simple volume, which incorporates many of the basic insights into the nature of the Christian mission, especially as it relates to the truth of the Holy Trinity. Anyone who undertakes a study of this subject would not be ill-advised to begin with this book, using as a companion volume Anders Nygren's *The Gospel of God*.

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them, including the great commission found at the end of St. Matthew. But the importance of these commands lies in their place of origin, which is not in the first place in the Bible itself but in the heart of God. When we study "mission" in the Bible, we find ourselves being pushed back, way, way back into the Person of God. The Bible, in a way, is like a long corridor. There are rooms opening off on each side. But you cannot spend time in these rooms. The corridor pushes you along and opens out into the heart of God.

When we arrive at the end of the corridor, we find that it is actually the beginning. It is in the heart of God that we find the basis and beginning of mission—simply because we find that in God's heart there is mission. The Bible takes us to God, and in that meeting we discover that God is the kind of God who goes out of Himself for good and loving purposes. He is God with a mission. He is a missionary God. Right at the start I want to make this plain. For this is the central point of what I wish to say. Our search for man depends on the searching God. God has gone out searching for man. The Bible may be entitled "God's Search for Man." From the first chapters of the Bible, in which God calls to man, "Where art thou?" (did God ask that because He did not know where Adam was, or because He was seeking him in love?) to the last chapter, where the Spirit and the bride say, "Come, and let him that is athirst, come," the Bible is salvation history, the history of God's search for man. It is the history of how God has gone forth from Himself in sacrificial seeking for those He loves. In looking for a single Bible passage to illustrate the basic meaning of "mission," I struggled between

a choice of two and then took both. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself . . ." and "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save the lost." (2 Cor. 5:19; Luke 19:10)

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself . . ." and "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save the lost." The story of how God came searching, seeking, reconciling, finding; this is the Gospel. In this Gospel of the Bible, the good news of what God has done and does, our mission is based. Our mission is to declare what was and is the mission of God. Our church organization is called the "India Evangelical Lutheran Church." In that title the word "evangelical" is important. That means centered in the Gospel; a body of believers gathered around the searching God and sharing in His search. That is, a people deeply and personally involved with the Triune God, going forth with the message for all men and for all places of how God has gone forth. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself . . . and has committed unto us the Word of reconciliation."

And now let us look more closely at what is meant by the truth that God is the searching God. We will consider the matter under these headings:

1. God goes forth from Himself.
2. Why was it necessary that God go forth in search?
3. How did God search?
4. The fact and fruit of His search is our message, the message of the Gospel.
5. God has committed this message to us.
6. With it we go forth, even as He went forth.

### 1. GOD GOES FORTH FROM HIMSELF

That God goes out of Himself we see in the creation of the world and man. For our understanding of this we should remember St. John's magnificent statement "God is Love." Now what is love? Is it a placid concept? Do we picture love as an untroubled pool of water? No, love is restless. The essence of love is that it is active, that it is ever seeking an object for its affections. It is always going out of itself seeking that which it may love. This is the way it is with God. His loving "going-forthness" we see in His own eternal nature—the Son coming from the Father and the Spirit being sent by the Father and the Son. But love is never satisfied. Its desire for fellowship is a consuming one. It is never satisfied with self. It is always seeking something new beyond itself on which to shower its affection. So God went out of Himself to create the world and man. He spoke the Word from His heart of love and thereby created a new sphere for its activity. Thus "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."

There at the beginning of time was demonstrated what was to be revealed again and again throughout the ages in the Bible—the essential truth that God goes forth from Himself out of love for purposes of good. He does not restrict Himself to agents, but goes forth Himself as love demands. God is almighty. But He does not keep His power for Himself. He goes out of Himself in His Word, which is His Son, and uses His power to create a beautiful world. God is holy. But He does not keep His holiness to Himself. He goes out of Himself through His Word and Spirit and calls men to holiness. God is Life. But not

even His life does He retain as His own. He goes forth in His Spirit and breathes it into man. God is Love. But He does not keep His love for Himself or to Himself. He sends it forth and down through His re-creating Word and redeeming Son, Jesus Christ. And it is there in Jesus Christ that we meet Him personally and know Him plainly as going forth from Himself to save. Perhaps you will agree with me that this truth gives lively meaning to our sometimes routine confession of the great Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. . . . And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven. . . . And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son. . . .

The significance of the concept of the Holy Trinity is therefore at least partly this—it reveals that our God, and the God of all men, proceeds forth from Himself in love. This, the Bible seems to suggest, is true of God in His own nature, in His "own" fellowship of the Trinity. But it is also true in terms of His activity, the reflection of His own nature. The Bible brings this God to us and through its witness to His saving acts declares what is the eternal nature of God. In a statement at a world missionary conference in Willingen, Germany, 12 years ago, it was observed correctly:

The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God

Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might through the Spirit be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God.<sup>3</sup>

So God in His love went forth and created the world and man. He established a fellowship with man. His love coursed freely towards its new object. There was a going forth from God to man, not in search but in fellowship. At the same time there was a movement from men to God as man responded joyfully to the love of the Creator. And so the God who goes forth from Himself in love "walking with Adam in the garden in the cool of the evening."

## 2. WHY WAS IT NECESSARY THAT GOD GO FORTH IN SEARCH?

It was necessary for God to go out in search of man because man was lost. Man willfully forsook this beautiful relationship with God and went astray. The relationship which man had with God was a very special one. He was a creature and therefore dependent, like all other creatures. At the same time he was different from all other creatures. God had not said merely, "Let us make man," but, "Let us make man in our image." This does not mean to suggest that man is divine but that there was something of the divine reflected in him. As a person, with a nature reflecting in some ways God's own, he would have fellowship with God. His relationship to God would therefore be like that of a child to a father, and out of that relationship he

would serve his Creator Lord in obedient and filial service. This family relationship of obedient love and personal fellowship constitutes the essence of the divine image.

But then came the temptation. The temptation came to regard the created position of loving communion with God and obedient dependence on Him "not as man's treasure, but as man's deficiency."<sup>4</sup> The child relationship was not enough. Man wanted more, some share in God's own wisdom and authority. He desired some common denominator with God, to be God's younger brother rather than His child. So in reaching up to what was not rightfully his to have, man became unfaithful to what God had created him to be. In so reaching up he fell down, and thereby alienated himself from the fellowship of God and separated himself from the beauty of God's life. The result was catastrophic. Everything went wrong. Man was cast out of the garden of fellowship with the Father. And the whole creation, which was to have been under man's dominion, as though it were aghast at man's misbehavior, turned against him and became the agent of God's anguished wrath. But neither the fiery sword of the angel nor the waters of the flood cleansed man from the unholy desire to be like God.

Now man is in a state of disobedience. He has lost his divine image, that obedient love and personal fellowship with the Father God. His humanity is distorted, and by nature he lives in a world of imaginations which are evil from his youth. In this imaginative and distorted state man assumes that he himself is lord, or co-lord

<sup>3</sup> International Missionary Council, *The Missionary Obligation of the Church—Willingen* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1952), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Johannes Blauw, "The Biblical View of Man in His Religion," in *Anderson*, p. 33. Blauw's treatment of this point is persuasive.

with God, or at least lord over himself. He knows God, but he lives as though the creature has taken the place of the Creator. He wants God in his life, in the sense that he wants to have God at his disposal when he is in need, like an aspirin tablet. But he does not cherish or understand God. He fears God and His commands slavishly and tries to perform them either out of such slavish fear or a desire to win God's favor. Or again he tries to run away from God to be free of His demands. He prefers unrestricted freedom and lordship over his own life to fellowship with God and dependence on His will.

But in this freedom man is not free. He is by nature under alien powers of violence, sin, and death. He lives, but it is a life captive under sin and death. I remember a motto inscribed in stone on top of a magnificent library in a city in the United States and reading: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Inside the library in thousands of volumes is contained much of the accumulated wisdom of the whole human race. But history has proved what a misquotation that word is when applied to human wisdom. Man's wisdom has not made man free. In his haughty pride man sometimes thinks he has been freed. God, however, has also used the 20th century after Christ, the century in which there was probably been more evil and suffering for the human race than in all human history, to show man that he is not free. He is captive to sin, a mighty power that grips him. Man is not, as he sometimes seems to think, lord over sin, but sin is lord over man. Sin conquers man's will so that he becomes its ready and willing slave. And at any moment sin is ready to slave-trade man into the hands of

the second despot, Death. So man passes his life in the land of the shadow of death, awaiting in fear the fulfillment of this inevitable judgment: "The wages of sin is death." Freedom from fellowship with God means freedom for sin and death. In this slavery you and I, and all men, die.

That is why God had to go in search.

### 3. HOW DID GOD SEARCH?

According to human calculation God should have let His people go, let them go to the destiny that they had chosen. But God is not man. God is sovereign, and God is Love. God is sovereign Love. He does not give up His claim on His creation. Man's unfaithfulness cannot destroy God's love. He, unlike man, is not unfaithful. The prodigal is still the Father's son even though he has strayed into a far country. The child's misconduct does not change the Father's love into indifference or hate. Nor will He grant the evil one the victory. He will claim back His own. His intention to do so has always been clear in His own mind as well as the cost of that intention. "The Lamb [is] slain from the foundation of the world." Now God begins to fulfill that intent. He does what must forever remain in the last analysis incomprehensible and unfathomable to man, so immense is its meaning, so large is its cost, so profound is its effect. God goes out in search of man.

He starts out by disclosing Himself to man. He wants to reveal to man what His nature is like and what His purpose for man is. He does this through His words and through His deeds. He selects a channel through which He will speak and act, a channel through which He will reveal His mission to the world. That channel is the people of Israel.

To them and through them God discloses Himself, reveals Himself, in word and deed. The truth of God is revealed truth. Man had run away from God. The barriers were up. The shadows had set in. Man could not brush aside the darkness, reach up and claim anew for himself the truth that he must have known in the garden, the truth that God's movement toward man is an everlasting movement of love. The Bible does not start with the words "In the beginning man was searching for God" but rather with the words "In the beginning God. . . ." <sup>5</sup> He is at the beginning of the revelation about Himself. He is the Subject who initiates action in order to make Himself known. It had to be so for Him who declares: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts"; for Him who declares: "You cannot see My face, for man shall not see My face and live."

God discloses Himself to man through His words: searching and demanding words, revealing and pleading words; words aimed at the heart of man. He reveals that He is the sole Savior against the multitude of rival claimants besieging man.<sup>6</sup> God reveals as powerless and meaningless the earthly authorities that claim to provide spiritual knowledge, security, and wisdom for man. He demands that nothing in life be put ahead of Him, for to do so is fool-

ishness and results in downfall. It is only God who can help man. "You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. You shall serve the Lord, your God, and I will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from the midst of you" (Ex. 23:2). At times His words reveal the fate and sorrow in store for those who hasten to false saviors away from the living God. "You shall have no other gods before Me," He says. "You shall not bow down to them to serve them, for I the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me." Then, when He has shown the death that is involved in allegiance to other things, He immediately shows the life that is involved in the recognition that He is the sovereign and gracious Lord over human life, saying, "But showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments." (Ex. 20:5 b.)

God's words reveal more than the loving claim which He has over mankind. In addressing Himself to the children of Israel, God establishes a covenant relationship with them, and through them with the whole world, in which this claim of love will be fulfilled and through which mankind will once again become God's own possession. The way of restoration of fellowship between God and man is through an individual, Abraham, as representative of his family, and through his family, Israel, as representative of the nations.<sup>7</sup> "Go from

<sup>5</sup> Kantonen, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> G. Ernest Wright, "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," in Anderson, p. 20. Wright demonstrates once again his helpfulness in integrating Old Testament and New Testament thought, this time in the context of the Christian mission.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 97.

your country. . . . I will bless you . . . and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves" (Gen. 12:1-3). With this community He establishes a covenant of love: "For you are a people holy to the Lord, your God; the Lord, your God, has chosen you to be a people for His own possession. . . . It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love upon you and chose you. . . . But it is because the Lord loves you" (Deut. 7:6 ff.). In this covenant relationship the Lord God is again revealed as a gracious Father. God the Father woos His people, whom He calls "His peculiar treasure," by words of love and free acts of grace, and the people respond, drawn by the Father's love. When Israel goes astray, God seeks and searches for them in words of fatherly love such as these: "When Israel was a child, I loved him. . . . It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in My arms. . . . My people are bent on turning away from Me. . . . How can I give you up, O Ephraim, how can I hand you over, O Israel. . . . My heart recoils within Me" (Hos. 11:1, 3, 7, 8). And through Israel God pleads ultimately with the whole world: "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. . . . I will make with you an everlasting covenant, My steadfast, sure love for David." (Is. 55:1, 3)

But God does not search for man in words only. He searches also in deeds. He makes known His searching nature by His redemptive acts for Israel. Chief among these redeeming acts was His leading the children of Israel out of the captivity of Egypt into the freely bestowed land of rest.

By this means God confirmed in the minds of the people of Israel that He is the saving God, that He goes forth from Himself for purposes of salvation and to assert His claim of love. He is not One who only speaks words of invitation and affection but One who works out His salvation purposes for His people in history. Again and again in its prayer and in its praise the children of Israel refer to this mighty act of deliverance. God's Lordship over His creation and God's Fatherhood is active, they declare with joy. God is the Savior of mankind. Out of that experience come the words of the Bible that describe God seeking and saving that which is lost: "deliver," "redeem," "salvation," "bring out," "lead forth," "mighty acts," "signs and wonders"; all words that keep before God's people His acts and His zealous righteousness on behalf of the weak and the lost.<sup>8</sup> In this redemptive deed and in this vocabulary we see that God is dead serious in His search for man, in His determination to redeem His people.

But Israel is a whore. She will not be faithful. She represents the world in her unfaithfulness. No matter how beseeching the words of God are, no matter how compelling the deeds of God are, she will not be faithful. Of every generation God must say in heart-broken anguish: "Yet they did not listen to Me, or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers" (Jer. 7:26). And so within the covenant we see a sign, a dark forbidding omen, and yet a sign of grace and mercy—the shedding of blood. Evil is so serious a matter that blood, understood as the seat and symbol of life, must be spilled

<sup>8</sup> G. Ernest Wright, in Anderson, p. 25.



both because of it and in atonement for it. This is an omen and sign that God will go much farther in His search for man, much farther even than gracious words and deeds of power, much farther than mankind could ever have the right to expect. In hidden prophecy to Israel He declares: "The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Ex. 12:13). "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life." (Lev. 17:11)

Yet lest there be any doubt about His intention, God indicates to Israel not only in symbol but also in specific prophecy how far He will go in His search for man. Though, in a sense, the matter is hidden, lest there be no place for faith, the truth is there to be revealed to eyes that would see and to ears that would hear. "To bring good tidings to the afflicted . . . to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor . . . to comfort all who mourn"; to accomplish these things the Lord will anoint by His Spirit and send One from Himself (Is. 61:1,2). To re-establish His rule and His peace without end He will go all the way to the place of rebellion and disorder, and Immanuel shall be His sign to men. But even as Zion is called upon to rejoice greatly at His coming, the impact of its rebellion against the King who comes, the omen of the blood, is splashed in red across the Messianic hope. The royalty of the King who comes is the royalty of love. And therefore to accomplish His search of love, His suffering Ser-

vant and Child will come as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He will be "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities . . . cut off from the land of the living," pouring out His soul unto death that He might bear the sin of many and make intercession for the transgressors (Is. 53:5,8,12). Then, and then alone, shall your God rejoice over you" (Is. 62:5). And then shall the faithful lift up an ensign over the peoples: "Behold, your salvation comes; behold, His reward is with Him." (Is. 62:11)

And so, in the fullness of His time, God "rewarded" man: for apostasy, seeking and finding; for disobedience, mercy; for hatred, love. God, who had spoken and acted in many and divers ways for His people, in the last days—we might say "at last," "finally"—spoke to mankind by His Son. The Son is the loving Word, the Word eternally begotten from God's heart of love and eternally with Him, the "Son of His Love." In and through Him God pleaded with man and worked for man. Mankind had not responded with faith and obedience to Him. So now God, who has always been going forth from Himself in love, went forth and "down." He did what He had always known He would have to do in order to complete His search for man and recover His creation.

But oh! the cost of the doing. He gave His Word, He gave His Son. This means He gave Himself into human flesh. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This was divine speech at its plainest, divine action at its clearest. God Himself personally confronted man, personally sought him out, and personally took man's lostness to Himself. Here we find pinpointed the Biblical basis of mission. God

was not going to keep Himself to Himself. Rather He would give Himself to renew man's lost fellowship with Him. "Of all the missionary journeys the Incarnation was the first, the costliest, and the most effective. God has never asked men to do what He Himself has not done before them."<sup>9</sup> He emptied Himself and took upon Himself our flesh. He entered into our situation completely, with all its humility and sorrow.

Herein is the truth for which the prophets grasped, the reality replacing shadow with substance, anticipation with fulfillment, insight with revelation, hope with fact.<sup>10</sup> God actually has a mission of love and goes all the way in fulfillment of it. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld Him and in Him the truth that God is full of grace, and what is eternally begotten in His heart is self-giving and self-sacrificing love. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." With St. Paul we must say in holy awe before this incredible love: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh! . . . [and therefore] preached among the nations, believed on in the world." (1 Tim. 3:16)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Harold K. Moulton, *The Mission of the Church—Studies in Missionary Words of the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1959), p. 4. Moulton, who has spent a period of service in India, does a further service as he points out the missionary significance of some familiar New Testament words and thoughts.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Dobbie, "The Biblical Foundation of the Mission of the Church," *The International Review of Missions* (July 1962), p. 288.

<sup>11</sup> The emphasis on "God" as the subject of action throughout the history of redemption, as distinguished from the rather more common emphasis on the action of one of the three Persons in the Trinity, reflects the writer's experi-

As nothing before or since, the coming of Jesus Christ brings judgment to the world, and this, too, is part of the message of the people of God to the world. It is clear that man's condition must be radically bad that God should have to come to this. In His coming in Jesus Christ, God makes plain how radical that evil is. God's life was always the light of men, but man did not comprehend it. Now God puts that life before the world, concretely, in the flesh, unmistakably, so that the world can never again misunderstand or fail to know. In so putting His life, holy as it is and pure in love, before men, that Life brings judgment to mankind. It is the Light of men also in the sense that it exposes the disastrous, egocentric, man-centered, materialistic darkness which grips and imprisons man wherever he is found . . . even, we might add, in the church of God!<sup>12</sup> "This is the judgment that the Light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the Light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

But as God in Christ has not come into  
ence in the task of communicating the Gospel to Muslims. As Monarchianism to a certain extent did a favor to the ancient church in reminding it of the truth of the one personal God, so the church's mission to various types of Unitarians both makes stronger its faith in the Trinity and at the same time compels it to give full weight to the truth that it is a Trinity in Unity. It is forced to take at full value such Biblical phrases as "the Word was God," "God manifest in the flesh," "God our Savior." Christians are monotheists. When any Person of the Trinity acts, it is God acting. We have to maintain this at the same time that we support the personal distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit, as revealed in Scriptures. The theme of "the searching God" finds meaning and acceptability only because both are true.

<sup>12</sup> F. N. Davey, "The Gospel According to St. John and the Christian Mission," Anderson, p. 72.

the world for pleasure, so He has not ultimately come for judgment, though that is a result. He has come for salvation. "The Son of man comes to seek and to save the lost." For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17). This was the great purpose for which He came. But to achieve it, to fulfill His search, all that Scriptures had foretold of it had to be fulfilled. The Shepherd who was good, and who had spent all of created time in search for His sheep, died for them in order to deliver them from waywardness and from the hand of the enemy. The blood of His life was shed. Sinful man was to be reconciled to God and restored to His fellowship. This meant that the barrier of sin separating God and man had to be removed. But "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." Therefore He who knew no sin was made to be sin, and in His mercy He bore it for us. "Then he [Pilate] handed Him over to them to be crucified" (John 19:16). But what really happened is that God in the flesh delivered Himself to them to be crucified. "And when they came to the place which is called the Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left" (Luke 23:33), representing the world in whose midst and for whom Christ suffered and died. Thus He fulfilled the will of Him who sent Him, which will was His very own.

The cross is the decisive act of God, the fulfillment of His missionary will. It is both the sign of God's grace and the sign of God's power, the divine act of gracious forgiveness and of conquest over opposing powers and spirits. It is "the illuminating

center of the mystery of God's redemptive purpose."<sup>13</sup> It says that God will Himself do all that is necessary for man's salvation, that He will go all the way in the search since man is utterly lost. Only the cross of God in Christ was adequate to solve the radical tragedy of man's predicament. Saint Paul, with a series of vivid contrasting pictures of its meaning, reveals why it is so. A humanly impenetrable barrier lies between God and man. Through the cross, God breaks it down. Man stands condemned before the judgment throne of God. The unmerited pardon of the cross brings acquittal. Man is in hostile rebellion against God. On the cross, God effects peace through forgiveness. Man has lost his status as a child of God. The grace of the cross brings the adoption of sons. Man is hopelessly lost in debt. The nails of the cross hold the canceling of his debt. Man is a slave in bondage. The cross makes him free.<sup>14</sup> "And if the Son makes you free," if God Himself in suffering and sacrificial love makes you free, yes, then "you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). The mission is of God. The cross of Jesus Christ is at the center of His mission. These two statements about man's bondage and his freedom are equally true, equally important. The cross explains, interprets, and effects what God has set out to do for mankind.<sup>15</sup> Therefore the cross stands at the center of all mission, and "we preach Christ Crucified" to mankind.

But God's search did not end in defeat with our Lord's death. If it had, it would

<sup>13</sup> Wilhelm Andersen, in Anderson, p. 303, quoting M. A. C. Warren from *Mission Under the Cross*.

<sup>14</sup> Kantonen, pp. 52 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Wilhelm Andersen, in Anderson, p. 303.

have been a failure, a glorious, remarkable, heart-tugging failure, but nevertheless a failure. The search, however, did not end there. In the mission of God there is a turning point, where the sorrow turns to joy, and the mission gains the victory. In the very act of dying, as well as in the dramatic moment of the resurrection, death is swallowed up in victory. Even for those only casually surveying the Biblical basis of mission it is easy to see the pivotal significance of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first sermons of the apostles are full of it. Their life was changed by it.

We sometimes unconsciously leave God hanging on the cross in our witness and preaching. The apostles did not. For God did not remain there. It was not His intention to remain there, and He could not be held by the bonds of death, now destroyed. The final destruction of death is accompanied by the assumption of life on the third day. The reason He had come in His searching mission was to bring life — "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). As the suffering and dying Savior, He has triumphantly opened the road to communion between man and Himself, and now as living Lord He invites man to Himself and to a living fellowship with Himself. To anyone who henceforth says, "O God, if You had been here," the living Lord replies: "I have been here, and I am." "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (John 11:25 f.)

It is as such, as the living Lord who went out on His mission of love and succeeded in it, that God now meets us. The fact that

He meets us is proof that His search has ended in victory enabling us to speak this day of mission. You may have been waiting for me to talk about the church's mission, and I have spent this entire time talking about God's mission. It is because God has a mission that the church has a mission. The church's mission is man's response to God's mission. It is because God went out on a search, suffered, died, rose, and lives that people have a mission. Therefore, as His people meditate upon their mission, they do so first by meditating upon God's mission and by meeting Him in adoring faith. The disciples waited in Galilee on a mountain, they waited in Jerusalem behind locked doors, they waited to be sent forth by Him who was sent. As the resurrected Lord came toward them they fell down in utter joy and adoration, and in the simple words of St. Matthew, "they worshiped Him." God in Jesus Christ graciously encounters us as the seeking, saving, and living Lord, and we salute Him as worshipers.<sup>16</sup> It is from the position of worship that we, the redeemed, hear His command to "go." We have a mission because God has a mission, has completed it for us, and is our Lord!

#### 4. THE MESSAGE OF GOD'S MISSION IS THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL

What we have been talking about—the redemptive search of God—is the message of the Gospel. We have spoken earlier of the importance of the word "evangelical" ("Gospel") in the title of our denomination "India Evangelical Lutheran Church." It means that we intend to be the church of the Gospel. Now what is the Gospel?

<sup>16</sup> Karl Barth, "An Exegetical Study of Saint Matthew 28:16-20," Anderson, p. 59.

It is the good news of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. It is the glad tidings of God's search undertaken and accomplished. It is not in the first place an old familiar truth nor an objective teaching to which one consents, although it is both of these. It is the telling of something that has happened, a matter of vital importance to the hearer. It is a message of unsurpassed beauty, offering its forgiveness and peace freely to the hearer.

He would not bear any longer being God on high without being God on earth, our Helper and Savior. He has called us, the unworthy, led us to His house and opened the door for us. . . . Like a true Father, He has given us a home with Himself where we may live and work, and even play and rejoice as His children, a home from which we will not be driven out. We shall nevermore be strangers, orphans, refugees.<sup>17</sup>

This is the message of the Gospel.

This message is a true message for a world that lies in spiritual darkness and ignorance. In a sense the world has a concern for truth, so great a desire for truth that it cannot be satisfied. In this modern world mankind is biting off great chunks of truth in the world of science, medicine, botany, physics, and so on, a search reflected in our own environment. In this general drive for truth is there no concern for religious truth? There is, and it is normally connected with the importance of knowing the Supreme Being, for the world in a sense does know something about God. It is not only our practical experience with the non-Christian world but our study of the Bible that tells us that. St. Paul says:

"For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world, His invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and Deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). The non-Christian knows God's sovereign Deity and power.

The result is twofold. It means fear and flight, for the sinful conscience of man declares its unworthiness and cries out, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). Again it means thirst for religious truth; for many an all-out and in some cases a noble effort to please God by living according to the dictates of the Law that He has written into man's conscience. But in neither case is the result satisfactory. Neither man's flight from God nor his flight to the Law avail to restore his fellowship with God, which was the essence of his created bliss as a child of God in the garden of the Father.

Therefore it is correct to say that the world lies in spiritual darkness and that the enlightening message of the Gospel, in which God reveals Himself as Savior, is needed by every man. The trouble is that the non-Christian knows God, but at the same time he does not know Him. This is not a contradiction or a paradox. While St. Paul says "they knew God" (Rom. 1:21), Jesus says, "They do not know Him who sent Me" (John 15:21). The non-Christian knows God, but not as the sending God, not as the searching God, not as the saving God.

A simple example, which I have often used with non-Christians, may be helpful

<sup>17</sup> Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives* (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 71.

to the understanding of this point.<sup>18</sup> There is a poor man who lives in a humble hut far from the capital city of a great kingdom. In that city dwells the emperor, the maharajah. The poor man knows him in the sense that he knows the maharajah is there. He knows that he is a mighty and stern ruler, so he fears him and tries to obey his laws. He knows the maharajah, doesn't he? And yet he doesn't really know him. One day the poor man becomes very sick. While he is sick he receives a greeting from the rajah, and a little later the rajah sends some medicine. He begins to understand that the rajah is kind to his people as well as just. But his fear is not gone. He is very sick, and his body is full of ulcers. One day there is a knock at the door of his hut. The door opens, the maharajah walks in, takes off his fine clothing, kneels down, and quietly cleans the wounds of the sick man. With his own hands he anoints the ulcers with medicine. Tearing the royal garments into strips, he binds up the wounds of the sufferer. Then he leaves to return to his palace in the capital city. Now the poor man knows the rajah, really knows him. He knows him as one who will trouble himself and humble himself and suffer for his people. He knows him as one who loves him, as a healer and a savior. Now the poor, healed

man no longer fears the king, but, knowing him for what he is, he loves him in return.

For men who still need to know God as He really is, the Gospel is the only message of light and hope. The Gospel puts God in front of man as He really is, enlightening man's darkness and ignorance. In the Bible it is therefore called revelation, a word used 44 times in its nominal and verbal forms.<sup>19</sup> God is the revealing God, wanting to make Himself known to men and finding the means for doing so. He does not conceal, He communicates. He reveals, gives, shares, and opens out for men what they have to know about Him. And He does it finally the way the rajah did, by coming to man and binding up his wounds. "No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to Me!" says Jesus. (Matt. 11:27, 28)

And to all who come in faith, to all Simon Peters, the Lord says: "Blessed are you . . . for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). Therefore the Gospel is also called a mystery—28 times it is so described.<sup>20</sup> But it is not a mystery in the usual sense of the word, but rather a revealed mystery, a secret that has been told, something long hidden but now opened out. "For He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ . . . to unite all things in Him." (Eph. 1:9, 10)

The Gospel breaks through man's spiritual darkness, in short, because the Gospel is Jesus. When the Gospel is offered to

<sup>18</sup> To some this example may seem to be too simple for a complex matter. The approach indicated, however, has been helpful to the writer personally in trying to incorporate into a whole the Scriptural insights and our knowledge of non-Christians and their beliefs. For a concise and helpful summary of some aspects of this important matter see Ralph Bohlmann, "The Natural Knowledge of God," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXIV (December 1963), 721—735.

<sup>19</sup> Moulton, pp. 4 f.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

men, it is Jesus Himself who is offered to them and received by them. But to be confronted by Jesus is to be confronted by God. When the message of the Gospel, Jesus, is proclaimed before ignorant and darkened men, God is put before men as He really is. When the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ is witnessed to mankind, the sending, searching, and saving God stands before man, "as though Galilee were everywhere."<sup>21</sup> Therefore Jesus says: "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God' (John 6:45; Is. 54:13). Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except Him who is from God; He has seen the Father" (John 6:45, 46). "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

The message of the Gospel is a message not only for a world in ignorance and in darkness but also for a world that lies in captivity. We have earlier pointed out how the world is in bondage to the alien powers of sin and death. In the world about us we see the cruelty of that bondage. Man envying, hating, corrupting, destroying, doing evil even when he wishes he could do good, sometimes desperately but vainly wishing to be free from these powers, sometimes fainting and without the strength even to wish for freedom. The days of the rosy optimist are finished. Most of mankind sees clearly that the powers holding man are strong and fully armed. But the message of the Gospel is that One stronger has come and has plundered the powers. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and

blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death He might destroy Him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb. 2:14 f.). Anders Nygren quotes what has become his famous example of the occupied country. The enemy had occupied a country, chained and enslaved its entire population. By intervention from the outside, the country has been freed, the enemy destroyed in battle. And now the message to all the people is—Come out of hiding, look about, take off your chains, for you are free. And so God, who has intervened in Christ to deliver man from the domination of evil, says: Come out of hiding, look about, take off your chains, for you are free. "If you continue in My Word," the Word of the Gospel—that the strength of sin is broken, that death is swallowed up in victory, and that all things are put in subjection to Christ—"you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."<sup>22</sup>

The message of the Gospel is not only a message for an ignorant and for a captive world but for a suffering world. The world, ignorant and enslaved, is a world in sorrow. When the world laughs, it laughs loud and hard and quickly before the next blow falls. Life is fickle, evil is haphazard, trouble is frequent, death inevitable. What else is there to do for the world but to laugh madly and to weep violently? The message of the Gospel is that there is another answer. The answer of the Gospel is not in its understanding of the nature of tribulation, or in escape from it, but in its overcoming through Jesus Christ. "I have

<sup>21</sup> For this sermon in a nutshell I believe that I am indebted to Karl Barth, but do not have the reference.

<sup>22</sup> Anders Nygren, *The Gospel of God* (London: SCM Press, 1952), pp. 29 ff.

said this to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Gospel is God's answer to evil, the answer that God has suffered it Himself in order that we might not have to suffer it beyond endurance. The Gospel speaks with the invitation of love from the lips of One who knows suffering and has overcome it, inviting and beseeching a sorrowful world to the peace that passes all understanding:

. . . calling the lost ones — "Where are you (Adam)?" (Gen. 2:9)

to the place of safety — "Go into the ark, you and all your household." (Gen. 7:1)

. . . calling the lost ones — "How can I give you up, O Ephraim!" (Hos. 11:8)

to the place of safety — "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28)

. . . calling the lost ones — "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem"

to the place of safety — "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you." (John 14:27)

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come' . . . And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price." (Rev. 22:17)

This is the message that goes before the world. It is the message of God's movement toward man in love. It is a message that calls for decision. Though the world may temporarily flee from making it, in the last analysis it cannot avoid that decision. For Jesus stands before every man, in effect, saying: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6). I am the true and living Way. I am God's Way to man, and therefore man's only Way to

God. On the one hand He declares that which forces a man to decision: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). On the other hand He points to the responsible decision which the world in the light of this truth is called upon to make: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). Contrition over the sin that brings God in Christ along the painful road of sacrificial suffering, and faith in the good news that He has so come in searching love — this is the response for which God looks and which His Spirit enables those who hear His appeal to make. As the saving God He stands before all mankind in Jesus Christ in urgent and pleading love, saying, "You must be saved. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

##### 5. THIS MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL GOD HAS COMMITTED TO US

This message of salvation, in which God graciously confronts mankind, invites him to the banquet, calls him to decision, and creates faith in God's proffered grace has now been committed by Him to His people, that is, to you and to me. The message of His rescue mission God has entrusted to us. The Shepherd of the flock has put to flight the enemy. But the sheep are scattered and lost and are now to be found and returned to the safety of the sheepfold. Those whom He has already graciously found God unites with Himself in His continuous search for man.

How does He do so? He does so through their baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; that is, through His personally involving them with Himself and His purposes. He is ever



proceeding forth from Himself. In His activity He is ever going out of Himself to seek and to save that which is lost. So now also those who are bound up with Him by the new birth and faith are bound up with Him in His "going-forthness," in His self-sending and self-giving purposes.

It is not by accident that we are baptized into the name of the Triune God. It is by our baptism in that name which reveals God as being ever in a movement of love toward man that the whole people of God is inevitably involved in mission. Just as mission is part of the Father's nature, so it is now part of the children's nature. Because the life of the people of God is renewed in fellowship with the searching God, their life is henceforth a life of search — searching for man with the message of the searching God. In Emil Brunner's oft-quoted words: "The church exists by mission as fire by burning." Once the fire ceases to burn, it ceases to be fire. But the church is ceaselessly on fire, being baptized into the eternal fire of God's love.

Our share in the search of God for man is therefore natural and inevitable. There is a practical identification of conversion and becoming witnesses, for we are converted in order that we might witness. It is God Himself, who, revealed in our hearts and dwelling in us, with that revelation at the same time pushes us out of ourselves in search with a message. The inevitable correlation between conversion and becoming a witness we see in the words of St. Paul: "But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. . . . I went away into Arabia" (Gal. 1:15, 16, 17).

Just as Christ was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary that He might become the Savior of men, so He is born again in us that we might become "saviors" <sup>23</sup> — not indeed as saviors in ourselves but in the sense of those whom we are to point to the true Savior. This is not therefore something in which we have a choice, nor is it something in which we want a choice. We are in this search with Christ all the way, and we would not have it any other way. We know that the road ahead will be full of hardships, strewn with pitfalls and obstacles, and overrun by enemies. But it is our road because it was Christ's road. It is the road of search to which His grace brought us, and so naturally, joyfully, and confidently we follow Him on His searching and witnessing way. So important, however, is this matter to God that He does not allow room for any misunderstanding. He puts our role in this search in plain and simple words. He sends us out to herald the message of His salvation. As He sent Himself forth in search for salvation, so now He sends us forth to proclaim salvation. Not only are we witnesses, but we are sent to witness. Not only does He say: "You shall be My witnesses," but He says, "Behold I send you." Not only are we born again to be witnesses, we are specifically commissioned as witnesses by the sending God. This is not a self-chosen commission, and therefore it is not negotiable. In the same moment that the sovereign and loving Lord calls us to Himself, He sends us from ourselves:

Rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to

<sup>23</sup> M. A. C. Warren, *The Gospel of Victory* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 47.

the things in which you have seen Me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me. (Acts 26:16 f.)

Since it is God who in Baptism unites us with Himself in His search; since it is God who reveals His Son to us that we may preach Him to the Gentiles; since it is God who sends us to bear witness to the forgiveness of sins, it is not unexpected that the New Testament describes those sent in terms of the words "herald" and "ambassador." God cried to Isaiah: "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" (Is. 6:8). We are heralds of the Gospel, proclaimers, conveyers of good news. A herald was a man who made public pronouncement on behalf of a superior, summoning people, declaring war, enlisting colonists. The essential thing about the herald therefore was that he was subordinate, and of himself insignificant, speaking only with the authority of his superior.<sup>24</sup>

So we do not create a message, or improve on one, or speak with our own authority. We have received overwhelmingly joyful news to proclaim from Him who has all authority in heaven and earth. We must go to the center of the market, to the center of man's attention, wherever that may take us, and summon him to hear the Good News. We are heralds of gladness, for as St. Paul says, "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ

as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5). As long as the people of God keep as their central goal the heralding of Jesus Christ as Lord, it will be true what the Spirit says: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation!" (Is. 52:7)

In addition to the title "herald," the Scriptures add the description "ambassador" to those who are sent to witness. "We are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). What characterizes an ambassador is that he does not make the policy. He serves the policy of his government, communicates it, and tries to put it into effect in tactful and understanding ways. As with the title "herald," so with the description "ambassador" we see protected the truth that both the message to be proclaimed and the commission to proclaim are from God. Since it is God's policy to save man through the proclamation of the Gospel, we have neither the right to substitute another message for it, nor the need to fortify it with extraneous, outside support.<sup>25</sup> As a government speaks through its ambassador, so in essence it is God Himself who through us is pleading with mankind. In considering the characteristics of witnessing, however, the concept "ambassador" adds a new dimension to the idea of heralding. "Heralding" points to the bold, open, fearless, and authoritative proclamation of the Gospel to which we are called. "Ambassador" points to the concern that the proclamation be purposeful. It is not to be simply proclamation in the sense of a noisy beating of the air. God's policy is not interested in proclamation as such, but His concern is rather to save man

<sup>24</sup> Moulton, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Kantonen, p. 13.

through the proclamation of the Gospel. Therefore the message of the Gospel is to be proclaimed with knowledge, tact, and understanding, with the concern that the result that God desires be attained in the hearts of men. To the bold and uninhibited voice of the herald must be added the concerned and beseeching tones of the ambassador: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:20)

God commits His message of the Gospel to us and sends us out as His heralds and ambassadors. But the glory and possibility of our participation in His mission lies in this, that He does not send us out alone. To the last He remains the sending God who sends Himself. In Christ, God, who sought man to the uttermost and loved man to the end, cried out on the cross, "It is finished," and so in one sense God's search was over. And yet, in another sense, it is not over. His objective deliverance in Jesus Christ must be subjectively received by men. The Good News must reach each individually. And therefore God's sending of Himself is not finished. Rather, He sends Himself again and again, and will keep on sending Himself until all things are accomplished according to His will. This sending of Himself in the message of His search and in His searching messengers is the sending of the Holy Spirit.

The heralding of the message that God has searched and found obtains its "final meaning" in relation to God the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> Without Him the message of the life, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is only a statement of facts — facts possibly true, possibly significant,

but on the same level as any other statement of historical facts. As such, even if they were true, they would not be likely to do anything for man. A recent scientific study on human behavior confirms this under the old thesis: "Communication of facts is generally ineffective against predispositions."<sup>27</sup> No ordinary message of goodness and morality — even though sound, reasonable, and buttressed by facts — is permanently effective among men who are by nature predisposed to evil. But the message of the Gospel and its facts are not defeated by this judgment because of the presence in it of God the Holy Spirit. He makes of every true proclamation of the Gospel an act of God. He turns every Gospel word issuing from the lips of man into His own work, in which He personally seeks to fulfill that which He has accomplished. God Himself through the Word of the Gospel, through His holy sacraments and through His presence in them makes what He has done in Christ a present reality and a present gift for every individual in every age.<sup>28</sup> He it is who convicts the world of sin, testifies to all that Jesus said and did, and guides mankind into all truth. It is because of God the Holy Spirit's presence in the Word of the Gospel and in the sacraments that the Gospel is in fact "the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes."

God the Holy Spirit does not only send Himself forth in the message but also in the messengers. He does not only occupy and empower the Word of the Gospel; through it He occupies and empowers the bearer of the Gospel. That is the fulfill-

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>27</sup> *Time* (Feb. 14, 1964), p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Kantonen, p. 77.

ment of God's promise: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8). God not only calls, illuminates, hallows, keeps Christendom through the message of the Gospel. The God who has found those whom He has sought empowers those whom He has found to bear witness to Him in word and deed. He dwells in His people that they may daily die to sin and awake to righteousness. He gives men a holy will and makes of their lives a temple where men may meet God. He gives to the church a variety of gifts and to each a manifestation of His presence for the common good. In every anxious moment and in every hour He is with His witnesses, teaching them "what you ought to say." With what abundance the Father gives the Spirit to them that ask Him! In this fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit lies the promise for the fulfillment of the witnessing task of the people of God. Scripture records that even after our Lord's resurrection "some doubted." But after the day of Pentecost "they lifted their voices together to God and said. . . 'And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to Thy servants to speak Thy Word with all boldness, while Thou stretchest out Thy hand to heal.' . . . And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 4:24, 29; 2:47). So the Lord now extends His hands in benediction over His frail and doubting people, empowering them with His gift: "Receive the Holy Spirit."

#### 6. NOW WE GO FORTH WITH HIS MESSAGE IN THE SAME MANNER AS THE SEARCHING GOD

Bound up with the God who went forth, the people of God go forth with His mes-

sage. How do they go forth? What is their method? There is no "method" in the technical sense. But there is a way of going forth, and the way is like Jesus' way. Most significant is the word of Jesus "As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). In this passage lies sufficient instruction for the church's way of witness. The going forth is to be patterned after Jesus' going forth. This statement is deceptive in its simplicity. Its truth is full of significance for the life of the church. In this final section we will explore its meaning under the headings: Jesus was outgoing, outgoing in love, in sacrifice, as a debtor to all, with urgency, with a prayer for unity and with confidence.

Jesus was outgoing.<sup>29</sup> His attention was other-directed. He was not concerned about His own welfare. He did not consider His own comfort. He was concerned for others. He opposed inturned religion. He found in the Jewish "church" that kind of religion — inturned, and mainly devoted to keeping out people who were sinners and keeping itself free from contamination. Therefore he so often "looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). He spent His time exercising His concern for people, looking for the lost, not counting the cost. We must become afraid of the development that can be discerned in the church in India that would take it on the way toward becoming like the Jewish church, inturned and self-concerned. This is what happened to some of the churches in the Middle East, which became "ghetto" churches, churches with walls about them, cysts of life rather

<sup>29</sup> Moulton, pp. 16—19. God in Christ, *before any of His apostles*, is the primary example for the church in its searching mission.

than living cells that grow. Perhaps we can find examples closer to home than the Middle East. This must not happen to us. A primary concern of the devil is to make the church inner-directed, for then he knows he will have won the battle. To that end he is very clever in his methods, saying: "Before you pursue your mission you must become strong yourself. You must take care of some of your own problems first. You must establish your financial situation." These are all legitimate concerns and plausible arguments. Thus he pushes us along the road of pious self-concern and helps us to betray the Son of man with a kiss. The God who went out in selfless search for others, and who put the whole world and every last sinner in it ahead of Himself, says to any church that wants to build walls of self-concern around itself: "Simon, Simon, I have something to say to you."

Jesus was outgoing. His outgoingness was the outgoingness of love. If the words "As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you" echo truly in our lives, our outgoingness will be one of love. Mission is not a matter of analysis but of obedience to the inner compulsion of love. It is not the result of planning but the result of the love of God in Christ constraining us. As our outgoingness flows from the love of God, who first loved us, so it also inevitably issues in love. Although Jesus did not tell the story of the Good Samaritan about Himself, it really was about Himself, wasn't it? He was like the Good Samaritan in that His instinct was to help, not to avoid; to save, not to bypass. To help, not for any other reasons except that the man was in need of help; not for hope of heaven or for fear of hell, not to satisfy the ego

or to provide publicity, not to increase the income of the congregation or the number of voters, but simply because the man was in need of help, and love responds to need.

If we should interpret the first part of 1 Cor. 13 in terms of mission, we might read:

If I speak in many languages and preach angelically in the pulpit and forcefully in the market, "but have not love, I am a noisy gong." If I plan new enterprises wisely and have all the faith to support a new mission as at Gundulupet, "but have not love, I am nothing." If I give 10 percent of my income to the congregation and suffer considerably from non-Christians because of my zealous witness, "but have not love, I gain nothing." Love is patient with those who cannot understand the Gospel, and kind to those who oppose it. Love is not jealous when a neighboring congregation grows, not boastful when it gains a convert. It is not arrogant or rude because it possesses the mysteries of God. In its mission to the world "it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

The God whose search for man was a search of love now says to those whom He sends forth, "Abide in My love." (John 15:9)

Jesus was outgoing, and outgoing in love. Jesus was therefore outgoing in sacrifice. He was the servant of love. Therefore inevitably He became the suffering Servant, the Servant of the cross. We have noted previously that the cross is at the center of God's mission. It is therefore also at the center of the church's mission—not only in the sense that it is at the heart of its message but also in the sense that it is to share and to bear the cross itself. The cross reveals the manner of mission to which

God in Christ calls us. When we remember the church's calling to be the "body of Christ" and each Christian's calling to be "individually members of it," we are helped to appreciate the meaning of this truth. For the body goes with the head and is in union with it. It exists to carry out the will of the head, and it goes where the head has gone. The Head has gone to the cross; so that is where the body goes. The church that does not accompany its Head on the journey to the cross is not the living body of Christ, and is separated from its Lord. This means, in short, that to carry out Christ's mission the church must play the part of suffering servant in this world, even as Christ, its Head, was the suffering Servant. For "a servant is not greater than His Master." (John 13:16)

This is both the law of spiritual life and the law of spiritual growth for the church that is bent on sharing in the mission of God. As the church seeks to gain the whole world for Christ, it must first lose its life "for My sake and the Gospel's" (Mark 8:35). The church, a child born of divine sacrificial love, cannot be a servant to the world and at the same time servant to itself. These two stand in contradiction. To be servant to mankind means to die to oneself. Those who think of the church as an agency to some sort of material security, or as a place for self-service, or as a channel for self-glorification, are wrong. God's way in Jesus Christ reveals the dreadful error of such calculations. In reflecting that way of "dying to self," the church may rather have to give up much or everything which it once considered essential for itself — perhaps even institutions, its salary scales, personal comforts, or even more than these, in order to

serve man to the uttermost with the Gospel. This is the law of spiritual life in Christ. But it is not something sorrowful or unbearable. For it is also the law of spiritual growth. Out of this sort of dying to self in order that God's saving will be done flows the fruit of search which God and His people so long to see. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). This has been the joyful experience of the sacrificing and suffering people of God through all the ages, and this has been in part and shall be in greater measure the joyful experience of the church of Christ in India. "As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). "If any one serves Me, the Father will honor him." (John 12:26)

Jesus, outgoing in love and in sacrifice, was outgoing toward all men. He was a debtor to all kinds of men and to all sorts and conditions of men. "Come to Me, all who labor . . ." was His all-inclusive invitation to mankind. To Him a man in need was a man in need, no matter who his father or mother was, or where he was born. Only He would have said, "I have to go through Samaria" (John 4:4). Only He would have chosen the half-caste Samaritans as examples of kindness (Luke 10:33) and gratitude (Luke 17:16) in the face of the caste-ridden Jewish religious community. The rich man and the poor man, the beggar and the extortioner, the physically ill and the demon-possessed, the Jew and the Gentile, all these He included in His ministry. It is to this kind of ministry that He calls the people of God, the people of the India Evangelical Lutheran

Church. For all kinds of men — the Brahmin and the tribal, the clerk and the factory worker, the student and the professor, the Hindu and the Muslim, the Dravida Kazhaken and the Communist, the sick and the suffering — for all the men and for all the kinds of men for whom Jesus would have assumed responsibility, His disciples now assume responsibility. As we see in the New Testament, it took time for the Jewish Christians to break out of their initial exclusivism. But under the inspiration of the Spirit and the leadership of the apostle Paul they soon did so. The day is upon us, too, under the Spirit of God to break out of old patterns and exclusivisms that separate us and the Gospel from men in need all about us. The God who without partiality sought out each one of us in Jesus Christ says to a seeking and searching church: "There is no distinction . . .; the same Lord is Lord and bestows His riches upon all who call upon Him." (Rom. 10:12)

Jesus was outgoing with a deep sense of urgency. Urgently God had sought us out in Christ. Urgently Christ had sought out men on earth. Look in your Bible concordance under the word "village," and you will be struck by the sense of Jesus' urgency. "He went among the villages teaching" (Mark 6:6). "He went on through cities and villages preaching" (Luke 8:1). "He went on His way through towns and villages teaching" (Luke 13:22). As He went, He had no place to lay His head, and in the midst of His labors He even overlooked eating on occasions. Never mind — "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). And wherever He went, there were the crowds, the crowds that

thronged about and jostled Him either with their affection or with their displeasure. 148 times the Gospels speak of the crowds.<sup>30</sup> Whereas the Pharisees said, "But this crowd, who do not know the Law, are accursed" (John 7:49), Jesus said, "I have compassion on the crowd" (Matt. 15:32). This is the word that may be painted on the masthead of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church as it faces with the people of God in India the great population explosion in this land — to be doubled to one billion in the next 30 years, 98 percent of whom face a spiritually hopeless future. "I have compassion on the crowd." And with all haste let us join hands together in every effort to proclaim God's love in Christ for the multitudes, saying with the Lord: "[We] must work the works of Him who sent [us], while it is day; before the night comes, when no one can work." (John 9:4)

Jesus, outgoing in urgency, was therefore outgoing and open in a plea for the unity of all those involved in His search. The world must know that the Father sent the Son. The world will know it in part by the unity which God's people have and display through their fellowship together in the saving life and searching purposes of the Father. Jesus, therefore, at a critical moment in His life, prays that His people may go forth in search together and in unity:

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who are to believe in Me through their Word, that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they may also be one in Us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. The glory which

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

Thou hast given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and Thou in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me. (John 17:20-23)

In considering the Biblical basis of mission, the church of the 20th century in a great movement of the Spirit has heard this prayer anew. It seeks to heed Christ's call to unity—not as a purposeless or merely sociological quest—but that the world may know that the Father has sent the Son. It is the mighty searching Trinity in Unity, the one God and Father of all, who is behind the great "ones" of Ephesians 4 — "one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism" — and through these He gives to His faithful the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That gift is purposeful — so that the love, fellowship, and unity of believers may proclaim to the world that the Triune God alone has the power to bind divided mankind together again into one harmonious body under one life-giving Head. Paul's appeal for unity in 1 Cor. 1: 10, that the believers "be united in the same mind," therefore comes to the India Evangelical Lutheran Church also in the context of God's mission. The verb for "being perfectly joined together" is the same as that used for "mending nets," that is, putting them back into a state of repair so that they can do their job.<sup>31</sup>

And finally, Jesus was outgoing with a sense of confidence. He tired, but He never tired of His work. There was something that bore Him on. It was the confidence of the final victory of God. Do you feel the sense of serenity and sureness in Jesus, even amidst the heat of the battle

and when the suffering is very great? "The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified" (Luke 24:7). This was a hard saying for Jesus, so hard we cannot ever fully understand it. But then He added, "They will . . . kill Him, and after three days He will arise" (Mark 10:34). He knew that He would rise. How this thought of ultimate victory must have comforted Him and borne Him up in His struggle unto death! God's search could only end in victory because the search was God's.

"As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you" — that is, with the same serenity and confidence that looks past the weariness, suffering, and striving to God's victory. When the call to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ is heard anew by the people of God, their first reaction is dismay. Certainly when the India Evangelical Lutheran Church looks at itself, its weakness, and its frailty, and compares these with the great task given to it, it will be filled with misgivings. With Moses it doubts: "I am slow of speech and of tongue" (Ex. 4:10). With Jeremiah it despairs: "I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (Jer. 1:6). With Jonah it turns to flight: "I cannot go to Nineveh" (Jonah 1:3). With Peter it cries out in confession: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (Luke 5:8)

The misgivings quite rightly arise when the church looks at itself. It is when we look at the searching and finding God, who has already assured the victory through the power of His resurrection, that misgiving is replaced with confidence. For He will not break the bruised reed of our frail talents, or quench the smoldering wick of our feeble efforts "till he brings justice

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 32.



to victory" (Matt. 12:20). It is the rising and living God who puts forth His power-laden hand and touches us: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down . . . to build and to plant . . . I am watching over My Word to perform it" (Jer. 1:10, 12). With His promises He then lifts up our eyes unto the hill.

On the hill stands the Lord, preparing ever anew to send out His disciples and us. So at last we come to what might have been expected at the beginning—the final great commission of the Lord, in which the victory of God's mission and ours is made sure:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always to the close of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20)

The four "alls" in this magnificent commission establish the comprehensiveness and totality of God's victory in Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> The first is "all authority." The carrying out of the mission of the disciples will not be finally determined by the excellency and strength of their own work; nor will it in the end be nullified by their deficiencies. Behind the command to go is the victorious Commander Himself, unto whom all principalities and powers are now subject. Though the sight is hidden to the world, the searching, acting, and ruling is the divine affair of God in Christ as He labors to unite all things in heaven and earth in Him. The second "all" is "all

nations." In this word we see how Christ's authority extends and sweeps over all peoples and all individuals, exempting none from the purview of His rule. He is desirous that the vision of His disciples reflect His own cosmic vision. The table is set, all things are now ready, and let all living beings come to the feast, where there is room for all. The third "all" is "all things that I have commanded you." Christ's authority has an intensive nature as well as an extensive one. Not only every man but all of life, the whole of every man, is claimed by Christ. That which Christ has commanded is so inclusive that God's demand on a man's life is revealed as a total one. Nothing can be held back. "All that rears its proud head against the knowledge of God" in the human heart is to be destroyed, and we are to "take every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5)

There is really one more "all," hidden in the word "always." "Lo, I am with you always to the close of the age." I, the Lord, am with you as you go and search for Me, with you always. I fill and rule your present, any present, with My word and grace. I will come with your future, with any future, as you go for Me.<sup>33</sup> The disciples remembered these words. When Christ ascended from the other mount, remembering them, they could not be and were not downcast. They knew that captivity was being led captive, that the victory was assured, and that the victorious One was with them. Therefore after the ascension they rejoiced greatly and "went forth and preached everywhere, while the

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 70. Cf. 1 Cor. 3:18-22, where St. Paul's emphasis is that both the present and future are ours because we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Barth, in Anderson, pp. 60 ff.

Lord worked with them and confirmed the message" (Mark 16:20). Hearing these words, how can we lose heart? As the church goes for Him, Christ is with the church, even as He once was—the same yesterday, today, and forever — suffering with it, rejoicing with it, praying for it to His Father, and making good His precious promises. It is said in the Scripture that Christ is sitting on the right hand of the Father. But when Stephen, the martyr witness, a symbol of the church in sacrificial and obedient action, looked steadfastly upward, he declared: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). Reading this, the early church in simple and beautiful faith taught that Jesus was so concerned for His faithful witness that in sheer anxiety He stood up!<sup>34</sup> This anxiety for His search and for His searchers is the unfading glory of God and the sustaining strength of the people of God. "Lo, I am with you always to the end of days, when ceaseless search shall end in ceaseless praise."

With these four "alls" ringing in our ears and singing in our hearts, we go forth to teach men of Jesus Christ and to baptize

them into the life of the Triune God, hoping in the power rising from the Easter Morn and trusting in the promise uttered from the mount in Galilee.

It is fitting to close a discussion of the Biblical basis of mission with a Bible passage. I will do so with a little one, a very little one that has meant a good deal to me. "Jesus said, 'My Father is working still, and I am working'" (John 5:17). Hear it again, so little in size, so very great in significance: "My Father is working still, and I am working." Now to Him who is the majestic One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit . . . To Him who has ever gone forth from Himself in love and who has gone forth in the flesh of Jesus Christ to seek and to find that which is lost. . . . To Him who takes us by the hand, that hand once sorely wounded but now alive with power. . . . To Him who says: "Let us go asearching, for I have other sheep. . . . I must bring them also" (John 10:16). . . . To Him who has never ceased His search, and now is working too. . . .

Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Malappuram, South India

<sup>34</sup> Kantonen, p. 71.