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LCMS MISSION: A PARADIGM OF ITS OWN

by Klaus Detlev Schulz

The Birthplace of Lutheran Missions

AS A WAY OF INTRODUCING our topic this morning, I'd like to start by taking you back for a brief moment to the birthplace of Lutheran mission. Where did it begin, and what are its contours? Though often without great appeal, history is missiology's treasure chest, and recalling events and statements from the past is an indispensable task. The year was 1842 when Friedrich Wyneken was traveling in Germany, and there he came into contact with leading Lutheran theologians and missiologists. As a result, when Wyneken returned to America in May 1843 after two years in Germany, he was a changed man from a more general theologian of greater latitude to one clearly focused on an ecclesial consciousness that the Lutheran church needed to be expanded among the settlers in America.¹ One contributing factor toward Wyneken's change must have been his encounter with the thoughts of a leading Lutheran missiologist in the 19th century by the name Ludwig Petri,² who

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in his famous document "*Die Mission und die Kirche*" (Mission and the Church), outlined a comprehensive and pivotal description of Lutheran mission. Petri's reflection on mission was necessary. With the rise in Lutheran consciousness, precipitated particularly by Klaus Harms and his 95

Theses in Kiel in 1817, Lutherans took issue with the prevalent mission concepts and practices of Pietist missions (e.g., the Moravians and Unionistic mission societies like Basel and the North German Mission Society).³

In brief, Petri's trenchant points were these: The Church needs mission, and yet mission also needs the Church. Mission has its right to exist only from the Church because the Lord did not want a church and mission but a missionizing church (27-28). Only in the name of the Church can mission educate, send preachers

¹ Norman Threinen. "F. C. D. Wyneken: Motivator for the Mission," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 60, no. 1-2 (January-April 1996): 19-45.

² In a letter to Petri, dated May 22, 1842, which was read out loud to the leading confessional Lutheran participants of the Hanoverian

Pentecost Conference (*Die Hannoverische Pfingstkonferenz*), Wyneken acknowledges that he is also familiar with Petri's missiological position. Applying it to America, he pleads that the help provided must go against ecclesial indifferentism. Mission "must be given by the entire Lutheran Community and from within it must rise preachers who are focused, churchly, vibrant in faith, sober, yet burning with love." (E. Petri and Ludwig Adolf Petri. *Ein Lebensbild* [Hannover: Verlag von Heinr. Feesche, 1888], 280.)

³ Ludwig Adolf Petri. *Die Mission und die Kirche* (Hannover: Hahn'schen Hofbuchhandlung, 1841), 14, 17-15, 20.

of the Gospel and have them preach to the non-Christians (29). If she, the mission, says she does it in the name of the Lord and not in the name of the Church, then she is decapitating the body of Christ (29). Mission must also desire the teachings and confession of the Church to protect the missionaries from preaching personal and idiosyncratic wisdom (30). In fact, the commissioned missionary shall not think that he can bring the heathen only a Gospel without the Confessions as well as the dogmatic struggles the Church has gone through throughout the centuries. That would be disingenuous and inconceivable (8, 6) since a pure Christianity in the “pure Gospel” sense cannot exist. Every preacher brings with him “exegesis, interpretation and particular rendering” of the Gospel, justification and the Sacraments (9, 28; 10, 10). Thus, though there is latitude in expressing liturgy and ceremonies, all heathens have a right to hear what mature Christianity teaches and confesses, and this would prevent them from repeating the same mistakes the Church has already gone through (8, 28; 9, 5, 10). The Church is obliged to watch over mission. Thus, mission societies must submit themselves under the Church and become part of the missionizing Church (31).⁴

Wyneken heard and brought back such thoughts to North America. It was an ecclesial consciousness that necessitated individual members be enfolded in a confessing Lutheran church. The ecclesial positivism entertained by Petri and Wyneken — namely that the Evangelical Lutheran Church offers the Gospel like none other in its purity and that this mission finds its culmination by gathering people in Word and Sacrament — is one he envisioned for North America. And he shared such an ecclesial commitment with other founding fathers of the LCMS such as C. F. W. Walther⁵ and Wilhelm Loehe. ⁶It is true that until 1842, Lutheranism conceptually

still followed, by and large, Luther’s individualized form of mission: That if a Christian would find himself the only Christian in a foreign place, he assumes the task for himself to gather believers.⁷ However, as soon as Lutherans actually became involved in mission, they realized that the Lutheran church must back and support any missionary endeavors.⁸ In their mission, individual congregations and church bodies would aspire to represent the Evangelical Lutheran Church by preaching the pure Gospel and administering the Sacraments rightly (AC VII). However, that should not be misunderstood as promoting an “ecclesial narrowness.” Lutheran mission maintains an ecumenical breadth by furthering the body of Christ — the one, true and catholic Church. As Loehe would put it, “For mission is nothing but the one church of God in motion, the actualization of the one universal, catholic church.”⁹

Assuming Its Rightful Place in Ecumenicism and Pluralism

Though many challenges today are different from past decades, the theological and missiological orientation of wanting to pursue Lutheran mission still applies to

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969). “If the Lutheran Church has the pure Word and sacrament in a pure confession, it obviously has the highest treasures of the church unperturbed. It thus has God’s fullness and the living source from which all deficiencies may be supplied, and it can claim for itself all the advantages of which other denominations justly boast” (Ibid., 113). And on page 115: “Because it has Word and sacrament in a pure confession, the Lutheran Church is the foundation of truth, and from its waters all thirsty souls in other churches have their thirst quenched.”

⁷ Martin Luther. “The Right or Power of a Christian Congregation or Community” in: *Luther’s Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry*, eds. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 310. “If you say, ‘How can this be? If he is not called to do so he may indeed not preach, as you yourself have frequently taught,’ I answer that there you should put the Christian in two places. First, if he is in a place where there are no Christians he needs no other call than to be a Christian, called and anointed by God from within. Here it is his duty to preach and to teach the gospel to erring heathen or non-Christians, because of the duty of brotherly love, even though no man calls him to do so ... In such a case a Christian looks with brotherly love at the need of the poor and perishing souls and does not wait until he is given a command or letter from a prince or bishop. For need breaks all laws and has none. Thus it is the duty of love to help if there is no one else who could or should help. Second, if he is at a place where there are Christians who have the same power and right as he, he should not draw attention to himself. Instead, he should let himself be called and chosen to preach and to teach in the place of and by the command of the others.”

⁸ Wilhelm Maurer. *Die Sendende Kirche. “Über die entscheidende Wende in der Entwicklung der evangelischen Missionsbewegung in Deutschland,”* in *Lutherisches Missionsjahrbuch*, ed. Walter Ruf. Vol. 18. (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Druckerei, 1952), 56-87.

⁹ Loehe, 59.

⁴ Ibid. See also E. Petri, 329-331.

⁵ See C. F. W. Walther. “Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently,” eds. Lawrence White and Paul T. McCain (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1990), 4. “The true visible church in an absolute sense, or part of the same, is that church in which the Word of God is preached purely and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution.” When he talks of the Church in the absolute sense Walther was not denying the reality itself: “A true visible church in an absolute sense is a group of Christians, in which there is certainly always evil men and hypocrites intermingled, but among whom the pure unadulterated Word of God and sacraments are found” (Ibid., 6). By contrast, there is also the Church in the relative sense which consist of a mixed group “in which the Word of God and the Sacraments are only generally and fundamentally present” (Ibid., 7).

⁶ Wilhelm Loehe. *Three Books about the Church*, trans. James Schaaf

the LCMS today.¹⁰ As a result, her mission assumes a legitimate place in the midst of ecumenical trends. In his formidable project, his *magnum opus* entitled *Transforming Mission*, the late David Bosch placed mission of the 20th century into what he called the “emerging ecumenical paradigm.”¹¹ Until then, he said, missions in the 18th and 19th centuries were mostly represented by Pietist movements and mission societies that were non- or trans-denominational or by denominational church mission societies that exported Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Anglicanism and the like to other lands.¹²

A significant change came in 1910 with the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh. Though still in a nascent stage, it immediately brought a sense of church unity among Protestantism that had not been known before, and it was a unity motivated by a concern for the world and its evangelization. This quest of joining together for a common witness to the world and setting aside theological bickering was hailed by theologians like Martin Kähler and Karl Barth as the fundamental ecclesiological breakthrough. To them, Christianity’s *Zerrissenheit* (disruption), that is, its absence of unity, is a token of sin, unbelief and a disregard for Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17:21.¹³

¹⁰ One should note that throughout her history, the LCMS has repeatedly affirmed Walther’s *Theses on Church and Ministry* as her official position. The missiological ramification of that decision has yet to be explored.

¹¹ The periods mentioned are: (1) The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity, (2) The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period, (3) The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm, (4) The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm, (5) The modern Enlightenment paradigm, (6) The emerging ecumenical paradigm. Cf. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 182–83. For a critical reflection on Bosch’s second paradigm, the Greek Patristic Period, see Alan Kreider’s “Beyond Bosch: The Early Church and the Christendom Shift,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, vol. 2 (April 2005): 59–68.

¹² The German period is examined in two volumes by Johannes Aagard, *Mission, Konfession, Kirche: Die Problematik ihrer Integration im 19. Jahrhundert in Deutschland*, vol. I–II (Denmark: Gleebooks, 1967).

¹³ Bosch, 459.

The allure of this new ecumenical style was great, and it immediately took a steep trajectory, spawning movements in the mid-20th century such as the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches, with its subsidiary mission committee, the International Missionary Council. However, since New Delhi (1961), that common witness suddenly was abandoned for a project of humanizing the world through inner-worldly agendas of transforming social and political situations. This collapse of mission from a proclamatory to a non-

The allure of the LCMS seems to be its confessional orientation that positively affirms a Lutheran identity, which the LCMS shares with 36 partner churches of the International Lutheran Council. Together, they speak a small, yet significant voice in the broad sea of alliances and movements of our present age, and the commitment to that cause is the conviction that this is the truth of Scripture.

proclamatory character gripped most mainline denominations. This erosion of missions was strongly criticized by missiologists such as the evangelical Lutheran Peter Beyerhaus and the evangelical Donald McGavran. This led to the formation of the Lausanne Movement in 1974, a conservative movement uniting evangelical Christians. Wheaton, Ill., became the central location, and guidance was given by the Fuller School of World Missions with Donald McGavran’s *Church Growth* principles. This evangelical movement itself is in jeopardy also, if one goes with the latest analysis of John C. Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession*, who diagnoses a

serious breakdown of its own identity.

Flirtations with Evangelicalism

To go along with Bosch’s analysis — made in 1992 and that declares our day and age as the era of ecumenism — would be a prejudice against those who follow their own paradigm, such as that of the LCMS. Indeed, the Missouri Synod’s Office of International Mission could easily shed light on the fact that Christian churches are looking for guidance from what they believe the LCMS represents. The allure of the LCMS seems to be its confessional orientation that positively affirms a Lutheran identity, which the LCMS shares with 36 partner churches of the International Lutheran Council. Together, they speak a small, yet significant voice in the broad sea of alliances and movements of our present age, and the

commitment to that cause is the conviction that this is the truth of Scripture.

However, when it comes to linking LCMS's mission to its ecclesial identity, a disparity between the two became evident to onlookers. I recall a discussion over this very issue a number of years ago with an important LCMS mission representative. We were pondering the shape and nature of our LCMS mission, at which point I was told that mission should be likened to a single model of a car such as a Cadillac, which looks the same to all onlookers and its drivers. Mission is generic enough for all to hop on and drive it. However, I soon realized that this comparison was a disingenuous description of our LCMS mission since over the years it had embraced concepts of mission that were very specific "models." Moreover, every other year, a new Cadillac rolled onto the belt looking different than the previous one. This left me, as a missiologist, on the constant run, trying to catch up with the next latest model in missions.

A brief synopsis may be of benefit to us all here. In the 80s and 90s, the allure of evangelicalism's church growth principles was great. The goals for numerical growth and the programmatic approach avoiding barriers set too high for new seekers also impacted the LCMS's worshipping culture and its ministry. This concern led the LCMS leadership to create a special task force whose document "For the Sake of Christ's Commission" offered a helpful direction, yet it never found its way into LCMS mainstream church planting efforts.¹⁴ In the mid-90s, a new trend emerged with a meta-church strategy. It embraced the use of cell groups and the leadership formation strategies of Carl George and George Kennedy. Internationally, this concept surfaced as a strategy for missionaries to raise indigenous leaders who would then take on the role of planting churches at a rapid pace, multiplying geometrically. This strategy was often broad based, occurring mostly with models of education that were alternative to seminary-based education, such as through Theological Education by Extension (TEE). Reflecting back on this strategy, it became evident that it was

If travelling light means abandoning a worshipping Christian culture around Baptism and the Lord's Supper, then our mission is inevitably on a collision course with religions alien to it.

too slow in creating pastoral leadership through ordination. In the last decade, a new shift occurred with LCMS mission that embraced an expansionistic vision of reaching of 100 million nationally and internationally. That vision had precedent cases like that of Hudson Taylor's vision for China a hundred years earlier¹⁵ or those expressed in the 1990s by other denominations.¹⁶ For a decade now, our international mission, like all denominations, has seen a noticeable withdrawal of career missionaries and a rise in volunteerism and short-term mission projects.¹⁷ Nationally, the prevalent missiological influences come either from mega churches that focus on reaching and keeping the older generations or from emergent church promoters who ponder to reach the young, the forgotten generation, through new innovative ideas that seek to abolish the "strangeness" of the Church.¹⁸

This brief synopsis of the last thirty years or so may remind us that our mission never had a generic approach but was always very particular in what it was doing. Much of its influences came from dabbling with missiologies, ideas and strategies that came from evangelicalism, which is, we are

told, struggling to stay afloat with its own mission identity. There is no doubt that an engagement with missiologies and contexts other than ours needs to happen. Yet it must occur with an affirmation and awareness of one's own identity prior to such a missiological engagement

¹⁵ Hudson Taylor's visionary expansionism done to the "glory of God" calculated that there if there were 1000 missionaries, they could daily reach about 50 families, so that the Gospel could in a 1000 days, that is in less than a year, reach the 50 million families in China. Thus, about 1000 missionaries were prepared for China.

¹⁶ David Barrett and Todd Johnson. *World Christian Trends* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), xiii-xiv. Klaus Detlev Schulz. *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 7.

¹⁷ Those who remained in the long-term track are now called Network Supported Missionaries raising their own support or part of it. This model came about because of a sheer lack of funds. However, it should be noted that this puts LCMS mission in the faith-based mission camp one that was significant for Karl Gutzlaff and Hudson Taylor versus the church-mission concept, which always had the church that sends also assume responsibility for raising support for their missionaries.

¹⁸ Timothy Tennent. *World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 29. One may see also Andrew Bauer's *A Lutheran Looks at Mega Churches* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2012).

¹⁴ The Church Growth Study Committee. *For the Sake of Christ's Commission* (Kirkwood: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2001).

so that a critical and constructive dialogue may occur. LCMS mission has the unique tradition that fuses the Church, confessing the Gospel and missions, and with that focus it may confidently address the world today. Admittedly, the world changes constantly; new trends and challenges emerge. And the way to address them is not by mere repristination or invoking nostalgic sentiments. The answer for LCMS mission lies in its ability to engage a missiological conversation with the challenges and contexts of our time critically and constructively and then respond to them fittingly and appropriately. In view of that plea, I'd like to highlight three areas from Africa, Asia and North America with the use of case studies where perhaps further thought and critical engagement is needed.

Preserving a Focus on What's Ethnic and Vernacular

Example 1: Africa and the Conference at Kikuyu in 1913

We turn to Africa. The year is 1913, and the focus is on the famous conference at Kikuyu, which sought to shape the future of Protestant missions for Africa. In the eyes of many English scholars, this conference was regarded as the most important conference since the Reformation. The conference's goal was spearheaded by the Anglican community, and it was to establish one, single, English-speaking Protestant church for East Africa. Later in 1947, such a project was successfully achieved in South India with the formation of the Protestant Church of South India, a union of multiple Protestant church bodies. Since denominational structures had not yet been that deeply entrenched in East Africa, as in Europe and America, this thought had its appeal. Thus, "The primary question was whether the young church in this African country, founded by the missionary agencies, should replicate the historic denominational churches of the West, or whether there should be a united Protestant church with no organic connections to outside bodies."¹⁹ Major missionary societies attended, such as the Anglican Church Missionary Society; the Church of Scotland Mission; the

¹⁹ Colin Reed. "Denominationalism or Protestantism? Mission Strategy and Church in the Kikuyu Conference of 1913," *International Bulletin* 37, no. 4 (October 2013): 207-212.

Africa Inland Mission, an interdenominational mission represented by American Charles Hurlburt; the United Methodist Mission; and representatives from German Mission societies, particular the Leipzig Mission Society, which worked predominantly in Tanzania.²⁰ Noticeably absent were the native African clergy, who had been working since the first ordination in 1885.

The proposal for the conference pushed for a common membership at which non-Anglicans could commune at

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Anglican altars and the other way around. It was also agreed to have a uniform length of instruction for the catechumenate. It affirmed the common goal to use Baptism and the Lord's Supper, but it allowed each to be administered according to the tradition of each denomination's liturgy. Yet the hope for a common order was also expressed. The overall basis for that unity would be the

acceptance of the Holy Scriptures and the historic creeds.²¹

The Lutheran representatives at the conference refused to sign the agreement. One reason was that it would be a confessional compromise. The Lutherans had just undergone their own attempt to find some unity among the multitude of tribal churches that they were forming, which, after a long discussion, had ended in an agreement to unite them all under Luther's Small Catechism.²² The Lutherans were working among a number of tribes of the Bantu and the Hamite background, such as the Dshagga and the Masai, and they were focused on creating tribal churches. The unity among them was achieved by providing a confessional basis for them all and not with the church organization or structure.²³ In contrast to the English representatives, the Lutheran missionaries aimed at bringing the Gospel in the specific mother language of each of these tribes. In contrast, the English and

²⁰ The five major mission societies from the continent in east Africa were: Leipzig (Lutheran), Berlin III (later called Bethel Mission predominantly Lutheran), the *Brüdergemeine* (called themselves friends of the Augsburg Confession).

²¹ Reed, 207.

²² Paul Rother. "Ein Schritt auf dem Wege zur Einheit der Kirche Christ in Ostafrika," *Lutherisches Missionsjahrbuch*, (1951-1952), 88-95.

²³ *Ibid.*, 93. The tribes in the region were numerous: the Nyakusa, Safwa, Nyika, Kinga, Sangu, Bena, Hehe, Luguru, Sagara, Saromo, Suaheli, Digo, Shambala, Pare, Dschagga, Ro, Arisha, Masai, Nyiramba, Turu, Wembere, Haya.

Catholic missionaries chose to speak with translators. In the aftermath of World War I, the British Empire took over most of the area, and English was introduced as the dominant language much to the dismay of Lutheran missionaries who thought it was robbing the natives of their identity.²⁴

In his overall appraisal of the Kikuyu conference and mission work in East Africa, Julius Richter identified two distinctly different Protestant mission types, what he called the continental and the British type.²⁵ Though both types shared the common goal of bringing the Gospel to the people, they set about achieving it in different ways. According to Richter, the continental missionaries studied assiduously the people and their country and mastered the African languages. Their mission was passionately devoted to the building-up of the congregations whose spheres of life and polity would be permeated with the yeast of the Gospel and endow the people and community with a sense for Christian morality. However, the missionaries stayed away from enforcing final organizational and structural independency on these native tribal churches. Though well meant, this reticence toward promoting final structure made the missionaries efforts appear at times patriarchal.²⁶

Richter proceeded to describe the second type, the one pushed by Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian traditions. The British mission, he said, drove towards the establishment of independent bodies, yet for Anglican and Methodist missions that took mostly “the characteristic drive of creating overwhelmingly Anglican or Wesleyan church provinces, whereby among the Methodist mission there emerged a strong impact towards emotional revivalism signified by a restless upheaval of emotional tension and release. In the Presbyterian, especially the Scottish mission, the basic trend was the characteristic drive for higher education, as it occurred back home, to ensure intellectual and economical progress.” In terms of this second type, Richter observed, “Creating the English gentlemen became the goal of all efforts. English church orders and churchly practice, English language and way of life, English school systems and English educational goals are imposed as if it was natural to the African.”²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., 91.

²⁵ Julius Richter. *Geschichte der evangelischen Mission in Afrika* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1922), 772-773. See also 616-618.

²⁶ Ibid., 772.

²⁷ Ibid., 773.

And since the Africans had the remarkable ability to copy things like the self-assured demeanor of the Englishmen that he found attractive, the transferal of the English way of life had its power.

Yet to Richter this was not the power of the Gospel. The basic premise of this mission type is the expectation that in Africa, the African is to be trimmed to live a life of dependency under the ruling white race, and he is helped best and most expediently if he is pushed back and loses his own specific racial characteristics, assimilating his tribal traditions into the British milieu.²⁸

What do we learn from this African episode? I think Kikuyu efforts speak a word of caution and concern to us all. Though the era of colonialism is over, the post-colonial times also carry power structures and influences predominantly of Western churches to the rest of the world. We live in a global age where global issues seem to dictate the agenda. Globalization has its effect of sucking up local identity into a broader a global system.

²⁹A result of the globalization trend is that it shapes people around the world in terms how they live, think and act, and as a result, it changes cultures.³⁰ The stigma of a worldwide McDonalidization is real, and many churches seem content to walk its line. The Kikuyu conference informs us that a very key component of Lutheran mission is to establish a confessional unity and relationship with others and yet to support the vernacular and locality. The danger of colonialism, of creating replicas of what is considered the English or American gentleman seems to be over, and yet the trend of post-colonial Westernization also desires a form of cultural homogenization in which Western cultural norms replace local culture, resulting in the loss of cultural diversity and identity.³¹ That trend seems irreversible, and yet our heritage informs us that the tribal and vernacular concerns of the people are still valid. Since Martin Luther’s advice in an Open Letter toward translating the Bible, there seems to be imprinted on Lutheran missionaries this unwritten rule of immersion.³²

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Brian Howell and Jenell Williams Paris. *Introducing Cultural Anthropology. A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2011), 205.

³⁰ A result of that globalization is that the old tradition of the matrilineal society of the Khasi in northeast India is dying out, being exposed to the global patrilineal dominance.

³¹ Howell, 206.

³² Notable pioneer missionaries such Bruno Gutman for Tanzania and as August and Carl Strehlow for Australia have shown how Lutherans pay particular attention to the article of creation.

This concern for the vernacular is not only an international issue. Our Synod in North America finds itself caught up with a predominantly white American membership that begs for greater attention given to ethnic diversity and recognition of the vernacular. As Pascal once noted, “We think playing upon man is like playing upon an ordinary organ. It is indeed an organ, but strange, shifting and changeable. Those who know only to play an ordinary organ would never be in tune on this one. You have to know where the keys are.”³³ Indeed, “Knowing where the keys are” is an integral part of Lutheran mission, and once played intentionally, the efforts can lead to successful multiethnic church-planting efforts in this country as well.³⁴

Lutheran Ecclesial Missions Put to the Test

Example 2: The 11th Triennial Convention of the Asia Missions Association

Whereas the first example expresses an ethnic and linguistic concern, the second one leads us to ponder ecclesiology and how the LCMS's ecclesial missiology can respond to that ecclesiological challenge. In a recent conference of all evangelical partners — called by the Asia Missions Association to Seoul, Korea, October 7-11, 2013, and entitled “Discipleship in the 21st Century” — presenters spoke of what discipleship and church is needed if mission is to succeed in Asia. The barrier to mission was acknowledged as being mainly religious. The breakthrough of the Gospel was not occurring among the people groups where prominent religions are Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and other traditional religions.³⁵ The tone for the conference was set by the opening address of Dr. David J. Cho, the founder of the David Cho Missiological Institute and the co-founder of the Asia Missions Association in 1975. He encouraged all participants to “be creative to develop Asian strategies” and said that all who are involved in missions to Asia should “not try to copy the Western model of mission and follow their ways without carefully examining their motivational and historical background.”³⁶

³³ Groothuis, 43.

³⁴ Mark Deymaz. *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

³⁵ “Reports and Presentations” contained in “File: Discipleship in the 21st Century Mission, 40th Anniversary Asia Missions Association, 11th Triennial Convention, October 7-11, 2013 Seoul, Korea.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1. “Most Asian missionaries,” he observes, “are following the Western ways of mission, what they observed on how and what Western missionaries in their mission fields have done without questioning. So,

Cho did not refrain from specifics to explain what precipitates his call for change. He said, “The traditional concept of missionary meant mostly ordained clerical missionaries and few medical specialists. Today, however, the concept of missionary has changed very much. All kinds of professionals and businessmen are serving in various mission fields more effectively, actively and extensively in places where Christian mission work is restricted.”³⁷ In view of strategies, he proposed: “Traditional Western mission strategies concentrated on planting denominational churches and constructing bible schools, seminaries, and hospitals. These mission works were a kind of project-oriented approaches. Today, the trends have shifted to insider movements, frontier missions, churchless Christianity movements, community development, etc.”³⁸

Dr. Cho's plea set the stage and tone for the seven plenary presenters. In essence, all called for a moratorium of missions done in the traditional Western style. Instead, they proposed a lighter and more successful “low-church” version that embraced discipleship and non-ecclesial structures against the conventional church planting and church growth concepts.³⁹ The Roman Catholic speaker Dr. David Lim pointed to the persecution of Christians in many parts of Asia and said that for this reason Christians, Catholic and Protestants should join their efforts. Instead of proselytizing one another, he suggested that they should work together as co-disciples of Jesus Christ, establishing Christ-centered communities (CCC) such as house churches in people's residences and workplaces, doing so through lay-led disciple multiplication movements. That can be complemented with community development plans such as business-as-mission and tentmaker movements, workplace ministry

they are falling into the same mistakes that Western missionaries have made.” And in Reports, pg. 2, Cho summons for a reconstruction of strategy for Asia: “We, the Asian mission leaders, should be creative to create our own Asian strategies and methodologies to avoid same mistakes Western mission leaders have fallen into. We, Asians, are not the same as the white Westerners. Then we should distinguish ourselves as Asians and create Asiatic approach to doing mission. We, Asians, have our own unique resources that Westerners did not possess” and “it should be possible to develop alternative scenarios far from Western strategies in the future global affairs.”

³⁷ One may add here that denominations like the Assemblies of God operate in countries with the “business as mission” model.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12. For the Japanese context, Dr. Kyu-Gong Kim advises “training” not merely “educating” disciples who will not adopt a passive attitude but be trained as Lord's workers at the forefront of Japanese mission. The means to achieve that is through the bible and prayer alone.

and campus and professional evangelism.

For Lim, missions to Asia must become an insider movement that avoids transplanting denominational churches (complex Christendom) that are mostly non-contextual (foreign looking) and that have, almost always, produced in the past “marginalized Christians who are separated from their communities — despised and rejected by their family and friends, not because of the Gospel but because of their extra-biblical forms/traditions, perhaps often unknowingly, resulting from ‘extraction evangelism.’”⁴⁰ Lim further observed that the dominant modern trend conveys the message that conformity to modernity is the route to success and that the people’s cultures and languages are dead ends. He bemoans the fact that Christian churches reinforce this cultural oppression by not valuing and promoting the vernacular. “Non-native-speaking church workers and expatriate missionaries must become convinced and must labor to convince indigenous Christians that Christ truly seeks to inhabit and transform their culture and worldview from within and from the inside out.”⁴¹

The above discussions at the AMA Conference and the particular interest of its Asian representatives to have a church expression that is not formed by foreign church-planting intrusions, predominantly from the West, challenges our Lutheran ecclesiology and missions. It is true that Evangelicalism’s individualism, lay discipleship and leadership coupled with a non-ecclesial or low-church consciousness has tread much lighter in the Asian context than its Lutheran counterpart. In light of that, we may raise the question: “What should an ecclesial missiology look like and what aspects of it may be treated as negotiable and which may not?” Looking back at the formation of LCMS’s first partner church in India, the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), mistakes may have been made in pushing for it to be an organizational structure with boards and ministries that were a replica of the LCMS and which, as a result, have to this day become a far too heavy burden to carry for the IELC.⁴² The question is, “What ecclesial visibility and what profile for worshipping and practicing Christians must our mission create or support in the context of religions inimical toward Christians?”

Finding answers to these questions is important in view of them also being raised in and for our North American context. In view of these successful subculture and sub-religious Christian movements like the church-house movement in Asia, Western scholars propose the same approach for us here in order to reinvigorate the growth of Christendom. The gist of this position can be gleaned from Alan Hirsch’s popular book *The Forgotten Ways*,⁴³ which debates the value of the Chinese Jesus Movement for the West by pointing it out as the most staggering phenomenon of our day, “unparalleled in history,” and that due to persecution it organized itself around the recovery of a simple Christology and structure, “travelling light” by ridding itself of “unnecessary impediments, including that of a predominantly institutional conception of ecclesia. For an underground church, all the clutter of unnecessary traditional interpretations and theological paraphernalia is removed. It has neither the time nor the internal capacity to maintain weighty systematic theologies and church dogma. It must ‘travel light.’”⁴⁴ This peculiar recovery of simplicity unleashed “the capacity to rapidly transfer the message along relational lines. Freed from philosophical density of the academy and from dependence on the professional cleric, the gospel becomes profoundly ‘sneezable’ — viral epidemic ... to be profound and yet simple — easily grasped by any person, and in many cases illiterate peasants.”⁴⁵

It seems that Lutheranism on the whole, and the LCMS’s mission in particular, has the theological and missiological potential of defining strategy for Asia around the witness character of the laity, especially

⁴³ Alan Hirsch. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 86. He continues, “In order to recover the ethos of authentic Christianity, we need to refocus our attention back to the root of it all, to recalibrate ourselves and our organizations around the person and work of Jesus the Lord. It will mean taking the Gospels seriously as the primary texts that defines us. It will mean acting like Jesus in relation to people outside of the faith; as God’s Squad, a significant missional movement to outlaw bikers around the world puts it, “Jesus Christ—friend of the outcasts” (94). That pertains to leadership also: “A renewed focus on leadership is absolutely essential to the renewal and growth of the church ... The question is, “*what kind of leadership?*” The church has got plenty of “leaders” now, but they’re not effectively impacting our culture.” See Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch’s *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 2003), 165.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴² I am aware of the LCMS appraisal of the “Churchless Movement in Asia” at www.lcms.org

through the vocation of all Christians,⁴⁶ and one that travels light by avoiding an imposition of church organization and structure on partner churches. However, being Lutheran in focus, LCMS's mission cannot travel light theologically.⁴⁷ If travelling light means abandoning a worshipping Christian culture around Baptism and the Lord's Supper, then our mission is inevitably on a collision course with religions alien to it.⁴⁸

A. Redirecting Resources and Volunteerism Back to North America

Example 3: Inner-City Chicago

I begin by reading to you a letter I recently received from a Specific Ministry Pastor student, Steven Warren, who serves Zion Lutheran Church as its pastor. Permitted to do so, I read: "Zion is a small African American Lutheran Congregation located on the Southeast side of Chicago in the Roseland Community consisting of 68 members on the rolls with an average attendance of 30 for Sunday morning worship. Approximately eighty percent of the congregation is new members as of Sept. 2009. Roseland like many neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago has many fatherless children and is plagued by gangs, drugs/alcohol abuse, and unemployment. In 1994 the membership was 260 souls with an average attendance of 130 for Worship Service. Zion once had a school with grades Kindergarten thru eighth grade.

In the year of 2000 the school was closed and Zion experienced some rough times due to internal strife within the congregation. This internal strife was caused by rouge members who rigged the election for our Board of Directors which allowed them to take control of the Church and Ministry. This lasted for five years and nearly destroyed the congregation and the ministry. Zion struggled for five years and eventually the faithful

members regained control of the Church and Ministry. In 2009 Zion excommunicated 8 individuals. The rogue members left Zion drowning in debt, and facing the possibility of being closed and the property being sold. After several meetings with N.I.D. President Dan Gilbert it was determined that Zion would remain open and begin anew as a New Start New Believer Ministry. I was installed as Vicar in Sept. 2010 and began my on-line studies in the SMP Program (at Fort Wayne) and I am presently in my third year. In the spring of 2012 Mission Facilitator Rev. Mike Mast spoke with me concerning the possibility of another church supporting Zion's Ministry. This led to a connection with St. Paul Lutheran Church in Mt. Prospect IL. St. Paul has provided support by paying my tuition for the first semester of this year and will continue to pay until Zion is able or if need be until I complete my studies. We at Zion are in the process of starting an after-school Art, Music and Poetry program for the children in the surrounding community and St. Paul has begun the process of determining how best it can support this project."

What is not stated in Steve Warren's report is that St. Paul's Lutheran Church has a very active short-term volunteerism. Positively, one should note, as the challenge with Zion in Chicago developed, St. Paul's redirected some of those resources toward the ministry of keeping that urban ministry with Steve Warren going, and at that quite successfully. Thus, we may ask, "Is St. Paul's initiative to redirect some of its resources from short volunteerism to community development indicative of a paradigm shift for Lutheran mission?" One would wish that this be the case. To be sure, there is no reason to whitewash short-term volunteerism overseas as all negative and it would benefit LCMS mission overseas to abort it. However, what would be helpful is a careful analysis of how resources spent and what contribution they make toward developing those who receive such foreign assistance. Perhaps from that research would come more initiatives like St. Paul to redirect some of its resources to community development ministries in this country.

Ever since Robert D. Lupton published his *Toxic Charity*,⁴⁹ such questions should be asked. Religious tourism, as he calls it, has become a growth industry: "1.6 million American church members took mission trips in 2005 — an average of 8 days long — at a cost of

⁴⁶ Perhaps a route to take missiologically is to embrace more intentionally the vocational aspect of ecclesiology: "The Church is also vocational in her service to and in the world. In addition to the ordained ministry of the Church, mission includes the sanctified life of Christians. Through their witness and conduct, all Christians serve the mission of the Church by extending the Word into all realms of society. Christians need not scout about for good works or purposes in their life; the call for specific good works comes along with each specific vocation" (Schulz, 300).

⁴⁷ We may recall Petri's words that no heathen should be relieved of that what the mature Christianity has come to confess throughout the centuries.

⁴⁸ One may consult here "Churchless Christianity (Movements to Jesus/Insider movements. An Evaluation from the Theological Perspective of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod." (December 2012), www.lcms.org

⁴⁹ Robert Lupton. *Toxic Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

2.4 billion.”⁵⁰ The problem, he says, is that churches and organizations are strategically at fault in that they follow the model of “doing for” the poor rather than a “doing with” paradigm. The concern on his side is that in granting money to those in need creates dependence and conflict not independence and respect.⁵¹ People view themselves as charity cases for wealthy visitors, turning them into beggars.⁵² The fault is with U.S. churches’ unexamined generosity, with those who through naïve “vacationaries” spend millions of dollars traveling around the world creating a welfare economy that deprives people of the pride of their own accomplishments — all in the name of Christian service.⁵³ In the end, he observes, “Most work done by volunteers could be better done by locals in less time and with better results.”⁵⁴

It seems that the volunteerism is best left alone, after all our members’ motivations are not at fault. However, compassions often have unintended consequences. Moreover, the reality is that the United States represents a mission field today, and resources for intentional church-planting strategies should be made available in this country.⁵⁵

Conclusion

I have presented three areas of concern that pose a direct challenge to our mission identity. Though our heritage has endowed us with a conscious combination of Church, confessing the Gospel and mission, we may step forward into this world with that missiological consciousness both nationally and internationally, by addressing the vernacular and ethnicities with the Gospel (example 1), speaking to the Asian context (and the world) with a clear ecclesiological discernment of what is necessary and what not (example 2) and redirecting our resources to an ever

needy, though what still seems “less” attractive to many, urban context (example 3).

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁵¹ Ibid, 28.

⁵² Ibid, 21.

⁵³ Ibid, 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁵⁵ Research alone confirms a significant shift in U.S. population configuration. In 2001, more than 29.4 million Americans said they had no religion, more than double the 1990 number. This is more than Methodists, Lutherans and Episcopalians combined, according to the American Religious Identification Survey 2000. People with no religion now account for 14 percent of the nation, up from 8 percent in a 1990 survey. Fifty percent of Americans call themselves religious, down from 54 percent in December 1999. An additional 33 percent call themselves “spiritual but not religious,” up from 30 percent, and about 1 in 10 say they are neither. From Cathy Lynn Grossman. “Charting the Unchurched,” *USA Today*, March 2007. See also *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*, 71.