

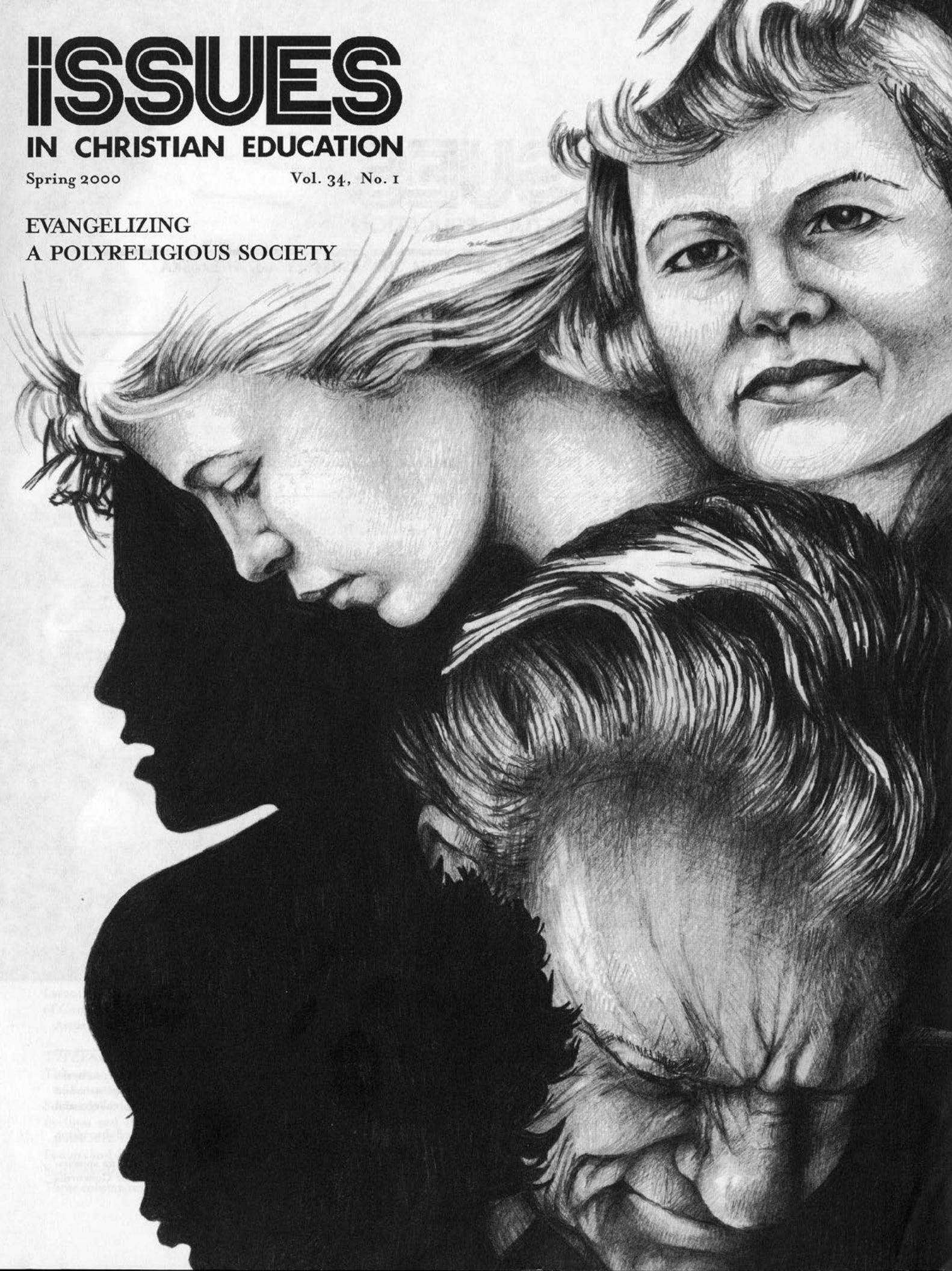
ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Spring 2000

Vol. 34, No. 1

EVANGELIZING
A POLYRELIGIOUS SOCIETY



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Evangelizing a Polyreligious Society

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reflections
reflections

WHEN I THINK OF THE CALL to evangelize given to Christians, I am reminded of two extreme responses by fellow Lutherans. One individual told a friend about the new congregation of which he was a member which was formed two years earlier. They began with less than 50 members. The friend asked about the current membership of the congregation. "Oh, it's still less than 50," he responded. "That's the way we want it. We're not interested in outsiders changing the makeup of the congregation," he added. The other example occurred in a large North American hotel, where a number of conventions were taking place at the same time. A Lutheran pastor returned to the meeting room following a bathroom break and announced to a friend, "What a day! I just converted a non-Christian!" These two illustrations are not what God intended for Christians involved in evangelizing the lost for Jesus Christ.

The thrust of this edition of *Issues* is to highlight the challenges facing all members of the church in bringing the Good News of eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to pluralistic society. Living as "Good News People" is complicated and provides many challenges as well as opportunities in the social contexts of the new century. This calls for building on a biblical foundation of living as Christ's witnesses and seeing evangelism as a ministry of every Christian which lasts for one's entire life.

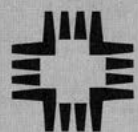
Chrysostom once said, "Nothing is more frigid than a Christian who cares not for the salvation of others." Not knowing how to evangelize is no excuse. Each of us can learn how to tell the Good News, and once attempted, one is often surprised by how easy the task can be with God's help. Every Christian can experience the joy of telling someone that Jesus died for everyone. God does not hold us responsible for the results of our witnessing. We witness and the Holy Spirit does the converting. In the editorial by Russell Moulds, he reminds us that we need not fret about our less-than-perfect witnessing, for "God's grace will cover a multitude of our imperfections, and His kingdom will still come."

It is my prayer that this edition of *Issues* will provide encouragement and excitement about evangelizing a polyreligious society, a society that needs to hear the Good News of God's gracious gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Orville C. Walz, President

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Learning by Doing

How can we get our students, fellow members and others involved in sharing the Gospel? In a world where our next door neighbors include Hindus, Jews, Muslims, agnostics and Buddhists, with the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses arriving on our doorsteps as regularly as Girl Scouts selling cookies, this is an important question. Jesus calls us "the light of the world." How, then, can we help our people let that light shine?

This issue is particularly frustrating for Christian leaders who have already "come alive" to their own responsibility to share Christ with others. We know the joy, the excitement and even the frustrations of witnessing to non-Christians. We want others to share that experience. And our hearts ache as we look out into the darkness and realize that so many people have never heard the story of Jesus—not even once!—and won't, unless we can help our people to share it.

I am no expert, but I have been involved in evangelism for nearly 20 years and in cross-cultural mission service for 10 years. During that time, the best method I have seen for involving others in outreach is my mother's training method.

My mother raised three children, all very close in age, while working full time. It was important for us to learn how to help out around the house very early. So she was always teaching. We learned not to stand around with empty hands on a Saturday morning. The child who did that soon found herself moving the lawn, learning how to sort laundry, or running the vacuum cleaner. "I don't know how!" was no excuse. Half an hour later, we knew. Then the job became our permanent responsibility. Effective teaching!

When I was 16, I experienced this kind of evangelism training. An older lady in our congregation convinced me to tag along on an evangelism evening, promising, "You won't have to say anything—just go with me and watch." I watched in amazement as she struck up friendly conversations and discovered a second cousin, a friend of a friend, and a long-lost Lutheran from the Midwest in the three homes we visited. When the conversations eventually turned to Christ, I listened and thought, "I could do that." A few months later, I was.

We used the same training method in a young Vietnamese refugee church that was started in St. Louis, Mo., when I was studying at Concordia Seminary. The pastor was run off his feet trying to "do it all"! Very intentionally I began grab-

bing anyone who stood still long enough and training them to do evangelism, mission outreach, and teaching. The youth soon learned to disappear when they saw me coming!

I took groups of people—youth and adults—along with me whenever I went to make an evangelism, hospital or shut-in call. They listened, learned and participated when they felt comfortable. Soon they began making such visits on their own. Today most of the evangelism, mission outreach and human care ministry of our congregation is carried out by the members, not the pastor, who functions as a counselor, preacher, teacher and trainer. Members of our congregation have even returned to Vietnam and, with no help but the Holy Spirit's, evangelized their home villages, resulting in baptisms! Some are also beginning to train others.

There are many excellent evangelism training methods as well as many books, videos and Bible studies on mission outreach. Christian leaders can use this training method with any of these resources. As our Christian people begin to learn and to practice sharing their faith with others, their non-Christian neighbors will see the light of Jesus Christ shining clearly through the darkness of our world.

Dr. Kari Vo

Counselor for Mission Interpretation
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Boasting in the Lord

When the preacher or teacher talks about money, the room gets quiet. But the silence often becomes deafening when the word *evangelism* is mentioned. We have the sense that we are not doing very well at it, and we are ashamed because we know evangelism is so important and so urgent. Why should we tell the Good News about Jesus? We should do it out of love for God, we say, or as obedience to His command, or as a response to His love. All are true. But this only scratches the surface. St. Paul quoted the prophet, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). Evangelism is a matter of boasting.

Think of the obstacles that seem to lie across our paths. We do not say anything that might upset our friends. We do not want them to think less of us, for we do not want to lose them as our friends. Or we do not want to embarrass ourselves. We feel ill-equipped, but we are not rushing to become better equipped. Deep down we sort of like ourselves this way.

It's all boasting, one way or the other—in this case boasting of ourselves instead of boasting in the Lord. But God chose the foolish and the lowly precisely to keep anyone from boasting before Him (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). In the early church there were a lot of lowly folks. The pagan critic Celsus complained that "workers, cobblers, leather-dressers, the most illiterate and clownish of men were zealous preachers of the Gospel."

In evangelism you have to pour yourself out. Not only do you not boast of yourself, but you grow heedless of whether anyone else boasts of you. Here the old Adam rebels, for it runs counter to his every instinct. The result is that we fail in evangelism. We need to recognize this failure for what it is. It is boasting of ourselves rather than boasting of the Lord. It is a denial, even if by silence, of the holy Name we bear. There is no reason for the Lord to take it lightly. Even on the level of human observation, the church father Chrysostom commented that "Nothing is more frigid than a Christian who cares not for the salvation of others."

As always when sin and guilt rear their ugly heads, the answer is Christ, our "wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and ransom from sin" (1 Corinthians 1:30). He lived the life of wisdom, with God at the center and self on the periphery—for us. He clothes us in righteousness, His own. In His blood our robes are washed, and they are white. For He became the price paid by a loving God for all sin, including ours.

Christ did all this by going the way of the cross. So do we. Baptized into His dying and rising, we are reduced to nothing. Our boast is only in Him. The key to evangelism is for us to be swept up into His mission of seeking and saving the lost. He opens our lips, and our mouths sing His praise and confess Him before our neighbors. If "Christ Himself has entrusted absolution to His Christian church and commanded us to absolve one another from sins" (Luther, *Large Catechism*), He certainly wants us to tell the Good News about Jesus to those who are around us. What else can we do? What indeed?

The Christian faith is a theology of evangelism and a theology for evangelism. Again and again the message of sin and grace, of Law and Gospel, keeps us reliant on our Lord Jesus for everything, starting with our own salvation. "Methods" come and go. "Strategies" change. But through it all runs the lifeblood of the church in the Word of God and in the proclamation of that Word by Christians according to their respective vocations. The constant is telling the Good News of Jesus. "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Ken Schurb

Assistant to the President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Evangelizing a Polyreligious Society

Imagine a non-Israelite visitor, perhaps a merchant, in Jerusalem sometime during the era of the Second Temple. Being religious according to his world's polyreligious views, he visits the great Jewish house of worship to pay his proper respects and satisfy his curiosity. As he wanders across the court of the Gentiles, he realizes he is not allowed beyond that point. As he stands, the temple choir is singing at the altar for the afternoon sacrifice, but he can't see too well because of the crowd and the pillars. Unable to understand the Hebrew hymn, he asks (in Aramaic) a local worshipper about what is being sung and is told that it is a psalm about the rivers of Babylon and the Jews' exile there years ago. Our visitor has been to Babylon and is intrigued.

"So, where's the god?" "The Lord is in His heaven, sir." "No, I mean where's the statue?" "Oh, we have no graven image here." "But don't you have an image of your God in that temple building?" "No, no statue of the Lord." "Hmm. Well, then, what's in the building?" "I've never been inside, but in the first room is a lamp, a table, and an incense burner. The inner room used to have a box in it until the Babylonians stole it. Now only its resting stone remains." "You've never been inside your own temple? And you had a box—and now just a stone—as the centerpiece of your worship? Okay, I'm almost afraid to ask, but—what was in the box?" "The original box had two tablets of writings, a jar of flour, and a stick."

Our visitor stares at his interlocutor and wonders if he's being put on. But the local appears sincere, so the visitor proceeds with his questions. "Now let me get this straight. You have no graven image. We don't go in the building. And you worship a missing box. Right?" The local smiles, realizing that all this sounds peculiar. "No, no, we worship the true and living God, the God of our fathers, the King of the universe, yours and ours. No image could ever resemble Him, so we have none."

"Interesting ideas," our visitor muses. "My God and yours, you say. So why don't we go in the building?" "Only the priests enter the building to conduct certain worship activities." "Ah," says the visitor knowingly, "that's where the priests and priestesses encourage your God to bless your productivity!" The local realizes the misunderstanding with a touch of offense. "No priestesses. Only priests. And we practice no sacred prostitution as do the Gentiles. The Lord blesses without such prompting."

The visitor realizes that he has somehow annoyed his source and changes the subject. "But I see the priests working outside at the altar, too. Where are the children?" "The priests' children serve at the altar only when they are big enough. It's heavy work dealing with sacrifices." "No, I mean, where are the children who are the sacrifices?" The local now recognizes that his visitor knows only about pagan views of worship and considers how to respond. "The true God forbids child sacrifice. We have a story about our forefather Abraham that teaches us this. The Lord requires only that we return in sacrifice a portion of what He has already provided for our families." The visitor ponders this a moment and asks, "Then your God eats only your meat and grain offerings?" "The King of the universe has no need of food, my friend. The sacrifices are our thanksgiving to Him, not our appeasement of Him. We sing about this in our psalms."

"But you said the singing was about an exile to Babylon." "Yes, today's song reminds us to keep our worship true, which we haven't always done. This temple was once destroyed because we neglected our covenant with the Lord. We have rebuilt the temple and seek to worship the Lord rightly, as many of our prophets have encouraged us. But, your pardon, please. I want to observe the sacrifice. You have many questions, and others can tell you more. Ask for one of the Levites or scribes. Oh, and ask them about the box! God's peace to you."

Our visitor found his experience at the temple both familiar and surprising. That some such conversations occurred is likely. God located Judah and His temple on a main trade route among three continents. Herod's temple had a court for Gentiles. The New Testament refers to "devout" Gentiles with an interest in Jewish worship and to proselytized converts to Judaism. As this edition of *Issues* discusses our outreach to a polyreligious society of varying worship forms and spiritualities, consider the parallels of those times and our times.

The visitor to the temple came expecting worship, so he shared some common ground with a Biblical perspective. But he was not a neutral party. He entered with a set of expectations. He was looking for the standard elements of ancient worship forms: a graven image, productivity rites, sacrifice of the first born, and appeasing the deity. He found a temple, and he found worship going on, but he did not find there what he expected. This perplexed and intrigued him. Perhaps this visitor departed, merely noting another curiosity in his travels. But many like him, prompted by the Spirit, recognized the encounter as a day of salvation and took to heart the servant song of Isaiah 49. Today, people encounter our worship, both corporate and individual. Like our visitor, they recognize worship when they see it. But, like our visitor, they will

become alert to the things of God only if our worship is distinct enough to challenge their expectations.

Israel was a nation of priests (Exodus 19:6). The church is a priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). Priests or intercessors have the difficult role of maintaining a dual persona of being both familiar to and different from those for whom they intercede. Priests must be enough like them so these others can approach and find commonality. Priests must be different enough so others can recognize something holy or set apart from common daily experience. Our visitor recognized the priests at the temple but was puzzled by their uncommon priestly activities. Today, people in a polyreligious society find religious behavior familiar when they see it. But, like our visitor, they will notice the things of God only if Christians, corporate and individually, are different or set apart enough to fulfill that role of the priest.

The visitor heard the temple choir singing Psalm 137. Worship music was not surprising. Our visitor was interested, though, that the song was about Judah's exile in Babylon, a place (and perhaps history) that he knew. God's people had incorporated this event in salvation history into the Psalter and their corporate worship. Today, people around us hear our elements of worship and realize these have meaningful content. But, like our visitor, they will attach significance to these elements only if their expectations are jarred a bit as we, like Judah, incorporate the life of the Spirit today into the living traditions we have received. Neither obscure content nor overly familiar content will be very helpful, as the Reformers found when moving the liturgy to the vernacular.

We are not the first to struggle with the tensions of the task to present the Gospel to a pluralistic society. Acts 11 recounts the distinctions between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch and recognizes both Jewish and Gentile modes. The Lutheran reformers also addressed such tensions in the *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article X*. Our dialog is productive when it avoids entrenchment in any particular tradition or current style either in the name of orthodoxy or evangelism. Psalm 137 was not sung in the first Temple. Psalm 151 (an apocryphal song about David and Goliath) is no longer even in the Psalter. Somewhere in our call to be "the same and different," ordinary Christians in their priestly roles in congregations will have to continually restrike a less-than-perfect balance and combination. Meanwhile, we need not fret about less-than-perfect. God's grace will cover a multitude of our imperfections, and His kingdom will still come.

Dr. Russell Moulds

Associate Professor of Psychology
Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska



A. R. VICTOR RAJ
**Pluralistic Spirituality:
A Religion of the 21st Century**

BORN in a traditionally Jewish household in Jerusalem, and brought up in the Roman Catholic Church in New York, Mary is now a leader of the Baha'i Movement in South Africa. She speaks winsomely about her new spiritual identity, and encourages her listeners and readers to take that giant step on their own to walk with her that broad way to a heightened awareness of deep spirituality. "If your God is within yourself, why look elsewhere?" she asks. She encourages all who seem to be lost in the struggle to "look deep within" and discover for themselves a spiritual direction.

Although Mary lives in Cape Town, people like her are all around us wherever we may be living, albeit with some degree of variation. Throughout my preaching and teaching ministry, I have had the privilege of meeting many people who have said that their encounters with people of other faiths have helped them appreciate what they have always believed, and enabled them to be nourished and to grow in their own faith. I have also known others who thought that they found in another religion something they wished they had in theirs. Yet others have been daring enough to

blend "the best" of various religions, thus making a new religion for themselves. Some others seem to enjoy a form of hybrid spirituality, at the same time striving to live by the teachings of more than one religious tradition. Thus we meet Christian-Confucianists, Hindu-Christian-Buddhists, and Daoist-Zen-Sufi-Contemporary Western Pagans.

Social psychologists such as Evans-Pritchard projected already in the sixties that the demise of religion was only a matter of time. This claim was founded on the assumption that post-Enlightenment humans had discovered themselves in every aspect of life and no longer needed religion as a crutch to lean on. Although some traditional religions may have "taken a hit" in their membership and revenue since that time, the fact remains that more people have become "religious" and are turned on by things "spiritual." Hence we wonder if Karl Marx's caricature that religion is the opiate of the people speaks more directly to this present situation than when he first directed that comment against the religious establishment. There is something in the air we humans breathe, as it were, that makes us religious, and if that basic need is not met properly, we will do every non-religious activity very religiously and spiritually.

Spirituality Is Alive

That spirituality is alive and well among humans the world over into the 21st century was evidenced by the assembly of more than 7,000 people at the Parliament of the World's

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Religions (PWR)¹ which met in Cape Town, South Africa, December 1-8, 1999. Unlike the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion, the PWR was a meeting of religious leaders and devotees from all continents advocating a wide variety of religious views, values, cultures, ethnicity, sects, cults and movements. Among the more than 900 presenters were missionaries and evangelists for The Temple Beautiful, The Church of Scientology, Inter-Religious Dialogues, *Sukyo Mahikari* (of pure light to purify you spiritually, physically and mentally), Earth Centered Spiritual Paths (Earth Spirit), Kashi Foundation, The Council of Thai Bhikkus, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, The Anand Marga Mission, The Quakers, The Art of Living Foundation, Free Masonry, Satanism, Sikh Dharma International, Scientific Pantheism, Anthroposophy, Clairvoyance and Spiritual Healing, Experiencing the Soul—Before Birth During Life After Death, and several self-proclaimed Supreme Masters.

The PWR that met at the foothills of Table Mountain brought to the table some universal concerns such as violence, peace and justice in world communities and challenged the world's religions and religious institutions to help alleviate social evils globally. Whether promoting peace to prevail on earth, an end to violence among peoples and war between nations, or keeping children away from television, the parliament proposed that the world's religions had specific contributions to make. PWR is committed to the evolution of a world community dedicated to a culture of non-violence serving the cause of justice for all and respect for all forms of life.

Putting theological considerations and obvious disagreements aside, soliciting help from religions and religious institutions to prevent the perceived imminent demise of humanity and the planet we inhabit is as true today as global warming. At last a generation that has been seeking freedom from religion for ultimate fulfillment is coming around to partner with religion and spirituality in an attempt to quell the impending annihilation of the earth and its inhabitants. Violence and injustice are the concern of those who desire

better days ahead for humanity and its habitat. While unfortunately for a few these vices may be the means to subdue other humans and their resources for personal gains, for the considerable majority such social evils are seen as threats to being alive as full human beings in serene surroundings.

Arguably, a major cause that unites people of diverse interests and independent world views is a common enemy. The intricacies of individual differences seem to dither and mellow at the front end when the antagonist presses forward head on. Though belated, the world community is taking into serious consideration the ever-present poverty of fellow humans and the subhuman conditions in which they struggle to survive under various dehumanizing forces such as tyranny and oppression. Whereas political and international initiatives to curb these perennial problems continue to suffer setbacks, today's world religions and spiritualities are demonstrating a renewed and sustained interest in coming to grips with them. A renewal of interest has been necessitated because in the course of history the human element in all religions has weakened those lofty ideals upon which they were first founded, necessitating a revisit from time to time. The world's religions need to give due attention to universal peace and justice inasmuch as they are meant to serve humanity holistically vis-à-vis the violence and injustice that prevail as a consequence of the misuse of modern technology and science.

An Over-Arching Principle

From a sociological perspective religion unites various peoples. Although interfaith dialogues help people of different religions to agree on many features they have in common, no two religions agree on the cardinal principles that are foundational for their independent identity. For example, not all religions interpret their basic elements such as God and humankind in the same ways. Denominational differences within religions are even more difficult to reconcile. If, on the one hand, many Christian denominations are intent on building bonds of unity among themselves, on the other hand others carefully delineate why they do not want to rush into any such endeavor

amidst perceivable differences. Nevertheless, the plurality of religions has emerged as a thriving fascination among contemporary students of comparative religions, thus inviting world humanity to experience a common spirituality through a process of mutual enrichment and edification.

In our society in which all persons exercise their right to remain different, diversity has become the over-arching principle that guides our relationship with one another. That this is the case in the sphere of religion and spirituality needs no further elaboration. If it were not for the common enemies as it were, there would be no common ground upon which various religions of the world could come together. In that light, those who insist on precision and clarity of definitions of words relating to religion and theology would find the following PWR description of God rather interesting:

As religious and spiritual persons we center our lives in an Ultimate Reality, which our traditions call by various names (the Absolute, Allah, Brahman, Dharmakaya, God, Great Spirit, the One, Waheguru), drawing hope and strength therefrom, in trust and vision, in word and silence, in service and solidarity.

(*A Call to Our Guiding Institutions*, p. 15)

If God were not accorded such an inclusive description as the above, perhaps the PWR could not feature the variety of speakers such as Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama and Hans Kung at various convocations. And if God were defined in the so-called particularistic or exclusivistic ways, the parliament would have enjoyed very limited participation. As much as diversity and plurality remain the ground rules for the world's religions to come together, not definitions that set boundaries to concepts, but descriptions that leave ideas open-ended become normative in all deliberations.

Open definitions of God conform also to the way in which many religious traditions interpret their "Ground of Being." In these traditions, not surprisingly, God is a means for humans to achieve their authentic selfhood. For example, in the Vedic tradition of Hindu-

ism, knowledge of the self and the knowledge of God are complementary. Knowledge of the self in fact is superior to the knowledge of God. For Theravada Buddhists, contemplating questions concerning the existence of God are but secondary to leading a life of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. It is said that according to the Chinese sage Confucius, if there are gods they must be busy working out their own salvation. Many religions that have evolved in the modern West purport the essential divinity of the human while others advocate their inalienable right to realize their own divine selfhood.

On the basis of these perspectives, the Parliament was a platform for a multitude of religions to come together, with a purpose of generating an ambiance for social transformation and peaceful coexistence of diverse cultures and communities in the world. Praxis, not pedagogy, was the ringing sensation of this all-encompassing gathering.

The PWR and its activities will continue to gain popularity in the future because of the common quest for spirituality and the drive to look for spiritual directions to resolve material, social and global issues. Christians who are familiar with the Apostle Paul's writings recognize that the natural knowledge of God is at work in such situations. Most religious groups within the parliament were not ashamed to pray in public places and chant their own particular *mantras* for peace and unity, not infrequently with a tacky spirit of competition. Each group was projecting proudly its own identity and heralding loudly matters in which they thought they excelled. A specific location in District Six of Cape Town was set up for inter-religious worship and prayer. One could pray as she or he chose, invoking either the Eternal Spirit, Mother Earth, the Ground of Being, the Supreme Being, or a composite of all of the above, with no specific liturgy but to lift the human spirit to the realm of the eternal.

A Shift in Perspective

Christianity acknowledges that its axis has been shifting gradually away from the West. When the second century of this new millennium unfolds, few people will still be able to label



Christianity a "western religion," and, happily, the caricature of the Christian religion as an arm of western colonialism will become a thing of the distant past. The Parliament is careful to minimize in its philosophy and leadership any dominance of Christianity and western culture although it was initially the brainchild of a predominantly Christian group that took cognizance of the plurality of world religions. This was clearly evident, at least in this assembly, in the noticeably limited number of easily discernible Christian presentations. While Christians were retreating to backstage, the leaders of most non-Christian religions, nevertheless, were dressed up in the respective ecclesiastical robes of their traditions and were encouraging members to consider the religion they represented as a better option by distributing free brochures and booklets. Others were bold enough to proselytize publicly an accusation leveled historically against Christians. We wonder if pluralism is indeed the final word on humanity's search for true spiritual identity.

In elucidating what the plurality of religions means for the average human being, David Chappell, Director of the East-West Religions Project, proposed the analogy of the mountain. Chappell tried to project four different visuals on the mind's screen. The first is that of a single mountain on top of which all humans are trying to climb regardless of what path they take and from what direction they make the first move. The second is the position that there is only one mountain. All those who do not climb that mountain are forever left in the valleys. A third view projects one big mountain while the rest are foothills, perhaps with the possibility of developing into full mountains some day. The fourth image acknowledges the presence of a variety of mountains, all located in the same range. Just as the religions are different from one to the other, they also have different gods at their center laced by a variety of religious understandings and spiritual practices. The pluralism project could get along well with all the above images except perhaps the second.

Those who fully subscribe to the doctrinal positions of any religion will find it difficult to reconcile with the pluralist agenda. With that being said, the invitation to dialogue with

others still stands even for people of such persuasion with the assurance that dialogue does not begin with doctrine, nor does it elicit conclusions. Dialogue, it is said, is a religious practice, and one may enter into that experience religiously.

Regardless of what schools of theology and comparative religions may speculate, the proletariat of the 21st century world religions is after a spirituality that works best for them. Many of these citizens of the new world order might very well be economically well off, intellectually sophisticated and socially elitist, but spiritually poor and hungry. Some religions which they have tried are found wanting. With certain others they have become too familiar to care if there is anything good in them. Yet other religions fascinate such people and whet their appetite just because they appear to be new. A mindset that prefers praxis to theory and diversity to uniformity detours quickly from the mainstream to the avant-garde and alternate ways of spiritual fulfillment. Thus pluralistic spirituality emerges from the smorgasbord of choice cuts from various traditions, choices made by one's own favorite chefs, that is.

Pluralistic spirituality seeks "divine guidance given in Holy Scriptures such as the Bible, the Q'uran, and the Bhagavad-Gita." It claims to connect technology to spirituality. It maintains the notion that humans are co-creators with God. It is not frightened by change, but welcomes change. Those who are enthused by it find in Jesus, Mohammed, and Krishna jointly as well as independently models for humans to attain multiple levels of their authentic selfhood. Among the progenitors of this new wave of spirituality are: born-again sons and daughters of Christian missionaries who later received fuller revelations from Hindu and Muslim masters; Jewish-born Catholics who later realized that the Buddha's proposal of reincarnation was the real medicine for disease, old age and death; and others who are prepared to "burn their karmic residue" by practicing meditation techniques.

A Continuing Quest

Without a doubt the history of religions precedes recorded history. The world's major

religions have longer histories behind them. Yet humanity's quest for experimenting new religions and spiritualities remains insatiable. Perhaps the 20th century witnessed the mushrooming of more religions than all other centuries together. All of them claim to know the best way to interpret the world and to change it into a better place for humans and everything around them. All these religions work with a global agenda. Their adherents are seen in major metropolitan cities and promote structured, intensive missionary activities in as many places as possible. There is never a dull moment for those who care to follow the success stories of these new religions.

To be sure, the seedbed of most of these new religions is geographically the West and religiously and culturally Christian. Christians and Christian churches are not always sure how to face these emerging challenges. While many Christians prefer to remain as silent witnesses to their faith, others maintain that Christian witnessing today is better accomplished by Christian presence than proclamation. Needless to say, at the academic level the pluralism project, like the idea of the PWR, was first launched by a Christian initiative.

The generally acknowledged identity markers of the Christian faith such as the authority of Scripture, its rootedness in history, and a clear vision of eschatology do not surface in inter-religious dialogue and the comparative study of religions. The Buddhist religion, for example, prefers the idea of the will to choose over the Christian concept of faith in God and His plan of salvation for all. In almost all religions of the East, neither the making of history nor its meaning ranks at the top on the list of priorities. Although scriptures of world religions help develop a perspective on human presence in the world, no "inspired writing" has any authority other than what different communities attribute to them parochially. What the human race awaits is a call to *inversion*, not conversion.

Where will Christians, especially Lutherans, be if pluralistic spirituality is the leading existential religious phenomenon that they can neither ignore nor escape in the years ahead? One Parliament member demonstrated a model to deal with this challenge. He was bold

to ask a presenter who said that he "saw the light" and was encouraging his listeners to follow his way to see it for themselves, "If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness." (Matthew 6:23b)

Another model is to follow up on the above question. In a major presentation of the PWR, a call to forgive was evoked by JP Vaswani, an "eminent practicalist and modern day saint" from India. Vaswani went on to explain: "It is only the strong who can forgive. There is not a wrong which cannot be forgiven. How much can you forgive? Life's richest treasure is the loving heart that is at peace with all. I know of no religion than the religion of unity and love, service and sacrifice."

But what price is forgiveness? And how is this done?

Forgiveness is indeed what a fallen world and its inhabitants need. Forgiveness is a relational concept. The exhortation to forgive and the desire to be forgiven presuppose that something serious has gone wrong in the relationship. There is no better way to explain that brokenness than that given in the Christian Scripture. From there we know how not just the strong but The Mighty One forgives and what price He paid to reconcile all humans with Himself and to restore harmony, peace and justice to rule all relationships. For how can anyone count money out of an empty purse, eat and drink from an empty dish and cup, look for strength and riches where there is nothing but weakness and poverty?²

Be forgiven fully before you can fully forgive!

Notes

¹The Parliament of the World's Religions met for the first time in Chicago in 1893. Its centenary was celebrated also in Chicago in 1993. The Assembly of the Parliament resolved to hold a third meeting in Cape Town at the threshold of the new millennium. Another meeting was announced five years hence. The Cape Town meeting was a foretaste of the parliament's resolve to effect for it a distinctly non-western format, leadership and participation in all its activities. This essay is a reflection of the writer as a participant observer. The references are from the Parliament's publications and its official newsletter, *Vukani*, published in the Cape Town newspaper.

²Some of the many questions Martin Luther asked of those trying to be justified by the Law in explaining Galatians 4:9.

HENRY ROWOLD

Evangelism—God's Call to His People: Biblical Perspectives

Israel as God's Mission People

As flawed as the cartoon movie, *Prince of Egypt*, was in its portrayal of Moses as a heel-become-hero, whose story climaxed when he led the children of Israel across the Red Sea, it was a remarkable, even compelling demonstration of how the visual arts can serve to express the biblical story.

I can't help wishing, however, that the artists could have carried the story a bit further, at least as far as Sinai, rather than stopping at the crossing of the Red Sea. If nothing else, that would have put focus on the people rather than on the heroic leader. What a picture, and what a story that could have been! There were the people on the run, chased through sea and desert, under attack by a succession of enemies, most frightfully Egypt, but others, too, like Amalek (Exodus 17). While they're on the run and under attack, they're living hand-to-mouth, on virtually nothing, scooping up the "daily bread" the Lord provides them along the way. My guess is that while they're on the run, under attack, gathering up that daily bread,

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they're also still getting to know each other, because, according to Exodus 12:38, what came out of Egypt was a "crowd of mixed ancestry" (NAB).¹ Not all, in other words, could claim Abraham's pedigree.

Finally this "mixed crowd" straggles its way to Sinai. While the story of Moses on the mountain and the account of the Commandments and laws are familiar to all of us, the most crucial part of the narrative comes just before we get to the Ten Commandments in Chapter 20. Before Moses is given the two tablets, God calls a "time-out." He speaks to Israel (both the Israel that knew Abraham as distant ancestor, and the Israel that was the "mixed crowd" which adhered themselves to Abraham's descendants), and He reviews for them who they are, what's really going on, and what's at stake.

That review of God (Exodus 19:4-6) is what we want to focus on.

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself" (v. 4). Yes, they had seen what God had done, and their eyes were still bugging out—I can't imagine how the *Prince of Egypt* version of the crossing of the Red Sea could even come close to the real thing!—and they were only beginning to catch their breath. "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my



treasured possession . . ." (v. 5). It seems strange that out of all nations this "mixed crowd" was all that God wanted as a "treasured possession." Why?

The answer comes in 19:6, but it's more an answer in terms of where God is coming from than where Israel is coming from: ". . . because (much closer to the Hebrew than the "although" of the NIV) the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God's choice of this "mixed crowd" is in view of and for the sake of the whole earth! As "mixed" as this Israel may have been in terms of pedigree, they were the spiritual descendants of Abraham, through whom, God said, "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Israel, and every person in Israel, had tasted a special deliverance (from Egypt and from all other enemies), and was now given a special calling that through them all nations might know and worship the Lord.

Note the two parts in the calling. One, "a kingdom of priests!" Israel, of course, had priests, the Levites, people from among their own, appointed by God to lead Israel in

worship, to intercede for Israel, to teach Israel the works and will of God (the Torah), and to apply that Torah to the lives of Israel. What then those priests were to Israel, Israel was now called by God to be to the nations, namely a "kingdom of priests," people who would bring the nations to the worship of God, intercede for them, teach them, and apply the works and will of God to their lives.

Incredibly, we're talking about this same "mixed crowd," still breathless and dumb-struck by what God has done for them, still getting to know each other. In this electric moment, God combines His creative and redemptive power and transforms this "mixed crowd" into a "kingdom of priests," and in turn incorporates them into their ancestor's task, namely God's means of bringing His blessing to the nations.

The second part of God's mandate in Exodus 19:6 is that this "mixed crowd" also be a "holy nation," which describes the inner life that empowers and models their mission. However "mixed" they may have been, they are now "holy," and they are God's. The commandments and laws that follow simply illustrate and detail more specifically what it means to be a "holy



nation." Being that "holy nation," however, is not for the sake of simply being holy (and certainly not being holier-than-thou) but for the sake of being a "kingdom of priests," so "all people on earth" can be blessed, as promised to Abraham. Israel is the model, the paradigm, the first-fruits of the people God intended when he created this world.

What we have here, already in the early pages of the Old Testament, is a marvelously clear and powerful statement of God's mission intent and of Israel's mission identity and mandate. Who is it that comprises this kingdom of priests and holy nation? Israel, not just some of Israel, not just a professional elite in Israel, not merely priests or prophets or kings among them, but that whole "mixed crowd," the whole people of God, and every one individually.

When Israel recounts its own history, and the prophets interpret and critique that history, the overriding concern often seems to focus on the question of how faithful Israel was to its calling as a "holy nation." When, however, Israel enters into God's presence in worship, driven more by God's glory and praise than by its own survival or faithfulness, its task of being a "kingdom of

priests" stands out with eye-catching boldness. "Declare His glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples," the psalmist cries out (96:3); "make known among the nations what He has done" (105:1). This is the "kingdom of priests" at work, inviting into God's blessing "all the peoples of the earth."

Even more astounding, when Israel through the psalmists calls to the nations, it calls on them to join Israel in serving God. The peoples of the nations are to worship (shout with joy, sing His praise, praise our God, be glad, rejoice, be jubilant, worship the Lord). They are also to "proclaim His salvation"—interestingly the Hebrew here uses a verb that ends up in the Greek translation as "to gospel or to evangel-ize."² By joining Israel, the Gentiles join the "kingdom of priests," and the "mixed crowd" continues to expand. Both Israel and Gentile grow together in common worship and witness (evangel-ing).

The New Testament Israel As God's Mission People

Nor is God's mission mandate for Israel, including the Gentiles who join Israel,

confined to the Old Testament. It, in fact, permeates the New Testament, from Jesus to Paul to the closing visions of Revelation. Of special interest for our purposes here, however, are several places in the New Testament where the authors import and reinforce the specific mission and mandate we have seen above. (The most well known is 1 Peter 2:9, where Peter quotes directly from the Exodus account: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."³)

Several things are particularly striking about this passage. One is that Peter cites the Exodus account in order to reinforce God's purpose for choosing His people, namely "that you may declare (His) praises" before the nations. God's people continue to exist for the sake of the nations, and the nations are continually to be brought into God's people. The other is that Peter seems also to be addressing a "mixed crowd." They are "strangers . . . scattered . . . chosen" (1:1-2) from places throughout Asia Minor, many of them likely Gentiles, living the lives of ordinary people, including both free and slaves (2:16-17). Only, in fact, in Chapter 5 does Peter begin to address the leaders ("elders").

The second passage that recalls and reapplies the Exodus mission mandate is the "great commission" of Matthew 28:18-20. Matthew 28:18 filters God's foundational assertion in Exodus 19:5 ("the whole earth is mine") through cross and resurrection, and attributes that to the Lord Jesus ("all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"). The outgrowth, the expression of God's lordship in Exodus is that Israel be a "kingdom of priests." Following that pattern, Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, sends the Israel before Him (his "mixed crowd" of disciples) to the nations, making disciples in turn as they go, charged with the tasks of baptizing and teaching . . . until the end of the age.

The final passage we turn to is the spectacular glimpse of the end of the age given us in the Book of Revelation, where the task given in Exodus and 1 Peter and Matthew is brought to completion. The "mixed crowd," gathered by

the "kingdom of priests," gathers around the Lamb, singing its multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual praise:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God and they will reign on earth. (Revelation 5:9-10)

From beginning to end, then, from Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptural account is driven by God's desire for His children. When they separated themselves from Him, He put the initial question and invitation: "Where are you?" Redeemed by the Lamb, and assembled around the throne of the Lamb, God's children show and proclaim where they are. They are gathered around Him, which was God's intent in the first place.

The Body of Christ As God's Mission People

What links that initial quest of Genesis and that final beatific chorus in Revelation is the mission of God, His outreach of love into our (His) world. The capstone of that mission, of course, is the coming of the Missionary, sent by the Father Himself, into our world. Both before and after the Missionary, God has also enlisted under-missionaries in His mission, beginning with Abraham and including the children of Abraham, i.e., all who believe, as Paul expresses it, and that includes us as well. Though our task may not always be easy, it is basically very simple, namely, in the words of Psalm 96, to "proclaim (evangel) his salvation day after day."

We, who have been born through the Gospel, ourselves bear the Gospel, live the Gospel, proclaim the Gospel, and commend the Gospel. We who are the products of the Gospel are now its agents. We who are fashioned by the Gospel are now walking expressions of the power of the Gospel in every aspect of our life and at every level of our life.

Where and how do we bear that Gospel? Most simply, of course, wherever and however. As the Gospel renews and shines through all

parts of our life, so it emerges in the daily junctures and relationships of our life—in our marital relations, our parental and filial relations, our relations with neighbors and colleagues. Where would we want anything other than our Christian faith at its clearest, our Christian life at its best, our Christian concern at its finest, our Christian sharing at its most meaningful? Obviously, we're not talking here about program or office, but about who we are in Christ. The doing at this level, the evangel-ing, is instinctual and natural.

There is a place, of course, also for intentional and programmatic outreach. The Body of Christ does reach out in a concerted, coordinated way into the lives of people in the community in which the Lord places it. Sometimes this reaching out is in response to a community that is hurting, e.g., disasters and crises, social conflict and unrest. At other times this reaching out may be to a community that is changing, with new people and new kinds of people moving in. At still other times this reaching out evangelizes the community in terms of education (elementary and high schools, pre-schools, Sunday schools, confirmation instruction, adult instruction). Whatever the context and purpose, the church identifies, marshals and trains the multi-faceted talents and expertise of its "mixed crowd" to reach out to that community. God does not bless His church with those gifts merely to see them set to the side. God intends them for ministry. God grants them for the service of the Gospel, now as in Exodus and throughout the history of the church. For a glimpse of just one specific example, look at the impressive list of seemingly very ordinary people, actually quite extraordinary "lay" people, co-workers both female and male, in the church in Rome that Paul commends (Romans 16:1-16)—a "mixed crowd" all its own.

As the Body of Christ lives and works, bearing the Gospel in daily life and witness, that Body needs to live continually in the Gospel. The bearers of the Gospel need, of course, to be borne by the Gospel and to be nurtured and nourished by the Gospel—evangel-ing at a different level. This form of Gospel ministry God also provides through Word and Sacrament and through the under-shepherds whom

God has called and whom the church has trained for the ministry of building up the Body of Christ.

As can be seen from the above, evangel-ing takes many forms, all of them at the very heart and core of the Christian mission and ministry. As confusing as that variety of forms may be, especially when further complicated by questions of office and structure in the church, what we want at all costs to preserve are some crucial links: between the evangel and all who receive the evangel, between the evangel and all who bear the evangel, and between the evangel and all who nurture (Word and Sacrament) those who bear the evangel. What we have (better, what we *are*) is a very sanctified "mixed crowd," called, graced and empowered by the evangel to be the kingdom of priests, proclaiming the evangel in the world.

So it was in that "mixed crowd" back at Sinai, proclaiming the evangel of God's deliverance from Egypt. So it was in the homes of those folks Paul commends in Romans, proclaiming the evangel of God's deliverance in Christ. So it is everywhere God's people live, from the house churches of China to the village churches of Africa to the parishes and congregations of the United States, proclaiming the evangel in the lives of God's people of every language and nation. So it will be when we take our place with those assembled around the throne of the Lamb, proclaiming His evangel and glory for days without end. Wouldn't that be a scene to get on camera, though I don't know how even the folks from *Prince of Egypt* could pull it off. We will just have to wait to experience it ourselves... evangel-ing as we wait.

Notes

¹Aside from this one reference to the New American Bible (NAB), all other Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the New International Version.

²The word "evangel" is the Greek form of the English word "Gospel." From evangel are derived words familiar to us: evangelize (to proclaim the evangel/Gospel), evangelism (the task of proclaiming the evangel/Gospel), and evangelist (the proclaimer of the evangel/Gospel).

³Peter seemingly uses the Septuagint (Greek) translation of Exodus, which reads "kingdom of priests" (i.e. priestly kingdom) as "royal priesthood." That flipping of modifier and modified does not materially affect the meaning, happily.



LEE SETTGAST

The Cry of the City: The Church's Challenge for the 21st Century

RECENTLY I drove a friend to the Los Angeles International Airport. He was an engineer from the Midwest who was attending a conference in Orange County. En route we came within several miles of my office in Inglewood. As we drove, we passed some sights he was rarely accustomed to seeing: bars on the windows and doors of homes and businesses, police officers on several blocks in the process of arresting men and women on the sidewalk, graffiti on buildings and freeway signs, druggies and prostitutes on the corners plying their trade.

I explained that we were only a short distance from my office. He asked what I did. I said, "You don't know?" (I thought he knew.) "No," he replied. I explained to him that I was the Director of the Los Angeles Nehemiah Project. He said, "It looks dangerous. You must often be scared." I explained that I really did not sense much fear. I had worked in similar situations for years believing that God had put me here to perform a ministry among people whom I love. I said that I saw this as an

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opportunity to enact the love of Christ to people whose lives are often hurting, empty and bleeding.

It has been quite a trip, I must say, from the grain fields and cattle yards of a Nebraska farm where I grew up to the streets of Los Angeles. This area with a history of riots, often beset by crime, drugs, prostitution and the homeless of all ages and ethnic backgrounds, is my field of ministry. I don't have a cathedral for a church or a congregation to shield and befriend me. Little did I realize when I was cultivating corn in Nebraska or showing cattle in the arena of the State Fair in Lincoln that this widely diverse and distant area would someday be my field of labor and ministry.

It has been quite a journey from my first church, a mission congregation in Osceola, Iowa. My closest experience there that represented anything near the inner city was feeding a sandwich to some homeless transients who came to our door or visiting a suspected thief in our one-cell town jail. Some years later in Norfolk, Nebraska, I was disturbed at dinner one evening by the police, who asked me to go with them to a house several blocks away to try to talk a man out of using a gun while holding his wife hostage in their home. Shaking in my boots, by the grace of God, I was successful. It was nothing compared to what I was to experience in ministry within the inner city years later. There would be inner city churches during my years of pastoral ministry in Los Angeles and Pasadena. Nothing, however, would prepare me better than a ministry in

prisons and jails which I served as a chaplain and supervisor of a staff of 70 other chaplains. This ministry would not be confined to the cells of jails and prisons. It would take me to the streets of such cities as Manila; Sao Paulo, a melting pot city of 16 million in Brazil; Tijuana, Mexico; San Francisco and, of course, Los Angeles. This was God's way of leading me finally to the Los Angeles Nehemiah Project. This is quite a journey from the Nebraska farm, but the Lord obviously sends us where he wants us and prepares us in His way.

The Urban Scene—What We Really Face

It has often been said in recent months that the real challenge of the church in ministry during the 21st Century is in the cities of our country and the world. I truly believe that, considering the movement of people toward cities, where 80 percent of the people in this country now live. Here, churches face real challenges and opportunities in ministry.

In viewing the needs and opportunities for ministry in the city, striking changes quickly become evident. Once thriving churches with large memberships and sprawling campuses have deteriorated greatly. Churches seating 1,000 to 1,200 once filled their edifices two and three times in Sunday morning worship. Today 40 to 70 people worship in those same sanctuaries on a Sunday morning. Of our seven Nehemiah Project churches in Los Angeles, five of them at one time had Christian day schools. Today, four of them are closed, but the facilities remain.

With the decline in membership, finances have suffered, and some of the properties have deteriorated because of a lack of funds. However, opportunities remain to use these properties for ministry. These churches are surrounded by people in need of help in their lives and lifestyles. In cities, there are many language differences. For example, in the greater Los Angeles area no less than 126 different languages are spoken. Is a plethora of languages an obstacle to ministry? No, because this is an opportunity for the church to preach the Gospel to people of every tongue. The world in our cities has become our opportunity for mission.

We often speak of doing cross-cultural ministry in the city. However, a pastor friend, the Reverend Dietrich Schlee of Faith Lutheran Church, Inglewood, California, recently said, "We are not people doing cross-cultural ministry, but by looking at the make-up of our city churches we see that we are cross-cultural doing ministry." To make his point, he noted that when he went to the hospital for triple by-pass surgery, he was attended to by a staff that included: a primary care physician who was African-American; a cardiologist who was Jewish; two surgeons, one from Peru and the other Chinese; a nursing staff of two from Thailand, one African-American, three Anglos, three Filipinos, two Peruvians, one Nigerian, one person from Pakistan, two people from Mexico and one man who was a Vietnam veteran. Schlee added, "The homogenous unit, as we generally think of it, does not exist in our area. The real homogenous unit is the complexity of the church, the people of God regardless of background who are created, redeemed and sanctified by Him."

In cities, elementary age school children often run the streets and become part of the gang culture. A committed Lutheran, Chris Stehr, who serves as the principal of a city public school in south Los Angeles, indicated that 60 percent of the children in his school (K-grade 5) live in homes without a parent. The surrogate parent is either a grandmother, a grandfather, or both, or foster parents. The church's presence needs to be felt in these struggling homes.

Being a member of an inner city church is not easy. Many of these people have seen all of the changes and deterioration through the years. Spiritual indifference can easily set in if they have not stayed in the Word. Some just want to know how to get their church to survive for another year. They need the encouragement and help of their brothers and sisters in suburban churches. What a unique opportunity for loving and caring ministry!

The Complexity of Urban Ministry—God's Training Ground

Considering the multi-faceted settings found in the urban community, the ministry of the church in the city is complex. To be effective in

this ministry, it is important to understand the dynamics at work on the streets, in the homes, in schools, in businesses, in politics, and, yes, even in the churches of the inner city. It is also important to note that the dynamics which have been years in the making also take years to understand, but understand we must if we are to be successful in this area of ministry. In the book, *Mass Violence in America* (Richard E. Rubenstein and Robert Fogelson, eds.), the comment is made, "We do not know very well what kind of society we live in, what kind of history we have had, what kind of people we are. We are just now beginning to find out, the hard way."

From personal experience, I can say that it takes years to understand life in the inner city with the complexities of personalities, ethnic backgrounds, race relations, and culture orientation and practice. To be effective in ministry in cities such as Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, as well as in many other American cities, it is important not only to understand the differences of people, but also to respect their differences. Twenty-five years of varied types of inner city ministry have helped me to grow in this understanding, realizing that I will always be learning.

I've come to know how people live and talk through my ministry in homes, businesses, on the streets, in the jails, and in the churches of the city. Not only did I become acquainted with cultures of some of the 160 plus gangs on Los Angeles streets, but I learned about the minds of those involved in criminal activity. I counseled not only in the jails, but in the homes of parents, single mothers, and wives whose loved ones were victims of gang violence and drive-by shootings. I learned much about culture, language and ethnic differences by lecturing regularly for five years at the ethnically diverse Fremont High School in south Los Angeles, noted at times for its racial tensions. Such experiences are vital for ministry in the city, where one key learning is that "you will never know it all."

While the city is one of the most challenging and opportune ministries of the church, there are many who are shying away from it. Many churches and church members have decided to leave the city for suburbia. In 1993 when

President Loren Kramer of the Pacific Southwest District asked me to do an intentional interim ministry at First Lutheran, Pasadena, the mother church of Lutheranism in the heart of that city, it was only a step away from turning the key and closing this strategically located downtown church. Part of my job was to answer such questions as "Was it worth keeping open?" "Could it ever be a viable congregation?" The congregation had become an integrated church of white/African-Americans in the 1960s. Through the years a membership of 1,200 plus had dwindled to an average attendance of 40 to 50 on Sundays. In conducting a study that involved the congregation's leadership which focused on the church's history, the surrounding community which now is 70 percent Hispanic, and the opportunities for ministry, three conclusions were reached: 1) the congregation's presence was definitely needed in the community; 2) the present membership of the church wanted to continue their ministry, but they were in need of ideas, direction and guidance; 3) the congregation would remain in the present location and develop community-based ministry no matter what the cost.

A new mission statement, objectives and goals for the congregation were developed, as well as specific methods of implementation. Among the methods for the ministry of the Gospel was a Children's Community Outreach Program. This ministry, focusing on all neighborhood children, but especially children of the Hispanic community, brought 200 children to the campus on the first weekend. First Lutheran has been offering this ministry nearly every year since. A Friday night basketball program for community youth which started with three teenagers now numbers 40 to 60 youth and includes Bible study and prayer time. The youth themselves named the program "Good Friday." An after-school tutoring program for middle-grade youth drew young people who normally would have roamed the streets as candidates for city gangs.

These programs have been led by an outstanding young pastor, Rev. Christopher Schaar, who followed my intentional interim ministry. Serving First Lutheran since 1994, he was asked about the best thing a church can do



to effectively meet the needs of people in an urban community. He responded, "A congregation needs to make decisions and back up those decisions to genuinely love that community no matter what the cost may be in terms of money, emotional drain and volunteers."

Strategies at Work

As I travel among the churches in the city, visiting with their leaders and members, and asking them about their hopes for the future, invariably I hear them saying: "We want to keep our doors open. We want to be an influence in our community. But we need ideas and guidance to carry them out."

In looking at some of the programs and projects at work in churches in different areas of our Synod, I find unique and effective strategies for the church's ministries in the 21st Century.

The Nehemiah Project

I have served as director of the Los Angeles Nehemiah Project since April 1999. Although plans are still being formulated, this is a uniquely cooperative effort involving members of the Iowa District West. When the Iowa District West was looking for a home mission outreach ministry in the inner city, they resolved to use some of their mission funds by committing \$65,000 per year to the Los Angeles Nehemiah Project, which up until this time had not been funded. Working in cooperation with the Pacific Southwest District, the Nehemiah Project has started to impact the community through seven churches presently involved: Grace, St. Paul, Christ, Hope Memorial and First Lutheran in Los Angeles, and Faith and Good Shepherd in Inglewood.

During the past summer, 45 high school age youth and their counselors from Iowa came to Los Angeles and were assigned to Nehemiah churches. Their visit was linked with the VBS programs of the congregation. "Ioway" (as the program is known) youth along with some of the youth of the Nehemiah churches made more than 5,000 personal calls in three weeks, visiting people in homes, on streets and in parks. One result was that Vacation Bible School attendance in the

churches tripled in comparison with previous years. Several youth were baptized. People began to worship with congregations and attend classes. A Sunday school teacher reported that attendance in her class increased from four to 19 as a result of the project. An exchange of Ioway and Los Angeles youth will take place in the summer of 2000, with Los Angeles youth going to Iowa.

Other projects currently underway or being planned for Nehemiah are: joint confirmation class retreats, lay leadership training courses, assisting congregations in developing their vision and goals, development of Hispanic missions, an urban school project providing day care and pre-school through grade two nurture and instruction in Nehemiah churches with existing facilities, and an outreach ministry to the parents of the children intended to aid assimilation into the congregation. Nehemiah is planning numerous community outreach programs, such as assisting needy families, offering Christian-based counseling for those with addictions and reaching out to gangs.

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Open Arms Child Development Center

The Open Arms concept (church planting through childcare) was born and gained momentum in the Atlanta metro area. In 1989, the Rev. Kevin Elseroad started a new mission with a child development center, the first ministry of this kind. Today more than 500 people worship weekly in their congregation, Christ the Shepherd, while nearly 220 children and families are served by the Open Arms Center. Since that time, 20 congregations have been planted in a similar manner.

The primary goal of this model is to serve families and to plant new congregations. Open Arms is and will always be a ministry of the congregation, and it is a very powerful ministry. Children are "soaking in" the atmosphere of Christian love and nurture for many hours each day, which has a profound impact on their lives.

For every activity/event which involves Christ the Shepherd and Open Arms families, there is the intentionality on the part of the leadership

that the Gospel message will be shared in a way that matches the event. Events are planned throughout the year, and invitations are extended to be part of the church family whether by visiting occasionally, worshipping regularly or joining the church. At the Open Arms Center a chapel event is planned each week. An egg hunt is held on the Saturday prior to Easter. Each October, as an alternative to Halloween, a pumpkin festival is held, offering games, treats, puppet ministry, clown ministry, and the Gospel message presented in an energetic, innovative manner. A strong emphasis is placed on a dual usage of classrooms, emphasizing the need for the Christ the Shepherd Sunday school/children's worship staff to know each other and share time together whenever possible. Building those relationships is seen as a way to promote constructive ways of addressing space issues.

For more information contact Rev. Kevin Elseroad, Pastor, Christ the Shepherd, Alpharetta, Georgia, 770-475-0640; Bonnie Elseroad, Director, Open Arms Center, 770-475-6570.

Life's Journey Ministries

Life's Journey Ministries (LJM) is a partnership of the Atlantic District and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Board for Mission Services. Rev. Gregory Seltz was called to New York City in 1997 to spearhead LJM. Since that time, LJM has launched a cluster of new ministries and a new congregation, Church for All Nations, in Manhattan. This congregation is the first of five to seven new LCMS churches to be launched in Manhattan by 2005. Dr. David Brockhoff has been called to serve as LJM Missions Developer of Phase 2. He will oversee the growth of small-group/cell churches. Pastor Seltz will continue to expand Life Journey Ministry's servant leadership training programs which include seven people who are currently enrolled in an urban-deaconate program.

LJM is an umbrella of ministries which involves an African Immigrant Ministry (eight congregations), an Open Arms preschool in "Hell's Kitchen," Youth Ministry/Servant Events, the Concordia Training Center for Urban Leadership, a multi-media evangelism

center, classical/jazz concerts and cultural events with an evangelistic appeal, ESL classes, African immigrant worship at 5 p.m. each Sunday, Bible study on Wall Street, and "discipleship boot camps" (summer training/servant events).

Specific outreach strategies include:

- Telephone-evangelism outreach not only to start congregations, but also to continue to launch new programs, studies and cultural events.
- Summer servant events in which teams of youth and adults venture into Manhattan passing out flyers to invite people to community service efforts and small group ministries.
- Prayer stations and "prayer walking" in which members of congregations and most ministries set up "prayer stations" with Bibles and free water on street corners, inviting people to "receive prayer," and a free gift.
- Urban deaconal training of leaders to become lay evangelists "on the beat" who invite people to small groups.
- CD-ROM outreach by passing out CD-ROMs with Bible studies keyed back to LJM's Web site.

For more information contact Rev. Gregory P. Seltz, LJM Executive Director, 212-674-6399; GPSeltz@aol.com

CAME

Jotham Johann, J.D., Executive Director and Asian Ministries Facilitator of the Lutheran Center for Asian-American Missions and Evangelism (CAME), left law practice to evangelize Asians through LCMS congregations. CAME is recognized by the LCMS Board for Mission Services as a mission society/agency with a statement of partnership and is funded by grants and private donations.

Dr. Johann's mission is to empower and equip congregations on the East Coast to reach out to the growing Asian-American communities. CAME provides assistance to ministries that seek help to identify indigenous Asian leaders, study nearby Asian communities and initiate intentional ministries to Asians of all generations. Jotham offers a series of workshops which promote cultural understanding of

Asian groups and equip congregations and church/school workers to share the Gospel with Asian Americans.

CAME is aiding ministries to Asians in and around Atlanta; Camden, N.J.; Hickory, N.C.; New York City; northern Virginia; Philadelphia; Pittsburgh; Richmond; Tampa; and Toronto. These ministries are intended to reach out to Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chinese, Hmong, Filipino, Indian, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Thai and Vietnamese communities and others who consider themselves of an Asian origin, background or descent. Since the beginning of CAME's ministry in May 1998, the number of Asian-American ministries on the East Coast has increased from eight to 24 ministries.

For more information contact Dr. Jotham Johann, CAME Executive Director, 703-971-9371.

Christ the King Christian Day School

Christ the King Lutheran Church is located on Chicago's south side several miles south of downtown Chicago. Rev. John Brazeal serves as pastor of this congregation which supports a Christian day school (pre-school-grade 8). The school, with an enrollment of about 100 children, is located in the heart of Chicago's ghetto community where one would least expect to find a church school. Most of the children who are enrolled live in the community and come from families who are unable to pay tuition. Yet Christ the King has the heart to reach out to these children and offer them a quality Christian education. The school is seen as a mission outreach to the inner city and suburban churches, and people are given the opportunity to support the school by adopting a child or children and paying tuition. This is a novel idea for funding a Christian day school in the inner city where many doors are closing.

For more information contact Rev. John Brazeal, Pastor, Christ the King, 312-536-1984.

Tell the Good News about Jesus

"Tell the Good News about Jesus" is a Synod-wide outreach promoted by Synod's Department of Evangelism Ministry. A focus is on storytelling, one of the most effective ways to create a passion for outreach by reminding

believers of Jesus' work in their lives. The program seeks people with powerful stories about Jesus at work in their lives, such as conversion stories or stories of faith. People who have personal stories to tell may tell them at church services or at congregational, district and synodical events. They may appear in publications of the church and on Web sites. Storytelling seminars will be offered to congregations and individuals beginning in the spring of 2000. The Schwan Foundation is offering one million dollars in each of the next three years to Missouri Synod congregations who have a special plan for telling the Good News.

For more information contact Synod's Department of Evangelism, 314-965-9000, or contact a district representative.

Conclusion

The church's challenge for the 21st Century is the Lord's call to reach out to others so that they might know the hand of the Master reaching out to them. Chris Stehr, the elementary school principal serving a public school in one of Los Angeles' most opportune areas for inner city ministry, summed it up well when he said, "We need to have the courage to come into the inner city, talk to the people, find their needs and respond to them. You can be Jesus to these people, the only Bible they may ever read. I don't think you can change the world, but you can change the world for a child." This is "The Cry of the City."

Resources

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Video Kits: "Sharing Faith in Families" and "Share Life: A Witness Workshop."

Department of Child Ministry and Department of Evangelism Ministry, Board for Congregational Services The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1999

Sharing Faith in Families

This resource sets out to do the following: strengthen families, foster the sharing of faith in our families, and equip families to reach out to others with that faith. *Sharing Faith in Families* accomplishes its goals in a very creative way. As churches begin to see their role as equippers in training families to foster and to nurture faith in the homes, "how to" resources can be hard to find. *Sharing Faith in Families* provides churches and professional church workers a wonderful resource to share with families so that the language of faith can be shared, fostered and nurtured in the home.

Sharing Faith in Families contains both modules and follow-up devotions after each module. Module One focuses on how God made us His children. This theme is featured in a videotape segment titled "Adoption." Devotional activities for Module One include reflection on a Scripture passage, a project and a closing prayer. The devotional activities are designed for a three-week time frame. Module Two deals with growing closer as a family who puts Jesus at the center of the home. This theme is featured in a videotape segment titled "Generations." It provides devotional activities for a three-week time frame for the family to do at home. Module Three emphasizes ways families can share Christ's love with other families. This theme is summarized in the videotape segment titled "Surprise Party." Devotional activities accompany Module Three, based on the same three-week format as in the other two modules.

The strength of *Sharing Faith in Families* is the activity-based format for the modules and devotions. Especially of interest to me was the Family Covenant in Module Three. The covenant has two sections, one for the family and the other for reaching out to another family. The first section focuses on the family's commitment to worship, Bible study and family devotions. The second section centers on the family's commitment to

reach out with God's love to another family by sharing their faith. The Family Covenant moves a family to be very specific and intentional in their own faith life as well as in the sharing of their faith with another family. The Family Covenant and the other activities create opportunities for families to talk openly with each other about God's gift of faith in their lives.

I encourage churches and professional church workers to review *Sharing Faith in Families*. It is a resource for family ministry that can be a true blessing for families who seek ways to foster and nurture faith. I would contend that most families agree that sharing faith within the home is important, but often families are discouraged because they do not know where to start or how to begin. *Sharing Faith in Families* can be that first step for families as they seek by God's Holy Spirit to make their homes, homes of faith, where families are affirmed as being children of the Heavenly Father.

Share Life: A Witness Workshop

From small group Bible studies to parachurch newsletters, lifestyle evangelism is becoming a common theme in much of the evangelism literature today. Lifestyle evangelism focuses on the relationships individuals have with one another in a variety of contexts: family, work, church and leisure. At the center of lifestyle evangelism is care and concern for the individual, where she or he is emotionally, physically and spiritually. More and more, trainers in evangelism and outreach use programs that focus persons on relationships within their own contexts. Rather than a one-time visit to an individual whom one has never met before, lifestyle evangelism is an ongoing, relationship-based approach to evangelism and outreach. *Share Life: A Witness Workshop* provides evangelism and outreach trainers with a resource that focuses on relationships as we carry out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

Share Life: A Witness Workshop is based on John 10:10 where Jesus says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The other key Bible passage that gives focus to the workshop is 1 Peter 3:15: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. . . ." The workshop contains five sessions that can be presented in a one-day workshop:

- Session One: God is FOR Us!
 - Session Two: God Works THROUGH Us!
 - Session Three: God Reaches Others THROUGH Us (Part 1)
 - Session Four: God Reaches Others THROUGH Us (Part 2)
 - Session Five: God WITH Us!
 - Appendix A: Seven Basic Truths
 - Appendix B: Handling Objections
 - Appendix C: The Andrew Principle
- Each session has particular emphases. In ses-

sion one, the group explores the term "life" and its implications in witnessing to others. Also, group building takes place in this session. In session two, the group explores individual personality types (lion, beaver, otter and golden retriever) and how each personality type may affect particular faith-sharing situations. In session three, individuals identify those in their own households. "Household" from a Biblical perspective includes a variety of contexts such as relatives, friends, work associates, with the emphasis being "they know you and are known by you." In session four, individuals develop their personal Gospel conversation and how that conversation may apply to those they listed in session three. In session five, faith conversations that create "real-life" situations help the group apply both the personality types identified in session three and how the Gospel presentation of *Share Life* would be incorporated in each situation. A videotape is provided to further illustrate these situations for the group.

I found *Share Life* to have two strengths. First, it keeps the focus on genuine, caring relationships. Emphasizing the Biblical perspective of "household" provides a great opportunity for self-reflection and the opportunity to keep specific individuals in her or his prayer life. Second, *Share Life* provides points of departure for further illustrating specific contexts regarding evangelism and outreach. For example, introducing the group to a term such as "unchurched" provides a great segue into a follow-up workshop that speaks specifically to this relevant dynamic in congregations.

To those who will lead groups through *Share Life*, I would like to share one comment regarding the personality types. It has been noted in various publications that what makes this workshop unique is the emphasis on the various personality types, encouraging many to give the reason for the hope that they have. In session five and the "real-life situations," the group is to identify how a lion (bold), a beaver (non-threatening), an otter (invitational), and a golden retriever (servant) would respond. I have some reservations about incorporating all four personality types in each situation. Not all personality types may be helpful in certain situations. Rather than focusing on personality types as a way of responding, I would prefer to encourage the individuals to be aware of their personality type tendencies and demonstrate "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15) as they respond to the "real-life" situations in the workshop. In terms of responding, I would have preferred some discussion in the workshop about how the many titles and names of Jesus could be shared in the "real-life" videotape segments. Two resources that I have found to be helpful in sharing Jesus' titles and names in evangelism and outreach situations are Robert Kolb's *Speaking the Gospel Today* and William McKay's *Me, An Evangelist?*

How timely *Share Life* is for us as we continue to carry out the Great Commission in the year 2000 and beyond. I recommend *Share Life* to all trainers in evangelism and outreach. *Share Life* is a workshop that keeps the focus and work of evangelizing upon the Holy Spirit. It is my prayer that *Share Life* will cause all of us to think about our "households" and to "share life" with those we are in relationship with in our daily lives.

Dr. Paul Holtorf

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Me, an Evangelist? Every Christian's Guide to Caring Evangelism.

William J. McKay

St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 1992

William McKay is definitely a gifted writer. His experience of serving on staff with Stephen Ministries contributes to the worthiness and need of the topic discussed in his writing. He introduces result orientation evangelism, process orientation evangelism and a caring evangelization cycle through an engaging story about a reluctant evangelist. McKay also reveals how all Christians can naturally share the love of Jesus with non-believers and believers, in a style that is fitting for them and is inviting to others.

The book is an easy read. McKay is very clear in what he has to say and uses terminology that is easy to understand. He also gives many examples for the reader to gain a better understanding of the point he is making. This book was written for people who are looking for a refreshing way to relate the Great Commission to their daily lives, and for those who possibly never thought they could be evangelists.

The book is divided into 20 short chapters which focus on areas such as taking the fear out of evangelism, how to talk about sin and Jesus, and how to be a caring evangelist. Each chapter begins with part of the story of how a couple witnessed to their neighbor. McKay brings out the challenges and the joys found in the caring evangelism relationship. The story is written in such a way that you feel a personal connection to Margaret, Sarah and Andy.

McKay labels two types of evangelism orientation: results orientation and process orientation. He states, "Results orientation is a style of relating in which people care more about getting their own way and controlling others than they do about the needs, feelings or well-being of others." He makes the point that it can be easy to slip into results orientation in evangelism. McKay explains that often our motives are in the right place, because we genuinely care about the other

person's spiritual life. However, we can lose sight of other's feelings and needs, which may lead to the other person feeling angry.

The process-oriented evangelism style McKay suggests emphasizes the relationship rather than the results. Through this method McKay encourages us to focus on the other person through caring by listening, trying to understand, relating in a non-judgmental way, and witnessing at the right time. He states that the key to process oriented evangelism is to care for people and trust the Spirit to work out God's plan.

McKay introduces the caring evangelization cycle as a useful tool. First, the cycle helps us understand what is happening in the spiritual journey of a person one is evangelizing. He breaks the cycle down into six steps: 1) God reaches out to us; 2) We experience failure of our false gods; 3) We admit our powerlessness, our need for a Savior; 4) We receive and believe in Jesus; 5) We grow in Christian community; 6) We serve God and people. The cycle is helpful because it relates not only to new believers, but it is also applicable to believers in the steps we take again and again as we continue to grow in faith and as faithful disciples.

The cycle also shows us how we can help others move through the six steps of the cycle. McKay identifies the four basic skills used when we evangelize: building relationships, listening, witnessing and praying. McKay commits a large portion of the book to showing how to develop and use these skills.

McKay discusses some important misconceptions concerning evangelizing. He devotes one section in his book to writing on how God does not hold us responsible for the results of our witness. In another section, he expands on our goals as evangelists. McKay states that our goals are not to cure the person, but to care for one; not to create a dependence on us, but an independence of us and a healthy dependence on God. McKay also describes how to be other-centered and how to care for others in crisis.

Chapter 12 is helpful for individuals to learn new ways to comfortably talk about Jesus in a way that best benefits the needs and situations of others. McKay defines eight ways to talk about Jesus: Jesus the Healer, Jesus the Good Shepherd, Jesus the Deliverer, Lamb of God, Jesus the Reconciler, Jesus as Immanuel (God-with-us), Jesus the Friend of Sinners, and Christ the Victor. He states that the various pictures of Jesus speak to people's certain needs and tap into the power of God through our witness grounded in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

McKay's book is an excellent source for seeing evangelism in a different light, and it is a must read for all.

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Mustard Seed versus McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future.

Tom Sine

foreword by Ravi Zacharias

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999

"We cannot practice biblical discipleship over the top of the acquisitiveness, materialism, individualism and consumerism of modern culture and wind up with anything that bears much resemblance to Jesus and his mustard seed movement." This statement captures much of Tom Sine's penetrating critique of the contemporary Christian church and forms the basis of his call to renewal.

Sine asserts that the global economy—McWorld—profoundly threatens the church by affirming values, such as those listed above, which conflict with the Gospel. McWorld, supported by the media, successfully creates new wants and leads us to prize material possessions, to focus on private concerns, and to de-emphasize community. The church, he believes, is hardly conscious of what is happening.

The fundamental problem for today's church is that it has accommodated itself to McWorld. "While Christians may on occasion rail at consumerism and materialism, research shows there is almost no connection between our religious faith and how we steward our resources." Christians have compartmentalized faith and created a dualistic, privatized discipleship which is cut off from much of the rest of life and cares little for the world. "Too many of us have embraced a narrow view of God's redemptive purpose as the saving of disembodied souls for a non-materialistic future in the clouds." The church has adopted secular, bureaucratic models and uses them in the name of Christ. It has learned from McWorld how to "package, commodify and market the church." Sine believes that many megachurches have become little more than "'Christian' consumer malls." The church has succumbed to McWorld's model because it has de-emphasized cultural transformation and has accepted the standards of the dominant culture. One reason for the church's failure to attract the under-35 generation is that it is not a distinctive alternative to McWorld society. Faith makes few "demands" upon our lives. The church has become much like Judah in Babylon, forgetting that it is in exile.

continued on the back cover

What, then, needs to happen? Sine contends that we must call people to "whole-life" discipleship and stewardship in which God's purposes are at the core of our entire life. God seeks to redeem humanity, not only spiritually but in all facets of its existence. If the church desires to manifest God's gracious will for people and for the world, it must work to bring justice to the poor and to empower them economically. It will emphasize community, mutual care and cooperation, and concern for the creation. The church will be a critic, not a protector, of culture. We need churches, Sine asserts, which are less places for worship than places where we live every day of the week. Such revitalization of God's people, he believes, will occur through the mustard-seed model. Change will come through the lowly and through small groups which are thoroughly committed to wholistic service. Transforming change will not, and perhaps cannot, take place through bureaucratic programming which emanates from centralized denominational offices. Sine describes numerous examples of mustard-seed faith communities which have sprouted up in a variety of denominations and in diverse social and cultural settings.

I enthusiastically recommend Sine's book. He has made a perceptive analysis of what is lacking in the church and why. Although some readers might be uncomfortable with his call for the church to be a transforming agent in society, the challenge which Sine lays before the church is solidly biblical. He is not advocating the establishment of a Christian political commonwealth, but he does urge the church to engage in the comprehensive ministry which Jesus preached and modeled.

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