

III. STRATEGIES FOR HOLISTIC MISSION

SECTION INTRODUCTION

Rodney L. Petersen

The final section of this volume suggests strategies for holistic mission. Holistic mission places ethical accent on living in the present in a context marked by the Book of Acts against an historical backdrop of biblical witness. Biblical revelation has always been deemed to have a prophetic role in the sense of a challenge to right living. To whatever extent it offers insight on global politics – events preceding an envisioned return of Christ (pre-millennialism in various forms), bound up with it (a-millennialism), or overcome through the progressive energies of history (post-millennialism) – ethics trumps eschatology in Christian theology.¹

There have been many different paradigms and ways for doing mission, for allowing the good news of Jesus Christ to shape lives and social structures. Mission has taken on specific strategies with defined objectives in relation to different models of history, but always with the end in view of forming disciples of Christ.² This is the case for each of the great periods of mission and preaching: the early expansion of the church, the preaching of reform by late medieval mendicants and new urban orders, Hussite, Protestant and Catholic re-formations, periods of mission and revival in the same groups and among the Orthodox. And mission today requires a sense of history. It requires confidence that God through Christ is destroying the powers of oppression, alienation, sickness, and death (I

Corinthians 15: 22-28), that strength is given the church to do God's mission (Romans 5:3-5) and that the end in view is good (Revelation 21).

A strategy for holistic mission begins with theological self-understanding. The development of such a strategy is the intent of Darrell Guder's work in this section's opening chapter. Guder's thesis is that Christian mission in regions like the United States or Europe, "is fraught with *theological* ambiguity." This ambiguity grows out of the unique histories of these regions and also out of challenges to whether mission is conceived of as method or theology, as constitutive of several tasks to be undertaken by the church or as shaping the church's core identity. For Guder, the tragedies of conflict, genocide and holocaust through the twentieth century have deepened the theological question of the nature of valid mission even as they have brought its necessity universally to our consciousness and created the need for a missional ecclesiology.

It can be said that the educational implications for such an ecclesiology are suggested by Elizabeth Conde-Frazier and Robert W. Pazmiño. In their chapter they write that an "Antioch Model" of church in mission, envisioned by Orlando Costas, implies a missional ecclesiology: the entire church is to be caught up in the liberating news of the gospel. They cite Costas' use of Hebrews 13:12-13: "Therefore Jesus suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured." For Conde-Frazier and Pazmiño, the implications of drawing such diversity into the church affect the structures of leadership; it creates a church that is inclusive of cultural difference and promotes educational policies that are as informative as they are transformational.

One context for mission in the twenty-first century is the global youth culture that is shaped by different ways of engaging or expressing alienation from the dominant culture. Ken Johnson relates the hope of the gospel for urban youth, often sensitive to the destructive powers of oppression, finding voice in Hip-Hop culture and its music. Increasingly disseminated among all youth, with global reach through media and other methods and systems, Thug Life and its variations define an alternative worldview with religious implications. For Johnson, this is a formidable urban border that contemporary missions must cross and for which a credible and up-to-date Christian apologetic is needed.

The twentieth century is noted for populations in movement: war, ethnic cleansing, economic and political unrest and ecological disaster have combined to create an unparalleled human crisis of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers that continues into the twenty-first century. Ruth Bersin

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describes this area of “border crossing” as she writes out of her extensive cross-cultural experience with a refugee immigration ministry. Beginning with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40; cf. 22:37), she looks at mission through the lens of family systems theory and stresses the need to foster relationships that neither project our fears nor scapegoat that which is other and different.

Christian mission is good news for all, but especially for the poor and marginalized. This aspect of social healing is expressed in different social and national settings in the next two chapters, first by Daniel Jeyaraj in India. He finds useful lessons from the history of Christian missions in the work of Christian Frederick Schwartz (1726–1798) which he documents in south India. Schwartz’s *Defence of Missions* answered allegations raised against Christian missionaries by colonial officers that Christianity did little of value for the Indian. Trusted by the local population, Schwartz wrote of how the gospel appeals to those of all walks of life, but especially to the poor and marginalized whose conversion elevated their social standing, restored their dignity, and promoted responsible social participation; the real culprits were European colonial merchants and their Indian allies who exploited the people. The next chapter carries our restorative and redemptive theme to the scourge of racism, the practice of slavery and its aftermath. It finds in Christian mission deep resonance between restorative justice and reconciliation.

That social healing can come even in areas of racial and ethnic hatred is exemplified in the work of Raymond Helmick, S. J. Such conflict, often engineered by cynical manipulative forces playing on group anxiety and historical grievance, make of religion a weapon for harm rather than healing. Helmick writes out of his missional motivation of the ways he has been guided to find reconciliation in the most intransigent of conflicts. His analysis of the dynamics within majority and minority groups, the direct nature of a conflict and the framework within which it occurs can yield solutions. Often *scapegoating* is fundamental to conflict in ways that mandate the need for understanding, and call for the potential of forgiveness in order to find reconciliation. He adds that the spirit of these conflicts seems to have become more cataclysmic following the 9/11 attack as the United States appeared to also be overcome by its own fear and rage.

Youth alienation, populations under stress, the needs of the poor and marginalized, racial and ethnic hatred and discrimination – all these form contexts for Christian mission. They are areas of social disease that find prophetic direction (Isaiah 58:6-14; Matthew 25:34-45) as Christian disciples discover the courage to be the body of Christ in the world, “stewards

of the mysteries of God” (Col. 1:9); but author Calvin DeWitt challenges us with more: to be “stewards of the earth” (Gen. 2:15). Creation, too, is recipient of God’s mission as the whole *cosmos* looks for liberation through the gospel (Romans 8: 18-21); personal and social salvation are only an aspect of the deeper ecological healing that is required of us and of our world. DeWitt draws attention to the interplay between the Biosphere and Missiology as he places importance upon putting our contemporary scientific understanding of the world into interactive relationship with missiology. This holistic mission is every Christian’s vocation. We are reminded of this by Margaret Eletta Guider in the final chapter where she argues that we now live in a world where the distinctions between mission senders and mission receivers are blurred by our mutual dependencies.

The Antioch Agenda is an agenda that involves all peoples in the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. It finds specific focus in the pressing issues of our day. These issues can be said to be the need for human flourishing, the demands of reconciliation in specific settings, an affirmation of religious freedom in the context of a dialogue among religions, and the necessity of freedom from fear. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) offer a vision of human flourishing. Defined by the United Nations, they form a template for action. The lens of Christian reflection offers missional perspective: the goal of eliminating extreme *poverty and hunger* draws us to consider how all are made in the image of God; that of reducing *child mortality* calls us to reflect on the incarnation, that the embodiment of Christian hope came into the world as a child; promoting *gender equality* draws us to reflect on the mystery of unity and diversity – that of gender, ethnicity and race; the goal of achieving *universal primary education* reminds us that education, schools and universities, have been the gift of the Church to global cultures; improving *maternal health* reminds us that the health of the mother is key to the health of the community; the work of combating *HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other Diseases* drives us to ask whether calamity/suffering is payback for sin; the task of ensuring *environmental sustainability* calls us to stewardship; and developing *networks for development* raises the question of those with whom we are willing to associate, to issues of “exclusion and embrace.”³ Mission in the twenty-first century fosters human flourishing.

Mission in the twenty-first century is also about reconciliation. Reconciliation, accompanied by forgiveness, grounded in justice – these all are central to Christian spirituality and open the gates forward to the repair of the world (*tikkun olam*). Robert Schreiter calls attention to the vertical, horizontal and cosmic aspects of reconciliation.⁴ In work for the Confer-

ence on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches (Athens 2005), he outlines six aspects of reconciliation and healing: truth, memory, repentance, justice, forgiveness and love.⁵ Reconciliation begins in particular settings and reaches out to cosmic dimensions. If there is a role for reconciliation in the political realm, as seen in Helmick's chapter, it finds its deepest grounding in theological reflection on God's work in Christ.⁶ This is where cycles of revenge and release are first encountered within a movement toward health and wholeness.⁷ Reconciliation involves, to use the words of Samuel Escobar, "Transforming Service."⁸ It is the "liturgy after the liturgy," to adopt the expression of Orthodox theologian Ion Bria.⁹

Third, Christian mission assumes and promotes religious freedom. There is a growing sense across the globe that rights and obligations arise from the people as embodied in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* set forth by the United Nations (1948). This was given further significance for religious consciousness and liberties in the U.N.'s *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* (25 November 1981). The social reality of people migrating around the world, contemporary technology and media – as well as an increasing tendency to standardize national citizenship – have all promoted a sense of global citizenship. With this has come an increasing understanding of the necessity for a dialogue among religions¹⁰ in the context of the freedom of religion.¹¹ Religious citizenship takes shape around issues of identity, lifestyle, specific needs and networks.¹² Just as Christianity played a role in globalization through the democracy of salvation, fostering global religious freedom in the context of a dialogue among religions must also be affirmed as a mission goal so as to promote the authenticity of religious choice and commitment.

A fourth goal for mission in the twenty-first century is to promote freedom from fear. At another time and place Franklin Delano Roosevelt offered a vision of a world founded upon four essential freedoms: the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and the freedom from fear.¹³ This must also be a dimension of mission in the twenty-first century. "Do not fear" is the charge given to Abraham, alike to Joshua, then with resonances through Jesus to John's vision, the Apocalypse: "Be strong and courageous... I will be with you" (Deuteronomy 31-23). The monotheistic faiths tell us that we live in a world of the one God, upon whose goodness we can totally rely.¹⁴ The victory cry of the Lamb who was slain is that, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed

away” (Revelation 21:4).

End Notes

- ¹ I believe this is the intent of Mark 13. On a diversity of perspective, see Robert G. Clouse, Robert N. Hosack, Richard V. Pierard, eds., *The New Millennium Manual: A Once and Future Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999); cf. Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, *America's Battle for God: A European Christian Looks at Civil Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Barbara Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in The Book of Revelation* (Westview Press, 2005); for history of interpretation, Rodney Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- ² See, e.g., David Bosch, Hans Küng, Stephen Bevans & Roger Schroeder cited elsewhere in this volume.
- ³ Sabina Alkire, *What Can One Person Do? Faith to Heal a Broken World* (Church Publishing, 2005). Economist and Anglican priest, Sabina Alkire calls us to craft mission goals that begin with prayer and then move through stages of study, financial giving, connecting with the impoverished, ritual, advocacy, and politics so as to be the *Ambassadors of Hope* (Robert Seiple) that we are called to be. The term “exclusion and embrace” is from the book of that title by Miroslav Volf (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).
- ⁴ Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation. Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (New York and Cambridge: BTI/Orbis, 1992). Schreiter has gone on to develop his ideas in different settings and articles.
- ⁵ Jacques Matthey and the Ecumenical Formation Team, “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation,” Preparatory Paper No. 1. Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Athens, May, 2005; cf. John Paul Lederach, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (Scottsdale, PA: Harold Press, 1999).
- ⁶ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); and with attention to the overtly political, see: Martha Minow, *Breaking Cycles of Hatred. Memory, Law, and Repair* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2002); also: Olga Botcharova, “Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy: Developing a Model of Forgiveness,” in Raymond Helmick and Rodney Petersen, eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation* (Philadelphia: Templeton Press, 2002): pp. 279-304; Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution. A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001): 251-280.
- ⁷ Literature on forgiveness is now legion. One might begin with Robert D. Enright and Joanna North, eds., *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Michael Henderson, *Forgiveness. Breaking the Chain of Hate* (Wilsonville, OR: Book Partners, 1999). A theology of forgiveness has been written by L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness:*

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A Theological Analysis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995); cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Vladimir Jankelevitch, *Forgiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

- ⁸ Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission. The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003): 142-154.
- ⁹ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC, 1996).
- ¹⁰ Hans Küng has long argued for the importance of a dialogue of respect among the religions, see the Parliament of the World's Religions, *Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (Continuum, 1994).
- ¹¹ On religious citizenship, see Bart van Steenberg, "The Condition of Citizenship," in Bart van Steenberg, ed., *The Condition of Citizenship* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 1-9, esp. 2.
- ¹² On "lifestyle politics," see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). On the "politics of identity" and related matters, see Jonathan Sacks, "Judaism and Politics in the Modern World," in Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 51-63.
- ¹³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Four Freedoms"; Address to Congress January 6, 1941 (*Congressional Record*, 1941, Vol. 87, Pt. I.).
- ¹⁴ I owe this reflection to Raymond Helmick, S.J. The paper in which he develops these ideas is entitled, "Do not Fear..., Because I am with You" (December 2004).

