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# Theological Issues in the Mission of the Church<sup>1</sup>

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Thus it is written... that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God... But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:3, 8).

... having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he calls you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe... (Ephesians 18-19, all from RSV).

The above excerpts from the Ascension Day lessons serve to remind us of the basis, content, and breadth of our Lord's calling of the church to mission. The heart of the missionary proclamation is of course the proclamation of repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all people, as Jesus described to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). During the forty days in which the Lord appeared to the disciples between his resurrection and the day of Pentecost he spoke to them about the "kingdom of God", and sent them in the power of the Spirit to be its witnesses (Acts 1). Note that there is here no reference to "church-planting" as such. These disciples, their minds enlightened by the Spirit, would in time have revealed to them fuller dimensions of the hope to which they were called, and a fuller understanding of the riches of God's glorious inheritance and of the immeasurable greatness of God's power. What strikes us here is that mission has not only a personal

dimension but also a global and cosmic thrust: to all nations, to the ends of the earth, to the end of time, for the purpose of manifesting God's eternal purpose—the fullness and richness of the divine kingdom and the greatness and glory of God. We want to examine the mission of the church in terms of the theological issues raised by the Mission of God and the Lord's missionary commission to the church.

## I. Can the Church as We Know It be the Agent of God's Missionary Purpose?

That is a more serious question than it may at first sound. Can the church in Canada, in the USA, in Europe or the third world—the local church in Saskatoon or wherever—be God's instrument in carrying out the task of manifesting the kingdom? I have learned that the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada is engaged in a major effort to strengthen missionary awareness at all levels. You are in the midst of a "Forward in Mission" campaign, and have recently appointed "mission coordinators" in your various regions and synods. Something like that occurred in the closing years of the Lutheran Church in America, and will doubtless also take place in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. What then is the significance of the fact that we need special campaigns to remind the church of what Jesus described as its fundamental task: to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, and to witness to the coming kingdom?

Back in the 1960s the World Council of Churches conducted a major study on "The Missionary Structure of the Church" (sometimes "congregation") which took a rather negative, even a pessimistic, view of the possibility of the local congregation serving as an instrument of mission.<sup>2</sup> It used such phrases as "the church stands in its own way", suggesting that the local church could only stumble over its own feet in its mission efforts, and that it displayed an extreme ineptitude. (This view was perhaps influenced more by the situation of European folk churches than by the example of North American congregations.) The local parish, this study pointed out, had originated in eleventh and twelfth century Europe when the process of christianization had already come to an end; such parishes were designed more for the *conservation* of members and tradition than for mission. The institutional church suffered from

inflexibility and “design flaws” which made it ill-fitted for the special task of continuous missionary outreach. Some reacted to the WCC report by wanting to dismiss the local congregation altogether as a vehicle of mission: the Lutheran reaction, by and large, was to seek to renew and reform the church for its missionary task.

Do our churches have a missionary structure? The newly adopted Lutheran World Federation statement on mission,<sup>3</sup> authorized by the LWF 8th Assembly at Budapest (1984) and now at last released by the LWF Department of Church Cooperation under the leadership of its Director, Dr. Ishmael Noko, has something relevant to say about the need for constantly challenging and reshaping the church to play its missionary role. The statement warns of the “maintenance or survival mentality” which closes the church to the outside, and restricts its spontaneous witness, tempting the church to concentrate exclusively on its own internal nurture and worship life to the detriment of its outward reaching witness.<sup>4</sup> The statement abounds in affirmations that mission or sending belongs to the “very being of the church”, and that it is no optional activity. It is the task “assigned to every Christian in baptism”, belongs to “all local congregations”, and is the “common responsibility of the whole church in all its manifestations”.<sup>5</sup> Many will recall that Vatican II’s *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes)* also contained the statement that “the Church on earth is by its very nature missionary”.<sup>6</sup>

Yet such affirmations do not automatically make the local congregation an effective or viable instrument of mission. If theological affirmations alone sufficed, what would be the need for “Forward in Mission” campaigns and for regional mission coordinators? For when mission is what the church does naturally and spontaneously—as in the church of the first three centuries—little urging and planning are needed. But if Kierkegaard is right in insisting that believers today need “Training in Christianity”, then it is also true that congregations need “training in mission”. My own experience comes from sitting as a member of the evangelism committee of our local congregation, Augustana Lutheran on the south side of Chicago. This congregation, I am convinced, is quite sincerely dedicated to the proposition that Augustana *exists* for mission in Hyde Park and throughout the world. It has a genuine missionary *intention*. But in actual practice it does not do all

that well in its missionary outreach. In our congregation it is necessary for the evangelism committee to function as a surrogate for the congregation as a whole. This committee makes a special point of noting and welcoming Sunday visitors, reports and follows up on persistent absentees, sends friendly greetings to recent visitors, appoints greeters, and alerts the pastor to potential new members. Most of the congregation's regular members seem to be too busy or preoccupied with their own friends to be sensitive to the newcomer or to extend the warm welcome to the stranger in the pew which is so important in forming one's first impression of a congregation.

The local congregation needs an evangelism committee just as a national church needs boards or commissions for mission at home and overseas to carry out its task of outreach. We like to say that "the church *is* missionary by its very nature", or—in the often quoted words of Emil Brunner—"that the church exists by mission as fire by burning", but we should not allow ourselves to get carried away by theological rhetoric. At the personal level evangelism can be as direct and spontaneous as one person inviting another to attend her/his place of worship. But at the community and even more the global level, mission means careful arrangements for crossing frontiers, identifying mission opportunities, reaching out, learning strange languages, relating to other cultures and sub-cultures, and being in contact with people outside the perimeter of the congregation or the national church. Mission in this sense is a specialized job requiring specially trained agents. The church in its outreach cannot dispense with the services of those who go out, knock on doors, or cross the frontiers between faith and unbelief—whether on the congregation's own doorstep or at the ends of the earth. This is not to deny that the church is a specially chosen instrument for communicating the gospel to all people—mission remains its special calling—but we need to see the church both theologically and practically, or pastorally. The theological affirmation that the church exists by and for mission must be complemented by suitable structures, agents and training for the task, if it is not to become a dead letter.



## II. What Are the Lessons of Mission History for Mission Work Today?

Here we want to review quickly the experience of the Protestant evangelical mission effort to see what theological lessons it yields for our missionary task today.

Going back two and one half centuries and looking at the mission efforts of the representatives of Halle Pietism and Moravianism, we can say that the earliest Protestant mission efforts lacked a clear sense of the place of the church in mission. These missions were guided by the goal of "*conversio gentium*"—making disciples of all nations. Missionaries sought to convert to Christ individuals who had a deep personal experience of the forgiveness of their sins and of salvation by grace through faith. The early converts were closely bound up with the faith, spirituality, and public status of the missionaries as spiritual emissaries from the west. These converts were gathered into little colonies of believers, called out from their ancestral culture and religion, and frequently dependent on the missionary both for spiritual guidance and economic support. It was not unusual for new believers, their livelihood cut off, to find employment within the Christian community. We know of the formation of Christian villages in India and of Christian farms and settlements in West Africa where believers lived, alienated from their own culture, and totally unable to practice self-reliance. The first generation of modern day missionary work, both Catholic and Protestant, had an uprooting and disruptive effect on the social and economic life of new converts. Similar reports certainly exist with regard to the effects of mission work among "Native" populations in the USA and in Canada.

It became obvious to those who prayed and planned for the success of "foreign missions" that corrective measures were needed. About one hundred and fifty years ago—to be more precise, in the decades between 1840 and 1860—a change came about in the definition of the missionary goal. Two Protestant mission theorists—the Anglican Henry Venn in England and the Congregationalist Rufus Anderson in the USA—almost simultaneously began to urge that the goal of the mission enterprise be reformulated as "*plantatio ecclesiarum*", the planting

of local churches, rather than the saving of souls. According to Venn and Anderson, new converts should be integrated into local churches which bore the so-called "three self" marks of church independence: self-governing, self-supporting, and self-extending (or propagating). Local churches should give of their own gifts and ties to support their own churches. They should create their own structures of self-government and choose their own pastors and bishops. They should also be "self-propagating", not merely in the sense that they owed their existence to mission effort but that they were dedicated to ongoing mission as the reason for their existence. By the end of the 19th century the "three self" had become the agreed goal of mission strategy. It replaced the ecclesiastical formlessness of Pietist missions and was then, and remains today, excellent mission theory.

The trouble was that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the independence of mission churches was largely a matter of "paper autonomy". These churches had the outward forms of independence, to be sure, but they continued to be ruled by the spirit and influence of western colonialism. Very little real emancipation from the dominance of western missionaries took place. In theory, the missionary scaffolding needed in the construction of the local native church would be removed, and the mission organization would be transferred to the "regions beyond", there to begin the work of mission all over again with an unevangelized group. What in fact happened under the influence of colonial theory—which tended to regard colonial people as inferior—was that western missionaries stayed on indefinitely as spiritual guides and tutors in Christ. Native Christians needed more time to learn Christian ways, more opportunities to adapt to "superior" western methods.

In 1912 a British Anglican missionary named Roland Allen, who began his missionary career as a Society for the Propagation of the Gospel missionary in China just before the Boxer Uprising (1900) and in later years worked as a home missionary somewhere in the western provinces of Canada, gave expression to his thoughts in a book which had profound consequences. In his *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (1912) and later in his *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder it* (1927) Allen radically called into question the structural conservatism of the Protestant missions of

his time, which in spite of the "three self" goal of church independence had totally capitulated to the spirit of European colonialism. He deplored the long-term residence of foreign missionaries, seeing it as a way of dominating the life of converts through superior education. St. Paul, said Allen, had been willing to trust his converts to the Holy Spirit, after appointing local elders and giving them the Bible, the Creed and the Sacraments. The Apostle sometimes wrote angry letters to the congregations he had founded, and when possible made short visits or sent his subordinates, but he did not suppress their initiative or impose himself upon them. Modern missions, said Allen, needed to learn to trust the Holy Spirit.

Thus by the beginning of the twentieth century the Protestant missionary movement, despite important advances in its theory, had not yet made a real break-through in its practice. The churches planted by mission agencies with the intention that they should become spontaneously self-propagating among their own people remained—always with some brilliant exceptions—unable to reach out effectively in mission on their own. They continued to be heavily dependent on western leadership and infusions of aid, and preoccupied with their own structures. Dependence on western churches was accentuated by the growing institutionalization of third world churches, as hospitals, schools, colleges, teacher training institutions, and theological seminaries began to appear. The visitor had only to visit the headquarters of a large Asian or African church and to observe the pyramidal structure complete with offices for presiding bishop and/or general secretary, along with various church departments—stewardship, studies, theological education, evangelism, etc.—all mimicking the bureaucratic patterns of western churches. In a famous remark the late Stephano Moshi, first Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, is reported to have said to western church representatives threatening to cut off foreign aid, "You made us what we are today, and so you are responsible to support us." Moshi had in mind the fact that the Tanzanian church, located in one of the world's twenty poorest countries, could not be expected to maintain an institutional giant that was the unique creature of North American and European benevolence.

Herein lay one of the weaknesses of the church in the mission field: its institutions, owing their existence to the economic



surplus of wealthy contributors in capitalist nations, were not economically viable in the context of the third world. Local churches seeking emancipation from western mission dominance had to find out what to do with costly institutions. In some cases they were seized by, or deeded over to socialist governments to run; in others, they were operated by local churches with heavy governmental subsidies replacing the aid formerly given by missions and churches. In either case the young third world church could not be responsible for the top-heavy structural burden imposed on it by the western colonial mission enterprise.

A special case was the dysfunctionality of arrangements for ministry in third world mission churches. The working assumption of western missions was that the model for ministry in the newly established third world churches was the fully trained western-type professional leader, the product of many years of church institutional training and now fully salaried for the position. Such local pastors, following the example of western clergy or missionaries, would be equipped with an office, vehicle, telephone, library and such other assistance or equipment as might be needed to carry out ministry functions. The model was totally unrealistic, non-viable, and economically unsupportable in the situation of most younger churches. For like the institutional ministries mentioned above, it assumed the economic surplus produced by capitalistic societies as the basis for support. But in the marginal non-cash economies of developing countries, new converts from the poorest classes lacked the wealth to support such luxurious western-style arrangements.

Making matters worse, western missions compounded the problem—and here arises a theological issue—by adapting the local church to their pre-conceived notion of ordained ministry, rather than adapting ministry to the contextual needs of the local church. The model of the full-time professional leader was retained, despite its non-viability, and the structure of the local church was made to conform to it. This was done by organizing anywhere from a dozen to twenty or more preaching places into a single extended parish or circuit presided over by an ordained missionary or native pastor who lived near to and served as pastor for a central church in a larger town or village. Local village or rural preaching points were served by a deacon, catechist, evangelist or teacher with a modicum of Bible

school training. The local village incumbent could gather the flock for worship, preach, catechize and bury the dead, but little else. The head pastor functioned as a kind of *de facto* bishop over this network of churches, visiting each local parish once in three to six months, settling all disputes on his infrequent visits, marrying engaged or common law couples, and baptizing the catechized. The Lord's Supper was also celebrated on such occasions. Given the prevailing ecclesiology of the time, the local church existed in the full sense only on those rare occasions when an ordained pastor was in residence. It was a case of the church conforming to the requirements of ministry rather than the reverse. Local baptized Christians were thus deprived of their right to a full regular ministry.

The overall result of these arrangements was that the local church was poorly adapted to its local environment—both economically and culturally—and that the local congregation and its ministry were far from contextual. Instead of promoting the “three self” aims of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation, the actual result was to promote excessively centralized church structures to perpetuate dependence on foreign assistance and alien church models. Gifted nationals were regularly brought to western training institutions for four to five years of tutelage, after which they were expected to return to their native lands and churches as bishops or theological educators and to maintain western ecclesiastical ways and practises. Effective moves toward self-reliance and contextualization were postponed indefinitely. Deeper theological insight into the nature of the church should have dictated other solutions but in the above cases theology seems to have mirrored—rather than corrected—existing practice.

The real breakthrough in terms of the reform of this unviable system of church and ministry came only with the collapse of colonial empires after 1945, and the rise of new conditions which made the old system untenable. The demise of colonialism brought about a resurgence of native cultural and religious consciousness in third world lands, plus a determination to rid newly independent countries of the now rejected legacy of western colonialism. Young churches were challenged to cast off their alien guise, cease conforming to the pattern of western religious colonies, and to manifest an authentically local cultural identity. In mainland China in the 1950s a kind of imposed “moratorium” on missionary sending took place as the

newly organized Chinese “Three Self Patriotic Church” embarked upon a policy of cutting ties with western churches and mission agencies. Western missionaries were deported, and foreign aid suspended, as the Chinese Three Self Church sought to purge itself of past imperialistic ties. Almost overnight, North American and European mission agencies were deprived of their single largest overseas mission field, with costly institutions and heavily subsidized churches. Anguished queries about “who lost China?” were directed toward former China missionaries, and lessons that might reveal mistakes of the past were avidly studied.

In Africa in the 1970s the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) proposed, on a voluntary basis, the mutual suspension of the sending and receiving of western subsidies and missionaries in order to give African churches breathing space to find their true identity as churches. “What are we—African local churches or colonies of western missions? We need to find out who we are and to discover our own resources for mission,” said key AACC leaders. The hope was that a ten-year voluntary moratorium on mission sending would enable African churches to become self-reliant and to return to partner relationships with western churches not as weak dependencies but as spiritual equals. Some western leaders complained loudly of the loss of “our mission fields and churches”—a comment which served to reinforce the African contention—while others complained of a betrayal of the Great Commission or wondered what western agencies would do if cut off from traditional bases of action. Some Africans, like the late Bishop Josiah Kibira of the Northwest Diocese of Tanzania, and a former LWF President (1977–84), were candid enough to suggest that western mission agencies might redirect their efforts toward the re-evangelization of their own people! In actuality, the proposed African moratorium led to few real breaks in relationships but it did result in a thorough rethinking of policies and relationships in the light of the new mission philosophy of local self-reliance, partnership relations rather than western dominance, and the practise of mission in and from all six continents.

What is a church, and how does it express its calling to participate in mission at home and abroad, and its God-given unity and spiritual fellowship with other churches in all six continents who name the name of Christ? The nineteenth century missionary movement, despite its excellent mission theory,

could not arrive at a correct answer to that question because of its general subservience to colonial attitudes. World mission was still equated with the missionary movement from the west, and unity was viewed mainly in terms of limited relationships between western sending churches and the young churches they had spawned in third world lands. Only the cataclysm of World War II, the breakup of colonial empires, Asian, African, and Latin American struggles for national liberation, and valiant efforts to reclaim lost national identities and cultural heritages were sufficient to bring down the curtain on the past.

The new search for ecclesial identity in third world churches, based on contextual models and approaches, and utilizing local cultural patterns and economic conditions, represents one of the most innovative chapters in contemporary church history. To date it has already resulted in countless new ministry experiments, sketches for local theology, creedal expressions, and fresh liturgical forms which witness to the exuberance, vitality, and cultural riches of these churches. Churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are now in the forefront of regional and global mission efforts, even as western mission agencies confront decline and growing apathy. During the twenty-first century these churches of the south, who already constitute an absolute numerical majority of all Christians in the world, are surely destined to play a leading role in the missionary and ecumenical movement of the churches.

### III. Three Contemporary Theological Challenges to the Church in Mission

These are 1) the church-centric missionary approach, 2) church growth philosophy, and 3) missionary implications of the ecclesiology of Faith and Order. I shall attempt to deal with each of these quite briefly, taking time only to suggest what is at stake with each challenge.

#### 1. The Church-Centric Approach to Mission

The shift from "*conversio gentium*" to "*plantatio ecclesiarum*" as the goal of missions which occurred in the nineteenth century proved to be a mixed blessing. In one way the move toward planting local churches represented a great advance over the earlier practice of making local converts loosely



associated with missionaries in a local Christian colony. Those converts could now be “churched” and in some sense become responsible for the life and ministry of their own churches, even if the actual situation did not begin to approach the “three self” ideal. Over the next century this led to a heavy emphasis on church-planting and on the creation of church structures. However, the missiological by-product of all this was an unwarranted concentration on what we may today call “church-centric missionary thinking”.<sup>7</sup> The church-centered syndrome in missiology arises when missionary thinking is entirely bounded by the concept of church—both as *subject* and as *object* in the church-planting process, and when mission is then defined as “the road from church to church”. This was the concept favored by Dr. Gustav Warneck, the “father” of German missionary science, who taught at the University of Halle at the end of the nineteenth century, and it has found strong support among Lutherans as well as others. It not only expresses the notion that churches rather than mission societies should be the real agents of mission, but also reinforces the notion that the church in the mission field should be the goal of that process. Church-centrism was a comfortable world—obviously not strange to home mission activity in the west—in which one needed to think no further about the mission goal than to reproduce churches where they did not already exist. Mission at home and abroad was equated with “church extension”, conceived largely in western denominational terms.

The attack on this church-centric view of mission activity came from a Dutch missiologist, Johannes Hoekendijk, who returned from mission service in Indonesia in 1948 to do a dissertation on “Church and People in the German Concept of Mission-Sending”, and while Secretary for Evangelism Studies to the WCC in Geneva in the early 1950s published his critical article attacking the prevailing philosophy of church-centered mission thinking.<sup>8</sup> According to Hoekendijk, church-centric missionary thinking revolved around an illegitimate center, namely, the church’s own existence, whereas in the Bible, especially the first three gospels, God is the author of mission and *sender*, Jesus is its messianic agent, the *shalom* of the kingdom is its content, and the world forms the context in which God’s mission is carried out. The church “appears”, says Hoekendijk, as an “epiphenomenon of the apostolate”, i.e.

the church exists only in the act of giving its apostolic witness. The church as such has no fixed ontological basis; it is a mere function of the apostolate and an instrument of the kingdom, ceasing to exist when its assigned apostolic task is finished. A related point made by Hoekendijk is that the church-centric mission approach forces the church to make propaganda for itself, rather than witnessing to Jesus Christ and the kingdom. In the competitive situation of church-planting this usually means making propaganda for a particular denomination. The attack on church-centrism thus raises the question of whether churches engaged in mission should continue to plant new denominational churches, and if so, how such churches can best be faithful to their calling of giving an ecumenical witness to the kingdom.

Hoekendijk's critique of church-centric missionary thinking was attacked for its exaggeration of the problem, but it effectively made the point that future missionary thinking and planning would have to take the kingdom of God much more fully into consideration as the goal of mission, and give less prominence to the church as the "be all and end all" of mission. Since the decade of the 1960s there has been a notable shift in ecumenical missionary thinking from the church-centric approach toward a kingdom-oriented one. The church in the ecumenical movement is still affirmed as God's chosen instrument for mission, since it is uniquely the bearer of the message of the gospel and of the sacraments. Its missionary service, however, must be carried out in a "servant" attitude and in conformity with the goals of the kingdom.

## 2. The Philosophy of Church Growth

The church growth movement is a "made in USA" philosophy of mission which has a wide following throughout North America, the third world, and some parts of Europe, including Scandinavia. In some ways it is a latter-day throw-back to the church-centric viewpoint we have examined above. Some of its critics describe it as a kind of "last hurrah for Christendom", i.e. a last-ditch effort to re-establish the dominance of the Christian church over secular western society. The "father" of church growth philosophy, Dr. Donald A. McGavran, long associated with the School of Church Growth of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, maintains that God

wills that churches should multiply and grow rapidly among all pieces of the vast mosaic of peoples which form the human population. New churches should be started, as many as possible, among all the "homogeneous units" which correspond to unevangelized people groups in the world. Mission work should concentrate single-mindedly on "discipling" such peoples, i.e. bringing them into Christian communities, while for the moment postponing activities which McGavran subsumes under "perfecting" those peoples, viz. education, literacy, healing, development, advocacy of justice, ecumenism, etc. Such "perfecting" activities are good in themselves but represent a distraction at the stage of discipling; McGavran believes they will follow naturally once peoples have been discipled.<sup>9</sup> Church growth methods of research and analysis, such as are carried out at the School of Church Growth, will be helpful in preparing the local soil for rapidly growing churches.

Dr. McGavran's church growth philosophy has undoubtedly made a real contribution to the re-awakening of the missionary spirit in the west, especially among evangelicals, but it remains defective in several ways. What is the understanding of "church" which underlies it, and what is the task of the church once it has been planted? Church growth theory must answer all the questions about the nature and the purpose of the church which we noted in connection with the ecumenical critique of church-centrism. Dr. McGavran wishes to fill the world with "fantastically multiplying churches", but mere ecclesiastical expansion will not do unless such churches are prepared to act as witnesses and servants of the kingdom. Numerical growth per se cannot be the goal of mission; such growth must be coordinated with other factors such as maturity of faith, contextuality, ability to witness and serve, and the local church's relationship to the church universal. The arbitrary separation between "discipling" and "perfecting" may tend to create superficial Christians who do not understand the demands and costs of true discipleship. Moreover, the "homogeneous unit" principle of church planting can open the door to racism, cultural exclusivism, and class consciousness, and even provide a plausible justification for Apartheid! The valid points in church growth methodology need to be brought into dialogue with ecumenical mission theology for the mutual benefit of both. Here again important issues with crucial practical

and organizational consequences are raised for the theology of the church in its mission.

### 3. Missionary Implications of the Ecclesiology of Faith and Order

A third set of issues comes not from the world of missiology but rather from the Faith and Order Movement which over the last seventy years has been moving toward definitions of Christian unity and also statements of ecumenical ecclesiology. These now appear to have definite implications for the theology of the church in mission. A case in point is the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document<sup>10</sup> which, while seeking convergence on three major points of ecumenical doctrine and practice, at the same time opens the door to a newer understanding of the church's missionary and ecumenical calling. BEM, as it is popularly known, does not yet set forth a full ecclesiology, and we must still await completion of the next Faith and Order statement on "The Apostolic Faith". Yet even in the two statements on the sacraments we receive hints of the unveiling of a new and richer ecclesiology with strong missionary and ecumenical accents. (We shall for the present not refer to the ministry statement.)

For example, the Baptism statement speaks not only of a washing of regeneration for the forgiveness of sins (Luther's Small Catechism) but also defines the meaning of Baptism in terms of the giving of the Spirit, incorporation into Christian community, and giving a sign of the kingdom to the world. "We are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world" (B6). Eucharist is not simply a sacrament offering forgiveness of sins but is also "the great sacrifice of praise by which the Church speaks on behalf of the whole creation" (E4), and the "feast at which the Church gives thanks to God for these signs and joyfully celebrates and anticipates the coming of the Kingdom in Christ" (E22). A careful reading of the texts will quickly reveal the extent to which both the missionary and the ecumenical dimensions of the church's calling characterize the statements. One may then conclude not only that missionary awareness has now begun to penetrate Faith and Order deliberations, but also that missiological reflection will in future be influenced by Faith and Order discussions. Such a mutual enrichment of both missiological and ecumenical discussions offers a promise that the



entire church of God will grow in greater self-understanding and in knowledge of and obedience to its service to the kingdom.

We have here identified some major issues in the theological understanding of the church as it carries out its missionary task. In the next lecture we shall examine some elements in a theological vision of the kingdom of God as the goal of that missionary task.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is the second of three lectures delivered by Prof. Scherer at the Annual Theological Conference held at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, 11–12 May 1988.
- <sup>2</sup> Cited in J.A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987) 111 f.
- <sup>3</sup> *Together in God's Mission: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission*, LWF Documentation, No. 26 (Geneva: 1988).
- <sup>4</sup> *Together in God's Mission*, 23.
- <sup>5</sup> *Together in God's Mission*, 8–9.
- <sup>6</sup> *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. A.P. Flannery (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 815.
- <sup>7</sup> The term was probably first used by J.C. Hoekendijk in his seminal essay, "The Church in Missionary Thinking" which originally appeared in the *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 41 (1952) 324–336, and has been reprinted as Ch. II, "The Church in Perspective", in *The Church Inside Out* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 32–46.
- <sup>8</sup> J.C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out*, 32–46. When Hoekendijk came to New York in 1965 he became the author's dissertation advisor.
- <sup>9</sup> McGavran's thoughts are set out in a dozen or more books. One of the most complete expositions of his thought is found in Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).
- <sup>10</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). Cf. especially statements on "Baptism" (2–7), and "Eucharist" (10–17).