Go and Make Disciples of All Nations: Missiological Musings on World Missions

It is always good for one to know what he is supposed to be doing. Even better – or, at least, more fulfilling – is for the same person to know why he is doing it! I suppose it is for this reason that the question: What’s your why? or Do you know your why? has become increasingly popular as of late. This, of course, is nothing new. While the phrasing might be somewhat new, the idea is not. It is safe to say that past generations – regardless of a clever question or not - have seen the value of both what and why. And so also, we.

I address you this morning as pastors and, specifically as members of the WELS ministerium. In general, I think we are quick to know our what. When we are asked what our church body should be doing...or what we, as a pastors, ought to be doing, we can raise our eyes above the daily malaise and collectively shout out in one accord: κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον - Preach the Gospel! By the grace of God, and with the help of our WELS worker training system, we have had that mantra instilled from early on and impressed on us repeatedly. It adorned the “old” WLS chapel that many of us worshiped in daily and now the same phrase greets all entrants of the current WLS chapel. It is the name of our preaching publication and a frequent reminder in our circles of our purpose. It is our what.

But what of the scope? Just how far does our Christian what extend? That answer, too, is quick to the tips of our tongues. We recognize the importance of Gospel ministry and we recognize that the scope is nothing less than the whole world! We return to the imperative of Mark 16:15 and hear the completed sentence: καὶ ἐπεν αὐτοῖς, Πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἀκαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει. Jesus doesn’t mince words when he speaks of the “world” and “all creation.” And with those words, the concept of world missions is emphatically placed on our collective Christian radar. Wow! What a daunting, yet exciting task! And so as followers of Christ we take it up and off we go. So much so that our church body includes in her organization a Board for World Missions that supervises our global gospel efforts. A current summary of this ministry is found here:

WELS World Missions conducts and encourages gospel outreach in 40 foreign countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in 14 prospective new mission fields. World Missions brings the light of God’s Word through evangelism efforts, church planting, training national workers for ministry, and providing religious materials in foreign languages. Forty-one world missionaries partner with more than 400 national pastors to conduct outreach and train more than 380 seminary students for service in Christ’s kingdom.2 A beautiful testament to God’s grace, we have seen great blessings over the years in our world-wide mission efforts. And I don’t think any Christian is going to question the importance of the world-wide aspect of our what...

...until there is tension.

And there always is a tension, if not multiple tensions! The arena of WELS world mission work comes at a great cost...literally. This financial tension is clear with a brief look at the WELS annual budget. In doing so, one will see that BWM efforts consume the third largest piece of the WELS operating budget. To put a number on it, $10,867,500 is designated for world missions for the 2019-20

---

1 While the concept is found throughout Scripture, the exact phrase is taken from Mark 16:15.
fiscal year. That falls behind Ministerial Education and Support Services, but slightly higher than Home Missions, as well as substantially higher than congregation and district ministries and support service subsidiaries. There’s no way to hide the fact: A lot of money is tied up in world mission efforts and that can raise eyebrows… and tensions.

Closely related to this would be an allocation tension which prompts the appropriate question of stewardship: are we wisely using the funds that we have at our disposal? What of the other scripturally-sound priorities of our Synod such as home missions and ministerial education? Should we consider cutting one “priority” to “fully fund” others? A quick review of Synod Conventions over the years would show the ongoing reality of this tension! In addition, there is also a manpower tension. With a current shortage of theologically-trained pastors in our synod, there are a number of WELS congregations longing for a shepherd. Perhaps, some might think, we should reallocate our world missionaries to address more pressing needs on the home front.

With these tensions (and more) it is healthy to remember our why. Why do we engage in world mission work? What value can be found in world missions even when placed in direct tension with other God-pleasing initiatives? It is not the intent to elevate World Missions over other important aspects of our synodical work. That would be foolish as there is much to be done across the board. It seems fitting, however, that at a pastoral conference meeting under the theme Every Pastor a Missionary, Every Church a Mission we would do well to shine the light on the “why” of the world mission efforts we undertake and some of the blessings such a global focus can reveal - both home and abroad.

I. Word Missions – Our Motivation

Scriptural Mandates

So, what is our why for world missions? In the most basic sense, it comes from scriptural mandate and modeling. From little on, we have memorized and treasured the closing words of Matthew 28 and the “Great Commission” that is contained in them. Because this section has been dealt with at length in another paper, let it be sufficient to simply point out the missiological scope of “all nations” that is spelled out by our ascended Lord. In addition, we have already looked at Mark’s version of the same commission and the mandate to κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει. But what can be added here is the why that Jesus adds to the what: ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται. With these words, the importance of mission work and its eternal implications in the lives of all mankind is succinctly set forth. I pray we never gloss over it!

With eternity on our minds, we jump from the parting words of the Gospel to John’s Revelation and we are reminded, once again of the cultural composite of the Holy Christian Church. In Revelation 5:9 we are offered a glimpse of the chorus sung by the four living creatures and the 24 elders on the global sufficiency of Christ’s work: “And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.’” Two chapters later we hear that the work of Christ has indeed gained a heavenly audience for a multitude of sinners who have come to faith in Christ – a multitude from across the world: After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count,

---

3 Ibid, p.96
4 If your interest is piqued as to what falls into such categories, feel free to read through your BORAM!
5 Placed in quotations simply to recognize the subjectivity of such terms.
6 We offer our thanks to John Strackbein for his exegetical work!
7 Mark 16:16
from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. The view is spectacular, and spectacul

arily varied! While this heavenly picture can supply motivation to any form of mission work – whether neighborhood outreach, home missions or world missions, it is clear from Scripture that the reality of “preaching the gospel” was never intended to be only a local event.

World mission work is about bringing “peace, peace, to those far and near” because Christ came and “preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.” We see this truth, frequently mentioned throughout God’s Word, jump of the pages of Scripture in the book of Acts as Paul and his companions take the Gospel from the vicinity of Jerusalem and Antioch to Asia Minor, Greece and beyond. Paul knew the power of the Gospel…and the universal need for the Gospel. And it motivated him to lift his eyes to distant lands and people. And what of the other apostles? While Scripture doesn’t offer too many details about their lives outside of the Gospel accounts, the history of the early church (along with the interspersed legend or two…) tells us not only of foreign mission work to Asia Minor and Rome…but to the South and the East as well. All this to say: The need of the Gospel crosses all cultural and national boundaries. The scope of the Christian church’s mission work ought to as well. It is, in fact, healthy to have the world in our view when considering our privilege to preach the Gospel.

From Mission Societies to Missionary-Senders

It is always appropriate to take our why from Scripture and we are blessed to do so. God and his word will always be that source. And yet, we can also find some compelling motivation for the importance of mission work when we look at the roots of our own church body. As European immigrants continued to pour into the United States, it was the mission efforts of Europe that frequently provided men and means for spiritual care in a new land. Granted, these efforts primarily were focused on relocated countrymen living in a new continent. Even so, we recognize such work as nothing less than a world mission effort in every sense. In his history “To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People: A Century of WELS World Missions,” Theodore Sauer notes:

“One might think that the fathers of the Wisconsin Synod would have held a worldwide vision of mission work from the very outset. After all, most of them had been sent to the United States by an overseas mission society. The three founders of the synod – Pastors John Muehlhauser, John Weinmann, and H. Wrede – all came from the Langenberg Mission Society in Germany...”

As recipients of a world mission effort, the WELS is proof of the importance of gospel outreach and care in foreign lands. In speaking of the first roster of Wisconsin Synod pastors, Sauer continues: “They had a vision that extended beyond provincial boundaries. They were unafraid to undertake something new and different. By virtue of their coming to America, they were already, in a sense, ‘world missionaries.’”

As the WELS began to stand on their own two feet and become confident bearing an increasingly confessional identity, the zeal of foreign mission work began to emerge. The church body that had been on the receiving end of mission efforts stood emboldened to initiate foreign mission work. Speaking about some of the early, formative years of the WELS, Sauer writes:

---

9 Revelation 7:9
10 Isaiah 57:19
11 Ephesians 2:17
12 I find the topic of where the first generation of Christ’s followers ended up – along with how the Word spread – to be fascinating! One recently published book on my yet-to-be read list is: Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing their Lives and Legacies by W. Brian Shelton.
14 Ibid, p. 15
President Bading† and the synod, however, did not lose sight of a real concern for worldwide mission work. As the synod observed the 400th birth year of Martin Luther in 1883, it was resolved to seek out a mission society that was both orthodox and zealous in its outreach and to channel the synodical mission offerings into its coffers.‖

As a result of this appeal different foreign mission opportunities were explored until it was decided to allocate men and resources for reaching out to the Native Americans in Arizona. This led to the first WELS world mission effort among the Apache in and around San Carlos, AZ. The church body that had been the recipients of mission efforts from Europe had now become the church body that was sending out missionaries.¶

The work among the Apache would prove to be the beginning of a mission zeal in the WELS that would continue to show itself in numerous world-wide mission efforts in the years to follow. In addition to Home Mission expansion, the first half of the 20th Century would see efforts directed toward battling for Lutheran confessionalism in various parts of Europe, the countries of Nigeria and Cameroon in West Africa, the island of Japan, and the initial efforts of mission exploration of central Africa. While much could be written about the specifics of each and every one of these efforts, it’s sufficient to recognize that the WELS had started a trajectory that would identify world mission efforts as one of their priorities, the fruits of which are evident today.¶

II. World Missions – Identifying our Philosophy

At this point, it is useful to narrow the scope from the broad and important what and why…to the strategic how. In other words, we know we are to preach the gospel. We hear Scripture’s call to carry that gospel message to the ends of the world. We eagerly desire to bring the truths of God’s Word to nations, tribes and people. But what is the best way to do that? How should we go about organizing and structuring mission work? How can we, with the use of sanctified wisdom, go about mission work in a way that provides foreign cultures with access to God’s Word not only now…but also for generations to come? And with that question we are now transitioning from the discussion of why we eagerly desire to carry out foreign mission efforts to the more “lively” discussion on the strategic philosophy of how to best carry such work out.

Direction from the WELS BWM Handbook

In general, our WELS world missions are carried out with the overarching philosophy of “indigeneity” in mind. The term “indigenous” is borrowed from the agricultural world. Some species of

---

† Rev. John Bading, the 2nd and 5th WELS president. Served from 1860-1864 and 1867-1887.

‖ Sauer, To Every Nation, pp.19-20

¶ To be clear, not everyone was excited! In his The History of the Wisconsin Synod, J.P. Koehler shared the view that foreign missions, specifically the decision to initiate work in Apacheland, was perhaps misguided: “There was something not entirely sound about Synod’s heathen-minded endeavor, the idea that a church is not living up to its mission unless it engages in heathen-mission work, according to the Lord’s great commission: Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. That idea is dogmatism, with a streak of pietism,...” (p. 198)

‖ But perhaps this forward momentum labored for a while! In his unpublished thesis: The Church Grows Under the Cross: Mission Expansion in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1929-1983, Prof. Joel Otto opines that in the early years of our Synod, “the WELS seemed content to let the Missouri Synod do the heavy lifting in home and mission work.”

■ Go ahead and get any number of past, present, and future world missionaries into a room and bring up the topic of mission philosophy. Good luck getting everyone to agree in every point…and in keeping the conversation brief!
plants are naturally conditioned to grow in specific, native environments. It follows, then, that an indigenous church is one that grows, even thrives, *naturally* within a given cultural context. With that in mind the WELS Board for World Mission handbook²⁰ has spelled out their philosophy of creating confessional, indigenous churches:

> Wherever the board conducts mission work it will seek to plant national churches that will grow up into their own identity and stand with us doctrinally and confessionally. World missions have sometimes been established with the assumptions that the sending church would provide permanent funding and that the expatriate missionary would be indefinitely responsible for the pastoral, teaching, preaching, and evangelism work. Strategies more recently developed by missionaries and their parent bodies seek to establish independent national churches that are self-administering, self-disciplining, self-propagating, and self-supporting church bodies within their own culture. We are fully aware that no specific mission formula is mandated in the scriptures. While methods themselves do not unite souls together in Christ's church, it is appropriate that each WELS world mission pastor work toward the same goals with similar aims.

Below you will find a closer look at excerpts defining the four “selves” mentioned above. These four selves are frequently referenced in conversations focused on the “progress toward indigeneity” that routinely are discussed in WELS world mission circles.

1. **Self-Administering:** While mission church planting might best flourish with a non-institutional approach, some preliminary organization of the national church is necessary. Qualified overseers and deacons were chosen by the early church (Acts 6:1-7) so the Word of God could be spread….A trusted treasurer may be selected to administer local funds as soon as possible. Sunday school and Bible class instructors can be chosen, trained and can carry on an education program along with full-time workers. The missionary trains and mentors spiritual leaders for the national church. He has a phased plan of transferring responsibilities to national leaders and eventually to a fully trained national pastor. The building of large, foreign-financed churches, schools, and institutional mission compounds is deliberately avoided. The church is pointed to God's Word for answers to its questions regarding self-government. When a mission progresses toward the partnership stage of development, any steps toward church organization will be taken with the national leaders and in keeping with the cultural context of the people among whom the structure is created.

    This aspect emphasizes that a national church that has the ability to “self-administrate” will better be able to stand independently if and when necessary. Opportunities for the proclamation of the gospel will theoretically be enhanced and multiplied over the years as the national church coordinates and administers the “business” of the church in an effective and culturally appropriate way. It also entrusts to national leaders the right to organize and structure their church in the way that they see fit as long as it does not contradict scriptural principals.

2. **Self-Disciplining:** In order to assure sound scriptural and evangelical practice, church planting Lutheran missionaries will not be satisfied with vague, enthusiastic, or emotional responses to the proclamation of the gospel….An orthodox confessional Lutheran church has a distinct message and place in a world confused by the wooing of pseudo-Christianity. All the doctrines of Scripture are boldly confessed so that the national church is prepared to defend the historic Lutheran faith. Patience realizes it may take a long time to develop doctrinal awareness….Cultural adaptations of traditional church customs and forms will be carefully tested and evaluated by expatriate and national workers together

---

²⁰ In this section, all italicized sections are taken from Section 4 of the WELS Board for World Mission Handbook. It is available by request to the BWM office.
during the partnership stage of development. The defense of the precious gospel will go hand in hand with the extension of its influence by well-trained disciples.

A church that is able, humanly-speaking, to identify, treasure, and safeguard the gospel is also a church that will be able to proclaim the gospel in truth and purity for years to come. This is at the forefront of self-discipling. We do well to remember the “disciple” aspect of discipline. Much of the current mission work in our WELS foreign field is currently centered around the intensive training of pastors and leaders who will be spiritually equipped to rightly divide law and gospel, evangelically admonish the erring, and take the privilege of discipling future leaders and generations with reverent respect. Because this an area of extensive WELS participation, conversations about what type of ongoing worker-training system can and should be established for and maintained by each sister synod is ongoing.

3. Self-Propagating: The planting of an indigenous church helps ensure growth that is natural and culturally appropriate. At the outset the mission team will be aggressively involved in gospel seed sowing…As the Lord unfolds his blessing, believers will be gathered, and the missionary will utilize the mission spirit that is in the hearts and lives of those won to faith in the Lord Jesus. The forward-thinking missionary also will realize that soul-winning ministry is enhanced by “preparing God’s people for works of service” (Eph 4:12). As believers are trained to propagate the faith, they spread the saving message to a greater number of people in clearer language and in a larger area than the missionaries could ever hope to reach…Believers witnessing among those of their own culture attract the ears of their fellow citizens in a way that is unique….

The aspect of “self-propagation” hits on the flexibility of the missionary’s role. In central Africa, for example, the first missionaries participated heavily in the casting of the gospel seed and subsequent gathering of new souls for Christ around the Word of God. Once a sister-church body has become organized, it is natural and appropriate for the evangelism efforts to come from within. As that occurs, it may become useful to re-designate the missionary manpower toward other aspects of mission work.

It is also under this aspect of self-propagation that a healthy conversation about the expected length of subsidized mission work in a particular geographic area is appropriate. A common question: How long ought a mission effort wait before seeing “appropriate” fruits of gospel outreach? How long before a mission is on the path of “self-propagation”? The reality is that self-propagation often becomes most evident in the 2nd and 3rd generations of those touched by the Gospel. It is then that the fruit of Christian homes and Christian child-rearing becomes most evident. For this reason, patience is important, when afforded the luxury of time and resources.

4. Self-Supporting: While this aspect of the indigenous church is not the foremost fruit of faith, it is the most tangible. Luther stated that the last part of a man to be converted is his pocketbook. There are great economic differences between the U.S. standard of living and the standard of many world fields. Our mission, however, is not to raise the living standards of people in other parts of the world, but to plant the church in the most efficient way….National funds should be gathered from the beginning and used for local expenses such as rent, utilities, and materials for education and worship. The new church should

---

21 In addition to our WELS missionaries, the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) also is deeply involved in this aspect.
22 This truly has been a noticeable shift in our WELS African mission work. If there is an interest to no more about this particular aspect – and the challenges it brings – feel free to ask me.
23 I’m fully aware of the subjectivity of this word.
24 Personally, I feel we have a tendency to fall into “Neo-Pentecostalism” (my invented word) in this area. I’m not speaking theologically, but practically. I’m speaking of seemingly unrealistic expectations for mission results that hide behind the guise of piety. I’m happy share more, if you are inclined to ask.
administer its own funds as soon as possible. While we do not conclude that financial assistance is out of the question, there are serious concerns that arise whenever national church subsidy increases. A crossroads is reached when the first full-time or part-time church worker has been trained. Who pays his salary? Once a sending church decides to furnish subsidy, the national church may have a long struggle before it is willing and ready to assume that responsibility for itself. Where subsidy has become established, some phased plan of self-support should be initiated.

It is this aspect of indigeneity that frequently receives the most attention—primarily because of the involvement of finances. This is also the area where the biblical principles of showing love for your neighbor in need and the desire to use God-given resources for the benefit of others can become intertwined. In the end, an open and transparent conversation is needed set realistic expectations when working with different cultures and economic classes. To pretend there is no difference is foolish and prevents discussions and strategic planning that should happen from the beginning. Discussions centered on both the fullest picture of Christian love in any given situation as well as unintended, but often disastrous reactions to Christian charity become all too common in our world mission efforts.

**Recognizing the Spectrum**

The concept of indigenization—along with WELS-specific applications—found above has long been the officially stated philosophy of WELS World Missions. It isn’t uncommon, however, to hear of other missiological philosophies among those coordinating or participating in the arena of missions. Indigeneity, Inter-dependence, Nationalization, and Partnership, are all buzzwords. And they can and have been defined in various ways with delicate nuisances. Philosophies abound. While there may be philosophies that are inherently at odds, it seems to me that a more beneficial way to discuss the variety of philosophies is to view them on a spectrum. Indigeneity may be the overarching goal, but there will be phases along the way where different emphases are necessary. One size does not always fit all. The Board for World Missions seems to acknowledge this:

> While the board works toward achieving this aim of establishing an indigenous church, there may be phases, areas, and conditions in mission fields where it will be inadvisable or even contrary to Christian love and the best interests of the work to try to reach this goal prematurely. Understanding, consideration, patience and love for the souls for whom Christ died will always govern the application of this indigenous aim, with the ideal always kept in view.

**Common Threats to Lasting Mission Efforts**

Now that the “ideal” of foreign mission work philosophy—namely the establishment of an indigenous church—has been discussed, it’s appropriate to also bring up the challenges that make such an ideal difficult to achieve. In reality, the pitfalls of world mission efforts are numerous and difficult to avoid. Perhaps the challenges are obvious when considering a hostile target environment, unstable political entities, or generations of spiritual dysfunction. But...what about when the threat toward lasting ministry efforts comes from the very ones who have been sent to preach the gospel?

Many books have been written with the goal of preparing missionaries and their mindset for the challenges they will confront in cross-cultural work as well as for the barriers toward lasting success that a well-intentioned missionary may inadvertently construct. For those that may be inclined to dive into the topic, I will simply whet our collective appetite by mentioning two books that have frequently been

---

26 BWM Handbook, section 4
utilized in our current mission circles. While the focus of this paper is specifically world missions, it becomes clear that the challenges addressed in these books can be found in any ministry effort – home or abroad - where there is a cultural and/or social-economic difference. With that in mind, I feel these resources are valuable for a wide spectrum of ministries.

**We Are Not the Hero**

One of the challenging temptations for a missionary serving another culture – specifically a culture that is of a lower socio-economic class than his own – is to fall into a “messiah mentality” in multiple aspects of his work. Yes, it is true that we who carry God’s Word to other people and cultures are to be seen as God’s ambassadors. And yes, those who bring the good news of a Savior to others are to be recognized as having “beautiful feet.” And yet, in the words of John the Baptist: “He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less.”

Perhaps the title of Jean Johnson’s book says it best: *We are not the Hero: A Missionary’s Guide for Sharing Christ, not a Culture of Dependency.* In her work, the danger of creating various forms of dependencies is discussed. Such dependencies destroy the initiative and ability for people to have the satisfaction and God-pleasing responsibility of doing things for themselves. While several aspects of dependency are discussed, Johnson describes the frustration of a financial dependency that she had created among the Cambodians she was serving. In a moment of clarity, Johnson confesses: “In other words, I led the Cambodians to believe that they needed to be well financed and semi-American in their approach in order to spread the gospel…I felt so unlike Peter and John. My experience was much more like, ‘Silver and gold I have; look what I can do for you!’”

To combat the “hero” mentality that inadvertently might lead to dependency, Johnson coins the strategic term “Premeditated Sustainability.” This term describes the intentional and well-thought out purpose behind everything a missionary or cross-cultural leader ought to do. In her own words, Johnson states: “My goal in writing this book is to assist those who fulfill the Great Commission cross-culturally to do it in such a way that they premeditate multiplication, indigeneity, and sustainability among the respective people groups whom they serve.”

Despite the caveat emptor of some Reformed theology interspersed with the occasional absolute statement, Johnson provides a valuable treatment of a difficult issue.

**When Helping Hurts**

“When Helping Hurts” is an additional book that is growing in popularity and provides a worthwhile treatment for the missionary (for example) whose Christian heart desires to address immediate physical needs of those he serves without causing long-term greater harm. The authors provide much food for thought regarding unspoken messages that can be unwittingly communicated when well-intentioned acts of charity take place:

---

27 2 Corinthians 5:11ff
28 Romans 10:15, Isaiah 52:7
29 John 3:30
31 Ibid, p. 17
32 Johnson, p. 13
And now we have come to a very central point: one of the biggest problems in many poverty-alleviation efforts is that their design and implementation exacerbates the poverty of being of the economically rich – their god complexes – and the poverty of being of the economically poor – their feelings of inferiority and shame. The way that we act toward the economically poor often communicates – albeit unintentionally – that we are superior and they are inferior.\textsuperscript{34}

With this in mind, the authors hints at a potential solution by reminding the one inclined toward charitable assistance to remain self-aware:

\textbf{One of the major premises of this book is that until we embrace our mutual brokenness, our work with low-income people is likely to do far more harm that good.} As discussed earlier, research from around the world has found that shame – a “poverty of being” – is a major part of the brokenness that low-income people experience in their relationship with themselves. Instead of seeing themselves as being created in the image of God,\textsuperscript{35} low-income people often feel they are inferior to others. This can paralyze the poor from taking the initiative and from seizing opportunities to improve their situation, thereby locking them in material poverty.\textsuperscript{36}

“When Helping Hurts” also provides a sobering insight into the various ways that the poison of paternalism can easily sneak into cross-cultural work – whether it is in the realm of resources, spirituality, knowledge, labor, or management.\textsuperscript{37} So, also, the authors not only take the time to identify and analyze the problem, but also provide some practical strategies for helping without hurting – both in world mission settings as well as at home.\textsuperscript{38}

So, where do we go from here?! We certainly can’t argue with Solomon when he wrote: “Of making (and reading...and analyzing!) many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.”\textsuperscript{39} We don’t want to fall into either the ditch of paralysis through analysis or the ditch of fool-hardy action. For mission work, we strive to “work while it is day”\textsuperscript{40} while also taking the time to “sit down and estimate the cost.”\textsuperscript{41} In short, we strive to balance tensions, all the while praying for the Lord’s wisdom, the Lord’s blessing...and most certainly, the Lord’s forgiveness.

III. World Missions – Recognizing the Domestic Value

One of the hopes for this work is to not only remind us of the what and why of world mission efforts and present a strategy for how the WELS goes about doing so, but also to draw attention to the value that foreign mission work brings to us at home - in our own lives and local gospel ministries. It is my belief, that a church body that prioritizes world-wide mission outreach – in addition to, not in opposition to, home mission work and ministerial education, enhances our collective ministry through the sharing of resources and experiences. Perhaps this is truly where the musings aspect of the paper becomes evident. Please allow me share some key “take-aways” and benefits that we, as a church body, are blessed to receive through our foreign mission work.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p. 62
\item \textsuperscript{35} Yes, theologically we would prefer for the author to have written: “...seeing themselves as having been created in the image of God,...”
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid, p. 61
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid, pp.109ff
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p. 149ff Part 3 is dedicated to this topic.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ecclesiastes 12:12b
\item \textsuperscript{40} John 9:4
\item \textsuperscript{41} Luke 14:28
\end{itemize}
Seeing the Gospel in 3D

One resource, in particular, that has recently received much attention in world mission circles is the work of Jayson Georges and his Honor/Shame research and insights. Georges has extensive experience as a missionary in cultures (predominantly the Middle East and central Asia) throughout the world. A great summary of Georges’ insight is found in the book: The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures. Through his work and research, Georges has crystallized what he believes to be fundamentally different cultural and societal outlooks on life that, once identified, will assist in biblical communication in a contextually appropriate way. I have personally found his insights to be accurate and believe his thoughts are worth sharing.

The key concept is the identification of the cultural outlook to which you are ministering. Here is a broad overview of the three cultural types:

1. Guilt – Innocence Cultures: The ideas for right and wrong are foundational in these societies and are codified in written rules and laws. Institutions (government, schools, etc.) establish rules to guide social behaviors. Theses cultures “socialize people to internalize the codes of conduct. Moral responsibility comes from within.” As a result, these societies tend to be individualistic and independent. There is heavy emphasis on the concept of justice. The breaking of written laws brings guilt...and justice or forgiveness is needed to rectify a wrong. These cultures tend to be found in Western civilizations. When speaking of our “home” culture, Georges opines:

   Understandably, Western Christianity emphasizes the facet of biblical salvation most meaningful in its cultural context. Historically, two significant voices behind Western theology, Augustine of Hippo (b.354) and Martin Luther (b.1483), were both plagued with an internal sense of God’s wrath toward their transgressions. So their writings explore how God forgives and acquits guilty sinners. While theology from Western contexts addresses guilt and innocence, people in most Majority World cultures desire honor, to cover shame and power, to mitigate fear.

2. Shame – Honor: These cultures have a strong group orientation and might be described as “collectivist” as opposed to individualistic. There is significant value placed on one’s honor which is social worth or value among peers and the community. Shame is the result of a negative rating from your community and comes from not living up to expectations. “Shame means inadequacy of the entire person. While guilt says, ‘I made a mistake’; shame say, ‘I am a mistake.’” Once shame has been given, then restoring honor before the community is needed. These cultures tend to be found in Eastern civilizations. An intriguing insight from Georges:

   Perhaps the reason for the (Christian) Church’s limited presence in the East is the absence of a theology contextualized for their honor and shame cultures. Most unreached people groups are predominantly honor-shame in cultural orientation. For this reason, a theology for honor-shame cultures may be missiologically strategic for fulfilling the Great Commission of making disciples in all nations.

---

42 www.honorshame.com
44 Ibid, p. 17
46 Ibid, p. 23
47 Ibid, p. 33
3. Fear – Power: “In fear-based cultures, it is not important to genuinely believe in certain truths or follow ethical standards. Rather, practices that placate the spiritual powers define acceptable human behavior.”48 Leaders in these contexts are viewed as spiritual people who can change the course of life through rituals and superstitions. These cultures tend to be tribal and are frequently found in animistic contexts where people sense fear or harm from the spirit world. They seek a greater power, frequently deemed to come through rites and/or magic.

Within these three cultural contexts, the need for God’s law and gospel remains unchanged. But the way in which it is presented is vital. Georges states “A person’s cultural orientation, or groupality, shapes their worldview, ethics, identity, and notion of salvation, even more than their individual personality does. For this reason, awareness of culture types helps us anticipate cultural clashes to the world.”49 With this perspective as a backdrop, the precious diamond that is the Gospel shines brighter...and more comprehensively. Just as a diamond is multi-faceted and is able to shine when held at a variety of different angles, so also, the Gospel! Cultural differences and leanings allow the beauty of God’s love for us to shine as the same truth is presented in a variety of culturally-significant ways.

Guilt, shame, and fear in global cultures is not a new concept. It should not surprise us. All three are consequences of Genesis 3 and the Fall. To understand, however, the biblical narrative of God’s 3D salvation, we must recognize the various dimensions of sin in mankind. It is not an either/or situation. The Bible is one narrative in which forgiveness, honor, and power are woven together for the repentant sinner. It’s perhaps better to speak of the guilt-shame-fear trichotomy of which innocence-honor-power is the Gospel message. Georges writes:

In Acts 26:18, Paul describes his mission to the Gentiles in 3D terms – “to open their eyes from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (power), so that they might receive the forgiveness of sins (innocence) and a place among those who are sanctified by faith (honor) in Jesus.” Paul’s ministry presented a three-dimensional gospel.50

In an attempt to coordinate these thoughts, the following chart51 summarizes the biblical plan of salvation in “culturally contextual” presentations: Chart of 3D Gospel on p. 57:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guilt – Innocence</th>
<th>Shame – Honor</th>
<th>Fear – Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. God’s Intention</strong></td>
<td><strong>God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.</strong> Jesus came so that we would have eternal life.</td>
<td><strong>God values you and wants to honor you as his child.</strong> God created us to live in harmony with him and our family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. The Human Problem</strong></td>
<td><strong>People are sinful and condemned by God.</strong> Our transgressions create a barrier between us and a holy God. Good works fail to reach God’s standard.</td>
<td><strong>People are shameful and dishonor God.</strong> Our rebellion disgraces the glorious God and produces shame. Our attempts to restore honor fall short of covering our shame as spiritual orphans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

48 Ibid, p. 25
49 Ibid, p.11
50 Ibid, p. 60
51 Ibid, p. 57-59, adapted and edited
3. The Solution of Jesus

| Jesus Christ is the perfect sacrifice for your sins. Jesus died on the cross in our place to pay the penalty of sins. Jesus bore the wrath of God’s punishment for us. | Jesus Christ bore all your shame and restores honor. Jesus’ disgraceful death removes our shame. By honoring God, Jesus allows you to rejoin God’s family. | Jesus is the warrior who restores our power. Jesus conquered evil powers and death to bring God’s power and blessings. His death disarmed powers and provides us spiritual authority. |

4. Our Sanctified Response

| The Holy Spirit brings us to know Christ as a personal Savior. We turn from the guilt of human immorality to live in blessed innocence. | The Holy Spirit bring us to treasure our place in God’s family. We receive God’s gracious welcome and live under his name. We turn from cultural acceptance and receive God’s honor. | The Holy Spirit brings us to value God’s divine power. We trust in Jesus alone for protection and power and turn from rituals, occult, superstitions and earthly for authority and blessings. |

5. Culturally Explicit Language and Terminology

| Law, Judgment, Rules, Acquittal, Innocence, Punishment, Guilt, Payment, Justice, Pardon, Works, Wrath, Sacrifice, Forgiveness | Loyalty, Family, Father, Jew/Gentile, Humiliation, Disgrace, Dishonor, Unclean, Approval, Worthy, Adoption, Boasting | Weak, Control, Authority, Bondage, Warfare, Conquer, Kingdom, Protection, Triumph, Wonders, Peace, Captive, Blessing/Curse |

Discussion: Further Musings on the Individual and Corporate Blessings of Foreign Mission Work

The benefit of foreign mission work is usually thought of in terms of those whom we reach with the gospel. And, to be clear, that is our focus! But I believe it must be stated that there is also great value for us individually and corporately as we participate in foreign mission work. For the sake of starting the conversation, I offer the following blessings for us to consider:

WELS Foreign Missions (whether home or abroad) are valuable to us because they provide...

1. A Healthier view of Home Culture:

2. An Appreciation of Blessings Received:

3. An Expansion of our Comfort Zone:

4. An Appreciation for our History:
5. An Opportunity to be Prepared for Institutional and Societal Change:

6. An Opportunity to View Challenges Differently:

7. A Renewed Zeal for Ministry\(^{52}\):

8. Exposure to a Global Perspective:

**Activity:** In small groups, provide details to “flesh out” the benefits for the individual or entity participating in foreign mission work. Is there any benefit that you do not understand? Is there any benefit that you would dispute? What additional benefits would you include?

In conclusion, the Gospel is to be preached to all nations. The Word of the Lord is clear. And so we preach the Gospel to as many nations as we are given opportunity. Have we bit off more that we can chew? Maybe. But we do so confident that even in our mess, the Lord of the Church can work to his benefit. But what is more, there are great benefits to the WELS as we undertake world mission work. And I pray that we continue to reap those benefits even as more and more in the world hear the Gospel through our humble efforts. In doing so, may the name of the Lord be praised!

David F. Bivens  
2019 Fall Pastoral Study Conference  
Atonement Lutheran Church, Plano, TX  
October 21-22, 2019

\(^{52}\) On this note, if you have not read through Edgar Hoenecke’s “The WELS Forty-Niners”, please do so! Such excitement and zeal to reach out to new lands! As an added bonus, the original footage of Hoenecke’s 8mm camera has been preserved and can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMfzTHdm1Wc
Select Bibliography


WELS Board for World Missions Handbook

2019 WELS Book of Reports and Memorials

Additional Resources

