

# 7.

## The Mission of the Church

DONALD SENIOR, C.P.:  
BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR MISSION

The universal mission of the church is thoroughly grounded in the Word of God. The entire Bible, not just the New Testament, lays the foundation for mission.

*The Old Testament*—Even though we do not usually associate a formal sense of mission with Israel and the Old Testament, there are important aspects of the Hebrew Scriptures that relate to the universal mission of the church.

First and foremost is the consistent biblical conviction that the God of Israel is not merely a tribal God or simply the God of the Jews, but in fact is the God of the nations as well. The early chapters of Genesis portray God as the creator of the universe and of the human family. The patriarchal traditions assert that God's call—and the ultimate source of Israel's own unique destiny—begins among the nations with the call of Abraham and Sarah. The covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12) has broad implications for the destiny of all humanity, as does the covenant with Noah (Genesis 9) which came before it. Even in its most ethnocentric periods, such as the post-exilic era, Israel knew that God's power extended beyond the boundaries of Judah and that, ultimately, all of the world and all humanity would be accountable to Yahweh. The God of Israel is a saving God, the God of Exodus, the God who is committed to bringing life to Israel and, ultimately, to all the world. The story of Jonah and the prophetic intuitions of Deutero-Isaiah that the prophet was called to be a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:1–6)—written during the post-exilic period—confirm that continuing tradition.

Another important point for mission is the fact that Israel drew much of its own culture and religious practice from the surrounding peoples. Even though election theology became an important vehicle for the self-identity of God's people and helped foster their undivided commitment to Yahweh, the Jews drew on Canaanite, Egyptian, and other impulses from their evolving cultural milieu for such essential realities as language, architecture, farming, government, and religion itself. At the same time that Israel was concerned to purify itself from what it considered the excesses of Canaanite nature religions, a prophet such as Hosea would use fertility images to describe the relationship of God and Israel. And in the development of its temple architecture and rituals, Israel borrowed heavily from other religious and cultural traditions of the Middle East.

Examples such as this can be multiplied. The importance of this for mission is that the story of Israel is, in fact, a dialectic between the covenanted people and the surrounding nations. While Israel itself was conscious of its unique destiny and jealously attempted to purify itself from corruption, at the same time it learned from other cultures and religious traditions and interacted with them in profound, if sometimes unconscious, ways. The mission of the early church was also subject to such a dynamic.

*The New Testament*—The sense of mission is profound and pervasive throughout the various books of the New Testament. Without doubt, the person and ministry of Jesus were the catalyst that made the call to a universal mission so important for the early church. But the New Testament also makes clear that a sense of that universal mission evolved only gradually in the post-resurrection period. Jesus himself seems to have confined his own ministry to Israel, with only occasional encounters with Gentiles. But the dynamic, inclusive cast of his own mission to sinners, outcasts, and occasional Gentiles, coupled with his proclamation of a God of exceptional compassion and forgiveness for the sinner, laid the foundation for the ultimate mission of the post-Easter disciples to the nations. Jesus' message proclaimed that the rule of the God of Israel was at hand (Mark 1:14–15), a rule that would be characterized by repentance and forgiveness.

That urgent eschatological message, given further impetus by resurrection faith, ultimately gave the early church its sense of being called to proclaim the good news of forgiveness to all the world.

There is no doubt that the mission to the Gentiles had many proponents in the early church. The Hellenistic Jewish Christians, already in close contact with Gentiles in the Diaspora, no doubt began early to proclaim the gospel to God-fearing Gentiles. Peter, as one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church, seems to have played an important mediating role between the Palestinian Jewish Christian communities (who may have been much more hesitant about expanding the mission to Gentiles) and the Hellenistic Jewish Christian communities such as the one at Antioch where the mixture of Jews and Gentiles had led to early incursions among non-Jews (as, for example, Acts 10–15). Standing as a colossus over the entire scene is, of course, the figure of Paul whose letters elaborate a profound theology of mission. Paul was convinced that through the death and resurrection of Jesus the new age had dawned and the God of Israel was now extending salvation to all through Jesus Christ. Paul's own energetic mission in Asia Minor and Greece was testimony to his theological convictions. The tensions between Paul and the Jewish Christian community of Jerusalem show us that the early church had differing views on how Gentiles were to be incorporated into the mystery of salvation and that creating a universal church where there is "neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female" (Gal. 3:28) remained an ideal for the first generation of Christians as it does for us today.

Beneath the diversity of New Testament theologies of mission and the turbulence of the early church's own mission efforts, there remains a consistent point of unity. The God of Jesus, the God of Israel, is a compassionate, all-embracing God whose love for the world is profound and extends beyond the boundaries of race, economy, class, or gender. Jesus embodied that inclusive mission thrust in his own ministry of the kingdom, and the Gospels present that ministry as the model for the church's own call to mission (see for example, Matthew 9:35–10:42).

**DONALD KAMMERDIENER:  
SOUTHERN BAPTIST MISSIONS**

The missions philosophy of Southern Baptists led in the earliest days of the Southern Baptist Convention to the creation of two mission boards. The Home Mission Board was charged with the missionary assignment in the United States and its territories. The Foreign Mission Board was chartered to “elicit, combine and direct” the missionary endeavors of Southern Baptists in all countries outside the United States.

This fundamental choice of a denominationally oriented and controlled mission program has resulted in the assignment of 6,860 career foreign missionaries, 3,379 of whom are currently at work in 112 nations. These missionaries have engaged in seed sowing and proclamation ministries on the one hand and in emphasis on harvesting through church planting on the other. From its beginnings in 1845 the Foreign Mission Board and its missionaries have attempted to respond to the educational, medical, and other human needs of people as a normal expression of Christian compassion. These efforts have intensified in the last generation.

The world context today has many implications for Southern Baptist missionary efforts. There is now, more than ever, a focus on the needs of the unreached and inaccessible peoples of the world. More than 3,000 such people-groups now challenge the world Christian family, and Southern Baptists share this pioneer spirit which intends to reach out to them. The Foreign Mission Board is initiating programs to assign non-resident missionaries to work in countries whose governments forbid Christian missionaries to take up residence; these will utilize the concepts of networking and research to open doors of ministry. A second development out of the contemporary context is to move toward more explicit partnerships with other Christians engaged in carrying out the Great Commission. The partnership approach responds to and helps initiate missionary activity by third world Baptists. It also finds expression in new and evolving relationships with other communions or denominations, often spoken of as Great Commission Christians.

Southern Baptist overseas mission efforts have historically been marked by steady but relatively slow paced growth in comparison to some other missionary groups. The last decade has been marked by a significant upturn in growth rates. It required 135 years for annual overseas baptismal totals to reach 100,000 for the first time. Only seven more years were required to cross the 200,000 mark in 1987. Southern Baptists today relate to over 2,000,000 overseas Baptists in more than 36,000 churches and mission congregations. In spite of this record of recent growth, a restless spirit of missionary challenge continues to evoke among Southern Baptists a desire to share a more effective witness concerning Christ among the peoples of the world.

**RITA FORBES, M.M.:**  
**MODELS OF COLLABORATION IN MISSION**

Missioners will be the first to testify to the necessity of Christian witness to the oneness of the body of Christ if their presence and action are to be credible. Diversity is not division, nor is unity identity. But the people to whom the missionary goes quickly perceive the contradiction of a message of love expressed in the language and actions of antagonism. The models of collaboration which have been developed in mission work are many and varied. The following are a few examples of the kinds of collaboration which now exists among missionaries.

*Common Prayer*—The World Day of Peace is a worldwide movement which has, from its inception, been led by women. Started by women of the church in the United States as a prayer day for missions, it has developed into a movement in which Christian people in over 170 countries in every region of the world engage together in “informed prayer and prayerful action”—the purposes of World Day of Prayer.

*Theology Schools*—The Ecumenical Christian Centre in Bangalore, India, stands for the promotion of ecumenism—the unity of churches and the unity of humankind. Established in 1963, the Centre has tried to keep the ecumenical vision alive through its involvement in the life of the church and the nation. From its early years the Centre has enjoyed the full participation of the

Christian churches and hopes to inaugurate the Indian School of Theology in 1988.

*Language Schools*—In many countries of the world there has been collaboration in language study with the opening of facilities to missionaries of many denominations. One example of this is the United Mission School in Katmandu, Nepal.

*Legislative Concerns*—One group established for vigilance in regard to legislative action is the Legislative Concerns Committee of the Hawaii Council of Churches. Their primary task is the review of bills coming before the legislature regarding relevant issues, including peace and environmental issues and human rights at home and abroad. Its recommendations are respected by legislators because they are based on sound research.

*Human Development*—Some basic forms of collaboration in mission have emerged in response to human needs. Frequently these have been spontaneous responses to calamities such as floods, famine, and war. But others have been more long-range through planning and joint financing. Coordination in Development (CODEL) is a consortium of forty-two Christian-related agencies that have programs in development assistance in Third World countries. The member organizations direct its work, and funds are granted for social and economic development projects under guidelines established by them. CODEL's focus is on ecumenical cooperation in the field and service to those people most in need of education, agricultural assistance, housing, health-care, water, and so forth.

*Ecological Concerns*—CODEL, among others, responds to the present-day need for education in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of actions which result in sustainable improvements in human conditions. It recognizes that such long-range projects depend on respect for a sound natural environment and for the traditions and mores of the local community.

Collaboration in mission can and will take many forms, depending on local situations as well as on the skills and interests of the missionaries. But above all, successful collaboration depends on human friendship and openness among persons and on their willingness to listen and to live a witness about which others will be compelled to say, "See how these Christians love one another."

(Persons who are interested in learning more about collaboration in missions may wish to contact Church Women United, Room 812, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10015. CODEL may be contacted at the same address.)

### **TOM STRANSKY, C.S.P.: MISSION AND MISSIONS**

In 1776, there were only 50,000 Catholics among the 3,500,000 new Americans. Whereas Baptists were increasing by means of very intentional evangelism of adults, including numerous Catholics, the United States Catholic Church began to grow almost exclusively through millions of European immigrants and their prolific cradle offspring.

Regarded by too many others as second-class citizens and, at most, second-class Christians, Catholics developed a strong tradition of defensiveness for the preservation of the Catholic faith and the avoidance of mass apostasy.

European Catholics judged the United States to be a foreign mission field. They sent their priests, nuns, and other church specialists and were generous with money, so that the young, unstable American Church could survive. They hoped that eventually Catholics in the United States could provide the bulk of personnel and funds and by themselves would carry out pastoral work, home evangelism, and foreign missionary activities.

In 1907, the Vatican organ for foreign missions, called the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, removed most of the United States from the list of mission territories. This meant that Catholics in the United States were on their own, so to speak, for home and foreign missions. In the next decade, the first American Catholic foreign mission societies were founded—the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and the Maryknoll Sisters.

Catholic overseas missionaries reached the peak number of over 9,300 in 1966. Because of the overall drop in the number of vocations to the priesthood and sisterhood in the United States, in 1988 the number was around 6,200, but with considerable increase in volunteer lay men and women missionaries, single and married.

Roman Catholic self-understanding does not accept the complete independence of any local church or of any national group of local churches. Each local church—the laity and clergy, with a bishop in communion with all other bishops, with and under the bishop of Rome—directly bears missionary responsibility not only for the unchurched at home but also for the unevangelized everywhere.

In many areas of the world (Africa, Asia, Oceania), the coordination of missionary responsibilities for personnel and funds is supervised by the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In recent years more and more personnel from one local church in the third world are ministering in another third world area. As examples, Mexican missionaries are now in Africa, Nigerian missionaries are in other African countries, and Indian personnel are evangelizing in Thailand.

Most recent official Roman Catholic biblical understanding of mission tries to integrate three factors.

The first is explicit gospel proclamation, within and outside the borders of the church, so that everyone, everywhere, has a real opportunity to be challenged by the explicit gospel of explicit faith in Jesus Christ, the one Lord and Savior of all.

Second is carrying out of God's works of justice and compassion by service to individuals, groups, and societal structures in temporal need, especially in the promotion of human dignity and in the fostering of human rights.

The third is the liturgical action of the church, so that individuals and communities are conscious that the kingdom of God is built up primarily by acts of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and petition before the Father, in the name of Jesus and in the Spirit.

# 8.

## How We Worship

E. GLENN HINSON AND GERARD AUSTIN, O.P.

Casual observation may cause you to wonder whether Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists have anything in common. You may conclude that unlikeness is especially true of their worship practices. You've heard the litany of differences, haven't you? Catholic worship is formal, liturgical, sacerdotal, and sacramental; Baptist worship is informal, non-liturgical, non-sacerdotal, and non-sacramental.

There may be a measure of truth in what you've heard, but there is also a considerable amount of distortion. For one thing, such characterizations describe more accurately what *used* to be rather than what *now* is true. Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists have both changed a lot in the past quarter century. To be quite fair, however, such views may never have been accurate. Catholic worship has never been so formal or Baptist so informal, for instance, that they could be seen as opposites. Catholics and Baptists both mixed formal and informal in style, liturgical and non-liturgical in form, clerical and lay involvement in leadership, and sacramental and non-sacramental in experience of grace.

This chapter is written in the conviction that Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist worship has more in common than we often recognize and that greater accuracy in describing what we do in worship, which is such a vital aspect of our Christian lives, will serve well the cause of Christ and Christ's church. In the past distortion, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation have erected

