

COP/NAME Study
Palm Desert, November 2005

- 1) I am honored to be here
 - a) Deep appreciation and respect for the mission execs
 - b) Equally deep appreciation and respect for my fellow District Presidents.

- 2) Personal limitations
 - a) Here this morning, not as a DP but as a Missiologist (whatever that might mean)
 - i) If missiology is so particular that it commands the attention of a few, then does it play its essential role of informing the whole of theology?
 - (1) We would find it curious if one in our circles introduced himself as a “Christologist,” that is, someone who focuses on the person and work of our Lord. Isn’t He the heart and soul of our faith?
 - (2) I would suggest the same of God’s Mission to the world in Christ.
 - ii) Missiologist: Personal awareness of my ignorance was reinforced on a daily basis.
 - (1) Ask the Kankanaey who patiently lived and worked with me for six years in the Philippines
 - (2) Ask PNG missionaries why this missiologist with all of his expertise spent the better part of a day in jail.
 - (3) Ask my DP colleagues or more so my mission staff present here today
 - iii) If missiological expertise means being an expert count me out.
 - iv) If expertise is measured more in asking questions rather than offering answers, then, count me in.
 - b) Here this morning, not as a DP but as a Missiologist (whatever that might mean)
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- 3) Missiology is the business of asking questions. That’s what makes it so interesting. That’s also what makes it so unsettling for the church established.
 - a) The church established wants to nail things down exactly. It has an inherent need to “fix boundaries” theologically and/or institutionally
 - b) Missionaries, because they keep on bumping into new phenomena (at least new to them and their established churches), are forced to ask questions.

- i) These questions often bump up against what the church has already determined as settled issues, and soften our theological boundaries.
 - ii) And that's what unsettles things.
 - iii) Think of some of the early missiological questions asked of the established church in Jerusalem: Can Jews enter Gentile homes and eat with them? Or, must Gentile men be circumcised in order to be Christian?"
- c) It comes back to the issue of wine skins
- i) What kind of wine skin was and is our Lutheran theology (our Confessions) intended to be: old or new? And along with our theology, what kind of wine skins are our structured patterns of church, theological education, mission outreach, to be?
 - ii) Good wine skins, new or old have the same purpose: keep out destructive contaminants while the wine is making and storing. We want our confession and derived patterns of mission and ministry to keep us focused on our Savior and protected from "every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."
 - (1) But is our theology an old wine skin--having completed its doctrinal expansion it is in place to keep and preserve this pure wine for all to receive
 - (2) Or is it to be a new wine skin that maintains theological elasticity needed for continued growth?
 - iii) Which is really a question, not about the skins, but about our understanding of the wine of our theology—is it still bubbling (fermenting) among us?
 - iv) Note this: Mission phenomena continually add yeast to the wine.
- 4) More than ever today, the LCMS must wrestle with what it means to be confessional
- a) Were our Confessions conceived as a theological box with intentionally fixed boundaries unaffected by changing contexts?
 - b) Were they conceived as a hermeneutical launching pad that could propel us into human contexts exotic from our own?
 - c) Do they give us all of the answers?
 - d) Do they give us the Gospel centered ability and confidence to ask questions?
- 5) This business of asking questions is critical today—for the people of God generally and in particular for those engaged in mission work here and overseas.

- a) We've awakened to the epochal shift that has taken place in the world, at least in the West regarding the role and significance of the church.
 - i) The west has outgrown Christendom
 - (1) We've experienced a radical loss of the power and prestige we depended upon: Who are we vis-à-vis the world in which we live?
 - (2) We've experienced a radical relocation or even dislocation of the context in which we are called to proclaim the Gospel.
 - (a) As radical for us as it was for God's OT saints when they woke up one morning not in Jerusalem or Judea, but in Babylon.
 - (b) How do we interface with these people?
 - (c) How do we live as strangers and foreigners?
 - (3) This shift has rocked our very synod.
 - (a) One of the greatest culture shocks to a new missionary is his or her loss of role understanding and expectation. Who am I vis-à-vis this new people among whom I live and work?
 - (b) The same can be said for us as the LCMS.
 - (i) We understood our role as a confessional lighthouse within Christendom,
 - 1. The voice of Biblical truth among the other Christian churches.
 - 2. We expected other Christians to see our light and be attracted to it.
 - 3. Like Solomon's Jerusalem, or Constantine's Christendom, the nations will be drawn to us like a giant magnet.
 - (c) But we are no longer in Jerusalem or Christendom.
 - (i) The church does not run the show.
 - (ii) We are in Babylon and we are struggling with how to be a confessional lighthouse in this new context.
- ii) This shift impacts how we go about our business. Biblically speaking, the church exiled or dispersed in Babylon was perhaps the very best thing that could ever have happened to it.

(1) Because it forced them to return to their roots as a missionary people

(a) Commissioned on Mt. Sinai as God's priests for the nations.

(b) That had been all but forgotten over the centuries

(c) Until they awoke in Babylon.

(d) It's in Babylon that they recovered their missionary vocation.

(2) Look for a moment with me at Daniel 3 and 4:

Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to assemble the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, were assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

Daniel 4: King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. 3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

(3) Think of the stories the many pagan rulers (chapter 3) or those who translated Nebuchadnezzar's letter into all the kingdom's languages (chapter 4) told at the dinner table that night. "Honey, kids, you will never believe what happened at work today . . ."

iii) I would suggest that more nations learned the Name of Yahweh while God's people were scattered in Babylon, then when they were gathered in Jerusalem.

iv) God's people of Babylon were known as the diaspora.

(1) A scattered people

(2) Not seen as blessing but as curse (good reasons)

v) But God re-birthed a missionary people in Babylon.

- b) In our Lord Jesus making reference to these scattered saints in His parable of the wheat and tares, He let us in on the divine purpose behind the diaspora: the nations
- i) He drives the point home even more clearly: Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12)
- ii) Note the death of St. Stephan and the scattering of the church
- (1) Lord will you restore the Kingdom to Israel? (The disciples thought Solomon's Jerusalem)
- (2) You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth (The Lord thought His holy diaspora)
- (3) All of what Jesus promised was fulfilled by this single word: diasperoin in Acts chapter 8. With the death of St. Stephan the church is scattered, that is, scattered like seed by the Master Sower's hand into all the world. (Dia = through or out + sperein = sperma = seed)
- (a) Acts 8:1 and they were all scattered (diaspa,rhsan) throughout the region of Judea and Samaria
- (b) Acts 11: 19 Now those who were scattered (diaspare,ntej) because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews...
- (4) This word for scattering is key (see Acts 5)
- (a) The apostles were hauled before the Sanhedrin because they refuse to stop preaching the Gospel (Jesus is the Messiah), particularly the fact that He rose from the dead. (Acts 5:30-31)
- (b) Gamaliel, a Pharisee (who believes in the resurrection of the dead) and a man of great respect, had the apostles removed from the room and puts the case before the Sanhedrin, "Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men"
- (c) He then put two witnesses (albeit dead) before the group to establish a pattern of truth.
- (i) Acts 5:36 For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed (dielu,qhsan) and came to nothing. dielu,qhsan best translates disintegrate, like a wooden rudder in salt water.
- (ii) Acts 5:37 After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered (dieskorpi,sqhsan). dieskorpi,sqhsan best translates scatter, like the ashes of a fire one wishes to extinguish.

- (d) The two witnesses together present a clear case
 - (i) Some guy rises up and claims to be a somebody
 - (ii) Lots of people follow him
 - (iii) He's killed
 - (iv) His followers scatter (disperse, disintegrate, fall away)
 - (v) And the movement loses its vitality.
 - (vi) Why? Because the leader is dead!

- (e) So, in summary, Gamaliel recommended the following: Leave this Jesus cult alone. If it is of men it will come to nothing, (just like Theudas and Judas). But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!
 - (i) What was Gamaliel really getting at?
 - (ii) If the Jesus movement is similar to that of Theudas and Judas it will fail. That is, like these men, if Jesus was killed and is *still dead*, then his followers will naturally scatter (disperse, disintegrate, fall away)
 - (iii) But if it is of God . . . Better asked, "What if Jesus was killed like these other men, but different from them He didn't stay dead?"
 - (iv) If Jesus rose from the dead, then no man in the world can stop this thing.

- (f) Now, St. Luke continues the story in Acts 7 and 8 culminating in the death of St. Stephan. With Stephan's death, the church is scattered (note the parallel in Acts 5). But Luke uses a different verb for the word scatter. It is diasparein or diaspora—scattered like seed for sowing.
 - (i) Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting to his death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered (diasparein) throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered (diasparein) went about preaching (euaggelizo) the word.
 - (ii) The result of this scattering is life not death. These saints are scattered (sown) in the resurrection power of their Lord Jesus Christ. No man can stop it.

(5) Truly, truly I say unto you unless as grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies ...

- c) He is doing the same to us.
 - i) We've come to realize that America is an unchurched society. That is, America is a place where the church is no longer in charge. What does it mean to be God's people living in an unchurched society?
 - ii) The cultural bridges that once brought people to our front doors are gone. What are the new bridges that we must build to the culture?

- iii) For centuries we Lutherans defined ourselves as a confessional movement within Christianity. What does it mean to be a confessional movement outside of Christianity?
 - (1) These are missionary questions.
 - (2) And our churches are being forced by present realities to ask them.
- d) And that is where each of you plays a valuable role in the Kingdom today
 - i) Church leaders thrust into a missionary context are forced to ask those questions.
 - (1) We learn the grace and humility of asking
 - (2) Believing that God answers faithfully in His Word
 - (3) And Word of God that you and I knew before springs to new life in this new and exotic context.
 - ii) We need to bow our heads in humility and thanksgiving that the Lord, in His mercy, has brought us to this day.
 - (1) He has chosen not to abandon us
 - (a) Not to remove His lampstand from our church.
 - (b) But to give us an opportunity to be His missionary people.
 - iii) He has chosen to open His heart to us, which, by Biblical description is a missionary's heart. John 3:16-17.
- e) We need to help our congregations and leaders to rediscover the missional center of God's Word.
- f) We encourage them to ask questions
 - i) To live comfortably with the fact that we do not have all of the answers
 - ii) But we know where to find them: In His Spirit
 - (1) As the Spirit of Christ speaks directly to us in His Word
 - (2) As we eavesdrop on conversations the Spirit of Christ has had or is having with other Christians across historical or contemporary cultures

- (3) As we listen to what the Spirit of Christ is saying to us through those who do not yet know Him
 - (a) Through the broken
 - (b) The disenfranchised
 - (c) Those still in the bonds of the evil one.

- 6) Then, we have to help our congregations in the LCMS understand what it means to be in authentic missionary partnership with others.
 - i) Authentic missional partnering is easier said than done for many of us in the LCMS
 - (1) Andy and the African-American Christian. “Don’t make me your project”
 - (2) For a long time we served our sister churches as if they were the “objects” or recipients of our missional love
 - (3) We are awkward now in serving *with* them. That is serving as co-subjects of missional love.
 - (4) Simple example from our own synod: Ethnic ministries
 - (a) If ethnic simply means people whose first language is other than English, perhaps “ethnic” is O.K. (Albeit it does not square exactly with Matthew 28: panta ta ethne)
 - (b) If ethnic creates a classification of Christians and churches treated differently from the main stream LCMS in leadership, theological education, and responsibility, then we have a problem.
 - ii) Be of good cheer, our synod is not unique. We are absolutely no different from the great apostles of the first century.
 - (1) They, too, did not proceed into the world with the understanding that the nations (the ethnics) were to be their missional partners.
 - (a) They could not imagine that the Samaritans or the Gentiles were co-heirs of eternal life and co-partners in the family business.
 - (b) Not until the Holy Spirit took matters into His own hands and poured Himself out upon these “foreigners”
 - (c) Brief excursion:
 - (i) Peter rightly connected Baptism with the coming of the Spirit and the equipping for mission (Acts 2:38-39).

(ii) In two separate occasions the Spirit chose not to come through that normal means—to the Samaritans and to the Gentiles

1. Acts 8: Peter and John lay hands on unclean Samaritans and the Samaritans receive the Spirit with attending signs like those of the Jewish disciples on the day of Pentecost.
2. Acts 10: Prior to water baptism being applied, the Spirit pours Himself out on Cornelius and family with attending signs like those of the first Pentecost.

(iii) In each case, the Spirit was impressing upon the Jewish Church His new covenant that included all peoples, (Samaritans and ends of the earth) equally.

(d) Peter recalled Jesus' words: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God? (Acts 11)

(e) Peter understood that in their Baptism by the Spirit these "ethnics" were commissioned as Christ's witnesses, His missionary people, full partners with the blood children of Abraham.

(2) Go one step further, even if Jewish believers came to accept the idea that the Gentiles would have the Gospel and share in its ministry, they could never have thought that they, themselves, would be the recipients of that Gentile ministry.

(a) Yet that was the Spirit's plan

(b) Through the Gentiles, the Jewish Christians learned the truth about circumcision and the real Abrahamic covenant of grace. (Acts 15)

(c) The Gentiles were God's instruments for the Jewish church to ask questions that they never could have asked before. They were forced by these questions to look again at their understanding of the Word and realign that understanding with the Spirit.

7) We are in a missionary age, an age of questions that we have not before asked ourselves. Now that these questions are surfacing we have the privilege to answer like the missionary church of old, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us that we . . ."

You finish the sentence.