

Modern Missions; Latin America

As we meet again this morning, we ask for Your presence and Your help. Do guide us and lead us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In this lesson we are moving into topic 20, which is "Modern Missions I." Topic 22 is "Modern Missions II." I will explain that division. One chart that is taken from Patrick Johnstone's book, *The Church is Bigger than You Think*, is a helpful one for looking at major missions movements over the last 2000 years. There were various movements in the early church, in the Celtic church, in western and Central Europe, the so-called Nestorian church in Asia, the Orthodox Church moving into central Europe and Russia, and the Catholic Church in northern Europe. Then in the 1400s and 1500s we see the Western missionary movement into the Americas and Asia. Similarly, the Russian Orthodox Church moved into Siberia and Alaska. The Moravians and Protestant evangelicals also moved. I will argue that it is helpful to see that whole phase as a continuous phase that we should call the Modern Missions Movement. There are actually two phases. The first began with the Roman Catholics, from Spain and Portugal in particular, going into the Americas and Asia. Then the evangelical Protestants went later. The global evangelical movement in our day is catching on, but much of what has happened on a global scale has happened unbeknownst to many of us because of cross-cultural missionary efforts in Africa and elsewhere.

There is another set of maps that gives some perspective on the modern missions movement. It illustrates the Roman Catholic missionary efforts. From 1500 to 1800, there was an area in southern Europe that was traditionally Catholic. Then there was the expansion of Spain into the Americas and Philippines. There was also the influence of Roman Catholic missionaries spreading around Africa and into various parts of Asia under Portuguese protection. Later, under French protection, there was growth and inroads in small areas of the coast of Africa. It happened similarly in India. There was fairly widespread influence in China as Jesuit missionaries had significant influence in pockets there.

The year 1792 was important, because it was the year William Carey published his significant work, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. The Protestant modern missions movement began in the 1790s. Protestants were prominent in northern Europe starting in 1600. As the British Empire and the Dutch trading influence spread into the North American colonies and into the Caribbean, some parts of northern and Latin America, southern Africa, and Australia saw pockets of Protestant gains during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Another chart shows some Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries. It names many of the household names in the history of Christian missions. De las Casas was a Dominican Spaniard who eventually realized the atrocities the colonial authorities were committing against the Native Americans in Spanish America. He started to write and otherwise protest those abuses. Francis Xavier saw significant numbers of baptisms in India, in what came to be known as Ceylon, which is current-day Sri Lanka. He was in the East Indies and then went to Japan in 1549. He died as he longed to get into China in 1552. There are Saint Xavier churches worldwide, including at Saint Louis University. He was one of the most widely known and beloved Roman Catholic missionaries in all of missions history. Matteo Ricci was an influential Italian Jesuit in China. He seemed to have the capacity and willingness to adapt to the particular situation. Roberto de Nobili in India did the same sort of thing. De Nobili adjusted to the Brahmin way of doing things. Matteo Ricci adjusted himself to the literati in China. He helped set in motion what came to be known as the Chinese Rights Controversy. That was involved with the question of what the Christian church should do about venerating or worshiping ancestors. Matteo Ricci took the

posture that it was simply a civic duty. It was not a religious act. He said it was only right for Christians to honor their ancestors by following through with the particular rites that the Chinese literati observed. The Catholic Church, under that sort of advice and leadership in China, advocated that position, but there was controversy back and forth. It depended on who were the superior generals within the Jesuits who had influence in Rome. When some conservative friends, Jansenists, gained particular influence in Rome in the 1700s, the Vatican pronounced a ruling that Christians may not observe those rites. When the Vatican's messenger conveyed that message to the church in China in the late 1700s, the Chinese emperor was not pleased with that ruling. The Catholic Church was therefore outlawed, and a period of rather flourishing peace ended. The question of what to do about ancestors remains a controversy among many Christians in the world. Matteo Ricci was one who took a more liberal, more generous position. Those are only a few of the prominent Roman Catholic missionaries in the modern missions movement.

Let me now explain why I think it is important to see what happened with the early modern Catholic missions, which began about 500 years ago. I think it is important to see that as part of the modern missions movement. In some ways it can be a semantic distinction. That is certainly nothing I want to die for or be arrogant about or even argue over. Most of the literature that you will encounter talks about the modern missions movement beginning with Carey in the 1790s. That is one way to look at it. It seems to me, however, that there are at least a couple of reasons for seeing the modern missions movement as a continuous movement starting 500 years ago.

The first reason is that it was a movement that moved from the West outward. It happened under Spanish and Portuguese protection, especially with the Spanish as they propagated the faith in their new colonies in the Americas and Philippines. It happened as Dutch and English traders began to go out contemporaneous with that. By the 1790s there were Protestant missionaries going out as missionaries. The Moravians were going out early. There were British, German, and American missionaries going out from the West. It was a continuous movement from the West to the non-Western world. I suggest it was a continuum. To see it as a continuum helps to understand how the non-Western world, speaking in generalities, wrestles with some of the same sorts of problems of contextualization. They have received the Christian faith through various Western nations over the course of the last 500 years. That is one strong reason to see it as a continuum.

The second reason is that the issues that the Roman Catholic missionaries faced in their ministries and in whatever locations they were in were the same issues that Protestant missionaries faced in the last two centuries. How do you adapt to the local setting? You could see unwitting abuse. There was importation of culture, imperial gains, and Christianity being associated with imperialism. The same issues that were around in 1500 were still encountered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To see it as a continuum, therefore, strikes me as helpful.

There were differences, however, so it also strikes me as helpful to consider it as phase I and phase II. The second phase was a Protestant phase. For example, there was the stress on translating the Bible into the vernacular tongues. That was a critical difference. Catholic missionaries were not doing that until after Vatican II in the 1960s. That was one major difference.

Let us think briefly about what I am calling phase I of the modern missions movement. You know that it was a decision between some papal bulls and the Spanish and Portuguese crowns that, as far as Spain and Portugal were concerned, the non-European world was divided into two parts. It was all considered non-European and non-Christian heathen. The heathen non-Christian world was half Spain's and half Portugal's. When you look at a world map and you see the scope of that mentality of the crowns of Spain and Portugal, you see how adventuresome that was.

In terms of the control that resulted, Spain had the resources to conquer much of Central and South America and move on to the Philippines. Portugal was only able to establish a few trading posts around Africa and India. As far as the papacy and the crowns were concerned, as they set out in their respective divisions, they viewed half of the world as Spain's and half as Portugal's. It only made sense that when Christopher Columbus came to the Americas he planted a flag and claimed it on behalf of the cross and the Roman bishop. That was the way it worked.

It was not a completely uniform picture as far as the people who were going out as missionaries. People like de las Casas objected to what they saw happening with some of the colonial rule. Many of the Jesuits in Asia had to be careful with respect to what the political and trading authorities had to say. Jesuits who were working in China, Japan, and other parts of Asia slowly became intertwined with the silver and silk trades. It was partly to support themselves financially. Missionaries who teach English in various settings today use that as a trade to help support themselves financially. Yet missionaries wanted to be specifically religious in their working aspirations. They had to be careful about being intertwined, and many of them saw the dangers and objected to how political authorities wanted to impose their will without understanding the situation. So it was a mixed bag, particularly in the Spanish scene, which had Conquistadors who went in to conquer and rule and missionaries and different landowners.

It is also helpful to recall that once we are looking at the late 1600s and 1700s. Verkuyl has written about the Moravian missionaries, who played important roles in formulating what missions is all about. They eventually helped to raise awareness among other Protestants about the importance of all peoples around the world coming to hear the Gospel. It was Count Zinzendorf in the early 1700s who set up his community at Herrnhut. Many missionaries were trained and sent out from there. Some missionaries sold themselves as slaves to go along to the Americas to minister. There were many creative ways that Moravian missionaries went out.

Pietist missionaries went early on with the Danish Halle mission as Lutheran pietist missionaries. They went early to India, before Carey and the formal beginning of phase II of the modern missions movement. What happened with these early pietist and Moravian missionaries was important for the later movement. They put their stress and zeal on the salvation of individuals.

When you think about the missions strategy of phase I of the modern missions movement, about what the Roman Catholic missionaries were about, and about what some of the early Protestant and Reformed missionaries and missiologists were about, their intent was basically to plant the church. They wanted to see the church take root and begin with all of its structures and hierarchy as an organization in these new lands. That was what missions was all about.

With the Spanish colonialism in the Americas and the Philippines, was the missionary's goal to start the church? Yes, and they saw that as part of a wider Christian civilization being brought into those lands that needed all of the benefits of world civilization, which was Spain. All of the structures of government, commerce, and ecclesiastical orders were all to be brought to bear in the new lands. As missionaries, they had a particular focus on serving the pope. The Jesuits had a particular allegiance directly to the papacy. That sometimes served them when they needed to act independently from colonial authorities. For example, some of them fought on behalf of indigenous peoples. They were part of the whole complex, but their particular focus was on the status of the church.

Let us move to the topic of Latin America. We will not spend much time on this topic either. I want to share a few websites with you. These are from some articles in *Christianity Today* that dealt with some

contemporary developments within Latin American Christianity. One was about increased cooperation between Pentecostals and evangelicals in Latin America. You will likely know that much of the significant growth in Latin American Christianity over the past decades has been among varieties of Pentecostal groups. You may also know about the development of liberation theology in Latin America in the 1970s and following. Many Roman Catholic ecclesiastical leaders have latched on to liberation theology and sought to be more affiliated with the poor and suffering masses in Latin America and the developing base communities of these poor people. One mission leader has said, "While the Catholic Church may have opted for the poor, the poor have opted for the Pentecostals." This is generally speaking. The article I referred to speaks about attempts at cooperation between Pentecostal groups and evangelicals. They realize that they cannot ignore each other. They are both sizable enough and growing to the extent, and they share enough, that they need to cooperate.

Another article speaks of how evangelicals in Latin America have grown to the point that many of them are more comfortable with consciously expressing being Latin Americans. The article explains that, for many Latin American Christians, forms of worship, church structure, church practice, and church lifestyle—because they came through Western missionaries and in particular North American missionaries—have influenced them to the point that they have struggled to be Latin American and Christian at the same time. With enough time having passed, however, and with having achieved enough growth and confidence, many of them are now incorporating Latin American styles of music and worship.

One Doctor of Ministry dissertation that is being written now for Covenant Seminary is a pastor from the United States who grew up in Cuba and then Venezuela, and in recent years he has gone to Mexico to lead worship seminars. He is writing a dissertation evaluating how some of these churches have taken what he has given in seminars and used the principles and contextualized them. What he has discovered in his research is that different church leaders have different attitudes toward using either traditional Mexican music or contemporary Christian music of the American variety. Contemporary Christian music of the American style is quite popular among many young people. Some church leaders say they definitely need to use it. Some say that they need to retain the traditional hymns, because they are holy and right and what the missionaries taught them. This researcher has found that few pastors in the Presbyterian Church in Mexico are ready to incorporate much traditional Mexican music. It has too many evil associations for them. Only some are willing to go that route. So this dissertation is discovering this present struggle.

Here at Covenant Seminary, we have people who have roots and experience in Latin America. One person from Mexico has agreed that there are struggles with worship, but in his experience, he has not seen anyone attempt to incorporate traditional Mexican music. The extent of such attempts was to make worship more like a fiesta. Much of what he saw was that many evangelicals there have a problem with living a compartmentalized life, having a religious part of life separate from the rest of life.

Other Latin American theologians whom I have read, including the Peruvian Samuel Escobar and the Argentine Baptist Rene Padilla, who have both written a number of articles and books, including in English, have been among the wide chorus of evangelicals in Latin America who have said that what liberation theology was trying to articulate in the 1970s was not completely off the mark. Much of what they were reacting against was a pietistic, compartmentalized, over-spiritualized Christianity that had been imported into Latin America from North America. They have been those who have helped to push the rest of the evangelical church to have social concerns and total-life concerns as part of the theological agenda in matters of the Christian Gospel.

One student's experience with Latin America began in 1978. When he first went in the 1970s, Protestants, evangelicals, and Pentecostals were all lumped together in terminology and understanding. They tended to be marginalized and not very significant. Over the last 20 years, however, there has been significant growth among Pentecostals. Now there is respect, influence, and continuing growth among those groups.

Some of the readings I assigned are from the book *Crisis and Hope in Latin America*, which was coauthored by Emilio Nunez and William Taylor. William Taylor is the editor of another book that I assign. I also assign some articles by Samuel Escobar. Let me read something from the forward to *Crisis and Hope in Latin America*, written by Samuel Escobar: "It may sound as typical Latin American exaggeration to say that the future of Christianity is at stake in what happens in Latin America today, but when we pay attention to figures, we may have to conclude that there is no exaggeration in that statement. Almost half of the Catholics in all the world live in Latin America." I heard someone mention recently that there were rumors that the next pope could be Latin American. Can you imagine what that would mean? When you think about the numbers and the papacy's desire that Latin America remain Catholic, it would be an interesting step. Escobar continues, "Consequently, the Catholic hierarchies consider the region as a reservoir of human and material resources for their missionary in the future."

Another side comment on this is that Latin America, especially 100 years ago, was something of an anomaly for the Protestant missionary force. Was it Christianized, or was it not Christianized? At the 1910 Edinburgh missions conference, for example, because of the long-standing Catholic presence there, it was basically considered to be Christianized. That was in comparison to Africa and Asia. Some of those views have changed in light of North American missionary activity in the twentieth century. At the same time, Latin America—and the Philippines, which fits into the same category—has been viewed differently missiologically than many parts of Africa and Asia by Western missions agencies and churches.

Returning to Escobar, "On the other hand, Latin America happens to be the continent where popular forms of Protestantism grow faster than anywhere else, and they grow at the expense of the Catholic Church. During the most recent decades, more people have left Catholicism in order to become Protestant than at the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century." That is interesting to think about. The Reformation in Europe is so significant for our identity in the West. Now think about what is happening in Latin America and the sheer numbers of people there. Escobar continues, "Brazil, with its population of over 140 million, is considered the largest Catholic nation in the world, but the Catholic percentage of the population went down from 92.8 percent in 1970 to 88.4 percent in 1980, and the decline has continued." The 22 million Protestants in Brazil might well be a majority in comparison with Catholics who actually practice their religion. There are large numbers of missionaries going out within Brazil to different people groups and going around the world. I spoke yesterday with someone who is ministering in Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony, and he is interested in recruiting Brazilian missionaries to minister in Mozambique. Mission to the World has sought Brazilian missionaries to minister in Portugal and other sorts of places in the world. So there has been a significant growth of Protestant Christianity in Latin America.

When you consider Latin America, you must remember the tremendous variety of peoples, nations, histories, and religious heritages there. For convenience's sake, we speak in lump terms of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but there is a tremendous variety of peoples in Latin America. The geography is also varied. There are mountains, forests, and beaches. In Argentina, you will see a variety of geography that most of us who have not been there will not be able to imagine. There is a variety of races. There has been a huge population explosion in many places. There are ever-changing and interesting political

situations in many countries. There are various religious scenarios with the Catholics and the varieties of new religious movements springing off of Catholicism, along with the varieties of Pentecostalism and Protestantism. There are rich cultures of music, dance, and craft.

When you consider history, they talk of history as that before and after 1492. We must remember that this part of the world had significant strands of history prior to 1492 if we are really going to think in a multi-polar, world-historical way. If you like history, the funniest book ever written is one by a couple of Brits in the 1930s, entitled *1066 and All That*. If you like history, and if you know British history in particular, you will be crying out of laughter when you read that book. It reminds me of this topic that I am talking about. For example, when it talks about India, it begins a chapter by noting in a tongue-in-cheek way, "Indian history begins in the 1700s, when they started fighting wars for the British." If we are not careful, we can think in those sorts of ways, including our thinking about Latin America. With the coming of the Spaniards, things obviously changed with the conquests and colonization that took place.

It has been stressed that Latin America has not had exclusively Roman Catholic missionary activity. In the mid-sixteenth century, there were various Protestants arriving, in association with Dutch and British attempts at establishing trading posts. It is important to remember that Protestant history goes back to the mid-sixteenth century. Some of those attempts failed, and some succeeded only a bit. The French Huguenots, for example, went there.

There were various revolutions and independences gained in the early nineteenth century and new republics that were formed. There was new development that occurred in the early twentieth century and instability that many nations experienced in Latin America. Then, when you consider all the various spiritual dimensions that have brought tremendous activity and tremendous vitality to the area, there is worldwide significance for what has happened with respect to the Christian faith in Latin America. This should be a help to us in realizing where the mission field is. It is the whole world. The Christians in Latin America are working out their salvation with fear and trembling just as we are in this part of the world. They are involved in sending out missionaries in a cross-cultural way, whether within their countries or outside their political entities.

Let us move on to the second phase of modern missions. By this I mean what has been occurring since the 1790s. Another way to describe it is as the Western missionary movement. There is a map that I provide for the class that shows the locations of Protestants in 1865. In 1792, the Protestants were in northern and northwestern Europe and in the North American colonies. There were pockets in South America and Australia with a significant presence by 1792. Over the course of the next 70 years, however, there were Protestant advances across what became the United States. There was advancement in southern Africa with activity by the English and Dutch there. It was also in the Indian subcontinent and further into Australia in association with colonial expansion.

One side note to the history of North America is that some people have noted that when you evaluate what has been called the great century in Christian missions, namely the nineteenth century, perhaps the single most significant occurrence of advancement in the nineteenth century was the spread across the North American continent of the Christian church in connection with the growth of the United States of America. By 1910, there was further growth into eastern Europe and parts of central Asia. There was growth further into China, Australia, and pockets of growth in South America. This is largely associated with British missionary expansion and some other European countries as well that were involved in colonial expansion throughout the world.

When you consider some prominent Protestant missionaries, there are some names that will be familiar to many of you. John Eliot in New England went to Indians. He was a congregational missionary with the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in New England. Thomas Bray was an Anglican. Ziegenbalg was one of the early German Lutherans who went to India in the early 1700s with the Danish-Halle Mission. David Brainerd was the young zealot who died in his zeal, giving himself no rest in his concern that Native Americans hear the Gospel. Christian Friedrich Schwartz was another Lutheran pietist who went to India in the 1700s with the Danish-Halle Mission.

Then there was William Carey. You may know the story of him; he was a shoe cobbler. As he heard about the adventures of Captain Cook in the South Pacific and became more aware of the needs of people around the world, he became concerned and convinced that Christians needed to do something about that. There is the anecdote that someone has noted if it is not true then it ought to be true. Carey was in a meeting of ministers, and he said there was something they should do, and the old minister said, "Young man, if God wants to do something, He will do it Himself. Sit down and be quiet." That shows some of the thinking that was prominent among Protestants. They believed the early Apostles had fulfilled the Great Commission, so what do we need to do about it? Carey wrote an inquiry into the means that should be used and that Christians should be involved in those things. Carey went to India and turned out to be a tremendous linguist. He was an educator and is rightly seen to be a pivotal and seminal figure.

Henry Martin was another Englishman, an Anglican, who went to India and then Persia. Robert Morrison was another Englishman, this time with the London Missionary Society. The Baptist Missionary Society was associated with the Independents. The London Missionary Society helped send many others out, including Anglicans. The Church Missionary Society was officially associated with the Anglicans out of England. The first American missionary to go out was Adoniram Judson. He went out and settled in Burma, which is now Myanmar. He helped to found the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which was associated with Congregationalists in England. En route aboard the ship, he became convinced of Baptist teachings and became a Baptist. The folks back home were not happy about that. Baptists were happy about that, however, and you will see many Judson colleges around this country named after him. There was Robert Moffat. There was Alexander Duff, the great missionary scholar out of Scotland, who went from the Church of Scotland to India. Samuel A. Growther was a young boy taken out of the Niger region as a slave. He was relocated by the British in Sierra Leone. Samuel Growther led cross-cultural missionary efforts into Nigeria.

David Livingstone made travels into the interior of Africa. When you come to the 1850s, you begin to see different missionaries move into interior areas. Much of that was because it became more practically feasible to do so. If you tried to go inland prior to that, you would die of disease or be killed. Livingstone was a trailblazer in that sense.

John Paton was an important Scottish missionary in the South Pacific. There were all sorts of heroic stories of missionaries from Britain, France, and the United States in the Pacific islands in the 1800s. That led to the widespread sharing of the Gospel. There were whole populations that converted to Christianity in the Pacific islands. There were many stories of martyrs and cannibals eating missionaries. Those stories fire the imagination further about what it means to be a missionary in the Pacific.

I have mentioned John Nevius already. He implemented in Korea the three-self formula. Churches needed to be self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. Those ideas were enunciated and articulated earlier by Henry Venn in England and Rufus Anderson in America. Then Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission. In connection with Taylor was the Guinness family. In various places

in Africa they supported the founding of what came to be known as faith missions. This was where faith missions began and where people began to go inland. A faith mission was where one did not have a church structure to support you financially. You did not go around asking for money to support you. You believed God, and you went. You trusted God to provide. You may know the story of Hudson Taylor. He sought to become Chinese. Other missionaries could not understand this eccentric figure, and he rubbed them the wrong way. In his autobiographies and in biographies about him, he became one of the heroic missionary figures who still captures many imaginations because of the hagiography about him.

Mary Slessor was another important missionary, in West Africa. She moved inland to present-day Nigeria. Her name stands out in Nigerian church history among the most prominent. Against the advice of many, she chose to move inward. She said that she was not a threat, and people would not consider her dangerous. She was able to blaze many trails. C. T. Studd was an interesting figure. He was a famous cricketer who left it all to go and join the China Inland Mission. Then he went to India, and then he eventually set up his own mission in Africa, the Heart of Africa Mission. Albert Schweitzer was the famous medical doctor from Germany who worked in French Equatorial Africa.

That is a list of some of the names that were important in the history of mission. We consider those figures more extensively in the History of World Mission elective course. It was not meant to be an extensive list, but rather to pick out some of those people who were influential.

I want to stress from Verkuyl's writings the importance of mission theory as developed by various missiologists. Gustav Warneck in Germany was a seminal missions thinker and researcher. Among Dutch missiologists, Bavinck, in our Reformed tradition, is extremely important, especially in his book, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. Many of us cut our theological teeth on Bavinck. Heinrich Kramer was an important worldwide figure, especially influential in the 1930s and 1940s when the worldwide Christian movement was starting to wrestle significantly with non-Christian religions. Kramer took a relatively conservative, although Barthian, posture for the uniqueness of the Christian religion among other religions. Many people had trouble accepting that sort of position. Hoekendijk was another important Dutch missiologist who wrote in the 1960s. He took a rather radical stand that the church as we know it needs to disappear to allow the modern secular age to come forward. Then the church would find itself as it loses itself. That was part of the interesting thinking going on in the 1960s.

I am going to pause in my description of these missiologists, because I want to introduce a guest speaker who is with us. In closing, let me describe a chart that is by Ralph Winter that considers what he calls the three eras of the modern missionary movement. We talked about the inland missions that began in the mid-nineteenth century. This chart shows that from the 1790s and for the next 100 years, missionaries went for the coastlands. Then in the mid-nineteenth century, people started going to the inlands. Then beginning in the 1930s with Donald McGavran and Cam Townsend, the notion of unreached peoples was crystallized. That is the final stage of missions, the one that we are in. We will refer to this notion later in the course.

We have guests with us today. It is a treat for us to have in the class Mark and Marty Meiland, who are Mission to the World missionaries in France. We became friends through various Mission to the World experiences, and we have remained in touch. They are in the United States on a home missions assignment, and they are in Saint Louis for a missions conference at a local church. They have been gracious enough to come and share some time with us in the class.

[*Mark Meiland*]

Dr. Jennings asked me to speak about missions in France and Europe. We know other missionaries in Europe and those who have more experience with missions in France. We could start when Marty and I arrived in 1994. We started in Paris with the language school. As soon as we were able to speak to people and as soon as we were able to understand their responses in France, I went around and asked as many people as I could what advice they would have for me as a new pastor. In France they have a tradition of pastors. The Reformation was in France since the time of Calvin and then declined through the wars of religion. Yet in French society and culture, they still understand what a pastor is. So I asked what advice they would have for me as a new pastor just starting a ministry in France. As you can imagine, I received all kinds of responses and suggestions. I asked missionaries, pastors, businesspeople, laypeople, believers, and non-believers.

I was at a wedding about a year after we had arrived in France. I asked the question to a businessman named Henri, who was seated next to us at the reception. He said two things that have stuck with me. He explained his own background and experience with the church. He was raised in a Jesuit school, and he learned a French phrase that meant he had his fill of priests. He explained why he left the church. He said that when he was a young boy he was positive toward the church. The village priest would come visit them in their home. He was the stereotypical chubby parish priest who would come and always arrive at 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock, and he would forcibly be invited to stay for lunch. He spent that time with people. Yet to Henri, that was the distant past. The church had become a business, an industry. It had become anything but personal. He said that was the one reason he had distanced himself from the church.

The other comment he made was that the church is now involved in politics and social activities and education. It was involved in everything but the spiritual. It was ironic for me to be hearing this from a man whose friends would describe him as a hardened cynic, a businessman, and a materialistic. What he did not find in the church was the spiritual.

The circumstances of this wedding and reception were that our common friends were having the wedding in a neighboring village, not their own village, because their local village priest was a communist. Our friend Michele was the president of the Chamber of Commerce, so you can imagine that he did not get along with the communist priest. The church was no longer offering what people wanted—personal and spiritual service.

When Marty and I arrived, we decided we could do that. We could spend time with people at wedding receptions, in restaurants, cafes, and in our home and their homes. We do have a spiritual message of reconciliation to offer people. Sometimes I am tempted, and people do want to hear about politics and economics. They want to talk about the death penalty or American issues. It is tempting to go that route, because we would have much to say about that. Yet we do not want to take positions that would offend people on those issues and limit their hearing regarding the Gospel of reconciliation. That kernel of the Gospel, practicing reconciliation, and having the truth of the Gospel, is important. We need to be orthodox and Reformed. We understand the culture and the world. Those things are essential, yet we need to do that in a way that is personal and spiritual, in a way that is relevant. What I have seen in Europe, and especially in France, and what we have learned in seminary, is that along with the inspiration and authority, it is the relevance of the Gospel, the relevance of Scripture, that is vital. Is the Bible something I can use in my relationships with my family, my wife, and my children? Those are the things we have found to be useful in our ministry.

My weakness is that I have trouble seeing the big picture. There are other people who do that kind of thinking in think tanks, addressing the larger issues in culture. So far, we have a personal ministry with neighbors, friends, and friends of friends. Those questions of relevancy are the things that people want to know. We have not considered much textual criticism or higher criticism. There are some people who ask those kinds of questions. I am glad for my seminary experience. I graduated from Covenant Seminary about 10 years ago. At that time, there was only one missions class. What served me in my experience was to take as many church planting courses that I could. That was what we were headed for. I did as much as I could to understand the principles and have them clear enough to me so I could apply those principles in a different cultural context. They helped me sort out what was cultural and what were universal principles.

Regarding our mission work in France, it is the church, but the church is not marketable in France. One missionary told me, "Do not come to Paris and expect people to line up to come to your Bible studies and small groups and church." The French merely shrug and move on. We are there, we are excited, and we have many people praying for us. We are prepared to be sent out as missionaries, and the French say, "So what?" They are not interested in coming to church, but they are quite interested in sitting down over a cup of coffee and talking. People will say all kinds of things. In that sense, ministry in Paris is like ministry in the United States. It is personal. People have needs. When they know how much you care, they will care what you know. They do not have the cultural context to put church into.

I grew up in northeastern Maryland, and I did not know many Muslims or many Jews. The idea of going to a Jewish Seder meal was nothing I had any idea about. Even if I had heard of one I would not have gone, because it did not mean anything to me. I grew up as a nominal Christian who did not understand the Gospel. I did not have a cultural insight into those activities. Many of us perceive that as antagonism or aggression from the French. In the seven years I have spent there, however, I can understand from their point of view their suspicions toward organized religion. They look back to the Crusades, the wars of religion, and all kinds of events that have happened that fortify and explain their position of being suspicious of organized religion. They consider the terrorist attacks on the United States and how religious extremism can cause all sorts of problems. They want to be prudent and cautious, but at the same time they do have spiritual needs and spiritual interests. We see our job as meeting those when we can and getting in touch with them and having something that we can offer them, which is the reconciliation of Jesus Christ.

I have been asked if there is renewal in the church. There are churches we know about. The Vineyard movement sent some people over, although that was a little messy. There is the Toronto Blessing and a big movement in the Catholic Church. Renewal can mean many things. I had a pen pal when I was in high school. I visited with her father, and he told me that her husband, his son-in-law, was a charismatic. It turned out that he played the guitar in church. That was the nature of his charismatic expression. So it can mean different things to different people.

That reminds me of another thing I did not understand about the Catholic Church before going to France. Sometimes as Protestants we are embarrassed because we are all divided up into different movements. It is hard to explain. The Catholic Church seems to me from the outside just as eclectic as Protestant churches. We have a friend who is Catholic, but she disagrees with the pope, she never goes to confession, she dislikes certain churches, and she agrees with only various points of the church.

Another thing about ministry in France and Europe is that you must get under the surface to understand what things really mean. We act quickly once we think we have labels that we understand or even if we

have a translation that we think we understand. Yet things do not necessarily mean what we think they do.

Another question I have been asked is in regard to the traditional French perspective on the church and the Gospel in comparison to the Africans, Sri Lankans, and French Caribbean islanders who are in France. I have not seen churches grow in France among the root French, the European French. There are churches that grow, such as two charismatic churches in Paris that have had tremendous growth, although we will see how long-lasting that is. In terms of reproducible growth, it is uniquely among the minority groups. There are different reasons for that. They are uprooted and not at home. They come to France and are more open to things. Yet even in the Caribbean islands, there are about 1700 churches, which is five times more per capita than there are in France. The Holy Spirit is working among many from Africa who are in France. All the churches that are growing are growing among Africans and non-continental French.

That is one of the puzzles of ministry that we have in France. I imagine it is like that elsewhere in Europe. Do we work with those in whom the Spirit seems to be working and bringing to us? One Lutheran pastor told me that God has rejected the French people because they have rejected Him, and he said the French people are going to hell. He told me when I came to France that I should go back to America and have a ministry of encouragement, of teaching and preaching God's blessing. He said I should not stay in France, where to be true to the Gospel would be preaching God's rejection of people who have rejected Him. Of course, I do not believe that is what the Gospel is. Jesus Christ has taken all that condemnation, so we can offer the peace of God that Christ has earned. Yet it is not universally understood that way.

Another question I have been asked is whether we have had any contact with the gypsies in France. The most contact we have had is when we see them outside our home or they knock on our door to sell something. We have read figures that half of the gypsies in France have been converted to the Gospel. They have 60,000 people getting together on airfields to have revival meetings and camp meetings. They certainly still do not have integration into the rest of the church, Protestant or Reformed.