

Introduction and Approach

Our Father, Your love and grace toward us truly is far greater, deeper, wider, and higher than anything that we can fathom or formulate. We praise You and thank You from the bottom of our hearts for Your devotion to Your people. You are devoted to redeeming and remaking this world that has rebelled against You and is a dark and fearful place to be. Yet it is one that has hope because of the Lord Jesus Christ, His life, death, resurrection, ongoing presence, and sure coming again to remake the cosmos. We thank You, Oh God, that You have called us by Your grace and mercy to be a part of Your people. We thank You, our Father, for calling us into Your service as well into serving the cause of the Gospel, to walk before You each day in our families, among friends, among neighbors, and in particular places where you have us. Our Father, as we head into this course together, we look to You to guide us and lead us, stir us in our hearts to be gripped by Your love and mercy and calling to serve You. Shake us to where we have deeper understanding and appreciation of Your goodness, glory, and grace. We look to You to guide each one of us. Help us as we think, study, read, and talk together. We give you all the praise and honor. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I trust that the grace and mercy of God as we see especially in the cross of Jesus will grip us and demand us to fully give ourselves to serving Him. This course, God's World Mission, is designed to bring to bear on each one of us the demands of the Gospel to serve Him and walk before Him. I do not know exactly what you may have heard about this course or what you come into this course expecting, but one thing that I think the subject matter will demand is an opening up to who God is, an opening up to know further who we are before Him, to be called and to be shaken at our foundations, to be challenged afresh to embrace and understand the Gospel, and to serve Christ in His ongoing mission in the world.

I am Nelson Jennings, and I teach World Mission here. I have been at the seminary for a couple of years, and I moved here from Japan. At the center of my own self-understanding is that God sent me here as a missionary from Japan. This part of the mission field is where He happens to have us laboring right now.

Let us look at the readings for this course. Gary Althen wrote *American Ways: A Guide for Foreigners in the United States*, which is designed for foreigners coming to the United States to understand mainstream American people. For those of you who are mainstream American people, hopefully it will be helpful for you to understand what you are like as a human being. Another book for this course is *Jesus in African Culture (A Ghanaian Perspective)* by Kwame Bediako. I think that you will find this stimulating. A third book is called *Establishing an Effective Missions Program For Your Church*, and it is designed to be an example for how to do a missions program in a church. That will be important for many of you already. This is Mission to the World's (MTW) suggestion on how to set up and run a missions program. MTW is the foreign missions sending agency of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). We will also read Wilbert Shenk's book, *Changing Frontiers of Mission*. I think Dr. Shenk, who is now at Fuller Seminary, has his finger on a number of issues related to where we are historically in world missions. He talks about how to understand that and how to move forward constructively in light of that. I appreciate him very much, along with so many others who have had their formative influences in a culture other than the one that is native to them. He mentions this, for example, in his introduction when beginning in the mid-1950s he had what he called a formative four-year apprenticeship in Indonesia. That was the kind of experience that shook him to be able to look at things interculturally and cross-culturally. This is so very basic to understanding God's mission and missions in general. We will also read a number of articles and portions of books, and we will look at a number of different authors from various volumes.

As the course goes along, I will mention a number of recommended readings. These are for your own long-term reference and for building a resource library for yourself or your church. I am aware of, and you should be aware of, many of these very important missions-related textbooks. Throughout the term I will give a brief introduction to each one of them so that you will have an idea of these works. The first one I want to mention is Roland Allen's book *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* This is often used as a missions text in many courses. It was first published in 1912, but it was not terribly well received at that time. It was quite critical of the missions movement of the day, which was just before World War I. This was at the height of Western confidence and confidence among the Western missionary movement. The world was going to become Christian; they could see it and taste it. It was right in the wake of the important 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference. Roland Allen comes along and asks what Saint Paul did in comparison to what the current missionaries were doing. He says they go out and build up institutions and edifices, putting themselves as ex-patriots in control of pilgrims and ministry, but Paul went in and got out. Allen's book was not well received at that time, but with a shaking of confidence in the missionary movement and within the West, especially after World War II, this book made a great comeback. Now it is quite popular and very important. It is very influential in missions thinking, so it is a must for any basic missions library.

Another important book is David Barrett and others' *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*. This has just been published in two volumes, though Dr. Barrett and his colleagues wanted three volumes. Oxford University press said that two would be hard enough to sell as it is, so Barrett and others will publish the third volume under a different title through a different publisher. If you want statistics, this is where to go. It has country-by-country information and multiple religions information. This is foundational for all statements that should be made about the worldwide status of Christianity and other religions. For example, you probably heard it said, and you may have said yourself, that currently there are more international cross-cultural missionaries from the non-Western world than from the Western world. The statistics say that is not true. Although the majority of Christians in the world live in the non-Western world, the fact is that a majority of missionaries who go internationally still come from the West. It is those sorts of hard statistics that Barrett and others have put together. They keep us from going from our general impression of things, which is not right all the time. It takes a while to become familiar with how to use this book, but if you really want to get into the statistics, you need to take time to go through the graphics. If you do any study on any country, this is one book that you need to look at.

Some good journals about missions are *Mission Frontiers* by the United States Center for World Mission in Pasadena and Wycliffe's *In Other Words*. As we will note during the course, the United States Center for World Mission in Pasadena is at the forefront of formulating strategic missions thinking. They are behind the perspectives course, adopt-a-people, and all those sorts of things. You cannot be familiar with up-to-date missions thinking in North America particularly or worldwide without being connected to the people in Pasadena.

I look forward to having a good and challenging time during this class. Let us talk a little bit about the challenge that comes with this course as we look further at the course purpose. The course purpose is "to be gripped in a personal and integrated way by world mission as the triune God's redemption of the cosmos wherein He grants, among all the world's peoples, faith in Jesus Christ, maturing of the church, and foretastes of the new heavens and the new earth." Let us break that down some. The first part is to be gripped. A course like this cannot just be an intellectual exercise that is interesting but simply a requirement. We will all come into this course with different understandings about world missions. Whatever the case, my prayer and hope is that, as we are together in this course, God will press on us by His Spirit through His Word as we meet together to be gripped by His grace, mercy, and commitment to

carrying out His mission. That is something that demands your soul, life, and all. For that to be a further, deep, overriding, gripping factor and center of your life is what this course aims at. I want you to be gripped in a personal and integrated way. This course is aimed at you and me. Each of us is involved in what God's mission is about in one way or another. It is not something that we can hold at arm's length. There is a danger, threat, wonder, and glory as far as that is concerned. It is to be gripped personally and in an integrated way. One of the easiest things that happens to missions, whether in a theological curriculum, in a church, or in someone's individual life, is for it to be off on the side. It might be something that if you are eccentric, somehow specially called, or cannot do something here, then you are involved in missions. This course seeks to integrate God's mission into all of your thinking and life. As you are involved in ministry in your local church or in a particular company, missional lifestyle should be a centering point for who you are. What you study in systematic theology, practical theology, biblical studies, and previously in economics all needs to be brought to bear and encountered by the kinds of things we will run across in this course. The purpose is to be gripped in a personal and integrated way by world mission.

World mission is the integrating phrase that I use. We will talk in just a minute as to why I selected that phrase and not the specific term missions. Missions is a good word, and they are interrelated, but world mission, for me, is a more comprehensive term. It is a phrase for how God is intent on redeeming His world. In short, missions, to my mind, fits under that. It describes much of what we do as God has called us to move cross-culturally in ministry. God's comprehensive world mission is to buy back, recreate, remake, and make right His world that has become lost in sin and turned its back on Him. In that sense, world mission is a working definition, but it is one that I find helpful at this point.

World mission is, first, the triune God's redemption of the cosmos. Mission, first of all, basically and fundamentally, is God's work. It is God's mission. We participate with Him, but it is His work. It is the triune God's work. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, from creation forward, have always been about making, remaking, and redeeming the entire world. To say that it is the triune God's work also has another implication specifically related to recent developments in worldwide Christianity. Because in recent centuries for many parts of the non-Western world, the Christian faith has come into their settings from the West, Christians in the non-West have faced the challenge of integrating their newfound identities as Christian people. Insofar as the Christian faith has come via the West, there automatically have been Western associations with Christianity, speaking in general terms. But people who live outside the West are not Western people. So you have to integrate your own identity. One way that people have tended to do that in certain settings in the non-West is to believe that "God is triune" is a Greek construct. They think that the only reason the doctrine of the Trinity developed is because it took place in Western Greek and Latin settings. They do not think they need that Western construct, so some people have tended to brush aside that God is triune in wanting to understand the God of the Bible in more indigenous, contextual terms.

I speak in general terms, and this has by no means always happened, but it has happened at certain points. That throws the good out with the bad, and it falls prey to the temptation to overlook 2000 years of Christian history. We firmly align ourselves with traditional evangelical orthodoxy by understanding God as triune. Sure, some of the formulation of the Trinity took place in their intricacies in particular Greek and Latin settings. But God is triune—that is who the God of the Bible is. We affirm that and place ourselves squarely within traditional orthodoxy. World mission is the triune God's redemption of the cosmos. He buys back in the Lord Jesus Christ the entire creation. It is a full-embracing redemption of everything. Yes, there is judgment on the wicked, and it does not mean that everyone is going to be saved. God is about more than simply religious, spiritual saving of individual souls. God is about remaking the entire cosmos. Romans 8 says that all of creation groans in anticipation of the full bodily

redemption of the sons of God. That cosmic redemption points toward the fact that an important reality in God's mission is the defeat of Satan and his hosts. The whole awareness of the spiritual world is something that many of us who have scientific backgrounds do not see as much as other people see and as what we see in the Bible. When you read the Bible you realize that the full scope of God's redemption, the defeat and crushing of the head of Satan, the cross, and the resurrection are central to what God's redemption is all about. The ongoing tussle with the forces of Satan and his principalities and powers is part and parcel of what God's redemption is all about. The triune God grants us grace. What God is about in redeeming His world is all out of His grace and the goodness of His heart. God made a good world; the representative heads, Adam and Eve, sinned, fell, and rebelled. God had every right to bring immediate judgment, but instead He brought both consequences and immediate commitment out of His grace to send the seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. It is recorded right there in Genesis 3, and it records for us that ongoing goodness of God to make the world right. He brings about His people by His grace, not by anything that we can do or anything that we really want to do.

What God grants takes place among all of the world's people. This is extremely important. In understanding all of Christian living and ministry, particularly when you talk about Christian missions, you already discuss multiple peoples, cultures, and cross-cultural ministry. The Christian faith at its heart inherently involves multiple cultures. The fact that you and I are followers of Jesus Christ and talking about God's world mission in this course in the English language is testimony to the multicultural reality of the Christian faith. Jesus did not speak English, and God did not give His Word originally to us in English. Just the fact that we are here is already testimony to that. As we see in looking at Christian history, the Christian faith has often been on the brink of destruction as it has been confined to one culture. Then you see it pass to another culture, and the Christian faith flourishes there. Much of what we see in our day in contemporary macro history has been a recession of the Christian faith out of Europe, but instead of the Christian faith being choked out, look at what has happened in the rest of the world. That is really the essence of the Christian faith. When Paul says that all have sinned and all are saved by faith, he talks about all sorts of people. Paul fought hard for that multicultural reality of the Christian faith against the Judaizers, who wanted to confine God to being the God of only one sort of people. They wanted to make God a tribal God. All religions, including the Christian faith, will have a tendency, because we are sinful human beings, to try to confine God to be the tribal God of only one kind of people. That is a tendency, but God will not let that happen to Christianity. He works by His grace among all the world's peoples to grant faith in Jesus Christ, repentance and faith, and trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior. Jesus Christ is the exclusive way to know God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." It is by repentance and faith by individuals and sometimes by peoples.

Those of us who live in a part of the world that instinctively stresses, in many good ways, the importance of individuals do not see as readily as some others the place of household baptisms we see in the Scriptures, for example. We hear about whole peoples coming to faith in other parts of the world. We can allow for the way God works in different peoples to bring about faith in Jesus of Nazareth, now risen from the dead and reigning in heaven above. He grants "faith in Jesus Christ, maturing of the church, and foretastes of the new heavens and the new earth." I use a comma to separate these three elements of redemption. We can look at them and think of them separately, but they will always need to be interrelated. You do not just trust and follow Jesus Christ apart from the organized Christian church. Neither of those takes place totally apart from wider sociopolitical, economic, public concerns. That is referred to in the third element of redemption. These are separate but always connected. Maturing of the church is always a part of God's mission. That will mean observable, objective, numerical growth of the church. God is concerned about that. It will also mean God's intent on maturing, refining, rebuking, and

nurturing His people where we already are. That is a part of His ongoing mission. Just because there are churches that live and exist in a certain place and among certain peoples in the world does not mean that is not a part of the mission field. God is always concerned about His people growing, learning, and maturing.

Without that perspective and reality, if you go into a place cross-culturally where the Christian church is not as strong or prominent, you will assume that you have little or nothing to learn. You will assume that you take the whole truth and nothing but the truth into this new setting, but you will unwittingly also take imperfections and cultural realities that will not be pertinent to the new setting. That is what gives rise to cultural imperialism and unhealthy relationships across cultures. God is always concerned about His people, and that is a part of His ongoing mission. What you see in cross-cultural mission activity is change that results in the target culture but also change in the people who go and learn. God also grants foretastes of the new heavens and the new earth. Part of God's mission is His wider concern for public matters of justice, for example. It is beyond me to think that it is outside of God's missional concern for His world in thinking about the north-south economic and affluence gap in the world today. That is a part of God's missional concern. That is not the only thing about God's missional concern, which some people want to reduce God's missions to. But it is certainly a part of His concern. Racial relations, socioeconomic relations, justice for workers and business owners, and gasoline prices are all a part of God's full-orbed, wide missional concern for His world. In general terms, that is the purpose of this course as we look at God's mission. Much of the course will involve breaking all that down and talking about the particulars of it.

Let us talk about the course objectives, of which there are six. One of them is to become more aware of the world, God's mission, and the church therein. That is meant to be taken for what it says. I want you to become more aware of what is happening in various places and in the church of Jesus Christ in the world and what God is up to there. Therefore we will read about Latin America, for example. Second, I want you to hear afresh the biblical meaning of world mission and of the Gospel. Cross-cultural interaction and intercultural interaction will bring fresh insights into the Word of God. We hear the Scriptures differently as we are located in different cultural settings. We all can stand a fresh hearing of what world mission is about and what the Gospel is all about. Third, we will integrate world mission with the Reformed and covenantal theology and worldview. What Reformed thinking is about needs to be informed by world mission and vice versa. We are here at Covenant Theological Seminary, and we think as Reformed people, but that is not necessarily set in concrete as to what that looks like. Fourth, we want to identify the current historical situation of world mission. This is particularly important, because many of the questions and issues that arise in connection with world mission matters are related to where we are in history. If you know the macro mission situation of where the world Christian church is and where world mission is, it can help you locate those questions and answer them constructively. To look at where we are historically is important. Fifth, we want to become more conversant with influential missiological concepts and terminology. This includes people groups, unreached people groups, and the Three-Self Church. Last, we want to reconsider and plan toward our necessary particular involvements in world mission. We are all involved necessarily and in particular ways. We want to look concretely at such things as cultivating world mission emphases and programs in the local church, going, sending out, or receiving short-term and long-term cross-cultural missionaries. Some of us send missionaries, and some of us receive missionaries. More and more in our world, it has become that all of us send, and all of us receive. We will look a good bit at money matters in various facets. We will look some at on-site tactics, methods, and issues. And in general, we will look at living as Christian people. Those are specific objectives as we head into this course.

Let me give a few further definitions and clarifications. The term missions is a good term, but I think the

way that it is normally used refers to our various activities. Let me tell you where in the Covenant Seminary theological curriculum missions fits. For example, it could be in practical theology, systematic theology, or biblical studies. Practical theology is the instinctive guess, and it might be there for good reason. When you look at a typical evangelical view of how theology is schemed out, you have biblical studies at the foundation of the verbally inerrant Bible. Then you have systematic theology, and out of that you have a theology of mission that you formulate, and then you have practical mission principles that you apply from this established mission theology. That puts it within the practical theology department. Sherk notes for us that it was Fredrick Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century who set the pattern of putting mission studies within the practical theology division of a theological curriculum. That is the way we normally think about it. Interestingly enough, at Covenant Seminary, mission studies is within the church history department. When you ask why it is this way, most people say that it just happened that way. I think it is a good place for mission studies. God's mission has been taking place within the history of the Christian church. Actually, mission studies is one of those theological disciplines that does not really have a home. It leeches onto and draws from all other departments. You need systematics, biblical studies, church history, and practical studies as you do mission studies. The reverse is also true. Systematics needs the input from mission studies. Mission studies has its own particular characteristics, but it also interrelates and interacts with other disciplines in the theological curriculum. One author notes that more creative and constructive mission studies interacts meaningfully with various levels of theological study. Your exegesis will interact with mission life and practices. Your theology in mission will not be all the way set because you do not know what mission is about from one cultural location only. Your theology that comes out of the Old and New Testament will be affected by intercultural and cross-cultural interaction. Yes, the Bible is set and God is unchanging, but at the same time, how we understand God and relate to Him is affected by intercultural interaction that is intimately related to what mission is all about.

Let me illustrate how mission studies interacts with the rest of our theological thinking. Missions, as commonly used, refers more to practical activities. That is a good term, and I do not want you to hear me telling you not to use that term anymore. I use the term missions, and you should use it as well. In this course, we will look at God's world mission in a more comprehensive sense. We will look at missions studies in ways that interact with other theological disciplines. Missiology as a discipline becomes perhaps a little more complicated than we might originally think. Allen Tippett is one of the originators of missiology as a theological discipline in North America. He says that the theory and theology of missions is at the center as theology, anthropology, history, ethno-theology (theologies of or done by different peoples), ethno-history, and the expansion of the church interacts. As all those things interact, then you have the theory and theology of mission. That begins to show how demanding missiology is as a theological discipline. Tippett expands on that to give us a better idea of what really is involved. Really almost anything comes into play with missiology. He includes repair work, discrimination, Chinese studies, church relations, administration, and economics, among other things that interact all around in complicated ways with each other as we think about mission and ministry in particular cultural settings. That serves to illustrate how demanding missiology is. Verkuyl also talks about missiology as a discipline. For example, when you look at the term missiology, you have *missio*, a Latin term, combined with *logos*, a Greek term. It is already something more complicated than you realize. It is a demanding academic exercise.

Charles Van Engen, who has written a number of influential works, maps out missional theology in a related sense. When you talk about a particular integrating theme and you want to think in a missional way about race relations or church planting in a certain community, you talk about the interaction of the foundational biblical texts that relate to that, the faith community church of which you are a part, and the particular missional context. That will then lead you into that particular theme in thinking missionally

about that theme. Van Engen expands on that in a way that shows us how all these different areas interface, focused on Jesus Christ. You have to think about sociology, leadership issues, and women in ministry so many times in approaching various issues missiologically. You cannot think about race relations in a town without realizing urbanizing trends, for example. We need to think in a Christian and missional way about how God would have us move, think, pray, and labor. That serves to illustrate the intricate and demanding nature of mission studies.

Andrew Walls says, "Culture is the workplace of theology." That is not to say, as some want to assert, that religious understanding in general and Christian theology in particular is confined to particular cultural locations. That is what some people want to say, that if you are involved in one culture you have nothing to say to another culture. They say that if you are in one culture you have nothing to learn from another culture. That absolutizes human culture. That is not what Walls means. He means that Christian theology does not take place in a vacuum. Christian theology is intercultural, but it takes place as formulated by human language, particular people, with particular concerns, and within particular settings. That is what a culture is, and that is where Christian theology takes place.

Finally, in going through this course, we will look at world mission in a comprehensive way as the triune God's redemption of the cosmos wherein He grants, among all the world's peoples, faith in Jesus Christ, maturing of the church, and foretastes of the new heavens and the new earth. As we go through the course, we will weave our way through, in some order that will not make a whole lot of sense, approximately 37 topics. As some handles for going through the course, let me point you toward four matters. To come to grips in a personal way with world mission means that you will need to integrate the theology of mission or missiology with other theological disciplines yielding missional theology. As we will see during the course, one of the pitfalls of the practical modern missions movement is that we have not had enough theologians involved. The reverse is also true in that one of the pitfalls of the development of modern theology is that there has not been enough missional input. We need to integrate and interact. Similarly, we need to take on a missional lifestyle.

Second, as we go through the course, generally speaking, we will go from theoretical matters to more applied matters. We will get some theoretical things right at the start, but we will move gradually into more concrete matters as the course progresses. You might be more concrete and visually oriented, thinking, "Just tell me how many missions conferences to have in my church each year." If that is where you are, hang on. The answer to that question needs to be informed by more theoretical matters. If you have more of a theoretical bent, you need to realize too, for example, that what happens in caring for this two-month-old child who has been abandoned in this suburb in Nairobi is also a deeply theological matter. The two will work together. Third, historical thinking is very important. We need to realize that there has been a past, we are in the present, and we are heading somewhere. Within God's overall redemption, that historical progression within His providence is very important. Finally, the thing that might make the course most demanding is that I hope that as we encounter different readings and meet together there will be a measure of cultural decoupling and broadening. I want you to be forced to take a step back from yourself and your own setting to gain a critical distance. That will hurt and be uncomfortable, but it will be an integral part of the course.

Next time we will talk about global Christianity. Consider this question for next time, "What are the critical elements or who are the critical players in the process of contextualizing the Christian faith?" Think about contextualization, what is involved with it, what the critical parts of it are, and who the most important players are. That is a guiding question that will help steer you for next time.