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Theme: RCA Mission in Chiapas: History and Prospect

Introduction to This Issue

The *Reformed Review* is pleased to present this issue on the Reformed Church in America's mission in Chiapas, Mexico. As the Mission Statement of the *Reformed Review* says, one of its goals is to "preserve the history of mission in the Reformed Church in America." Because of its proximity to the United States and Canada, because of its dramatic story, and because of its rich results, this mission in Chiapas in cooperation with the Presbyterian Church of Mexico has drawn continuous and strong support from the people of the R.C.A. We are pleased to tell its story here.

Long-term missionaries and an administrator for the Chiapas mission have written the articles in this issue. J. Samuel Hofman begins by providing an overview of the history of the Chiapas mission, providing good treatment of both the conflict and cooperation that went into it, especially in its first generation. Charles Van Engen situates the Chiapas mission within the history of missiological thought and practice, and draws several pertinent conclusions for world mission in general. Vernon J. Sterk discusses the missiological factors that contributed to the remarkable growth of the church in Chiapas. Finally, Roger DeYoung discusses the rise of mission partnerships between classes and churches and the Chiapas churches. The issue ends with a comprehensive list of the long-term cross-cultural missionaries from the R.C.A. who served in Chiapas.

The Chiapas mission of the R.C.A. is winding down, having helped during most of the twentieth century to build a strong indigenous church that can stand steadily on its own feet and do its own mission. Now we should raise the question: Is God calling the R.C.A. to carry out a similar cross-cultural mission to a key part of the world in the twenty-first century?

Robert E. Van Voorst
Editor

The History of the Chiapas Mission

J. Samuel Hofman

The State of Chiapas is about half the size of Iowa. It is a remote and neglected green jewel snuggled up against Guatemala. Geographically and culturally it should be part of Guatemala. But in 1824, following the war of independence when both Mexico and Guatemala broke free from Spain, Chiapas chose to become part of Mexico.

Chiapas has been called the Sleeping Green Giant. It is a rugged, mountainous area, kept lush and green by heavy rainfall coming from three directions. On the southwestern coast, the fertile strip of land between the mountains and the ocean receives its rain from the Pacific. The eastern and central part of the state receives its moisture from the distant Caribbean. The rain arrives from the east in late May to relieve the dry season and refresh the fields of recently planted corn and beans. During the winter months, the northern and eastern parts of the state also receive rain from the north. The cold drizzle, called a *norte*, is the final advance of a cold wave that has crossed the Gulf of Mexico. All this rain produces a verdant, productive region.

The surplus water also provides a great deal of hydroelectric power, as it rushes down from the mountains through the valleys and back to the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean.

The Gospel Arrives

The gospel also came to Chiapas from three directions: from Mexico City, from Guatemala, and from Tabasco, the state to the north of Chiapas. Chiapas was a spiritually parched land. The Catholic Church had a spiritual monopoly, dating back to the Spanish conquest in the 1520s. The Catholicism that arrived was medieval, unchallenged by the Renaissance and the Reformation and unrefined by the Catholic Reform. In the centuries that followed, the remoteness and ruggedness of Chiapas, the scarcity of priests, and the illiteracy of the people produced a Catholicism that was more animistic than Christian. The good soil of Chiapas desperately needed the good seed of the gospel.

From 1902 to 1904, visits to Chiapas by English and American missionaries from Mexico City succeeded in planting seeds in Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital city in central Chiapas. But the chaos of the Mexican Revolution that erupted in 1910 made further visits impossible.

At the same time, the gospel was brought from Guatemala to Southern Chiapas by Indian evangelists, who had been converted through Presbyterian mission work in Guatemala. They placed Bibles in the hands of the town officials in the village of Mazapa. The president and secretary were converted, and this humble highland village became a beacon of light for that area.

Guatemalan coffee pickers also brought the gospel to coffee ranches near the town of Tapachula, and a congregation formed in this commercial center at the end of the railroad.

The gospel also entered from the north, from the neighboring State of Tabasco. Tabasco had received the gospel as a result of the American Civil War. Five Confederate soldiers from Kentucky, who preferred exile to Yankee rule, had traveled south more than two thousand miles to the coastal plain of Tabasco. They carved ranches out of the tropical jungle and married Mexican women.

Their leader was Johnny Green, whose sons became influential political leaders. His son, Carlos Green, was elected governor of Tabasco in 1917. However, it was a turbulent and violent time in Mexican politics. Two years later he was forced out of office. When he attempted to regain the office in 1924, he and his brother were killed by their political opposition.

The Presbyterian Church in Tabasco

Joseph Coffin was another of the men from Kentucky. He and his Mexican wife waited over ten years for the birth of their first son, whom they named José and dedicated to the Lord's service. José was sent to the Presbyterian Seminary in Mexico City, where he married an educated and dedicated young woman, Luz Otero. After his graduation, they returned in 1905 to serve in remote Tabasco. They set up a primary school in Paraiso, and José began his pastoral and evangelistic work.

He joined two veteran Mexican ministers who were serving several Presbyterian congregations in Tabasco. Along with three ministers from the Yucatan Peninsula, they had formed the Presbytery of the Gulf of Mexico.

A Presbyterian missionary by the name of Sutherland and the Tabascan ministers had already penetrated into the jungles of northern Chiapas, finding some response in some isolated ranches and villages. In 1920 José Coffin accompanied the Tabascan minister, the Reverend Eligio Granados, on a trip into Chiapas. Their preaching in the village of Tumbala was rewarded with a large number of converts, including both Mexican ranchers and Ch'ol Indian laborers. The ministers immediately baptized all the converts and promised to visit them again. It would be six years before that promise was fulfilled.

The Tapachula Invitation

The number of believers in the southern tip of Chiapas multiplied quickly, including a group in Tapachula, the commercial and communication center of the area. Hearing that there were other Presbyterians in Mexico City, they sent word asking for pastoral help. Responding to the request, the Presbyterian leaders in Tabasco decided to send José Coffin and his wife to Tapachula. They began their work in 1920, and five years later the Presbyterian center in Tapachula included a chapel, parsonage, medical work, six primary schools, and a community Red Cross office. José Coffin had organized three additional congregations and was visiting families and groups of believers in eighty-one locations scattered throughout the interior of Chiapas.

The heavy work load prompted the Coffins to request missionary help from the Presbyterian Mission Board, but it responded that it was already overextended. However, the Presbyterian Mission Board in turn invited the Reformed Church in America to provide a missionary for Chiapas. The Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church responded that it was also already overextended. But when the Reformed Church Women's Board of Domestic Missions heard of the opportunity, it accepted the challenge. The women justified their beginning a ministry in this foreign land by saying that, since most of the Chiapas people were Indians, the board's participation would be an extension of its mission work among the American Indians.

The men's Board of Domestic Missions agreed to join the women in investigating this opportunity. A committee of four made the long trip from New York to Tapachula in 1925. The trip included a long cruise from New York to Veracruz and a slow train trip to the southern tip of Chiapas. The committee consisted of Edith A. Allen and Ada Quimby Knox of the Women's Board and the Reverend G. Watermulder and the Reverend Henry Sluyter of the Board of Domestic Missions.

José Coffin, an ardent Presbyterian, was not pleased when he heard that instead of missionaries from the Presbyterian Church, he was being offered aid from the Reformed Church, which he suspected of being much too liberal. But his concern was eased when he found that one of the women had the hallowed name of Knox. The Coffins were so impressed by her that they named the playground of their school Ada Park.

Edith Allen was also very impressive. The Chiapas Mission later gave her the title, "The Mother of the Chiapas Mission," based on "her quick understanding of the situation in Mexico, her grasp of details, her personal interest in us and in the Mexican workers."[1] Upon return to the US, she wrote a report of the trip and the group's visit with the Coffins. The report included the following question, which gives a blueprint for the future work in Chiapas:

> Shall the Reformed Church in America come to the help of this noble servant of the Master and send preachers, medical workers and such native helpers as may be, to some well chosen and equipped Reformed Church Mission center in Chiapas, to be associated with the Presbyterian forces there in bringing Chiapas into that fellowship of Christ through which in His own time it will itself be able to achieve entirely, not only its own Christian ministry, but also send gospel messengers to Indians of other more remote sections of South America where millions wait the gospel of a Saviour's love and healing?

She answers her lengthy question with enthusiasm:

> The Domestic Boards have said "Yes" to this call from Over the Border, and some in our churches by their gifts have also said "Yes." A noble young son of [our] church and recent graduate of Princeton, with his prospective bride, have answered, "Here I am, send me," and they are going and we are going, all of us—through prayer and love and gifts, for the Reformed Church in America does not put its hand to the plow and hesitate; it does not fail.
>
> Yes, in Christ's name and in His power we are coming to help you, brother Indians of Chiapas! We are coming, honored brother José Coffin,

> and all other lovers of the Master there whose names we know not yet. Blessed heavenly Father, lead thou us on that Thy will may have its way with us for Chiapas and all the great work to which Domestic Missions is called.[2]

John and Mabel Kempers

The "recent graduate of Princeton [Seminary]" with a concurrent M.A. from Princeton University was, of course, John R. Kempers. Born in Sioux Center, Iowa in 1900, he had graduated from Hope College in 1921. He had served one summer at the Comanche Indian Mission in Lawton, Oklahoma, under the Reverend Richard Harper, who recommended him to the Domestic Board for this new venture in Chiapas. His "prospective bride" was Mabel Van Dyke of Holland, Michigan, who was also a graduate of Hope College. Following John's graduation, they were married in August 1925.

On December 4, the Kemperses took the same cruise as the four board members had before them, arriving in Veracruz on December 12. Two weeks later the door closed behind them. The Mexican government began enforcing some of the antichurch laws of the liberal constitution, prohibiting the entrance of foreign ministers and priests into Mexico. Foreign priests and ministers living in Mexico could no longer celebrate the sacraments. Hundreds of priests and nuns were expelled from the country, beginning a long and sometimes violent chapter of conflict between the state and the church in Mexico.

After some orientation and language study in Jalapa and Mexico City, the Kempers took the long train ride to Tapachula, arriving May 1, 1926. Although Coffin had his doubts about this young Yankee missionary couple, he was comforted by the fact that John Kempers was a graduate of the prestigious Presbyterian seminary at Princeton. There would be no theological conflicts between them.

The Kempers's assignment was to reach the Indians of Chiapas. There were six tribes scattered in the rugged north, central, and eastern parts of the state. José Coffin proposed that he and Kempers make an exploratory trip through the state, beginning at the northern border and traveling back south to Tapachula. Coffin intimated that it would be a two-week trip. Coffin was testing the Kempers's commitment and endurance. Leaving their wives in torrid Tapachula, they took the train north and east to Tabasco, where Coffin spent two weeks visiting family and the congregations there. Kempers wrote to Mabel, warning her that the trip was going to take longer than two weeks and expressing his regret that he would not be there to celebrate their first wedding anniversary.

The two men purchased horses and mules and supplies and began the trail into Chiapas. It was the middle of rainy season, the worst time of the year to travel. The

trails were horrendous. The mosquitoes were ferocious. They visited some of the groups of believers on the way, in Tumbala and Yajalon and Chilon, and replaced their worn-out horses five times. Worst of all, sickness struck the pair. Kempers nearly died from food poisoning half way home in the town of Ocosingo. God provided help from an American doctor who happened to be in Ocosingo. A few days later, in Comitan, Coffin became seriously ill with dysentery. Two months after they had left home, the bedraggled pair rode slowly into Tapachula.

Both John and Mabel Kempers passed the first test. Instead of calling the assignment impossible, they took as their motto: *Chiapas para Cristo* ("Chiapas for Christ"). They now knew how challenging it would be. As John Kempers wrote: "If it takes two months to cross the state, how long will it take to cover it?"

The trip through the rugged, remote Indian area revealed how difficult it was going to be to reach these tribes. Kempers decided that their first priority should be to strengthen the Spanish-speaking believers, in hopes that these Mexican believers would later reach out to the Indian tribes around them. On the trip he had seen Ch'ol Indian converts in the congregations in Tumbala and Yajalon. He hoped this would happen in other places as well. So Kempers joined Coffin in the visitation of the scattered Mexican believers, with their saddle horses and mules as their partners in mission. Years later, as Kempers began his retirement in California, he wrote:

> I wish all the Chiapas missionaries would get on their horses and visit the churches in their areas. I know from experience how important that is. There was a time when I knew every believer in Chiapas and everyone knew me. I often traveled two days up and two days back just to visit one family.[3]

The Conflict

Although Coffin and Kempers had the same method of ministry, their different goals brought them into sharp conflict. Coffin was quite content to be the only ordained Presbyterian minister in Chiapas. He would appoint lay chaplains for the new groups and hold elections of elders for the larger congregations. But he was very reluctant to train others for ordination to the ministry. However, he did eventually approve of the ordination of one of his chaplains, Genaro de la Rosa, to assist him in Tapachula and the surrounding area.

Kempers, being a foreigner, was prohibited from administering the sacraments. But he was allowed to teach and preach. And he realized that an even greater priority was the training of leaders for the many congregations in Chiapas. Only a year after their arrival, the Kempers began giving training sessions for the chaplains, with the church building serving as a classroom and dormitory and their home serving as the dining hall. They also initiated youth work and women's societies. All of these new activities

were opposed by Coffin, but they went ahead nonetheless.

Bert and Harriet Kempers

In 1929, when they returned to Chiapas from their first furlough, they were accompanied by John Kempers's brother, Dr. Bert Kempers, and his equally gifted wife, Harriet Heneveld Kempers. They had been called to begin a medical ministry in Chiapas, and they would have made an excellent contribution to the mission work. During the following ten weeks, John took his brother on some long trips over the trails to show him how desperate the health needs were. As Bert Kempers reminisced years later: "We slept in the most awful places and climbed over mountains, crossing rivers, and one time we were caught in a downpour. The horses sunk into the mud up to their knees."[4]

On one trip they bought a "wild eyed belligerent mule" in Comitan to replace a worn out pack horse. As Bert remembered:

> John thought we could tame him with a solid load and we did, though several times as the load shifted, he bucked until objects were scattered all over and twice he bolted and nearly caused us to lose our footing on the narrow ledge. We had other close calls and even now recall, usually at night, how fortunate we were to have escaped alive.[5]

Bert and Harriet were eager to serve in Chiapas. However, the Mexican Medical Society recently had successfully lobbied the government to prohibit foreign doctors from doing medical work in Mexico. The closing of this door and the forced return of Bert and Harriet Kempers to the U.S.A. was a huge disappointment for all of them.

The Move to Tuxtla

To give themselves more freedom from Coffin's control, the Kempers moved to the capital city of Tuxtla Gutierrez in central Chiapas in 1931. There they began working with groups of believers who had first been evangelized nearly thirty years before by the missionaries from Mexico City. The Tuxtla congregation developed quickly to the point where they called a Mexican minister, the Reverend Ezequiel Lango, from Mexico City to serve them. The work was strengthened by Lango's ministry, and eventually the Presbytery of the Gulf gave him the pastoral responsibility for all of the central area of the state, in spite of Coffin's objections.

The Final Battle

Meanwhile Kempers continued to train leaders. At the invitation of Lango, who had returned to serve in Mexico City, two young men from Chiapas, Daniel Aguilar Ochoa and Nehemias Garcia, were sent to the Presbyterian Seminary. Two other candidates for the ministry were taught in the Kempers's home. At last in 1949, three Chiapas men

were ordained at the annual meeting of the Presbytery of the Gulf in Tuzantan, Chiapas. This provided the necessary five ministers to form the Presbytery of Chiapas.

But Coffin kept his foot on the brake as long as he could. In that hotly contested Presbytery meeting, an elder delegate from Tabasco, Carlos Lutzow, cast the deciding vote in favor of forming the Chiapas Presbytery. As Kempers wrote years later:

> That Tuzantan meeting was a humdinger. Two hostile camps. The ordination there of Nehemias, Margarito, and Bartolome was the undoing of Estrella and Coffin that gave us the necessary five to form the Presbytery.[6]

Another letter reflects the strong mixture of admiration and antagonism Kempers had toward Coffin:

> Coffin the lion. A man, a great man, who was destroyed by his own jealousy. He had a way of hypnotizing the unwary to think he and he alone was right. How De la Rosa, Lango, and I suffered under that man. And how the work progressed in spite of him in his spiteful years.[7]

When the leaders of the Presbytery of the Gulf continued to delay the formation of the Chiapas Presbytery, the synod ordered its immediate organization. The historic day was July 14, 1949.

Later that year, Coffin and his wife left Tapachula and returned to Tabasco, unwilling to transfer his membership from the Presbytery of the Gulf to the new Chiapas Presbytery. He was received with honor in his home area, and that same year was elected to be the first president of the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico. He also was invited to speak at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA in Seattle, and he received an honorary doctor's degree from Whitworth College.

Missionary Reinforcements

In the early 1940's Mexico's political leaders relaxed their antichurch prohibitions and the door to missionaries opened slightly. Garold and Ruth Van Engen slipped into Mexico in 1943. They went to Yajalon to prepare to serve the Ch'ol Indian converts in that area.

The tropical climate quickly undermined Ruth's health, and the doctor urged them to return to the USA or at least find a cooler climate. In 1948 they moved to the city of San Cristobal de Las Casas, located at seven thousand feet elevation. There they teamed up with a dynamic, capable Mexican minister, the Reverend Daniel Aguilar Ochoa. Together they developed a Bible school and established a press for religious publications.

At that same time God raised up two mission organizations to share the gospel with the Indians of Chiapas. Mexico was the first challenge for the Wycliffe Bible Translators. They were given permission by the Mexican government to give the 130 Indian languages a written form, to produce literacy materials, and to translate the New Testament into these newly written languages.

Their missionaries entered the six tribes of Chiapas, living in remote villages in order to learn their languages. To provide them with transportation, supplies, and communication, a new organization of Christian pilots and mechanics called Mission Aviation Fellowship arrived in Chiapas. They established a base in central Chiapas at Ixtapa with two airplanes. For thirty-eight years they provided transportation and communication for the missionaries of Chiapas, without suffering a serious injury or fatal accident.

Ch'ol and Tzeltal Response

Two of the tribes responded enthusiastically to this witness in their own languages, the Ch'ol and the Tzeltal tribes. Providentially, one of the Wycliffe couples to the Ch'ol tribe was John and Elaine Beekman, members of the Reformed Church in Midland Park, New Jersey. Under their translation and teaching, the Ch'ol believers multiplied rapidly.

In the Tzeltal tribe, the Wycliffe Translator was Marianna Slocum, a Presbyterian from Pennsylvania. Her partner was a nurse, Florence Gerdel. After enduring several years of hostility and suspicion, there was a gospel breakthrough in a small valley called Corralito in 1949. The missionaries moved to Corralito, and in five years the New Testament translation was completed. Florence Gerdel's medical work prospered also, and under Kempers's supervision a medical building was constructed at Corralito.

The background of these missionaries facilitated the placing of the Ch'ol and Tzeltal work under the Presbyterian Church of Mexico. Daniel Aguilar Ochoa of San Cristobal became the officiating pastor for the Tzeltals, and the Reverend Alejandro Barrios, pastor of the church in Las Margaritas, served in the Ch'ol field. They prompted the selection of elders and deacons and organized the Indian churches, which then joined the Presbytery of Chiapas. The welcome and respect that the Indians received in the Chiapas Presbytery was an uplifting and gratifying experience for the downtrodden Indians.

R.C.A. Missionaries in the Indian Fields

The Wycliffe missionaries planned to move on to new fields of service as soon as the translation of the New Testaments was completed, so R.C.A. missionaries were called to continue the work in the Ch'ol and Tzeltal fields. Al and Nita De Voogd began their

service in the Ch'ol field in 1952, with the daunting task of establishing a Bible school in the jungle on the banks of the Tulija River. With tenacious drive and determination, Al beat back the jungle. With homemade bricks, their home was built on the hillside. Its lower level became the Bible school classroom. Nita's expanding medical work soon necessitated the building of a clinic between their home and the river. The heavy work load, the humid heat, and the jungle insects were a huge challenge.

Paul and Dorothy Meyerink were flown into Corralito in 1955 and began looking for a location for a Tzeltal Bible school. It would be six years before the Lord placed in their hands the beautiful Buenos Aires Ranch, a three-hour walk downriver from Corralito. It soon became evident that establishing a leadership program in a remote location demanded the presence of more than one couple. So in 1959 Sam and Helen Hofman joined the Meyerinks, and Henry and Charmaine Stegenga joined the De Voogds.

The Chiapas Mission

The Reformed Church work in Chiapas for so long had been one solitary couple. Now a group of six couples formed the Chiapas Mission. For the Kempers it meant additional work in communication, orientation, and the complicated struggle to get immigration papers for the new couples. Their home in the capital city became the refuge for renewal and shopping for the four couples living in the remote tribal areas.

For Kempers it also meant that decisions that he had made quickly by himself in past decades now needed long discussions, motions, and votes in mission meetings. As director and treasurer, John Kempers still held the power and pocketbook of the mission. The Kempers had lived through the lean years of the 1930s and taught frugality by precept and example. Accountability was strict and R.C.A. money was not to be wasted in Chiapas. This occasionally produced frustration, as for example when Al De Voogd once objected, "I can't build a Bible school in the jungle on a shoe string!"

The Spanish language churches received a new couple when Gene and Arlene Meerdink arrived in 1966. They began developing a conference grounds in the hills above Tapachula for retreats and leadership training. But Gene had several severe bouts with typhoid, and they were forced to return to the U.S.A. five years later. Their place was taken by Charles and Jean Van Engen. Charles was the son of Garold and Ruth, and thus was fluent in Spanish. He teamed up with the Reverend Jorge Lopez Perez, a gifted young minister, and they developed a Bible school and seminary program that prepared a new wave of leaders for the Chiapas churches.

All four women in the Reformed Church couples serving in the Spanish language were gifted in music and teaching. Mabel Kempers, Ruth Van Engen, Arlene Meerdink, and Jean Van Engen all contributed greatly to the development of church music, and also strengthened the women's societies and the youth work of the churches.

The Kemperses Retire

When the Kempers's retirement year arrived in 1966, the Van Engens and the Meerdinks continued the ministry to the Spanish-language churches. Not that Kempers left willingly, knowing that he still had the health and vitality for additional years of service. To ease the pain of their uprooting, the mission board arranged for them to spend the first three years of retirement in Mexico City, teaching at the Presbyterian Seminary.

In 1967 an additional couple was called to the Tzeltal field. Jim and Sharon Heneveld picked up where the Wycliffe missionaries had left off in the lowland dialect area of the tribe. Later they joined the Meyerinks and Hofmans at the Buenos Aires Ranch, which was transformed into the Tzeltal Bible School. It was a fruitful team, with Paul Meyerink majoring in Bible translation, Sam Hofman in administration of the Bible school and the medical work, and Jim Heneveld in literature production. They and their wives shared the teaching load, offering a wide range of learning opportunities to the Tzeltal believers.

Resistant Tribes

Whereas the Ch'ol and Tzeltal believers multiplied very rapidly, the progress in the Tzotzil and Tojolabal tribes was much slower. This was due to severe persecution. Tribal and village authorities were determined not to permit any change from their animistic Catholicism. The initial persecution in the Ch'ol and Tzeltal tribes subsided quite quickly, but in the Tzotzil and Tojolabal tribes, the persecution was persistent and violent. Wycliffe missionaries and their converts were chased out of the villages. The Tzotzil Christian refugees began accumulating in San Cristobal and the Tojolabal refugees in Las Margaritas. The translations of the New Testaments continued, and eventually the Wycliffe missionaries and their Indian translation partners produced New Testaments in Tojolabal and in five dialects of the Tzotzil language.

However, all of the Wycliffe translators who served in these two tribes were from Baptist and independent churches. They were not comfortable with the idea of placing the Indian converts under the care of the Presbyterian Church of Mexico, preferring that the Indian converts remain independent and free to develop their own style of church government. But in the heat of the persecution, it was the Mexican Presbyterian Church leaders and believers who came to the aid of the persecuted Indians. As the Wycliffe missionaries completed their translations and moved on, the Tzotzil and Tojolabal believers asked the Presbyterian leaders to receive and organize them. This helped in their relationship to regional and state government officials, as the Presbyterian Church was recognized and respected.

This meant that additional missionaries were needed for these new fields. In 1969, Vernon and Carla Sterk arrived and moved into Navenchauc, a village known to be a

center of witchcraft and alcoholism in the Zinacanteco Tzotzil tribe. The Zinacantecos were still completely closed to the gospel, having resisted previous attempts by Wycliffe missionaries to begin work in their tribe. Through medical work and community projects, the Sterks cautiously began their language learning and witness.

Progress in the Ch'ol and Tzeltal Areas

In 1966, the Stegengas welcomed John and Mildred Bode to the Ch'ol Bible School. John was an agronomist from central Iowa, and he introduced the Ch'ol and Tzeltal believers to some appropriate modern methods of agriculture. After three years of fruitful and helpful ministry, they returned to Iowa, where John began a valiant ten-year battle with cancer.

Paul and Dorothy Hostetter arrived in 1973 to provide the Stegengas a long-term partner at the Ch'ol Bible School. Paul's previous experience in the Sudan and Pakistan was valuable, and Dorothy was a gifted linguist, teacher, and musician. They assisted the Stegengas and the Ch'ol church in the transfer of the Bible school from the remote jungle location to the central town of Palenque, a location famous for its spectacular Mayan ruins.

The medical work in the Tzeltal field grew as the church expanded, with more than sixty village health workers serving their people's basic health needs. In 1975 Dr. Glenn and nurse Carolyn Folmsbee responded to the need for medical missionaries to continue the training of these "paramedics." The Folmsbees established a medical training center in their home in Yajalon, a location that also enabled them to develop a network of twenty health workers in the Ch'ol tribe.

Ups and Downs in Mission Work and Missionaries

In June, 1977, Chris and Henny Platteel arrived from Canada to begin their work in the Tojolabal tribe, constructing a home in the remote village of Santa Lucia. This brought the Chiapas Mission to its peak membership of ten couples, serving in five languages: Spanish, Ch'ol, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Tojolabal. But 1978 was to be a year of serious losses. Hank Stegenga's slow recovery from hepatitis and typhoid forced them to make the difficult decision not to return to Chiapas. The Henevelds were forced to leave when Jim became seriously ill with regional enteritis. Chris and Henny Platteel's baby died shortly after birth in Tuxtla. His grave is the only Reformed Church missionary grave in Chiapas. Garold and Ruth Van Engen retired after thirty-five years of faithful and helpful ministry. And Paul Meyerink's surgery to remove a brain tumor in 1979 threatened to end their fruitful ministry.

There were more disappointments to come. In 1980 the Hostetters moved to California to serve in the Garden Grove Church, where Paul became minister of evangelism and missions. A year later the Platteels returned to Canada following the death of yet

another infant son.

As an increasing number of Chamula and Zinacanteco Tzotzils responded to the gospel, the persecution increased. Thousands were expelled from their villages, not only evangelical converts but also renewed Catholics. The Sterks moved to San Cristobal de Las Casas and for several years worked to care for these refugees, helping them resettle in San Cristobal, and, with funds from Reformed Church World Service, helping them purchase land and build new evangelical villages in the nearby hills.

One encouragement was the arrival of Al and Sue Schreuder in 1981 to join the Sterks in the large Tzotzil field. They began their orientation and ministry in the unevangelized village of Potovtic. There they survived and endured the eruption of the nearby Mt. Chichonal in 1982. When the town drunk was converted and left his alcoholism, the village leaders felt threatened and asked the Schreuders to leave. They moved to the Christian refugee village of Betania and later joined the Sterks in San Cristobal to participate in the leadership training program at the Tzotzil Bible School. Al has also given direction to the medical work, and Sue is inaugurating women's work in the Tzotzil tribe.

More Reinforcements

The year 1984 brought needed reinforcements to the Chiapas Mission. Bill and Peg De Boer, whose first visit had coincided with the volcano's eruption, began ten years of fruitful service at the Ch'ol Bible School, now located in Palenque. Steve and Sue Van Bronkhorst also arrived in 1984 to begin work in the Amatenango dialect of the Tzeltal tribe, a section of the tribe that had persistently resisted evangelization. The Van Bronkhorsts gained permission to live in the central village of Amatenango, until the conversion of several families. These families and the Van Bronkhorsts were then forced out of the village and moved to the nearby town of Teopisca. There they were joined by a Tzeltal missionary couple, Roberto Santis and his wife, Micaela. In 1989, the Van Bronkhorsts returned to the U.S.A. because of Steve's health problems. But Roberto and Micaela continued the outreach, and after years of struggle and persecution, a church was established in Amatenango.

Also returning to Chiapas in the fall of 1984 were the Meerdinks. They assisted in the development of the Girls' Bible School in Berriozabal, north of Tuxtla, the capital city. Also for five years they participated in the birth and development of the seminary at that same location. Gene also played a major role in the development of the Media Center in San Cristobal.

Departures and Arrivals

From 1985 to 1995 there was a confusing flow of missionaries from and to Chiapas. In 1985, Charles and Jean Van Engen moved on to Holland, Michigan, where Charles

would teach at Western Theological Seminary. This left an empty spot at the Tapachula Conference Grounds that has never been refilled.

In that same year, Dr. Moises Ocampo Torres of Toluca, Mexico, began his ministry in the Tzotzil tribe. He developed a paramedic training center in San Cristobal and now has a network of thirty Tzotzil paramedics, who are treating over twenty thousand people a year. He and Al Schreuder also oversee the medical work in the Ch'ol and Tzeltal areas.

In 1990, Brian and Donna Renes of Sioux Center, Iowa, arrived to serve in the Tojolabal tribe. They joined the Hofmans in Las Margaritas, who had transferred south from the Tzeltal tribe in 1988. The arrival of the Reneses permitted the Hofmans to return to the Tzeltals in 1994 for the revision of the highland Tzeltal Bible and the translation of the New Testament into the Amatenango Tzeltal dialect, and the preparation of their hymnals.

In 1992, the Folmsbees and the Meyerinks reached retirement age. In 1993 the DeBoers returned to the USA and began their ministry to the American Indians in Dulce, New Mexico.

Then came the happy return of the Henevelds to the Tzeltal tribe in 1994. Their arrival coincided with the Zapatista revolt and the occupation of the Tzeltal Bible School by rebel Indians. They moved to Ocosingo and have had a very fruitful ministry teaching in the Bible school established there by the lowland Tzeltals. Jim has also assisted in a new translation of the Bible in the lowland dialect, and Sharon has developed a prison ministry.

In 1995, the illness of one of the Renes daughters and the political uncertainties caused by the Zapatista revolt forced the Renes family to leave Chiapas. Brian became a translation consultant for the United Bible Societies and now gives valuable computer training to missionaries who are involved in Bible translation in Latin America.

Chiapas Reaching Out to Others

In 1925, Edith Allen looked forward to the day when the church in Chiapas "will itself send gospel messengers to Indians of more remote sections of South America where millions wait the gospel of a Saviour's love and healing." From the beginning, the believers in Chiapas have not limited their witness to their own people. The Tzeltal believers shared the gospel with the Huisteco Tzotzil tribe to the west and with the Tojolabal tribe to the south. In the eastern jungle, a Tzeltal missionary learned the language of the Lacandon Indians to evangelize them.

Ministers from Chiapas have served in Texas, California, and Washington. A Tzeltal minister serves a large Mexican church in Morelia, Mexico. Another pastors a church near the capitol city of Tuxtla.

In 1920 the humble village of Mazapa became a lighthouse to its area in Chiapas. Today, two brothers from Mazapa, Jorge and Abner Lopez, are pastors of historic Presbyterian churches in Mexico City. They have both served as president of the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico, and Abner Lopez also serves as director of the Mexican Bible Society.

To prepare Chiapas missionaries for service in foreign lands, Vern Sterk and Chuck Van Engen have developed a missiological study program and are helping build a mission organization called the Chiapas Missionary Association (AMICH). This fulfills Edith Allen's vision of Chiapas missionaries going out into the unreached parts of the world.

Support Personnel and R.C.A. Administrators

We have made no mention of the many short-term and support personnel who contributed to the work in Chiapas, including about a dozen teachers who taught missionary children in their remote locations. Wayne Luben of Colorado carved an airstrip from a hill at the Ch'ol Bible School. Herb Tanis of Illinois drilled wells at the Ch'ol and Tzeltal Bible schools. Dr. Robert Kalee of Michigan taught and equipped thirty Tzeltal paramedics for dental work. Dr. David Barnes of Pella, Iowa, is doing likewise for the Tzotzil paramedics. Dr. Harrison Visscher of Grand Rapids, Michigan filmed and produced a professional quality movie on the Reformed Church's work in Chiapas. Bill and Marge Vander Pol from California helped in the development of the Tzeltal Bible School at the Buenos Aires Ranch. Their airplane and vehicles brought needed equipment for the printing and audiovisual ministries. There is a long list of couples and work crews who assisted in construction and maintenance projects.

Several couples served as caretakers of the Mission House in San Cristobal, a convenient location for rest, renewal, shopping, and storage for the couples living in remote tribal areas. When this need diminished, the Mission House became the hotel and conference center for the increasing number of visiting groups and work crews that wanted to see and serve in Chiapas. During the past four years, Jeff and Deb Feenstra have welcomed, oriented, and accompanied fifty-nine mission teams from the U.S.A. and nine groups from within Mexico. They have hosted a thousand people in all, including a variety of committee meetings and retreats.

The support and guidance of the Reformed Church's mission administrators, called "area secretaries," became increasingly significant as the decades passed. For the first four decades, Kempers appreciated the freedom from control that their isolation provided them. But the arrival of additional missionary couples increased the importance of the area secretary. The list of area secretaries is a distinguished group of

dedicated and capable leaders. Kempers spoke highly of Zimmerman and Vande Berg. Those of us who arrived in later decades treasure the memories of serving under Russell Redeker, Beth Marcus, John Hiemstra, Howard Schade, Harold Brown, Dick Vander Voet, and Roger De Young. We couldn't have done it without them.

Summing It Up

Nearly eighty years have passed since the Kemperses arrived in Chiapas. The scattered groups of believers then totaled less than one thousand. Today the Presbyterian Church in Chiapas numbers over two hundred thousand, gathering in about thirteen hundred church buildings, and worshiping in six languages. It took John Kempers twenty years to achieve the organization of the Chiapas Presbytery; now in Chiapas there are fourteen presbyteries under three synods.

Chiapas was a unique experience for the Reformed Church in that a large number of missionaries were sent to one area over a long period of time. This provided the opportunity to develop a very solid and supportive mission organization. The Chiapas missionaries all became one family, which is still very united with bonds of love.

The missionaries majored in leadership training, establishing a seminary, five Bible schools, and a paramedic training center. Translation work includes three Bibles and one New Testament. There has also been the preparation and publication of hymnals, concordances, textbooks, pamphlets, and news bulletins in five languages.

Missionary service in Chiapas was also characterized by long-term service. The first six couples averaged more than thirty years of service. The next eight couples averaged more than seventeen years of service. And this was in spite of the serious health hazards that sent several couples home much too soon. This long-term commitment provided continuity and productivity for the work.

Reformed Church missionary couples have invested a total of 350 years of service in Chiapas. That represents a huge amount of financial and prayer support from the people of the R.C.A., living up to Edith Allen's expectations when she wrote eighty years ago: "The Reformed Church in America does not put its hand to the plow and hesitate." We can all rejoice together that as we have given ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, our labor in the Lord has not been in vain.

ENDNOTES

[1] *Chiapas for Christ*, pamphlet published by the Reformed Church Board of Domestic Mission, July 1958, 4-5.
[2] *Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field*, June 3, 1925, 341.
[3] Letter to author dated September 23, 1971.
[4] Letter to author dated January 24, 1990.

[5] Letter to author dated March 12, 1989.
[6] Letter to author dated February 27, 1982.
[7] Letter to author dated September 4, 1971.

Mission Basics 101:
Lessons from Chiapas for the 21st Century

Charles Van Engen

The state of Chiapas is the southernmost of the thirty-six states of the United States of Mexico and borders Guatemala and the Pacific Ocean. Roughly half the size of Iowa, Chiapas has two major mountain ranges. Rising to around ten thousand feet above sea-level, they cut the state in thirds. Around three-quarters of its nearly three million people speak Spanish. The other quarter speak five Mayan languages as their heart language (Tzeltal, Ch'ol, Tzotzil, Tojolabal, Lacandón) and Zoque, an ancient pre-Columbian[1] language coming from the neighboring Mexican state of Oaxaca. Four other pre-Columbian languages, Mam, Quiche, Chiapa, and Motozintlec, are no longer spoken in Chiapas.[2] Today, over a quarter of the state are Protestants, the largest percentage of any state in Mexico.

For approximately the first thirty years of Reformed Church in America (R.C.A.) presence in Chiapas, R.C.A. missionaries worked predominantly among the Spanish-speaking Presbyterian churches. Today, about one-half of all Presbyterian Christians in Chiapas speak Spanish. They have been instrumental over the years in supporting and encouraging the growth and development of the churches in the Mayan areas.

Although we in the Reformed Church associate the beginning of the mission work in Chiapas with the arrival there in 1925 of pioneer missionaries John and Mabel Kempers, they were not the founders of the Presbyterian churches in Chiapas.[3] And John Kempers was not the originator of some of the basic principles that guided the mission work in Chiapas. In 1920, five years before the Kemperses arrived in Mexico, the foundation had been laid by the Reverend José Coffin (1881-1956), a Presbyterian pastor from the neighboring state of Tabasco.[4] Coffin's father was a Scottish-American Presbyterian from the U.S. and his mother was a Mexican native of Tabasco.[5] Coffin had been assigned by the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico to carry out evangelistic mission work among, and supervise the development of, the churches in the state of Chiapas. By the time the Kemperses arrived in Chiapas, there were six major Presbyterian church centers in the state.

- Tuxtla Gutierrez (1903—from where eventually grew the Zoque work);
- Mazapa de Madero (1910);
- Yajalón (1915—from where eventually grew the Ch'ol churches);
- Tapachula (1915).
- San Cristobal de Las Casas (1918—from where eventually grew the Tzeltal and Tzotzil churches); and
- Las Margaritas (1919—from where eventually grew the Tojolabal churches).

In 1902, in the capital city of Tuxtla Gutierrez (central Chiapas), a Presbyterian missionary from the U.S, Edwin McDonald, shared the gospel with a group of Christian Endeavor young people who eventually became the founders of the church there. Everywhere else in the state, the first groups of believers began almost exclusively through the evangelistic witness of laypersons who shared their Bibles and their faith in Jesus Christ. These early pioneer lay evangelists came from the north (Tabasco) and from the east and south (Guatemala). The church in San Cristobal de Las Casas (the oldest city in Chiapas, dating back to 1528) originates from the witness of a young man, Manuel Molina Espinoza. He came to faith in a Presbyterian church in the neighboring state of Campeche where he had gone to find work. Upon returning home he, his wife, and another couple held public, rather heated debates about the Bible and faith in Jesus Christ with the traditional Roman Catholic clergy and the seminarians from the local Roman Catholic seminary. So began of the Presbyterian church in that city. For the past one hundred years, Presbyterianism in Chiapas has been a predominantly lay-led, popular movement.[6]

In this context, José Coffin established the following basic guidelines for mission in Chiapas.

1. Personal Evangelism (over against public campaign evangelism).
2. Rural Work (over against church development in the cities that was the Presbyterian pattern in much of the rest of Mexico at the time).
3. Ministry of the Laity. In each small congregation of believers, he would name *capellanes*, lay chaplains who would preach, visit homes of interested inquirers, and be the organizational leaders of the new believers.
4. Pastoral Leaders were to be chosen on the basis of their experience, giftedness, and leadership recognized by their congregation, and all leadership positions were to be voluntary, with no remuneration.
5. Clear Ecclesiastical Structures were taught and carefully organized along the lines of Presbyterian polity.
6. Avoid Publicity whenever possible, due to the constant harassment and persecution of the believers, persecution that dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century.

Arriving with Mabel in 1925, John Kempers began his missionary career in Chiapas with a three-month trip, traveling with José Coffin on foot and by horseback from Palenque on Chiapas's northern border with Tabasco, through the mountainous central region, down the eastern side of the state bordering Guatemala, and ending up in Tapachula where Mabel was waiting for him. In 1925 and 1926 much of this area was virgin jungle crisscrossed by muddy trails along swollen rivers and rocky slopes covered with ancient pine groves. Beginning with that trip, over the next several years Kempers was initiated into mission in Chiapas by José Coffin, learning Coffin's mission

guidelines.

Twenty years later, in the late-1940s, John Kempers and José Coffin would butt heads over the autonomy of the work in Chiapas and the formation of the Chiapas Presbytery. (José Coffin would not let go of his "mission field.") And yet it is clear that John Kempers, that young man from the corn fields of Sioux Center, Iowa, would draw his most foundational mission principles for work in Chiapas from his early mentor and co-laborer, José Coffin. With time, Kempers modified what he learned from Coffin and established missiological principles that have influenced the mission practice of R.C.A. missionaries and the Chiapas churches ever since.

John Kempers was also an avid reader, a profound thinker, and an astute and careful missiologist. He read the mission thinkers of his day. In what follows, I want to reflect on that eighty-year history and draw out what I consider to be the seven most foundational mission principles that have guided the work of mission in Chiapas. (There are others, of course, that one might select.) In relation to each of the seven, I will briefly mention the broader global origin of each missiological principle and where Kempers would have encountered it in his reading, summarize the way that principle took shape in Chiapas, and briefly suggest ways in which it may apply to mission in North America in the twenty-first century. My thesis for this essay is that the growth and development of the churches in Chiapas is due in part to following classical, tried-and-true missiological principles that apply equally well for mission in North America in the 21st Century.

1. A Three-fold Goal of Mission – Gisbertus Voetius

The most foundational principle of classical Reformed missiology was articulated by Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676). Voetius was the most influential Dutch theologian of the seventeenth century. J. H. Bavinck and Johannes Verkuyl agreed with and followed Voetius, as has R.C.A. mission theory of the past hundred years.[7]

The Principle

Voetius stated that the biblically based goal of mission is three-fold:

- the conversion of people to faith in Jesus Christ,
- the planting of churches, and
- the glory of God.

The longer history of the impact of the gospel in Chiapas is filled with stories of radically transformed lives in the midst of great poverty and severe, constant, concerted persecution.

In Chiapas

In Chiapas, Voetius's vision was articulated with the motto of the R.C.A. missionaries,

Chiapas para Cristo, Chiapas for Christ. The perspective of the three-fold goal of mission permeated the vision, set the priorities, and guided the day-to-day decisions of the Reformed missionaries and their Mexican partners.[8] This understanding of mission made it necessary to emphasize long-term identification and deep immersion on the part of the missionaries in the culture and life of the people and the churches in each place. The type of mission carried out in Chiapas cannot be accomplished through short-term mission endeavors. Chiapas missionaries have seen themselves primarily as evangelists—and as the supporters, trainers, and equippers of indigenous evangelists.[9] The desire was to be able to share the gospel in appropriate and meaningful ways after having gained the right to be heard because one has become an integral part of the life of the new culture, enjoying close personal relationships with people in that culture.

This meant that Reformed Church missionaries have necessarily devoted long years to understanding their adopted culture, building friendships, immersing themselves in the life of the church in their area, and walking through thick and thin alongside their Chiapanecan friends. Thus from the 1940s through the late 1960s Kempers insisted that any new missionaries coming to Chiapas were expected to spend their first four years living in a village or small town, listening to, worshiping with, and learning from the Christians there. They were essentially forbidden to begin any major programmatic initiatives during those first four years. There was deep wisdom in this way of doing cross-cultural mission. In later decades this approach was not followed quite as closely, with rather significant negative results.

For mission in the 21st Century

Gisbertus Voetius's classical Reformed view of mission is nothing new to the Reformed Church in America. A brief look at the *Evangelism Manifesto* of 1977, the *Ad Hoc Report On World Mission* of 1987, numerous publications of the General Program Council of that decade, the "R.C.A. Ad Hoc Task Force For Mission in the 1990s," and the *Mission Handbook* of the Mission Services Unit of the General Synod Council of the R.C.A. will demonstrate that this perspective remains at the bedrock of the R.C.A.'s missiology. The "Mission and Vision Statement" adopted in 1998 reflects Voetius's vision. And the ten-year goal adopted by the Reformed Church in America in 2003 and 2004 is built on this same commitment to call people to faith in Jesus Christ, to plant a hundred new churches in multiple contexts where people speak many different languages, and to transform all of the life of persons and structures in a given context, to the glory of God. We now know that mission among the multitude of cultures and languages in the cities of North America will require a similar long-term, incarnational, evangelistic, and missional commitment if we are to see new churches born in our cities, to the glory of God.[10] Just how this vision was lived out in actual missionary practice in Chiapas is the substance of next six mission principles.

2. A Holistic Gospel – John Mackay, Helen Barrett Montgomery, John R. Mott

A central figure in Latin American Protestantism generally and Presbyterianism in particular is John A. Mackay (1889-1983). Born in Scotland, Mackay and his wife, Jane Logan Wells, served from 1916 to 1932 as Presbyterian Free Church of Scotland missionaries in Lima, Peru; Montevideo, Uruguay; and Mexico City. In 1932 Mackay became the president of Princeton Theological Seminary and later a major figure in the ecumenical movement. [11] Together with important ecumenical mission leaders like Helen Barrett Montgomery (1861-1934),[12] and John R. Mott (1865-1955),[13] among others, John A. Mackay was part of a generation of mission thinkers that did not split verbal evangelism from social action.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a common understanding of the Bible. Missiologists generally shared a consensus around a classical view of mission that saw the gospel as affecting all of life. They had a common definition of mission, articulated and popularized by the watchword of the Student Volunteer Movement (S.V.M.): "The evangelization of the world in this generation." That watchword was later used by John R. Mott as the title of his most famous book and was also adopted as the motto of the great World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910. The S.V.M.'s watchword assumed a holistic view of mission, even though we must recognize that such a view was too often encased in a Euro-centric goal of Christianization and civilization. Yet even that goal assumed a conversion component. The emphasis on social service of a hundred years ago in terms of agriculture, medicine, and education were not seen as activities over-against verbal proclamation and personal faith conversion. They were seen as integral aspects of proclamation of a gospel that called for conversion. After the Second World War this changed in North American thinking about mission, and a great gulf was created between those who advocated socioeconomic and political change over against those who affirmed verbal proclamation as central to mission.

The Principle

We might state this second principle as follows:

> When a person comes to biblical faith in Jesus Christ there begins a process of conversion that transforms all aspects and every aspect of that person's life both personally and socially.

In Chiapas

In Chiapas, the missionaries and the Chiapas Christians never accepted the North American dichotomy of the 1950s and 1960s between proclamation evangelism and social action. This artificial dichotomy became a significant problem in other parts of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico (N.P.C.M.) and had significant impact in the R.C.A. as well. But not in Chiapas. I believe it was primarily the influence of the ancient

Mayan worldview that would not allow the R.C.A. missionaries to accept a split in their understanding of mission. For a thousand years the Mayans had understood that all of life is interconnected. One's relationship to the deities, one's spiritual and emotional health, one's physical health, family relationships, and the agricultural fruitfulness of one's land are seen as interwoven aspects of one whole. Thus, for the Mayan Christians, their conversion to Jesus Christ was expected to impact every aspect of their lives.

This holistic understanding of the gospel provided the foundation for a host of mission activities on the part of R.C.A. missionaries in Chiapas. Their central desire was that men and women become disciples of Jesus Christ and responsible members of Christ's church (*Chiapas para Cristo*). Yet, while holding to that center, over the past eighty years the Reformed missionaries have been heavily involved in literacy; agriculture; public health; medical clinics; spiritual warfare; education; music; home crafts like carpentry, sewing, and cooking; the relocation of refugees; and continual visitation and support of prisoners. In several cases R.C.A. missionaries helped build whole new towns. Though some may think that the Chiapas missionaries have not been as politically active as they might have been, one needs to consider that all these activities have been carried out in a context of pervasive political corruption, social dislocation, and religious oppression. In the Chiapas context, a holistic gospel and an integral approach to conversion is in fact powerfully subversive and transformational.

For example, from 1917 to 1924 the church in Tapachula was the primary provider of asylum and medical attention for people of the area who were suffering first from an epidemic of smallpox and later from tuberculosis. That ministry eventually became the Red Cross of the area. José Coffin oversaw that ministry just as he had been instrumental in creating the Red Cross in his native Tabasco some years earlier.

From the 1940s to the 1960s the Presbyterian churches throughout the state were at the forefront of efforts to teach people, especially women, to read. From the 1930s to the 1950s John and Mabel Kempers devoted considerable energy to organizing special youth hostels, homes-away-from-home where young people could live in the city in order to further their education. The Bible schools in each area have served a broader educational purpose, with a significant number of Bible school graduates becoming government-paid school teachers in their communities. And ever since Wycliffe Bible Translator Florence Gerdel opened her clinic in Corralito in the Tzeltal area in the late 1940s, the R.C.A. has been heavily invested in supporting the medical and public health work of the Mayan churches through rural clinics.

The holistic mission practice in Chiapas is due in large part to the contribution of the women missionaries. The genius of the R.C.A.'s salary structure for the Chiapas missionaries was that it supported the couple as a team, not individual persons. Thus the missionary wives were freed and empowered to contribute to the mission efforts at whatever level was possible, given each person's giftedness, sense of call, and the

demands of family and children's education. In each case, the balance between missionary action and family commitments changed over time as the children grew up and left for the U.S. to continue their education.[14]

The women missionaries carried out holistic mission. The first medical clinic initiated and supported by the R.C.A. was started by Nita De Voogd, a nurse, on the banks of the swift-flowing Tulijá river, in the middle of the Ch'ol jungle. Nita De Voogd, Dee Meyerink (midwifery), Carla Sterk (parasitology), Carolyn Folmsbee (public health), and Arlene Meerdink (home health) were heavily involved in matters that span the whole of life. They engaged in public health, home health, and the training of paramedics. Home crafts were taught by Sharon Heneveld, Helen Hofman, and Dee Meyerink at the Tzeltal Cultural Center at Buenos Aires. Education of youth and women saw the contributions of Mabel Kempers and Ruth Van Engen (literacy and young women's short courses); Jean Van Engen and Arlene Meerdink (Mabel and Ruth Young Women's Bible School); Carla Sterk and Sue Schreuder in San Cristobal. Mabel Kempers, Ruth Van Engen, Jean Van Engen, and Arlene Meerdink taught music. The Bible translation work would not have been possible without the dedicated work of Dorothy Meyerink, Helen Hofman, and Carla Sterk. The translation, preparation, and editing of periodicals, educational materials, and publications of all kinds involved Mabel Kempers, Ruth Van Engen, Dorothy Meyerink, Dorothy Hostetter, Helen Hofman, Arlene Meerdink, Carla Sterk, Jean Van Engen, and Donna Renes. Sharon Heneveld has taught in a local university and created a program for prison visitation. As has been the case throughout the past two hundred years of Protestant mission work around the world, women were at the forefront of holistic mission action.

For Mission in the 21st Century

It is a reason for rejoicing that at the beginning of this new century, mission theorists and mission practitioners no longer hold to the dichotomy between verbal evangelism and social action created fifty years ago. There is today a very substantial global consensus around the kingdom-of-God theme as a way of building a more holistic view of mission.[15] Missiologists representing every major tradition in Christianity now recognize the need for what some are calling a "missiology of transformation" that seeks to offer a gospel that transforms all of life personally, socially, structurally, and nationally. This is especially true today in terms of mission in the cities of the world. Some years ago, Emilio Castro articulated this view so well.

> In carrying out God's mission, we cannot opt permanently for one aspect of mission or another, be it liberation, development, humanization, or evangelization. These are all essential, integral parts of the mission entrusted to us and cannot be set against one another without becoming, simply, caricatures of what they really are….Our critical approach will be credible only if it is clearly seen to be closely linked to a declaration of our faith in Jesus Christ, if it does not stem from any connection with

> competing ideologies or rival power groups. As Christians participating in a political liberation struggle, it is absolutely essential that we never lose sight of our commitment to the Christian community as a whole and to the deepest roots of our faith. But, at the same time, our evangelism can be credible only when its message is seen to be valid in relation to the often cruel facts of real, everyday situations (Castro 1978: 88; quoted in Norman Thomas 1995:146).

3. The Bridges of God – Donald McGavran

In 1955, Donald McGavran published what some consider the most important mission book of the twentieth century, *Bridges of God*. McGavran spoke out against the prevailing "mission station" approach so prevalent in Africa and Asia at the time, an approach that extracted converts from their culture and natural relationships and isolated them in mission compounds where they became carbon copies of the foreign missionaries.[16] Over against such a practice that he had also seen in his native India, McGavran affirmed that "bridges of God" form the clearest and most effective pathways for believers to share their faith personally and informally with those with whom they have natural affinity relationships. Of course, McGavran did not invent this process of God's mission—it is as old as the church itself. But McGavran suggested that it should be a much more intentional part of mission practice.

The Principle

The most effective means of evangelizing people, especially in resistant areas, is for Christians to share their newfound faith in their heart language and in culturally appropriate ways with those with whom they have natural affinity relationships. The gospel then spreads and the churches grow as a grass-root, popular movement.

In Chiapas

Personal, relational witness has been the primary methodology whereby the churches have grown in Chiapas. From the beginnings of the first churches a hundred years ago until today, no other method of evangelism comes even close to its impact in Chiapas. One person told another person about their newfound faith—who told another person, who told another. As family members watched the changed life (in all its facets) of a new believer, they too would become interested in reading the Bible and eventually becoming believers in Jesus. Often these changes have involved physical, emotional, and spiritual healing, especially from alcoholism. Thousands of fascinating stories abound of the way the gospel spread through natural "bridges of God" in every corner of Chiapas. One of the best collections of such stories is found in Al Schreuder's master's thesis, where he traces the growth of the church in the Chamula (Tzotzil) area—almost exclusively through relational evangelism.

Relational evangelism was rendered even more effective because of a pattern of

constant relocation of people throughout the state. For example, the church centers of Mazapa and Tapachula began because of the witness of coffee pickers from Guatemala. The founders of the church in Las Margaritas (Tojolabal) as well as the early Christians in the Chamula (Tzotzil) and some Tzeltal areas first heard the gospel when they went down to the hot country along the southern coast of Chiapas to work in the coffee plantations. Early Ch'ol believers had gone north to the state of Tabasco to work where they heard the gospel. In his article in this issue of the *Reformed Review*, Vern Sterk mentions the relocation to San Cristobal of thousands of persecuted believers from the Tzotzil areas. This eventuated in the evangelization of San Cristobal. Where thirty years ago there were three or four small, struggling Protestant churches, today the town is literally surrounded by around forty church buildings that are packed with people every Sunday.

Yet over the years, the Chiapas missionaries also used every available technological means at their disposal to share the gospel. They used victrolas (hand-wound phonograph players), flannel graph, filmstrips, an extensive audiotape ministry, 16-millimeter movies, cassettes, and the printed page. At one point my father, Garold Van Engen, was running a printing business that published five monthly periodicals in three languages, had several hundred people enrolled simultaneously in a Bible correspondence course, and printed thousands of pamphlets and tracts. Chiapas missionaries wore out countless mimeograph machines. But the technology was seen as secondary and supplementary to the personal faith-sharing by Christians along their natural relational bridges. The impact of personal witness by Chiapas Christians was so strong that John Kempers had an oft-quoted saying: "The church seemed to grow most rapidly where I was not present."

For Mission in the 21st Century

Everywhere in the world and particularly in Europe and North America, mission along the "bridges of God" is being relearned. We saw the effectiveness of personal witness some years ago when we discovered the phenomenal growth of the house-churches in China in the midst of severe persecution during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Today, if one were to examine fifty books on evangelism published over the past thirty years, at least half of them would be about relational evangelism and personal witness.

The growing trend in new church development today is to establish cell-based churches, house churches, or Bible study groups. And it is increasingly apparent that the postmodern generation's distrust of traditional church structures, styles, and systems in Europe and North America means that the only way they will be able to hear the gospel is from the lips of another trusted person with whom they have a close personal relationship. We now know that over 80 percent of new church members in North America first come to a church because of the witness of a friend, coworker, family member, or business associate. For the R.C.A. to start one hundred new churches in the next ten years, it is imperative that we equip and empower the members of our

churches to share their faith along their natural relational bridges. Of course, this has implications concerning the faith-development of R.C.A. church members. We speak of our faith only when there is something to tell. And that is the subject of the next several principles.

4. The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church – Roland Allen

John Kempers was a follower of Roland Allen (1868-1947). Allen was a British missionary to China (1895) and Africa (1931-1947). A prolific mission writer, Allen is best known for *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours* (1912) and *The Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It* (1927). Allen "ranks among the most influential (missiologists) when it comes to applying biblical principles to missionary work." He is also "credited with being the first to develop the connection between the Holy Spirit and missions." As a strong critic of contemporary mission practice, Allen "challenged what he saw as an over-reliance on professionalism, money, and organization in mission."[17]

The Principle

Following Roland Allen's missiology, this fourth principle is as much recognition of fact as it is a pattern of mission work. The development and growth of the church is first and foremost the spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit, and human efforts and organizations are secondary, at best. John and Mabel Kempers were in complete agreement with this perspective.

In Chiapas

The "spontaneous expansion of the church" took a unique twist in Chiapas. It became a principle of decentralization, one of the most important and foundational operational rules that Kempers insisted on. In his history of the Presbyterian Church in Chiapas, the Reverend Hugo Esponda places this as the first of eight mission principles that Kempers followed.[18] This working principle meant that as new R.C.A. missionaries arrived in Chiapas they were placed in remote areas with little contact with other expatriate missionaries. Garold and Ruth Van Engen were sent to Yajalón and later to San Cristobal, Paul and Dee Meyerink to Corralito, and Al and Nita De Voogd first to Santa Maria and then to the middle of the jungle on the banks of the Tulijá River where three major trails crossed each other in the middle of the Ch'ol area. As director of the Chiapas Mission, John Kempers did this intentionally. He believed that this dispersion would force the expatriate missionaries to have to learn from, work alongside, and depend upon national leadership.

In Kempers's mind, keeping the number of outside missionary personnel small and dispersed would allow for the spontaneous expansion of culturally appropriate churches. Although this made for very difficult cross-cultural ministry, it accomplished the goals John Kempers set. As Roger De Young signals in his article in this same issue,

the foundation of "partnership" in Chiapas between the R.C.A. missionaries and the national leadership was laid with this principle.[19] As Kempers had done with José Coffin, the next generation of R.C.A. missionaries ended up traveling, eating, sleeping, bathing in the rivers, learning culture and language, making major ministry decisions, and carrying out their mission practice alongside their Mexican coworkers. From that time to the present, Chiapas mission practice has never been "us" the American missionaries over against "them" the national leadership. It has always been "us," servants of the church—no matter the place and culture from which we come.

This spirit of close companionship, cooperation, and interdependence is evident in the by-laws of the Chiapas Presbytery, founded in 1949. In spite of Kempers's strong, independent, pioneering, sometimes domineering personality, he refused the privilege of voting in the Presbytery he fought so hard to create. Contrary to the contemporary practice in the rest of the Mexican Presbyterian Church, in the Chiapas Presbytery the expatriate missionaries would have no vote, and they would have voice only when and if the Presbytery invited them to speak. This mode of partnership continues to this day.

This together-with style of operation can be seen even in the recent Bible translation work of the Meyerinks, Hofmans, Sterks, and Henevelds. The principal translators were indigenous leaders, with the missionaries coming alongside only as facilitators and learners. Here lies the relational genius behind the creation of the Commission for Joint Mission, as Roger De Young describes. This pattern was also followed by Vern Sterk (with assistance from Chuck Van Engen) in working with the leaders of the now fourteen presbyteries in Chiapas to create the Chiapas Mission Association.

Roland Allen's concept of the spontaneous expansion of the church gave rise to a second operational rule in Chiapas: do not begin anything that the national church cannot continue. Though this was not always followed (as in the case of the "Media Center"), it colored much of the missiology of the Chiapas missionaries. This viewpoint meant that by the late 1950s Chiapas missionaries no longer paid the salaries of national pastors and evangelists, nor did they pay for church buildings. One impetus for this operational rule was a recognition that the Chiapas Christians themselves could and should support their own pastors at the same economic level as the members and build church buildings that resembled their own homes. The Chiapas missionaries emphasized intentional and concerted teaching about stewardship and tithing, knowing that once a group numbered around fifteen family units who tithed, they could support a full-time pastor and could carry out the programs of their church. In the mid-1960s, this commitment to stewardship and tithing moved Garold Van Engen and Alfonso Marín to work toward creating the first Union of Deacons in the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico.

A second impetus for this operational rule came from the fact that the Chiapas missionaries were always strapped for money. From the 1930s until the 1970s, all

international, cross-cultural mission work in the R.C.A. was supported, funded, and coordinated through the Board of Foreign Missions, with one exception: Chiapas. From its early years, the work in Chiapas was the only international cross-cultural work that the Board of Domestic Missions supported. The domestic (home) board supported pastors and ministries in the five or six Native American mission fields. But the Board of Domestic Missions was not set up to support an operation as complex and costly as the work in Chiapas. So for decades, until 1972 when the two boards were brought together in what became known as the General Program Council, the missionaries essentially had to fend for themselves.

I remember a story that Kempers loved to tell about writing to the secretaries of the Women's Board of Foreign Missions and the Board of Domestic Missions. He needed a horse and did not have the money for it. The first response he received back from the R.C.A. leadership was to question why a missionary would need a horse. In New York and New Jersey to have a horse was a tremendous luxury only the rich could afford. Kempers responded with an explanation as to why he needed a horse to travel the trails of the mountains of Chiapas. After a lengthy correspondence, Kempers finally received the approval and the money to buy a horse. By that time, according to his story, he had bought one horse (with borrowed money), had worn that horse out, and had nearly worn out a second. The systemic lack of support of the Chiapas mission endeavor during its first fifty years forced the missionaries to be very careful with their expenditures and very self-conscious in not funding anything that the national church could do. Thus they focused their energies in Bible distribution, encouraging and supporting lay Bible colporteurs,[20] lay evangelists, and the women of the churches who regularly visited homes of people interested in studying the Bible.

This operational rule also meant that partnership projects were to originate from, and be operationally managed by, primarily the mission practitioners on the local level. Although there have always been high-level church-to-church and mission-to-mission conversations during the past eighty years, they have proven to be rather counter-productive if they are not in touch with the local people, local issues, and local church structures. True mission partnership arises out of close personal relationships of trust, mutual respect, interdependence, and local empowerment.

For Mission in the 21st Century

The traditional Pentecostal movement, the more recent Charismatic movement and what is known as the "New Apostolic Reformation" movement of the past decade have echoed Roland Allen's principal contribution. They have emphasized the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in the renewal, equipping, sending, planting, and development of churches. Those of us from the older historical churches could probably profit from listening more carefully to that emphasis.

Roland Allen's thought, not received well during his lifetime, has had a profound

impact on mission practice in the latter third of the twentieth century. During the past twenty years, for example, two of the best-known restatements of his "spontaneous expansion" perspective can be found in the writings of Peter Wagner and Christian Schwarz. In the early 1980s Wagner wrote *Your Church Can Grow* (1984), in which he describes what he called the "seven vital signs" of a healthy church that grows. This book was reprinted a number of times and read by several thousand pastors in North America and Europe studying missiology or pursuing doctor of ministry degrees in church growth. In 1996 Wagner's idea of "seven vital signs" was restated by Christian Schwarz, who did his doctor of ministry studies under Wagner's mentorship. Schwarz subsequently developed the "eight quality characteristics" of what he called *Natural Church Development* (1998). During the 1990s, Schwarz's "biotic approach" exerted significant influence in the thinking, planning, and processes of church development among a number of Reformed pastors and regional leaders. The approach is almost a carbon copy of Roland Allen's mission theory.

Today's stress on personal giftedness for ministry and on empowering the members of R.C.A. churches for ministry both in the church and in the community draws its theoretical inspiration from the thought of Roland Allen. Allen would also be pleased to see our recent emphasis in the R.C.A. that congregations should parent new congregations as well as our desire that local classes build cooperative mission endeavors with regional groups of churches in other parts of the world.

5. Indigenous Church Principles – Venn/Anderson, Roland Allen, Eugene Nida, and Charles Kraft

Roland Allen was part of a line of thought about the "indigenous church" that began with the Englishman Henry Venn (1796-1873) and the American Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), was restated and expanded by Allen, and then was transformed by the contributions of Eugene Nida, Charles Kraft, and others who brought cultural anthropology to bear upon their missiological reflection. Venn and Anderson are famous for advocating what became known as the "three-self formula:" that the goal of cross-cultural missions should be to establish a church that is self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. They suggested that at that point, the work of the foreign missionary was finished. The "three-self formula" essentially ruled the day for almost a hundred years (the 1840s through the 1940s) in mission thinking generally and in the R.C.A. specifically. It was designed by two mission administrators anxious to have a way to be able to bring to a close mission endeavors in certain parts of the world. The formula played a very important role in focusing attention on the development of the national churches and reducing to some degree the missionary paternalism and control of the day. But missiologically and theologically it proved to be reductionistic and introverted, creating churches that exhibit all over the world fourth and fifth "selves:" self-centered and selfish.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Roland Allen strongly advocated the "three-

self," but with a twist. National churches, he suggested should be "indigenous" in a deeper sense. They should be native to the soil in which they have been born—not potted hot-house plants transplanted from Europe or North America and placed artificially in Asia and Africa. This new concept of "indigeneity" looked beyond the internal church structures and considered the extent to which a church was appropriate to its culture. Interestingly, this new concept of indigeneity arose out the situation of the churches in China. This was true of Roland Allen's thought and also relates to the insistence decades before Allen (in the late 1850s), by R.C.A. missionaries in China that the Chinese church should be autonomous, a truly Chinese church, not an extension of the R.C.A. in China.

In the late 1950s and 1960s the concept was again reshaped. By this time, some folks were beginning to draw insights from cultural anthropology to assist them in their cross-cultural communication of the gospel. And what they began to learn from cultural anthropology caused them to re-define the concept of "indigeneity" once again, giving it a deeper and broader meaning with reference to the worldview of the culture or cultures in which the churches found themselves. This change in mission thinking was huge.

The Principle

The fifth principle appears simple today; it was revolutionary in its day. Simply stated, it insists that congregations in a given context should be appropriate culturally and in every other respect to the context in which they are located.[21]

In Chiapas

In Chiapas, this principle had already been woven into the very fabric of R.C.A. missionary life because of the patterns of decentralization and partnership mentioned above. But over time the importance of cultural indigeneity as understood through the lenses of cultural anthropology became even more important to some. I believe this issue derived from the uniquely close partnership of the R.C.A. missionaries in Chiapas with Wycliffe Bible Translators. It is important to realize that Cameron Townsend (1896-1982), founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, though starting his work in Guatemala,[22] was very much involved—and learned much—from the situation in Chiapas. He was a family friend and some-time partner of John and Mabel Kempers and Garold and Ruth Van Engen. The authors of some basic textbooks that Wycliffe uses to train its translators have names like John Beekman (who worked in the Ch'ol area: see Beekman 1974, 1981) and Bill Wonderly (who worked among the Zoques), both of whom cut their linguistic and anthropological teeth in Chiapas.[23]

Shortly after arriving in 1952, Albert De Voogd began reading Eugene Nida. For a time the De Voogds had been mission partners with John and Elaine Beekman, living

together in Berea. Albert became enamored with cultural anthropology. It is a strange part of the history that one of the major sources of often heated disagreement between John Kempers and Albert De Voogd was about the insights of cultural anthropology. Oddly, Kempers did not seem to appreciate anthropology, though he had been doing it his entire missionary career. De Voogd believed it could help solve a number of problems. With time, De Voogd was proven right. In later years the Hofmans, Meyerinks, Sterks, Schreuders, C. Van Engens, and Renes's all studied anthropology with Charles Kraft in one way or another.

One cannot underestimate the profound impact that this new concept of "indigeneity" had on the work of the Chiapas missionaries. This principle was the basis for requiring that new missionary recruits spend most of their first four years getting to know the people, language, and culture of their new adopted home. Language learning was considered the integral part of their mission work. The desire to see the rise of culturally appropriate, indigenous churches spurred the long and arduous Bible translation projects in all the Mayan areas. It fueled the almost furious translation and production of materials of all kinds in the indigenous languages. It propelled the missionaries to encourage the Chiapas Christians to develop their own hymnody, drama, and indigenous styles of music. And, while remaining within a broad Presbyterian polity, the churches in Chiapas have developed their own indigenous forms of church organization, leadership, and decision-making that best match their culture.[24]

The commitment of the R.C.A. missionaries to this principle has also meant that they have given top priority to long-term missionary service in Chiapas. Short-term assistance has been helpful to them. But the long-term immersion, identification, and partnership with the indigenous church is the primary missional orientation.

For Mission in the 21st Century

In North America we are just beginning to learn from the experience of cross-cultural, long-term missionaries around the world. We have begun to recognize the tremendous cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and generational diversity of people in the cities of North America. We are striving to learn how to incorporate a number of different worship styles and to discover how "a thousand churches in a million ways" can meaningfully present the gospel to a "lost and broken world so loved by God."[25] As I have written elsewhere, an "indigenous" church in North America today should be as ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse as the schools, sports complexes, and shopping centers of its context.[26]

The R.C.A.'s search for a variety of models to plant different kinds of congregations demonstrates an awareness of cultural differences and a desire to see Reformed churches appropriate to their context. To be viable and believable, the churches of North America will need to explore ways they can be reformed, reshaped, recreated to be more appropriate to the people who live in their mission contexts. In the R.C.A., the

Regional Synod of New York is showing us all the way forward in this exploration.

6. "Each one teach one" – John Nevius and Frank Laubach

The sixth principle flows naturally from the desire for a culturally indigenous church mentioned above. The Reformed missionaries in Chiapas were committed to developing a church that was not only contextually appropriate but one that was biblically grounded as well. And for this John Kempers drew from the thought of John Nevius (1829-1893)[27] and the "Nevius Method."[28] John Nevius was a Presbyterian missionary to China. Bong Rin Ro, a Korean missiologist, reports the following. "In June 1890 the Presbyterian Mission in Korea invited John Nevius and his wife…to give a series of messages on Nevius' book, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*. Though the Neviuses were only in Korea for the two-week missionary conference, the Nevius Method was adopted by the missionaries as the primary means to reach Korea for Christ. Many attribute the rapid growth of the Korean church to the consistent application of the Nevius Method in Korea." [29]

The Principle

The Nevius Method and the principle behind it are very simple. Every Christian should be learning the Bible from someone and should be teaching the Bible to someone. Because of their heavy involvement in literacy work in Chiapas, the missionaries sometimes referred to the Nevius Method with the words, "each one teach one." Although that phrase presents a similar idea, it actually came from Frank Laubach (1884-1970) and his efforts in literacy.[30] But the principle is the same.

In Chiapas

John Kempers read avidly about the growth of the churches in Korea. In Chiapas, he and Mabel, together with Garold and Ruth Van Engen, applied this principle as the bedrock of church development, especially in the Spanish-speaking churches. Kempers and Van Engen were avid students of the Protestant Reformation and as Reformed Christians in Latin America they were convinced that "*sola Scriptura*" was a missional principle not only for the sixteenth century but also for twentieth century Chiapas. As children of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, they believed in the "priesthood of all believers" and wanted to see all members of the Chiapas churches reading, understanding, and interpreting Scripture for themselves regardless of their level of secular education. All through their missionary careers they carried boxes of Bibles in their cars wherever they went, distributing and selling Bibles in the churches or leaving them on consignment with pastors, lay evangelists, elders, deacons, and leaders of the churches.

The churches in Chiapas have been deeply committed to the Bible. For many years in August they would hold an entire week of special worship services every night of the

week. It was called the "Week of the Bible," culminating in a great Sunday celebration that was known as *Día de la Biblia* ("Day of the Bible"). The offerings received during that week-long celebration would be sent to the Mexican Bible Societies and sometimes to the World Home Bible League for the printing and distribution of Bibles. I have often thought of that special week as a kind of mission-emphasis week in Chiapas. For most of the past eighty years, R.C.A. missionaries have worked closely with the Mexican Bible Societies on a host of projects. And the present director of the Mexican Bible Societies, the Reverend Abner Lopez, is the son of one of the early leaders of the church in Mazapa, Chiapas. Abner's father, Heriberto, lived with the Kemperses and was discipled and mentored by them in the days before there was a Chiapas Bible School.

One of the ways the Kemperses and G. Van Engens worked out their commitment to the Nevius Method was in organizing the Union of Christian Endeavor Societies (1943) and the Union of Women's Societies (1947), both of which pre-date the formation of the Chiapas Presbytery (1949). They devoted a huge amount of time and effort to these unions of local societies. Every year these organizations would hold a "convention," hosted by a local church. John and Mabel, Garold and Ruth seldom missed a convention. They organized Bible recitation bees like spelling bees; they held competitions in on-the-spot extemporaneous Bible expositions, there were competitions and presentations of music and drama. And every night there was serious Bible study.

These two couples also laid a heavy stress on adult Bible study during the Sunday school hour. For years they kept track of the statistics of Sunday school attendance in every one of the Spanish-speaking churches in Chiapas. Graduates of the Chiapas Bible School in which all four missionaries taught understood that one of their primary responsibilities as pastors and lay leaders in their churches was to teach the Bible so that their students could in turn teach others. If there is one foundational principle above all others that I would highlight as directly influencing the growth of the churches in Chiapas, it is the adherence to the Nevius Method of Bible study.

With such a foundation in Bible study, it is no wonder that beginning in the late 1950s the Chiapas missionaries in the Mayan areas would devote the next fifty years to translating the Bible, preparing Bible study materials, encouraging the indigenous development of phenomenal dramas of the Christmas story (particularly in the Tzeltal field), and doing everything they could to empower every member of the Presbyterian churches in Chiapas to read the Bible for themselves, to learn from someone and to teach someone else what they had learned about the Bible.

For Mission in the 21st Century

We urgently need to affirm this principle if we want to re-evangelize North America. It is difficult for people to share their faith in Jesus Christ with others if they do not know their Bibles. Without Bible knowledge, such conversation is reduced to the story of one person's experience or an advertisement as to why the hearer should begin to attend the

speaker's church. One of our biggest obstacles to the development of healthy, vibrant churches in North America is the biblical illiteracy of the members of our churches. We have known for some time now that the church is only one generation away from extinction. The church dies if the children no longer follow the faith of their parents.

Yet in Europe and North America today there is a deep hunger for spiritual meaning. People seek out others for spiritual direction. They buy countless spiritual self-help books. Concerned churches develop extensive discipleship programs. The recent phenomenon surrounding the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, served to demonstrate once again the deep spiritual hunger that permeates North American society in this new century. We might find that an adapted form of the Nevius Method would open up whole new opportunities for grass-roots movements that call people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, students of the Bible, responsible members of Christ's church, and witnesses of God's grace in their lives.

7. In-ministry Leadership Formation – José Coffin

We have come full-circle and return to one of José Coffin's most fundamental guidelines of church development: the in-ministry formation of pastoral leaders. The matter of pastoral leadership has been a major issue for the church since before Pentecost (see Acts 1). And down through the church's history there have been a number of different ways the church has responded to its need for qualified, motivating, transformational leaders. In Chiapas the churches have followed an approach first developed by José Coffin.

The Principle

Pastoral leaders of the church should be indigenous to their churches, the natural, culturally appropriate leaders who have arisen from the ranks of the faithful in the churches. They are to be chosen on the basis of their experience in ministry, their giftedness, and their leadership ability that is recognized and confirmed by their local congregation. Their formal theological education is important but should be viewed in a supporting role, not as the basis for their leadership.

In Chiapas

The principle as articulated above was modeled by José Coffin, encouraged by John Kempers and the other Chiapas missionaries, and institutionalized in the Chiapas presbyteries as the foundation for raising pastoral leadership in Chiapas. This model has differed markedly from the practice in central and northern areas of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico, where seminary education is still seen as a prerequisite to, and the basis of, selection and authority in ministry. José Coffin began this model in Chiapas before Kempers's coming. Like a bishop, as he itinerated around the state he would name *capellanes*, spiritual chaplains who were to lead each congregation and

church. For example, three of the first five Presbyterian pastors in Chiapas were selected and ordained precisely on this basis. In addition to this pattern, in the Spanish areas the Christian Endeavor societies and the Women's Societies provided a kind of "farm club" for leaders in the church.

Due in large measure to José Coffin and the pattern he had seen arise previously in Tabasco (and due in part to the terrible shortage of ordained pastors everywhere in Chiapas), an indigenous form of church organization arose that continues to this day in all the language areas. In order for a congregation to become a mother church and have an ordained pastor, it is expected that the congregation will be caring for anywhere from five to twenty-five other smaller congregations and preaching stations in its surrounding area. Each of these congregations will have a president, a treasurer, and a lay preacher selected by the members of that congregation. Deacons and elders are usually selected from the entire church field, the mother church, and its satellite congregations. The deacons are often charged with the responsibility of evangelism and works of mercy in the community. Elders are expected to be able to preach several times a month.

Within this structure there arose another indigenous model of leadership. As a consistory becomes aware of young people (men and women) who appear to have the gifts for ministry, they are selected and called to be unordained, half-time or full-time *obreros* ("workers"—the men) and *misioneras* ("missionaries"—the women). Some may already have some Bible school training. They are given staff responsibilities for evangelism, Christian education, daily vacation Bible schools, teaching Sunday school, preaching in the numerous congregations, visiting the homes of inquirers, comforting the sick, and so forth. They do almost everything an ordained pastor does except preside over the consistory and administer the sacraments. Much of the pioneer evangelism throughout Chiapas has been due to the work of these *obreros* and *misioneras*. This indigenous pattern of home-grown leadership formation has been a wonderful fountain from which has flowed a constant stream of new leaders who can respond to the explosive growth of the churches in Chiapas. The six Bible schools and seminary in Chiapas come alongside this pattern of leadership formation and offer theological education as a supporting supplement to the experienced-based ministry formation that occurs in the churches.

For Mission in the 21st Century

In this new century there is increasing interest in developing new patterns of leadership formation for missional churches in North America. The house-church movement and the growth of cell-based churches are calling for a pattern of in-ministry formation. The large mega-churches seem to be increasingly convinced that they need to form their own home-grown leaders who rise through the ranks of ministry within their church.[31] And we now know that the formation of pastoral leaders for ministry in the cities of North America involves a long and deep process of personal transformation in the

midst of ministry before a person is prepared to begin learning about ministry in the city. Further, cross-cultural demands of mission in North America make contextually appropriate ministry formation even more urgent.

The professionalization of the clergy so prevalent fifty years ago in North America has run its course and seems to have little to offer the new emerging church structures. Churches everywhere seem to be looking for pastoral leaders with the appropriate formation in their being, knowing, doing, and serving. Many seminaries are increasingly strapped to provide all the resources that this holistic approach to ministry formation calls for. In the Reformed Church for some time now we have been discussing the need for new patterns of ministry formation to meet the needs and missional vision of our churches in North America. The churches in Europe are experiencing as great an upheaval in pastoral leadership as we are in North America. Everywhere in the West we seem to be searching for ways to renew old paradigms and discover new paradigms of ministry formation.[32] Increasingly, postmodern young people seem to be aware of their need for emotional, psychological, and spiritual healing, and they are calling for personal mentoring and one-on-one spiritual direction as an integral part of their formation for pastoral ministry in North America. Maybe there is something to be learned from the past eighty years of ministry formation in Chiapas.

Conclusion

Taken together, these seven mission principles are rather basic. There are no surprises here. The planting, growth, development, and health of the church is always a mystery (Karl Barth called the church itself the "mysterious creation of God"). But on the other side of the coin, there is no mystery at all. There are no secret formulas, no instant solutions. If there is one thing we might learn from the eighty years of R.C.A. mission work in Chiapas it is that, along with the mysterious and wonderful work of the Holy Spirit, the human side of evangelism and mission involves mostly long, slow, basic, hard work and common sense—and a profound commitment to "be all things to all people so that by all possible means" (1 Cor. 9:22) some may come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. And it is hard work.

Mission in Chiapas has been essentially Mission Basics 101. It has been "one beggar telling another beggar where to get food."[33] May we learn from the Christians in Chiapas and keep telling the story of Jesus Christ to all who yet do not know him. *Chiapas para Cristo*, "*North America para Cristo*!" To God be the glory.

ENDNOTES

[1] "Pre-Columbian" refers to the ancient civilizations that existed in middle America before the coming of Columbus.
[2] Hugo Esponda, *Historia de la Iglesia Presbiteriana de Chiapas* (Mexico City: El Faro,1986), 11-13.
[3] In Chiapas, the R.C.A. works with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico that began in Monterrey, Mexico,

in 1872 and began in Chiapas in 1903. The R.C.A. began work in Chiapas at the invitation of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico.

[4] See Comité Pro-Centenario, *1872-1972 Centenario Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México* (Kingsville, Texas: Escuela Presbiteriana Panamericana 1973), 881-83.

[5] Coffin was the first moderator of the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico, 1947-1950. (cf. Comité Pro-Centenario 1973: 876).

[6] Esponda, *Historia de la Iglesia Presbiteriana*, 166-67, 237.

[7] Cf. J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), 155; David Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), 126-27; Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 21; Scott Moreau, Harold Netland, and Charles Van Engen, eds., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 1002; *The Ad Hoc Report on World Mission*, 1987, 4-7; "R.C.A. AD HOC Task Force For Mission in the 1990s," 1990; Eugene Heideman, *A People in Mission: The Surprising Harvest* (Grand Rapids: R.C.A. Press, 1980), 79-90; General Program Council, *Mission Handbook*, (Grand Rapids: R.C.A. Press, 1987), 2-3.

[8] It is interesting to note here that another area of the world where this vision permeated the work of R.C.A. missionaries was the Sudan-Ethiopia-Kenya region, where the conversion of people to Christ and the growth of the churches has also been remarkable, to the glory of God.

[9] Vern Sterk mentions this in his article elsewhere in this issue of *Reformed Review*.

[10] Cf. C. Van Engen and Jude Tiersma, eds., *God So Loves the City: Seeking a Theology for Urban Mission*, (Monrovia: MARC, 1994).

[11] See Elias Medeiros, "John Alexander Mackay," in Moreau, Netland and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 589-90.

[12] Helen Barrett Montgomery, an ordained Baptist pastor and preacher, was one of the most important women missiologists of the twentieth century. She was an American Baptist trained at Wellesley College and Brown University, majoring in classical literature. She was the first president of the national Women's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society and the first woman president of the Northern Baptist Convention. She and a coworker established an annual day of world prayer which eventually became the World Day of Prayer. She wrote a book titled, *Western Women in Eastern Lands*, which sold 100,000 copies in 1910. (By contrast David Bosch's book, *Transforming Mission*, today's mission best seller, has sold a mere 30,000 copies.) She was the first female scholar to translate the entire New Testament (titled, *Centenary Translation of the New Testament*). She was the first female missiologist to write extensively in the theology of mission: *The Bible and Mission.* See Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 469-70; Moraeu, Netland, and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 657; and Gerald H. Anderson, Robert T. Coote, Norman A. Horner, James M. Phillips, eds., *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 62-70.

[13] John R Mott, a Methodist layman, was secretary of the YMCA, cofounder of the Student Volunteer Movement, chair of the great World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910, founder and chair of the International Missionary Council and presided over the IMC conference of Jerusalem 1928. In 1946 he shared the Nobel Peace Prize and at its founding in 1948 the World Council of Churches named him its honorary president. His best-known work is *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*. See Moraeu, Netland, and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 664; and G. Anderson, et al, *Mission Legacies*, 79-84.

[14] Recently, this remuneration policy was changed in R.C.A. missionary support, with questionable results.

[15] See, e.g., Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1991), 101-118.

[16] See also the dialogue between McGavran and folks in the World Council of Churches on this subject in the *International Review of Mission*, vol. 54 (Oct), 1965 and vol. 57 (July), 1968.

[17] Jim Reapsome, "Allen, Roland," in Moreau, Netland, and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 54.

[18] Hugo's list of John Kempers's eight principles is as follows:

1. Decentralization of church workers and missionaries, spreading them out and placing them in strategic locations;
2. The identification of the missionaries with the indigenous people (a key to the success of the mission work, especially in the Mayan areas);
3. Establishing only institutions that the national church could later direct and maintain without subsidies;
4. Supporting the construction of churches and pastor's homes only if the local church pays half the cost, following the principles of good stewardship;

5. Avoiding the payment of such high salaries that later the national church cannot take over the complete support of its own ministers and church workers;
6. Giving preference to the training of national pastors and lay church workers over the introduction of a growing number of expatriate missionaries;
7. Working toward having the Mayan churches and the Spanish-speaking mestizo churches be part of one Presbytery of Chiapas for the good of the Church and for the integration and empowerment of the Mayan Christians; and
8. Seeking the approval of local consistories and the Presbytery before initiating any new mission work (Esponda, *Historia de la Iglesia Presbiteriana*, 238-39 – translation by Charles Van Engen).

[19] This operational rule was also encouraged by the Mexican Constitution of 1910-1912 that prohibited foreigners from administrating the sacraments or officially pastoring Mexican churches. Thus the missionaries could build the church only as they walked and worked alongside strong national leadership.

[20] The "Bible colporteur" movement is a major feature of Latin American Protestantism, beginning with James Diego Thomson (1788-1854), who distributed Bibles as an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society and began Lacastarian schools that used the Bible as a primary text. "Thomson established some one hundred Lancastrian schools in Buenos Aires (Argentina) alone and was made an honorary citizen of Argentina and Chile, where he was invited by the government in 1821….In 1827, Thomson was sent by the Bible Society to Mexico, and later worked in the Carribean" (Stephen Sywulka, "Thomson, James 'Diego'" in Moreau, Netland, and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 959-60). Names like Moisés Ovando, Zenón Cueto, and Margarito Hernandez are famous in Chiapas for being instrumental in the founding of a number of major church centers. They would walk the mountainous, muddy trails behind a burro laden with boxes of Bibles.

[21] Because the words have other meanings and are prone to misunderstanding, we no longer use the words native" or "indigenous" to refer to this quality of a church that in every sense belongs in its context.

[22] Cf. Peter J. Silzer, "Townsend, William Cameron" in Moreau, Netland, and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 964.

[23] The list of cooperative partnerships between R.C.A. missionaries and Wycliffe translators is rather long. Here are some examples:

John and Mabel Kempers with Beekmans, Wonderslys, Goertz, Marianna Slocum, Florence Gerdel;
Garold and Ruth Van Engen with Ken and Nadine Weathers and Ken and Elaine Jacobs;
Al and Nita De Voogd with John and Elaine Beekman;
Paul and Dorothy Meyerink and Sam and Helen Hofman with Marianna Slocum and Florence Gerdel;
Henry and Char Stegenga with John Beekman; with Wilbur and Evelyn Aulie; and with Vi Workington and Ruby Scott;
Jim and Sharon Heneveld with Marianna Slocum and Florence Gerdel in the Bachajón area;
Vern and Carla Sterk with Marion Cowan and Ken and Elaine Jacobs;
Chris and Henny Platteel and Sam and Helen Hofman with Julia Supple in the Tojolabal area;
Al and Sue Schreuder with Ken Weathers and Ken and Elaine Jacobs.

[24] In the September, 2004, issue of the *Church Herald*, the question is asked, "Can Evangelism and TULIP Happily Co-exist?" (Steve Bierly, 20-23). The history of the R.C.A. mission work in Chiapas would give a resounding YES! John Kempers and Garold Van Engen printed and reprinted thousands of copies of a small booklet in Spanish on "the five points of Calvinism." For years they taught that material everywhere throughout the state. Most of the pastors of the Spanish speaking churches had the booklet nearly memorized. And as "five-point Calvinists," they were deeply committed and highly effective evangelists.

[25] Taken from the R.C.A. Statement of Mission and Vision.

[26] Charles Van Engen *Planting Multiethnic Churches in North America*, unpub. ms, 2002.

[27] Cf. James Reapsome, "Nevius, John Livingston" in Moreau, Netland, and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 676-77.

[28] Cf. Bong Rin Ro, "Nevius Method," in Moreau, Netland, and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 677.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Cf. Alan Seaman, "Laubach, Frank Charles," in Moreau, Netland, and Van Engen, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 562.

[31] See, for example, "The Ladder System—How to Select and Train a Minister," *Church Herald*, May 19, 1972, 4-5.

[32] See C. Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 240-52.

[33] D.T. Niles, *That They May Have Life* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), 413.

Missiological Factors in the Growth of the Church in Chiapas

Vernon J. Sterk

As we celebrate eighty years of the work of the Reformed Church in America in Chiapas, Mexico, one fact leaps out: the growth of the church has been extraordinary! God has so blessed the work of missionaries and Chiapas evangelists and pastors that the number of believers in the National Presbyterian Church in Chiapas has surpassed the total membership of the Reformed Church in America. The growth of the church in Chiapas is even more astounding when we hear official statistics that show that the combined number of all Protestant/evangelical denominations in the state constitutes more than one-third of the total population, or more than a million people. In this article I would like to highlight a number of missiological factors that have contributed to that impressive church growth.

The Anthropological Approach

Before we attribute the incredible expansion of the kingdom of God to any human factors, we must acknowledge God's power and sovereign plan in all that has taken place in Chiapas. However, God has chosen to use missionaries and missiological approaches in carrying out that plan. Eugene Nida declared that good missionaries have always been good anthropologists. [1] From the very early days of the work of John and Mabel Kempers, and especially in the principles of the Chiapas Mission of the Reformed Church in America (R.C.A.), the accepted approach for any new missionary has been to live with the people and learn the indigenous language. The clear expectation was that missionaries would respect and study the culture. When my wife Carla and I arrived for our first term of evangelistic mission work in Chiapas, my first impression was that our approach was to be much like that of a cultural anthropologist. Since we had been called to do pioneer evangelism in an unreached tribe, our first task was to find a tribal village where we could live with and learn from the Zinacanteco indigenous people.

My training in theology at Western Theological Seminary had prepared us for many things, but not the resistant and strange world in which we found ourselves immersed. Our first day living with an Indian family was filled with the chanting of a shaman who sacrificed black chickens and poured out liquor libations in a ceremonial ritual that overwhelmed us. As evangelistic missionaries, our task was to share the good news of Jesus Christ, but the language and worldview barriers seemed insurmountable. We had little choice but to use an anthropological approach:

> Effective missionaries have always sought to immerse themselves in a profound knowledge of the ways of life of the people to whom they have sought to minister, since only by such an understanding of the indigenous culture could they possibly communicate a new way of life. [2]

Prior to our intrusion into the Zinacanteco tribe as white foreigners, the indigenous people had known a few Harvard University anthropologists. So when asked what we had come to do in that tribal area, our answer was that we had come to study their language and culture. We were immediately identified as cultural anthropologists, a category that was acceptable and understandable in their cultural context. To have identified ourselves as evangelistic missionaries would have meant to the Zinacantecos that we would threaten and destroy their Mayan culture and religion.

An Incarnational Approach

To communicate the gospel in resistant or hostile societies much more is required than knowledge of the language and understanding of a culture. One of my first guidelines came from a joint meeting of the Chiapas missionaries in 1969. We had just arrived on the field following linguistic training and missionary orientation. "Your first task will be to find a Zinacanteco village where you can live and learn the Tzotzil Indian language," was the counsel that we were given. Village living was one of the clear principles for initiating work among the resistant indigenous people in Chiapas. In order to avoid immediate rejection, it was necessary for us to not only live *with* the indigenous people, but to attempt to do everything humanly possible to live *like* them. For us this meant sharing a one-roomed dirt-floored Indian house with an Indian family in a Zinacanteco village in which there was no evangelical Christian witness. It meant learning to dress like, carry water like, and eat like the people of the host culture. Since there existed no running water or electric energy systems in the villages at that time, life-style adjustments were harsh and demanding. This incarnational approach has been the bridge for Chiapas missionaries to cross the difficult cultural boundaries and make identification and acceptance possible.

In order to gain a culture's permission to communicate the message of the gospel, this incarnational approach is foundational, especially in resistant and hostile situations. Charles Kraft has pointed out that God is our ultimate example of incarnation. When God revealed himself in Jesus Christ, "God not only came, he became. [God], in Christ, identified himself with his receptors. God in Jesus became so much a part of a specific human context that many never recognized that he had come from somewhere else."[3] We have witnessed missionaries from other mission agencies who have attempted to minister to indigenous people while living at a distance in one of the cities, and who have insisted that it is not

necessary to communicate in the indigenous languages. Their lack of effectiveness has been marked by the fact that within a few short years most of them have been "called by God to move on to another ministry." The clear fact is that the incarnational approach, an intentional and personal involvement in the life style, felt needs, and worldview of the people to whom we minister, has been a crucial growth factor in Chiapas.

Indigenous Languages

Another important guideline that we received from the Chiapas Mission was: *For effective communication, it is essential to learn the indigenous language and do mission work in that language.* I can remember missionary J. Samuel Hofman suggesting that our first five years would be dedicated to language learning. It was never an option to evangelize tribal areas using the Spanish language. So learning the Tzotzil language was our first major assignment. The Zinacanteco village in which we were allowed to live was highly monolingual; therefore, we were not allowed the Spanish crutch for our early communication. We were forced to learn the Tzotzil language to survive, and since "necessity is the mother of language learning," we were blessed to have to learn language in real situations from real people. Tzotzil became our new language, Zinacanteco our new culture, and we began to build relationships with a new people. These would prove to be the keys that opened the doors of communication to a resistant tribal people. The ability to be an active participant in the heart-language of a people is essential to effective communication, especially when the goal is to reach the hearts of people with the gospel message.

The Missionary as Evangelist

A third major emphasis in Chiapas is that the *missionary is first and foremost an evangelist***.** Even before our arrival in Chiapas, my concept had always been that the goal of a missionary is to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who had never heard. John Kempers, who retired from his work in Chiapas just before we began our first term, shared with us that same emphasis. His courageous pioneer venture of covering the entire State of Chiapas on horseback exemplified his aspiration: *Chiapas para Cristo* ("Chiapas for Christ"). His passion for reaching the unreached tribal groups in Chiapas caught fire in my wife and me as a young, adventurous missionary couple.

The Zinacanteco tribe was one of those unevangelized tribes, and while we could have begun our work as teachers in a Bible school in the Ch'ol tribe where R.C.A missionaries had already established a growing church, we felt God's call to be evangelists. Ken Jacobs, a Wycliffe Bible translator in the neighboring Chamula tribe, encouraged us to "give birth to a church" in an area with no Protestant/evangelical presence. We were warned that it would probably take

more than twenty years before we would see any converts in that resistant tribe, yet our calling as missionaries compelled us to be evangelists (2 Cor. 5:14). As missionaries we must first consider that God "has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:19b-20a, NIV).

The missionary thus sets an example for the new believers, and eventually for pastors and leaders of the new church. If the missionary has given priority to personal evangelism, the first believers of the new church will follow that example. As a tree can only bear fruit of its own species, so the missionary/evangelist will reproduce what he or she has modeled. The early missionaries in Chiapas (not only R.C.A. missionaries) lived out this principle, and the result was that the first believers in each tribal group became fearless evangelists, even in the face of threats of violence and persecution. As a result, the church multiplies. This very basic missiological principle rings true for pastors and church leaders in any context or culture.

Healing Ministry and the Power of God

The new Protestant/evangelical believers in Chiapas emerged from an animistic worldview; their indigenous spirituality was not dominated by a Western scientific worldview. In other words, they believed that health and wholeness are determined by spiritual power and not by medical science. In the pre-Christian religious practices, the indigenous shamans served as both seers and curers. Their function was to call upon the spirits and deities, and by means of blood sacrifices and appeasement to bring healing. So when indigenous Christians began to read and interpret the Bible, they readily understood that it was God's power that brought healing and freedom from fear. Evil spirits that caused disease and adversity were overcome by the power of Jesus Christ.

The good news of God's power and of forgiveness without animal sacrifices became the central themes of evangelization in the animistic tribal areas. Stories of God's miraculous healing of disease and of power over the evil spirits spread though families and villages. In the Tzotzil tribes, the most compelling factor in the spread of the gospel has been this witness to the healing power of God. In informal surveys that my wife and I have done, we have found that approximately 90 percent of the Tzotzil Protestant/evangelicals originally responded to the gospel after witnessing a miraculous healing. New Christians defend their decision to follow Christ by telling that one of their family members has been healed of a serious disease through the power of God. This witness to the healing power of Christ ripples through kinship groups and produces rapid growth because it fits readily into the indigenous worldview concept that healing comes through spiritual power.

In Chiapas it is often the indigenous Christians who have led Western missionaries into a healing ministry. Our Reformed background can limit our view of the spiritual power that God has made available to us for evangelization. However, when we witness the power of God actually to cast out evil spirits and miraculously heal the sick, and then we reread the biblical account, our Western scientific worldviews are challenged. We see that Christ can give freedom from curses and illness, from alcoholism and drug addiction. What has been understood as scientific medical work is thus converted into a healing ministry in which Christ is glorified as the healer. This is probably the most overwhelming factor in the multiplication of Protestant/evangelical Christians in Chiapas!

Bible Translation

Another important aspect that has contributed to the work of the Lord in Chiapas is Bible translation. During our internship in Chiapas from Western Theological Seminary in 1966, Paul and Dorothy Meyerink introduced us to this essential facet of the task in Chiapas. We witnessed these missionaries dedicating their time and their lives to the translation of the Word of God in the Tzeltal language. In the Tzotzil area we worked alongside Wycliffe Bible translators who not only became our coworkers but also impressed on us the importance of making the Word of God available in the heart language of each tribal group. They finished the translation of the New Testament into several of the Tzotzil dialects, laying the foundation for the work that would follow.

Respect for indigenous culture and language can find no higher expression than in Bible translation. When people are enabled to translate the Word of God into their own mother tongue, they are empowered to develop their own church, to form their own biblical theology, and to construct their unique cultural forms of worship and music. Thus, R.C.A. missionaries in Chiapas have emphasized the translation of all biblical materials into the indigenous languages. My wife and I were invited by the Tzotzil believers to coordinate the translation project of the first full Bible in the Tzotzil language in 1987. Working in consultation with the Mexican Bible Society, and combining efforts of Presbyterian pastors and elders with the labors of Roman Catholic catechists, the ten-year interconfessional project proved to have multiple positive effects. It provided a real impetus in breaking down the walls of resistance and intolerance, thus becoming an important factor in the growth of the church and in promoting reconciliation in the religious and political conflicts that have traumatized the indigenous regions of Chiapas. The Bible translated into the indigenous languages has been an essential factor in the growth of the church in Chiapas.

Support for Persecuted Christians

In Chiapas the growth of the church has caused persecution, not the other way around. As the increasing number of believers in Christ became a threat to the power of tribal leaders and shamans, persecution exploded in our faces. In spite of all of our efforts to show respect for indigenous cultures and to avoid causing resistance to the gospel message by projecting a Western worldview, the threat to traditional power structures resulted in persecution, as it almost always does. From the 1950s until the late 1990s persecution endangered the lives of believers and slowed the growth of the church.[4] When persecution becomes violent and persistent it can completely halt that growth.

The R.C.A. has supported the persecuted church in Chiapas faithfully. Missionary work to prepare indigenous leaders for the impending onslaught, as well as relief and relocation efforts during times of expulsions from tribal homes, helped the church survive. Severe persecution can result in a weakened and divided church, but the support and involvement of the R.C.A., through its missionaries, sustained suffering groups of Christians effectively. During the more than twenty years of violent expulsions of Tzotzil Christians in which approximately twenty-five thousand people were displaced from their tribal homelands, Reformed Church World Service backed the formation of Protestant relocation communities where expelled Christians could reconstruct their lives, homes, and churches. As anthropologist Jan Rus stated it:

> You provided a culturally acceptable alternative for indigenous people to escape the cruel oppression of tribal mafia leaders. You offered land and communities where persecuted Tzotziles could maintain their tribal identity and indigenous language, and at the same time find freedom from repression. No wonder so many indigenous people were attracted to the evangelical movement.[5]

The establishment of Christian human rights and legal defense organizations was another important contribution in enabling the suffering church in Chiapas both to survive and to thrive. During times of aggressive persecution, the lack of legal guarantees in Mexico made it urgent to establish the Christian Legal Defense Committee. Since its conception in 1985, thousands of persecuted Christians have endured the pain and pressure of persecution because of the legal protection and encouragement offered to them. Even more significant are the long-term achievements that have brought about a time of relative tolerance and religious freedom in Chiapas. In tribal villages where believers received death threats just a few short years ago, new house churches are springing up. In tribal villages where terrorization had effectively discouraged any new believers, the Protestant/evangelical church is flourishing as never before. Through the combined labors of many Christians, the ugly face of persecution has nearly been obliterated. The church is growing in numbers and influence in Chiapas.

Recently I was told of several tribal councils and municipal presidencies where Protestant/evangelical pastors and leaders are being invited to participate in tribal authority positions. This is a sign of major victory for the church.

Empowering Indigenous Leadership

One of the principal strengths of the Chiapas Mission of the RCA has been its emphasis on the training and empowering of local leadership in the church. We do not establish R.C.A. churches in Chiapas, but rather we have chosen to work as partners with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico. This partnership concept is another of the innovative principles of R.C.A. It allows the indigenous church to create its own identity within a particular national and cultural context. The goal is to train indigenous leadership so that the pastors, elders, deacons, and other church leaders are enabled to govern themselves and to feel that they are freed from missionary domination.

R.C.A missionaries have concentrated most of their efforts in preparing written Bible study materials and in training indigenous leaders, and then turning the authority and control of the church over to them. Missionaries have often taken the initiative in establishing Bible schools and being the main teachers. This has been one of the major contributions of R.C.A missionaries from the early 1940s to the present. Bible schools have been launched and important leadership training provided with the support of the RCA in almost every language group in Chiapas. However, after several years of training in such schools, indigenous Christian students must be allowed to become the teachers of the succeeding generations. Missionaries who are not willing to step out of the way and permit the indigenous local leaders and teachers to have the authority and control eventually hinder the maturity of the church. This principle of allowing indigenous leadership and ownership is especially important in the areas of administration and finances.

The strength of the church in Chiapas has been lay leadership. From the very beginning the new Christians have grabbed the baton from the missionary and have done the main evangelism and outreach. These lay evangelists did not wait for ordained clergy to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Thousands of stories could be retold of courageous new believers who, with a minimal amount of biblical training, went out into their tribal areas regardless of persecution threats, to pray for the sick and communicate the gospel message in places where missionaries could not or dared not go. As the church grew, the ordained pastors and missionaries who were wise enough to mobilize and empower the lay leadership in the churches continued to see the church grow rapidly. It may have been a blessing that the church grew so rapidly that the number of ordained ministers could not keep up with the growth. The result was that a few ordained ministers had to function like circuit riding bishops, each supervising fifteen to

twenty congregations. The elders and deacons became the true pastors of the flock on the local level. These lay pastors became the core and strength of the church, and for many years the leadership training was aimed primarily at these indigenous elders and deacons. These lay leaders spearheaded an evangelistic movement that was mainly responsible for the incredible growth of the church.

A Missionary Vision

Chiapas Christians have always demonstrated a missionary vision, expressed first in personal evangelism, and now in a vision that is being expanded to the whole world. When indigenous church leaders heard that I had been teaching missiology one semester a year at Western Theological Seminary, they asked me why I was doing that in the U.S.A. when I had not yet taught them any of those courses. So, a few years ago, a small group of Chiapas church leaders and pastors asked us to teach missiology courses in Chiapas. Charles Van Engen, professor of missiology at Fuller Theological Seminary and a former R.C.A. missionary in Chiapas, joined me in organizing a missiology course with a curriculum of study. Dr. Van Engen and I taught several of the courses, but we also invited many well-known missiologists to teach in their areas of specialization. After five years of intensive courses in mission outreach and the formation of the first Chiapas Missionary Agency, AMICH, the church in Chiapas is considering sending out its first missionaries to an unreached tribal group in the neighboring state of Oaxaca. Their future goal is to send Chiapas missionaries to one of the Arabic countries of the world. Prior to the recent death of Mabel Kempers, I shared with her the vision of the Chiapas Mission Agency. Her words were: "Oh, if only John could have been here to hear that. That will bring the mission in Chiapas to full circle."

The work of the RCA has been blessed by God in marvelous ways. Not only has the goal *Chiapas para Cristo* nearly been attained, the ultimate goal of all mission efforts is almost in place. When those who received missionaries catch the vision to send out missionaries to other parts of the world, the circle of mission is completed. Thus, the circle of world mission will continue, and we are privileged to play a key role in God's plan.

Conclusion

Since the inception of the Chiapas Mission of the RCA eighty years ago, a variety of missiological factors has contributed to a vibrant and growing church. May the story of Chiapas inspire others to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries with a gospel message that is communicated through sound missiological principles and approaches. As we celebrate God's work in Chiapas, may the RCA be challenged by God to continue to use its unique mission principles and witness to reach the many ethnic groups within the borders of the USA and Canada and

also in resistant areas of our multicultural world. Thus, the RCA will continue to be an essential part of the full circle of world evangelization and mission.

ENDNOTES

[1] Eugene Nida, *Customs and Cultures* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), p. xi .
[2] Ibid., p. xi.
[3] Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), p. 175.
[4] Arthur Bonner, *We Will Not Be Stopped: Evangelical Persecution, Catholicism and Zapatismo in Chiapas, Mexico* (Universal Publishers/UPUBLISH.COM, 1999). This book provides a popular, relatively objective view of persistence in the face of persecution and of Christian transformation instead of armed revolution.
[5] Jan Rus, veteran anthropologist who has worked among the Tzotzil tribes of Chiapas. Conversations in the 1990s.

The Practice of Mission Partnership in Chiapas, Mexico

Roger De Young

Partnership is one of the primary principles by which the Reformed Church in America (RCA) seeks to serve others in its global mission program. Working alongside national churches is a practice adopted by early Reformed Church missionaries in places like China and India. This principle has earned the respect and trust of the denomination's mission partners in Chiapas, Mexico, and around the globe.

Partnership is also a biblical concept. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:3-5). The Greek word for sharing, *koinonia*, is also translated as partnership, participation, or partakers. Commenting on Phil. 1:5, Fred B. Craddock, says that the "common translation of this rich New Testament word is 'fellowship,' but that overused and misused word probably will not carry the freight any more."[1] In today's church, a time of fellowship usually means sharing coffee or juice and cookies after worship on Sunday morning. The Greek word *koinonia*, or "having in common," that the Apostle Paul uses throughout the letter of Philippians (1:5, 7, 2:1, 3:10, and 4:14), says Craddock, "is variously translated according to what is being shared: money, suffering, work, or grace."[2]

The story of Paul's call to Macedonia and his visit to the leading city of Philippi in Acts 16 is a story of sharing the gospel with Lydia and the women gathered by the river, as well as with the jailer and his family. It is the story of freeing the woman enslaved by a spirit of divination and being used by those who would exploit her for financial gain. It is also the story of sharing hospitality after the suffering and imprisonment of Paul and Silas. When Paul prayed for his partners in Philippi, he prayed with joy, because they participated with him from the first day and through the times when life became difficult and painful.

The story of the partnership between the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico and the RCA in Chiapas, Mexico, is also filled with the kind of *koinonia* that the Apostle Paul experienced with his partners in Philippi. For nearly eighty years the National Presbyterian Church and the RCA have walked and worked together to share the good news of Jesus Christ in the highlands of the mountains and the rain forests near the coasts, demonstrating the grace of God through preaching and teaching, healing the sick, and translating the Scriptures and the hymns of the church into the Mayan languages. They have welcomed each other into their homes, encouraged one another in the faith, and prayed together for

healing and strength as they suffered from sickness, persecution, and now even imprisonment.

The partnership began when the Presbyterian Mission Board in the United States invited the Reformed Church to provide a missionary for the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico. As usual, it was the denomination's Women's Board of Domestic Mission that accepted the challenge. The Women's Board sent a team of four to survey the need in Chiapas; they responded by sending the first of many mission couples, the Reverend John and Mabel Kempers, in December 1925. As the partnership continued, the National Presbyterian Church in Chiapas was formed and began to grow rapidly under the motto, *Chiapas para Cristo*, "Chiapas for Christ." Within fifty years the church formed three presbyteries—the Chiapas, the Chol, and the Tzeltal—each containing thousands of new believers.

In 1972, after a hundred years of fruitful ministry, the Presbyterian Church in the USA and the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico agreed to withdraw all Presbyterian missionaries from Mexico. This action followed a missionary moratorium movement in the worldwide church. At an RCA Mission Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Dr. John Gatu, general secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, had said, "The time has come for the withdrawal of foreign missionaries from many parts of the Third World….to allow a period of not less than five years for each side to rethink and formulate what is going to be their future relationship."[3]

In April of 1976, the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico and the Presbyterian Church in the USA met in Mexico City to hammer out a post-moratorium working relationship. This agreement, entitled, "A New Relationship in Joint Mission," recognized:

- A sense of the national church's own responsibility, autonomy, and identity;
- A growing understanding of relationship with the world Christian community, including the moratorium itself, by the Presbyterian Church in the USA;
- A sense of interdependence, appreciation, and understanding among the Mexican and American Presbyterian churches;
- An opportunity for ministry in mission together in Mexico, the USA, and other parts of the world.[4]

RCA representatives were present at this meeting, and the RCA's General Program Council accepted the document as a basis for future relationships and work. However, the RCA missionaries were not affected by the agreement because the representative of the Chiapas Presbytery had pointed out that the

relatively young church in Chiapas still needed RCA missionaries, especially since nearly all of them worked with Mayan-language churches. The agreement was then amended to allow RCA missionaries to serve the Mayan-speaking areas until 1980.

RCA missionaries had also developed mission goals and guidelines over the years by which they defined the way they worked with each other and with their mission partner, the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico. These goals were listed as follows:

1. To witness to Jesus Christ as Savior, Healer, Liberator, and King so that many people will respond to him and become responsible members of his church.
2. To build the church in Chiapas so that:
    a. It develops its gifts of leadership.
    b. It participates in God's mission.
    c. Its members responsibly and joyfully give themselves and their resources.
    d. It develops all the gifts given to it by our Lord.
    e. It manages its affairs under the Lordship of Christ.

In five "working principles," the missionaries stated:

1. We respect the freedom of the national Christians to do those things for which they already have the skills, and we seek to help them learn necessary skills.
2. We encourage the national church to financially support and develop their own programs to the fullest extent possible.
3. In those cases where urgent program needs arise which temporarily outstrip the national church's resources, we will cooperate in giving assistance.
4. While recognizing that we as foreign missionaries are agents of change, we are committed to respect the integrity of the national church we serve. Therefore we are committed to avoid:
    a. Creating programs that are beyond the national church's skills.
    b. Offering new options with financing completely from the outside.
    c. Controlling decisions about the goals, methodology, management, and financing of new programs.
    d. Copying leadership styles which do not fit either our personality or that of the church we serve.

e. Personal lifestyles inconsistent with the standards of the national church.

5. We are dedicated to exercising our Christian conscience with personal integrity, engaging in dialogue with the national church in refining our mutual lifestyle and behavior in accordance with our understanding of the Word of God.[5]

The missionaries sought a relationship with the national church that would be characterized by mutual respect and harmonious cooperation. They wished to serve with the national church as partners in mission, encouraging, equipping, and assisting them in the task of reaching all of Chiapas with the good news of Jesus Christ.

To maintain this partner relationship, The Commission of Joint Mission in Chiapas (*La Comision de Mision Conjunta de Chiapas*) was formed February 10, 1982, and was composed of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico, one representative of each presbytery in Chiapas, one RCA missionary from each language group, the RCA's administrator for Chiapas, and one representative from each participating Chiapas synod.

The commission agreed on three simple principles that would govern the way they were to work together:

1. The mission of the church is the responsibility of everyone.
2. There shall be a spirit of mutual help between the national church and the RCA that will favor the wise use of available resources.
3. Persons in the cooperating churches shall have a mutual respect and confidence.

It assigned the following responsibilities to the Commission of Joint Mission:

1. Coordinate the mission work already established in Chiapas.
2. Receive new projects from the representatives of the General Assembly, the Chiapas presbyteries, and the RCA. These projects will be evaluated, prioritized, and returned to the cooperating church for approval and modification.
3. Evaluate the personnel of cooperating churches: The sending church must respect basic doctrines, culture, and lifestyle of the receiving church; at the beginning of his/her work, new personnel will be examined by the Commission of Joint Mission in Chiapas.

4. Collaborate with the group or institution to which the fraternal worker has been assigned in matters of orientation, supervision, and pastoral care.
5. Coordinate and evaluate programs of exchange between the cooperating churches.
6. Every proposed project between the national church and the RCA must be presented to this commission.
7. When the time comes to evaluate each project, the receiving church will decide whether to continue the project.

Though the terms of this evolving partnership were clearly spelled out by both mission partners in the language of equality, making a truly equal relationship in an unequal world of rich and poor, educated and uneducated, can be difficult. Three factors are important: who carries out the work of the church, who makes the decisions, and (most importantly) who provides the financial support. In a healthy mission partnership, the work, the decisions, and the finances must be shared mutually by both mission partners.

Working Together to Grow the Church

Laws passed by the Mexican government in 1926 to restrict the activities of missionaries mandated that the RCA missionaries and the leaders of the national church work together in the mission of the church. Foreign clergy were not allowed to administer the sacraments, conduct weddings, or serve as ordained ministers in the usual church functions. This meant that from the beginning, the missionaries were put in the position of assistants rather than leaders.[6] The missionaries had to depend on the leaders of the early evangelical church in Chiapas to provide the preaching and teaching of the gospel. The presbyteries asked the missionaries to teach theology, agriculture, carpentry, sewing, music, and health care in the Bible schools, as well as to translate the Scriptures and Christian literature into the Mayan dialects. Meanwhile, most of the work of evangelism was done by Chiapas church leaders. This was a task they were best equipped to do, because they understood the language and culture of their own people.

Delegates of the National Presbyterian Church Lead in the Meetings and Decisions

As part of the partnership, missionaries were and still are assigned to a presbytery in Chiapas. The missionaries are expected to attend both the presbytery and the annual Commission of Joint Mission meetings, but the meetings are led by the officers of the National Presbyterian General Assembly. At these meetings, presbytery leaders present reports on the work of the presbyteries as well as on the work of the Bible schools, the John Kempers

Seminary, the paramedic training programs, and human rights issues. They also bring proposals for new projects. When requests for new church programs and tools are proposed by the Chiapas church leaders, both the national church officers and the Reformed mission leaders are asked to consider them for support. The missionaries are given a voice and are often asked to share their advice, but they are not allowed to vote on the proposals. This structure of mission government assures that the voice and the will of the Chiapas church leaders are heard. This method of decision-making follows the agreements of the Commission of Joint Mission as well as lessons taught in the early 1800s by Dr. Rufus Anderson, who served as secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He suggested at that time that the church in India and China and every other area of the world must become "self-governing, self supporting, and self-propagating."[7]

Program Support Is Shared Equally by the Partners

The true test of any mission partnership is determined by who controls the purse strings. Though the terms of this mission partnership were clearly laid out on paper, the real practice of partnership is determined by who has the funds and thus also holds the power in the decision-making process. The "Golden Rule" of politics is that "those who have the gold rule."

Therefore the sharing of funds in a mutual mission relationship requires a delicate balancing act. One way this balance has been attempted in Chiapas is to abide by the Joint Mission agreement that the RCA and the National Presbyterian Church each provide half of the program support for a Bible school or mission project. When more than half of the support comes from the mission partner, especially from the North, it is easy to assume that since they pay the bills, they should also decide how the funds should be used. This sense of money and power can easily carry over into mission decisions, even though the missionaries do not have a vote on the decision.

It also becomes a question of ownership. If more than half of the budget to operate a Bible school comes from the mission partner in the North, whose school is it really? If a volunteer work group from the United States comes with the best intentions to buy the materials and construct a church building for their poor brothers and sisters in the South, whose building does it become?

The RCA mission program has strived to avoid dependency by providing less than half of the support for Chiapas mission programs and projects. Requests to build or expand sanctuaries are always declined by the commission because those are projects the congregations can do themselves. Work groups have assisted with the construction of Bible school, seminary, and medical clinic buildings because they provide ministry for the broader church.

Agreeing to provide limited financial support also enables the national mission partner to develop good stewardship habits among its members. They learn to trust the Lord for provision rather than becoming dependent on the resources of their mission partner.

Have these guiding principles of mission partnership in Chiapas always been followed? If we are honest, we have to say no, not always. In the early 1990s, the Reformed Church began a major mission fund drive called "Putting People in Mission." Nine million dollars of worthy mission projects were proposed from across the denomination and from its global mission partners. In Chiapas a simple printing press was producing hymnbooks, Christian education materials, and health education literature. It was most effective. However, at that time audio recordings and videotapes were being promoted as powerful tools to help communicate the gospel in new and colorful ways. Seeing a great opportunity, RCA missionaries submitted a proposal to expand the printing press into a media center, complete with a Christian bookstore, a recording studio, and video and projector rental services. In the zeal of putting this new technology to work for the church in Chiapas, the Joint Mission agreements were forgotten. The media center was built and funded entirely with gifts from the RCA fund drive. But the church in Chiapas, albeit a growing church, was not able to sustain the salary and business tax expenses of maintaining the media center, even though the building and all the electronic equipment had been contributed. Today, what began as a high-tech media center has returned to its former status of a simple printing press that serves the actual needs of the church in Chiapas. Ideas, especially great and ingenious ideas from northern neighbors, need to be tested by the real ability of mission partners to use and sustain them.

Another difficult issue for mission partners is deciding when it is time for the missionaries to turn even their supplemental tasks over to the national church. After eighty years of working together, the Joint Mission partners have begun to evaluate the need for mission personnel and have scheduled a reduction of program funds for the five Bible schools, the seminary, and the medical clinics. The role of the missionary is ever changing from that of teacher to advisor and consultant. Most of the work done by missionaries in the past is now being done by Chiapas church leaders. Eighty years ago, the Reverend John and Mabel Kempers explored the villages in the mountains and valleys of Chiapas to share the gospel. Now church leaders from those mountains and valleys are exploring other places in Mexico and beyond that have not yet heard the good news of Jesus Christ. They are praying for the Lord to raise up mission workers whom they will send out to be witnesses to the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church in Chiapas has come full circle.

And what does the mission partnership look like now that the daughter church has matured and even grown larger in numbers than its mother church? Can we find ways to learn from each other and work together in reaching out in new ways and new places?

In the past few years, the Reformed Church has sought to develop the next phase of this and other maturing mission partnerships with a program called Classis Companions. This program seeks to provide opportunities for RCA classes to build deep and meaningful relationships with Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. Missionaries and volunteer work groups know from their experience that though they have gone to give and teach, they have always returned having received and learned more than they gave or taught.

Though the Reformed Church still has rich resources, modern technology, and an excellent theological education for ministers, our global mission partners have a vital faith, a spirit of joy, and insights and a zeal for starting new churches that we are missing or have forgotten. In a time when the church in the northern hemisphere is in decline and the church in the southern hemisphere is growing rapidly, we have much to learn from our global mission partners.

Though some RCA congregations have formed "sister-church" relationships with mission partner congregations in places like Japan and South Africa, the Classis of Illinois is one of the first classes to form a Classis Companion relationship with another church body. The classis has already exchanged letters with the Ebenezer Tzeltal Presbytery in Chiapas. Plans are being made for mutual visits between members of the Illinois Classis and the Ebenezer Presbytery. As this relationship grows, it is hoped that there will be a sharing of resources, expertise, and programming ideas that will strengthen each other's ministries, as well as the sharing of prayer concerns. One concern is that the relationship not become focused or dependent on finances. Guidelines developed for this companionship program suggest that any exchange of contributions should only be given for projects that have been agreed upon by both national churches and by the Commission for Joint Mission. The intent is to provide for accountability of funds and prevent tensions and inequities that might result if some part of the partner churches received more funds than others. The mission partner companions have agreed to a formal Companionship Covenant. This covenant clarifies expectations for the relationship and is to be evaluated, amended, and renewed over the five- to seven-year term of the relationship.[8] Although missionaries, in this case, the Reverend Jim and Sharon Heneveld, will be vital links to the companion relationship, this evolving program places the RCA classis and the Tzeltal presbytery in direct contact as they walk the road of faith in Christ together.

The practice of mission partnership begins with a vision to share the faith and form lofty principles and goals of how to live and work together. But the practice becomes incarnate when the partners sit around simple tables to share bread and the Bread of Life, singing familiar hymns of faith in various languages. Sometimes it even means suffering together. The practice of partnership happens when brothers and sisters meet face to face, praying, deliberating, and working together across cultures to share their faith, their gifts, and their insights in service to their Savior and Lord. While the mission partnership of the Reformed Church in America and the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico has not been perfect or without problems, it is a good model of how brothers and sisters "have participated in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:5). For this great privilege, we in the Reformed Church can pray with joy every time we remember our Presbyterian partners in Chiapas, Mexico.

ENDNOTES

[1] Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians* (John Knox Press, 1985), 16-17. I also need to give credit to Dr. James Cook, emeritus professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, for his helpful counsel on this passage.
[2] Craddock, *Philippians*, p. 16.
[3] Eugene Heideman, *A People in Mission: The Surprising Harvest* (Reformed Church Press, 1980), 54.
[4] "A New Relation in Joint Mission," 1976, p. 1.
[5] "Chiapas Mission Guidelines," rev. 1993, pp. 1, 3.
[6] Heideman, *People in Mission*, pp. 18, 19.
[7] Ibid., p. 30.
[8] "Classis Companionship Manual," produced by RCA Mission Services and available by contacting the mutual mission coordinator, David Dethmers, in the Grand Rapids Regional Office. David can be contacted by calling 800-968-3943 or email: ddethmers@rca.org.

Long-term, Cross-cultural R.C.A Missionary Personnel in Chiapas, Mexico

Compiled by Charles Van Engen and J. Samuel Hofman

Name	*Years*	*Language and/or Place of Service*
Rev. John and Mabel Kempers (Princeton)	1925-1969	Spanish, Zoque, Mexico City
Rev. Garold and Ruth Van Engen (W.T.S.)	1943-1978	Spanish Chenalho Tzotzil
Rev. Albert and Nita De Voogd (W.T.S.)	1952-1963	Ch'ol
Rev. Paul and Dorothy Meyerink (W.T.S.)	1955-1993	Tzeltal Oxchuc
Rev. Samuel and Helen Hofman (W.T.S.)	1959-2000	Tzeltal Oxchuc, Tojolabal, Amatenango Tzeltal
Rev. Henry and Charmaine Stegenga (W.T.S.)	1959-1978	Ch'ol
Eugene and Arlene Meerdink	1965-1971/ 1984-1994	Spanish, Tapachula, Berriozabal
John and Mildred Bode	1966-1969	Ch'ol
Rev. James and Sharon Heneveldt (W.T.S.)	1967-1978, 1994-present	Tzeltal Bachajon, Ocosingo
Rev. Vernon and Carla Sterk (W.T.S.)	1968-present	Tzotzil Zinacantan, Chenalho
Fred and Wylene Dickerman	1971-1973	Ch'ol
Rev. Charles and Jean Van Engen (Fuller)	1973-1985	Spanish Tapachula
Paul and Dorothy Hostetter (W.T.S.)	1973-1980	Ch'ol
Rev. Chris and Henny Plateel (W.T.S.)	1975-1982	Tojolabal
Dr. Glenn and Carolyn Folmsbee	1975-1992	Medical Ch'ol, Tzeltal
Rev. Chris and Henny Platteel (W.T.S.)	1977-1982	Tojolabal
Rev. Al and Sue Schreuder (W.T.S.)	1980-present	Tzotzil San Andres, Chamula
Louis and Marilyn Sytsma	1981-1984	Medical Tzotzil
Rev. William and Peggy De Boer (W.T.S.)	1982-1993	Ch'ol
Rev. Steve and Sue Van Bronkhorst (W.T.S.)	1984-1989	Tzeltal Amatenango
Dr. Moisés Ocampo Torres	1985-present	Medical Tzotzil, Ch'ol, Tzeltal
Brian and Donna Renes	1990-1995	Tojolabal
Rev. Janelle Koolhaas (W.T.S.)	2001-present	Tzeltal Ocosingo

Book Reviews

Act and Being: Toward a Theology of the Divine Attributes, by Colin E. Gunton, (reviewed by Mike DeJonge)

Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community, by Robert Webber, (reviewed by Donna Rathert)

C.S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason, by Victor Reppert, (reviewed by Mark G. McKim)

Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today, ed. by Richard N. Longenecker, (reviewed by Thomas A. Kopecek)

Ever Against the Stream: The Politics of Karl Barth, 1906-1968, by Frank Jehle, (reviewed by John Jaeger)

Familiar Stranger: An Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth, by Michael J. McClymond, (reviewed by David W. Jurgens)

Feminist Theology, by Natalie Watson, (reviewed by Amy de Groot Bowling)

The Future of Religious Colleges, ed. by Paul J. Dovre, (reviewed by Earl Wm. Kennedy)

The Gospel According to Moses: What My Jewish Friends Taught Me about Jesus, by Athol Dickson, (reviewed by Sylvio J. Scorza)

Hear My Story: Understanding the Cries of Troubled Youth, by Dean Borgman, (reviewed by Amy de Groot Bowling)

Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thought on the Church's Ministry, by Edward Farley, (reviewed by Robert Hoeksema)

Signs Amid the Rubble, by Lesslie Newbigin, (reviewed by Peter Van Elderen)

StormFront: The Good News of God, James V. Brownson, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, and Charles C. West, (reviewed by Robert Hoeksema)

What Happens in Holy Communion? by Michael Welker, (reviewed by Dr. John Jaeger)

Act and Being: Toward a Theology of the Divine Attributes, by Colin E. Gunton, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. ix, 162pp., $29.00.

Act and Being contains Colin Gunton's first steps toward the doctrine of God in his projected systematic theology—a project cut short by his death in 2003. The majority of this work levels a "perhaps predictable" critique "that much of our inherited doctrine [of the divine attributes] appears to owe too little to biblical and trinitarian considerations, too much to a priori philosophical decision about what God may be conceived to be" (vii). This reliance on Greek philosophy at the expense of biblical revelation entails naming God primarily by negation. Quickly tracing the *via negativa* through history, Gunton demonstrates its connection to metaphysics that set divine and nondivine attributes in opposition and denigrate creation. Moreover the negative way's strong polarity of God and world ironically sets the stage for human ascent to deification apart from the mediating work of Christ. Thus the negative way is neither sufficiently material nor sufficiently incarnational (these two being closely related in Gunton's theology).

Rejecting the Greek metaphysics of the *via negativa* entails replacing its corollary analogical theory of predication with a univocal theory, which Gunton identifies in Scotus and Ockham and traces into the Reformation. Here we arrive at God's attributes by reference to the material world, not by stripping it away, as with the *via negativa*. So "we construe all our theological terms as functions of God's involvement in the created world" (71) as manifest in Christ and perfected in the Spirit. Gunton then locates his own theology of the attributes in this tradition and outlines its contours with heavy reliance on Barth's *Church Dogmatics* II.1 and its principle that "God's being is in act."

Gunton criticizes few contemporary theologians, but *Act and Being* implicates movements such as "Radical Orthodoxy." This is most clear at two points: in Gunton's reading of Aquinas as overly indebted to philosophy's God (Pickstock and Milbank's *Truth in Aquinas* notwithstanding); and in his commendation of Scotus, whom Radical Orthodoxy demonizes as a pioneer of theology's capitulation to modernity. Gunton's counternarrative thus foregrounds Reformation theology, which Radical Orthodoxy almost completely elides.

Mike DeJonge

Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community, by Robert Webber, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003. 219pp., $14.99.

In response to the 1999 International Consultation on Discipleship's concern that church evangelism programs today produce converts but not disciples, Webber sets out to develop a "full-orbed vision of the life of a disciple." His primary critique is that churches today have compartmentalized various ministries (worship, evangelism, discipleship, spiritual formation, and assimilation)—assigning them to different staff or committee persons. Instead we need an integrated approach—not a program, but a process. The early church (first through third centuries) stands as a viable model for today's faith-forming communities. Webber's text traces early history and documents to outline stages of the discipling process. With each stage, he suggests how today's churches can adapt this model to speak to our postmodern context.

In the New Testament church these elements made up the discipling process: Hearing the gospel, repentance, instruction to flee the corrupt world, baptism, and reception of the Holy Spirit. For the new convert, changes were expected in belief, belonging, and behavior: a radical departure from the past life into a politically risky new life of faith and action.

Once society was "Christianized" under Constantine, baptism shifted from adult to infant, and the process of formation took on a different structure with each new era of church growth and philosophy. Rebounding from the age of reason, our postmodern era hungers for a spirituality that is more mystical and sacramental. To meet these needs, Webber proposes such avenues as intentional neighborhoods; mentoring new converts; immersing the unchurched in the life of the community of faith through worship, service, and study; well-defined rites of Christian passage; a greater emphasis on Christian vocation; and a stronger stand over and against the predominant culture.

A study book with summary charts and discussion questions in each chapter, Webber's volume (third in Baker's six-part Ancient-Future series) gives the evangelizing congregation new grounding for deepening its discipling process. Although in its repeated jumps from ancient to postmodern the book doubles back on itself a lot, still it presents a comprehensive framework within which today's missional church can grow and deepen. Resource booklets have been developed for each stage of a six-month-long discipling journey.

Donna Rathert

C.S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason, by Victor Reppert, Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2003. 132pp.

C.S. Lewis argued that the existence of reason or rationality provided a strong argument for theism over against naturalism. The argument appears in various of Lewis's writings, but perhaps most prominently in *Miracles* (1947). Boiled down to

essentials, Lewis's argument is that naturalism, the belief that the universe is all there is, a random collection of atoms, is self-contradictory. If naturalism is true, then all mental processes are determined by the random collisions of atoms in the brain, which means that everything one thinks, including the notion that the universe is all there is and it is nothing more than a random collection of atoms, is also the result of a random collision of atoms and not to be trusted. The naturalist, according to Lewis, is put in the impossible position of arguing that all that exists, including all thinking, is the result of random, irrational causes, a position which undermines the reason by which he or she comes to this conclusion. The naturalist is, in Lewis's view, very much like a man sawing off the branch of the tree on which he is seated.

Reppert examines Lewis's argument against naturalism at length, particularly in light of developments in philosophy since Lewis's time. Lewis's argument was never meant to be a full fledged philosophical discussion of the matter, and, says Reppert, "one honors Lewis's achievement…not simply by repeating what he says, but by developing his ideas." Reppert concludes that while Lewis's argument does not "close the case against naturalism," it continues to provide "substantial reasons for preferring theism to naturalism."

As Reppert observes, Lewis did not imagine that his arguments irrefutably and absolutely "proved" the truth of Christianity, despite occasionally triumphalistic statements in his books. Lewis was both realistic and humble enough to know that his arguments pointed one toward Christianity, but were not, by themselves, absolutely conclusive. Consequently, Reppert treats Lewis's argument against naturalism in an even handed fashion, neither regarding Lewis as some sort of infallible authority in apologetics, nor, alternatively, seeing him as nothing more than an amateur. Reppert believes Lewis's argument against naturalism still has considerable validity today, and still points us in the right direction.

Reppert writing style is made difficult by convoluted and obscure discussions which at times get away from the main thesis. On occasion it also seems that Lewis's argument against naturalism and his argument against reductionism may be being confused. From a common-sense perspective, Lewis's argument against naturalism still holds considerable validity today. A heavier emphasis on this fact would have greatly strengthened Reppert's point that decades after it was first made, Lewis's argument is still convincing for many.

Mark G. McKim

Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today, ed. by Richard N. Longenecker, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002. xix, 251pp., $19.95.

This collection of essays on church order and leadership includes three devoted to ancient pagan and Jewish contexts, four to the New Testament, two to the church fathers, and three to the main contemporary church orders: episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational. The collection's cover advertises its authors as "distinguished scholars" presenting a "coherent, panoramic picture." While the scholars *are* distinguished (e.g., Alan Segal, Craig Evans), the editor himself rightly eschews claims for coherence of panorama, affirming that the volume provides a general readership "only . . . some direction by setting out selected topics"—without footnote apparatus but aided by bibliographies.

Only a few chapters are successful in accomplishing the editor's goal. Longenecker discusses the relevant material in Paul's ten letters (not including the Pastoral Epistles) but, admitting the scantiness of the data, devotes half of his chapter to Pauline ecclesiastical images. Noteworthy is Peter Richardson's presentation of the archaeological evidence for pagan and Jewish voluntary associations, though nowhere in the volume is the corresponding Christian archaeological and literary evidence systematically discussed. I. H. Marshall writes a good reprise of pertinent data from his 1999 commentary on the Pastoral Epistles. Alan Hayes's chapter on the ante-Nicene churches of Lyons, Carthage, and Rome is the collection's best: it demonstrates convincingly how the churches were far more loosely organized and charismatic than is often supposed, including in Rome—with Cyprian exemplifying the increasing imposition in the third century of an upper-class Roman sense of order and hierarchy.

Two of the three chapters on the modern church are jarring compared with the rest of the volume. Both John Webster and Miroslav Volf contribute essays in abstruse theological construction, Webster recommending through a curious *via negativa* an episcopal order that bears little resemblance to the historic episcopate and Volf appealing to a "correspondence between Trinitarian and ecclesial communion" in order to overcome the view of the early Baptist, John Smyth, that the church emerges when souls saved individually by God join other isolated souls. David Hester's essay on the presbyterian order is more descriptive, though without neglecting its scriptural and theological basis.

Thomas A. Kopecek

Ever Against the Stream: The Politics of Karl Barth, 1906-1968, by Frank Jehle (trans. Richard and Martha Burnett), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 117pp., $22.00.

Ever Against the Stream is a carefully crafted book examining Barth's political thought over different periods of his lifetime. After an initial chapter dealing with Barth's theology, the remaining chapters provide a kind of biographical sketch of his life, viewed through the lens of politics. One sees Barth as a nineteen-year-old fraternity

student, a socialist pastor, a radical Romans-commentary writer, a Social Democrat in 1930s Germany, and a Social Democrat back in Switzerland. One also sees him banned from public speech during World War II, back in Germany to encourage restoration after the war and later criticized for his political position during the rise of communism.

Jehle uses the brief, yet illuminating chapters to provide an overall glimpse into Barth's political life. What he reveals is an independent, courageous thinker whose political thought flows from his theology of the gracious freedom of God. He also depicts a theologian whose political thought tends in the direction of social democracy nearly his entire life and who seemed to go,
as indicated by the title, "ever against the stream." For instance, when Barth attacked national socialism in the 1930s, his stance was so resolute that even many of the Confessing Church turned away from him.

Jehle also shows how the Barth's political commitments frequently made him the target of criticism and even punishment. While pastoring at Safenwil and attempting to assist the workers there, a factory owner's son attacked Barth in the newspaper. Also, due to his uncompromising position with regard to national socialism, he was "retired" and had to leave Germany in the summer of 1935. Then, in Switzerland in 1941, he was banned from all political speech making for the duration of the war.

Ever Against the Stream is both well written and well argued. The book could be used not only as a good introduction to Barth's political thought, but also to his life as a whole. This work is also a helpful reminder that the theologian's magisterial volumes of *Church Dogmatics* are related to specific social and political concerns at the time of their writing.

John Jaeger

Familiar Stranger: An Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth, by Michael J. McClymond, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. xii, 212pp.

This book reviews fairly the history and current state of historical Jesus research and its results and on that basis presents the life and teachings of Jesus and their relation to Christian faith. It does so in a manner that can be recommended for individual and small group lay study. It has already found favor with scholars who are familiar with historical Jesus studies and with lay persons with no formal study of the topic.

The author states in the preface that he intends this book to be for Christians of all traditions and denominations and for those of other faiths, as well as agnostics, atheists, and spiritual seekers. His thought is that all readers might benefit if they find that the Jesus they are familiar with will become strange to them, or if those to whom Jesus is a

stranger will find a growing sense of familiarity. While eschewing the use of technicalities in discussing the life of Jesus, the author has also tried to avoid "dumbing down" his presentation, acknowledging that many issues are complex and cannot be simplified beyond a point at which there would be distortion of the issues.

In his attempt to reach laypeople, McClymond states that the second and third chapters dealing with the history, sources, and methods of Jesus research and the fourth chapter on the first-century Palestinian background of Jesus' life are not absolutely essential for understanding what follows in the fifth through eleventh chapters. I would recommend that the last two chapters, "Wisdom, Apocalypse, and the Identity of Jesus" and "Thinking Outside the Boxes: A Critique of Contemporary Images of Jesus," be studied carefully.

In "Thinking Outside the Boxes," McClymond intends that the reader see Jesus in an unusual way. He states that Jesus was a home wrecker, sided with the poor, preached fire and brimstone, and was totalitarian. He contrasts these ideas to four popular views of Jesus in North America: the "family values Jesus," the "end-of-the-world Jesus," the "socially inclusive Jesus," and the "global spirituality Jesus." In each case McClymond brings the reader to see in the teachings of Jesus the challenge to live as a follower in the kingdom of God that puts our priorities and our ways in judgment. The chapter does well in relating Jesus' way and teaching to our contemporary life. It illustrates that no one has a monopoly on misinterpretation.

McClymond sees Matthew 25:31-46, often termed, "The Parable of the Last Judgment," as a description of Jesus' eschatological teaching and as an explicit and elaborate portrayal of the coming of the son of man and his judgment (144-6). However, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other interpreters since their time, including this reviewer, have seen the passage differently in the context of Matthew. The literary form of the so-called "parable" is a judgment recognition scene, which in other literature such as 1 Enoch is a literary form used to give encouragement to the persecuted faithful. In Matthew 25 people are judged as to how they have received the least of Jesus' brothers, not the poor in general. The point of Jesus' eschatology being here expressed can still stand. The importance of helping the poor, as a characteristic of the Christian life, and its relation to the eschaton in the teaching of Jesus, can still be seen in the example and teaching of Jesus elsewhere in the gospels and especially in Luke as in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

This is an excellent work with a great deal to offer students and lay persons. It will reward many readers.

David W. Jurgens

Feminist Theology, by Natalie Watson, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003. x, 110pp., $15.00.

Like other books in the Guides to Theology series, sponsored by the Christian Theological Research Fellowship, *Feminist Theology* is written for those who are new to the subject. It is divided into two chapters, "Scripture and Tradition," and "Themes in Feminist Theology."

In the first chapter Watson defines feminist theology as "the critical, contextual, constructive, and creative re-reading and re-writing of Christian theology." It "regards women—and their bodies, perspectives, and experiences—as relevant to the agenda of Christian theologians and advocates them as subjects of theological discourses and as full citizens of the church" (2, 3). Accordingly, Watson discusses feminist ways of reading scripture, and the history and development of feminist theology.

In the second chapter, Watson gives an overview of themes central to feminist theology: language for God, theological anthropologies in relation to women's bodies, sin and salvation, Mary, ecclesiology, and eschatology. She also discusses lesbian feminist theology, post-Christian feminism, and includes a few critiques of feminist theology from those who are inside and who are outside of feminist theology.

The last part of the book is an annotated bibliography of English works that are helpful for those new to the field, and works that are of special importance to feminist theology.

As a primer in feminist theology, this relatively short book was packed with information and adequately skimmed the surface of the field of feminist theology. The author is knowledgeable and able to simplify a wealth of information and boil it down to the essentials. However, I expected this book to be more objective and neutral in its treatment of feminist theology; instead, it was written with a definite bias. Watson is openly critical of theologians (female theologians in particular) who choose not to be feminist theologians but instead use methods found in patriarchal scholarship (4). Another weakness is that Watson has chosen to write exclusively on the feminist theologies that focus specifically on women's issues, not those that focus upon equality between men and women (4). I would recommend this book to those who want to know what feminist theology is about; I would also recommend that they keep in mind that the feminist theology field is much broader than what is written in this short book.

Amy de Groot Bowling

The Future of Religious Colleges, ed. by Paul J. Dovre, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xi, 368pp., $30.00.

Of the making of books about the Christian college, its past, present, and future, there seems, at the moment, to be no end. The present volume, edited by a retired Missouri Synod Lutheran educator, stands out in the crowd by its focus on the future and by the broad religious spectrum of its contributors.

> This collection…is organized around five…questions: 1. What will be the place of religiously informed scholarship in the academy of tomorrow?…2. Is the trend toward disengagement from a distinctive religious identity and mission inevitable?…3. Can churches that have lost their college-relatedness be transformed? Can colleges that have lost their church-relatedness be transformed?…4. Are the diverse educational missions of religious colleges viable in an intellectual sense? In a social sense? How can such viability be encouraged and secured?…5. Will public policy and the interpretation thereof be an ally or an enemy of religious colleges?…" (editor's introduction, xi).

The eighteen articles were originally presented as papers at a conference at Harvard University in 2000. The authors range from the well-known Calvinist historians George Marsden, Mark Noll, and Joel Carpenter to Roman Catholics, Mormons, mainline Protestants, Nazarenes, Baptists, Evangelicals, Lutherans, an Anabaptist-Mennonite, and a black United Methodist. Some of the essays are better than others. Some contributors are sanguine, some pessimistic. In any case, this stimulating volume has something for everyone.

Readers of the *Reformed Review* might well wonder why their Reformed Church colleges fail to appear in these pages or in other recent works about Christian colleges. If Calvin, Gordon, and Wheaton are included, why not Hope, Central, and Northwestern? The answer may lie either in the small size or the lack of a clearly Christian public image of these schools. One hopeful sign, however, is a volume by James Kennedy and Caroline Simon, provisionally titled *Can Hope Endure?*, that is due for publication in 2005. It is a historical analysis of the delicate balancing act that Hope College has performed between openness and Christian focus, especially during the twentieth century.

Earl Wm. Kennedy

The Gospel According to Moses: What My Jewish Friends Taught Me about Jesus, by Athol Dickson, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003. 268pp., $16.99.

A Southern Baptist layman, Athol Dickson, accepted an invitation from Philip, a Reform Jew, to participate in a Bible discussion group (Chever Torah) at his Reform temple on Saturday mornings. A few trial visits turned into a five-year interchange, joining significant numbers of Christians in an interfaith examination of differences and similarities between Judaism and Christianity. They studied the Jewish Bible (the

Christian Old Testament), selections from the Talmud, and the New Testament. After five years, Dickson, with some concerned input from Philip, produced the results of the interchange as a conservative Christian's enrichment of his faith in the gospel, acknowledging that many of his doctrines had originated in the Old Testament and had been paralleled in the Talmud. The Reform Jews had not converted the Christians who participated, nor had the Christians converted the Jews, but both groups understood better in what way "Judaism is the root of Christianity" (14).

The perspective of the book is Christian and the intended readership is also Christian. Yet the sources and much of the terminology derives from Judaism. The author also hopes to provide a bridge to Jewish readers, not specifically to proselytize them but to aid them in understanding Christianity as a natural development from Judaism.

After nine chapters of substantial agreement on sin, grace, and obedience, Dickson deals with two problem areas: "Skeletons in My Closet: Evil Christians in Spite of Jesus," and, "One and All: The Trinity and Monotheism." He confesses not only Christian involvement in creating ghettos and instituting holocausts but also insensitivity toward Jewish feelings in calling their scriptures the "Old" Testament and in begging the question of messianic identity by regularly adding the title Christ to the name of Jesus.

Dickson deserves credit for his effort to smooth relations between Christians and Jews, but in doing so, he has deemphasized the newness of God's revelation in Jesus.

Sylvio J. Scorza

Hear My Story: Understanding the Cries of Troubled Youth, by Dean Borgman, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003. xiv, 418pp., $19.95.

A veteran of the youth ministry field, Dean Borgman crafts this latest book about troubled youth carefully and thoughtfully, integrating his own observations, current research, theory, and theology. As the title suggests, this book focuses upon troubled youth, who are, Borgman points out, in the minority. Most young people are "doing fine." This book focuses upon subcultures, smaller groups of kids who are not doing fine, for a variety of reasons.

Topics or issues are discussed and arranged into four parts: (1) Context and scope of trouble; (2) growing up healthy and unhealthy; (3) the problem of violence; and 4) addictions, healing, and reconciliation. Within these four parts Borgman explores, among other things, the theology of suffering, developmental development, societal trends and problems related to violence (urban and suburban), and healing. The

presentation is well organized, allowing the reader to select a particular topic of interest and find it quickly.

This book could easily be used as a textbook in an undergraduate or graduate program, or even as a group study book for youth workers in the field. It gives a broad perspective on issues related to troubled youth and never separates theology from current events or from academic endeavors or research. There are questions at the end of each chapter and scenarios for reflection in the chapter, lending itself well to group discussion. Additionally, Borgman includes references to books, articles, and sites on the Internet for those who want to know more about a particular topic.

Borgman has a depth of knowledge and ability to think critically about youth issues. Particularly rich is the way in which he views culture, research, and the problems of troubled youth through the lens of theology. It is a good resource, but the discussion of theory and theology will make it difficult to read and digest in one or two sittings.

Amy de Groot Bowling

Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thought on the Church's Ministry, by Edward Farley, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. xvi, 189 pp.

These thirteen essays by Edward Farley, Vanderbilt University Divinity School professor of theology emeritus, are a response to the "ever-present tension in virtually all religious communities between popular religion, or piety, and faith. . . ." Popular piety tends to be "ethnocentric, culturally and racially xenophobic, individualistic, cosmological and literalistic, casuistical, authoritarian, biblicistic . . . and persuaded (certain) that its beliefs and practices are identical with what God believes and desires." Farley laments the continued isolation of congregations from the textual riches, methods, and insights of theological education. The essays are grouped under three headings: Practical Theology, Homiletics and Worship, and Christian Education and Pastoral Care.

In part two, the author challenges the prevailing "bridge" paradigm of preaching, i.e., to build a bridge from the Bible passage to the situation of the congregation. This "failed paradigm" departs from primitive Christian preaching. Jesus proclaimed the impending reign of God. Early Christian preachers proclaimed the good news of salvation through Jesus.

Farley offers a new paradigm in which the task of preaching "is the disruption of the world of the congregation under the hopeful expectation of redemption." He thinks ". . . if the world of Gospel embraces the mysteries of God's working, then it will always transcend and even be normative toward specific passages of Scripture. This

transcendent character of the world of Gospel is the reason that the church can expose, judge, and move beyond the xenophobias, homophobias, and sexisms of the ancient community and its Scripture."

Part three examines the current practice of education and pastoral care in the church. Farley claims that our calling is to faithfulness, not to religion, to witness to the gospel, not to growth and success. In contrast, he notes the idolatrous nature of much religion and the need of popular piety for religion to exist. "Popular piety is the fuel that runs the engine of religion." The excellent curricula of the 1960s some of us remember failed because they were offered to an "unlearning culture."

For pastors, preachers, and teachers interested in enabling today's church, I recommend this book.

Robert Hoeksema

Signs Amid the Rubble, by Lesslie Newbigin, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 121pp., $15.00.

This is a collection of lectures by a theologian who throughout his long life brought a gospel-driven theology to bear on the church and the culture in which it finds itself. In addition to lectures given early in his life in Bangalore and later in Cambridge (Henry Martyn Lectures), there are a few pages summarizing his thoughts about gospel and culture. Some transcriptions are interrupted with parenthetical references which are irrecoverable and which the editor attempts to fill with his knowledge and research of Newbigin.

These lectures touch on the major themes that occupied Newbigin's ministry and that are worthy of reflection by all of us who attempt to bring the gospel as missionaries to the American culture. The Bangalore Lectures entitled, "The Kingdom of God and the Idea of Progress," challenge our presuppositions about the direction of history, presuppositions largely distilled from the culture in which we live. Newbigin's emphasis that God owns the world and refuses to allow popular cultural and theological trends to compromise God's revelation of what history is and how it has been dramatically affected by Jesus Christ informs our world view. For example: "Every faithful act of service . . . which seemed to have been forever lost and forgotten in the rubble of history will be seen on [the day of resurrection] to have contributed to the perfect fellowship of God's Kingdom" (47).

The Henry Martyn Lectures offer similar gems to generate thought. Newbigin's thoughts on the differences between proselytism and evangelism should be required reading for church leaders who seek to add numbers to an organization rather than to

minister to the souls of people. His postscript on gospel and culture states unequivocally that we bring truth to bear on our culture when [we] begin to tell stories about what this God has done (117). Newbigin takes our often-restricted understanding of what God can do and asserts, "We are required to provide space for disobedience, for dissent, for disbelief, in the faith that God in His own way and in His own time will manifest His rule" (120).

Newbigin's writings are a welcome antidote to thoughtless evangelistic fervor, technique driven church growth, and the subtle, gospel-denying religious approach to faith that emphasizes a clear knowledge of how God works and rather than who God is. His thoughts are communicated with the passion of a believer and leader who lives into his message. Perhaps his most powerful assertion is found in the last sentence of the book, where he notes that conferences on mission and evangelism are often pervaded by anxiety and guilt. He calls us to recall that the resurrection and the mission of the church began with "an enormous explosion of joy," and "the mission of the church is simply the continuing communication of that joy—joy in the Lord" (121). Newbigin has been called "a fresh voice of Christian prophecy in the contemporary situation," and this collection affirms that title.

Peter Van Elderen

StormFront: The Good News of God, James V. Brownson, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, and Charles C. West, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xii, 129pp., $18.00.

Five essays offer a vision for the church of the gospel, and our culture that has tended to tame and distort it. In his foreword, George R. Hunsberger says of this volume: "It promises to prod the continuing conversion that the Spirit intends for the church. . . ."

Barry Harvey shaped the first chapter, "Storm: God Addresses the Spirit of the Age." The author laments our consuming culture which "locates health, happiness, and meaning . . . in the realm of private feelings and values rather than in the shared mission in which God's people participate." Harvey writes of God's mission in a fallen world, in the work of Jesus, and in the church.

James Brownson drafted chapters two and three. Chapter two is entitled "Allegiance: Participating in God's Intentions." The theme is salvation. "The good news of salvation is that God wins." We are created not to be consumers, but to know God and to participate in God's life and mission. The author submits Mark 1:1-5 and Galatians 1:6-8; 2:7-14 as test cases.

Chapter three, "Communion: Dying and Rising with Jesus Christ," reminds the reader that the life of Jesus defines the lives of those who give allegiance to him. What does it

mean to die (1 Cor. 1:18-25) and rise (Eph. 1:20-23) with Christ? In the church we are to live in God's faithfulness, as if death is defeated, while confronting the powers of this world.

"Powers: The Church and the Life of the World," was drafted by Charles West. The problem is power. God's power is, by God's design, in covenant. Justice is about power. God's justice struggles with the injustice of the people of God. In this battle between God and the powers, the mission of the church is analysis, intercession, prophecy, and imagination.

Inagrace Dietterich shaped chapter five, "Practices: Reoriented in the Way of Christ." The chapter focuses on the Beatitudes, which "are not saying about individual moral character" but a description of "the quality of life and witness of communities who members have heard the good news." The church finds its righteousness in receiving, celebrating, and manifesting the love, mercy, and forgiveness of God.

This book reminds us of whose we are and what we are to be.

Robert Hoeksema

What Happens in Holy Communion? by Michael Welker (trans. by John F. Hoffmeyer), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. xi, 192pp., $18.00 (paper).

What Happens in Holy Communion? is a unique book in which a major German theologian, Michael Welker of the University of Heidelberg, addresses many interesting and significant questions regarding the Lord's Supper. He covers such questions as: "What does it mean to say that Christ is present in Communion?"; "Is it permissible to exclude people from the celebration in some situations?"; and "Are bread and wine the only appropriate elements, or are can other items be substituted, such as apples and water?" While writing from a Reformed perspective, Welker attempts to address these and many other questions in an ecumenical spirit.

The book contains twelve chapters, each of which address in different ways the question, "What happens in holy Communion?" In the first part of the book, Welker discusses Communion as people thanking God and celebrating a community meal in a symbolic manner. In the second section, he focuses on the Lord's Supper as the place where Christ's presence is experienced in a worshipful and profound way. In the third part, Welker addresses Communion as the joyous gathering of the universal and eternal church, as well as the hopeful gathering in anticipation of the new creation and the glorification of God.

Welker shows that the Lord's Supper has meaning for the full range of theological doctrines, as expressed in a Christian statement such as the Apostle's Creed. His answers to the various questions about liturgical practice are thus anchored in carefully considered theological reflection. Welker provides a helpful contribution to theology and a beneficial resource for the church with this work.

John Jaeger

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