

American Society of Missiology, Annual Meeting 2006

Colleagues,

This past weekend for the umpteenth time I was north of Chicago at Techny Towers (RC retreat center) for the annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology [ASM].

I want to tell you about the weekend.

1. There are 400 or so members in the ASM. They span the ecumenical denominational rainbow. The society was consciously crafted that way at the very beginning nearly 40 years ago. How these folks found each other in the first place, I don't really know. But somehow, somewhere, in the USA missiologists who were Roman Catholics, "Evangelical-Independent," and "Conciliar" (= folks from mainline denominations who are members of the World Council of Churches) were in the same place at the same time and created the ASM. That tri-partite parsing of the ecumenical spectrum still prevails. Presidents are elected in a three-year rotation according to these rubrics. Outgoing president was RC Stephen Bevans. New prez is independent Darrel Whitemann. Prexy-elect for a year from now is Presbyterian Darrel Guder. Boards have members equally balanced according to the same ecumenical arithmetic.
2. A few of the surviving founders, now octagenarians, were at this year's get-together. They get red-carpet treatment. No longer alive from that pioneer group is Bill Danker, the first ever "missiologist" in the Missouri

Synod. Bill was my colleague at Concordia Seminary and then at Seminex. He “converted” me [his verb] to missions back in the 70s, thus rescuing me from the limbo of being “just” a prof. of systematic theology. Even though I was an outsider—never having been a “real” missionary “in the field”—he dragged me to some of the early ASM meetings. They eventually accepted me as a member. Bill then dragged me further to the international version of the same, International Association for Mission Studies [IAMS], and I’ve been missiologically enmeshed – or is it infected? – ever since. About 25 years, I think.

3. People still ask “what’s missiology?” The “-logy” part of the word is academic convention, like psycho-logy, biology, socio-logy. The missiologists make Christian missions the focus of their teaching and research. They do the same thing with their subject matter that sociologists do with society. It’s that simple.
4. Lutheran mission theology at the national and international gatherings is a minority voice. And Lutherans don’t show up at these gatherings in any great numbers either, sad to say. Among the 150 or so of us at Techny this past weekend, I found only one other Lutheran. There are 16 ASM members (4%) in the directory with clearly “Lutheran” addresses. Although I’ve been around long enough to be one of the bunch in the give-and-take of discussion and debate, I’ve never been asked to be on the program. The “other” Lutheran at this year’s event, Frieder Ludwig (Luther Seminary, St. Paul MN), was on one of the panels this time, but not by virtue of being Lutheran. One Lutheran on the ASM roster regularly tweaks me when I bemoan such matters: “Let’s face it, Ed, Lutheran missiology is an oxymoron.” ThTh receivers know I hold an op ed perspective on this.
5. But Luther did get quoted for support in two of the major

presentations—surprise, surprise—from supposedly quite different places on the theological spectrum, neither of them normally associated with Blessed Martin. One was the opening statement of Roman Catholic Steve Bevans' presidential address, "The Church as Creation of the Holy Spirit." The other was the closing statement by Assemblies of God seminary president Byron Klaus in his address "Pentecostalism and Mission." Steve's Luther said: "It is the proper work of the Holy Spirit to make the church." Byron quoted from the last verse of Luther's A Mighty Fortress: "The Spirit and the gifts are ours; their might with us abideth" – apparently an AoG version of the hymn verse.

6. "Pentecostalism and Mission: From Azusa Street to the Ends of the Earth" was the ASM theme this year. Except for the president's address, all the presentations came from Pentecostal folks. "Azusa Street," as some of you may know, refers to the revival in Los Angeles and the Pentecostal "outbreak" that happened there in 1906. So it's 100 years. Azusa Street is considered by many to be the birthplace of Pentecostalism; the pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission there, William Joseph Seymour, the church-father of the movement.
7. Here's the entry on Seymour in the Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission (p.613) "(1870-1922) African American Pentecostal pastor and leader of the Apostolic faith Mission. Born in Louisiana to former slaves, and raised as a Baptist, he later joined the holiness movement, adopting its belief in the entire sanctification and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the imminent return of Christ. In 1905 he came into contact with Charles F. Parham [sc., born the next county over from the Schroeder family farm!], leader of a Midwestern Pentecostal movement. After adopting Parham's teaching that God would bestow the gift

of tongues [i.e., known human languages] on Spirit-baptized believers to expedite world evangelism, he moved to Los Angeles. Beginning in 1906 his band of followers met in a former African Methodist Episcopal church on Azusa Street for prayer and renewal, which led to the launching of the Apostolic Faith Mission. News of the Azusa Street revival and restoration of the gifts of the Spirit quickly spread around the world through the pages of THE APOSTOLIC FAITH, edited by Seymour, and also through the ministries of persons who traveled from there across America and overseas."The uniqueness of this revival, the most influential of the century in terms of global impact, includes its eschatological orientation, spirituality, and interracial and intercultural makeup. . . . Seymour affected the worldwide course of the Pentecostal movement and became revered, especially among African American Pentecostals, for his emphasis on love and reconciliation as a witness of the Holy Spirit."

8. So we learned about Azusa Street and what's happened since then—also from Pentecostal voices out of Asia, Africa and Latin America, some historically linked to Azusa Street, some not. They all had those fancy academic initials behind their names, as did the rest of us. Pentecostals are not sitting in the back of the bus. The last speaker from the tradition was Amos Yong, systematic-theology-and-mission (hmm!) professor at Regent University (Virginia Beach, VA) "pushing the envelope with my own fellow Pentecostals," as he said, as he spun out a compelling scenario for "Pentecostalism and Interreligious Dialogue—Challenges and Opportunities." Some of us used to think that inter-religious dialogue was reserved for the eggheads. That may still be the case, but there are Pentecostal eggs in the basket.
9. Some ThTh readers probably know of the explosive growth in

our day of Pentecostal Christian numbers throughout the non-Western world. Others of you may not. The statistics are stunning. Here are some numbers from David Barrett, the guru of “missiometrics” today. [See his website www.WorldChristianDatabase.org for more.] When Azusa Street happened a century ago, less than a million Christians worldwide called themselves “Pentecostal, charismatic, or neocharismatic.” This year 600 million (yes, that’s the number) Christ-confessors use those words to identify themselves. Worldwide Lutheranism is around 80 million—and many of these also come under the Pentecostal rubric. One example of that is the (Lutheran) Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia with its several million members—most of whom, from what we learned when we worked there, would call themselves “charismatic.”

10. Back to the Luther quotes from the non-Lutheran conference speakers. When Steve Bevans began his presidential oration with his Luther quote, I blinked my eyes. What’s up? I wondered. He’s one of the dear “separated brothers”—originally the Pope’s designation for us non-Roman Catholics—with whom I’ve been discussing (better, arguing) for years about mission theology at ASM assemblies. He and his colleague Roger Schroeder at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago recently put it all together in a tome that is becoming the contemporary classic: “Constants in Context. Theology of Mission for Today.” ThTh offered a two-part review last year. If interested, GO to <https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur070705.shtml> and <https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur071405.shtml> Steve and my continuing taffy-pull is about the Kingdom of God. Even with the Luther quote, it didn’t seem to me that Steve got very close to what the Reformer proclaims God’s kingdom to be, let alone what the NT says. For a quick

look see Luther's explanation of "Thy kingdom come" in his small and large catechisms. Steve teased that he'd started with the Luther quote just to make me happy. I countered that a piece I've written for the next issue of CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION (Aug. 2006), "The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark," is really intended as my next step in our pas-de-deux. He said he'd read it when it appears.

11. When Byron Klaus concluded his "Pentecostalism and Mission" presentation with words from A Mighty Fortress, I blinked again. So I asked him in the Kaffee-klatsch thereafter, why the Luther citation? With his impressive scholarly credentials he knew, as did I, that Luther was not at all friendly to the "charismatics" of his day. "Here's why, Ed," he said. "When I was pastor of an Assemblies of God church here in Chicago years ago, we had many once-upon-a-time Lutherans in our congregation. But even apart from that, we had Luther's 'A Mighty Fortress' in our hymnbook. And whenever we sang it, the rafters shook, not just because of the one-time Lutherans. It was our confession. And the rafters really vibrated when we got to the Christ-confession in the last verse: 'The Word shall not depart from us, He ever with us sideth. The Spirit and the gifts are ours; their might with us abideth.' Since Luther is so 'mighty' with his Christocentrism in that hymn, he has to be right on the Holy Spirit too."

As surprising as it may seem, I was speechless. I finally did muster a Hallelujah.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder