

Mostly Mission, Some Miscellanea

Colleagues,

I. First an obit.

Richard L. Lyon, 77, “late-in-time” “discoverer of the Gospel” (his words), founder of the Order of Philippi, Crossings aficionado, super-whiz dentist for our family, lifelong Presbyterian AND ordained ELCA pastor—a real Mensch—died yesterday afternoon in hospice care at his daughter’s home in Texas. Marie and I are flying home to St. Louis this weekend, d.v., for the funeral Tuesday morning at the First Presbyterian Church in Alton, Illinois. I’m slotted to be the preacher. R.I.P., Richard.

II. We’ve been here at the Overseas Ministries Study Center for exactly one month, and I am (slowly) getting on with the assignment for which I came, my two research projects: “Lutheran missiology: an oxymoron?” and “Why Jesus in today’s world awash in a sea of faiths?” Most of January I’ve been in the classroom in the OMSC’s 4-week Intermester Seminars for Seminarians. I’ve been one of a dozen-plus teachers in the program—most all of them “real” missiologists. I’m learning. Next week I can get down to “my own work.” Well, maybe, as the previous paragraph prognoses.

III. But to move somewhat toward the mission study agenda, I’m sending first-hand mission artifacts for today’s ThTh. I do so, biting my tongue and cuffing my hand NOT to send on to you responses to last week’s ThTh 189. All but one came from women colleagues, all of them “suggesting” other issues for the Gospel to address in our world. The theology in these responses is too good for me to try to

summarize, so I'll save them for posting on a rainy day. I'm also cuffing my keyboard fingers NOT to comment on the theology of our US president's State of the Union message this week, almost every sentence wildly applauded by those in the live audience. Such applause signals that he was doubtlessly articulating the religion of America, a religion shot through with heresy. Some still ask: what's heretical in the religion of America? Answer: Check the president's text again for the following: our Manichean view of evil [world divided between evil people and righteous ones], our Pharisee heresy [God, I thank thee that I am not like other people], our salvation-theology that war and money for war will save the nation [i.e., that it is not real righteousness, God's kind of left-handed righteousness, that exalts a nation], and the all pervasive blindness to God our critic, God the terror-inducer whom Jesus urges us to fear (Luke 12:4f.). I've been asked by some folks from the United Church of Christ here in New England to discuss this with them after Easter. If something useful comes from that I hope to pass it on to you.

IV. Now finally to mission data.

In 1999 Marie and I did a mission stint in Indonesia—yes, it was the hardship venue of Bali—and sent ThTh postings on our life and learning there. Two of our colleagues there at that time were Bill and Margaret Hansen. Bill is a 1952 graduate (50 yrs ago!) from Concordia Seminary (St. Louis)—a member of one of the seminary's most illustrious classes ever. His classmates: Bob Schultz, Marty Marty, Richard Koenig, Ralph Zorn, Ken Kraemer, Bob Huebner, Don Meyer, Luther Beckemeier, Ken Mahler, Bob Clausen—and many others too humorous to mention (e.g., Franz Bibfeldt). Bill eschewed ordained ministry under the Lutheran label, took some alternate paths. In retirement he and Margaret

came to Bali as a faith-missionary at the same time that we were there and we discovered our common roots. They continue in Bali responding to a variety of Macedonian calls. Below is some first-hand mission history from him that arrived in yesterday's In Basket.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

From Bill and Margaret Hansen

Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

Thu, 31 Jan 2002

Here we are well into 2002 already. I am just finishing my monthly three-day fast and feeling quite victorious. In addition, in three more days I will have completed reading the Bible through entirely for the 69th time; this time it includes reading the New Testament through in the Indonesian language, for which I am so thankful to God. One more thing: If I live another week, I will be 73 years old (Margaret is a mere 65).

Do I sound like I am boasting? I am. The grace of God is something to boast about. When I realize that God has strengthened us for almost 2 1/2 years in Indonesia, I want to boast about His unfailing mercy.

This time I have three articles to send you—all in one package.

TAKE MY HANDS; TAKE MY FEET

Her face is lovely. She is warm, chatty, and fun to be with. Her name is Julie.

Just out of her 30's now, Julie, a single woman, came to

Indonesia 8-1/2 years ago.

Talking to her, you forget about her hands and feet. Crippling arthritis has deformed all four limbs quite severely for such a young person. But it does not stop her from fulfilling her God-given calling in Bali.

I love to watch Julie's hands as she plays the keyboard for songs of praise during worship, even more when she stands behind the keyboard and leads the music with her beautiful voice. As arthritic hands glide naturally over the notes, you think, "God is getting glory even through those hands."

Julie rides an 85cc Honda motorbike; she rides it everywhere in Denpasar where she lives, and she rides it to the mountains around Bedugul where she goes for regular ministry. I think of her on her motorcycle when it is raining so hard, as it is now. It rains so much in the mountains. Total raingear is a necessity. I think of those hands and feet on the controls of the motorbike, praying for her safety on the mountain curves.

Back in Denpasar, Julie regularly teaches over 100 children the English language. God has opened this door of ministry with its service and contacts for her. Julie was born a teacher, I believe. In her "free" time she teaches individual Christians, discipling them to follow Jesus. She also takes correspondence courses through an American university, and she develops reading material for children.

Serving God with good health (as in my case) is one thing; serving with severe handicaps is a special ministry of love. Lord, I am thankful that you put Julie in our path. She reminds me that "we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." (II Cor. 4:7)

When I look at Julie's hands and feet and see her serving the Lord with such joy, I think of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Though I would say, "Take it away, Lord," He says: "My grace is sufficient for HER, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor. 12:9, adapted) Today, seeing Julie, "I delight in weaknesses" (v. 10), for I see the glory of God through them.

Julie has just gone back to America for a short furlough. She may need more surgery on her limbs. "O God, have great glory in Julie!"

"ARI" CARRIES ON FOR JULIE ***(Name changed for security)***

Ari is a bright 17-year-old Balinese high school student who accepted Christ into his heart because of Julie.

His home village is *****, in the mountains, where Julie has been teaching people about Jesus for more than six years. There is a Christian man in *****, the first believer to convert from Hinduism. He is Ari's uncle. He bore the brunt of persecution when he came to Christ.

Ari's uncle has invited Julie to teach children the gospel in his home. Ari was one of those children, who now remembers hearing about Jesus from Julie when he was 12.

Ari's father died in 1997. Ari says appreciatively: "Julie was there for his funeral." There were twelve children in Ari's family, and there were three different mothers.

Many of Ari's brothers and sisters have now moved to Denpasar, the center of Bali's commerce and industry. Ari came to Denpasar last year in order to go to high school. He lives with

one of his brothers.

After he moved to Denpasar, Ari looked Julie up, and she spoke to him further about the Lord. Ari decided to become a Christian, and the next day he told Julie about it. Julie prayed with Ari and continues to mentor him in Christ.

Ari's school is Hindu. Ari has not hidden his Christianity, but he has not flaunted it either. Some of the students have made it hard for Ari. When they experimented with ouija boards during recess, Ari felt that he should not. Julie confirmed his feelings and prayed for him. But taking a stand has not made him popular.

In class last week the class began to talk about how bad a thing it is to "change your religion." No one mentioned Ari, but everyone knew who the subject of the conversation was. The teacher then asked everyone to "meditate" (Hindu-style) and report on what each person saw as he meditated. Ari wisely said that he just saw "light."

Ari faithfully attends Christian worship services, and he freely asks fellow-believers to pray about his problems. He even hosted our mid-week prayer meeting this week.

At Christmas-time Ari took part in the program, singing and reading a Scripture. His voice was clear and golden, his love for Jesus shining through.

On Christmas day, at 6:00 a. m. Ari's sister called to wish him "Merry Christmas." He was thrilled with even this small touch from a family member, for he is receiving the usual cold shoulder from most of his family.

Pray for Ari to maintain a good witness, and ask the Lord to fill him with His love.

MUSINGS SENT TO A FRIEND

Every once in a while when we think it is hot here (we are quite close to the equator), we think of Birmingham, AL, and it doesn't seem hot at all.

Sometimes we pass by Dunkin Donuts (yes we have them in Bali, and they are quite popular), and we wish we were with you on a leisurely Sunday afternoon enjoying donuts and each other.

One of the hard things about being here—there aren't that many—is not having our privacy. People are everywhere in this island nation of over 200 million people. Early in the morning when we are walking and hearing nothing, we look to the side of the road, and there are people like noiseless shadows behind the lovely vegetation. We forget that, but then we can't forget, either.

At our home we have a helper couple living on the premises and working for us (cooking, guarding, washing clothes, cleaning, gardening, driving) with their beautiful six-year-old son. God couldn't have blessed us with better people. But they have no concept of privacy, nor will they ever have it, I believe. They were just raised with two dozen relatives around in small quarters.

After I take a bath I step out of the kamar mandi to dry off and finish dressing, and someone is standing there. I change my bath time—to no effect. Another time I think I am alone, but I look up from my reading, and someone is going through the house. I like my quiet. People talk endlessly. Men here are not non-communicative and they rattle off answers before their wives are through speaking, but the conversation goes on and on at 100 decibels. The constant loud chatter is like a radio that

one cannot turn off.

People drop in to see you out of the blue. Sometimes they call ahead, but most do not have phones. We have learned to accept people at any time, but it is hard when we are tired. We often invite them to stay for a meal, and they usually do. Our cook is so supportive and ready with refreshments or enough food for guests.

Our helpers are Balinese Christians, and they share with us in ministry. We want them to. We pray for them to this end, and for all the people whose paths cross ours regularly, that the Holy Spirit will use us to introduce them to Jesus or help them to know Him better through our example. We know we are living in a fishbowl, but it is a wonderful chance to show off our Jesus. And it gives us great joy when we see others walking in the light and going on in the gospel life.

After almost 2 1/2 years here, we are getting pretty well accustomed to living in Indonesia. The language is not coming easy, however. I have always had fair ability with languages, but starting as a septuagenarian who cannot hear well has carried its frustrations. We know a lot of words, we think, until we hear them spoken in fast sentences; then it seems we just don't know anything. Fortunately, many people speak a few words of English, and some speak quite a bit, if you can understand it. No worse, though, than Australian speakers—we live close to Australia—or people from European countries like Holland. Sometimes we have to check to see if we really know English!

In a week we will go on another trip to the little island of Sabu, the driest place in Indonesia. We have never been there before. We plan to stay a week, then go on to Timor for another two weeks. Our work in Sabu will be Bible seminars for pastors

and leaders during the day and worship services in the evenings. In Timor it will be some of the same, plus intensive teaching of young people in Bible School. We need your prayers for boldness in witnessing and effectiveness in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Love from Bali, Indonesia

BILL and MARGARET HANSEN (January 2002)