

# The History of Medical Missions

Colleagues,

This week's post is an ellipse—one storyline orbiting two centers. First center in the ellipse is John Eckrich's review of Christoffer Grundmann's pioneering historical study of Medical Missions; second center is John's own pitch for medical missions today. Both author and reviewer themselves constitute a second sort of ellipse on the personal level as well. Author Grundmann is the current occupant of the "John R. Eckrich Chair, University Professor in Religion and the Healing Arts" at Valparaiso University. Reviewer John D. Eckrich M.D. is the son of the man for whom the V.U. chair is named. For more biographical data on both John and Christoffer see the final paragraphs of this post. Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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***Book Review and Commentary—  
Christoffer H. Grundmann. Sent to Heal: Emergence  
and Development of Medical Missions.  
University Press of America: Lanham, Maryland.  
xvi, 375 pp. Paper. US\$40.***

*Reviewed by John D. Eckrich, M.D., Internist and  
Gastroenterologist, St. Louis, and Executive Director of Grace  
Place Lutheran Retreat Ministries.*

*Dr. Christoffer Grundmann, in this remarkably detailed and utterly enlightening perspective on medical missions, closes his thesis thusly, "All (God's people who hear the call of Christ into healing ministry from the Gospel in Matthew 4:23 and commissioned to us in John 14:12-15) are asked to give a credible account of the corporeality of salvation in their respective witness, a witness which will be credible not in what it claims but in what it actually brings about tangibly. And this should be nothing but life, life in abundance."*

*This beautiful paraphrase catches the essence of John 10:10, and I believe sounds the leading trumpet voluntary from the orchestral history of medical mission work as provided for us in Grundmann's wonderful text to lead us to mission service in the 21st Century. Abundant life is "whole life," integrated living, balancing body, mind, spirit, relationships and emotion into vocation and leisure. This Gospel mantra, defined by Christ himself in Mark 12 for the scribes and teachers of the law, describes for us the characteristics necessary to do medical missions in the future.*

*Medical missionaries need to understand themselves as "whole" people and approach their task wholistically. They must see the dis-order and dis-ease in the people they serve wholly. Missionaries must deal with an interactive matrix of health and disease"physical, spiritual, emotional, relational and intellectual" all experienced in a milieu of terrorism, biodegradation, and the very real challenges of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, atheism and whatever "isms" the future holds for us. What formidable challenges! How could anyone vaguely hope to "heal" in this quagmire? Thank God, as Dr.Grundmann exemplifies for us from history, we do not enter this trying ground on our own. Our ancestral missionaries model for us the "healing" power embodied in our work because, and only because, the glorified body and spirit of our Savior*

*resides within us from our baptism. His whole being makes us whole. We cannot help but succeed!*

*Why is an historical review of medical missions so important now, and not just a major intellectual exercise? As Grundmann reminds us, history provides us the distance and overview of our actions to allow us to be truly critical of our motives, direction and outcome assessments.*

*Particularly poignant are the enlightening questions Grundmann asks of 19th Century missionaries, and which he reminds us are the questions we need to ask of ourselves today:*

- *What is the “proper task” of medical missionaries?*
- *How does “saving souls” relate to healing diseases and ordering society toward better function?*
- *With scarce money, should it be spent to train and support primarily medical personnel?*
- *Does the explosion of science and technology redefine “life,” “salvation,” “healing,” and “abundant living”?*
- *Does modern medicine compel us to send people resources into dangerous and often unwelcome settings?*
- *Can we really “enjoy” modern culture and medical knowledge without feeling obliged to extend these to “have nots”?*

*Sent To Heal* beautifully explores the multiple layers and parameters of these questions with focus on the foundations of medical mission work in the 1800's led by middle European and British advocates, mission societies of Europe and North America, gender-specific missionary pioneers, geographic mission stations in Asia, Africa and eastward, and types of mission venues, particularly hospital and medical clinics, dispensaries and public health initiatives. With anticipation, we look forward to Dr. Grundmann's promise of a second volume detailing 20th Century medical mission work with its new

challenges and opportunities. This is most necessary!

Dr. Grundmann sets the table for what I find are the major themes facing us in the third millennium. Epidemiology, public health and hygiene, preventative health, the economics of health care distribution and preservation of ecological resources for health are leading issues for anyone joining the future medical mission debate. Practitioners must be trained and must think and treat wholistically. They must be versed not only in their medical expertise, but anchored in their spiritual relationship to Christ, with good management, teaching and people skills. They should be compassionate (theology of the Cross) and continue to bear the hurts of those they serve as their medical missionary ancestors have modeled for them.

Finally, from my own perspective and grown out of history and contemporary trends, I believe great awareness should be given the concept of faith-community based nursing, what we used to call "parish nursing." This model, forwarded by Granger Westberg and others, holds real promise not only for North American peoples, but for all regions of the world. As we have learned that the "great American doctor" and the "European or American" hospital/clinic model imposed into foreign cultures may not be so acceptable an entry point to Gospel ministry today, the simple care, education, health/hygiene-delivery model offered by faith-based nurses appears to have effective acceptance in many more societies.

Dr. Grundmann's book is an essential read for all who hear and accept the call to health and healing ministry. The bibliography alone is worth the price of admission. But more importantly, this text and references demonstrate for us how this fascinating and complex cadre of disciplines and medical and theological topics place medical mission work on firm

*scientific, sociologic, theological, and humanitarian footing. This is God-work.*

*John D. Eckrich, M.D.*

**Addendum:** *John R. Eckrich, who glorified Christ in this Valparaiso chair, led a dedicated Christian life centered in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He loved the Church and the Church treated him with goodness. His beginnings were humble and austere in 1920's America – broken family, poverty of the depression, night school degree in engineering from Washington University, St. Louis, business and civic leadership, and finally CEO of The Lutheran Medical Center of St. Louis.*

*When the health care and urban environment around Lutheran Medical Center was spiraling into a formidable future, he was able to transition this great health resource into a charitable foundation, now actually divided into two phenomenal organizations: the Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis having awarded multi-millions of dollars toward myriad health initiatives in St. Louis and the world; and, Lutheran Senior Services' managers of a multitude of senior living and health care facilities throughout the central U.S. His four children and their spouses all work in the health industry and serve their home Lutheran congregations with vigor. Jack Eckrich rests this day with a Crown of Glory in the arms of his healing Savior to eternity.*

*John D. Eckrich, M.D. (John R. Eckrich's son) is a Lutheran physician, Internist and Gastroenterologist for the past 30 years in St. Louis. From his experiences as physician to many Lutheran seminarians at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and private physician to many pastors, teachers and LC-MS personnel, he founded Grace Place Lutheran Retreats. Grace Place offers weeklong retreats to Lutheran professional church*

workers, teaching them preventative health and wellness skills to integrate physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and relational health into their professional ministry and personal pilgrim walk. In five years, Grace Place has retreated over 650 clergy couples and 150 seminary students, “inoculating” them against unhealthy practices. Dr. Eckrich was a medical missionary to Slovakia in the 1990’s and currently serves as the medical director and advisor to Dar Al Kalima Health and Wellness Center in Bethlehem, Palestine.

Christoffer Grundmann has theology degrees from several institutions in his native country Germany, beginning with the Hermannsburg Mission Academy and concluding with the standard “double doctorate” for German university professors with two book-length dissertations. One of them is the book reviewed here. The second book (still only available in German) deals with the phenomenon of healing in the so-called “AIC,” African Instituted Churches, in southern Africa. Christoffer was a Lutheran missionary in South India from 1978-83. During that time he facilitated the first-ever translation and publication of Luther’s Works in the Tamil language. On return to Germany he joined the staff of the Institute of Medical Missions at Tuebingen as theological consultant and hospital chaplain. After several academic appointments in Germany, he joined the Valparaiso (Indiana) University theology faculty in 2001. He is a sought-after expert in matters of medical missions, faith and healing, healing and the spirit worlds, and is often elsewhere on the planet for consultations and guest lectures in these fields.