

CALVIN SEMINARY FORUM

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COVER ESSAY

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MISSIONS?

Changes Underway.

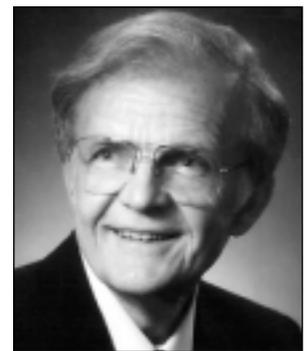
For all who follow Jesus, engagement in the enterprise called "Missions" is not an option. Missions will continue until Christ returns. However, forms of missionary endeavor, methods, and leadership can change. A number of changes are currently underway. I will comment briefly on four of them.

Southern World Missionaries are Now in the Lead

I regard this as the most exciting thing happening in global missions. There are currently over 40,000 cross-cultural missionaries from

the West, and in some places more are needed. ***There are twice that number of missionaries sent out by churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America.*** Just as the world church is no longer predominantly western, global missions is no longer dominated by westerners. In fact, the West itself needs missionaries from other countries to help us evangelize ethnic communities here. ***For the first time in history, the slogan has become a reality that Mission is the proclamation of the whole gospel, by the whole church, to the whole world.***

Because of this, one of the greatest challenges in missions is the development of partnerships between northern and southern world churches, mission agencies and schools. The



ROGER S. GREENWAY

Professor of World Missiology at Calvin Theological Seminary

“...global missions is no longer dominated by westerners, ”

experience and financial resources of one side of the world must be matched with the spiritual riches, enthusiasm and evangelistic skills of the other. ***Old mission structures need to be re-examined***

in the light of new realities and the tasks we share in common with non-western churches.

At the seminary level, we need to develop partnerships

Please see COVER ESSAY next page ▶

FEATURED ARTICLES

“What’s Happening in Missions? Changes Underway” - Roger S. Greenway	p. 1
“World Missions” - Henry Zwaanstra	p. 3
“Magaji Meets Jesus: The Rocky Road to Conversion for a Follower of African Traditional Religion” - Albert Strydhorst	p. 4
“The Fiesta in the Philippines” - Anne C. Kwantes	p. 6
“God’s Love: The Compelling Force of Christian Missions.” - Carl Bosma	p. 8

COVER ESSAY cont.

GREENWAY

with southern world institutions that will diminish the need for uprooting foreign students by bringing them here and that will enhance the degree programs available overseas. Such partnerships will also enrich education in the West as students and professors are regularly exposed to global realities.

The Missionary Movement is Post-denominational as well as Post-western

The distinctive ideas and practices that formed and divided churches in the past are now considered irrelevant to most Christians. People support the mission work that appeals to them, regardless of whether or not it bears a familiar denominational label. Denominational agencies that once were prominent in global missions, now play relatively minor roles. **Most of the work is done by newer evangelical groups and independent churches that have little interest in denominational differences.**

This does not mean that denominational mission agencies no longer have roles to play in missions. They are needed to support their global networks of churches and institutions, especially in leadership development. **In some places they are still needed for old-time pioneer mission work, planting churches where none were before.** But in any case it is important for missionaries to move beyond their denominational circles and operate in a framework of evangelical ecumenism where the burning concern is the advance of God's kingdom.

In a world where multitudes are poor, many are persecuted, resources are stretched, and so many need to hear the gospel, **unity and cooperation among Christian workers are higher values than old divisions and petty differences.** Missionaries schooled in Reformed theology and missiology have a great deal to offer. But in order to maximize their influence, they must move into wider arenas than many of them did in the past.

The Internet is the New Way to Communicate

Not long ago a heated debate broke out among mission leaders over the question of whether the "dumbing down" effect, observable in North American education, had struck missions as well. The interesting thing about this debate was that it was carried out largely by way of the internet. Only a fraction of it appeared in print.

Charges and countercharges flew back and forth over whether an elite number of people called "missiologists" or mission professionals had an edge on knowledge about missions. Voices came "out of the woodwork" defending the credibility of people who had not published books or scholarly articles, nor enjoyed name recognition, but who were leaders of churches and organizations involved in missions. It was pointed out that one of the websites carrying the debate had more subscribers than the two leading journals, *Missiology* and *The Evangelical Missions Quarterly* combined. Some of the loudest voices came from people never heard of in missiological circles.

“ A ‘virtual library’ of Reformed literature: a joint venture for CTS/CRWM? ”

The internet has become the medium-of-choice for cutting-edge missiological discussions. I expect that books and journals will always be venues for serious writing, but they are too slow to satisfy a fast-paced world in which people feel the need to communicate ideas and respond to changes now. **The internet has produced a new generation of opinion-makers who bypass traditional media and make creative use of electronic communications.**

The thought appeals to me of producing a "virtual library" of Reformed literature that via the internet can be downloaded anywhere in the world. The production of such a global resource could be a joint project between Calvin Theological Seminary and Christian Reformed World Missions. It would greatly enhance our witness throughout the world.

Local Churches are Resurfacing as Centers of Evangelism

We have come through an era in which evangelism, in many cases, was conducted outside the orbit of the local church. Often, it was done by people who regarded local congregations mainly as sources of money and workers, but not as vital centers of evangelism. The drift away from church-based evangelism can be traced back as far as the fourth century. But in today's world, which resembles in many ways the reli-

gious environment of the Early Church, **local congregations are regaining their sense of apostolicity, the missionary calling.**

Churches large and small are sensing in new ways their responsibility to be light, salt and leaven in the world. Interest in church structures and the affairs of classes, presbyteries and major assemblies is declining while more emphasis is placed on outreach to the community and church members' involvement in short-term overseas missions.

This resurfacing of interest in evangelism based in local congregations is a healthy development. But it needs to be accompanied by a clear articulation of the Reformed view of God's kingdom and its practical applications for life. It is here that Reformed missiology offers an important contribution to congregations engaged in evangelism. **I believe that the post-modern world is fertile ground for evangelism, but it must be the kind of evangelism that goes beyond the simple "call to decision," to in-depth discipleship, community building, education and ministries of reconciliation and healing.**

The stress in recent years on methodology, social studies, and anthropology have been beneficial in a number of ways. The sense now is that in pulpits and classrooms theological reflection is needed to direct God's missionary people in the right direction. ■

Henry Zwaanstra, Editor

WORLD MISSIONS



**HENRY
ZWAANSTRA**

Professor of Historical
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Theological Seminary

This issue of FORUM is devoted to world missions.

Sabbatical Leave

During the spring quarter of the 1998-99 academic year and this past summer, I was on sabbatical leave. I volunteered my services as a missionary teacher in Nigeria and in the Philippine Islands. While on sabbatical, I decided that an issue of the FORUM should focus on world missions.

From March to May, I taught in two schools in Nigeria: The Theological College of Northern Nigeria, located in Bukuru and the Jos Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), located in Jos. JETS is the theological school of the Evangelical Church of West Africa. **The students at these schools come from all the Nigerian states and some from other African countries. They represent many different denominations: Reformed, Presbyterian,**

Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, and others.

While in Nigeria, I worshiped in many different churches in the Jos area. The Christian church in Africa is the fastest growing church in the world. Christianity is also growing very rapidly in Nigeria. The churches I visited were very well attended with many young people present. **The singing was vigorous and engaging; the preaching was lively, biblical, and evangelical.** It is a spiritually uplifting and deeply gratifying experience to observe the power of God's Word and Spirit in Africa today.

When in Nigeria, I visited the places where Christian Reformed missionaries worked and established churches: Wukari, Donga, Takum, and Lupwe. I also went to Mkar, the headquarters of the NKST church (The Church of Christ among the Tiv). There I visited the Reformed Theological College of Nigeria and Hill Top University, a Christian institution of higher education.

From June to the end of August, I was in the Philippine Islands. There I taught at the Asian Theological Seminary in Bacolod City on Negros Island and at its extension in Iloilo on the neighboring Island of Penay. The students in the Philippines also came from many different evangelical Protestant denominations. Six pastors from the Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines enrolled in the course. All the students, regardless of denominational background, respected the Reformed theological tradition.

In both Nigeria and the Philippines, I attended the Christian Reformed missionaries' annual conferences. All CRC missionaries, world relief personnel, supportive staff, and their families attended the conferences. Attending these conferences was for me a richly rewarding experience.

// The Christian church in Africa is the fastest growing church in the world. //

The CRC missionaries and relief workers in Nigeria and the Philippines are impressively competent and dedicated servants of God. I presume this is no less true of CRC missionaries and relief workers in other parts of the world.

In This Issue

Professor Roger Greenway, veteran CRC missionary and missiologist writes the lead article on the changes presently underway in global missions. Professor Carl Bosma, also a former CRC missionary, comments on the Great Commission and its continuing relevance for world missions.

I invited Albert Strydhorst, a CRC missionary working among the Kambari people in northwestern Nigeria to contribute an article to this issue. The Kambari area is a frontier area of CRC outreach in Nigeria. I visited Albert and his wife Carolyn during the Easter vacation in 1999. **Weekdays, Albert and Carolyn's dust-covered backyard is a medical clinic where Carolyn dis-**

penses medicine and cares for the sick. On Sunday mornings, Albert conducts open-air church services in the same place. Illiterate men and boys from surrounding villages come here to hear the gospel preached in their own language. The Kambari have

not yet been sufficiently influenced by the gospel to permit women and girls to attend worship services. On Easter Sunday, the Easter Story was read for the first time in the tribal language. CRC missionaries translated the story into the native language. In his article, Albert takes the reader into the interior spiritual life of a recent convert from African tribal religion.

I also invited Anne Kwantes, professor of Asian Church and Mission History at the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila, to write an article on mission work in the Philippines.

Protestant missionaries in the Philippines present the gospel primarily to an urban, nominally Roman Catholic population. In her article, Anne focuses on the Philippine *fiesta* and how religion, both pre-Christian and Roman Catholic, has influenced it. ■



ALBERT STRYDHORST

Christian Reformed
Missionary in Nigeria

MAGAJI MEETS JESUS: THE ROCKY ROAD TO CONVERSION FOR A FOLLOWER OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION.

“...this church is 'a mile wide, but only an inch deep.'”

“Wow,” Magaji exclaimed as he looked up. “This is really interesting.”

I beamed inside. This is what I had been hoping for since we had started reading Bible stories each evening. We had been moving slowly through a series of stories that captured the big picture. But tonight I arrived late, so I asked what he had found so interesting. “Oh, it’s from a page called Leviticus,” he said. “Those people slaughtered animals just like we do.” I made a mental note to update my list of Most Interesting Bible Stories.

“Magaji...recalls the early days and how he first understood Christianity.”

Magaji found Leviticus interesting because it connected with his experience. But, finally, **Scripture and preaching must prove more than just interesting; they must be meaningful.** And I’m increasingly impressed with how full of meaning our missionary activity is, though sometimes not as we had hoped or planned.

Let’s assume that Magaji continued to read the Bible

and became a Christian. Now imagine that ten years later, he has entered the pages of the FORUM to reflect on his journey. He recalls the early days, and how he first understood Christianity. Fearing that his writing may offend some of his teachers, he reminds them of one of their own proverbs: “God hits home runs with nerf balls.”

Who I Am

My name is Peter. I was Magaji, but I discarded that name when I was baptized. The missionaries tried to convince me to keep my old one, since it would be a way of honoring my parents who gave me the name. But a pastor convinced me that a new name would mark me as a new person. He

told me of many people in the Bible who had their names changed. Besides, Magaji is the title of a pagan priest, and I wanted to leave that life behind. Now the Christians call me Peter; the missionaries and my father still call me Magaji.

I’m a farmer. I have thirteen living children; four of my children have died. I’ve been to Bible School, so many people come to me with questions about Christianity. But

I’ll never be an elder in the church because I have two wives. I sometimes find it strange that the missionaries encouraged me to go to Bible School, and then my church told me I could never be a leader. “This is what the Bible teaches,” I was told. I looked it up, and they’re right.

My Story

The church in Africa has grown explosively! Yet just last week I read in a pamphlet that this church is “a mile wide, but only an inch deep.” I wasn’t surprised that an African wrote this, because he knows how we are. We can worship God with great enthusiasm one day, but on the next we sneak off to the boka to consult the spirits. I know, because I’ve been there.

Why don’t we follow Jesus more wholeheartedly? I’m not sure, but I think some of the reasons go back a long way. I’ll

never forget when the missionaries first came to live with us: each with his own truck and motorcycle, medicines for all kinds of sickness, and money that never finished. Some of us thought that this was the life of a Christian, and we sure wanted it! We learned some Bible stories, were baptized, and went to church on Sunday, **but in our hearts we were never converted.**

But others of us went deeper into Christianity to understand what it was really about. It wasn’t easy, because at first the missionaries didn’t speak our language. They learned slowly and painfully. The pain wasn’t theirs alone. We were told repeatedly that following Jesus was evil; but no, the missionary meant to say that it was difficult. And then there were occasions when we didn’t have the right word in our language, like the word for Holy Spirit. In some of the early baptisms, I remember people being baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Good — but sometimes bad — Spirit of God.

It wasn’t only that the missionar-



Cont. pg. 5 ►

MAGAJI...cont.

STRYDHORST

ies weren't saying things clearly. **We usually misunderstood because we were listening through the filter of our own experiences.** Like with prayer. Before, we always went through our traditional priests who would mediate blessings or curses for us. Now we didn't need these mediators anymore. We could go directly to God. I know one of my brothers who cursed his enemy through prayer. No one advised him to do this, but that's what we understood prayer to be.

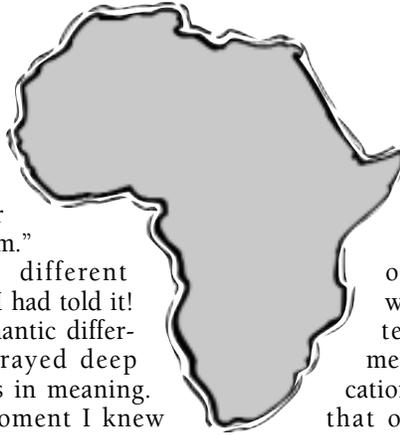
Many of us even saw the Bible as a kind of charm. In the past we protected ourselves with charms of sacred grass. Most Muslims wear talismans or charms containing writings from the Koran. It only made sense that we would similarly use the Bible. One of the Nigerian evangelists once even advised me to place a Bible near my bed to prevent any troubling dreams. The prophylactic Word!

But there is one area above all where Christianity has failed Africa: It has not taken seriously the power of the spirit-world in our lives. Let me be frank. **Spirits are just as real to us as the air we breathe.** And though occasionally they soothe and comfort, more often they frighten the living daylight out of us. They will not be ignored.

I remember the time my dead father came to me in a dream. He admonished me to leave my habit of excessive drinking. When I recounted my experience to the missionary, he listened with great interest. He even encouraged me to take my father's advice. But later, when he gave my testimony to others, he stated

t h a t
 "Magaji dreamed that his father came to him." That was different from how I had told it! Minor semantic differences betrayed deep differences in meaning. At that moment I knew that he did not yet understand my world.

The church doesn't ignore the spirit-world like it used to. Today missionaries are stretch-



beginning they insisted that God was not only interested in saving our souls, but our bodies as well. They ministered with medicine and education. They insisted that our farms were important to God. They taught us a holistic gospel that celebrated God's rule over this world.

To bolster our appreciation

with it. I'll never forget the day that we read the story of the Golden Calf. God had saved Jacob's children from slavery, and then these people rejected him. As we read about the sacrifices and the drinking and the revelry, I exclaimed: "That's like how we do!"

My brothers glared at me as if I had just revealed a secret of our traditional religion. I had. But I meant more than that. I meant that **we had done just like the children of Jacob: We had turned our backs on God.** Of course we didn't do it as deliberately as they had. But I often felt in my own heart, as we sacrificed and indulged in revelry, that this was not pleasing to the One who gave us life.

In the coming days we went on to hear how God rescued those disobedient children of Jacob. And, interestingly, I began to see myself more and more as one of those children. When we finally reached the place where Peter challenged the people to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, I was ready!

Not everyone meets Jesus the way I did. Many people

“ Our country is filled with Christians longing for heaven and cursing this world. ”

ing their worldview to let the spirits in. But we need to do more than simply accept the reality of spirits and their power. What we need is the Rest that comes from knowing that Jesus Christ has crushed Evil. The final outcome of our struggle is certain! Out of this confidence, and with the strength of the Holy Spirit, we are able to command the spirits to flee.

These dramatic confrontations with spirits do take place. I prefer to be with my African brothers when they happen, because I think the missionaries are still a bit behind on the learning curve. But we mustn't forget the most important thing. **Spiritual confrontations are the servants of something bigger and better — the peace and rest that we know in Christ.**

The missionaries led me into the Light. From the very

of this world, we were discouraged from singing songs that yearned for heaven. I now understand the reasoning behind this. **Our country is filled with Christians longing for heaven and cursing this world.** But let me also caution that our *experience* creates in us a hunger for something better. If I were already living in a mansion, maybe another mansion wouldn't be a big deal. But for us who bury many of our children, heaven holds a lot of promise. Our view of life-after-death isn't simple escapism like we've sometimes been told.

What was it that finally brought me out of my fathers' religion and into my new life? Bible reading had a lot to do

come because they see that Christianity works: believers don't fear the spirits like they once did. But unless these people plant their feet in the same story that took me in, they'll be numbered among the "mile wide and inch deepers." That's why, elder or not, I spend almost every evening telling the Story. ■

“ ...repent and believe in Jesus Christ, I was ready. ”

THE FIESTA IN THE PHILIPPINES



ANNE C. KWANTES

Professor of Asian Church and Mission History at Asian Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines.

Everyone here agrees — Filipinos love *fiestas*. The word “*fiesta*” will bring a smile to the face of almost any Filipino. After all, a *fiesta* is a special time with friends, a time for fellowship, food, and lots of activities. Each year brings numerous *fiestas*. Sometimes people are busy for weeks preparing for them. It is surprising, how even those facing many problems in their day-to-day life set them aside and participate in the festivities.

Fiestas and Why They Occur

What actually are *fiestas* and why do these celebrations occur? The *fiesta* is of Spanish origin (the reason for the Spanish term). Spain, being a Roman Catholic country, set aside certain days to remember particular saints with processions and celebrations. **When Spanish missionaries entered the Philippines during the mid-1500s, they found that the *fiesta* was a convenient tool**

to help teach Filipinos the Roman Catholic faith.

From the very beginning Spaniards brought missionaries to the Islands. The Spanish wanted to christianize the people, as well as colonize the country. The missionaries tried to attract the people, who lived in widespread areas, to the towns where there were Roman Catholic churches. Missionaries hoped and expected that people would be drawn to and participate in the colorful processions and religious dramas.

Today, there are *fiestas* throughout the Philippines to celebrate events in the life of Jesus and Mary, and to honor saints who lived long ago. When the Spaniards came, many communities were given

on Ash Wednesday and receive ashes on their forehead from the officiating priest. On Palm Sunday, cleverly woven palms are bought and blessed at church, and then later brought home. Many rituals are observed as Holy Week continues. The passion story is chanted from booths temporarily constructed along the streets. In the cities some people drag heavy crosses along the road. Others walk along the streets whipping themselves to fulfill a vow to God or to do penance. On Thursday, all those who can, return to their home town. **Every year on Good Friday, some individuals allow themselves to be publicly and openly crucified for some minutes.** The country comes to a standstill.

in striking contrast, is empty. It eloquently declares that Christ is risen.

Town *fiestas* have many faces. They usually feature a mass and a procession. Long after the religious ritual is completed, people eat, drink, and enjoy the rest of the day.

“...Spanish missionaries...found that the *Fiesta* was a tool to teach the Roman Catholic faith.”

names of saints. Nearly all towns have a patron saint to remember.

The last nine mornings before Christmas throngs crowd the churches for pre-dawn masses, the *misa de aguinaldo* (mass of the gift). The climax comes at midnight, December 24, when at the *misa de gallo* (mass of the rooster) Christ’s birth is celebrated. Following that, people visit their parental homes for an elaborate dinner. Here grandchildren receive money from grandparents. The next morning, December 25, is quiet. The people sleep.

The celebration of Jesus’ suffering and death is a bigger event than Christmas. Filipinos normally go to mass

On Easter morning, the meeting of Jesus and his mother, Mary, is acted out in church services and in public dramas. Yet, in the Filipino setting, the resurrection of Jesus is far less important than his suffering and death. Paradoxically, at the same time that people remember the suffering Christ, they also gather with their families to eat and drink in a festive mood. A further paradox is found in the crucifix, a cross with Christ hanging on it. **The typical Protestant cross,**

Unfortunately, all too often excessive drinking mars the festivities.

Each year towns located on the sea have their own unique processions. Perhaps the most famous is the feast of Our Lady of Peñafranca, in Naga City, approximately 450 kms. southeast of Manila. Here a flower-decked raft with a shrine to Mary is floated down the river. Another famous *fiesta* is the annual three-day festival in Obando, Bulacan, just north of Manila. The

“...on Good Friday, some... allow themselves to be publicly and openly crucified...”

FIESTA...cont.

LEDER

procession for this festival is particularly famous because of its special dances of childless couples, who believe that these dances will fulfill their wishes and prayers for a child. It is also said that the "lovelorn suitors" come here to pray for a wife. Young women also come to pray for a husband.

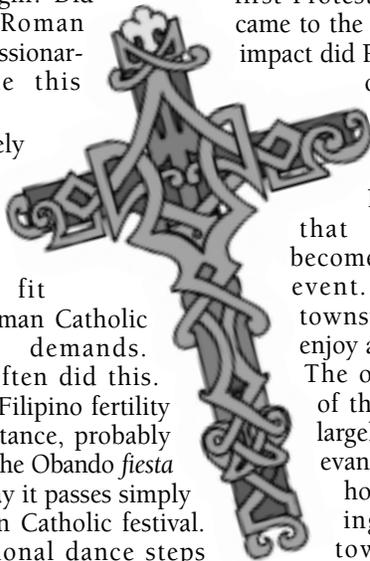
The *fiesta* — always colorful, always accompanied by music, feasting, and Roman Catholic ritual — takes an important place in a town's calendar. But where did the Philippine *fiesta* really have its origin? Did zealous Roman Catholic missionaries initiate this practice?

Very likely Filipinos adapted pre-Hispanic rituals to fit Spanish Roman Catholic colonial demands. Filipinos often did this. An ancient Filipino fertility rite, for instance, probably survives in the Obando *fiesta* though today it passes simply for a Roman Catholic festival. The traditional dance steps seem to pre-date the arrival of Spanish missionaries. The procession of a *fiesta* in Laguna, southeast of Manila, includes dancers who crouch, shake their shoulders, and imitate

Early in the Spanish period (1565-1898), existing folk rituals seem often to have been combined with what the missionaries were trying to teach. **According to Roman Catholic scholars, after some three hundred years of Spanish presence in the Philippines, most of the pre-Spanish features of the festivals have faded.** The *fiestas* have become Filipino Roman Catholic feasts.

Protestants and the *Fiesta*

One hundred years ago the first Protestant missionaries came to the Philippines. What impact did Protestantism have on the *fiesta*? How have Protestants responded to it? Some Filipino Protestants insist that the *fiesta* has become merely a social event. Relatives and townspeople meet and enjoy a holiday together. The original honoring of the saints has been largely forgotten. Some evangelical Christians, however, want nothing to do with the town *fiesta*. They make other plans for the day and stay far away from the festivities. Still other Protestants try to use the *fiestas* to keep Christian traditions alive, as did the early Roman Catholic Spaniards. The majority of evangelical Christians do not want to be part of the town *fiesta* as most Filipinos celebrate it. There are, however, creative ways of giving a biblical significance to the day. **Some Christian families prepare food, invite guests to their homes, and use the occasion to visit together and to give**



// The typical Protestant cross... is empty. //

handicapped people. It is thought the practice goes back to the distant past when handicapped people looked for healing from priestess healers.

// The *Fiestas* have become Roman Catholic feasts. //

thanks to God. One of the participating families often prepares leaflets with meditations and prayers of thanksgiving.

The United Church of Christ, one of the largest Protestant denominations in the Philippines, holds Reformation lectures during the month of October. In this way the church reminds its members of the meaning of the Protestant Reformation.

“ Some evangelical Christians..., want nothing to do with the town *Fiesta*. ”

The Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines (CRCP), a sister denomination of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, celebrates Reformation Day annually in several denominational centers. People gather for worship, singing and drama. Reminiscent of the *fiesta*, eating together is part of the celebration. Some CRCP congregations also observe pre-dawn services during the nine days before Christmas. Again, **worship, fellowship and breakfast together strengthen the Christian character of the event.**

New Wine in Old Wine Skins?

In time, will the original purpose of the *fiesta* be forgotten if new meaning is poured into these days of celebration? Should Protestant Christians celebrate something other than what the townspeople celebrate in a *fiesta* or should they set aside such festivities altogether because they do more harm than good?

One cannot help but note that young people in North America often party enthusiastically in churches on Halloween. Reformed families in America also enjoy decorating a Christmas tree, even

though Christmas trees originally were mid-winter symbols of fertility in Europe.

In the missionary context another question inevitably arises: **What approach should missionaries take when confronted with practices such as the *fiesta*?** Should the cross-cultural missionary make decisions about such matters, or should new Christians themselves decide them for their own people? These questions remain for your contemplation. ■



CALVIN SEMINARY FORUM

GOD'S LOVE: THE COMPELLING FORCE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS.



CARL BOSMA

Associate Professor of
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Novelist Reynolds Price claims that Jesus' teaching "has resulted in the most far-reaching movements of mercy, tolerance and human freedom..." ("Jesus of Nazareth: Then and Now," Time, Dec 6, 1999, p. 94). For this reason he also asserts that Jesus' words in Matthew 11: 28-29, "Come to me," offer the old welcome. Even though Price professes that Jesus cured him from cancer, he cannot accept Jesus' final instruction to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. In his opinion, "that last command goes on contributing heavily to the evils of national and religious warfare, institutional and individual hatred, imperialism and enslavement..."

Under the banner of love and human freedom, Price and others plead for cultural diversity and religious inclusiveness. **Since they consider all Christian missionary efforts to be at odds with religious pluralism, they call for an end to Christian missions.**

An important argument against the current call for ending Christian global missions is the intrinsic Scriptural link between God's love and his disciples' permanent obligation to disciple the nations in the period between Christ's first and second coming. A principal reason for continuing the commission to preach the gospel "to the ends of the world" and "to the end" is that **the missionary enterprise is not only a natural response to Christ's royal edict (Mt. 28:18-20), but that it is also rooted in God's persistent love for his creation (John 3:16) as that love manifests itself in redemptive history.**

Jesus accepted his mission. Because of Christ's loving obedience, God reconciled himself once for all to the world (Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:18) by making peace through Jesus' blood, shed on the cross (Col. 1:20) and by "not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

So that the nations might participate fully in the blessing promised to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), Jesus, the seed (Gal. 3:16) and the son of Abraham (Mt. 1:1), also sent his disciples into the world (John 17:18; 20:21). He empowered them with the Spirit to declare God's pardon of sins (John 20:22-23). **Consequently, the disciples' commission is based on the connection between God's sending his Son into the world and the Son's sending the disciples into the world.**

A significant corollary of the sequence of sendings described above is that discipleship and mission are inseparably connected. Jesus called disciples to make them fishers of men (Mk. 1:17 par.). Jesus' invitation to come, to take up his yoke and to learn from him in Matthew 11 and his final command in Matthew 28 to go, to make disciples and to teach cannot be split apart. **Those who have taken up Jesus' yoke and learned from him will make his last command their first concern.**

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God's gracious forgiveness and reconciliation require one to participate in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) because of Christ's compelling love (2 Cor. 5:14). To impress this requirement on the minds of their members, local Christian Reformed churches (CRC) should impress upon their members Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:16: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" Since God's love compels us to make disciples, I urge the CRC to increase its world missions outreach in the new millennium. Each one should reach one! ■

**"...discipleship and mission
are inseparably connected."**