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# The Evangelical Missionary Movement: the pure gospel, or can there be a bit of progress, enlightenment and colonialism?

Rolf Hille

## I Random Observations in Ghana

The setting is a public primary and middle school near the Ghanaian capital Accra. It is December 2012. In the pleasant coolness of the morning before the beginning of our meetings I am always drawn to the KGs, that is, to the 'Kindergarten kids'—the frizzy hair, big dark eyes, the easy smile of the children's faces with their flashing white teeth. I know these are the clichés of a European grandfather who cannot escape the charm of the young Africans. The school is located right next to the campus of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, where we are meeting with the Committee of the Global Christian Forum, an international ecumenical working group.

So I go over to the spacious schoolyard where the different classes have lined up in three rows for the start

of the lesson. These include the preschool children and the first-graders. The children are decked out in blue school uniforms based on the British model with white shirt and necktie. But one of them has forgotten his tie. Weeping, he steps out of the line and gets some swats from the teacher on the back. Another has no proper shoes. He suffers the same fate.

They sing a hymn together, followed by 'The Lord's Prayer'. The national anthem is played. They put their right hands on their hearts. They are dismissed to their classrooms and they read together the text written on the blackboard: 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want' (Psalm 23:1). Finally, instruction begins.

What kind of strange amalgam is it that comes together here? There are deep traces of the work of Basel missionaries, with a self-evident Christian confession at a state school. This is supplemented by the British educa-

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tional tradition and the almost military drill of old colonial times.

This event is certainly nothing more than a very incidental flash of light into an African country which has been strongly influenced by Christianity and which has a colonial history full of change. And yet, this snapshot makes the explosiveness of our subject plainly clear: 'The Evangelical missionary movement—the pure gospel, or is a bit of progress, idealism, and colonialism allowed?'

It *was* allowed. Not only in the past, over more than two hundred years of missionary activity, but even today, politics and Bible, business interests and personal testimony may still be strikingly interwoven. We were in Accra in the week before the Ghanaian presidential elections. On the one side a Pentecostal preacher and on the other, an elder of a Presbyterian congregation stood as candidates.

The Pentecostal advertised his cause with an Old Testament Bible verse: 'The battle is the Lord's'—the Lord decides the election campaign. In the streetscape of the capital, hopelessly overloaded by traffic, there is hardly a car on which a Bible word or a confession of Jesus is not attached as a bumper sticker, next to a campaign slogan and information about the owner.

Was the declared intention of the missionaries to proclaim the pure gospel only an illusion in the face of the temptations and needs of this world? Did they fail with their purist missionary concept?

## II The Crazy (Displaced) Purity Requirements of Idealistic Philosophy

Indeed, the phrases chosen for the topic do have an ironic undertone. It would also be too naive to believe that one could build a church or even rule a secular state exclusively with the gospel without regard for the interests of this world.

In reality, Prussian discipline intertwines with British traditions and Christian content to form an overall picture, in which it is often impossible to clarify precisely what flows from each source. And yet the demand remains that the pure gospel without admixture should define and characterise Christian mission.

### 1. The dream of philosophical idealism

Historically, the 19th century was the great epoch of German idealism, beginning with Kant, radicalized by Fichte, developed by Schelling and completed by Hegel. Now it may hardly be assumed that the missionaries, who were sent to Africa and Asia from Pietist Bible schools and seminaries, had participated intensively in the philosophical developments of their epoch. Yet, the long tradition of philosophical idealism has shaped western thought since the time of Plato and Plotinus.

What characterizes this spiritual heritage? First and foremost, the deep conviction that the world of ideas is the real reality. Everything else that we have in mind in the world of tables and benches is only a shady, unclean, and, in fact, already defiled reality.

To give a concrete example: if we

have a table before us, it is not difficult to identify and name this object as a table. The amazing thing is that we have objects that have a round surface or a rectangle made of wood or plastic, which have high or low legs, but all represent the same word 'table' and then in principle we also know what is meant by this.

Platonic philosophy interpreted this phenomenological phenomenon as follows: All the concrete tables that exist in the world have their origin in the idea of the table, which, in an intellectual dimension, embraces all earthly reality, and yet can never be represented materially in this world. For every concrete model of a table, for example, built by a carpenter, is ultimately only an approximation to what claims to be the pure idea.

The table itself, that is, the idea of the table, is realized as a table in every piece of material work, but it is still concealed as a purely spiritual dimension. At the moment it assumes an earthly form, the idealism of its spiritual origin is already abandoned and corrupted.

This being-structure of ideas is further developed, starting with simple material things and increasingly applied to mathematical ideas, ethical values, and finally to the sum of the good, ie, an absolute and ideal representation of God. What we recognize in our world are only derived, shadow-like ideas, which, while they give us an awareness of the nature of the origin, do not really reveal it.

This is not without meaning and impact on the notion of 'the pure gospel'. Is there a presentation of divine revelation in this world that retains its original ideality? Philosophically, this

is hard to imagine and must basically remain a phantom, which one chases after, yet cannot reach. The high estimation of the idealism of the pure prototype in the world of ideas over against their concrete transformations in the world remains, however, even when the call for the pure gospel is raised in theology and the church.

Moreover, this categorically defined the Protestant theology of the late 18th and especially the 19th century, being strongly influenced as it was by German idealism. The ideal goal is a representation of God and a redemption of the pure spiritual soul from this world, one which is removed from all the confusions and aberrations of material reality. Hegel's God is that absolute spirit which cannot be grasped. It can be experienced only through its opposite, the antithesis, which enters into the world and experiences suffering.

This is what Hegel's concept of incarnation, cross, and redemption looks like. In the Hegelian understanding, Jesus a mortal man is the antithesis to the absolute spirit, which alone represents the pure idea of God. In this system of dialectical processes, God is, then, the original thesis.

## 2. The inevitable conflict of the history of biblical revelation and Hellenistic-Greek philosophy

Apostolic theology in biblical times was a thoroughly missional theology. It was challenged theologically by the philosophical thought patterns of the West. The Greek philosophers since the pre-Socratic age had raised questions about the origin, ie, the *archae* of being, and thus the ontological founda-

tion and general view of reality.

In this respect the problem arises in a particular way as to whether and to what extent this philosophical approach of the Greek tradition is compatible with the biblical way of thinking with respect to form and content. This is ultimately about the basic legitimacy of any missions-oriented theology in respect to contextualization.

Within the relationship of text and context, the term 'text' first refers to the uniqueness of the biblical text as a revelation given in a specific linguistic, cultural, and historical environment. The text of the Hebrew Bible and the oral proclamation of Jesus, communicated by the evangelists and apostles, encountered the Greek-speaking world of the Roman Empire in the age of Hellenism. This placed the biblical texts in a fundamentally different context of world-experience and thinking.

Thus, the early Christian mission was necessarily drawn into the process of contextualization. The challenge of contextualization within the Bible was underlined also by the fact that the New Testament canon was written in the Greek language, although most authors of the New Testament and Jesus himself lived in the Hebrew-Aramaic language and thought-world.

The same applies to the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew canon into Greek. It is not only about the profound differences of language, but also about the fact that language is associated with a cultural mentality as well as a specific historical experience.

For theology, therefore, the encounter of Jewish-Semitic historical thought, as it is anchored in the historical revelation to Israel, represents the primary and constitutive accom-

plishment of contextualization with the thought-tradition of philosophical and scientific Hellenism. From the connection between Jewish and Greek thinking arose that fundamental reflective form of theology, which has become characteristic of the two-thousand-year history of the Occident.

Within the Christian churches with their mission and apologetics, what we call systematic theology today, and in particular missionary apologetics, develops from the canonically prescribed forms of language and possibilities of thought, combined with the philosophical thought structure of Hellenism. This particular form of theological reflection still characterizes the theological understanding of the West even today.

A new challenge to contextualization emerged in the early Middle Ages with the mission among the Germans and Slavs north of the Alps. Furthermore, in the course of modern discoveries and the subsequent history of missions history since the 16th century, the Christian mission in Latin America, Asia and finally Africa once again encountered a wealth of cultural and linguistic contexts, into which the Christian message had to be formulated. On a global scale, it is finally evident that in the 20th and 21st centuries (with their characteristic features of mobility and information technology) there is an indispensable need for missionary contextualization.

The interrelationship between text and context is, on the one hand, concerned with the continuity or preservation of the original text, and, on the other hand, with the openness to various new contexts, in which theology must express the text in new language

forms and thought structures. Only in this way can it correspond to the missionary canon on which Paul bases his mission, as expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Discussion today about evangelization of different milieus is only a recent and final offshoot of the need for contextualization which has been evident throughout history.

### III The Condescension of God and Historical Revelation

The contrast, as shown, could not be greater. On the one hand there is the pure world of ideas, which is unaffected by all material earthly events and, on the other hand, the down-to-earth tangible stories reported by the Bible.

The God of the Bible is revealed in history; that is, he limits himself to a concrete place and a concrete time, and engages in a specific historical situation. Therefore, Paul can say, 'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law' (Gal 4.4). The eternal comprehensive truth is thus bound to a tiny province of the Roman Empire in remote Galilee.

The time circumstances are also clearly fixed. It is Herod the Great, who has developed the conditions for the fact that Pontius Pilate, as a Roman governor, has plunged the Jewish people into a deep crisis.

Against the background of historical events in space and time, God also limits himself with his word semantically and mentally to the Semitic languages of Hebrew and Aramaic. The use of these languages also necessarily provides the framework for genuine possibilities of expression and limitations to certain structures of thought.

The challenge is that, with this condescension of God into a historical context, the abstract claim of philosophy is rejected. God has not at all been subtracted, but is bound to, the conditionality of earthly existence.

Furthermore, as God chooses places, times, and situations for his self-disclosure, he confines himself to seemingly entirely accidental conditions and does not claim to disclose knowledge of the truth which is unrelated to the context of this physical world. His truth reveals itself rather in historical realities at specific points in time. The choice of the accidental, sometimes even the arbitrary, is, from our point of view, part of the peculiarities of the action of God.

This can be found throughout the Bible and is already clearly evident in the Old Testament. Among all men at the time of the Flood, Noah finds the grace of God. Abraham, a nomad, is chosen from among the many who pass through the desert. It is tiny Israel that God makes the scene of his action. The small planet Earth in the midst of an infinitely large universe with its incomprehensibly extended Milky Way becomes a place of creation and the history of salvation.

The whole saga of election then finds its completion in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Here, God not only speaks and acts, but as a person he enters without restriction or reservation into the confusion and anxiety of this world. Moreover, even the eschatological hope of the Christian faith is realised in the fact of the bodily resurrection; precisely what is so important for the Platonic doctrine of the soul is denied.

According to Greek understanding, the immortal soul is freed from the

body at death and is placed in an ideal celestial sphere, where it has nothing to do with corporeality. Therefore, the proclamation of the resurrection of the body was rejected by the Greeks as foolishness. But the embodiment in a specific person, although one not merely earthly, is, nevertheless, the hallmark of all biblical revelation.

This entire connection between the condescension of God and the historicity of his revelation is always important also for the body of Christ, that is, the church and her mission. Mission always means concretization of the gospel into the flesh, into a given geographical, ethnic, historical and cultural situation which, with a different claim and self-understanding, is opposed to the Christian message.

Precisely because the revelation of God is historical, mission cannot abandon material reality abstractly in the sense of an idealistic purity, but must engage with it, indeed enter into it. In this sense, contextualization is anything but an invention or a new paradigm of mission theology of the 20th and 21st century. Rather, it is clearly described in the so-called missionary canon of Paul:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the

weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. (1 Cor 9:19-24).

The pure gospel is thus definitely laid out for contextualization by the apostle to the Gentiles. It is therefore not a question of denying one's own culture when engaging in mission, which is not possible, or denying the culture of the missionary target group. Rather, in a new situation in which non-Christians live, it is a matter of connecting these people with the gospel incarnate in Jesus Christ.

#### IV The Pure Gospel as a Commission for Contextualization

The issue here is the incontestable tension of eternal divine truth on the one hand and the temporal revelation of this truth in human form on the other. Neither Israel nor the Christian Church received the truth of God in a transcendent sphere in which they would have been direct witnesses to the divine truth, but only in the given form of their respective historical conditions of life.

This proves also to be the ever-new task and challenge in every epoch of missionary history. In this way the missionaries of the 18th-19th centuries faced the 'savages' in the tribal regions of Africa and Asia in the context of the then colonial 'superiority' of Europe. In a difficult process of self-



understanding, the missionaries had to learn to distinguish between their involvement of their own traditional cultural conceptions on the one hand, and, on the other, the culture of the missionary country, with its peculiarities and values, which had already been prepared for the gospel of Jesus Christ or hindrances that it might have presented to the message of Christ.

Mission therefore always implies thorough study, both of the biblical text and of the historical-cultural context. It is crucial that the text clearly has precedence over the context. The truth claim of the text, especially in view of its historical condition, is normative for the newly emerging contexts in mission history.

The thorough study of the biblical text creates the necessary autonomy and distance from the context. The biblical revelation of God is constantly questioning people and their situations and confronts them with a truth that they could not have derived from themselves. Their own knowledge is at least relativized, often negated. By clearly taking into account the profile of the Christian truth claim through the study of scripture, sovereign freedom over the context is established. Thus the text transforms the context.

In this dynamic process of the study of the text, self-critical reflection of the context of missionaries themselves also takes place. This can be avoided only by distancing oneself from the context. People live in their own given context in a kind of notorious blindness. Just as they do not consciously perceive the air that surrounds them, so the uniqueness, danger, and contingency of their own context are not clear to them.

One of the outstanding achievements of missions, therefore, is cultural-historical, that is, becoming sensitive to the conditionality of one's own context, and thus becoming capable of real transcultural awareness. I became aware of this for the first time during a semester spent in research in the United States. Before that, I had always seen Americans at international conferences as people who spoke with great enthusiasm and much optimism about their faith. They developed far-reaching visions. I considered this to be a particularly faithful and authentic gospel attitude of American Christians.

When I then experienced within the country how the economy was presented enthusiastically in advertisements, and how politicians advertised their programs with visionary concepts and showed the same optimism as I had seen from the evangelists, I realized that what I had regarded as genuinely Christian, was at least partly the Christian expression of the 'American Way of Life'. I then combined this criticism with the conclusion that the sometimes crippling or even pessimistic outlook of the Germans was not a pure explication of the Christian faith, but rather a typical mental condition of our own tradition.

Within this horizon of historical conditioning, searching for the pure gospel does not mean abolishing the specifics of different mentalities and ethnic expressions in order to penetrate to the abstract of the pure gospel. Rather, it means asking how the biblical text accepts or even corrects the context in its characteristics and its possibilities.

It is unquestionably an advancement in modern mission theology that these connections have been thorough-



ly analysed and worked out in practice. However, I would have some doubt about talking about a 'paradigm shift in mission theology', since the task of contextualization is already set with the Great Commission, namely, 'going to all peoples'. In the varied and highly differentiated way of the mission from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth, the task of contextualization has been posed since the very beginnings.

An eloquent example of this is Luke's *Acts of the Apostles*, which tells us how the gospel encountered magical religious ideas, popular Hellenistic polytheism, and the constructs of a highly differentiated Greek philosophy. All these processes demonstrate in a variety of ways the penetration of the text into new contexts and the penetration of the contexts into the text, as Jesus implies in his parable of the leaven.

## V The Purity of the Gospel in the Form of the Doctrine of Justification

It would be a disastrous misunderstanding to dismiss the theological task of the proclamation of the pure gospel as impracticable in the face of its confrontation with the purity of idealism. The opposite is the case. Through the on-going challenge of mission, Christian theology has continually set for itself the task of clarifying the nature of the gospel despite its integration into changing historical forms of expression.

In this sense, the pursuit of a '*theologia perennis*', that is, a theology which is always the same is certainly justified. In the controversial theological disputes of the history of theology

and the history of missions this fact can be proved in many ways.

Here, in a special way, it is the Reformation of the sixteenth century, which, in the form of the *Confessio Augustana*, Article VII, declares for itself theological purity which is inextricably linked with the truth of the gospel. Here the church is said to be a meeting of the faithful: 'in qua evangelium pure docetur ...' (in which the gospel is taught purely). Certainly it is not the abstraction of the Greek doctrine of ideas but the sole efficacy of grace without works of the law.

Luther's whole life and theological struggle were defined by the question of how sinful people can stand before the holy and just God and be saved from the Last Judgment. In this, through his study of the Roman letter, that is, of a biblical text, Luther discovered that the event of justification is an absolutely exclusive matter. There is no way possible, either as a preparation or as a condition, for it to involve human activity in any way whatsoever. Justification is solely by faith (*sola fide*) and by grace alone (*sola gratia*). If in this event any human involvement were involved, even if only a mental one, everything would be spoiled. For the being and actions of people are always sinful before God, even in their best endeavours.

This basic view of the purity of the gospel is foundational for the evangelical church and theology. It cannot be asserted of this pure truth that it is abstract and without context in the idealistic sense. Rather, it is strongly connected with the historical presuppositions of the late Medieval church as well as with the framework of Germanic perceptions of law.

Without the penitential theol-

ogy propagated by the late Medieval church with its prerequisites for the right acceptance of grace and the open question of purgatory or indulgence, justification solely from grace without works as taught by Luther would not be conceivable. For example, in dealing with the so-called antinomians, i.e., those groups which wanted to abolish the law altogether (or Dietrich Bonhoeffer's critique of 'cheap grace') the proclamation of justification still remains as a crucial norm. The lack of moral seriousness and effective sanctification cannot and should not deny the truth of justification by grace alone.

The *cantus firmus* of a biblical theology of missions and evangelism remains therefore bound to the Christological and soteriological context of the doctrine of justification. Justification is possible because Christ, through his sinless holiness on the cross, saves the sinful human. A person is enabled by the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit to believe in the message of justification. Missionary theology, which does not proceed wholly from the justifying Christ, has given up its essence.

## VI Concrete Problems in the Cultural Baggage of Western Missionaries

The present insights into the missiological definition of the purity of the gospel will now be briefly outlined and related in a concluding section, at least in some aspects, to the concrete situation of evangelical missions in the 18th and 19th centuries.

### 1. European nationalism and colonialism

With the great discoveries at the beginning of the modern age (North and South America, Africa, and Asia), the feeling of cultural and religious superiority of western imperialism developed. People were thus so connected with their own traditions that the cultural, economic, and political structures of Europe were largely identified with the truth claim of the Christian church.

This merging of European and North American superiority with respect to the ethnic groups and cultures of the southern hemisphere was so dominant that the expansion of the western empire by colonialization was regarded as an act commanded by the Christian faith. As far as pagan cults and customs found among the so-called 'savages' were concerned, the task was to overcome paganism by means of the message of the church, and, where this was not possible, by the use of force. The history of Latin America is a devastating example of this.

This problem arose also for Protestant missions of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. On the one hand, missionaries were convinced that the Word of God as such has the power to change people and cultures from the inside out, while at the same time they needed to respect the people who are reached by this Word. This often resulted in an ambivalence between solidarity with the peoples and churches in the missionary countries and the simultaneous need to use the infrastructure of the respective European colonial powers as a shelter for their own missionary activities. The ambivalence addressed here permeates the newer history of missions in the tension be-

tween colonialism and non-violent proclamation of the Christian faith.

However, an essential motivation for identifying with the contemporary colonial leaders of the European states came from the conviction of the superiority of western civilization, which was shared by both the colonial powers and the missionaries. They wanted to use the gospel to teach the underdeveloped peoples the benefits of the western world in the fields of school, business, politics, healthcare, and technological infrastructure.

## 2. Slave trade and slavery

A particularly intense point of conflict in this respect was the slave trade, which was carried out by the white 'christianized' peoples with the aid of Arab merchants. A number of pseudo-biblical reasons often served to justify imperial racism. One of these was the curse which Noah had pronounced upon his son Ham (Gen 9:25f.). Black Africans were regarded as descendants of Ham and were therefore subjected to the rule of Shem. This primitive logic was used to justify the subjugation and exploitation of the Africans.

Then there were references to the practice of slavery, both in the Old and New Testaments, not least in the practice of the Roman Empire. It was pointed out that Paul, for example, nowhere prohibited slavery or called for a slave riot. It was, however, certainly overlooked precisely how the apostle to the Gentiles dissolved the principle of slavery from within through the spiritual power of the Christian communities in his letter to Philemon.

In the more recent history of missions, besides the effort to mitigate

the effects of slavery, we find also the firm determination to abolish slavery altogether. At the same time, however, there was always the temptation to at least partially secure the economic advantages of slavery.

## 3. Marriage, family and the status of women

Another field of conflict was raised with regard to the question of marriage and the family. What had to be changed with regard to the biblical order of creation? How can a monogamous relationship between man and woman be achieved, for example, in a polygamous society with its social structures and customs?

The missionaries realized very quickly that they could not simply plant the Christian model of marriage instantaneously in a completely differently structured culture and society. Only if one accepted the existing structures with a certain flexibility and gradually transformed them into Christian marriage was there a realistic chance for long-term change.

A very significant model for this missionary practice is already found in Titus 1:5-9, where Paul, in his exhortation to the elders and bishops in verse 6, explicitly says that the bishop should be 'husband of one wife' (or 'a man of one woman'). This means that, in many of the Pauline missionary churches, there were polygamous relationships which continued to exist even after conversion and baptism. However, the community leader should be characterized by the fact that he lived in an exemplary way in a monogamous marriage.

In this way, the apostle was able to

change the social structure of the entire church over one or two generations so that Christian marriage and family were the result of this development. In many respects, this cautious and sensitive handling of the problem also applies to recent missionary history.

An important issue in this context was the question of the role of women in church and society. Especially in societies that were strictly patriarchal in structure, the focus was on emphasizing the dignity and equality of women and instilling these values in their minds and also putting them into practice.

#### 4. Finance and work ethics

A further missiological problem was the question of the financing of mission work. At first, the missionaries were supported materially by the monetary offerings from Germany and other western countries, in order to be able to finance the construction and maintenance of mission stations.

In the era of advanced colonialism, the missionaries were tempted to participate fully in the economic privileges of the white population in African and Asian countries. Thus, the missionaries belonged to the social upper class and at least indirectly also benefited from the exploitation of the natives by the colonial administration. However, many of the missionaries, especially from so-called faith missions, deliberately did without the prerogatives of colonialism to lead lifestyles more in solidarity with the indigenous population.

With regard to money and in the broader sense of work ethics, there was also a considerable amount of con-

flict. Missionaries attempted to teach the African and Asian populations European work disciplines and how to build up reliable financial administrations, not least with the goal that, in the longer term, the young churches could be independent financially. It is precisely in this respect that the difficult balancing act between the western feeling of superiority and solidarity with the indigenous population is shown again.

#### 5. The Enlightenment and liberal theology

European-American colonial history cannot be understood without the background of the European Enlightenment of the 18th century. However, at this point, the distance between the missionary work of Pietist-Evangelical provenance and the intellectual leadership in the colonial territories is particularly intense. The Revival movement of the nineteenth century was theologically in deep conflict with the so-called 'neology', that is, with the liberal theology of Protestantism shaped by the Enlightenment.

It was true that the scientific and technological knowledge that emerged from the Enlightenment was adopted and used, but, at the same time, Pietist-Evangelical missionaries strongly resisted enlightenment theology that was critical of the Bible.

This situation is of great relevance to the history of missions as the young churches of Africa and Asia, as well as Latin America, were definitely shaped by the Revival movement and Bible-oriented Protestantism. Many tensions, especially in the so-called 'mainline churches', that is, the large traditional

churches in Europe, such as Lutheranism, the Reformed Churches, Methodism, the Baptists, etc., are divided today between conservative and liberal positions.

The young churches of the global south, which are growing strongly, are clearly keeping their distance from the northern liberal churches and risk dividing the church rather than adopt liberal positions.

### 6. Missions as an ecumenical impulse

Finally, it is significant that the ecumenical movement, in the context of evangelical missions of the nineteenth century, was of great importance precisely in view of the 'pure proclamation' of the gospel.

With its founding in 1846, the Evangelical Alliance succeeded for the first time in modern church history in building a fundamental bridge between all branches of the three main streams of the Reformation of the 16th century. Christians from Lutheranism, the Reformed Churches, and the Anabaptist free-church movements met in the Evangelical Alliance. They were thereby instrumental in preparing the first World Missions Conference in Edinburgh as a missiological enterprise.

Modern ecumenism has one of its decisive impulses in world mission. This was because it was increasingly recognized that, in the missionary countries, the confessional divisions within Christendom were a serious obstacle to the faithful proclamation of the gospel. To have overcome these confessional divisions, which had emerged from the 16th and especially the 17th century, is one of the great

achievements of the modern Evangelical mission movement.

## VII Summary

### 1. Contextualization as God's risk

We must be careful not to judge the new missionary movement in an a-historical manner from the position of an abstract idealism. Rather, it is a matter of God's way to speak his word into the various human contexts, even at the risk that the contextualization can sometimes lead to serious errors and delusions.

But a church free of context is, from the theological grounds given above, neither possible nor worthy of pursuit because it would contradict the essence of God's revelation. Rather, the real issue is the struggle between textual contextualization and the overcoming of unbiblical contextualization attempts.

### 2. Missions in the tension between adaptation and contradiction

Specifically, the extent to which individual missionary societies and individual missionaries yielded to the temptations of European progress and colonialism is shown in contradictory fashion in mission-historical reality. The spectrum ranges from a self-critical distance from its own western culture to a naive acceptance of the aims of colonialism along with its repressive politics.

### 3. Intercultural flexibility and the pure gospel

The overall result is that the question of a pure proclamation of the gospel in missions is confronted by highly contradictory and complex contexts in

which a high degree of flexibility and intercultural reflection is required. The flexibility in cross-cultural work must always be bound to the one pure gospel of the justification of the sinner by grace alone.

## Dangerous Prayer

### Discovering a missional spirituality in the Lord's Prayer

Darren Cronshaw

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**Darren Cronshaw** is Pastor of AuburnLife, Researcher with the Baptist Union of Victoria, and Professor of Missional Research with Australian College of Ministries.

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