



Mission News

Mission Activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches

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Prince George

British Columbia

Home Mission and Foreign Mission

Over the past year, I've had much opportunity to consider the differences between overseas mission work and the work of outreach and missions on the "home front." Having accepted the call to take on the position in Brazil which will soon be vacated by Rev. Julius VanSpronsen, I will be leaving the home mission field in 2017, and joining the ranks of our foreign missionaries, the Lord willing. And while the work of mission in Prince George remains my present calling, the issue of cross-cultural communication and learning a foreign language has been on my mind.

Communication

When a missionary goes overseas to work in another culture, with people who speak another language, the issue of communicating effectively with people who are "different" is obviously emphasized, for good reason. The task of the missionary is based on communication. And so, if effective communication is hindered in any way, the missionary's ability to fulfill his calling is greatly decreased.

The same is true for home missions, although I don't believe we often think of this as an important consideration when it comes to mission work in our own country. As the church of Jesus Christ, we have been made a distinct and separate society, an enclave of God's kingdom, surrounded by a culture which is (or should be) very different from ours. We can see this clearly in the opening words of most of the New Testament epistles.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:2, the Apostle Paul addresses the Corinthian Christians as "the church of God that is in Corinth," as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus," and as those who were "called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours." They, and

we, have been set apart from the world around us, and united with a body that exists throughout the world. Our allegiance and identification has been radically changed, so that we are the church – in Corinth, so to speak, but not of Corinth.

Different

So we are called to be different from the world around us. Our language is different. Our thought patterns are different. Our cultural practices are different. And I'm not speaking about ethnic differences, about a "Dutch" or "European" or any other culture, as compared to the ethnicities of the people in our communities. I'm speaking about the Christian culture, which we take for granted, especially if much of our personal interaction is limited to our own circle.

What this means, practically speaking, is that all mission work is cross-cultural mission, whether it's done in Prince George or Hamilton, or in Maceio or Recife. The challenge for the missionary, and for the church as a whole, is to maintain the cultural difference that exists between the church and the world, while at the same time communicating the glorious good news of Jesus Christ across that cultural divide.

Christian culture and Canadian culture

In Canada, that means we need to know the culture we are addressing, and be aware of the differences between Christian culture and Canadian culture (and uphold, and strengthen, that difference). The challenges that face the Canadian church are rooted in Canadian culture. And that challenge is similar to that being faced by Christians throughout the "Western" world (Europe, North America, Australia, and other westernized nations). On the one hand, the culture that surrounds us (and all too often seriously influences us) is wealthy; and that wealth is



proving the wisdom of Proverbs 30:8 and 9, where Agur prays that the Lord would give him neither poverty nor riches, “lest I be full and deny you, and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.”

Canada has become full. And consequently, our nation is experiencing a widespread denial of the LORD. In a materialistic culture, there is all too often little thought given to the fact that we are dependent creatures. Many people are full, and have become blinded to eternal realities; the fullness of their stomachs (and cupboards, homes, and garages) has blinded them to the emptiness of life without Christ. And at the same time, all too often we as Christians have become compromised by our identification with the surrounding culture – and so the light of the church often doesn’t shine as brightly as it should. Prosperity has led to increased materialism and hedonism – a view of the world that is limited by what we can see and experience “under the sun.”

Welfare state

At the same time, we live in a welfare state. For generations, Canadians have been trained to seek out government programs to provide for their needs, and the state has been deified. The worship of Mammon has been institutionalized, and we are taught to think of ourselves as “consumers.” The worship of Molech is legalized, when the unborn are sacrificed on the altar of convenience and personal pleasure. And finally, the worship of Baal is inculcated in our population through an educational system that teaches that it is the government, and not God, that provides for us.

These are the challenges we face in doing cross-cultural mission work in our own country. The first challenge the church faces is to maintain the “pure and undefiled” religion that James writes about in James 1:27 –

visiting orphans and widows in their affliction, and keeping ourselves unstained from the world. And the second challenge we face is breaking through those barriers to the gospel that our culture has erected over the past century.

Victory

Our local challenges may differ from those faced overseas, and the growth of the church in the non-Western world, and the shrinking of the church in the West, prove that the challenges we face here are significant, and far-reaching. But we know that while we are involved in a battle, the great victory has already been won, and we have the Great King on our side. We can be confident, even when the enemy appears to be very strong indeed!

Please continue to remember the work of home mission in your prayers. The battle we are involved in is a spiritual one, first and foremost. Pray for the young mission congregation in Prince George. The Lord has blessed us richly over the past eight years, and we trust that he will continue to provide for his people here, and that he will continue to gather his saints, as he has gathered us.

New missionary

The church in Smithers has struck a calling committee mandated to find a replacement for the current missionary, and the hope is that the transition to a new missionary will happen without the mission congregation having to face a period of vacancy.* We trust that the Lord will continue to provide for this congregation, and pray that a man will be found to water and nurture what has been planted. And in all this, we remember, and rejoice in the fact, that it is God who gives the growth. And may there be much.

Rev. Jim Witteveen

(*Editorial note: Candidate Tim Schouten has accepted the call of the Smithers Church for the Prince George work.)





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Gospel Opportunities



is needed for the good and progress of the world. Freshly confirming his assessment, the year 2016 opened with a most dramatic event in the Muslim world. The fanatical **Sunni** Muslims who rule Saudi Arabia suddenly executed 47 men, including the most senior **Shiite** Muslim religious cleric in the country, Sheikh Nimr Baqir. Quickly the top Shiite

Top: Shiite Muslims pledge to avenge the killing of their senior cleric.

One of MERF’s Arabic Gospel Media Ministry team recently shared a fascinating book. The Arabic title would translate: “The Fall of Islam’s World.” It was published a few years ago by a famed political scientist, novelist, and philosopher. Dr. Hamed Abdel-Samad was born and raised a Sunni Muslim in Giza, Egypt and now lectures in Germany. His introduction says: “My intention is neither to defame nor defend Islam. I am dealing with an incurably sick, speedily dying entity called Muslim World which is in complete denial of its illness.” His pessimistic conclusion is both powerful and prophetic.

Rich with historical and contemporary illustrations, the book clearly describes the “fanatical illusion” that Islam



Beatitudes – Matthew 5:3–10



Saudi Arabia, wrote: "Killing cannot be the holy will of God...Jesus the Christ (Issa al-Masih) spoke the true will of God when he said love even your enemies, not kill those who disagree with your religion."

T. T. of Aden, Yemen says: "All I see around me is suffering, destruction and death, all in the name of Allah...I no longer believe in this terrible Allah ... Thank you for showing me a different way."

N. is a Syrian convert on the run in Lebanon with her 11 year-old daughter. Since her conversion, her Muslim husband divorced her and is trying to marry their young daughter into the harem of a wealthy Saudi sheikh in exchange for a large bride-price. N says: "All I want is prayer that my daughter is protected and grows as a true Christian. Is this too much to ask of the Lord Jesus?"

Thank you for praying for and supporting Gospel work through MERF in Arab and Muslim lands.

Top: Inter-Muslim conflicts threaten 2016

Ayatollah in neighboring Iran, Ali Khaminai, tweeted: "Saudi Arabia and ISIS are made of the same fabric; they both kill those who disagree with them." He went on to pledge unwavering support for "Shiite citizens who revolt against systematic injustices and oppression" in Arabia.

Both Sunni and Shiite intellectuals predict that this will lead to the suffering of many millions in conflicts of tit-for-tat sectarian cleansing, with many thousands of deaths. Already, Sunni Muslim versus Shia Muslim violence over the past 35 years has killed an estimated four million in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen.

Christ Restores Humanity

Although it is unclear whether Dr. Abdel-Samad has become a Christian, his book vehemently rejects the idea that Mohammed resembles Christ in any way. Comparing Muslim and Christian ideas about God's relationship to mankind, he asserts that Christ's incarnation (becoming man), suffering, and death mean that God [Allah], the Creator of humanity, joins mankind to restore humanity to its original God-given state. In contrast, he describes the inhuman God of Islam as killer of the humanness of man. The book states that Islam itself has become the most dangerous enemy of humanity.

A few years ago, such statements would have brought public death sentences by both Sunni and Shiite clergy. Sunni Jihadists might still seek to murder him, but he is now only one of millions, growing by the day, no longer fearing to speak out their doubts. Some go as far as calling Mohammed a "lunatic" and describing the Koran as "satanic." Jihadists' threats to kill anyone who

dares criticize are no longer able to silence dissent. Islam no longer has control over the thinking of its own people. Books, articles, and blogs are now widely available on the Internet.

Muslims themselves effectively point out what is wrong with Mohammed, the Koran, and the Islamic worldview. Thinking Christians have the opportunity to relevantly provide disquieted Muslims with Gospel hope. The Gospel message is penetrating closed Muslim societies on an unprecedented scale.

Gospel Hope

The dramatic Saudi executions inspired many Arabic and Persian blogs to point the finger at Islam itself. Some bloggers quote parts of Christ's Sermon on the Mount about forgiveness and peacemaking. We can rejoice in the way the Lord is leading growing numbers of disillusioned Muslims to be convicted of their need for Christ.

From MERF's Arabic Media Ministry contacts:

S.M. from around Mecca,

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*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."
 —Romans 8:28*