The Origin of Protestant Missions

Gordon D. Laman

The words "Protestant missions" usually bring to mind the nineteenth century heyday of Protestant missionary activity and its accompanying theoretical or theological foundations. At best, we might think of eighteenth century pioneer missionaries. A little reflection on that fact raises two questions. Were the Protestant churches really unconcerned about and uninvolved in the church’s mission during their first two centuries? Also, what are the roots from which Protestant mission activity and missiology sprang? Endeavoring to answer these questions, this paper will trace the development of the idea and the practice of Protestant missions.

Obstacles to the Development of Protestant Missions

An interesting confluence of opinion may be observed between certain Counter-Reformation Roman Catholic polemicians and modern church historians in regard to their evaluation of the Protestant Reformers’ attitude toward world mission. It has been assumed that the Reformers had no interest in it and had given little or no thought to it. It is claimed that even though the Reformers believed they had rediscovered the apostolic gospel, they did not have an apostolic vision of its spread throughout the world.

Roman Catholic Cardinal Robert Bellarmin (1524-1621) listed missionary activity as one of the eighteen marks of the true church and called Protestants heretics on the ground that they had not converted pagans or Jews. Many modern church historians appear to see much validity in such a criticism. However, I will attempt to portray what I believe to be a more accurate and fair evaluation of early Protestantism in this matter.

While it is certainly true that among the sixteenth century Reformers we do not find a developed theology of mission, it would be unfair to conclude that they were not concerned about those outside the church without knowledge of the gospel, or that they never thought about mission at all.

It must be admitted that, generally speaking, there is a "strange silence" of the Reformers on missions. When it comes to a discussion of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 or of Acts 1:8, neither Luther nor Calvin clearly identify the responsibility of contemporary Christians to continue the work of the apostles by proclaiming the gospel to all people. This silence is truly an enigma. From the first edition of his significant history of Protestant missions in 1884, Gustav Warneck claimed that this lack shows that the Reformers had not recognized the missionary obligation. This judgment, however, appears to
be too severe.

A fair assessment of the early Protestants in this matter requires recognition of the unique circumstances in which they lived. The well-documented Roman Catholic missions of the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries reflected the piety and evangelistic zeal of the monastic orders, but were also closely linked to the unprecedented exploration and colonial expansion carried out by the Spanish and Portuguese. Moreover, in accordance with the mentality of the times and by the realities of power politics, the religion of subjects was determined by their rulers. Historical circumstances can therefore be said to have facilitated the flourishing of Roman Catholic missionary activity at the very same time when the Protestant movement was enduring the pangs of childbirth and the traumas of adolescence.

Practical Obstacles

Before Protestant missions could develop, both practical and theological obstacles needed to be overcome. We ought not to forget that mere physical survival was the issue for Protestants and Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, notably in Germany, France, Switzerland, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Scotland. Furthermore, when the Protestants were not defending themselves or endeavoring to establish an identity over against the Roman Catholics, they had a strong tendency to dissipate their energies arguing amongst themselves. Stephen Neill bluntly states, "Protestants everywhere wasted their strength, with honorable but blind and reckless zeal, in endless divisions and controversies." Accordingly, the first obstacle to the development of Protestant missions to be noted is Protestantism's own external and internal struggle for survival.

Another practical difficulty that blocked the development of mission activity among non-Christian peoples was their simple lack of contact with people outside Europe. The ships of Spain and Portugal, both Roman Catholic countries, controlled the sea lanes, and a kind of religious imperialism was combined with commercial and political imperialism. Throughout the sixteenth century, and in some parts of the world until much later, Protestants had little or no opportunity for mission activity among non-Christian peoples outside Europe.

At the same time, these geographical limitations were reinforced by certain psychological ones. The concept of the Landeskirche, the regional church, based on the principle of cuius regio, eius religio, that each nation follows the religion of its ruler, was given a legal basis by the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, after Luther's death. But long before that, this concept had helped make possible the protection of Luther and the establishment of Lutheranism in some of the German states. On the other hand, while a ruler was expected to show concern for the spiritual welfare of his subjects, determining how they
were to worship and exercising authority over the church in his region, he had no responsibility for any matters outside his realm. The assumption was that other rulers would take care of such matters for their people. A church with such geographical/psychological limitations was unlikely to develop a dynamic missionary motivation. This situation was gradually altered later after Holland and England became major maritime powers.  

An additional, practical matter affecting the development of Protestant missions was the lack of any recognized authority, organization, or structures for the implementation of mission activity. For a thousand years before the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church had carried on missions. Behind this mission history lie several important factors. The pope’s authority was seen as global in scope, and was recognized as transcending that of rulers and empires. The monastic orders were the missionary agencies of the Roman Catholic Church, and the monks were its missionaries. The monastic system perpetuated the traditions, knowledge, and organization for missions, continuously sending out well-trained, disciplined missionaries. For hundreds of years Catholic monarchs provided financial means and protection for missions in their territories. These factors had facilitated the earlier spread of Christianity through Europe and were at the time of the Reformation making mission possible in the colonies of Catholic empires. The Protestant churches, having rejected this whole system and all that it involved, had no recognized authority, structures, or means to carry out mission work.  

A final practical obstacle to the formation of Protestant missions has to do with the limited knowledge of the world in the sixteenth century. Many believed that in unexplored territories there were lost Christian churches that had been established by the preaching of the apostles. Though it was pure legend, some firmly insisted that a Christian king named Prester John ruled forty kingdoms in Africa. Such claims by both Protestants and Roman Catholics tended to induce complacency about missions.

Theological Obstacles

Theological obstacles also inhibited the development of Protestant missions. First, the rejection of the papacy by the Protestants included a rejection of its universal claims. Missions conducted under papal authority, alluded to above, were called into question in terms both of motivation and method, i.e., by mass conversions, often using secular power. It was not that the Reformers were above any involvement with politics, but they saw the Christian faith as a matter of responsible, individual commitment. Even Luther, who eventually acceded to the formation of a territorial church because of circumstances, originally intended to accomplish the reformation of the church by individual conversion.
Second, the Reformers repudiated monasticism with its double standard of the Christian life. Despite all that may be said for Roman Catholic missions, it is important to note that ordinary church members were not interested or involved. It was only the elite believers, the monks with their works righteousness, who were involved in the pope's mission work. Anything like Roman Catholic missions was therefore theologically repulsive to the Reformers.

A third inhibiting factor may have been both theological and psychological. The Reformers rejected both the views and the actions of the radical Anabaptists concerning church and state. Among other things, the Anabaptists, appealing to the Great Commission, demanded the conversion and rebaptism of all, including the Protestant Reformers.

Moving on to the Reformers themselves, a factor inhibiting development of Protestant mission activity was the emphasis on eschatology in the sixteenth century. Paul Avis says, "Luther's world of thought was incorrigibly apocalyptic: both he and Melanchthon believed the end of the world to be imminent. The darkness was already passing away; the night was far spent; the day was at hand. There could be no question of long-term missions to remote and inaccessible lands." Both the success of the evangelical reform in bringing in a revival of the gospel and the opposition it faced by the forces of antichrist, i.e., pope and Turk (Islam), were to Luther evidence of the imminent end of the world. Another inhibiting theological factor was the tendency of the Reformers to think of missionary work as requiring a special office. They usually concluded either that the missionary calling had already been fulfilled by the preaching of the apostles or that the call to that office must now be left solely to the sovereignty of God. Calvin's views are illustrative. In his commentary on Ephesians 4:11, Calvin describes the original apostles, including Paul, and their assistants the evangelists, such as Timothy, as having a missionary office. Of them he says, "Their office was to publish the doctrine of the Gospel throughout the whole world, to plant churches, and to erect the Kingdom of Christ. So they had no churches of their own committed to them; but they had a common mandate to preach the Gospel wherever they went." Later Calvin adds, "For God adorned His Church with apostles, evangelists and prophets, only for a time, except that, where religion has broken down, He raises up evangelists apart from Church order... to restore the pure doctrine to its lost position." It is self-evident that Calvin saw the role of Luther and others in the Reformation in this light. That Calvin did not consider the sending out of missionaries or evangelists to be a normal part of the church's function is further substantiated by these words in the Institutes, "Nonetheless, I call this office 'extraordinary,' because in duly constituted churches it has no place."

One further hindrance that may be noted is a viewpoint that gained increasing numbers of adherents. Many came to think that all nations had at least once been offered the true knowledge of God, not only by the apostles, but already through the preaching of the patriarchs, particularly Enoch and Noah.
It was evidently concluded that this had fulfilled the biblical admonitions. On a more positive note, one further factor may be cited concerning the Reformation myopia toward mission. "Emphasis upon the Bible, the priesthood of all believers, the full responsibility of each Christian under the gospel, and fulfillment of one's Christian calling where he is placed, meant a recovery of meaning for local congregational life. Later these concerns led to new forms of response to the Gospel's universal claim ... "

**Concern for Mission Among the Reformers**

It could be a mistake to demand of Luther and Calvin a full-blown theology of mission. We ought not to expect too much too soon of the Reformers. The criticism by Cardinal Bellarmin of the lack of Protestant mission activity was indicated above. In this regard David Bosch offers a useful observation: "Bellarmin and others who agreed with him naturally judged Protestantism in light of the current Roman Catholic conceptions of mission. If, however, we bring the New Testament understanding of mission into play, the situation changes somewhat. Mission is surely more than dispatching special ambassadors to remote countries. As far as the Reformers were concerned, Europe too, was a mission field. Mission is the Church crossing frontiers into the world, but they judged that the world had entered the Church. They thus saw their primary task within the borders of historical Christianity."

It is therefore quite natural that Luther and Calvin felt that their mission was primarily within Christendom itself. The Reformers did not use the term mission. Nevertheless they saw their mission as that of crossing the barrier between faith and unbelief or wrong belief, and by that definition, most individuals in the Roman Catholic countries of Europe of that day would need to be seen as the objects of mission.

In 1526, in the preface to his *German Mass*, Luther remarks that within the churches there are "many who have not yet believed or become Christians and the majority stand there and gaze to see something new, just as if we were holding divine services among the Turks or heathen."

It is important to keep in mind that the reform spread in Europe according to two distinct patterns. Many became Protestants by a mass acceptance imposed by the authority of the ruler. Many others, however, became Protestants by personal choice and decision, often at great risk of life itself. The Protestant churches that came into being in the early stages of the Reformation in Germany, England, and Switzerland were the result of mass diffusion of the reform. But even this was usually possible only because of enthusiastic support from many individuals. And after the churches in these countries became Protestant, long term efforts to persuade, teach, and nurture individuals in the evangelical faith were carried on. Also it ought not to be overlooked that outside of Switzerland, i.e., in France, Scotland, and the Netherlands, Calvin-
ism spread primarily by individual conversion. Bible study groups, preaching missions, and a sizable literature that implemented the new possibilities resulting from the invention of the printing press contributed to the spread and nurture of the Protestant and evangelical faith.

Gustav Warneck's conclusion that Luther had no conscious concern for mission has been refuted by the more recent studies of Werner Elert. Elert argues persuasively that even though Luther never delineated a mission theology or organized a missionary movement, he clearly demonstrated a concern for foundational issues upon which such a theology and program could be built. Luther believed in the power and universality of the gospel and affirmed the task of its proclamation. For example, from Colossians 1:23 and Mark 16:15 he concluded that the gospel was not to be kept in a corner but should fill the globe. On the basis of Psalm 117 he said that the gospel and baptism must traverse the whole world. And from Haggai 2 he concluded that the gospel will be a treasure for all nations. These interpretations presupposed the absolute need of salvation for all people.

It is true that Luther sometimes spoke as though the gospel had already been preached in all nations. Elert sees this as part of his argument that the gospel is proclaimed for all. In any case, those words of Luther need to be balanced against other examples of his expressed views. Luther emphasized that the church of Christ is not to be bound to a particular locality, referring to the existence of churches and Christians outside Europe, in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. At the same time he spoke of newly discovered islands where the gospel had not yet been preached. He clearly saw the course of the presentation of the gospel to all nations as in progress. According to Elert, "The idea of many, later theologians—that the church of the present time is no longer obligated to preach among the heathen, because the apostles have already reached all—is totally foreign to him, just as it is to Melanchthon." Elert shows that for Luther the preaching of the gospel “was begun through the apostles and continues, and is carried farther through the preachers here and there in the world, is driven out and persecuted; yet it is made known farther and farther to those who have never heard it before.” According to Elert, Luther insisted that it was not enough to preach before Christians. Preaching must also extend to those who have not yet heard the gospel, so that the number of Christians may increase. The obligation rests on all Christians to present the gospel by both deed and word before non-Christians, whenever there is opportunity. Luther further suggested that proclamation of the gospel becomes a sending out as well. In order that the heathen may come to know and believe in God, preachers must be sent to proclaim the word to them. Luther even went so far
as to say, "Thus it is the best work of all that the heathen have been led out of idolatry to the knowledge of God." 13

Calvin's Concern and Involvement

While Calvin seems never to have stated clearly that it is the responsibility of all Christians or of the church to carry out the Great Commission, his concern and enthusiasm for the preaching of the gospel and for the spread of its impact on individuals and society are abundantly clear both in his voluminous writings and in his life. The following quotation from one of Calvin's sermons, cited by Iain Murray, demonstrates Calvin's concern for the proclamation of the gospel: "Seeing God hath given us such a treasure and so inestimable a thing as his word is, we must employ ourselves as much as we can that it may be kept safe and sound and not perish . . . . First of all, let every man see he lock it up fast in his own heart. But yet it is not enough for us to have an eye to our own salvation, but the knowledge of God must shine generally throughout all the world and everyone must be partaker of it; we must take pains to bring all them that wander out of the way to the way of salvation." 14

Calvin's Institutes, commentaries, sermons, and tracts reflect his dedication to the spread of an evangelical faith, reformed according to the Scriptures. But the record of Calvin's life and his abundant correspondence also bear eloquent witness to the action he took to spread the gospel and to nurture and encourage others engaged in that task. From his conversion to the evangelical faith in 1533 until his death in 1564, Calvin was perhaps the greatest advocate of the spread of the biblical faith and the establishment of evangelical churches. His native France, fled because of religious persecution, lay just across the border from the city of Geneva. Calvin's burning desire for the conversion of France to living faith may be seen in his work from the earliest period. In 1536, only three years after his conversion, he published the first edition of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, addressing it to Francis, King of France, whose conversion to and tolerance of the Protestant cause he sought. The first of several French editions of the Institutes appeared in 1541, and his translation of the Bible into French ten years later.

From 1553, preachers trained in Geneva for evangelism in France (we will call them missionaries) began to cross the border to help the struggling French Protestants. Most of these men had gone to Geneva to avoid persecution and/or to seek a Protestant education, and they often lodged with the professors of Calvin's Genevan Academy. Listening daily to Calvin's sermons and receiving as lectures much of what are now Calvin's commentaries, they were profoundly influenced by him. Before such students could be sent to France as missionaries, they had to pass rigorous examinations verifying their theological orthodoxy, preaching ability, and private morality. Numerous extant letters from
Calvin to them in France show how he reinforced them in their work with words of encouragement and advice.  

The period from 1533 to 1555 was a time of sowing and preparation in France. There were no organized congregations for a long time; growing numbers of believers gathered secretly. The preaching of the gospel and the nurturing of new believers in the evangelical faith expanded. Persecutions intensified from 1539, but sustained and nurtured by the publications, correspondence, and trained ministers from Geneva, the movement spread. In 1555 there were five organized Reformed churches in France; in 1559, the year the first national synod assembled in Paris, there were nearly 100; and by 1562 they numbered 2,150. The peak of missionary activity was reached in 1561, when 142 missionaries were serving in France. That same year, forty-eight titles were published in Geneva for use in France and elsewhere. In 1564, thirty-four printing presses were operating in Geneva, indicating the evangelical impact through the printed page. Calvin's writings, training of missionaries, and letters of encouragement played a crucial role in the advances of the French Protestant movement. The beginning of the wars of religion in 1562, the death of the charismatic leader Calvin in 1564, and the ensuing strife among the church leaders in Geneva, ultimately led to the demise of this missionary movement.

However, Calvin's concern for the spread of the evangelical faith was not limited to France and Switzerland. His correspondence reveals his extensive involvement in the advance of reform and evangelical faith throughout Europe. In 1544, for example, Calvin was involved in sending the first Reformed preacher, Pierre Brully, into the Netherlands. Brully courageously laid foundations for a visible, evangelical church there, but unfortunately died a martyr after only three months. Calvin also both directly and indirectly influenced the advance of the evangelical churches among other national groups and in other nations. Geneva was a center for refugees from religious persecutions all over Europe. Most were French-speaking, from France, the southern Netherlands, and the Rhineland; but there were also English, Scots, and Italians, and for them Reformed churches worshiping in English and Italian were formed in Geneva. Through the coming and going of these refugees, and through the evangelical writings from the printing presses of Geneva and elsewhere in Latin, French, English, and Dutch, the Reformed faith was exported widely, even to Poland and Hungary. By correspondence, Calvin encouraged, guided, and dialogued with this diaspora of evangelical Christians witnessing under persecution.

One further involvement of John Calvin warrants our consideration. It has to do with the only overseas Protestant missionary effort actually launched in the early days of the Reformation. Calvin was approached in 1555 by a man named Durand de Villegaignon, who had the backing of Admiral Coligny, with a request for assistance. Calvin was asked to provide pastors from Geneva to
accompany French Huguenot immigrants sailing for Brazil to establish a settlement on an island in the bay of Rio de Janeiro. Although Villegaignon's letter and Calvin's reply have not survived, there is evidence that the Geneva Company of Pastors did in fact send two ministers with these several hundred immigrants to Brazil. It is significant that they clearly expressed the hope not only to minister among the Protestant immigrants, but also to convert the natives. The whole project of establishing a settlement ended in failure after Villegaignon reverted to Roman Catholicism. No longer supported from France, the Huguenot colonists had to set sail for Europe. However, when it was realized that the ship was overloaded, five of them tried to return to the coast of Brazil in a small boat. They were captured and forced to sign a confession of Roman Catholic faith that still survives today. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this first Protestant attempt to establish an overseas colony, and in which Calvin cooperated, included a missionary purpose and ended in martyrdom. 20 Avis writes in summary: "The Reformers and their followers were not bereft of missionary vision or totally uninvolved in missionary activity. Their chief concern was with the spread of the reformed faith in Christendom, conceived as the mission of the word of God, but in spite of enormous practical and theological problems, they also looked beyond the immediate horizon to the diffusion of the gospel throughout the world." 21

Early Protestant Missiology

In the time of the Reformers, the effort to reform the Roman Catholic Church inevitably led to the formation of Protestant churches in several European countries. Initially, enormous effort was required to reform worship, define the sacraments, clarify the essentials of the evangelical faith, and identify the true nature of the church. Of necessity, this took place over against the corrupted Roman Catholic Church of that day. The greatness of the Reformers is that in spite of this situation they also maintained a larger vision. After Luther and Calvin passed from the scene, however, a gradual transformation took place. For the most part, that larger vision was lost, and increasingly the energies of the Protestants were dissipated in strife and division, in the establishing of state churches, in defining pure doctrine, and in setting the bounds of Christian conduct. Nevertheless, Protestant scholasticism offers examples both of the inability of some to see the biblical imperative for mission and the insight and courage of others who did.

Understanding of Mission in Lutheran Orthodoxy

Particularly in Lutheran Orthodoxy, mission disappeared beyond the horizon of church and theology. One example is Philip Nicolai, of the late sixteenth century. He went to great lengths to prove with dubious arguments
that the Great Commission had already been fulfilled by the apostles (and therefore nothing now stood in the way of the parousia). He bluntly stated that Christians should not engage in mission to non-Christians. 22

In 1651 Count Truchsess challenged the theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg to acknowledge the continuing requirement of obedience to Matthew 28:19. The faculty rejected his position and insisted that the gospel had already been taken to the whole world by the apostles. The faculty stated that if some races of people had forgotten or not responded to the gospel, they deserved eternal punishment. They judged neither Christian laity nor ministers are called to be missionaries. 23

Another example of the resistance to an emerging Protestant missiology is the experience of the most fervent, early advocate of missions among the Lutherans, the Austrian baron, Justinian von Welz. In 1664 von Welz began issuing a series of enthusiastic appeals to his fellow Lutherans to face up to their world mission responsibilities. One appeal was entitled: "A Christian and true-hearted exhortation to all right-believing Christians of the Augsburg Confession respecting a special association by means of which, with God's help, our evangelical religion might be extended." Von Welz's call to mission was ignored, and his attempt to establish chairs of mission in the universities failed. 24

Von Welz was vehemently opposed by Johann Heinrich Ursinus, Lutheran superintendent of Ratisbon. Ursinus said that a missionary society as proposed by Von Welz would be a work of Satan, i.e., humans presumptuously usurping God's work. Ursinus thus revealed his distorted view of predestination. He also said that missionary work would be casting pearls before swine, and that Von Welz's proposals were unwise, impracticable, and godless. Faced with this rejection, Von Welz abandoned his baronial title, became an ordained minister, and sailed to Dutch Guiana as a missionary. He died there not long after beginning his work.

One further element of seventeenth century orthodox Lutheran understanding of mission is revealed in Ursinus's polemic against Von Welz. Ursinus was convinced that some people were impervious to conversion to the Christian faith. He claimed that he was not totally against a missionary venture among pagans, but that "such pagans should not be savages with hardly a trace of humanity, such as the Greenlanders, Lapps, Japanese, Tartars, or American Indians." 25

Decades passed before a fuller appreciation of the church's missionary calling gained wide acceptance in the Lutheran churches.

Early Reformed Missiology

Some elements encountered in the views of Lutheran orthodoxy on mission are found in Reformed orthodoxy, although they usually take a less extreme form. The evidence also indicates that there were at least some in the
Reformed fold who very early saw the mission of the church to the whole world. For example, there are scholars who detect a true missionary vision in the thought of Martin Bucer, the Strasbourg Reformer. Henri Strohl, writing in a French journal in 1936, claimed that among all the Reformers only Bucer insists on the missionary task of the church: "Commenting on the injunction in Ezekiel 34:16 to seek the lost and bring back the strayed, Bucer remarks that the Church must bring to Christ those who know him not, sending forth the gospel from home territory even so far as heathen lands. As Bucer sees the matter, while God alone knows his elect, he has commanded us to go forth and call all creatures to eternal life." 26

It is also worth noting that John Knox's Scots Confession of 1560 proclaimed on its title page that the glad tidings of the kingdom shall be preached throughout the whole world and then shall the end come. 27

In the Netherlands, the progress of the Reformation was held back by circumstances related to its being ruled by Roman Catholic Spain. Protestantism there lived under persecution. Nevertheless, the Protestants in Holland emerged into the open in 1566 and began to worship in the fields, often in large congregations. 28 Movement toward greater organization and doctrinal discipline led to the first national synod of the Dutch Calvinists in 1571. The revolt against Spain broke out in earnest in 1572, under the leadership of William of Orange, and resulted in the independence of the Netherlands. The Dutch Reformed Church grew gradually in strength until it claimed about fifty percent of the population in 1650. 29

Along with this Dutch Calvinist church emerged a unique blend of scholasticism and pietism. A movement began which is sometimes called the Second Reformation (nadere Reformatie). Men such as Witsius, a Brakel, and J. Heurnius objected to the deadness and formalism of orthodoxy. Emphasizing the double work of the Holy Spirit, they spoke of both the renewal of the inner life and the renewal of the world. Calvinism's soteriological and theocratic elements converged in this movement, laying a firm foundation for a theology of mission. 30 So it is not surprising that it was in the Netherlands that the first Protestant drafts of a missiology arose.

One of the first Protestant theologians who not only participated in the work of missions but also contributed to the development of missiology was Hadrianus Saravia (1531-1613). After serving successively as pastor of three Reformed congregations in the Netherlands, he spent some time in England. There he was befriended by Richard Hooker and became sympathetic to the Anglican episcopal system. Later he served five years as a professor at Leiden University, where he was criticized for his Anglican tendencies. Returning to England, in 1590 Saravia wrote a treatise entitled, De diversis ministorum Evangelii gradibus ("On the Various Levels of Ministers of the Gospel as They have been Instituted by the Lord"). In it he argued in favor of the office of ecclesiastical bishops, and claimed that because they stood in the line of
apostolic succession they had been given authority to send out missionaries. Theodore Beza opposed this idea on the basis that the missionary mandate of Matthew 28 ended with the apostolic era. Beza did concede that the church might be expanded under certain circumstances, but he disclaimed the need for apostolic sanction saying that in such a case every Christian is competent for such work. Johann Gerhard also opposed Saravia. Nevertheless, Saravia had a formative influence upon others, including Heurnius, Voetius, those of the Danish-Halle Mission, and English Puritans. John Eliot, early missionary to the American Indians of New England, was especially influenced by Saravia.

The awakening of interest in missions to non-Christians on the part of the Dutch churches is related to the establishment of the Dutch East Indian Company. After this trading company founded overseas colonies, Dutch Christians for the first time came to feel called to begin missions in such regions as Ceylon, Formosa, Java, and the Moluccan Islands. Missionary activities began in 1598 under the influence of Rev. Petrus Plancius, a theologian, geographer, and organizer of world voyages. These early Protestant missionary activities, though faulty in practice in many ways, opened the way for missiological thinking.

Justus Heurnius (1587-1651) was both a medical doctor and a theologian. In 1618 he published a treatise in Leiden that significantly advanced mission activity during the era of the East India Trading Company. The book, De legatione Evangelica ad Indos capessendo ("An Exhortation to Embark upon an Evangelical Mission among the Indians"), had an eschatological emphasis, pointing to the dual dangers of the Pope and Islam. Heurnius saw the risks involved in the pursuit of material wealth and the tendency to exploit on the part of the colonial powers. He called for the new opportunities in Asia to be used in the service of the gospel.

Four chapters in the book represent Heurnius' efforts to state a biblical basis for mission. One chapter deals with the methodology of mission, especially emphasizing Bible translation and clear biblical preaching. Another chapter stresses the missionary mandate for all Christians, including lay people involved in business and trade.

Heurnius himself served in India as a missionary for fourteen years, until conflict with the East India Company led to his return to the Netherlands. It is very likely, judging by resemblances in William Carey's Enquiry, that Heurnius' book had some formative influence on him.

Other Dutch missionaries followed Heurnius to Asia. From 1622 to 1633 there was even a special seminary in Leiden for the training of missionaries, under the direction of Antonius Walaeus. After graduating twelve missionaries, the school was discontinued, probably because of the interference of the Dutch East India Company in the work of the missions.

Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) was an influential and very productive professor at the University of Utrecht. His first lectures on missiology were
entitled *De plantitoribus ecclesiasticis* ("The Planting of the Church"). Voetius took up the following four subjects in order: the grounds of mission, the vehicles of mission, the object of mission, and the purpose of mission. In his book, *Politica Ecclesiastica* ("Church Government"), he also indicated important guidelines for a theology of mission. "God himself is causa efficiens prima, the true, effective ground of mission, and he executes his work through the church. The church herself, not a spiritual order or missionary society, is to be the agent of mission. As regards the aim of mission, Voetius distinguishes three facets. The immediate aim is conversio gentilium, the conversion of pagans. The aim is, however, subordinate to a more distant goal, plantatio ecclesiae, the planting of the church. The supreme and ultimate goal of mission is gloria et manifestatio gratiae divinae, the glorification and manifestation of divine grace." 

Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617–1666) was a pupil of both Voetius at Utrecht and Walaeus at Leiden. In the latter part of his career he taught at the University of Utrecht and later at Leiden University. Hoornbeeck authored four books on missiology. Two of them are of particular interest: *Summa Controversarium Religionis* (1653) and *De Conversione Indorum et Gentilium* (1665). In the latter, Hoornbeeck went so far as to take up what amounts to mission anthropology. He described briefly the history of non-Christian peoples who were the objects of mission both for the early Christians and in his own day. He attempted to understand their religious ideas and tried to indicate possible approaches for converting non-Christians.

Hoornbeeck held that the missionary commandment comes to us from two sources. First, it is conveyed to us in both the Old and the New Testaments. Second, it is set before us by the example of both the apostles and of the best men and women throughout Christian history. Thus it is clear that Hoornbeeck did not share the view of many contemporaries that the missionary mandate was meant only for and already adequately fulfilled by the apostles.

Hoornbeeck agreed heartily with Voetius that it is the church’s obligation to become a sending agency for the carrying out of the missionary mandate. He went so far as to outline a plan for a Protestant organization to promote the cause of missions that would be comparable to the Roman Catholic *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*. He envisioned a worldwide network of missionaries in contact with and supporting each other. Hoornbeeck also taught that universities were obligated to inform theological students concerning missions and to train missionaries for service among non-Christians. His opinion was that governments should support missionaries by their money and authority. Hoornbeeck also discussed the means and methods of missions. He had considerable knowledge of Roman Catholic missions and evaluated highly the way the Jesuits learned native languages, preached, taught, and offered medical care in their mission work. He urged the Reformation churches to surpass the Roman Catholics in their enthusiasm for mission.
Conclusion

If we recall the life situation of the Protestants in the sixteenth century and the obstacles to be overcome, the slowness of development of Protestant mission and missiology is very understandable. I have demonstrated that the Reformers were not lacking in concern for the proclamation of the gospel to people outside the evangelical faith and church. They recognized the power of the biblical message. They revived the gospel in the church and made mission possible. Further, it is noteworthy that it was a blend of orthodox biblical faith and piety that led both to active involvement in mission and development of Protestant missiology. Church history demonstrates that it was mainly through involvement in and theologizing about foreign missions that the Protestant churches came to discover the full missionary dimension of the church. 37

Many congregations today seem to have lost their sense of direction. Some are facing inward and lack community, national, or global vision for their mission. Such congregations seem concerned primarily for themselves and their continuance. At most, such congregations think only of adding individual converts to their membership. Other congregations and pastors have become little more than social and political pressure groups and activists. They appear unconcerned for the conversion of individuals and their nurture in the church.

The enthusiasm of the Reformers for spreading a Bible-centered, evangelical faith, and the balanced understanding of missiology of seventeenth century Dutch Calvinists remains a source of inspiration for the contemporary church.

ENDNOTES


3 Ibid., 221.3.


6 Hogg, op. cit., 99f.

7 Avis, op. cit., 174.


65
9 Avis, op. cit., 173.
10 Hogg, op. cit., 100.
12 Avis, op. cit., 180.
15 Avis, op. cit., 187.
17 Avis, op. cit., 187.
20 Avis, op. cit., 211f.
21 Ibid., 212.
22 Bosch, op. cit., 123-125.
24 Avis, op. cit., 212.
25 Bosch, op. cit., 125.
26 Avis, op. cit., 175.
27 Idem.
28 Avis, op. cit., 189.
29 Godfrey. op. cit., 99-103.
30 Bosch, op. cit., 126.
32 Ibid, 71.
33 Godfrey, op. cit., 114.
34 VerKuyl, op. cit., 21.
35 Bosch, op. cit., 126f.
36 VerKuyl, op. cit., 21f.
37 Hogg, op. cit., 95.