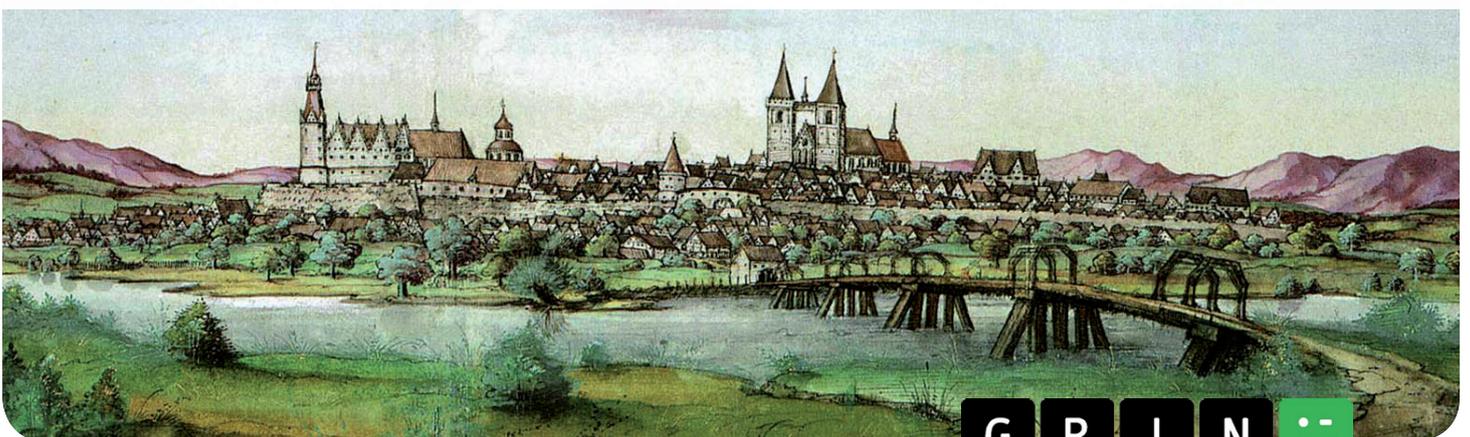




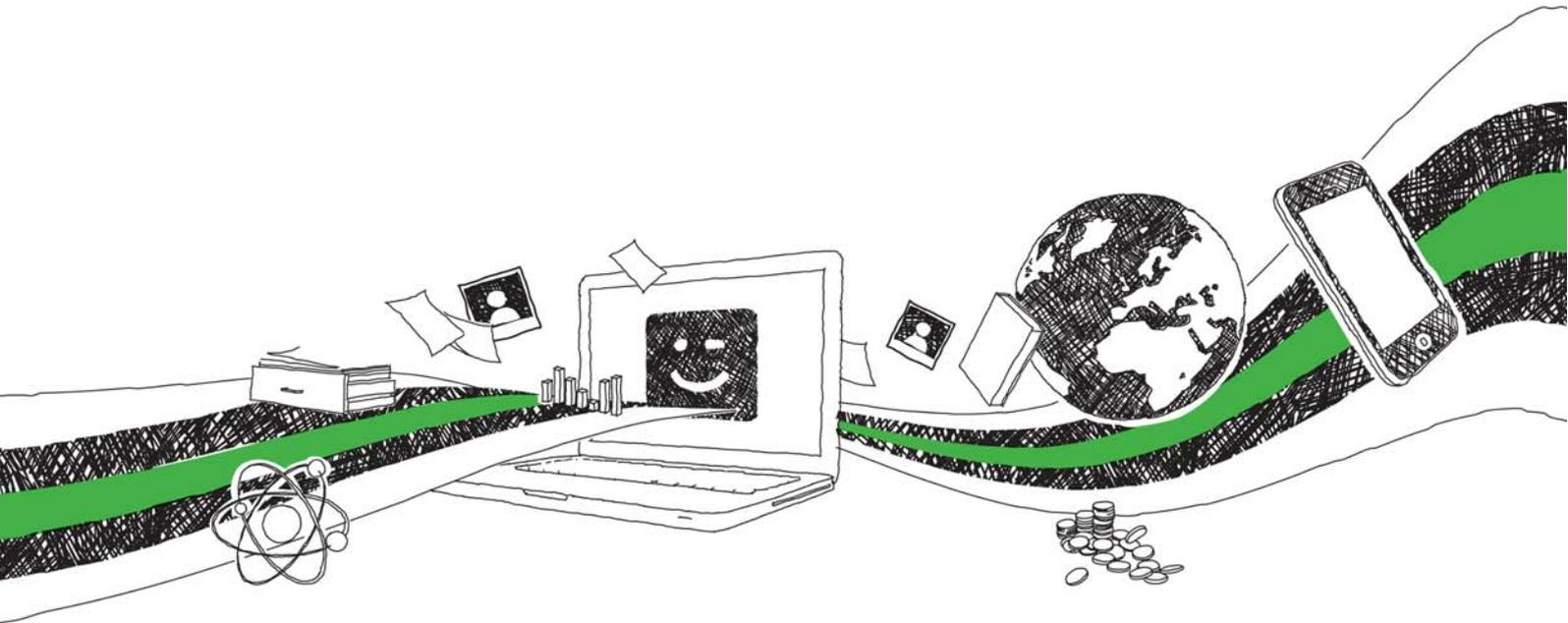
Thorsten Prill

Luther, Calvin and the Mission of the Church

The Mission Theology and Practice of the Protestant Reformers



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the Mission of the Church
The Mission Theology and Practice of the
Protestant Reformers

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Waak, Bid en Stry

*Aan al my broers en susters van die Rynse Kerk in Namibië
wat my ontvang het as een van hulle!*

Met baie dankbaarheid!

*‘Maar julle sal krag ontvang wanneer die Heilige Gees oor julle kom,
en julle sal my getuies wees in Jerusalem sowel as in die hele Judea
en Samaria en tot aan die uiterste van die aarde.’*

(Handelinge 1:8)

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Foreword

The year 2017 commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. In 1517 Martin Luther, a German monk and professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg published his *Ninety-Five Theses* in which he criticised the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church. On the 31st October of the same year Luther sent his *Theses* to his bishop, Albert of Brandenburg. This date is considered the beginning of the Reformation. While the Protestant Reformers are widely praised for the rediscovery of the biblical gospel, they have come under fire regarding their views on mission.

There is a school of missiologists and church historians who argue that the Protestant Reformers were not interested in mission and, in fact, ignored the mission mandate which Christ had given to his Church. Consequently, the Reformers did not make any noteworthy contribution to mission theology, so the critics claim. This view is widespread and accepted by many as fact. However, a closer study of Luther, Calvin, Bucer, and Melancthon, shows that the critics miss both the Reformers' commitment to practical mission work and their missiological contributions.

The critics seem to overlook the fact that cities, such as Geneva and Wittenberg, in which the Reformers lived, studied and taught, served as hubs of a huge missionary enterprise. Thousands of preachers went out from these centres of the Reformation to spread the gospel all over Europe. Leading Scandinavian theologians, such as Mikael Agricola, Olaus Petri, or Hans Tausen, had all studied under Luther and Melancthon in Wittenberg before they began their reform work in their home countries.

Furthermore, with their re-discovery of the gospel of justification by faith alone, their emphasis on the personal character of faith in Christ, their radical re-interpretation of the priesthood, their recognition of God's authorship of mission, their reminder that the witness to the gospel takes place in

the midst of a spiritual battle, and their insistence that the Bible has to be available in common languages, the Protestant Reformers laid down important principles for the mission work of the church which are still valid today.

I am very grateful to Peter Beale, Hannah Fox, Ruth Newman, and Karen Roe for all their comments and corrections. I am also grateful to all faithful partners in the gospel who through their support have made it possible for me to write this book. My special thanks go to the following organisations and churches: Crosslinks (London), Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary (Windhoek), All Saints Church (Preston), Cornerstone Church (Nottingham), Evangelische Sankt Martini Gemeinde (Bremen), Nottingham Chinese Christian Church (Nottingham), St Michael's Church (Bramcote), and the Windhoek Congregation of the Rhenish Church in Namibia.

Thorsten Prill

The Charges against the Reformers

The Protestant Reformers have come under fire regarding their views on the role of mission. Key critics include both church historians and mission scholars. Among the former is the American historian William R. Hogg. In his book *Ecumenical Foundations* Hogg argues that within Western Protestant Christianity interest in mission work developed very slowly.¹ He goes on to say that ‘[t]he Protestant reformers, among them Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli and Calvin, disavowed any obligation for Christians to carry the gospel beyond their fellow-countrymen.’² Hogg’s view is shared by Stephen Neill who served as a Professor of Missions and Ecumenical Theology in the German University of Hamburg. In his well-known book *A History of Christians Missions* Neill writes:

Naturally the Reformers were not unaware of the non-Christian world around them. Luther has many things, and sometimes surprisingly, kind things, to say about both Jews and Turks. It is clear that the idea of the steady progress of the preaching of the Gospel through the world is not foreign to his thought. Yet, when everything favourable has been said and can be said, and when all possible evidences from the writings of the Reformers have been collected, it all amounts to exceedingly little.³

Similarly, J. Herbert Kane, an evangelical scholar who taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, criticises the churches of the Reformation for a lack of missionary enterprise. He comments:

One would naturally expect that the spiritual forces released by the Reformation would have prompted the Protestant churches of Europe to take the gospel to the ends of the earth during the period of world exploration and colonisation which began about 1500. But such was

¹ Hogg, *Ecumenical foundations*, 1-2.

² Hogg, *Ecumenical foundations*, 2.

³ Neill, *A history of Christian missions*, 222.

not the case. The Roman Catholic Church between 1500 and 1700 won more converts in the pagan world than it lost to Protestantism in Europe.⁴

Kane goes on to identify deficiencies in the Reformers' theologies as the main contributing factor.⁵ He argues that the Reformers believed that the Great Commission had been achieved by the apostles by taking the good news to the ends of the world as it was known at that time. Consequently, there was no longer any need to send out missionaries to faraway countries. Kane also sees the Reformers' views on predestination as a stumbling block.⁶ Their 'preoccupation' with the sovereignty of God, Kane believes, prevented them from promoting the spread of the gospel among pagan nations. Finally, he mentions the Reformers' 'apocalypticism' with its negative view of the future as a hindrance to global mission.⁷

In his book *From Everywhere to Everywhere: A World View of Christian Mission* the Anglican missiologist and former bishop of Rochester Michael Nazir-Ali gives the following explanation for the Reformers' lack of mission awareness:

The theological underpinning of this abandonment of responsibility for the world was provided by a curious kind of dispensationalism which limited World Mission to the times of the apostles! The apostles had proclaimed the offer of salvation to all nations, it was held, and there was no need to make a second offer to those who had refused the first. Closely allied to this view was the doctrine, taught by Calvin among others, that the Kingdom of God could not be advanced by human industry but was the work of God alone. Even those who believed that God used means in the exercise of his sovereign will believed that the

⁴ Kane, *A concise history of the Christian world mission*, 73.

⁵ Kane, *A concise history of the Christian world mission*, 73.

⁶ Kane, *A concise history of the Christian world mission*, 74.

⁷ Kane, *A concise history of the Christian world mission*, 74.

absence of means for a particular people and their presence for another was a sign of that sovereign will, to which Christians must submit. It was not until much later that the view which regarded Mission as one of the means used by God came into prominence. It is not too much of a caricature to say that at the time of the Reformation it was widely believed that if God wanted the heathen to be saved, *he* would provide the means for their salvation. There was little reflection on the vocation of churches and individuals to bring this about. It was not until well into the eighteenth century that such views began to be challenged in a systematic way.⁸

Other scholars have suggested that the Reformers refused to consider mission to be a proper theological subject and therefore showed a remarkable indifference to the missionary task of the church. In *Eclipse in Mission: Dispelling the Shadow of our Idols* Goodwin argues that the early Protestant era was characterised by a surprising lack of missionary activity.⁹ As one of the reasons he identifies a trend towards hyper-Calvinism among the Reformers which saw no need to reach out to those who did not believe in Christ.¹⁰ However, for Goodwin the decisive reason is that the thought of the Protestant Reformers did not necessitate a separate theology of mission.¹¹ Goodwin continues: ‘Indeed, Calvin and Luther’s thought,..., would suggest that the absence of mission in their thinking was theological and not just an issue of oversight! It appears that they did not deem mission *per se* to even be a valid theological discipline or doctrine worth mentioning.’¹²

In *What in the World is God Doing?* C. Gordon Olson speaks of the *Great Omission* of which Luther, Calvin and their fellow Reformers were

⁸ Nazir-Ali, *From everywhere to everywhere: a world view of Christian mission*, 43.

⁹ Goodwin, *Eclipse in mission: dispelling the shadow of our idols*, 25.

¹⁰ Goodwin, *Eclipse in Mission: dispelling the shadow of our idols*, 25.

¹¹ Goodwin, *Eclipse in mission: dispelling the shadow of our idols*, 26.

¹² Goodwin, *Eclipse in mission: dispelling the shadow of our idols*, 26.

guilty.¹³ The reason for their failure, Olson believes, was a spiritual one. The Reformation which they had started lacked deep spiritual roots. Olson goes on to explain what he means by that:

The Reformation was not a great revival in which tens of millions of people were born again. Probably there were only a minority of Protestants who really came to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The rest were swept along with the tide. With the territorial church arrangement of Europe it was not hard to be a Protestant without being born again. It is important to understand that the Reformers did not spell out a clear doctrine of regeneration or new birth. Much reliance was placed upon baptism and communion, which were seen as ‘sacraments’...The more we learn about the spiritual state of the reformation churches, the more it seems like Christ’s words to the Sardis church in Revelation 3:1, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” Before there could be world evangelism, there had to be spiritual renewal. That was two centuries in coming.¹⁴

In his article *The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission* Ralph Winter also speaks of an omission.¹⁵ However, by that he means the Protestant Reformers’ abandonment of any kind of monastic or sodality structure. For Winter this was the greatest error of the Protestant Reformers.¹⁶ He believes that ‘in failing to exploit the power of the sodality, the Protestants had no mechanism for missions for almost 300 years, until William Carey’s famous book, *An Enquiry*, proposed “the use of means for the conversion of the heathen.”¹⁷ In another article entitled *The Kingdom Strikes Back: Ten Epochs of Redemptive History* Winter insists that the first

¹³ Olson, *What in the world is God doing?*, 119.

¹⁴ Olson, *What in the world is God doing?*, 119.

¹⁵ Winter, *The two structures of God’s redemptive mission*, 250.

¹⁶ Winter, *The two structures of God’s redemptive mission*, 250.

¹⁷ Winter, *The two structures of God’s redemptive mission*, 251.

Protestants ‘did not even talk of mission outreach.’¹⁸ According to Winter, they left the work of mission completely to the Roman Catholic Church:

Rather, the period ended with the *Roman* Europe expanding both politically and religiously across the seven seas. Thus, entirely unshared by Protestants for at least two centuries, the Catholic variety of Christianity actively promoted and accompanied a worldwide movement of a scope unprecedented in the annals of mankind, one in which there was greater missionary awareness than ever before.¹⁹

Like Ralph Winter, the Mennonite missiologist Bernhard Ott is very critical of the Protestant Reformers. However, in contrast to Winter he identifies another wing of the church as the most mission-minded group within 16th century Christianity. Ott writes:

Even the reformers did not recapture the New Testament vision of a missionary church. Their focus was on the inner renewal of the established church and the stability of Christendom. It is not Mennonite arrogance when I claim that the Anabaptists were the only real missionary group in the time of the Reformation.²⁰

Such criticism of the Protestant Reformers, which is shared by many other authors,²¹ is anything but new. In his work *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time* published in

¹⁸ Winter, *The kingdom strikes back: ten epochs of redemptive history*, 224.

¹⁹ Winter, *The kingdom strikes back: ten epochs of redemptive history*, 224.

²⁰ Ott, *Mission and theological education*, 87-88.

²¹ E.g. Camp, *A survey of the church’s involvement in global/local outreach*, 214-215; Dakin, *What is at the heart of a global perspective on the church?*, 45; James, *Post-reformation missions pioneers*, 251; Johnstone, *The church is bigger than you think: the unfinished work of world evangelization*, 54-61; MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe’s house divided*, 427; Tanis, *Reformed pietism and Protestant missions*, 65-66; Tennent, *William Carey as missiologist: an assessment*, 17; Thomas, *Readings in world mission*, 32-33; Verkuyl, *Contemporary missiology*, 18.

1901 German missiologist Gustav Warneck has laid, as Schulz writes, the foundation for the widespread criticism of the Reformers.²² If Neill's and Kane's criticism is harsh, Warneck's judgement like that of Olson is devastating. Thus, he states:

We miss in the Reformers not only missionary action, but even the idea of mission, in the sense in which we understand them today. And this is not only because the newly discovered heathen world across the sea lay almost wholly beyond the range of their vision, though that reason had some weight, but because fundamental theological views hindered them from giving their activity, and even their thoughts, a missionary direction.²³

The question one has to ask is whether such criticism of the Protestant Reformers is justified. Were the Reformers really indifferent to mission? Is there really a lack of mission emphasis in their theologies?

²² Schulz, *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 46.

²³ Warneck, *Outline of a history of Protestant missions from the reformation to the present time*, 10.

The Critics and their Flaws

Most of the critics of the Protestant Reformers like Neill, Kane, Olson or Warneck share a view of mission which emphasises its global dimension. Warneck, for example, defines mission as ‘the regular sending of messengers of the Gospel to non-Christian nations, with the view of Christianizing them.’²⁴ Olson’s definition has a similar thrust. ‘Mission’, he writes ‘is the whole task, endeavour, and program of the Church of Jesus Christ to reach out across geographical and/or cultural boundaries by sending missionaries to evangelise people who have never heard or who have little opportunity to hear the saving gospel.’²⁵ If we understand mission first and foremost in such a way, i.e. as the enterprise of taking the gospel to places where there is no Christian presence, the charge against the Protestant Reformers might be justified. Martin Luther, though he recognised the Turks’ need of salvation in Christ,²⁶ was not actively involved in the sending of missionaries to them or any other non-Christian nation. He only encouraged Christians who had become captives of the Turks to serve them ‘faithfully and diligently’ so that they might ‘convert many, if they [the Turks] were to see that the Christians are so superior to the Turks in humility, patience, diligence, faithfulness, and similar virtues.’²⁷

Calvin supported the sending of two preachers from Geneva to the Portuguese colony of Brazil in 1556,²⁸ ‘but for a variety of internal and external

²⁴ Warneck, *Outline of a history of Protestant missions from the reformation to the present time*, 10.

²⁵ Olson, *What in the world is God doing?*, 13.

²⁶ Miller, *From crusades to homeland defense: Martin Luther responded to Islam with a new military philosophy, fresh focus on the Qur’an, and provocative readings of biblical prophecy*, 32.

²⁷ Cited in Pelikan, *After the monks – what? Luther’s reformation and institutions of missions, welfare, and education*, 6.

²⁸ Reifler, *Handbuch der Missiologie*, 164.

reasons this first overseas Protestant mission effort failed.’²⁹ This was Calvin’s only direct involvement with overseas mission work.³⁰

While on the surface, the charges against Luther, Calvin and their fellow Reformers seem to be warranted, a closer examination shows that they are for various grounds problematic.

Historical Circumstances

First, the critics seem to ignore the fact that there are several valid reasons why the Protestant Reformers were not more focussed on world mission. The Reformers, as the word indicates, considered it their first task to reform the church, which was a time-consuming endeavour.³¹ They were fully committed ‘to establish and secure the principles of the Reformation in their own domain.’³² Their regional churches were, as Bosch points out, ‘involved in a battle of sheer survival; only after the Peace of Westphalia (1648) were they able to organize themselves properly.’³³ The Thirty Years War (1618-1648), in particular, had devastated many Protestant countries in central and northern Europe and had made it very difficult for Protestants to have a normal church life.³⁴ As a result, it was almost impossible to develop an overseas mission strategy.³⁵ Furthermore, in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, located in countries like Italy, Portugal, and Spain which were maritime powers with colonies and trading connections outside Europe, most Protestant churches in Germany or Switzerland did not have any direct links with overseas countries.³⁶ Unlike the Catholic rulers ‘none of the

²⁹ Jongeneel, *The Protestant missionary movement up to 1789*, 223.

³⁰ See Wilcox, *Evangelisation in the thought and practice of John Calvin*, 215; Beaver, *The Genevan mission to Brazil*, 14-20.

³¹ Bosch, *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, 245.

³² Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 609.

³³ Bosch, *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, 245.

³⁴ Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 609.

³⁵ Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 609.

³⁶ Bosch, *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, 245; Sunshine, *Protestant missions in the sixteenth century*, 14.

monarchs won over to the Reformation had’, as Zorn points out, ‘responsibilities in distant countries.’³⁷ Therefore, it would have been difficult for the Reformers to pursue overseas mission work compared to Spanish and Portuguese Roman Catholic monks who could rely on the support from their monarchs and willing navigators.³⁸ The rulers in the Protestant countries were in general solely interested in their own regional churches and indifferent to mission work in other lands.³⁹ Consequently, the Reformers would have had to proceed without their sponsorship, raise sufficient funds themselves, and identify both missionaries and experienced seafarers, who were willing to take the former to other continents. Missionaries would have been particularly difficult to find due to the abolition of monasteries in Protestant countries, which had previously served as mission centres for a thousand years.⁴⁰ However, even if the Reformers had found suitable missionary candidates, convinced their Protestant kings, dukes and princes of the necessity to spread the gospel beyond the boundaries of their territories, and secured financial support for such mission work it is very unlikely that many Protestant missionaries would have been allowed to enter the overseas territories governed by the Roman Catholic superpowers of that time.⁴¹ Schulz concludes: ‘Thus the lack of missionary intent and enterprise is mostly a case of historical circumstance, which many scholars – who often level scathing criticisms against the reformers – are loath to admit.’⁴²

³⁷ Zorn, *Did Calvin foster or hinder missions?*, 173.

³⁸ Stewart, *Calvinism and missions: the contested relationship revisited*, 67.

³⁹ Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 610.

⁴⁰ Stewart, *Calvinism and missions: the contested relationship revisited*, 67-68; Thomas, *Readings in world mission*, 32.

⁴¹ Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 610.

⁴² Schulz, *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 45.

Missing the Wider Picture

Surprisingly, many of the critics seem to be unfamiliar with the Reformers' theological writings. They interpret some of their doctrinal positions without looking at the wider picture. However, if the wider picture is taken into account their allegation that the Reformers lacked missionary vision and zeal becomes less convincing. This is, for example, the case with both the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine of God's sovereignty. According to Kane, the former 'precluded the responsibility of man'⁴³, while James argues that the latter had a similar effect as it 'lessened the responsibility of humanity.'⁴⁴ However, a careful study of their writings shows us that neither Luther nor Calvin downplayed the role Christians should play in spreading the gospel; neither Luther nor Calvin were 'Hyper-Calvinists' as some of the critics seem to suggest. Calvin even saw the doctrine of predestination as a motivation to share the gospel with all people. In *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* Calvin writes:

Since we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestined and who does not, it befits us so to feel as to wish that all be saved. So it will come about that, whoever we come across, we shall study to make him a sharer of peace. But our peace shall rest upon the sons of peace. Hence, so far as we are concerned, salutary and even severe rebuke will be administered like medicine, lest they should perish or cause others to perish. But it will be for God to make it effective in those whom He foreknew and predestined.⁴⁵

Like Calvin, Luther did not have any doubt that all responsibility for salvation from sin and eternal condemnation lay exclusively with God.⁴⁶ In his explanation of the *Third Article of the Apostle's Creed*, which we can find in

⁴³ Kane, *A concise history of the Christian world mission*, 74.

⁴⁴ James, *Post-reformation missions pioneers*, 251.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Concerning the eternal predestination of God*, 138.

⁴⁶ Kolb, *Martin Luther: confessor of the faith*, 103.

his *Small Catechism*, Luther famously states: ‘I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.’⁴⁷ However, at the same time Luther stresses that believers are totally responsible for the sphere of responsibility which God has given them.⁴⁸ This includes the area of evangelism. In his commentary on Isaiah 40:9 Luther writes that ‘[e]very Christian is also an evangelist, who should teach another and publish the glory and praise of God.’⁴⁹ The church, he argues, has been ‘well informed and taught’ and therefore is obliged ‘to proclaim and urge joyful tidings’. Luther clearly distinguished between divine and human responsibilities. He strove, as Kolb puts it, ‘to hold God’s responsibility in tension with human responsibility to preserve the integrity of God as Creator and the integrity of the human creature as his special creation, fashioned in God’s image...’⁵⁰

For Bucer the doctrine of predestination had an important place in his theology.⁵¹ Stephens even argues that it shaped the whole of his theological thinking.⁵² In any case, it is striking that Bucer’s conviction regarding God’s supreme role in salvation did not keep him from being passionate about evangelism. During his time of exile in England Bucer wrote *De Regno Christi (On the Kingdom of Christ)* in the form of two books to promote the Reformation in his host country.⁵³ In the second book Bucer dedicates five chapters to the selection, training and sending of evangelists. In chapter four he writes the following about the necessity to send evangelists to every parish church in England:

⁴⁷ Luther, *Small catechism*.

⁴⁸ Kolb, *Martin Luther: confessor of the faith*, 103.

⁴⁹ Luther, *Luther’s works: lectures on Isaiah, vol. 17*, 13.

⁵⁰ Kolb, *Martin Luther: confessor of the faith*, 103.

⁵¹ Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland*, 331.

⁵² Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the theology of Martin Bucer*, 23.

⁵³ Pattison, *Poverty in the theology of John Calvin*, 114.

Furthermore, since such great ignorance of the Kingdom of Christ holds sway over all everywhere, so that its power and its salutary effect upon its men and the fact that apart from it everything is harmful and destructive can hardly be explained, taught, and presented convincingly in one or two sermons, no matter how careful and accurate they are, there must first be sent out to all the churches of the realm evangelists who are appropriately learned and motivated for the Kingdom of Christ.⁵⁴

Bucer continues to explain what expectations he has regarding the ministry of those evangelists.⁵⁵ They have to be highly motivated and passionate, while their approach has to be not only Gospel and Kingdom-centred but also contextual. Bucer writes: ‘They must announce assiduously, zealously, and in a timely fashion to the people everywhere the good news of the Kingdom. And they should teach from the Gospel, with strength and energy, whatever pertains to the Kingdom of Christ and whatever it is necessary to believe and do for present and future happiness.’⁵⁶

Regarding the Reformers’ understanding of the Great Commission Kane states that ‘[t]hey taught that the Great Commission pertained only to the original apostles; that the apostles fulfilled the Great Commission by taking the gospel to the ends of the then known world; that if later generations were without the gospel, it was their own fault...’⁵⁷ Kane continues to say that it was part of the Reformers’ teaching that ‘the church in later stages had neither the authority nor the responsibility to send missionaries to the ends of the earth.’⁵⁸ This view is widespread and often repeated by contemporary authors.⁵⁹ Luther and Calvin are usually at the centre of their criticism. In

⁵⁴ Bucer, *De regno Christi*, 269.

⁵⁵ Bucer, *De regno Christi*, 269.

⁵⁶ Bucer, *De regno Christi*, 269.

⁵⁷ Kane, *A concise history of the Christian world mission*, 73.

⁵⁸ Kane, *A concise history of the Christian world mission*, 73.

⁵⁹ E.g. Allen, *Preaching for a great commission resurgence*, 286; Davies, *The great commission from Calvin to Carey*, 44; Gerrish, *Christian faith: dogmatics in outline*,

Discovering the Mission of God: Best Missional Practice for the 21st Century, edited by Mike Barnett, R. A. James, for example, puts it this way: ‘Martin Luther, John Calvin and many other early Reformers assumed that the apostles had completed the Great Commission, and the message had fallen on deaf ears....Their belief was that the church did not have the power or the responsibility to commission missionaries.’⁶⁰ In *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* Paul Avis speaks of ‘the strange silence’ of the Protestant Reformers on mission.⁶¹ He continues: ‘When both Luther and Calvin comment on the Great Commission (Matt. 28), they remain bafflingly silent on the duty of present-day Christians to carry on the work of the apostles in bringing the gospel to ‘every creature’.’⁶²

The fact that this charge against the leading Reformers is often repeated in both popular and scholarly works does not necessarily mean that it is true. What is certainly true is that 17th century Lutheran orthodox theologians revived the scholastic view that the Great Commission was no longer valid.⁶³ ⁶⁴ In 1652 this view was even expressed by the theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg.⁶⁵ Luther, however, did not identify with this viewpoint. ‘Luther did not’, as Coates writes, ‘accept the interpretation of Ps. 19:5 and Rom. 10:18 as signifying that the apostles had literally penetrated into every country and region of the earth.’⁶⁶ Coates continues:

232; Goodwin, *Eclipse in mission: dispelling the shadow of our idols*, 26; Ryoo, *The Moravian missions strategy: Christ-centered, Spirit-driven, mission-minded*, 38.

⁶⁰ James, *Post-reformation missions pioneers*, 251.

⁶¹ Avis, *The church in the theology of the reformers*, 168.

⁶² Avis, *The church in the theology of the reformers*, 168.

⁶³ Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 601.

⁶⁴ In *Witness to the World* Bosch writes the following about the attitude towards mission at the time of Lutheran Orthodoxy: ‘In Lutheran orthodoxy in particular, mission disappeared completely beyond the horizon of the Church and theology. Orthodox theologians no longer saw, as Luther did, a challenge in the decadence of the world, but rather withdrew into the dogmatically demarcated reserve of pure doctrine.’, 124.

⁶⁵ Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 601.

⁶⁶ Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 601.

Luther rather understood these words in a more general sense, a position that he believed to be empirically supported by the recent discovery of America. The New World gave no evidence whatsoever of any exposure to the Gospel, whereas the apostolic endeavors in India, Persia, Ethiopia, and other regions were still bearing fruit.⁶⁷

At the same time it is only fair to say that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 did not play an important role as a missiological text in Luther's thinking. Davis points out that there are forty-six citations of Matthew's Great Commission passage in the collected works of Luther, but only once does Luther refer to the passage in a missiological context:

In a letter of October 2, 1539 to the Elector John Frederick Luther comments on the use of Matthew 28:19 by Martin Bucer to appeal to Luther to send Melanc[h]thon to England to help the cause of the Reformation there. Luther writes that this verse does not obligate him to send Melanc[h]thon, because he [Luther] is "Going into all the world...to preach" through his *writings* – and he also does not wish to leave the present work.⁶⁸

In contrast to Bucer, Luther clearly did not read Matthew 28:16-20 missiologically. He did not base the missionary task of the church on this passage. However, when we look at his interpretation of Luke's version of the Great Commission, which is recorded in chapter 24, verses 45-49 of his Gospel, we see that Luther treats this passage as a missiological text. Luther comments:

According to this command all the Apostles have first judged and re-proved the world, and proclaimed God's wrath against it; afterwards

⁶⁷ Coates, *Were the reformers mission-minded?*, 601.

⁶⁸ Davis, *Practicing ministry in the presence of God: theological reflections on ministry and the Christian life*.

they preached forgiveness of sins in Christ's name...As therefore the Apostles have preached according to the command of Christ, so too must we do, and say that all men are conceived and born in sin and are by nature children of wrath, and on this account condemned,...With this however we do not cease, but we again encourage and comfort those whom we have rebuked, and say that Jesus has come into the world to save sinners, so that all who believe in him, should not perish, but receive everlasting life.⁶⁹

Luther also saw the need to take the gospel to all nations. He recognised the importance of Christian believers going to those who had not heard of Christ and witnessing to them.⁷⁰ In a sermon on Mark, chapter 16, preached on Ascension Day 1523, Luther said the following about Jesus' missionary commission to preach the gospel to all creation:

We have often said heretofore that the Gospel, properly speaking, is not something written in books, but an oral proclamation, which shall be heard in all the world and shall be cried out freely before all creatures, so that all would have to hear it if they had ears;...For the Law, which was of old, and what the prophets preached, was not cried out in all the world before all creatures, but it was preached by the Jews in their synagogues. But the Gospel shall not be thus confined, it shall be preached freely unto all the world.⁷¹

Reflecting on the words of Psalm 117, verse 1 'Praise the LORD, all you nations', Luther argues that the nations first need to hear God's Word before they can praise him.⁷² He then goes on to say: 'If they are to hear His Word, the preachers must be sent to proclaim God's Word to them.'⁷³

⁶⁹ Luther, *The complete works of Martin Luther, volume 4, sermons 68-91*.

⁷⁰ Tennent, *Invitation to world missions: a Trinitarian missiology for the twenty-first century*, 451.

⁷¹ Luther, *Sermons by Martin Luther, volume 3, for Pentecost*, 161.

⁷² Tennent, *Invitation to world missions: a Trinitarian missiology for the twenty-first*

Unlike Luther, Calvin clearly saw the missiological relevance of Matthew 28:16-20. He believed that this passage was still binding for the church.⁷⁴ However, in contrast to the Anabaptists, who suggested that the Great Commission applied to all Christian believers, Calvin argued that it applied to true ministers of the Word only, because it had been first addressed to the apostles.⁷⁵ In his commentary on Matthew 28:16-20 Calvin explains that ‘the Pope of Rome and his band’ have no right to claim succession to the apostles because ‘no man can be a successor of the apostles who does not devote his services to Christ in the preaching of the gospel.’⁷⁶ True preachers of the gospel, however, stand in the succession of the apostles and therefore are, like the apostles, bound by Jesus’ commission. Commenting on Jesus’ command ‘to teach all nations’ Calvin writes: ‘[T]he Lord commands the ministers of the gospel to go a distance, in order to spread the doctrine of salvation in every part of the world.’⁷⁷ Calvin’s view that Jesus’ commission is still valid for called and ordained ministers of the church can also be seen in his comment on Jesus’ instruction about baptism. Thus, Calvin writes: ‘Now since this charge [*baptizing them*] is expressly given to the apostles along with the preaching of the word, it follows that none can lawfully administer baptism but those who are also the ministers of doctrine.’⁷⁸

century, 451.

⁷³ Cited in Tennent, *Invitation to world missions: a Trinitarian missiology for the twenty-first century*, 451.

⁷⁴ Sunshine, *Protestant missions in the sixteenth century*, 13.

⁷⁵ Sunshine, *Protestant missions in the sixteenth century*, 13.

⁷⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke – volume 3*, 316.

⁷⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke – volume 3*, 316.

⁷⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke – volume 3*, 316.

A Narrow View of Mission

Finally, it has to be said that the critics' view of mission tends to be rather narrow. While they are right in emphasising the centrality of the Great Commission and the global dimension of mission, they seem to forget that the church is not exclusively sent 'to the ends of the earth'. The critics seem to overlook the fact that the church is also called to be involved in mission on a local and regional level. In the version of the Great Commission recorded by Luke in Acts 1:8, Jesus commissions his disciples to be his 'witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. What we have here are three stages of witness. As Köstenberger and O'Brien point out, these stages have to be interpreted not only geographically but also theologically and ethnically.⁷⁹ They continue:

The first stage is Jerusalem, where Jesus finished his work and where Israel was to be restored in the remnant of Jews who believed in him as Messiah. The second stage is Judea-Samaria...referring to the area of the ancient kingdoms of Judah and Israel. This fulfils the ancient promises of the restoration of the whole house of Israel under one king... Finally, the apostolic witness will extend to 'the ends of earth', a key expression which... indicates that God intends his salvation should reach all peoples. Geographically, the phrase denotes the end of the world in a general sense. Ethnically, it refers to the Gentile world. If the gospel is for the Jews first, then it is also for the Gentiles...⁸⁰

In other words, the disciples would begin their missionary work in Jerusalem; the capital of the Jewish nation. Jerusalem was, as Wilson writes, 'the home of the Apostles and the base for the Church's mission.'⁸¹ Jerusalem

⁷⁹ Köstenberger & O'Brien *Salvation to the ends of the earth: a biblical theology of mission*, 130.

⁸⁰ Köstenberger & O'Brien *Salvation to the ends of the earth: a biblical theology of mission*, 130-131.

⁸¹ Wilson, *The gentiles and the gentile mission in Luke-Acts*, 240.

functioned as their missionary centre.⁸² From there, they would continue in the surrounding area of Judea. ‘But then the Christian mission’, as Stott comments ‘would radiate out from that centre..., first to despised Samaria, and then far beyond Palestine to the Gentile nations, indeed *to the ends of the earth*.’⁸³ ⁸⁴ The message here for the church is clear: God’s people are going out to others to be witnesses for Jesus. However, this mission usually starts at home.⁸⁵ Phillips notes:

Here, too, we have the Lord’s master plan for world evangelism. They were to begin in Jerusalem – *their own community*. They were to begin with neighbors, family, friends, people all about them. That is where all witness properly begins. They were to reach out next to Judea. They were to evangelize *their own country*. They were to be concerned with those who spoke the same language, had the same customs, lived in the same environment and under the same government. The next venture would give them experience in following the Holy Spirit’s lead, in meeting strangers, in getting used to travelling, adjusting to new situations. Home missions are just as important as foreign missions.⁸⁶

There is something wrong if Christians seek to reach faraway nations for Christ but show no interest in their own neighbours, both immediate and

⁸² See Johnson, *The Acts of the apostles*, 11; Rusam, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 229; Scott, *Acts 2:9-11* as an anticipation of the mission to the nations, 101. Wilson writes: ‘The gospel has first to be preached in Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8, 2-8) and even Paul begins his work by preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem (Acts 9:20f, 26:20). Moreover, as the mission widens its scope, reaching out to Samaritans and Gentiles, the Jerusalem Church is always close on its heels, enquiring after and checking each new development (Acts 8:14f, 11:1f, 22f). And it is in Jerusalem that the Apostolic Council convenes (Acts 15) to decide once and for all the exact requirements to be made of Gentile converts.’

Wilson, *The gentiles and the gentile mission in Luke-Acts*, 240.

⁸³ Stott, *The message of Acts: to the ends of the earth*, 42.

⁸⁴ For the discussion of the phrase ‘to the ends of the earth’ see Ellis, *The end of the earth* (Acts 1:8), 123-132; Moore, ‘To the ends of the earth: the geographic and ethnic universalism of Acts 1:8 in the light of Isaianic influence on Luke’, 389-399.

⁸⁵ See Hughey, *Witness...where? The four arenas of mission involvement*, 49.

⁸⁶ Phillips, *Exploring Acts, volume one, Acts 1-12*, 21.

more distant, or as Hughes puts it: ‘Followers of Christ yearn for the gospel to go to the ends of the earth *and* their own community. There can be no burden for distant unreached peoples without a burden for unreached neighbors.’⁸⁷ If we apply this broader interpretation of Jesus’ Great Commission, we will see that the Protestant Reformers were indeed actively involved in missionary outreach.

⁸⁷ Hughes, *Acts: the church afire*, 18.

The Reformation Cities: Regional Mission Hubs

In many varied way, cities, such as Wittenberg, Geneva, Zurich, Basel and Strasbourg, served as the regional mission hubs of the Reformation movement.⁸⁸ First, it was in these cities that the Reformers developed and taught their ideas. Secondly, it was in these centres that the Reformers produced their writings and had them printed.⁸⁹ In Wittenberg alone over 1,000 editions of Luther's works were printed between 1516 and 1546.⁹⁰ Thirdly, it was from these cities that not only merchants and traders but also itinerant evangelical preachers and pamphleteers, as well as former students of the Reformers, went out in all directions to spread the message of the Reformation.⁹¹ Stewart, for example, stresses the central importance of these cities for the Calvinist Reformation when he writes:

From them streamed out many hundreds of persons who –often after finding a safe haven from persecution in a particular city of the Reformation – returned to their home regions with the theological and pastoral training required to fit them for work as pastors and evangelists. They went out in response to appeals from cells of evangelical believers in France, the Low Countries..., north Italy, and regions of the Alps. Particularly in France, there is evidence of a determination to build networks of congregations systematically across the kingdom. From Geneva alone (by no means the only “sending” center) more than two hundred preachers were sent out during the fifteen year period 1555-1570.⁹²

⁸⁸ Stewart, Calvinism and missions: the contested relationship revisited, 68-69.

⁸⁹ See Pettegree & Hall, The reformation and the book: a reconsideration, 787-788.

⁹⁰ Von Habsburg, *The reformation in Europe, c 1500-1564*, 43.

⁹¹ Pierson, The reformation and mission, 814; Spitz, *The Protestant reformation, 1517-1559*, 184.

⁹² Stewart, Calvinism and missions: the contested relationship revisited, 68.

Geneva, which had become a safe haven for thousands of persecuted Protestant refugees, developed into a centre of theological training and sending.⁹³ It was Calvin who realised the great opportunity, which presented itself to him, to equip and send out evangelists and preachers to the surrounding countries.⁹⁴ Geneva was ideally situated for this purpose as it was only through that city that Protestants could safely enter France, a country which was otherwise surrounded by realms under the control of reactionary Roman Catholic monarchs.⁹⁵ Calvin's strategy proved to be very successful as the number of Reformed churches in France dramatically increased within a short time. While in 1545 there were only five Reformed churches, seventeen years later about 2,150 congregations existed.⁹⁶ In the 1560s approximately ten per cent of the French population, i.e. three million people, belonged to these congregations.⁹⁷ Beeke writes about the pastors who had returned to France:

The French Reformed pastors were on fire for God and, despite massive persecution, God used their work to convert thousands. This is one of the most remarkable examples of effective home missions work in the history of Protestantism, and one of the most astonishing revivals in church history.⁹⁸

⁹³ See Buys, *The relevance of the mission strategy and theology of John Calvin for Africa*, 166-167; Haykin, *John Calvin's missionary influence in France*, 42; Reid, *France*, 221.

⁹⁴ See Buys, *The relevance of the mission strategy and theology of John Calvin for Africa*, 167; Walker, *John Calvin: the organizer of reformed Protestantism*, 380. Mauldin, *Fullerism as opposed to Calvinism: a historical and theological comparison of the missiology of Andrew Fuller and John Calvin*, 39.

⁹⁵ Buys, *The relevance of the mission strategy and theology of John Calvin for Africa*, 168.

⁹⁶ Buys, *The relevance of the mission strategy and theology of John Calvin for Africa*, 170.

⁹⁷ Buys, *The relevance of the mission strategy and theology of John Calvin for Africa*, 170.

⁹⁸ Beeke, *Calvin's evangelism*, 78.

Reformed churches emerged not only in France but also in Hungary, Poland and parts of Germany.⁹⁹ In the Netherlands the Reformed church became a very powerful force against Spanish rule.¹⁰⁰ In England the Puritan movement, which was deeply influenced by Calvinism, gained influence within the Church of England, while north of the border John Knox, who had studied in Geneva, worked hard to reform the church in Scotland.¹⁰¹

What Geneva, Basel and Zurich were for the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland, southern Germany, the Netherlands and France, Wittenberg was for the Reformation in northern Germany, north-east Europe and Scandinavia. Like these Swiss cities, Wittenberg served as a mission hub from which the re-discovered message of salvation by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, spread to many German territories and other parts of Europe. Cameron notes:

The process by which the reformers reached their hearers was just as important as that by which pamphlets reached their readers. Some reformers were already established preachers in their community, and gravitated to the Reformation as they carried out their duties, through their own reading or contacts. Besides Luther himself, this occurred with Zwingli, Matthäus Zell, Wolfgang Capito, Berchthold Haller, Benz of Schwäbisch-Hall, Schappeler of Memmingen, and doubtless many others. Such preachers could carry their hearers with them on the basis of their existing reputation. Others travelled as students to a reformed centre, say, Wittenberg, Zurich, Strasbourg, or Geneva, and returned to their birthplace to spread the message among those they knew. Wittenberg siphoned an astonishing number of visiting students,

⁹⁹ Pierson, *The dynamics of Christian mission: history through a missiological perspective*, 147.

¹⁰⁰ Pierson, *The dynamics of Christian mission: history through a missiological perspective*, 147.

¹⁰¹ Pierson, *The dynamics of Christian mission: history through a missiological perspective*, 147.

through its schools, several of whom became prominent as reformers of their native districts.¹⁰²

In Germany former students of Luther and Melanchthon like Andreas Althamer, Anton Corvinus, and Martin Chemnitz, to name just a few, became catalysts of the Reformation.¹⁰³ In the Danish and Swedish kingdoms many of the leading Reformers had also studied under Luther and Melanchthon at the University of Wittenberg. Among them were men like Olaus Petri, Hans Tausen, Mikael Agricola, and Gizur Einarsson.

¹⁰² Cameron, *The European reformation*, 232.

¹⁰³ See Rittgers, *The reformation of suffering: pastoral theology and lay piety in late medieval and early modern Germany*, 180; Dixon, *The reformation and rural societies: the parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach 1528-1603*, 145; Whitford, *T&T Clark companion to reformation theology*, 386.

Wittenberg and the Reformation in Scandinavia

Olaus Petri: The Leading Swedish Reformer

The history of Swedish Lutheranism began when Olaus Petri,¹⁰⁴ who had been born as the son of a blacksmith in the city of Örebro on 6th January 1493,¹⁰⁵ came to Germany in 1516.¹⁰⁶ From 1516 to 1518 he studied together with his brother Laurentius under Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon in Wittenberg. The two Swedish brothers were, as Heininen and Czaika write, strongly influenced by the teachings of the two German Reformers.¹⁰⁷ While in Wittenberg Olaus Petri heard Martin Luther lecture on Hebrews and Galatians and became a firsthand witness of the controversy over the sale of indulgences by the Catholic Church through Johann Tetzel.¹⁰⁸ Kraal points out that during Olaus' studies Luther completed three major works against the theology and practice of the Catholic Church: *The Disputation against Scholastic Theology* (1517), *The Ninety-five Theses* (1517), and the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518).¹⁰⁹ When the Petri brothers returned to Sweden from Wittenberg in 1518, they were won for Luther's ideas.¹¹⁰ Back in their home country they preached against someone selling indulgences who had come into that country.¹¹¹ They also managed to win over Laurentius Andreae to the cause of the Reformation,¹¹² prior to him becoming chancellor of the Swedish kingdom.¹¹³

Under the protection of the new Swedish king Gustavus Vasa, Olaus Petri and his brother began preaching against other Roman Catholic practices

¹⁰⁴ Also known as Olavus Petri or Olof Pettersson.

¹⁰⁵ Kraal, *The Swedish reformation debates of 1527-28*, 374.

¹⁰⁶ Blåder, *Lutheran tradition as heritage and tool: an empirical study of reflections on confessional identity in five Lutheran churches in different contexts*.

¹⁰⁷ Heininen & Czaika, *Wittenberg influences on the reformation in Scandinavia*.

¹⁰⁸ Skarsten, *Olaus, Petri (1493-1552)*, 1746.

¹⁰⁹ Kraal, *The Swedish reformation debates of 1527-28*, 375.

¹¹⁰ Kraal, *The Swedish reformation debates of 1527-28*, 376.

¹¹¹ Lindsay, *The reformation*, 55.

¹¹² Heininen & Czaika, *Wittenberg influences on the reformation in Scandinavia*.

¹¹³ Lindsay, *The reformation*, 55.

such as veneration of the saints and pilgrimages to healing shrines.¹¹⁴ In 1524 Olaus Petri was appointed secretary of the Stockholm city council,¹¹⁵ before publishing his book *Useful Instruction* two years later.¹¹⁶ In the following year he published *Answers to Twelve Questions*, in which he insisted that it was the church's primary task to preach the pure gospel.¹¹⁷ With the permission of the Swedish king, Olaus Petri's treatises and books were distributed throughout the kingdom.¹¹⁸ Petri also contributed to the translation of the New Testament into Swedish.¹¹⁹ Scott comments on Petri's writing ministry and its influence:

He wrote profusely and with a remarkable persuasiveness; he had a knack for establishing intimate contact with his reader. For ten years he almost enjoyed a monopoly of the printing press that had been introduced in Stockholm in 1526, and he produced a flood of translations and pamphlets (:128). In his reforming zeal Master Olof wanted to arouse debate on the whole question of church reform, but the powerful Bishop Brask refused. Nevertheless the eager young man found occasion to answer in print various objections of those who clung to Roman doctrines and practices.¹²⁰

Among Petri's opponents was not only Bishop Brask, though he was the most prominent one, but also numerous other Catholic priests and bishops.¹²¹ In 1523 Nicholaus Kindbo made a compilation of Petri's doctrines which he considered heretical and sent it to Bishop Brask, who in turn distributed it to other clergy.¹²² 'On the occasion of Kindbo's compilation,

¹¹⁴ Lindsay, *The reformation*, 55.

¹¹⁵ Scott, *Sweden: the nation's history*, 128.

¹¹⁶ Jones, *The great reformation*, 106.

¹¹⁷ Jones, *The great reformation*, 106.

¹¹⁸ Kraal, *The Swedish reformation debates of 1527-28*, 376-377.

¹¹⁹ Scott, *Sweden: the nation's history*, 128.

¹²⁰ Scott, *Sweden: the nation's history*, 128.

¹²¹ See Lindhardt, *Skandinavische Kirchengeschichte seit dem 16. Jahrhundert*, 279.

¹²² Kraal, *The Swedish reformation debates of 1527-28*, 376-377.

Bishop Brask also asked King Gustav Vasa, in vain, to establish the Inquisition in every bishopric of Sweden in order to eradicate Lutheranism by force.¹²³

Interestingly, the reform movement which Olaus Petri and his brother initiated did not see any need to subscribe to a particular confessional standard.¹²⁴ The Petri brothers ‘were convinced that the pure Word of God was all one needed in combating the errors of the medieval church.’¹²⁵ It was only seventy-five years after the brothers’ return to Sweden from Wittenberg that the Swedish church adopted the Augsburg Confession as its confessional foundation.¹²⁶

Hans Tausen: The Danish Luther

In 1523, five years after Petri had graduated, the Danish monk Hans Tausen came to Wittenberg to study under Luther. Tausen, who later became the father of the Danish Reformation, belonged to the order of Knights Hospitalers at Antvorskov.¹²⁷ He had been trained at the three universities of Rostock, Copenhagen and Leuven. While in Wittenberg he was influenced by the ideas of the Protestant Reformation, causing concern to his superiors who subsequently called him back to Denmark in 1524. They feared that Tausen was aligning himself too closely to Luther. This fear was not unwarranted. Vind writes that ‘Tausen must have been immensely impressed by the proximity to Luther and his fellow theologians, since shortly after his return home, he began his evangelical preaching.’¹²⁸ Back in Antvorskov Tausen taught in a sermon on Maundy Thursday that people are saved

¹²³ Kraal, *The Swedish reformation debates of 1527-28*, 377.

¹²⁴ Skarsten, *The reception of the Augsburg Confession in Scandinavia*, 88.

¹²⁵ Skarsten, *The reception of the Augsburg Confession in Scandinavia*, 88.

¹²⁶ Skarsten, *The reception of the Augsburg Confession in Scandinavia*, 88.

¹²⁷ Dreyer, *An apologia for Luther: The myth of the Danish Luther: Danish reformer Hans Tausen and “a short answer” (1528/29)*, 213.

¹²⁸ Vind, *Approaching 2017: the influence of Luther in Denmark*, 123.

through Christ alone.¹²⁹ This kind of preaching was not without consequence. On the one hand, it triggered persecution from the Catholic Church, but on the other hand, he gained the support of the people. Inspired by Tausen's preaching there was a growing enthusiasm for the teachings of Luther in Denmark.¹³⁰ Vind writes:

In 1525 he was sent away from the monastery in Antvorskov to the monastery of the Order of St John in Viborg, probably on account of irregular preaching. In Viborg he continued to preach, and presumably he became more and more critical of the existing church. We know that around 1526 he was expelled from his order. When the bishop sought to arrest him for heresy, he was defended by the citizens of Viborg, and they managed to get a letter of protection for him from King Frederik I.¹³¹

Within a short period Tausen managed to establish the Reformation in Viborg.¹³² In 1527 he had so many supporters in the city that the church, where he usually preached, could not hold all of them.

In the years following Tausen translated the works of Luther from German into Danish and repeatedly called upon King Frederik I to introduce the Reformation in Denmark, appealing to his sense of duty as king.¹³³ This did not happen until 1537 under the rule of King Christian III.¹³⁴ There is no doubt however that Tausen (together with Jorgen Jensen Sadolin) played a crucial role in the Danish evangelical movement and its post-Reformation

¹²⁹ Larson, *Reforming the north: the kingdom and churches of Scandinavia, 1520-1545*, 202.

¹³⁰ Jones, *The great reformation*, 100.

¹³¹ Vind, *Approaching 2017: the influence of Luther in Denmark*, 123.

¹³² Vind, *Approaching 2017: the influence of Luther in Denmark*, 125.

¹³³ Schwarz Lausten, *Luther nach 1530: Theologie, Kirche und Politik*, 18.

¹³⁴ Schwarz Lausten, *Die heilige Stadt Wittenberg: Die Beziehung des dänischen Königshauses zu Wittenberg in der Reformationszeit*, 92.

Lutheran Church.¹³⁵ Gideon and Hilda Hagstotz summarise Tausen's role well when they write:

As a royal chaplain he drew immense crowds in Copenhagen. In 1530 he presented an independent confession of faith of forty-three articles, a counterpart of the Augsburg Confession. He stipulated the Bible alone as sufficient for salvation, the eucharist a commemoration of Christ's death, the Holy Spirit the third person of the Godhead; and purgatory, monastic life, indulgences, mass, and celibacy of priests he declared contrary to Scripture. He was named one of the seven superintendents of the realm; he shared in the construction of the ecclesiastical constitution; and he served for nearly twenty years as bishop of Ribe, until he died.¹³⁶

Mikael Agricola: Reformer and Father of Finnish Literature

In Finland, which had been part of Sweden since the middle of the 12th century,¹³⁷ the Protestant 'Reformation was mainly the work of theologians educated at Wittenberg by Luther and Melanchthon.'¹³⁸ The reason why most Finnish Reformers trained in Wittenberg was that in the 1530s a number of Swedish bishops began to grant scholarships to enable students to study at the birthplace of the Reformation.¹³⁹ Among those who came to Wittenberg was Mikael Agricola.¹⁴⁰ Like many others, Agricola had been deeply impressed by the evangelical preaching of Petrus Särkilathi in the late 1520s.¹⁴¹ However, unlike many of his fellow students he did not receive a scholarship, despite Luther himself appealing on his behalf via a letter of

¹³⁵ Schwarz Lausten, *The early reformation in Denmark and Norway, 1520-1559*, 20.

¹³⁶ Hagstotz & Hagstotz, *Heroes of the reformation*, 300.

¹³⁷ Lavery, *The history of Finland*, 1.

¹³⁸ Vogler, *The spread of the reformation in Germany and Scandinavia (1530-1620)*, 195.

¹³⁹ Heininen & Czaika, *Wittenberg influences on the reformation in Scandinavia*.

¹⁴⁰ Also known as Mikael Olavinpoika or Mikkel Olofsson.

¹⁴¹ Kouri, *The early reformation in Sweden and Finland c. 1520-1560*, 65.

recommendation calling on the Swedish king to fund Agricola's studies.¹⁴² Nevertheless, Agricola still left for Wittenberg in 1536 and returned home three years later.¹⁴³ Upon his return he was appointed rector of the cathedral school in Turku. Eighteen years later King Gustavus made him bishop of Turku and gave him the task of training the first Protestant pastors in Finland.¹⁴⁴ Just like Olaus Petri, Mikael Agricola had an influential writing ministry which shaped the Reformation in Finland. Jones notes:

Agricola was an immensely productive author and scholar, the father of Finnish literature. He undertook the translation of the Bible and published his New Testament in 1543. In 1544 he published his manual for ministers, *A Biblical Prayer Book* and five years later his two service books for conducting the liturgy of the Mass. Agricola had a deep interest in promoting spirituality and although Lutheran in his theology, he had a real respect for late mediaeval devotion and never indulged in bitter polemics against Roman Catholic practices. His generous and pious spirit, with a warm concern for pastoral care of his flock and the promotion of practical Christian living left a lasting mark on the spiritual life of his country.¹⁴⁵

Jones' evaluation of Agricola's ministry is shared by other scholars. The Finnish Reformation is sometimes called the *Quiet Reformation* as it was not actively supported by large segments of society (as it was the case in Denmark and Germany), but almost exclusively carried by members of the clergy.¹⁴⁶ This, however, does not mean that the work of Agricola and other Finnish Reformers was in vain. On the contrary, they reminded the Finnish people of the nature of true, biblical faith. Andersen writes:

¹⁴² Lavery, *The history of Finland*, 40.

¹⁴³ Kouri, *The early reformation in Sweden and Finland c. 1520-1560*, 65.

¹⁴⁴ Vainio, *Reflections of pastoral significance*, 58.

¹⁴⁵ Jones, *The great reformation*, 106.

¹⁴⁶ Vainio, *Reflections of pastoral significance*, 45; Andersen, *The reformation in Scandinavia and the Baltic*, 164.

[W]hen the Roman superstructure of sacramental magic, justification by works and the worship of saints was done away with, the reformers were able to touch hands with the true religious life of the later middle ages, with its reverence for Christ, the mystery of the Passion and penance which in evangelical form provided the transition of the new age. The writings of Agricola show this clearly. The reformers were aiming at a personal faith...¹⁴⁷

Gizur Einarsson: The First Lutheran Bishop in Iceland

The foundation of the Reformation in Iceland was laid by a small group of young, theologically educated men.¹⁴⁸ Among the members of this group was Oddur Gottskalksson, Gisli Jonsson and Gizur Einarsson. All of them had lived or studied in Germany at one point.¹⁴⁹ Einarsson had been sent to Hamburg by his bishop, where he was exposed to the new teaching of the Reformers.¹⁵⁰ This teaching made a deep impression on him. Cunningham notes: ‘As it happened, Gizur became a convinced evangelical after studying for some years in Germany where he heard Luther and Melanchthon preach at Wittenberg. When he returned to his native land around 1533-1534 he was already under suspicion...’¹⁵¹ However, in 1537 Einarsson was nominated by Bishop Ögmundur to be his successor. He became the first Lutheran church leader in Iceland in 1540. Appold writes about Einarsson’s ministry:

[H]e succeeded in introducing Lutheranism to southern Iceland after he arrived in Skalholt in 1540, becoming Iceland’s first Lutheran bishop. Though practical changes were very modest, his patient and diplomatic approach allowed Icelanders to view a form of Lutheranism that was not synonymous with Danish oppression. He was aided by the efforts

¹⁴⁷ Andersen, *The reformation in Scandinavia and the Baltic*, 164.

¹⁴⁸ Cunningham, *Changing fashions: the coming of the reformation to Iceland*, 71.

¹⁴⁹ Cunningham, *Changing fashions: the coming of the reformation to Iceland*, 68-70.

¹⁵⁰ Cunningham, *Changing fashions: the coming of the reformation to Iceland*, 69.

¹⁵¹ Cunningham, *Changing fashions: the coming of the reformation to Iceland*, 69.

of a fellow Lutheran., Oddur Gottskalksson ..., who translated the New Testament into Icelandic, as well as a “postil” by the German Reformer Anton Corvinus, an annual cycle of sermons on the weekly lessons. Gissur encouraged his pastors to buy both, thus raising the level of their preaching...¹⁵²

Wittenberg and the Reformation in Norway

In contrast to the other Scandinavian territories there is no indication that former Wittenberg students played a significant role in the Reformation in the Norwegian kingdom. The Reformation came to Norway first and foremost through itinerant preachers from Germany.¹⁵³ The centre of the Norwegian Reformation was the city of Bergen, where the growing German-speaking community together with some local aristocratic families first embraced the Protestant faith. Scholars believe that Bergen had become a pre-dominantly Lutheran city by 1531.¹⁵⁴ Six years later the rest of the country became officially Lutheran when King Christian III ‘declared the Danish church reformed and signed the royal charter which declared Norway no longer a co-kingdom but another province of Denmark.’¹⁵⁵

However, as Quam points out, the Norwegian church had become Lutheran in name only.¹⁵⁶ Authentic Lutheranism was introduced under the leadership of Jørgen Erikssøn, a faithful supporter of Melanchthon,¹⁵⁷ who was appointed bishop of Stavanger in 1571.¹⁵⁸ Quam writes the following about Erikssøn’s ministry:

¹⁵² Appold, *The reformation: a brief history*, 155.

¹⁵³ Heininen & Czaika, Wittenberg influences on the reformation in Scandinavia; Grell, *Scandinavia*, 269.

¹⁵⁴ Christopherson, *Hallelujahs, damnations, or Norway’s reformation as lengthy process*, 280.

¹⁵⁵ Christopherson, *Hallelujahs, damnations, or Norway’s reformation as lengthy process*, 280.

¹⁵⁶ Quam, *The theology of the Norwegian reformer Jørgen Erikssøn*, 170.

¹⁵⁷ Quam, *The theology of the Norwegian reformer Jørgen Erikssøn*, 173.

¹⁵⁸ Quam, *The theology of the Norwegian reformer Jørgen Erikssøn*, 170.

Erikssøn did good work. From the beginning, he had the support of King Frederik II. He developed a program of regular visitation to the parishes. He involved the cathedral chapter in his work. He built up the Latin school and used it for the education of pastoral candidates. He also gave leadership to the diocese through his preaching and teaching. By the time of his death in 1604, the Stavanger diocese had become an integral part of the Lutheran Church of Norway.¹⁵⁹

In summary, we have seen that Wittenberg played a central role as a regional mission hub for the Reformation movement in northern Europe or as Heininen and Czaika put it: ‘An examination of the Reformation in Scandinavia shows that reforming influences emanating from Wittenberg were taken up in all parts of Scandinavia.’¹⁶⁰ Luther himself saw the Reformation as a missionary movement, Wittenberg as its centre, and his fellow Reformers as missionaries.¹⁶¹ In a letter to Melanchthon he even compared Wittenberg to Antioch and his colleagues to the apostle Paul and his co-workers:

You lecture, Amsdorf lectures; Jonas will lecture; do you want the kingdom of God to be proclaimed only in your town? Do not others need the gospel? Will your Antioch not release a Silas or a Paul or a Barnabas for some other work of the Spirit?¹⁶²

Consequently, the allegations against Luther and his fellow Reformers pertaining to a lack of missionary involvement are unjustified. But what are we to make of the accusation that their theologies were also not at all missional?

¹⁵⁹ Quam, *The theology of the Norwegian reformer Jørgen Erikssøn*, 170.

¹⁶⁰ Heininen & Czaika, *Wittenberg influences on the reformation in Scandinavia*.

¹⁶¹ Hendrix, *Rerooting the faith: the reformation as re-Christianization*, 565.

¹⁶² Cited in Hendrix, *Rerooting the faith: the reformation as re-Christianization*, 565.

The Reformers and their Mission Theology

The Protestant Reformers: The Fathers of Evangelical Missions

Some scholars, such as Scherer and Pitt, have conferred the title of ‘Father of Evangelical Missions’ to Martin Luther,¹⁶³ thus directly contradicting the claims of the critics. While this title is probably too strong a term, it is true that the theologies of Luther, Calvin and other Reformers, with their focus on the Word of God, the church, faith, and salvation contain important principles for mission. To fully appreciate the missional character of the Reformers’ theologies one needs to look at the situation of the church on the eve of the Reformation.

Europe on the Eve of the Reformation

On the eve of the Protestant Reformation, religion played an important role in the lives of most Europeans but the biblical Christian message was hardly heard.¹⁶⁴ The true gospel had almost vanished and the visible church had become a spiritually and morally corrupted institution.¹⁶⁵ For hundreds of years the church had used a policy of assimilation as one of their main mission strategies: elements of pagan religions and cultures that had not been rejected had instead become incorporated into the church.¹⁶⁶ This strategy was very successful. The church expanded and became more and more influential.¹⁶⁷ However, over time the pagan elements started to negatively impact the practice and doctrine of the church. There was, for example, a strong belief in supernatural powers.¹⁶⁸ Only priests could say the words at Holy Communion which would, in their belief, transform the wine into Christ’s blood and the bread into his flesh, or bless buildings and animals

¹⁶³ Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in conflict: 10 key questions in Christian missions today*, 348.

¹⁶⁴ See Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 11; George, *Theology of the reformers*, 21; Johnston, *The Protestant reformation in Europe*, 2-3.

¹⁶⁵ See Whitford, *Luther: a guide for the perplexed*, 4; Dixon, *Contesting the reformation*, 36.

¹⁶⁶ Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 15.

¹⁶⁷ Spitz, *The Protestant reformation, 1517-1559*, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 15.

and thus provide a kind of supernatural protection (:22).¹⁶⁹ Supernatural power was also ascribed to the Bible and the church liturgy. Birkett notes:

[I]t was because of a belief in the inherent power of words that the church resisted translating the Bible from Latin into the common tongue. The argument was that the words themselves, as recorded, had to be preserved... This attitude to the Bible could also be seen in church ceremony. Gospel texts were thought of to be powerful as the collection of particular letters, quiet apart from their actual message. Books of the Gospels were kissed and venerated. Also the Latin liturgy was considered to be powerful in the same way as the Bible,...conveying power to those who used them, even if their meaning was not understood.¹⁷⁰

By the beginning of the 16th century the church had also acquired various privileges which served the purpose to protect the church's spiritual work and its clergy.¹⁷¹ Thus, only the priesthood had the authority to give or withhold the sacraments and to judge and excommunicate members of the laity.¹⁷² The church authorities could also close down a local congregation.¹⁷³ There was nothing lay members could do about it. Members of the clergy were also more or less beyond the jurisdiction of the secular criminal courts.¹⁷⁴ In addition, the clergy 'claimed complete immunity for Church property: once passed to the Church, property was deemed for ever to belong to the Church, never to be alienated, and to be taxed only with the Church's consent.'¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 22.

¹⁷⁰ Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 23-24.

¹⁷¹ Cameron, *The European reformation*, 33.

¹⁷² Cameron, *The European reformation*, 33.

¹⁷³ Cameron, *The European reformation*, 33.

¹⁷⁴ Cameron, *The European reformation*, 33.

¹⁷⁵ Cameron, *The European reformation*, 33.

The church was without doubt a powerful institution and everyday life was dominated by its mediating power. The most powerful person in the church was the pope in Rome. He had the authority to appoint bishops and clerics, and he also benefited from this system financially: candidates had to pay their way into the office and while the post was vacant all the income went to Rome.¹⁷⁶ The church might have been highly influential but it was also an institution facing a severe crisis.¹⁷⁷ Chaunu describes this crisis well when he writes:

With the system of Indulgences, everything rested on the Church... The letters which the money changers dispatched to...Rome, and which in exchange for tinkling florins came back receipted with the pardon and the passport to heaven, bear witness to it. The Church had the key to Scripture which it alone knew and which it scarcely troubled itself about any more. It alone knew, it alone provided, it alone saved. That might have been comforting, but it was dangerous...¹⁷⁸

The time was clearly ripe for change. It was also ripe for the rediscovery of biblical truths and a fundamental reform of the church, or as Whitford puts it: '[E]ven while people on the local level remained fundamentally pious and strongly connected to their parish, nearly all Christians of the late medieval era recognized that the church, in "head and members", needed renewal and reform.'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 27.

¹⁷⁷ Brandt, *Kirche im Wandel der Zeit, Teil 1: Von Paulus bis Luther*, 221-222; Lutz, *Reformation und Gegenreformation*, 13-14.

¹⁷⁸ Chaunu, *The pre-reformation climate*, 56.

¹⁷⁹ Whitford, *Luther: a guide for the perplexed*, 4-5.

The Message of Mission: The Gospel of Justification

In his book *Evangelical Truth* John Stott writes about mission: ‘The Christian Church is called to mission, but there can be no mission without message. So what is our message for the world?’¹⁸⁰ The answer that Stott gives is to the point: the Christian message for the world is the message of the cross, i.e. the gospel. The message of mission Stott writes ‘centres on the cross, on the fantastic truth of a God who loves us, and who gave himself for us in Christ on the cross.’¹⁸¹ This is the message Christians must proclaim.¹⁸² This is the message they must glory in: ‘My thesis’ Stott continues, ‘has been that for our acceptance with God, for our daily discipleship, and for our mission and message to the world, we...should glory in nothing but the cross.’¹⁸³

Luther and Calvin would have wholeheartedly agreed with Stott. They lived in a time when the message of the cross was no longer at the centre of the life of the church.¹⁸⁴ They lived in an age when people were told that they could obtain spiritual blessings, including the forgiveness of sins, by paying certain sums of money to the church.¹⁸⁵ However, through the study of the Scriptures the Reformers came to realise that the true gospel was very different from the gospel taught by the church. They realised that while the Bible teaches the condemnation of sinful people, it also teaches that sinners are offered free forgiveness through Christ.¹⁸⁶ John Calvin summarises the heart of the gospel well when he writes:

Finally, God took pity upon this unfortunate and thoroughly unhappy man. Although the sentence which he passed upon him was correct, he

¹⁸⁰ Stott, *Evangelical truth: a personal plea for unity, integrity and faithfulness*, 96.

¹⁸¹ Stott, *Evangelical truth: a personal plea for unity, integrity and faithfulness*, 96.

¹⁸² Stott, *Evangelical truth: a personal plea for unity, integrity and faithfulness*, 97.

¹⁸³ Stott, *Evangelical truth: a personal plea for unity, integrity and faithfulness*, 98.

¹⁸⁴ See Spitz, *The Protestant reformation, 1517-1559*, 51-52.

¹⁸⁵ Lindsay, *The reformation*, 47.

¹⁸⁶ Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 38.

nevertheless gave his only and much-loved Son as a sacrificial victim for such sins. By reason of this amazing and unexpected mercy [...], God commended his love towards us more greatly than if he had rescinded this sentence. Therefore Christ, the Son of God, was both conceived through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin. He was finally raised up on the cross, and through his own death delivered the human race from eternal death.¹⁸⁷

The Protestant Reformers rediscovered the biblical gospel of justification.¹⁸⁸ They came to realise that people are justified by faith alone; that they cannot contribute anything to their salvation because on the cross Christ has already achieved everything for them.¹⁸⁹ The Reformers understood that justification is a gracious act of God by which a believer is declared righteous. Melancthon notes:

For what cause is justification attributed to faith alone? I answer that since we are justified by the mercy of God alone, and faith is clearly the recognition of that mercy by whatever promise you apprehend it, justification is attributed to faith alone...For to trust in divine mercy is to have no confidence in any of our own works. Anyone who denies that the saints are justified by faith insults the mercy of God. For since our justification is a work of divine mercy alone and is not a merit based on our own works, ..., justification must be attributed to faith alone.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Cited in McGrath , *The Christian theology reader*, 187.

¹⁸⁸ Stott, *The cross of Christ*, 182.

¹⁸⁹ Reeves & Chester. *Why the reformation still matters*, 26.

¹⁹⁰ Cited in McGrath , *The Christian theology reader*, 231.

The Heart of Mission: The Proclamation of the Gospel

Luther and his fellow Reformers not only came to embrace the biblical gospel, they also emphasised the necessity to proclaim it. In his *Large Catechism*, Luther writes the following about the second petition in the Lord's Prayer:

For the coming of God's kingdom to us occurs in two ways; first, here in time through the Word and faith; and secondly, in eternity forever through revelation. Now we pray for both these things, that it may come to those who are not yet in it, and, by daily increase, to us who have received the same, and hereafter in eternal life. All this is nothing else than saying: Dear Father, we pray, give us first Thy Word, that the Gospel be preached properly throughout the world; and secondly, that it be received in faith, and work and live in us...¹⁹¹

Luther recognises that the gospel needs to be preached both to those who already belong to Christ through faith and to those who are not yet part of the kingdom.¹⁹² We can see here as Schulz writes, 'the missionary dimension to Luther's theology: God's mission takes place within the Church, and yet it also extends beyond the Church to those still held in unbelief.'¹⁹³ Interestingly, Luther stresses that the gospel has to be proclaimed 'throughout the world'. By using this phrase, he acknowledges the global aspect of evangelism. The gospel has to be proclaimed to all unbelievers whether they live close by or far away so that they can come to a personal faith in Christ.

¹⁹¹ Luther, *Large catechism*.

¹⁹² See Gensichen, *Missionsgeschichte der neueren Zeit*, 6; Ahrens, *Lutherische Kreolität: Lutherische Mission und andere Kulturen*, 423.

¹⁹³ Schulz, *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 50.

This obligation to proclaim the gospel to all nations is also acknowledged by Calvin. In his *Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon* Calvin states the following in connection with 1 Timothy 2:4: ‘[T]he Apostle simply means, that there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation; because God wishes that the gospel should be proclaimed to all without exception.’¹⁹⁴

For the Reformers, preaching certainly formed the heart of mission. The preaching of the gospel had, as Zorn notes, priority over other activities, such as church planting and diaconal work.¹⁹⁵ The reason for this was that ‘preaching the word built up the church, the latter being the consequence of the former and not the reverse.’¹⁹⁶ Consequently, one can only agree with Chung when he writes ‘that the Reformation teaching of justification has an urgent motive for mission.’¹⁹⁷

The Author of Mission: God

It is striking that both Luther and Calvin stress the role that God plays in the missionary proclamation of the gospel. In his *Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon* Calvin writes:

Now the preaching of the gospel gives life; and hence he justly concludes that God invites all equally to partake salvation. But the present discourse relates to classes of men, and not to individual persons; for his sole object is, to include in this number princes and foreign nations. That God wishes the doctrine of salvation to be enjoyed by them as well as others, is evident...¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 40.

¹⁹⁵ Zorn, *Did Calvin foster or hinder missions?*, 188.

¹⁹⁶ Zorn, *Did Calvin foster or hinder missions?*, 188.

¹⁹⁷ Chung, *Reclaiming mission as constructive theology: missional church and world Christianity*, 101.

¹⁹⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 40.

God himself, is ultimately responsible for the preaching of the gospel. It is his will that all nations hear the gospel and it is God who invites people to receive salvation. Put differently, mission is first and foremost God's mission or to use the common technical term, *missio Dei*. Schulz notes: 'God is the subject. Our activity must subordinate itself to God's doing, and any success is due to Him.'¹⁹⁹

The Protestant Reformers hold that whenever the Word of God is proclaimed properly God's voice can be heard.²⁰⁰ The voice and the words of the preacher, writes Luther, 'are not his own words and doctrine but those of our Lord and God.'²⁰¹ This notion is based on the Reformers' view of mission.²⁰² To them the missionary proclamation of the gospel is an essential part of God's salvation plan. While salvation is achieved through Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection, it is distributed through the Word of God by the Holy Spirit.²⁰³ Without this distribution through the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit who applies the gospel to sinners no one would be saved. In his work *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Manner of Images and Sacraments* Luther underlines the central role which the Word of God plays in the life of Christians:

Christ on the cross and all His suffering and His death do not avail, even if, as you teach, they are 'acknowledged and meditated upon' with the utmost 'passion, ardor, heartfeltness'. Something else must always be there. What is it? The Word, the Word. Listen, lying spirit, the Word avails. Even if Christ were given for us and crucified a thousand times, it would all be in vain if the Word of God were absent and were not distributed and given to me with the bidding, this is for you, take it, take what is yours. If I now seek the forgiveness of sins, I do

¹⁹⁹ Schulz, *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 50.

²⁰⁰ Reeves & Chester. *Why the reformation still matters*, 46.

²⁰¹ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St John, in Luther's works*, vol. 22, 526.

²⁰² Reeves & Chester. *Why the reformation still matters*, 46.

²⁰³ Reeves & Chester. *Why the reformation still matters*, 47.

not run to the cross, for I will not find it there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ, as Carlstadt trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacraments or gospel, the Word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives me that forgiveness which was won on the cross.²⁰⁴

The Reformers acknowledge that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in God's mission. For Calvin the spreading of God's kingdom is clearly the work of the triune God.²⁰⁵ In his commentary on Micah, for example, Calvin underlines the role of the Father as the one who sends the gospel to all nations:

[T]he Lord will show, not only in one corner, what true religion is, and how he seeks to be worshipped, but he will send forth his voice to the extreme limits of the earth...In that passage the doctrine of Christ is metaphorically called a sceptre, ... ; for Christ does not otherwise rule among us, than by the doctrine of his Gospel; and there David declares, that this sceptre would be sent far abroad by God the Father, that Christ might have under his rule all those nations which had been previously aliens.²⁰⁶

In a sermon on 1 Timothy 2:5-6 Calvin explains the Son's role in the mission of the Triune God when he notes that Christ 'came not only to reconcile a few individuals, to God the Father, but to extend his grace over all the world.'²⁰⁷ Christ, Calvin continues, 'suffered not for the sins, which were committed in Judah only, but for those which were committed throughout

²⁰⁴ Cited in Preus, *The theology of the cross*, 49.

²⁰⁵ Beeke, *Calvin's evangelism*, 68-69.

²⁰⁶ Calvin, J 1950. *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets, vol. 3, Jonah, Micah, Nahum*, 259.

²⁰⁷ Calvin, *Selection of the most celebrated sermons of John Calvin, minister of the Gospel, and one of the principal leaders in the Protestant reformation*, 186.

the world.’²⁰⁸ Calvin leaves us with no doubt about the global dimension of Christ’s mission. The same applies to the mission of the third person of the Trinity. In his *First Sermon on Pentecost* Calvin writes: ‘We see, then, when the Holy Spirit descended, that was not only for a little handful of people, but in order that this might reach all the ends and extremities of the world.’²⁰⁹

Like Calvin, Luther recognises the central role the Holy Spirit plays in God’s mission. Commenting on the third article of the Apostle’s Creed Luther writes the following in his *Large Catechism*:

I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it. For formerly, before we attained to this, we were altogether of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. Thus, until the last day, the Holy Ghost abides with the holy congregation or Christendom, by means of which He fetches us to Christ and which he employs to teach and preach to us the Word, causing it [this community] daily to grow and become strong in the faith.²¹⁰

According to Luther, it is the Holy Spirit who works in and through the church. It is the Spirit of God who through the church’s preaching brings individuals to faith in Christ and into the church and thus sets them free from the influence of the devil. It is also God’s Spirit who through the

²⁰⁸ Calvin, *Selection of the most celebrated sermons of John Calvin, minister of the Gospel, and one of the principal leaders in the Protestant reformation*, 186.

²⁰⁹ Cited in Dillenberger, *John Calvin: selections from his writings*, 562.

²¹⁰ Luther, *Large catechism*.

church's preaching strengthens the faith of believers and equips them to bear fruit.

God's Instrument in Mission: The Church

For the last two hundred years mission in general and cross-cultural mission in particular have been dominated by mission agencies and other parachurch organisations.²¹¹ For many years mission organisations have been reminding local churches in the West of their responsibility for world mission. Local churches, they rightly argue, must be mission-minded. However, there is also a need for mission organisations to be church-minded.²¹² Unfortunately, there is the tendency among mission agencies today to see local churches first and foremost as a source of new missionaries and financial means.²¹³ Local churches and their individual members are seen as supporters of mission agencies and their missionaries rather than as mission partners.²¹⁴ This is especially true for international faith missions which have no formal link with any particular church body. They operate more or less independently from churches and are not accountable to them.

In contrast to many evangelical interdenominational mission agencies today, the Protestant Reformers clearly had a church-centred approach to mission. Luther, for example, emphasised, as Wendland writes, the 'overall mission (or gospel) orientation of the invisible Church – and of the individual, visible congregation – as being an integral part of their nature and purpose.'²¹⁵ Consequently, there was no need for him to even think about any

²¹¹ See Johnstone, *The church is bigger than you think: the unfinished work of world evangelization*.

²¹² Johnstone, *The church is bigger than you think: the unfinished work of world evangelization*, 205.

²¹³ McCain, *Church-minded missions: taking the local church seriously*, 137.

²¹⁴ Prill, *Evangelical mission organisations, postmodern controversies, and the new heartbeat of mission*, 35.

²¹⁵ Wendland, *Cultural and theological specificity in Lutheran missiology*, 25.

separate mission organisation that would work alongside the church.²¹⁶ For Luther and his fellow Reformers, it is the church which ‘serves as the catalyst and base for missionary outreach.’²¹⁷ According to Bucer it is in particular the ministers of the church which Christ uses as his missionary instruments. In *Concerning the True Care of Souls* Bucer writes:

[W]e can see very clearly and obviously that our Lord Jesus, now in his heavenly nature, is with us and rules and feeds us from heaven; this rule and feeding, that is, the work of our salvation, he exercises among us through his ministers, whom he calls, ordains and uses for that purpose. Through them he calls all nations to reformation and declares to them forgiveness of sins, pardoning their sins and accepting them as his disciples, giving them new birth to godly life in holy baptism and then teaching them all their lives long to keep everything he has commanded them.²¹⁸

In other words, it is the task of the church to preach the Word of God to both believers and unbelievers, to incorporate new believers through baptism into the church and to strengthen them through teaching and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the faith.²¹⁹ All this happens on the local, congregational level.²²⁰ Luther believed, as Kolb and Arand note ‘that God gathered his people into communities, into congregations gathered by and around his Word as it was proclaimed, read, and shared in its sacramental form.’²²¹ This conviction stems from the Reformers’ understanding of the church. According to the Reformers the marks of the church are twofold: the Church of God is present wherever the gospel is faithfully preached and the

²¹⁶ Wendland, *Cultural and theological specificity in Lutheran missiology*, 25.

²¹⁷ Schulz, *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 53.

²¹⁸ Bucer, *Concerning the true care of souls*, 21.

²¹⁹ Schulz, *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 52.

²²⁰ Schulz, *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 53.

²²¹ Kolb & Arand. *The genius of Luther’s theology: A Wittenberg way of thinking for the contemporary church*, 180.

sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are properly administered. Calvin puts it this way: 'Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and listened to, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, it is in no way to be doubted that a church of God exists.'²²² Similarly, Luther writes that 'anywhere you hear or see such a word preached, believed, confessed and acted upon, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, a 'holy Christian people' must be there, even though there are very few of them.'²²³ Luther did not like the idea of the church as an institution.²²⁴ He rather saw it as the community or assembly of believers.

While the Reformers have a high view of the ordained ministry,²²⁵ they also insist that the whole people of God are called to be witnesses to God's grace and salvation through Christ.²²⁶ What Mashau writes about the theology of the Calvinist wing of the Reformation is certainly also true for the Lutheran Reformers and their ecclesiological views:

Reformed theology rediscovers the ecclesiology that accommodates the office of the believers in mission. It does not only place emphasis on the church as an institution with the office-bearers as the only functionaries in her activities, but also on the church as an organism, with individual members spread in diverse walks of life, where they are responsible for being faithful witnesses of Christ wherever God places them. Individual members of the church of Christ are entrusted with the responsibility of being kings, prophets, and priests. They are the witnessing community of God. To this end, the indwelling Spirit in

²²² Cited in McGrath, *The Christian theology reader*, 270.

²²³ Cited in McGrath, *The Christian theology reader*, 266.

²²⁴ Reeves & Chester, *Why the reformation still matters*, 135.

²²⁵ See Evans, *Problems of authority in the reformation debates*, 220; Gordon, *The new parish*, 412; Steinmetz, *Taking the long view: Christian theology in perspective*, 93;

²²⁶ Zorn, *Did Calvin foster or hinder missions?*, 187.

their lives equips them with different charismata. He also empowers them to be true and faithful witnesses of Christ in the world.²²⁷

In several of his works Luther reaffirms the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. For Luther the priesthood of all believers means that through Christ every Christian has direct access to God and does not need any human mediator between God and himself.²²⁸ ²²⁹ Luther strongly rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine and practice which gives both members of the clergy and the saints a mediating role. For Luther, to invoke the saints as mediators ‘is substituting dumb idols for Christ.’²³⁰ The only mediator Christians as members of the spiritual priesthood need is the Son of God. Through him they can directly come before God the Father in prayer:

For Christ is our sole Mediator, and no one need expect to be heard unless he approach the Father in the name of that Mediator and confess him Lord given of God as intercessor for us and ruler of our bodies and souls. Prayer according to these conditions is approved. Strong faith, however, is necessary to lay hold of the comforting Word, picturing in our hearts as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.²³¹

²²⁷ Mashau, John Calvin’s theology of the charismata: its influence on the Reformed confessions and its implications for the church’s mission, 95.

²²⁸ See Yarnell, *Royal priesthood in the English reformation*, 2.

²²⁹ This is also Calvin’s position: ‘Christ now bears the office of priest, not only that by the eternal law of reconciliation he may render the Father favourable and propitious to us, but also admit us into this most honourable alliance. For we, though in ourselves polluted, in him being priests (Rev. i. 6), offer ourselves and our all to God, and freely enter the heavenly sanctuary, so that the sacrifices and praise which we present are grateful and of sweet odour before him.’ *Institutes of the Christian religion, book II*, translated by H Beveridge, 431.

²³⁰ Luther, *Sermons by Martin Luther, volume 8, sermons on epistle texts for Trinity Sunday to Advent*, 175.

²³¹ Luther, *Sermons by Martin Luther, volume 8, sermons on epistle texts for Trinity Sunday to Advent*, 226-227.

However, there is more to Luther's view on the doctrine of the universal priesthood. As Alston points out Luther did not understand the doctrine merely in individualistic terms: 'Luther was no rugged individualist; he was an ardent advocate of Christian community. The truth of the matter is that even when Luther spoke of the priesthood of all believers, he was speaking of the one essential ministry of the whole church.'²³² Luther, as Alston writes, had no intention to abolish the priesthood, but to expand it.²³³ In his treatise *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* Luther states that all Christians are consecrated priests through their baptism.²³⁴ Consequently 'there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status. They are all of the spiritual estate, all are truly priests, bishops, and popes. But they do not all have the same work to do.'²³⁵ Though their individual work might differ, as members of God's royal priesthood they all have the mandate to witness to Christ. In a sermon on John 21:19-24 Luther says that as priests all Christians can 'teach all the world' about the faith.²³⁶ The difference, however, between those Christians who hold a ministerial office and those who do not is that the former proclaim the word on behalf of the entire Christian community while the latter do it in a private capacity.²³⁷ 'Parents evangelize their children. At work, relationships are formed with colleagues, who, in the course of friendship and common work, can be introduced to the Gospel of grace.'²³⁸ In a sermon he preached on 1 Peter 2:9 in his Wittenberg church Luther reminds his

²³² Alston, *The church of the living God: a reformed perspective*, 46.

²³³ Alston, *The church of the living God: a reformed perspective*, 46.

²³⁴ Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, 12.

²³⁵ Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, 14.

²³⁶ Luther, *Sermons by Martin Luther, volume 1, sermons on gospel texts for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*, 241.

²³⁷ Muthiah, *The priesthood of all believers in the twenty-first century: living faithfully as the whole people of God in a postmodern context*, 19.

²³⁸ Veith, *The spirituality of the cross: the way of the first evangelicals*, 85-86.

congregants that they are all called to proclaim the blessings of God's love in Christ.²³⁹ Luther says:

Everything then should be directed in such a way that you recognize what God has done for you and you, thereafter, make it your highest priority to proclaim this publicly and call everyone to the light to which you are called. Where you see people that do not know this, you should instruct them and also teach them how you learned, that is, how a person through the good work and might of God is saved and comes from darkness into light.²⁴⁰

In another sermon preached in 1522 Luther goes a step further. He stresses that it is Christ himself who gives believers the assurance that the gospel is indeed true. Christians who have been assured in such a way, Luther argues, cannot but witness to the world that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the world's only Saviour. Luther states:

That is, if he is in the heart he speaks through you, and assures and confirms you in the belief that the Gospel is true. Then, as a result, the confession of the Gospel springs forth. What then is the Gospel? It is a witness concerning Christ, that he is God's Son, the Savior, and beside him there is no other. This is what Peter means when he says: "Ye are a royal priesthood, that we are elected thereto, that we preach and show forth the excellencies of Christ." 1 Peter 2:9. Hence, there must always be witnessing.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Kolb, *Jeder Christ ist in die Pflicht genommen, Zeugnis vom Glauben abzulegen: Die Verkündigung der Lutheraner in der Spätreformation zu Mission und Bekenntnis*, 132.

²⁴⁰ Cited in Stolle, *Church comes from all nations*, 20.

²⁴¹ Luther, *Sermons by Martin Luther, volume 1, sermons on gospel texts for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*, 222.

The Motives for Mission: A Passion for God and a Passion for People

In his book *Mission Matters* John Brand argues that there are two outstanding biblical motives for missionary service: a passion for God and a passion for people.²⁴² ‘No Christian’, writes Brand ‘will ever be truly effective as a missionary unless he has a genuine love and concern for those he seeks to serve.’²⁴³ At the heart of this passion for people lies the biblical truth that anyone who lives and dies without Christ is lost for eternity.²⁴⁴ While a passion for lost people is a crucial motive for mission, it is not the highest one.²⁴⁵ Missionaries also need to have a passion and enthusiasm for God and his glory. They ‘need to become jealous for his glory, even as God is jealous for his own glory.’²⁴⁶ Both mission motives, mentioned by Brand, are prominent in Reformation theology.

The Protestant Reformers saw human beings first and foremost from the perspective of their essential sinfulness and their inability to save themselves.²⁴⁷ They did not share Thomas Aquinas’ optimistic view regarding the ability of human reason. Instead, they emphasised the depravity and lost nature of humanity and their need of a saviour. ‘Luther’s starting point’, as Spencer notes ‘was the hopelessness and futility of the human situation: he accepted fundamentally Augustine’s doctrine of original sin and the dependence of humanity on God.’²⁴⁸ Commenting on the Apostle’s Creed Luther deals with the fall and its consequences when he says: ‘For when we had been created by God the Father, and received from Him all manner of good, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil, so that we fell under his wrath and displeasure and were doomed to eternal

²⁴² Brand, *Mission Matters*.

²⁴³ Brand, *Mission Matters*, 6.

²⁴⁴ Brand, *Mission Matters*, 11.

²⁴⁵ Brand, *Mission Matters*, 11.

²⁴⁶ Brand, *Mission Matters*, 13-14.

²⁴⁷ Labuschagne, Calvin and mission, 478.

²⁴⁸ Spencer, *SCM study guide to Christian mission: historic types and contemporary expressions*, 116.

damnation, as we had merited and deserved.’²⁴⁹ Luther goes on to explain that only a compassionate and gracious God could save human beings from that fate. It is only through the work of Christ that they can enjoy the benefits of being reconciled to their creator:

There was no counsel, help, or comfort until this only and eternal Son of God in His unfathomable goodness had compassion upon our misery and wretchedness, and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers, then, are expelled now, and in their place has come Jesus Christ, Lord of life, righteousness, very blessing, and salvation, and has delivered us poor lost men from the jaws of hell, has won us, made us free, and brought us again into the favour and grace of the Father, and has taken us as His own property under his shelter and protection, that He may govern us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life and blessedness.²⁵⁰

The Reformers emphasised not only the lost nature of human beings and their need of salvation but also their obligation to exclusively worship the God of the Bible. In his *Institutes* Calvin makes this point very clear when he states: ‘But God, in vindicating his own right, first proclaims that he is a jealous God, and will be a stern avenger if he is confounded with any false god; and thereafter defines what due worship is, in order that the human race may be kept in obedience.’²⁵¹ Calvin continues to say that ‘unless everything peculiar to divinity is confined to God alone, he is robbed of his honour, and his worship is violated.’²⁵² This kind of passion for God is also obvious in the writings of Calvin’s fellow Reformers. Thus, Zwingli in his *Short and Clear Exposition of the Christian Faith*, written in 1531, notes: ‘This is the fountainhead of my religion, to recognize God as the uncreated Creator of

²⁴⁹ Luther, Large catechism.

²⁵⁰ Luther, Large catechism.

²⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion, Book I*. Translated by H Beveridge, 105.

²⁵² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion, Book I*. Translated by H Beveridge, 105.

all things, who solely and alone has all things in His power and freely giveth us all things.’²⁵³ In his lectures on the letter to the Ephesians Bucer argues that the ultimate purpose of election is the glory of God alone: ‘For it is not the sanctification of our life, that is the chief purpose of our election, but the very glory of God. It is on account of this and for this that all things were created and that we have been regenerated.’²⁵⁴

The Response to Mission: Faith in Christ

In his book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* James Packer argues that the evangelistic call should never be a call to believe that Christ died for one’s sins but the call to trust in Jesus Christ.²⁵⁵ To urge people to believe that Christ died for their sins would mean to dissociate the saving work of Christ in the past from the person of Christ in the present.²⁵⁶ The object of saving faith, however, is not the atonement but Jesus himself, who gave his life as an atonement for sin. Packer concludes:

The gospel is not “believe that Christ died for everybody’s sins, and therefore for yours,” any more than it is “believe that Christ died only for certain people’s sins, and so perhaps not for yours.” The gospel is “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sins, and now offers you himself as your Saviour.” This is the message we are to take to the world. We have no business to ask them to put faith in any view of the extent of the atonement; our job is to point them to the living Christ, and summon them to trust in him.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Zwingli, *On providence and other essays*, 241.

²⁵⁴ Cited in Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the theology of Martin Bucer*, 71.

²⁵⁵ Packer, *Evangelism and the sovereignty of God*, 74.

²⁵⁶ Packer, *Evangelism and the sovereignty of God*, 74.

²⁵⁷ Packer, *Evangelism and the sovereignty of God*, 77.

In an age when people's spiritual life was dominated by the observance of rituals, and the veneration of saints, as well as trust in the supernatural powers of the priests, the Protestant Reformers emphasised the personal character of faith in Christ. As a matter of fact, it is a central aspect of their theologies. Luther, for example, insists, as Shepherd puts it, 'that faith – as contrasted with mere "belief" – is the engagement of the Christian's total person with the Person of Jesus Christ.'²⁵⁸ For Luther faith consists of three components. The first two are knowledge of Christ and assent to who he is and what he has done.²⁵⁹ However, for the German reformer the third component is crucial: trust in Christ as one's personal Lord and Saviour.²⁶⁰ Such faith is established through the preaching of God's word. In *On Christian Liberty* first published in 1520 Luther writes:

Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what his name denotes may be effectual in us. Such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, and what benefit it is to us to accept him.²⁶¹

In *A Sermon on Three Kinds of Good Life* Luther explains what the benefits of such saving faith in Christ are:

He who calls on Christ in faith, however, possesses his name, and the Holy Spirit most certainly comes to him. When the Spirit comes, however, look, he makes a pure, free, cheerful, glad, and loving heart ...This is the last thing on earth that any man can do...This is the road

²⁵⁸ Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther: an introduction to his life and thought*, 159.

²⁵⁹ Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther: an introduction to his life and thought*, 160.

²⁶⁰ Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther: an introduction to his life and thought*, 160.

²⁶¹ Luther, *On Christian liberty*, 292-293.

to heaven...Christ referred to this when he said in Mark, “He that believes shall be saved.” Faith alone saves...²⁶²

Like Luther, his Wittenberg colleague Philipp Melanchthon places trust at the centre of the Christian faith.²⁶³ For Melanchthon faith is a ‘matter of the heart.’²⁶⁴ In *Loci Communes Theologici* he states that ‘faith is nothing else than trust in the divine mercy promised in Christ, and it makes no difference what sign it has been promised.’²⁶⁵ Melanchthon continues to say that ‘[t]his trust in the goodwill or mercy of God first calms our hearts and then inflames us to give thanks to God for his mercy so that we keep the law gladly and willingly.’²⁶⁶

Likewise, Calvin argues that faith is more than mere head knowledge.²⁶⁷ For Calvin, to have faith means to have a close relationship of love and trust with Christ.²⁶⁸ As a matter of fact, fellowship with Jesus through faith is the most personal, meaningful and precious relationship possible. Thus, Calvin notes:

We ought not to separate Christ from ourselves or ourselves from him. Rather we ought to hold fast bravely with both hands to that fellowship by which he has bound himself to us. So Christ is not outside us but dwells within us. Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us.²⁶⁹

²⁶² Luther, *Luther’s works: the Christians in society I*, vol.44, 241.

²⁶³ Mursell, *The story of Christian spirituality: two thousand years, from east to west*, 169.

²⁶⁴ Mursell, *The story of Christian spirituality: two thousand years, from east to west*, 169.

²⁶⁵ Melanchthon, *Loci communes theologici*, 92.

²⁶⁶ Melanchthon, *Loci communes theologici*, 92.

²⁶⁷ Calvin, *Calvin’s Institutes: abridged edition*, 68.

²⁶⁸ See McKim, *John Calvin: a companion to his life and theology*.

²⁶⁹ Calvin, *Calvin’s Institutes: abridged edition*, 71.

Bucer insists that such faith cannot exist without love for God.²⁷⁰ Everyone who has through faith, ‘the certainty that in God he lives and moves and has his being’ and that God gave him eternal life ‘by delivering up his own Son to death for his sake’, Bucer argues, cannot be ‘indifferent towards God’ but must love him.²⁷¹

Payton points out that for the Reformers faith in Christ which alone justifies is never alone: ‘[T]he faith that justifies cannot be solitary. It cannot exist by itself, in supposedly blissful isolation’²⁷² In his *Institutes* Calvin famously says that faith and good works belong together:

For we dream neither of a faith devoid of good works nor of a justification that stands without them. This alone is of importance: having admitted that faith and good works cleave together, we still lodge justification in faith, not in works. We have a ready explanation for doing this, provided we turn to Christ to whom our faith is directed and from whom it receives its full strength.²⁷³

For the Protestant Reformers genuine faith in Christ always leads to good works. Like Calvin, Luther strongly holds that no one can earn his or her salvation by being a good person, but that does not mean that good works are not important. In *A Treatise on Good Works* Luther argues that good works are the litmus test of true faith,²⁷⁴ and in *The Freedom of a Christian* he writes: ‘Nevertheless the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God and considers nothing except the approval of God, whom he would most

²⁷⁰ Lugiyo, *Martin Bucer’s doctrine of justification: reformation theology and early modern irenicism*, 88.

²⁷¹ Cited in Lugiyo, *Martin Bucer’s doctrine of justification: reformation theology and early modern irenicism*, 88.

²⁷² Payton, *Getting the reformation wrong: correcting some misunderstandings*, 123.

²⁷³ Calvin, *Calvin’s Institutes: abridged edition*, 102.

²⁷⁴ Luther, *A treatise on good works*, 73.

scrupulously obey in all things.’²⁷⁵ For Luther and his fellow Reformers good works are not a condition but a consequence or expression of salvation.²⁷⁶ Forell notes: ‘Faith is never unethical faith. He who has faith will be sanctified and do good works. Justification and sanctification are for Luther two aspects of the same process and therefore mutually interdependent.’²⁷⁷ For the German Reformer, good works and service in society are an integral part of the Christian life, even if they are risky. In *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague* Luther says the following about the civic duties towards one’s neighbour:

If his house is on fire, love compels me to run to help him to extinguish the flames. If there are enough other people around to put the fire out, I may either go home or remain to help. If he falls into the water or into a pit I dare not turn away but must hurry to help him as best I can. If there are others to do it, I am released. If I see that he is hungry or thirsty, I cannot ignore him but must offer food and drink, not considering whether I would risk impoverishing myself by doing so.²⁷⁸

Steinmetz summarises the heart of Luther’s ethics well when he says: ‘For Luther, the vertical relationship to God and the horizontal relationship to the neighbour are so inseparably joined in the act of faith that one is unthinkable without the other.’²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Luther, *The freedom of a Christian*, 359.

²⁷⁶ See Schofield, *Philip Melancthon and the English reformation*, 63.

²⁷⁷ Forell, *Faith active in love*, 85-86.

²⁷⁸ Luther, *Whether one may flee from a deadly plague*, 125-126.

²⁷⁹ Steinmetz, *Luther in context*, 124.

The Nature of Mission: A Spiritual Battle

In his *A Practical Theology of Missions* Wright argues that mission is rooted in God's nature.²⁸⁰ One of the qualitative statements which the Old Testament makes concerning the being of God is that he is the one and only true God, while all other gods are human made idols.²⁸¹ Thus, we read in Exodus 20:3-4 that we must not have any other gods but God and must not make for ourselves an idol of any kind. Wright goes on to explain what this means for mission when he writes:

Missions involves the clash of truth with falsehood. Whether people be primitive animists or Buddhists, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus or even worshippers of Mary or science or money, the missionary message calls them to reject the lie and receive the truth – there is only one true God. Missions, then, involves calling men and women from the darkness of every kind of deceptive lie, fabrication, false philosophy and counterfeit religion into the light that radiates from the one true God (:29-30).²⁸²

This aspect of mission, i.e. that it involves a clash between truth and falsehood, can also be found in the writings of the Reformers. Luther, for example, recognises that the evangelising church is involved in a spiritual battle, i.e. in a clash between God's truths and God's Church on the one side and the devil's lies and his false church on the other side.²⁸³ In his *Large Catechism* Luther prays 'that through the Word and the power of the Holy Ghost Thy kingdom may prevail among us, and the kingdom of the devil be put

²⁸⁰ Wright, *A practical theology of missions: dispelling the mystery, recovering the passion*, 27.

²⁸¹ Wright, *A practical theology of missions: dispelling the mystery, recovering the passion*, 29.

²⁸² Wright, *A practical theology of missions: dispelling the mystery, recovering the passion*, 29-30.

²⁸³ Kolb, *Late reformation Lutherans on missions and confession*, 26.

down.²⁸⁴ The church in mission is always confronted with the devil and its powers. Mission is never ‘done in a neutral zone.’²⁸⁵ ‘[T]he ministers, whom Christ has authorized to proclaim his redemption’, writes Calvin, ‘are the objects of Satan’s daily warfare.’²⁸⁶ Similarly, Luther argues that Christians must expect the devil to become active wherever God’s Word is proclaimed and believed.²⁸⁷ Commenting on the Lord’s Prayer in his *Large Catechism* Luther notes: ‘If we would be Christians, therefore, we must surely expect and reckon upon having the devil with all his angels and the world as our enemies who will bring every possible misfortune and grief upon us.’²⁸⁸ Luther continues to give the reason for the battle which the devil rages on Christian believers: ‘For where the Word of God is preached, accepted, or believed, and produces fruit, there the holy cross cannot be wanting.’²⁸⁹ To this explanation Luther adds a strong warning: ‘And let no one think that he shall have peace.’²⁹⁰

While the Reformers recognise the power of the devil they also stress that the weapons Christians in general and Christian ministers in particular have been given are stronger than all the weapons of the enemy. In the introduction to his *Large Catechism* Luther notes:

The devil is called the master of a thousand arts. But what shall we call God’s Word, which drives away and brings to naught this master of a thousand arts with all his arts and power? It must indeed be the master of more than a thousand arts. And shall we frivolously despise such

²⁸⁴ Luther, *Large catechism*.

²⁸⁵ Schulz. *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 50.

²⁸⁶ Calvin, *Commentaries on the harmony of the gospels, vol.1*.

²⁸⁷ See also Oberman, *Luther against the devil*, 75-79. Scaer, *The concept of Anfechtung in Luther’s thoughts*, 15-30.

²⁸⁸ Luther, *Large catechism*.

²⁸⁹ Luther, *Large catechism*.

²⁹⁰ Luther, *Large catechism*.

power, profit, strength, and fruit – we, especially, who claim to be pastors and preachers?²⁹¹

Besides God’s Word, Luther saw prayer as a powerful weapon against the devil and his schemes. Again in his *Large Catechism* Luther urges his readers to pray without ceasing: ‘[S]ince the devil with all his power, together with the world and our own flesh, resists our endeavors, nothing is so necessary as that we should continually resort the ear of God, call upon Him, and pray to Him, that He would give, preserve, and increase in us faith,..., and that He would remove everything that is in our way and opposes us therein.’²⁹² Christians, Luther believes, cannot win the spiritual battle by their own strength.²⁹³ They have to fight with the ‘Word of God and the prayer of faith.’²⁹⁴ One can only agree with Rogers who argues that Luther’s ‘most significant contribution to contemporary understandings of prayer is his treatment of the devil and spiritual warfare.’²⁹⁵ Rogers goes on to explain what he means by that. What he says about Christians in general also applies to many Western missionaries who enter the mission field in Africa, Asia or Latin America well equipped with finances, expert skills and theological knowledge but ill-prepared for the spiritual battle that is going to be waged against them. Too often Christians forget that they are weak and that they have a powerful enemy.²⁹⁶ Having lost sight of their own weakness and the might of the enemy they rely on their self-sufficiency. ‘This sinful self-sufficiency’, Rogers concludes, ‘has left many churches silent before the open doors of heaven. In so many parts of the church, we have forgotten that we are at war and therefore rarely call out desperately for help.’²⁹⁷

²⁹¹ Luther, *Large catechism*.

²⁹² Luther, *Large catechism*.

²⁹³ See Rogers, “Deliver us from the evil one”: Martin Luther on prayer, 342.

²⁹⁴ Rogers, “Deliver us from the evil one”: Martin Luther on prayer, 341.

²⁹⁵ Rogers, “Deliver us from the evil one”: Martin Luther on prayer, 346.

²⁹⁶ Rogers, “Deliver us from the evil one”: Martin Luther on prayer, 346.

²⁹⁷ Rogers, “Deliver us from the evil one”: Martin Luther on prayer, 346.

The Book of Mission: The Bible

‘Throughout the history of the church’, Franklin and Niemandt note, ‘Christians have viewed the translation of the Bible into the languages of the world as an indispensable foundation for the sustainable mission of God.’²⁹⁸ This translation work has been accelerated since the beginning of the modern missionary movement at the end of the 18th century.²⁹⁹ As a result, there are today more than 2,300 languages which have at least one biblical book. In *Translation as Mission* Smalley demonstrates the important role which Bible translation has played in the modern mission era. He describes the main motivation of translators well when he writes: ‘They worked by the grace of God and believed they were doing the will of God, driven by the hope that the Bible would become accessible to the people among whom they lived and worked.’³⁰⁰

The translation of the Bible from the original languages into common European languages was also high on the Reformers’ agenda. The Reformers wanted God’s Word to be read and understood not only by priests and monks but by all people.³⁰¹ Thus, in 1521 while hiding in Wartburg Castle Luther began to translate the New Testament from Greek into German.³⁰² A year later, in September 1522, the first edition with a total circulation of 3,000 copies was printed and distributed.³⁰³ The entire German Bible, which was a ‘Wittenberg group endeavour’, was published in 1534.³⁰⁴ McGoldrick notes:

²⁹⁸ Franklin & Niemandt, *Vision 2025 and the bible translation Movement*, 3.

²⁹⁹ Franklin & Niemandt, *Vision 2025 and the bible translation Movement*, 4.

³⁰⁰ Smalley, *Translation as mission: bible translation in the modern missionary movement*, 18.

³⁰¹ Jongeneel, *The Protestant missionary movement up to 1789*, 222-223.

³⁰² Beutel, *Luther’s life*, 12.

³⁰³ Beutel, *Luther’s life*, 12.

³⁰⁴ Kolb, *Bible in the reformation*, 87.

During his stay at Wartburg, Luther translated the New Testament from Greek into German in eleven weeks! There had been earlier German versions, but they were dialectical renderings of only local usefulness. Luther's mastery of language enabled him to produce a Bible for all Germans, and in the process he became the father of *Hochdeutsch* – High German – the national language.³⁰⁵

Luther continued to refine this Bible translation up to his death in 1546. He developed what Wills calls 'a target-orientated conception of Bible translation.'³⁰⁶ Thus, one of the main principles he applied in his translation work was to watch the mouths of the people (or in German "dem Volk auf's Maul schauen").³⁰⁷ Schulz explains: 'Luther noted carefully people's ways of expressing themselves as they pursued their daily chores and duties. This principle laid down by the reformer has become an inspiration for all Protestant missionaries.'³⁰⁸

Two years after Luther's death his former student Mikael Agricola published his translation of the New Testament in Finnish, followed by parts of the Old Testament in 1551 and 1552.³⁰⁹ Luther's influence also shaped the Bible translations into the Danish language.³¹⁰ The first version of the Danish New Testament was 'awkwardly translated by Malmö's former Mayor Hans Mikkelsen' in 1524.³¹¹ A better translation by Christien Pedersen followed in 1529.³¹² Two years later, the richly illustrated Zurich Bible, the result of the translation work of Huldrych Zwingli and some of his students, was published in Switzerland.³¹³

³⁰⁵ McGoldrick, *Introducing Martin Luther*, 30-31.

³⁰⁶ Wills, *Translation and interpreting in the 20th century: focus on German*, 7.

³⁰⁷ Wills, *Translation and interpreting in the 20th century: focus on German*, 8.

³⁰⁸ Schulz, *Mission from the cross: the Lutheran theology of mission*, 175.

³⁰⁹ Kolb, *Bible in the reformation*, 89.

³¹⁰ Kolb, *Bible in the reformation*, 89.

³¹¹ Fudge, *Commerce and print in the early reformation*, 47.

³¹² Kolb, *Bible in the reformation*, 89.

³¹³ Reeves, *The unquenchable flame: discovering the heart of the reformation*, 77.

It is certainly not an exaggeration to say that the translation work of the Reformers and their view of Scripture have had a strong influence on the Protestant mission endeavour in general and the Protestant Bible translation movement in particular.³¹⁴ Jongeneel notes:

Since then translation of Scripture from the original languages into vernacular languages and distribution of these translations among believers have been essential characteristics of all Protestant mission work. The nineteenth-century creation of Bible societies to translate and distribute the Bible was a logical consequence of the Reformation's doctrine of *sola scripture*.³¹⁵

The reason why the Protestant Reformers desired the Bible to be accessible to all Christians is founded upon their belief about the Bible's authority. The medieval church held that there was more than one authoritative source of Christian theology.³¹⁶ In addition to Scripture, tradition and reason were considered to be important sources. Tradition has to be understood as 'an active process of reflection by which theological and spiritual insights are valued, assessed, and transmitted from one generation to another.'³¹⁷ The Reformers were not opposed to tradition and reason as sources of theology.³¹⁸ They used their reason, accepted the early creeds of the church and valued the history of biblical interpretation.³¹⁹ However, they insisted that 'the authority of the church, its leaders and its councils derived from Scripture and was therefore subordinate to Scripture.'³²⁰ One of the most out-

³¹⁴ Zorn, *Did Calvin foster or hinder missions?*, 189.

³¹⁵ Jongeneel, *The Protestant missionary movement up to 1789, in missiology: an ecumenical introduction*, 223.

³¹⁶ Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 90.

³¹⁷ McGrath, *Christian theology: an introduction*, 219.

³¹⁸ Reeves & Chester. *Why the reformation still matters*, 35.

³¹⁹ Reeves & Chester. *Why the reformation still matters*, 35 & 39.

³²⁰ Reeves & Chester. *Why the reformation still matters*, 39.

spoken advocates of this view was Melanchthon, who highly valued the creeds and confessions of the church. Payton observes:

For him, *sola scriptura*, did not rule out but found itself buttressed by the subordinate religious authority of the church fathers, the ancient creeds and the doctrinal decrees of ecumenical councils. Significantly, Melanchthon roundly condemned a misappropriation of the Protestant slogan. He rejected all novel teachings, following the church fathers (and Luther) in this regard. Specifically, Melanchthon repudiated those who claim to follow Scripture but show no interest to stand with the consensus of the faithful through the ages, preferring to posit their new insights instead.³²¹

For Melanchthon and his fellow Reformers Scripture alone was the ultimate authority, because both the pope and church councils could err but divine Scripture could not. Luther first expressed this view when he met for debate with Johannes von Eck in Leipzig in June/July 1519.³²² Mansch and Peters give the following account:

Eck insisted on an answer: was the Council of Constance,..., capable of error? Indeed it was, stated Luther. “That’s the plague!” said a shocked Duke George, who was sitting close by. But Luther was firm. Councils were made up of men, and were, like the pope himself, subject to error. Christians were obligated to test the words and deeds of men by Holy Scripture. Scripture alone was perfect in its authority: *Sola Scriptura*, he called it.³²³

³²¹ Payton, *Getting the reformation wrong: correcting some misunderstandings*, 147.

³²² See Weinacht, *Melanchthon und Luther: Martin Luthers Lebensbeschreibungen durch Philipp Melanchthon*, 93 & 99.

³²³ Mansch & Peters, *Martin Luther: the life and lessons*, 97.

However, it was, as Mathison points out, at the Diet of Worms in 1521 where Luther spoke the famous words regarding the authority of Scripture:³²⁴

Since then Your majesty and your lordships desire a simply reply, I will answer without horns and teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.³²⁵

For Luther the principle of Scripture alone is clearly Christo-centric.³²⁶ Hasel notes: ‘For Luther, it seems, there is no *sola Scriptura* without a *solus Christus*. Scripture must be understood in favour of Christ, not against Him.’³²⁷ Luther sees the Bible as the cradle which holds Christ. In his *Prefaces to the Books of the Bible* he writes:

Therefore let your own thoughts and feelings go, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines, which can never be worked out, so that you may find the wisdom of God that He lays before you in such foolish and simple guise, in order that he may quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling-clothes and the mangers in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds. Simple and little are the swaddling-clothes, but dear is the treasure, Christ, that lies in them.³²⁸

³²⁴ Mathison, *The shape of sola scriptura*, 95.

³²⁵ Cited in Mathison, *The shape of sola scriptura*, 95.

³²⁶ Daniell, *The whole bible in English*, 92.

³²⁷ Hasel, *Scripture in the theologies of W. Pannenberg and D.G. Bloesch: an investigation and assessment of its origin, nature and use*, 44.

³²⁸ Luther, *Works of Martin Luther: translated with introductions and notes, volume vi*, 368.

Sola Scriptura means that only Scripture carries absolute normative authority because it is only Scripture through which a true and full knowledge of God is available. In his *Institutes* Calvin argues that the Scriptures as God's special revelation are absolutely necessary for a saving faith in God.³²⁹ It is through his Word that God makes himself known both as creator and saviour, and draws people to himself and sustains their faith. Calvin writes:

Therefore, though the effulgence which is presented to every eye, both in the heavens and on earth, leaves the ingratitude of man without excuse, since God, in order to bring the whole human race under the same condemnation, holds forth to all, without exception, a mirror of his Deity in his works, another and better help must be given to guide us properly to God as a creator. Not in vain, therefore, has he added the light of his Word in order that he might make himself known unto salvation, and bestowed the privilege on those whom he was pleased to bring nearer and more familiar relation to himself...And not in vain does he, by the same means, retain us in his knowledge...God therefore bestows a gift of singular value, when for the instruction of the Church, he employs not dumb teachers merely, but opens his sacred mouth; when he not only proclaims that some God must be worshipped, but at the same time declares that He is the God to whom worship is due;...³³⁰

³²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion*, translated by H. Beveridge, 64.

³³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion, Book I*, translated by H. Beveridge, 64.

Commenting on the salvation of the Old Testament patriarchs Calvin continues: ‘It was necessary, in passing from death unto life, that they should know God, not only as Creator, but as Redeemer also; and both kinds of knowledge they certainly did obtain from the Word.’³³¹

The Reformers were strongly opposed to the common practise of the medieval church which interpreted the writings of the Old Testament and the New Testament according to its own teachings which contained both biblical and unbiblical elements.³³² In his *Institutes* Calvin rejects the idea that any Christian doctrine can come from anywhere but Scripture:

Hence it is not strange that those who are born in darkness become more and more hardened in their stupidity; because the vast majority, instead of confining themselves within due bounds by listening with docility to the Word, exult in their own vanity. If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle must be, that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching, and that is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture. Hence the first step in true knowledge is taken, when we reverently embrace the testimony which God has been pleased therein to give of himself. For not only does faith, full and perfect faith, but all correct knowledge of God, originate in obedience.³³³

In summary, we have seen that it would be wrong to speak of a lack of mission emphasis in the theologies of the Protestant Reformers, in particular in Luther’s and Calvin’s theologies. On the contrary, the Reformers formulate some important mission principles. Firstly, they leave us with no doubt that mission is first of all God’s mission. Secondly, they emphasise that the gospel is the message of mission which must be proclaimed both within and outside of the church. Thirdly, the desired response to such gos-

³³¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion, Book I*, translated by H. Beveridge, 65.

³³² Birkett, *The essence of the reformation*, 90.

³³³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion, Book I*, translated by H. Beveridge, 66.

pel proclamation is trust in Christ as Lord and Saviour. Fourthly, the Reformers stress that mission is a church-based endeavour. It is local communities of believers which the Holy Spirit uses to expand the universal Church until the return of Christ. Fifthly, the Reformers recognise that the Church in mission must be motivated by a passion for lost people and a passion for God and his glory. Sixthly, the Reformers affirm that the evangelising church is always involved in a clash between truth and untruth, i.e. between the truths of God and the lies of the devil. Seventhly, the Reformers urge us to make the Bible – the ultimate authority for Christians in all matters of faith and conduct – accessible to all believers in their own languages. Finally, in an age when mission has become a very broad and at times vague concept, the 16th century Protestant Reformers remind us that the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ forms the heart of what God is doing in and through His Church.

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Thorsten Prill is a Crosslinks mission partner lecturing in missiology, practical theology and systematic theology at Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS). Before coming to Namibia he was pastor of two churches in the UK and Lutheran & International Chaplain at the University of Nottingham. He is the author and editor of several books, including: *Contemporary Issues in Mission: What Christians Need to Know* (2015), *Deutschsprachige Evangelische Auslandsgemeinden* (2015), *Migrants, Strangers and the Church in Southern Africa* (2013), *Mission Namibia* (2012), *God's Mission in Southern Africa* (2011), *Building up the Church of Christ* (2010), *German Protestantism and the Spirit of God* (2010), and *Global Mission on our Doorstep* (2008). He has published articles in various journals, such as *CA Confessio Augustana*, *Evangel*, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, *Evangelical Review of Theology*, *Foundations* and *Haddington House Journal*. Thorsten Prill is an ordained minister of the Rhenish Church in Namibia, a united Lutheran and Reformed church body.

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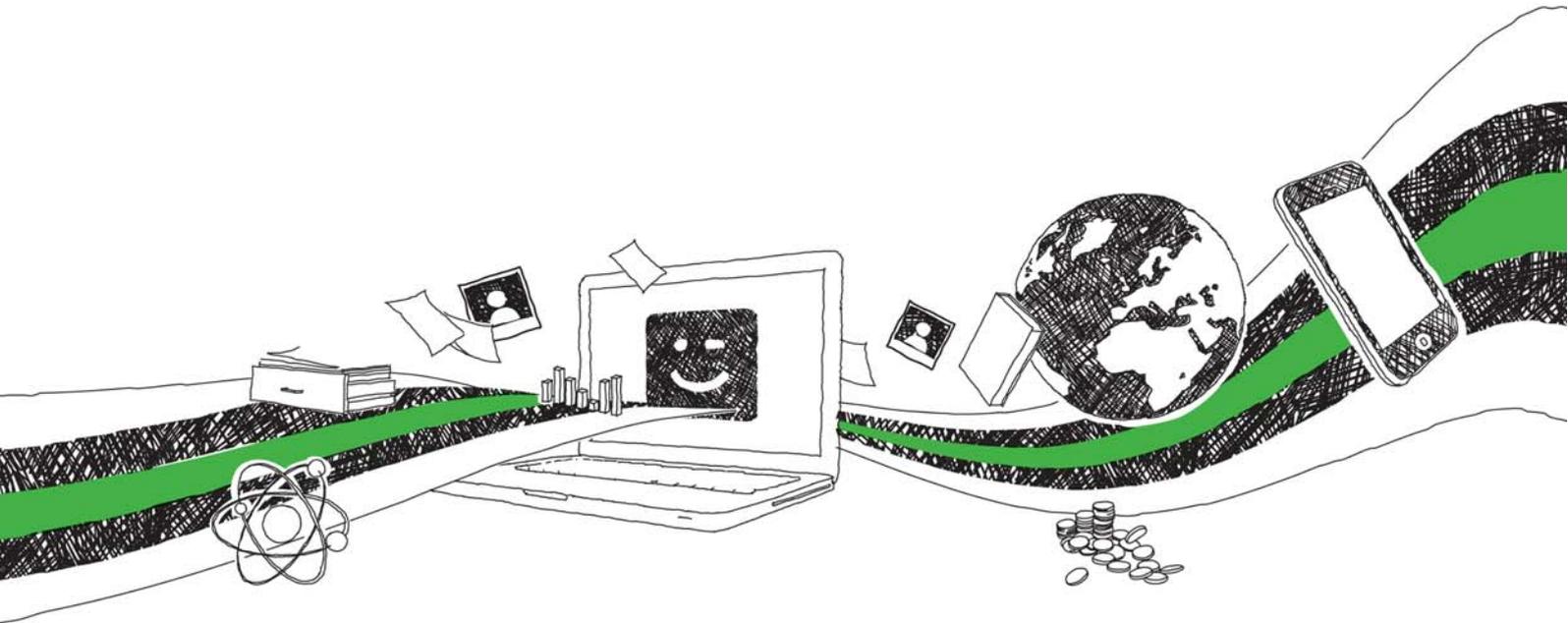
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