

## The Mangled Narrative of Missions and Evangelism in the Reformation

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*In the nineteenth century, Gustav Warneck, often considered the father of missiology, argued that the Reformers had no concern for missions. This idea has been picked up and repeated by a long series of evangelical missions textbooks and popular writings. However, there is a significant amount of research on the Reformers that disproves this widely held idea. This article examines Warneck's arguments exposing various weaknesses. Second, it examines the writings and work of Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin, noting the significant concern for the spread of the gospel throughout the world.*

*Key Words: evangelism, Gustav Warneck, John Calvin, Martin Bucer, Martin Luther, missions, Reformation.*

Over the past century, many of the books dealing with the history of Christian missions have declared, with varying degrees of certainty, that the Protestant Reformers were derelict in their duty to spread the gospel throughout the entire world. Writers have accused the Reformers of both inactivity and indifference. This unverified opinion has become a virtual certainty among the popular audience. However, is this a fair assessment of what the Reformers did and taught? In this essay I will trace the history of this deleterious account of the Reformers in regard to missions and evangelism, critique the methodology of this view, and then present the writings and actions of three Reformers: Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin.

### A Negative Interpretation

The Reformation has long been considered by Protestants as a great spiritual revival and doctrinal renewal of the church. However, some writers have argued that the Reformers failed to grasp the missionary imperative of the church and have even accused the Reformers of leading the church astray. This view appears to originate with German missiologist Gustav Warneck (1834–1910), a pastor and missions enthusiast whom many regard as the father of Protestant missiology. In his influential survey, *Outline of the History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present*

*Time*, Warneck stated that although the conclusion was “painful,” nevertheless it is clear that Luther and Calvin’s “view of the missionary task of the church was essentially defective.”<sup>1</sup> Warneck concedes that Luther preached the gospel earnestly himself, but “nowhere does Luther indicate the heathen as the objects of evangelistic work.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Luther “never gives an intimation from which it can be inferred that he held direct mission work among the heathen to be commanded.”<sup>3</sup> Warneck concludes “the mission to the heathen world had no interest for [Luther] or his fellow-labourers.”<sup>4</sup>

What evidence does Warneck produce to ground such a conclusion? He acknowledges the many obstacles confronting any worldwide effort from Protestants in the sixteenth century including persecution, lack of contact with “heathen” nations, lack of infrastructure, and inability to travel to newly discovered lands since Catholic countries (e.g., Spain and Portugal) held sway over the oceans. Still, Warneck faults the Reformers for not lamenting such limitations, suggesting that if they really wanted to reach such far away areas, there would be indications in their writings of strong yearnings to break through these obstacles to mission.<sup>5</sup> Instead, according to Warneck, we find among the Reformers no idea or activity of missions “in the sense we understand them today.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Warneck, faulty theology caused the Reformers’ defective perception of the imperative of missions. He specified three problematic ideas. First, Warneck says Luther believed the apostles had fulfilled the Great Commission so it no longer applied to the church of his time. However, Warneck acknowledges that Bucer and Calvin did not believe this. Second, Warneck says the Reformers’ doctrine of election kept them from sensing any missionary duty. Even though Bucer and Calvin did not think the Great Commission was fulfilled, their belief that the

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<sup>1</sup> Gustav Warneck, *Outline of the History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: J. Gemmell, 1884), 17. Three of Warneck’s ten German editions were translated into English in 1884, 1901, and 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Gustav Warneck, *Outline of the History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time* (Chicago: Revell, 1901), 8–9. The various editions of this book remain consistent in the critique of the Reformers. I drew the first several quotes from an earlier edition because Warneck’s points were made more succinctly there.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

work of salvation was God's work meant there was no human responsibility for the work of missions. Third, the eschatological views of the Reformers inhibited missionary thinking. "Luther and his contemporaries were persuaded that the end of the world was at hand . . . so that no time remained for the further development and extension of the kingdom of God on earth."<sup>7</sup>

Warneck's negative representation has been echoed by others through the years. Kenneth Scott Latourette says the Reformers were indifferent to the task of world missions due to their faulty theology, though he does not mention election specifically.<sup>8</sup> Herbert Kane marvels that "spiritual forces released" in the Reformation failed to produce *any* missionary activity, and he blames the same three points of theology that Warneck lists.<sup>9</sup> Stephen Neill finds "exceedingly little" interest in missions from the Reformers.<sup>10</sup> Neill says little about the reasons for this deficiency but does comment that the Reformation churches did not feel that missions was an obligation on the church. William Hogg says the Reformers "disavowed any obligation for Christians to carry the gospel."<sup>11</sup> Michael Nazir-Ali charges the Reformers with abandoning the responsibility of world missions and blames this on their understanding of election and the idea that the Great Commission no longer applied.<sup>12</sup> According to Ruth Tucker, during the Reformation "the urgency to reach out to others was not seen as a top priority," and she suggests the Reformers did not acknowledge the responsibility to evangelize those without the gospel.<sup>13</sup> She also roots this problem in faulty theology. Gordon Olson says the

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 27. Latourette focuses on Luther but does not quote Luther on any of these points. He simply cites Warneck as proof.

<sup>9</sup> J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission: A Panoramic View of Missions from Pentecost to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 73.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Neill and Owen Chadwick, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin, 1990), 189.

<sup>11</sup> William Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth Century Background* (New York: Harper, 1952), 1–2. Hogg cites Warneck as his support.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Nazir-Ali, *From Everywhere to Everywhere: A World View of Christian Witness* (London: Flame, 1990), 42–43.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 20. According to Tucker, only in the eighteenth century did Protestants begin "acknowledging their responsibility to evangelize those without the gospel" (98).

Reformers did "virtually nothing to advance the cause of world evangelization," and he blames the Reformers' theology, mentioning the same three points as Warneck.<sup>14</sup> Johannes Verkuyl blames the Reformers' lack of missions activity on their belief that the Great Commission no longer applied, but he does not reference election or eschatology.<sup>15</sup> Justice Anderson, in a standard missions textbook, attributes the Reformers' lack of missionary zeal to a misunderstanding of the Great Commission and eschatology.<sup>16</sup>

This negative interpretation of the Reformers appears commonly in more recent theological writings as well. For example Ed Stetzer writes, "The church that 'reformed' lost touch with the God who sends, and the mission of the church suffered."<sup>17</sup> Missions professor Al James says that "the Reformers' theology had little or no room for missions activity" and "a faulty theology served as a hindrance to the early Protestant Church being involved in missions."<sup>18</sup> David Allen refers to the "general consensus" that the Reformers had almost no missionary vision.<sup>19</sup> Paige Patterson, in a column posted at the website of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board, charged the Reformers with being ineffectual in missions and cited their doctrine of election as the reason.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> C. Gordon Olson and Don Fanning, *What in the World Is God Doing? Essentials of Global Missions: An Introductory Guide* (Lynchburg, VA: Global Gospel Publishers, 2013), 103.

<sup>15</sup> Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, trans. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 18–19.

<sup>16</sup> Justice Anderson, "Medieval and Renaissance Missions (500–1792)," in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 194–95. Anderson, like several other Free Church authors, says the connection between state and church in the Magisterial Reformers hindered missions since a state church's mission is confined to national interests. However, this fails to account for the missionaries sent out from Geneva to various countries throughout Europe.

<sup>17</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 23.

<sup>18</sup> R. Alton James, "Post-Reformation Missions Pioneers," in *Discovering the Mission of God: Best Missional Practices for the 21st Century*, ed. Mike Barnett and Robin Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 251, 252.

<sup>19</sup> David Allen, "Preaching for a Great Commission Resurgence," in *Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam Greenway (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 286.

<sup>20</sup> Paige Patterson, "The Anabaptists, Evangelism, and Missions," May 29, 2017, <https://www.imb.org/2017/05/29/anabaptists/>.

In an essay contained in his highly influential textbook, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph Winter says Christians of the Reformation era sent no missionaries, “did not even talk of mission outreach,” and did “not even try to reach out.”<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, Warneck’s argument took root. Few of these works present their own primary source research on the topic. They simply cite or allude to Warneck or to someone who has followed him. Rarely is there evidence of Warneck being read critically. Typically Warneck’s view of the Reformers is simply asserted or assumed as one of the proven facts of historical scholarship. However, this raises the question of whether Warneck was correct or even if he has been properly understood. Thus, we now turn to critical interaction with Warneck, particularly how he defined missions and his appraisal of the Reformers’ theology.

### Warneck’s Definition of Missions

In popular theological literature and conversation, a common assumption is that the Reformers had no concern for the salvation of souls or the preaching of the gospel. However, this is not what Warneck argued at all. In fact, he concedes that the Reformers were effective in Christianizing Europe and, in this sense, the Reformation “may be said to have carried on a mission work at home on an extensive scale.”<sup>22</sup> Warneck also concedes that Luther encouraged any who were taken captive by the Turks (a real threat in the sixteenth century) to be prepared to be a gospel witness to their captors. Luther urges such Christians to faithful living and witness that they might “convert many.” This would appear to demonstrate significant mission-mindedness, but Warneck dismisses it as simply “the spirit of Christian testimony” rather than proper “missionary work” since this comes from the scattering of persecution rather than the systematic sending out of missionaries.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere Warneck quotes a long excerpt from an Ascension Sunday sermon of Luther’s where he describes how the gospel will go out to the whole world “sped ever farther by preachers hunted and persecuted hither and thither into the world.” This, however,

<sup>21</sup> Ralph D. Winter, “The Kingdom Strikes Back: Ten Epochs of Redemptive History,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 224.

<sup>22</sup> Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions* (1901), 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. Yet, the original spread of the gospel in Acts resulted from an outbreak of persecution.

cannot be understood as an interest in world missions, Warneck says, because there is “no reference to any systematic missionary enterprise.”<sup>24</sup> These are just two examples of many that show that Warneck is operating with a very narrow, even anachronistic, view of missions. To be reckoned as “missions,” Warneck believes, it must be a systematic work, preferably by an institution outside the church that consistently sends missionaries to previously unevangelized areas.<sup>25</sup> As a result, Warneck completely discounts numerous mission-minded statements made by various Reformers because they do not call for the establishment of a missions agency. For example, Martin Bucer’s rebuke of Christians for their attitude towards Jews and Turks is diminished because “there is little trace of earnestness as to how one may win their souls to Christ our Lord.” Bucer prays for church leaders who will help the church labor for the salvation of Jews, Turks, “and all unbelievers to whom they may ever have any access.” Warneck concedes that this sounds like “a direct summons to missions,” but it only appears so since Bucer neglects to say anything about “instituting missions.”<sup>26</sup> What Warneck means by this is clarified later when he faults Bucer for failing to see the need to devise an “institution for the dissemination of Christianity.”<sup>27</sup>

Warneck fails to find any evidence of mission activity or thinking in the Reformers essentially because he has defined “missions” in accordance with what he and others were doing in the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> His arguments prove that the Reformers were not participants in a nineteenth century missions agency! But they do not prove that the Reformers had

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> See also Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 45–46. Schulz describes Warneck’s conception of mission this way, “Warneck promotes a sociological and organizational concept of mission that encourages a ‘sending’ pursued deliberately by an institution, such as a mission society or a core group of individuals, and that works in geographic terms of leaving one territory for another, preferably across an ocean” (46).

<sup>26</sup> Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions* (1901), 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Jean-François Zorn has shown that the word “mission” was first used in regard to global gospel outreach in the sixteenth century by Roman Catholics. This is why this specific term is not used by the Reformers—it was a new term coined by those in opposition to them (“Did Calvin Foster or Hinder the Missions?” *Exchange* 40 [2011]: 179–81).

little or no concern about the worldwide spread of the gospel or the salvation of people from all over the world.<sup>29</sup>

This begs the question of a proper definition of “missions.” Yet such a definition is a topic of debate among contemporary missiologists. David Bosch warns against defining mission “too sharply and too self-confidently.” He states, “Ultimately, mission remains undefinable; it should never be incarcerated in the narrow confines of our own predilections.”<sup>30</sup> Instead of defining missions, he expounds the various elements of missions. He clearly believes that missions involves taking the gospel to a world in need, preaching, planting churches, discipling, and meeting needs in Jesus’ name.<sup>31</sup> Bosch argues there is no theological basis for distinguishing “foreign” and “domestic” missions. He refers to the myth “that travelling to foreign lands is the *sine qua non* for any kind of missionary endeavor and the final test and criterion of what is truly missionary,” and says this idea has been demolished.<sup>32</sup> Bosch’s survey suggests that modern missiology has turned away from the narrow definition that governed Warneck’s analysis. At the core, missions is the Church joining in the mission of God to bring people into fellowship with himself by gospel proclamation, church planting, discipleship, and living out the ethical implications of the gospel.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The charge that Warneck’s critique of the Reformers’ view of missions is anachronistic is also made by Robert Kolb, “Late Reformation Lutherans on Mission and Confession,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006): 26. For a thorough critique of Warneck’s conception of “mission” see Elias Medeiros, “The Reformers’ Commitment to the Propagation of the Gospel to All Nations from 1555 to 1654” (PhD diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS, 2009), especially pp. 15–111.

<sup>30</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 9.

Bosch, 9.

<sup>31</sup> See his table of contents as well as his closing comments on p. 519.

<sup>32</sup> Bosch, 10.

<sup>33</sup> This is similar to the definition suggested by Justice Anderson, that missions refers to “the conscious efforts on the part of the church, in its corporate capacity, or through voluntary agencies, to proclaim the gospel (with all this implies) among peoples and in regions where it is still unknown or only inadequately known” (“An Overview of Missiology,” in *Missiology: an Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson [Nashville: B&H, 1998], 2). See also Bruce Ashford, ed., *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011).

### Warneck’s Assessment of the Reformers’ Theology

Even if Warneck’s definition of missions is too restrictive, is there truth to the claim that the Reformers’ theology kept them from seeing and embracing the missions mandate of Scripture? We will take up each of the three points of theology Warneck and others have listed as problematic.

First, did the Reformers teach that world missions was no longer an obligation for the church? Calvin explicitly rejects this idea in his commentary on Matt 28:20: “It ought likewise to be remarked, that this was not spoken to the apostles alone; for the Lord promises his assistance not for a single age only, but *even to the end of the world*.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, lecturing on Mic 4:3, Calvin stated, “The kingdom of Christ was only begun in the world, when God commanded the Gospel to be everywhere proclaimed, and . . . at this day its course is not as yet completed.”<sup>35</sup> Whatever one thinks of Calvin’s theology or mission involvement, he certainly did not teach that the Great Commission had been fulfilled in the apostolic era.<sup>36</sup>

Neither is it true that Luther taught that the day of missionary obligation had passed.<sup>37</sup> Writing on Matt 22:9 Luther stated, “This [time for missions] is not yet completed. This era continues so that the servants go out into the highways. The apostles began this work and we continue inviting all. The table will be full at the advent of the last day and when the Gospel has been made known in the whole world.”<sup>38</sup> He also stated, “It is necessary always to proceed to those to whom no preaching has been

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<sup>34</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 17 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 391 (emphasis original).

<sup>35</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Micah*, vol. 14 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 265.

<sup>36</sup> Part of the problem with this misrepresentation of the Reformers is that later readers expect the Reformers to speak of missions from the same texts modern readers do (e.g., Matt 28:19–20).

<sup>37</sup> John Warwick Montgomery stated, “To attribute such views to Luther is, however . . . to fly directly in the face of the evidence” (“Luther and Missions,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 3.4 [1967]: 193–202).

<sup>38</sup> WA 17/1:442.46ff., cited in Ingemar Öberg, *Luther and World Mission: A Historical and Systematic Study with Special Reference to Luther’s Bible Exposition* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 134. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 386, has a helpful discussion of how Luther’s comments have been misunderstood as suggesting the era of world mission closed with the apostles.

done, in order that the number [of Christians] may become greater.”<sup>39</sup> In contrast to Warneck’s accusation that Luther thought there was no need to take the gospel further because it had already reached the whole world via the apostles, Luther says,

Their preaching went out to the whole world even though it has not yet reached the whole world. This outcome has begun and its goal is set though it is not yet completed and accomplished; instead, it shall be extended through preaching even farther until the Day of Judgment. When this preaching reaches all corners of the world and is heard and pronounced, then it is complete and in every respect finished and the Last Day will also arrive.<sup>40</sup>

Luther anticipates that people “will be sent by God among the nations as preachers and thus draw many people to themselves and through themselves to Christ.”<sup>41</sup> Luther specifically called for the gospel to be taken to the Bohemians, the Russians, and the Muslim Turks.<sup>42</sup> Within a short time after his death, Luther’s disciples had set out on mission work to all of these groups.<sup>43</sup> And these men, like those sent to other parts of Europe, went out knowing they were likely to be executed.

Second, did the Reformers’ doctrine of election prevent them from doing mission work? Warneck says that since Luther saw salvation as a work completely of God’s grace, he did not think a “human missionary agency” was part of God’s plan.<sup>44</sup> He asserts the same of Bucer and Calvin. For proof he simply cites one statement by Calvin without context:

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 389.

<sup>40</sup> Ascension Sermon, May 29, 1522. WA 10/3:139.17–140.16. Cited in Volker Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 24. See also Luther’s Sermon on Titus 2:11–15, Christmas Postil, 1522. WA 10/1.1:21.3–23.14 (cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 98–99) where he clearly says the work of taking the gospel to the whole earth is not yet completed.

<sup>41</sup> *The Prophet Zechariah Expounded*, LW 20:305–6. Cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 97.

<sup>42</sup> Warneck also critiques Luther’s idea of world mission by saying Luther thought the mandate was simply that the gospel be preached to all people, not that they would necessarily believe. Warneck is bothered that “the Reformer [Luther] does not understand the progress of the Gospel through the whole world in the sense that Christianity would become everywhere the ruling religion, or that all men would be won to the gospel” (*History of Protestant Missions* [1901], 13).

<sup>43</sup> Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 498–99.

<sup>44</sup> Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions* (1901), 16. Once again Warneck sees missions only in terms of a sending “agency.”

“We are taught that the kingdom of Christ is neither to be advanced nor maintained by the industry of men, but this is the work of God alone; for believers are taught to rest solely on His blessing.”<sup>45</sup> Later writers often make this same assertion, citing the same quote without context or any mention of where it is found.<sup>46</sup> It is a strong statement, but anyone familiar with Calvin’s writings will recognize his affirmation that salvation and the advance of God’s kingdom ultimately depends on God alone. However, even a cursory reading of Calvin will show that he also strongly emphasizes human responsibility as well as recognizing that God works through means.<sup>47</sup> For example, Calvin states that the “gospel does not fall like rain from the clouds, but is brought by the hands of men,” and God “makes use of our exertions, and employs us as his instruments, for cultivating his field.”<sup>48</sup> Warneck does not demonstrate how Calvin’s understanding of election hindered missions. Neither do later writers. It is assumed that the doctrine of election “made missions appear extraneous if God had already chosen those he would save,”<sup>49</sup> or “if God wills the conversion of the heathen, they will be saved without human instrumentality.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, we have already seen various statements from Luther and Calvin that called upon believers to proclaim the gospel so that people might be saved. Furthermore, if this doctrine made foreign missions moot, why did it not stifle mission work within Europe? Even Warneck concedes that this work was significant. Why would a belief in God’s sovereignty

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. I have not been able to find the source of this quote. In the books I have found, authors quote it without citation or simply cite Warneck.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., Kane, *A Concise History*, 74; Olson and Fanning, *What in the World Is God Doing?* 103.

<sup>47</sup> Zorn, “Did Calvin Foster or Hinder the Missions?” 178, 184, is especially helpful on Calvin’s emphasis on the necessity of means. See also David Calhoun, “John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure?” *Presbyterion* 5.1 (Spring 1979): 18–20.

<sup>48</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, vol. 19 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 399; *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 16 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 121. Elsewhere Calvin also says the fact that ministers help rescue souls from death “ought to be no small encouragement for godly teachers to stir up the heat of their . . . desire, when they hear that they call back miserable souls from destruction, and that they help those who should otherwise perish, that they may be saved” (*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 19 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 98).

<sup>49</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 97. See also page 20.

<sup>50</sup> Kane, *A Concise History*, 74.

prevent the Reformers from trying to evangelize overseas but not preclude them taking the gospel to France (or other areas of Europe) at the risk of their lives?

Last, Warneck asserts that the Reformers did not believe there was much time for mission engagement since the world would end soon. Latourette, Kane, and Tucker all repeat this claim without any citations from Luther or any demonstration of how the idea shaped actions other than saying the Reformers (particularly Luther) did not think there was time for mission work. However, Warneck conceded that Luther nowhere says the imminent end of the age was a reason for not doing missions. Thus, this connection is merely a guess. However, Warneck says the reason why Luther never made the connection is that even apart from his eschatology Luther knew nothing of a duty for world mission.<sup>51</sup> So, Luther's eschatology kept him from missions, and we know this because even though we cannot link his views on eschatology and missions, Luther was ignorant of a missions duty anyway. This is a convoluted argument, and yet people have repeated it for over a century.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, all three areas of doctrinal critique fail. Whether or not one agrees with the specific doctrines in view, the arguments fail to prove that these doctrines either were held by the Reformers or that they hindered mission thinking or work.<sup>53</sup>

### Evaluation of the Reformers Themselves

Now we must turn to the deeds and writings of three Reformers to see what evidence we find of missions involvement and evangelistic impulse. Since we have critiqued Warneck's narrow definition of missions, in the Reformers' words and deeds, I will look for an active calling of people to faith in Christ and a concern for the gospel to reach the nations.

#### Mission within Christendom

One key problem in Warneck (and those who follow him) is his failure

<sup>51</sup> Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions* (1901), 16.

<sup>52</sup> See Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 51–52, for further refutation of the idea that Luther was certain of the imminent end of the world and that this hindered missions.

<sup>53</sup> It will not do to argue as Gordon Olson does that at least we know some people have used the doctrine of election to stifle mission endeavors. Practically every positive doctrine has been abused by someone over the years (*What in the World Is God Doing?*, 104). The question in view is whether the doctrine hindered mission work in the Reformers themselves.

to recognize the missionary setting for Protestants in Europe in the sixteenth century. The gospel was largely unknown by the vast majority of people in Europe, and the Reformers labored to get this gospel message to as many people as possible. Calvin's preface to his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* declares that his writing was intended to aid his fellow countrymen in France, "very many of whom I knew to be hungering and thirsting for Christ; but I saw very few who had been duly imbued with even a slight knowledge of him."<sup>54</sup> Calvin expounded the Scriptures to help people know Christ. This is why one biographer says, "Calvin in Strasbourg or Geneva was also a missionary, an envoy."<sup>55</sup> Luther also said that many of the people who attended the church services "do not believe and are not yet Christians." Thus, he said, "the gospel must be publicly preached to move them to believe and become Christians."<sup>56</sup>

Scott Hendrix's *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* has been particularly helpful in demonstrating the mission element involved in the Reformers' work in Europe.<sup>57</sup> His basic premise is that the "Reformers saw themselves in a missionary situation in which the faith had to be taught to a populace they judged to be inadequately informed."<sup>58</sup> The entire program of the Reformers was to re-evangelize their native lands. Calvin, for example, saw himself as a missionary, laboring "to turn nominal believers into real Christians."<sup>59</sup> Of course, Hendrix grants, it took some time before full-fledged international mission work began in Reformation churches, but this developing outward reach was an organic result of Reformation ideas. "The Reformation's own sources state plainly how Reformers saw their enterprise as a missionary campaign to renew and replant Christianity in European culture."<sup>60</sup> Nineteenth-century scholars working in a largely Christianized Europe could miss the fact

<sup>54</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 20.9.

<sup>55</sup> Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 138.

<sup>56</sup> Luther, "German Mass," LW 53:62–64. Cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> Scott Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. Hendrix also cites the revised preface of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* where Calvin says, "God has filled my mind with zeal to spread his kingdom and to further the public good" (88).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 163–64. Theodor Bibliander (1509–1564), was a biblical scholar from Zürich, who, according to Hendrix, was probably the best informed among the Reformers about Islam. He published a book on how Christians should respond

that in the mind of the Reformers the majority of Europe in their day was in need of evangelization.<sup>61</sup>

The training and sending out of pastors that occurred in Geneva and Wittenberg should be understood as an essential element of the Reformers' missionary campaign. The missionary zeal of these pastors is underscored by the fact that many or most of the areas to which they went were hostile to these pastors so they went out at the risk of their lives. Under Calvin's leadership, Geneva became "the hub of a vast missionary enterprise"<sup>62</sup> and "a dynamic center or nucleus from which the vital missionary energy it generated radiated out into the world beyond."<sup>63</sup> Protestant refugees from all over Europe fled to Geneva; they came not merely for safety but also to learn from Calvin the doctrines of the Reformation so they could return home to spread the true gospel. The Register of the Company of Pastors in Geneva records numerous people sent out from Geneva during Calvin's time to "evangelize foreign parts."<sup>64</sup> The records are incomplete, and eventually, due to persecution, it became too dangerous to record the names of those sent out, although it numbered more than one hundred in one year alone. Bruce Gordon refers to the sending of such a large number of missionaries into France the "most audacious missionary effort" undertaken by the Genevan church.<sup>65</sup> By 1557 it was a normal part of business for the Genevan pastors to send missionaries into

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to the Turks as well as published the first printed version of the Koran in Latin. He "emphasized that God willed all peoples, including Muslims, to be saved" (166–68).

<sup>61</sup> Today we can also easily miss that in the sixteenth century various distinct cultures and people groups existed within what is now the boundary of a single country.

<sup>62</sup> Raymond K. Anderson, "Calvin and Missions," *Christian History* 5.4 (Fall 1986): 23.

<sup>63</sup> Philip E. Hughes, "John Calvin: Director of Missions," in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. J. H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 45. Portions of this section of the essay are taken from Ray Van Neste, "John Calvin on Missions and Evangelism," *Founders Journal* 33 (1998): 15–21.

<sup>64</sup> Alister McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin, a Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 182. Cf. Philip Hughes, ed. and trans., *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 308.

<sup>65</sup> Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 312. David Calhoun states, "The degree of commitment of Calvin and the pastors of Geneva to this missionary outreach is nothing less than amazing" ("John Calvin," 28).

France. Robert M. Kingdon called it a "concentrated missionary effort."<sup>66</sup> Philip Hughes notes that Geneva became a "school of missions" that had as one of its purposes "to send out witnesses" who would take the gospel "far and wide." Hughes describes Geneva as "a dynamic centre of missionary concern and activity, an axis from which the light of the Good News radiated forth through the testimony of those who, after thorough preparation in this school, were sent forth in the service of Jesus Christ."<sup>67</sup> Zorn suggests Calvin developed a "missionary theology for Europe."<sup>68</sup> For good reason Hendrix concludes, "The Reformation was a missionary campaign that envisioned a renewed Christian society in Europe."<sup>69</sup>

So, there is no need to discount the words and deeds of the Reformers in regard to the evangelization of their neighbors and neighboring lands, as Warneck did. In fact, given the persecution they faced and the difficulty of travel, we should commend their work. Let us then turn our attention to a sampling from the writings of Luther, Bucer, and Calvin, as representative Reformers, to see the attention given to concern for the salvation of others.

### Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Although it does not seem to have been picked up in most evangelical missions textbooks, substantial attention has already been given to Luther's comments on evangelism and world mission. Volker Stolle's *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission* gleaned significant sections from Luther where he advocates for the task of taking the gospel to all people.<sup>70</sup> Robert Kolb hailed Stolle's work as "more historically sensitive" than Warneck, and it "demonstrates Luther's interest in the spread of the Christian faith."<sup>71</sup> Werner Elert has also drawn from the rich resources of Luther's mission-oriented comments to demonstrate Luther's concern for mission, noting how his conception of mission differed from (and was healthier than) Warneck's view.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvinist Religious Aggression," in *The French Wars of Religion, How Important Were Religious Factors?*, ed. J. H. M. Salmon (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1967), 6.

<sup>67</sup> Hughes, *Register*, 25. See also Michael A. G. Haykin, "John Calvin's Missionary Influence in France," *Reformation and Revival* 10.4 (Fall 2001): 35–44.

<sup>68</sup> Zorn, "Did Calvin Foster or Hinder the Missions," 178. Zorn's article is perhaps the best one on Calvin and missions.

<sup>69</sup> Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard*, 174.

<sup>70</sup> Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*.

<sup>71</sup> Kolb, "Late Reformation Lutherans on Mission and Confession," 40.

<sup>72</sup> Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 385–402.

Also, Ingemar Öberg, in his *Luther and World Mission: A Historical and Systematic Study with Special Reference to Luther's Bible Exposition*, demonstrated thoroughly Luther's drive to get the gospel to all people.<sup>73</sup> Robert Kolb commended Öberg's work, stating that he had mined a "wide variety of sources within Luther's writings with great care and acumen."<sup>74</sup> As a result, Kolb said, Öberg showed the wealth of insights to be found in Luther's writings "for sound mission thinking."<sup>75</sup>

There is no need or space for restating all that Stolle, Öberg, and Elert have gleaned from Luther, but in what follows I will draw some examples from their work and my own observations to demonstrate Luther's evangelistic and missionary concern.<sup>76</sup> Luther's correspondence, alone, was a missionary endeavor as he wrote to people all over Europe urging gospel truths and counseling leaders and others in how to advance the cause of Christ.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, Luther taught his people to pray for the conversion of unbelievers and for the gospel to be preached over the whole world. In his brief work written to teach his people how to pray he instructs them to meditate on each petition of the Lord's Prayer, turning that into specific prayers. Luther provides an example of how one might pray from each petition, and in the first three petitions he explicitly prays for the conversion of unbelievers.<sup>78</sup>

This evangelistic concern can also be seen in Luther's exposition of the Lord's Prayer in his Large Catechism. Discussing the second petition, "Your kingdom come," Luther explains that this teaches us, among other things, to pray that the kingdom "may gain recognition and followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world." Later in the same question he says this petition teaches us to pray both that believers might grow in the kingdom and that "it may come to those who are not yet in it." Concluding, he writes, "All this is to simply say:

<sup>73</sup> Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Kolb, foreword to *Luther and World Mission*, by Öberg, viii.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. See also, John Warwick Montgomery, "Luther and Missions," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 3.4 (1967): 193–202.

<sup>76</sup> Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 46–47 n. 3, lists more works which highlight the mission emphasis in Luther's writings.

<sup>77</sup> For a fascinating graphic display of the geographic distribution of Luther's correspondence, see Ernest G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 4. Plass calls Luther's correspondence "a missionary influence, as was the University of Wittenberg" (Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says, An Anthology* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959], 958).

<sup>78</sup> Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, trans. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012).

'Dear Father, we pray Thee, give us thy Word, that the gospel may be sincerely preached throughout the world and that it may be received by faith and work and live in us.'<sup>79</sup> People who pray regularly for the conversion of people around the world are a mission-minded people. Pastors who teach their people to pray this way are mission-minded pastors.

As noted previously, Warneck conceded that Luther "with all earnestness" urged "the preaching of the gospel, and longs for a free course for it" but said "nowhere does Luther indicate the heathen as the objects of evangelistic work."<sup>80</sup> However, preaching on Matt 23:15, Luther says, "The very best of all works is that the heathen have been led from idolatry to God."<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the conversion of the "heathen" was a significant theme in a number of Luther's hymns, including this one based on Psalm 67:

Would that the Lord would grant us grace, with blessings rich  
provide us,  
And with clear shining let his face, To life eternal light us;  
That we his gracious work may know, And what is his good pleasure,  
And also to the heathen show, Christ's riches without measure  
And unto God convert them.<sup>82</sup>

Here is another Luther hymn based on Mark 16:15–16 and Luke 24:46–49.

Christ to all his followers says: Go forth  
Give to all men acquaintance  
That lost in sin lies the whole earth,  
And must turn to repentance.  
Who trusts and who is baptized, each one  
Is thereby blest forever;  
Is from that hour a new-born man,  
And thenceforth dying never,  
The kingdom shall inherit.<sup>83</sup>

In another hymn based on Simeon's song in Luke 2:28–32, Luther also

<sup>79</sup> Luther, *Larger Catechism*, 2.51–54; in Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 427.

<sup>80</sup> Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions* (1901), 12.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Plass, *What Luther Says, An Anthology*, 957. Also in Elert, *Structure of Lutheranism*, 390.

<sup>82</sup> LW 53:234, cited in Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 496. Öberg provides other examples as well.

<sup>83</sup> Cited in Öberg, *Luther and World Mission*, 496.



taught his people to embrace world evangelization.

It was God's love that sent you forth  
 As man's salvation,  
 Inviting to yourself the earth,  
 Ev'ry nation,  
 By your wholesome healing Word  
 Resounding round our planet  
 You are the health and saving light  
 of lands in darkness;  
 You feed and lighten those in night  
 With your kindness.  
 All God's people find in you  
 Their treasure, joy and glory.<sup>84</sup>

Luther's hymns were central to the piety of Christians who embraced his teachings. These hymns were sung in families and at work, thus significantly shaping the thinking and living of the people.<sup>85</sup> The inclusion of such explicit mission themes in these hymns is significant.

Luther is abundantly clear about the duty of believers, not just magistrates or official clergy, to share the gospel with others. He says, "One must always preach the Gospel so that one may bring some more to become Christians."<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, "It would be insufferable for someone to associate with people and not reveal what is useful for the salvation of their souls."<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Luther says, "If the need were to arise, all of us should be ready to die in order to bring a soul to God."<sup>88</sup> Luther recounts his own conversations with Jews where he sought to demonstrate Jesus is the Messiah and to call them to faith.<sup>89</sup> Luther states, "It is certain that a

<sup>84</sup> "In Peace and Joy I Now Depart" (Lutheran Worship 185.3–4); "Lobgesang des Simeon" (Hymn of Simeon) 1524 Evangelisch-Lutherisches Kirchengesangbuch 310.3–4 WA 35:439.8–20. Cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 49–50.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Robin Leaver, *The Whole Church Sings: Congregational Singing in Luther's Wittenberg* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) and Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>86</sup> Sermon on the Good Shepherd, 1523. WA 12:540.3–15. Cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 26.

<sup>87</sup> Sermons on the First Books of Moses, WA 24:261.26–262.11. Cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 16.

<sup>88</sup> Plass, *What Luther Says*, 28–36.

<sup>89</sup> Sermon on Jer 23:6–8, November 25, 1526. WA 20:569.25–570.12. Cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 61. Luther's interaction with the Jews

Christian not only has the right and power to teach God's word but has the duty to do so on pain of losing his soul and of God's disfavor." Luther then answers the objection that someone might raise that all are not ordained to pastoral ministry. He says that if you find yourself in a place where there are no other Christians, then one "needs no other call than to be a Christian . . . it is his duty to preach and to teach the gospel to erring heathen or non-Christians, because of the duty of brotherly love."<sup>90</sup>

Here are a few extended sections which demonstrate Luther's concern for personal evangelism and his desire to stir up others to this task.

For this reason, however, he lets us live that we may bring other people also to faith as he has done for us. . . . This is part of being a priest, being God's messenger and having his command to proclaim his Word. You should preach the "good work," that is, the miraculous work that God has done as he brought you from darkness into light. This is the highest priestly office. Consequently, your preaching should be done so that one brother proclaims to the other the mighty deed of God: how through him you have been redeemed from sin, hell, death, and from all misery, and have been called to eternal life. You should also instruct people how they should come to that light. Everything then should be directed in such a way that you recognize what God has done for you and that 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 one through the good work and might of God is saved and comes from darkness into light.<sup>91</sup>

For once a Christian begins to know Christ as his Lord and Savior, through whom he is redeemed from death and brought into His dominion and inheritance, God completely permeates his heart. Now he is eager to help everyone acquire the same benefits. For

is too large a subject to delve into here. He urges gentleness toward them for the sake of evangelism in his early work. His later, harsh work is theologically, not racially motivated, where in frustration he calls for punishments with the aim of drawing them to Christ. This is misguided evangelistic zeal with terrible consequences.

<sup>90</sup> *The Right and Power of a Christian Congregation*, 1523. LW 39:309–10. Cited by Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 21.

<sup>91</sup> Sermons on 1 Peter, first edition, 1523. WA 12:318.25–319.6. Cited by Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 20.

his greatest delight is in this treasure, the knowledge of Christ. Therefore he steps forth boldly, teaches and admonishes others, praises and confesses his treasure before everybody, prays and yearns that they, too, may obtain such mercy. . . . He constantly strives and struggles with all his might, as one who has no other object in life than to disseminate God's honor and glory among the people, that others may also receive such a spirit of grace.<sup>92</sup>

Far from being concerned only about his own locale, Luther provides a model for missional engagement today. He warns people about getting too caught up with their own setting or language so that they are unable to reach others.

I do not at all agree with those who cling to one language and despise all others. I would rather train such youth and folk who could also be of service to Christ in foreign lands and be able to converse with the natives there, lest we become like the Waldenses in Bohemia, who have so ensconced their faith in their own language that they cannot speak plainly and clearly to anyone, unless he first learns their language.<sup>93</sup>

As Herbert Blöchle said, "Luther did not speak just on occasions and periodically to the questions about mission to the heathens. His entire theology is rather permeated by a 'missionary dimension.'"<sup>94</sup>

### Martin Bucer (1491–1551)

Earlier we noted that Warneck quoted some strong missionary statements from Bucer. Furthermore, his book *Concerning the True Care of Souls* is filled with evangelistic pathos and exhortation. He even rebukes the church for failing to mount a more serious missionary endeavor to the "Jews and Turks" and says that the current threat from the Turks is God's judgment for their failure.<sup>95</sup>

Bucer calls for earnest, zealous, evangelistic labor. To pastors he says,

<sup>92</sup> *Exposition of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Chapters of the Gospel of St. John*, LW 24:87–88. Cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 23.

<sup>93</sup> *German Mass*, LW 53:62–64. Cited in Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations*, 43.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 48.

<sup>95</sup> Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, trans. Peter Beale (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009), 87. Hendrix also notes that in spite of the known difficulty and dangers "a sixteenth-century mission to the Turks was nonetheless supported by Erasmus, Luther, Bullinger and Bibliander" (*Recultivating the Vineyard*, 168).

"True carers of souls and faithful ministers of Christ are not to miss anyone anywhere out with the word of salvation, but diligently to endeavor to seek out all those to whom they may have access in order to lead them to Christ our Lord."<sup>96</sup> Bucer calls for perseverance in sharing the gospel with people who do not readily accept it: "Faithful members of Christ are not to give up lightly on anyone."<sup>97</sup> In fact, Bucer says, "One should be so persistent with people [in calling them to faith] that to the evil flesh it seems to be a compulsion and urgent pressing."<sup>98</sup> For Bucer, zealous missionary work is rooted in God's desires and stirred by the example of Paul:

He [God] desires that they should be sought wherever they are scattered, and sought with such seriousness and diligence that one should be ready to be all things to all men, as dear Paul was [1 Cor. 9:22], and even to hazard one's own life, as the Lord himself did, so that the lost lambs might be found and won.<sup>99</sup>

Bucer affirmed God's sovereign election of souls to salvation, but did not see this as conflicting with energetic missionary enterprise:

But it is not the Lord's will to reveal to us the secrets of his election; rather he commands us to go out into all the world and preach his gospel to every creature. . . . The fact that all people have been made by God and are God's creatures should therefore be reason enough for us to go to them, seeking with the utmost faithfulness to bring them to eternal life.<sup>100</sup>

Combining the pastoral care noted previously and evangelistic zeal, Bucer prayed,

May the Lord Jesus, our chief Shepherd and Bishop, grant us such elders and carers of souls as will seek his lambs which are still lost . . .<sup>101</sup>

### John Calvin (1509–1564)

Contrary to the impression or assumption of many, Calvin exhibited

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 76. "Carers for souls" is Bucer's typical phrase for pastors, even though a term for "pastor" was available.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

deep evangelistic concern.<sup>102</sup> Refugees came to Geneva, fleeing persecution, with many coming to be trained in order to return to their countries as gospel preachers. Pete Wilcox states, “Even if not all of those who attended Calvin’s lectures were missionaries in training, the majority were caught up with him in an evangelistic enterprise.”<sup>103</sup>

In 1556 Calvin and his fellow ministers helped to support the first mission endeavor to target the New World, with a group sent to Brazil.<sup>104</sup> Warneck discounted this as a mission endeavor because he questioned Calvin’s involvement or sympathy and doubted whether the aim was really to evangelize indigenous people or just to provide religious services for the European settlers. However, we have a good account of the Genevan church’s actions in the personal journal of Jean de Léry, a member of the church in Geneva. A man seeking to establish a French colony in Brazil sent a letter to Calvin and the Genevan church asking for ministers of the gospel to accompany the settlers. According to de Léry the letter specifically asked for preachers and other people “well instructed in the Christian religion” so that they might teach the other Europeans and “bring savages to the knowledge of their salvation.”<sup>105</sup> The firsthand account we have of the event makes the missionary element of the endeavor crystal clear. Furthermore, the response of the church to this request is striking. De Léry records, “Upon receiving these letters and hearing this news, the church of Geneva at once gave thanks to God for the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in a country so distant and likewise so foreign and among a nation entirely without knowledge of the true God.”<sup>106</sup> This is not the response of a church that has no heart for missions, a church concerned only with stabilizing itself. Rather, this is the result of teaching and preaching that held up the responsibility to proclaim the gospel to all people.<sup>107</sup> Here we see the longing for opportunity to engage in world

<sup>102</sup> Indeed, Benoît could state of Calvin, “From the outset his theological work is an effort of evangelization and of witnessing” (J. D. Benoît, “Pastoral Care of the Prophet,” in *John Calvin, Contemporary Prophet*, ed. Jacob Hoogstra [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959], 51).

<sup>103</sup> Pete Wilcox, “Evangelisation in the Thought and Practice of John Calvin,” *Anvil* 12.3 (1995): 212.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. R. Pierce Beaver, “The Genevan Mission to Brazil,” in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 55–73; Kenneth J. Stewart, “Calvinism and Missions: The Contested Relationship Revisited,” *Themelios* 34 (2009): 63–78.

<sup>105</sup> Beaver, “The Genevan Mission to Brazil,” 61.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Beaver says Calvin was not in Geneva when the church decided to send

missions which Warneck says is missing.

Warneck also says the Brazil mission does not qualify as a mission endeavor because it did not last long enough. It is true that through treachery the effort came to an end. However, obedience and not success has always been the call. While the Brazil mission was still ongoing, a letter was sent to Calvin from one of the missionaries. He described the difficulties of their evangelistic efforts but said, “Since the Most High has given us this task, we expect this Edom to become a future possession of Christ.”<sup>108</sup> Not only was this clearly a mission endeavor, the missionaries themselves persevered in a most difficult task buoyed by confidence in a sovereign God.

What kind of preaching led to a church which had such missionaries as these and which responded so jubilantly to mission possibilities despite the difficulties? Calvin’s sermons have been too much neglected by scholars, but in his sermons we find the type of exhortation and prayer which would propel evangelistic activity as he regularly and earnestly urged his people to seek the salvation of the nations.<sup>109</sup> For example, preaching on Deuteronomy, Calvin said, “If we have any kindness in us, seeing that we see men go to destruction until God has got them under his obedience: ought we not to be moved with pity to draw the silly souls out of hell and to bring them into the way of salvation?”<sup>110</sup> In his sermons on 1 Timothy, preached in the year leading up to the Brazilian mission, Calvin regularly concludes with a prayer for the salvation of the nations.<sup>111</sup> He tells pastors that God has made them ministers for the purpose of saving souls and thus they must labor “mightily, and with greater zeal and earnestness” for the salvation of souls.<sup>112</sup> Even when people reject the salvation offered to them, Calvin tells pastors that they must continue to “devote” themselves

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these ministers (“The Genevan Mission to Brazil,” 61). However, Wilcox corrects this point showing that Calvin was in Geneva and, thus, included among the celebrants (“Evangelization in the Thought,” 216).

<sup>108</sup> Beaver, “The Genevan Mission to Brazil,” 64.

<sup>109</sup> T. H. L. Parker’s, *Calvin’s Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) provides a moving description of Calvin’s preaching and its power.

<sup>110</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1583; facsimile repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 1219 (from a sermon on Deut 33).

<sup>111</sup> John Calvin, *John Calvin’s Sermons on 1 Timothy*, ed. Ray Van Neste and Brian Denker 2 vols. (Jackson, TN: CreateSpace, 2016). For more on Calvin’s evangelistic prayers, see Elsie McKee, “Calvin and Praying for ‘All People Who Dwell on Earth,’” *Interpretation* 63.2 (April 2009): 130–40.

<sup>112</sup> Calvin, *Sermons on 1 Timothy*, 2:133.

to this evangelistic work and “take pains” in calling people to faith so that they might “call as many to God as they can.” Calvin urges, “We must take pains to draw all the world to salvation.”<sup>113</sup>

Calvin expounds Paul’s call to pray “for all men” (1 Tim 2) with application to the church’s missionary responsibility to the world: “Call upon God and ask him to work toward the salvation of the whole world, and that we give ourselves to this work both night and day.”<sup>114</sup> Throughout this sermon Calvin calls for fervent prayer and persistent action for the salvation of souls, urging his people to “have pity and compassion on the poor unbelievers.”<sup>115</sup> He tells his people, “The greatest pleasure we can do to men is to pray to God for them, and call upon him for their salvation.”<sup>116</sup> It is no surprise, then, that at various places in these sermons Calvin speaks of the salvation of our neighbors as being “dear to us.”

This evangelistic compassion is rooted in the character and action of God, as Calvin states in his sermon on 1 Tim 2:3–5:

Let us mark first of all when the Gospel is preached to us that it is just as if God reached out his hand (as he says by the prophet Isaiah, Isa. 65:2) and said to us, “Come to me.” It is a matter which ought to touch us to the quick, when we see that God comes to seek us, and does not wait until we come to him, but shows that he is ready to be made at one with us, although we were his daily enemies. He seeks nothing but to wipe out all our faults and make us partakers of the salvation that was purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. And thus we see how worthily we have to esteem the Gospel, and what a treasure it is.<sup>117</sup>

Some have said that the ministry of the Reformers was concerned only with teaching further the Christians who were in their midst. These sermons demonstrate how wrong this is about Calvin. He stated, “It is not enough for us to teach other men faithfully, unless we have a zeal to edify and care for the salvation of all men.”<sup>118</sup> He tells his congregation that believers “must draw their neighbors to God in such a way that they must go with them.”<sup>119</sup> Specifically speaking to pastors Calvin encourages them to ask, “Why has God placed me here? To the end that church should

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 2:141.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 1:156.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 1:159.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 1:193.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 1:130.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 2:130.

increase more and more, and the salvation of men be always sought for.”<sup>120</sup>

Some have argued that Calvin’s view of predestination prevented any evangelistic impulse. But notice that Calvin is not inhibited from calling all who hear him to Christ.

So often as we preach the doctrine of salvation, we show that God is ready to receive all who come to him, that the gate is open to those who call upon him, and to be assured that their inheritance is prepared for them there above, and they can never be deceived of it.<sup>121</sup>

Commenting on Jas 5:20 Calvin also states:

To give food to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty, we see how much Christ values such acts; but the salvation of the soul is esteemed by him much more precious than the life of the body. We must therefore take heed lest souls perish through our sloth, whose salvation God puts in a manner in our hands. Not that we can bestow salvation on them; but that God by our ministry delivers and saves those who seem otherwise to be nigh destruction.<sup>122</sup>

In fact, Calvin strongly rebukes those who lack evangelistic concern.

So then let us mark first of all that all who care not whether they bring their neighbors to the way of salvation or not, and those who do not care to bring the poor unbelievers also, instead being willing to let them go to destruction, show plainly that they make no account of God’s honor. . . . And thus we see how cold we are and negligent to pray for those who have need and are this day in the way to death and damnation.<sup>123</sup>

Rather than someone who was merely concerned with organizing the new Protestant church or for deeper teaching, we find in Calvin a true shepherd who cares for his people and yearns for the salvation of souls.<sup>124</sup> As he stated, “We cannot bestow our lives and our deaths better than by bringing poor souls who were lost, and on their way to everlasting death,

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 2:127–28.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 2:388.

<sup>122</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, vol. 22 of *Calvin’s Commentaries* trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 361.

<sup>123</sup> Calvin, *Sermons on 1 Timothy*, 1:201.

<sup>124</sup> See also Michael A. G. Haykin and C. Jeffrey Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Calvin’s Missional Vision and Legacy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014).

to salvation.”<sup>125</sup>

### Conclusion

In his history of Christian missions, Stephen Neill says, “When everything favorable has been said that can be said [about the Reformers commitment to mission], and when all possible evidences from the writings have been collected, it amounts to exceedingly little.”<sup>126</sup> This brief article has shown this to be untrue, and I have not been able to include the large number of quotes others have cited in the writings of the Reformers on this topic. It is time for the narrative to change. The evidence is ample; the conclusion is clear. The charge of apathy regarding missions among the Reformers is common but unfair. If we reject an anachronistic, narrow, unscriptural definition of missions, it is obvious that the Reformers were significantly mission-minded and present to us a largely untapped resource for mission strategy, especially as the West is once again increasingly devoid of the gospel. Of course, they did not launch full blown overseas mission projects as later Christians would, but that is due to the limitations of their time and not due to a lack of concern for missions.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, their work laid the foundation for the later expansion of world mission endeavor. Rather than denigrating these forebears, we need to examine their work afresh to see what lessons they may have for us in this hour of great need for gospel advance.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Calvin, *Sermons on 1 Timothy*, 1:297.

<sup>126</sup> Neill and Chadwick, *A History of Christian Missions*, 189.

<sup>127</sup> Scharpff was correct: “Luther was a man of his times. For this reason and for reasons already mentioned elsewhere, evangelism could not be carried on as we do today. Nonetheless, Luther no less than the modern evangelist, appealed directly to the individual and invited him to decision” (Paulus Scharpff, *History of Evangelism: Three Hundred Years of Evangelism in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States of America* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966], 12).

<sup>128</sup> Schulz seeks to tease out some of these lessons and states, “It would be a fatal mistake to ignore the fundamental contributions that this period [the Reformation] has brought to the Church and her mission” (*Mission from the Cross*, 67).