

Nbr. 50 – March, 2023

A Hint from St. Paul: Theology AND Mission

Second only to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the apostle Paul was arguably both the Christian church's greatest theologian and also her greatest missionary. Look at his letter to the church at Rome. This epistle is a missionary entrée to the imperial capital and points west, and at the same time a careful and clear exposition of the faith.

Paul wrote: "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (Rom. 1:14-15). *Under obligation*, he wrote. Paul owed people something.

If you had made some great life-saving biological breakthrough and kept it to yourself, that would be terrible. Such a thing should be shared far and wide! You would be under obligation. Paul brought something even better than that, the most important Gift from the Greatest of all Givers. He had to pass it along. "Well, he was an apostle," you might say. Yet the church has the very same Gift, to this day. Do we owe our neighbors any less?

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel," Paul went on, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . . For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Rom. 1:16-17). Because of Christ and what He did, the unrighteous are declared righteous, the lost are saved, and the dead live, as Paul wrote in the rest of Romans. That's all on account of Christ.

See? WOW! Theology and mission need not be an "either/or." They are a "both/and."

Spiritual Hunger

A late-2022 study by Barna showed that about three-quarters of Americans surveyed say that they want to grow spiritually. The same study reported that almost half of those surveyed say they are now more open to God than they had been prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, some four-fifths of those responding think the world has a supernatural or spiritual aspect.

So, even while the number of religiously unaffiliated persons continues to grow, large numbers of people told this survey that they have a spiritual hunger. This should not be surprising, for God "has put a sense of eternity in people's minds. Yet, mortals still can't grasp what God is doing from the beginning to the end" (Ecc. 3:11).

Remember the Synod's Every One His Witness (E1HW) resource for training people in speaking of Christ to people where they are. If you need details on E1HW, contact me.

A Dollar for Missions

Again I am asking for your assistance in making congregations in your Circuits aware of A Dollar for Missions (DFM). The last issue of this newsletter carried a listing of the projects slated to receive DFM funds in 2023. Keeping this initiative in front of people will be especially important here in its early days.

We are constantly making improvements to the DFM section of CID's website, to help people all over the District learn more about the 2023 DFM projects in general and specifically to find out about the current DFM project at any given time. See <http://www.cidcms.org/ministry-a-dollar-for-missions.html>



Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers

Worth Considering:

Evangelism and the Movies

Even as other media proliferate, films abide. It may not be too much to say that moviemakers have turned into priests, of a sort, in our culture. The films they produce can make people feel warm and fuzzy, or shake them to their core. Movies prompt folks to think, and in many respects tell them what to think. And they keep coming back, whether to actual theaters or to Netflix.

At the last of the Synod's "Making Disciples for Life" conferences in St. Louis, I was pleased to attend a sectional on movies by my former classmate Dr. Philip Hohle. He proposes a new kind of ESL: Entertainment as a Second Language. We need "Christian viewer-critics" of film, he says. Further, we can have "movie missionaries."

For movies are full of religion. We can help people see it and critique it. We can use talk about films as an entrée to conversation about Jesus.

Dr. Hohle suggested five practical ways in which such efforts can be organized. I will mention three. None of these would require a church to pay for any kind of special movie license.

"Book Club" model. Just like members of a club might agree to read a book on their own and come together to discuss it, groups could work similarly with a movie. View it independently, then gather for conversation. Leaders could go so far as to provide discussion questions and other resources for biblical analysis of the film. Nonchurched people who have an interest in movies can be invited.

Friend/Family Zoom model. This is basically the same model as above, used within one's circle of family or friends. Choose together which film to view, watch it, then meet in person or on Zoom to

discuss it. I add that this can be a fruitful way to open spiritual conversation with a friend or family member who tends to shy away from such things.

Theater rental model: Determine to discuss a movie that is already showing at – or that you know will be coming to – a theater near you. See the film yourself when it first opens, if you have not already done so. Based on your viewing, prepare to lead a discussion of the movie a few days later, on a date when you have made previous arrangements to rent the theater after one of the regular showings of the film. The rental may cost \$200 or more for an hour, but do not assume that theater owners will reject such an after-movie discussion session out of hand. Owners are keenly interested in bringing people into their theaters (where they will pay admission, buy popcorn, etc.). Publicize the date and time for the showing of the film that will be followed by your discussion. Encourage church members to invite their nonchurched friends to come and see the movie, then stick around to talk about it. Bear in mind, too, that in addition to new releases, some theaters are now also occasionally showing older movies. My wife and I recently saw *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* (1982) at our local theater. An interesting discussion session – not only about Vulcans and Starfleet, but also leading to a reflection on Christ and His substitutionary sacrifice – could have been conducted thereafter.

A couple of Phil Hohle's books that might help to inform these efforts (I have read neither): *Lenses: Ten Ways to Interpret the Movies You Love* and *The Filmmaker's Prayer*

Both of these books are available from Amazon.

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