

Scripture on the "Open Door" - Should It Guide Us In Our Mission Work?

The Great Commission reads: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations" Mt 28:19 "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" Mk 16:15. Does this commission mean that every Christian is to be a globe-trotter, hitting every nook and corner of the world and preaching the Gospel to every living human being in the world? Does it mean that if the individual Christian cannot accomplish that, at least the congregation he belongs to should? Does it mean that if even the congregation cannot do it, then surely the Synod he belongs to ought to accomplish that?

These questions are not meant to create any doubt about the Lord's word in the heart of anyone. For when we do that, we become coworkers of the devil. None of us want to be that. The questions are only to stimulate our thinking and then to find right answers from the Word of God.

Do the Lord's words in which He speaks of an open door for mission work provide us orderly guidance for our mission work? It seems that in the past many esteemed church leaders believed that God guides individual Christians, congregations and larger church groups (mission societies, synods, etc) to do mission work in specific areas or among specified people. Our own Synod brethren who held that view have been criticised. (Our World Missions - Karl Krauss WLQ Vol 72 #4). More of that later. If this view is entirely human and is clung to as an excuse for not doing mission work, then, of course it is as wrong as it can be'. But is it?

God is a God of order. Does God want order in the work of missions also? Does He provide guidance for such order in His "open door" passages? Does He strongly hint at a certain natural order when He states the future fact that His disciples would be witnesses unto Him "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth?" Acts 1:8

God gave other general commands and then gave further directives to carry them out in an orderly manner. We are to baptize all nations. But we do not run through the world pushing open all doors where there are unbaptized people and baptize them. We correctly concluded from recorded procedure of the apostles that baptism is to be administered only to those who request it as a means of grace for themselves and for their children. (Gausewitz Q 36 - Acts 16:25-34; Acts 8:26-40; Acts 16:14-15). Again, God asks us to love all men. But He also indicates an order in which we proceed in carrying out this command: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men". Gal 6:10

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Does God prescribe an order for procedure in mission work in the "open door" passages?

Let us look at Rev 3:7-9: "And to the angel in the church at Philadelphia write: These things says He that is holy, He that is true, He that has the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth: 8) I know thy works: Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name. 9) Behold I will make them of the synagog of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie; behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee".

Here God is not only called holy and true, but He is spoken of as a King Who has an official key. He opens and no man shuts; He shuts and no man opens. Only God has the keys to the kingdom of heaven. No man can limit or interfere with His power to admit into His kingdom or to exclude from it. The Lord has indeed given the Office of the Keys to His church on earth, but this office can be properly exercised and administered only at His command, by His power, and according to His word.

So whenever mission work is successful, it is definitely the Lord's doing. "Die Sach ist dein, Herr Jesus Christ".

The next words that concern us here are: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door". The picture of an open door is used repeatedly in the NT in speaking of opportunities for Christian mission work. (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:3). We will come to these passages later. At Philadelphia the open door was an opportunity to win Jews of that city for Christ.

Here the Lord also told the congregation at Philadelphia just why He gave them an open door. He says: "Thou has a little strength, and hast kept My word, and not denied My name". Though weak (perhaps in numbers), this congregation had proved itself faithful. Hence God rewards it with favorable mission opportunities. He does that; not they!

These Jews in Philadelphia claimed to be God's people. They were not, of course. But God would bring it about through the mission work of the Philadelphia congregation that these people would accept Christ as their God and Savior and humbly join the Christian congregation at Philadelphia in sincere Christian fellowship. God will make them know that He truly loves the congregation of Christians at Philadelphia - that the Christians are truly His people.

This mission work at Philadelphia was clearly to be directed and blessed by the Lord. It was to be His work from A to Z.

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Pastor Krauss says (Our World Missions - (WL) Vol 72 #4): "It is noteworthy that the broadening of our world missions began in earnest at the same time we were involved in a doctrinal struggle". - Did the Lord give us open doors after a large sector of the Synodical Conference proved unfaithful and the WELS by His grace proved faithful to His word? I believe it. May His grace keep us faithful as Philadelphia was that more doors for successful mission work may be opened to us! "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes" Mt. 21:43.

Another passage in which the words "open door" appear is Acts 14:27: "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles". Paul and his helpers had come to the big synod meeting in Jerusalem to settle a big question. For some had said: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved". To prove that such obedience to the ceremonial law was no longer necessary for admission into the kingdom of God Paul and his helpers pointed to case after case, where Gentiles became the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ without obedience to these ceremonial laws. Again, the passage shows that God directs mission work and makes it successful. He opened the door of faith unto these Gentiles. Paul testified to that. Mission work is the Lord's doing! He gives the open door for it.

1 Cor 16:9 is another "open door" passage. "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries". Here Paul explained to the miffed Corinthians why he waited so long at Ephesus before revisiting the Corinthians. Originally Paul had planned to go from Ephesus to Corinth by sea, then visit Macedonia, then return to Corinth and then go to Jerusalem. But the Lord changed the missionary's mind, for him. He would now go by land from Ephesus through Macedonia and then to Corinth. The Corinthians were miffed because Paul changed his plans. But Paul gives the reason for the change. The Lord, Who directs all mission work, had given him a great and effectual open door - a golden opportunity for successful mission work - at Ephesus. And the Lord also seems to have made it clear to Paul that if he did not enter that particular open door right at that time, that door might well be closed; for there were many adversaries. The many books of curious arts that were burned in Ephesus as a result of faith in the Gospel of Christ are evidence of what Paul meant by that great and effectual open door at Ephesus. Acts 19:19ff.

So here God clearly directed the work of His great missionary, Paul. He did not go where he wanted to go, but God directed him by showing him the open door of the hour.

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Paul uses the words "open door" again in 2 Cor 2:12.13: "Now having come to Troas for the Gospel of Christ, and a door having been opened for me in the Lord, I have had no relief in my spirit, because I did not find Titus, my brother, but after taking my leave of them, I went forth into Macedonia". Paul's helper, Titus, had been sent to Corinth to help them overcome difficulties. Paul had arranged to meet Titus at Troas. Now when Paul came to Troas, the Lord showed him a wide open door for successful mission work there. Paul knew that it was the Lord's will that he enter that open door at Troas. But Paul honestly confesses that he was so concerned about Corinth and so worried ~~that~~ Titus did not succeed in ironing out the difficulties there in a God-pleasing manner that he turned his back on that open door at Troas momentarily and hastened on to Macedonia in the hope of seeing Titus sooner. Clearly Paul did that with a heavy heart. He was torn between his concern for Titus and Corinth and his obvious duty to enter that open door at Troas. True, Paul did leave Troas temporarily to see Titus, but later he did work at Troas.

Again, it is clear that the Lord directs mission work by pointing men to <sup>of</sup> open doors for such work. Mission work is altogether the Lord's doing.

Finally, we take a look at Col 4:3: "Praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ". Here Paul is urging the Colossians to pray for him and his helpers. And in that prayer they are to ask the Lord to give Paul and his helpers open doors, opportunities to proclaim the Gospel with success. Here Lenski comments: "By His providence God opens the door. Many fail to note this and try to break open doors for themselves. When spreading the Gospel, we must follow God's providential indications as to where we ought to work".

Acts 16:6 ff shows that God also closes doors for mission work planned by men, at least temporarily. Paul and his helpers were "forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia". They had definitely planned to go to Bithynia, but the Holy Ghost "suffered them not". Contrary to the plans of Paul and his helpers God opened a door in Europe and called them to Macedonia through a vision. We cannot take the Gospel where we want to. The Lord directs the work. Mission work is the Lord's doing every time.

Again, men may think a certain place or people impossible for mission work. Jonah certainly did not think that Nineveh was an open door. But God pushed Jonah into that open door and behold, Nineveh repented.

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Peter thought it impossible that any of the Gentiles should ever constitute an open door for mission work. But the Lord coaxed and pushed through a vision and through a delegation from the house of Cornelius and behold, the house of Cornelius did receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Mission work is the Lord's work all the way. He directs and blesses it. Really we should never talk as though mission work were all up to us, to our planning and to our scheming. The Lord will see to it that this work is done to the end of time. He says: "The Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come". Mt. 24:14

2.

Now after this look at passages in which the Lord uses the words "open door" and some passages that are related, we want to see how these passages guided the church in its mission policy.

First we look at the influence these passages seem to have had on some men not of our confessional stripe. We bring a few quotes from a book entitled "The Mission of God" with the sub-title "An Introduction To A Theology Of Missions" by George Vicedom. This book was translated by Gilbert Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf for Concordia Publishing House.

Quote: "The church is not called on to decide whether she will carry on mission work or not. She can only decide for herself whether she wants to be church. She cannot determine when, where, and how mission will be carried out, for the mission is always divinely guided, as is shown above all in Acts. Mission, as the business of God, implies that He lays claim to make use of all His believers exactly as He wishes, in order to impart His love to all men through His believers". We take this to mean that Vicedom believed that God opens the door for mission work when, where and how He pleases. And He always directs segments of His Church to enter such open doors.

Another quote: "Moreover this withdraws it (the kingdom of God) from man's caprice. This gift always remains the Given's to dispose of as He will". Again God opens the door for missions when, where and how He pleases.

Another quote: "Through the mission the church must do nothing less than to prepare for the coming of Jesus. The end can only come when the message of the kingdom is proclaimed to all nations as a sign unto them. (Mt 24:14). Therefore the Holy Ghost leads the church step by step into the mission to the heathen as a fact of the last times and thus prepares for the arrival of Jesus". Again this must mean that the Lord opens the door for mission work when, where and how He pleases.

Another quote: "Paul did not go before he had a specific call. Although

Paul had received the authority from the Risen One, he did not question in the least the right of Antioch to commission him. He submitted to the leaders of the church in that place who acted at the behest and under the direction of the Holy Ghost". This can only mean that Paul waited until the time when God opened the door and sent him to a specific field.

Another quote: "The Spirit...drives the apostles into the work and shapes it" (Then he refers to Acts 16:6). "The Spirit is so strong that the entire mission is nothing more than a triumphal march of God in whose train Paul follows as a conquered opponent". The conclusion must be that God opens the door to mission work when, where and how He pleases.

Another quote: "Thus the church's mission is at the same time the mission of God...The mission of the church is no independent, arbitrary, optional work of the church. It likewise is not determined by circumstances...God remains the One Who sends, who leads and who decides the mission of the church". Conclusion: God opens the door to specific mission work when and where and how He pleases.

Next a quote from an essay entitled "The Missionary Call - What Saith The Scriptures" by Alden Gannett. The essay is found in Bibliotheca Sacra Vol 117, page 3ff. "In the Acts of the Apostles it is recorded that Paul and his companions were 'forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia' and that later 'they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not' (Acts 16:6-7). These prohibitions indicate that the great missionaries were proceeding, to some degree at least, on the basis of human judgment. Again, the same servants of Christ are seen using this human factor in making the final decision regarding the push into Macedonia; for the text speaks of their 'concluding' (ASV) from the Macedonian vision that Europe was to be their next area of spiritual conquest... A divine call and divine guidance, however, led their action... The Holy Spirit provided guidance step by step along the way". Evidently this man also believes that God opens the door for specified mission work when, where and how He pleases.

Next a few quotes from "The Missionary Nature Of The Church" by Johannes Blouw, professor at Free University of Amsterdam, member of the World Council of Churches. "This whole study... seeks to answer the question 'What does it mean in theological terms and in practice for the church to discharge its mission in all ages?' The call of Abraham... is the beginning of the restoration of the lost unity of mankind and of the broken fellowship with God. 'In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed' (Gen 12:3). Here it becomes clear that the whole history of Israel is nothing but the continuing of God's dealings with the nations,

and that therefore the history of Israel is only to be understood from the unsolved problem of the relation of God to the nations... The OT does not state that the election of Israel meant the rejection of the nations... The nations come into view variously in the OT, but always in their relation to Israel... The possibility is always open for reception into Israel as the people of God and for sharing in the salvation and blessing of Israel".

Though the words "open door" are not used here, the man is saying that in the OT God gave an open door to all nations by putting Abraham and Israel in their midst. This also reminds one of the opening words of Psalm 67: "May God be gracious to us (Israel) and bless us, and make His face to shine on us, that Thy way may be known upon the earth, Thy saving power among the nations".

Another quote: "Never in the whole period of the OT was there any deliberate missionary activity". He explains *Johah* as simply an example of the great mercy of God to a people that did come to recognize the God of Israel. The existence of Israel was God's way of opening the door to the nations in the OT.

More quotes: "The church cannot deny that God converts the nations... The church evangelizes to the extent that God inspires her... Mission work is completely dependent on the secret activity of God in the church. The Gospel does not enter the world along capricious, arbitrary paths, but in accordance with an unchanging pattern: Jerusalem, Israel, the Gentiles... The course of the Gospel is so strange and unprecedented that it can only be explained by repeated pointing to the intervention of God Himself... One rarely finds an admonition to preach the Gospel in Paul's epistles. What he does ask for from the people is intercession that the word of the Lord may speed on (2 Thess 3:1)... The proclamation of the Gospel among the nations is not a human, but a divine act, a work of the exalted Christ and His Spirit... To fill the world with the message of Christ is a task beyond the power of individual churches... The verb in Acts 1:8 is future, not imperative. The fact that Christians are witnesses is God's doing".

So this man also concludes that God opens the door to mission work when, where and how He pleases.

Next a few quotes from a book entitled: "Pentecost and Missions" by Harry A. Goer of the Christian Reformed church working in Northern Rhodesia.

Quote: "A comparison of the bases that have consciously undegirded the mission witness in the most recent and in the very earliest periods

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of the history of the church reveals a striking contrast. There is a contrast between the exceedingly heavy emphasis that has been placed on the Great Commission in the missionary motivation of the church during the past 150 years and the apparently complete absence of this motivation as a conscious factor in the missionary life of the early church... In the conception of the Reformers and of the majority of the seventeenth century theologians the Great Commission was binding only on the Apostles. When they died, Christ's command died with them. It does not extend to the church which the apostles founded. From the death of the apostles onward the church expands through witness in their immediate community or as a result of being scattered on account of persecution... Luther's view is like that of Calvin 'that the apostles entered strange houses and preached was because they had a command and were for this purpose appointed, called and sent, namely that they should preach everywhere, as Christ had said: 'Go ye...preach to every creature'. After that, however, no one again received such a general apostolic command, but every bishop or pastor has his own particular parish' (Weimar Vol 31), ... How, then, are we to conceive of the progress of the Gospel on the world? It was in principle declared to the whole world by the apostles. The work begun by them continues in ever widening circles to extend to men everywhere. This is not done by means of self-conscious missionary programs, however, but is effected through the preaching and especially through the dispersion of Christians attendant upon persecutions... The views of Melancton, Bugenhagen, and Zwingli are similar to those of Calvin and Luther... The fact is that the Jerusalem church did not lift a finger to carry the Great Commission into effect".

Again, the only conclusion can be that God opens the door for the expansion of the church when, where and how He pleases.

Finally, quotes from "An Evangelical Theology of Missions" by Harold Lindell, Editor of Christianity Today.

Quote: "Traditional Christianity always held that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity whose office in relation to missions is that of executive director. He has charge of the enterprise both on the side of the churches and on the side of the heathen... This calling to be a missionary which is universal to all believers is not the limited doctrine to the effect that all must go to a foreign field. As never before we must destroy the idea that the world is divided into two parts - the one in which we live and which we designate as the home field and the rest of the world which we designate as the foreign field. So far as God is concerned, the world is the field and every believer

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is called upon to witness in the world. The particular area where one witnesses is not dramatically important by any means. The important element is that each individual be doing the will of God whenever that will of God may lead".

The conclusion again must be that God opens the door to mission work when, where and how He pleases.

Another little remark by Lindsell is interesting. He says: "The Apostle Paul would have been rejected by the average mission board of today because he was one-sided, his health was poor, his spirit was divisive, and he had peculiarities".

### 3.

We have looked at passages that use the term "open door". We have also seen how these passages seem to have guided the mission policy of men not of our confessional stripe. Now let us see how these passages seem to have guided also the fathers of the Synodical Conference and of our own synod in their mission policy.

First we look at an essay entitled: "The Development Of Home Missions In North America" by F. C. Streufert, Sec of Missions in the Missouri Synod. - (TM Vol 17 p 99ff.

I will try to summarize his statement and make comment on them.

He points out that no church body sent our fathers here. Various conditions in Europe moved them to come here. When they came here, they witnessed to others. As long as Christians are Christians, they will do that (Acts 1:8). The first Missouri Synod convention in April 1847 resolved to elect a mission board to do Indian mission work. They were going to do that by establishing mission colonies among the Indians. They also appointed "Besucher" who were to look up Lutherans and interest others. They were also to visit the English speaking colonies. If other Lutherans were found, they were urged to organize a congregation or to affiliate with one already close by. Literature also was made for distribution.

In 1848 definite proposals were made to start through mission colonies, similar to our later missioner corps idea. One such colony came from Germany and tried this type of mission work in Michigan. Indian mission work was also to be done in Oregon by means of such a colony. There were also plans of making Oregon a stepping stone to the islands of the Pacific and to work through such colonies among the Chinese in California.

But the Lord did not open the door for this planned mission work. There was war with the Indians and local offices of Indian affairs decreed that there were no possibilities of opening missions among the Indians in

Oregon, Missouri or Iowa. The Kickapoo Indians were altogether opposed to missions.

At this turn of events, the idea of "Besucher" was stressed more again. But Besucher Buenger and Ernst reported closed doors at the next convention. Visitor Graebner reported that he had little success in Michigan. Lutherans there took no real interest in the Word of God and the Lutheran Church. But it was resolved to use Besucher to work over New Orleans.

In 1857 "Evangelists" were talked about to work among the large droves of new settlers. Also colporteurs were to go to New York City and to New Orleans. But here again the Lord did not open the door; for suitable men could not be found to do the work.

The following is a direct quote: "After it had valiantly but unsuccessfully tried to establish mission colonies, after it had failed to find qualified colporteurs, and found that the itinerant missionary policy did not work out satisfactorily, the synod pointed out that missions and mission expansion is the duty of every pastor and of every congregation and of every member in its midst, and that it is the duty of every pastor and of every congregation to extend the work particularly to the adjacent territory... It was further pointed out that this new missionary policy would be in the interest also of the newly established mission congregations, inasmuch as these new mission parishes would then not be established in far-away, isolated places. It was believed that the new mission stations were in need of close communications with the mother church... It was the policy of our missionaries never to give up as hopeless any station, no matter how few the hearers were. This practice in being faithful in small things was wonderfully blessed by the Lord. In many localities where fifty to sixty years ago the itinerant preacher would gather about him a few hearers there are today large magnificent churches".

We have here a number of ideas that were definitely held by the Brenner administration of our Synod - which is criticised by Karl Krauss. Mission expansion was definitely stressed as the duty of every congregation and individual. Each was to witness and to brighten the corner where the Lord put him with the Gospel. It was also stressed that missions should not be started too far away from home base. Definite close ties were deemed necessary for various reasons, including eternal vigilance for pure doctrine. And the reluctance to close small stations was certainly also there.

Now we note that Streuffert concludes by saying that the Lord did open doors to advance His kingdom through these methods. The Lord always opens the door and gets the job done when and where and how He pleases, the plan of man notwithstanding.

Given the funds the Brenner administration perhaps would have done more mission work, though it did send out men for \$25 per month. The situation was the same in the Missouri Synod. Streuffert writes that in 1874 the synod was urged to support missions in these words: "während einige Gemeinden fast ueber Vermoegen taeten, stecken andere in stinkendem Geize und zeigen eine unverantwortliche Gleichgueltigkeit gegen das Heil und Gedeihen der Kirche"

Streuffert also pointed out that expansion by establishing daughter congregations worked very well. Institutional work also proved to be an open door and so did radio work. "War was used by the Lord to scatter His witnesses and that led to many open doors. Missions flourished whenever congregations were on their toes and followed up their members to the suburban areas on to neighboring communities. Streuffert says: "Home Missions are after all the most important, the very foundation, the very life-line of missions everywhere".

Again that was the thinking of the Brenner administration almost to a T. We find these same ideas in an essay entitled: "Missouri Synod Undertakes Foreign Missions" by Koppelmann - CTM Vol 22 No 8 p 522ff. He points out that in 1893 it was voted to undertake a heathen mission of its own in some heathen country. He contends that the Missouri Synod became the first Lutheran church body in America to acknowledge mission work as a definite part of its program rather than that of a society within the church. This was pushed especially by a Pastor Ferdinand Sievers who had headed a mission colony project at Frankenlust, Michigan. The Lord seems to have closed the door for more work through his colony; for in 1868 it was described as "no longer a fertile field".

Beginning about 1865, he says, there appeared to be two camps, more or less, as far as mission thinking was concerned. Some felt very definitely that to live up to the Savior's charge the Missouri Synod had to enter upon a foreign mission project of its own. Others felt that home missions were the prime duty of the church.

We mention again that the latter was definitely the thinking of the Brenner administration in our synod also.

Koppelmann also mentions that Sievers had a proposal that was ~~never~~<sup>not</sup> carried out. He felt that men must be especially prepared for missions to the heathen, and that opportunities for missions must be sought out. He advised the election of a Director of Missions to take the matter in hand. In his opinion the land purchased in Michigan (apparently for the defunct colony) would be an ideal site for this mission institute.

In 1877 work was begun among the Negroes by the Synodical Conference.

This mission met with such favor that shortly the complaint was voiced that home missions were not receiving enough funds because of the Negro Missions. This would seem to indicate that the Lord really opened the door for Negro Missions right in this country at that time.

The Synodical Conference of 1884 heard an appeal (not from Japan) to begin work in Japan. There was a desire for such work among the people. But others also said: "Are we not already doing heathen mission work among Jews and Negroes? Are we not occupied with home missions? God has not yet given us a clear indication as to the field to be occupied!" When an unidentified layman asked about opening a heathen mission, he was told that the Board was looking for an open door!

Japan came under consideration again. But the 1890 convention was unwilling to renew the resolution of the previous convention.

Now the Sievers, father and son, went to work again and got support from Stoeckhardt. They pointed out that the people had the money and were in fact donating it. They said the Lord would surely provide the men and the blind heathen had to be on the conscience of everyone.

About this time a request came to do mission work in Zululand. The Norwegians were asking the Missourians to step in. Koppelman does not report whether this door opened through a specific call was entered or not.

Koppelman quotes from the 1892 Convention of the Synodical Conference: "Also the matter of missions to the heathen was thoroughly discussed. The Synodical Conference encouraged the individual member synods to consider this matter <sup>at</sup> ~~and~~ their next convention and to formulate resolutions accordingly... Incidentally it was the Wisconsin Synod at this time undertook work among the Arizona Indians and it was largely at Wisconsin's urging that the above action was taken".

Koppelman reports that the 1893 Missouri report says: "The Lord has His hour in which He moves hearts to agree to that for which He has sent His people" (So that is a part of God's work of opening the door!) "For our synod <sup>the hour</sup> is now come in which the Lord is directing us to a new activity in missions among the heathen. The Lord not only shows us that the doors to the heathen have opened throughout the world, but also has poured into our laps the means for this new mission activity".

Then Koppelman reports that by regular proposals and resolution Japan was chosen. The attention of the board focused on a Mr. H. Midsuno, a student at Springfield and a native son of Japan. He was duly sent to Japan as a missionary, but things did not work out. "To be altogether truthful about it, the church papers and the daily papers had to report that the doors so widely open were slowly but definitely closing.

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'Japan for the Japanese' was the cry. The missions and the churches already established did well to hold their own as is evident from the history of missions in Japan".

The synod found an open door for mission work in India in 1893.

→ Koppelman's work also seems to show that the Lord opens and closes specific doors for mission work when, where and how He pleases.

"The Greatest Missionary Problem" by H. Nou - (JM Vol 17 p 257 ff)  
This man was plugging hard for Mohammedan mission work. He says: "250 million people of Islam present a tremendous challenge to our faith". But statistics in themselves are never an open door to mission work.

He says: "Though it is true that some Moslem lands were difficult of access and others closed by the temper of their population and vagueries of the game of politics, the great mass of Mohammedans has been lying at our door, not indeed begging to be taken in and cared for, but by its helplessness mutely appealing in the strongest possible way for a good Samaritan service on the part of the Christian church... Once a very lively hope was entertained that the existing ancient churches (Coptic in Egypt, Abyssinian in the heart of Africa, Nestorian in Syria and Iraq) might be revived and charged with the duty of bringing Christ to their Moslem compatriots. But it seems these churches just do not stir in mission work any more... Yet the millions of Moslems in India are more easily accessible than those of any other land... There is an open door here as long as Great Britain is master in India." - Has the Lord pretty well closed the door for this work in India?

I had the privilege of sitting at the feet of Geo. Lillegard when he gave his "Lectures On Missions" at the Pastors' Institute at the Thiersville Seminary in 1955. These lectures are recorded in WLO Vol 53 #1 to Vol 54 #1. These lectures are fascinating and thought-provoking reading.

Lillegard points out that any discussion of Christian missions involves in reality the whole field of church history and even of world history. (This can only mean that God directs missions. He opens doors for its success and in His providence He at times closes them).

He points out that God also is in control of making that Gospel preaching a savor of death unto death or a savor of life unto life (2 Cor 2:16) whenever it is heard. The fact that the Gospel is rejected by some does not mean that it has not been preached effectively among them. Nor is their ignorance of it proof of anything else than they have failed to make use of the opportunity God has given them to hear and receive it. There are many people living within the sound of church bells and with Bible ready at hand who are just as ignorant of the

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Gospel as the most isolated savage in darkest Africa.

The Lord nowhere tells us that all the world will ever believe the Gospel. But He does tell us that it will be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations. (Mt. 24:14) (This will happen. God will do it. A Drenner will not prevent it, neither will a Hoenecke enable Him to do it).

In speaking of the time of Noah Lillegard says: "In that enlightened age... surely there was no single individual who did not know about the promises given to Adam and Eve. Yet they all perished in unbelief".

Of the people after Babel he says: "Whenever these people went, they brought with them the knowledge of God's promises, as well as of His judgments on unbelievers. But they held down the truth in unrighteousness as Paul says to the Romans".

Of Abraham Lillegard says: "God called him to be the great missionary of the Gospel in the world. That he and his descendants might fulfill their task as missionaries, God placed them in the Land of Canaan, the geographical center of the great land mass of the earth, Eur-asia and Africa. From this center Abraham and his descendants would be able to reach all the people of the earth. The gracious God of Israel showed His saving power in ways to impress all nations - crossing the Red Sea and destroying the Egyptian army - making the sun stand still upon Gideon at Joshua's prayer to enable the Israelites to defeat their enemies - Gideon defeating the Midianites with 300 men, etc".

"At the time of David and Solomon the fame of the Lord and knowledge of His word was brought to the limits of the then-known world.

Through the Babylonian captivity the Jewish people were scattered throughout the then-known world. (Thus God opened doors). And Jewish business men had established themselves in all the chief cities of the world.

Lillegard summarizes: "The Bible teaches that God has not only planned and provided a full salvation for all men, but has proclaimed and published abroad the good news of that salvation to all men at all times... If men are ignorant of the unconditioned Gospel, it is because they in their stubborn rebellion against God close their eyes to its saving truth... While we have the duty to preach the Gospel to every creature, God has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth (Rom 9:18)"

"In the first century the apostles and their disciples brought the Gospel to every part of the inhabited world (He does not think that America was populated then). Christ told His disciples to teach all nations. That this was literally fulfilled is clear from the records we have of the activity of the Apostles. Some discount the traditions that have been handed down to us, but there is no reason why they cannot be accepted as substantially

reliable. St. Paul went from the deserts of Arabia to the coasts of Spain. Andrew to Persia, India, Russia, the British Isles. Thomas to Parthia, India and China. Matthew to Ethiopia, Persia, Parthia and Macedonia. Nathanael to Armenia and as far as India. Judas to Arabia, Assyria and Persia. Matthias east of the Caspian Sea. Simon to Egypt, Cyrene, Libya and Morocco. This by the end of the first century the church had struck roots in every part of the known world. By the end of the fifth century the church had spread to the uttermost stretches of the Roman empire and had become the ruling religion in it."

Lillegard points to many instances in church history where God always found ways to open the door to get His Gospel to His elect and to close it to others as a matter of judgment. God has no problem opening and closing doors. He is always in control.

He points out that 1815 to 1914 has been called the great mission century. Since that time the great work of missions has continued to advance in some areas, but in others it has received mortal blows. The church has been officially banned from all Communist domains. Doors are also closed by dryrot within the churches.

Roman Catholics did not bring pure Gospel, but God gave open doors through them, because they distributed portions of Scripture. Lutheran countries pioneered in strictly foreign mission work. But often open doors were not entered because men and means seemed to be lacking. God also used Bible Societies to open doors.

Lillegard was much interested and greatly involved in mission work in China. He reports that there was a Tai-Ping rebellion in 1860. These rebels were quite successful for a time. They almost took all of China. They were Christian. These lines were taken from their liturgy: "Our Heavenly Father of His great mercy, did not spare His own Son, but sent Him down to give His life to redeem sinners. When men may know this and repent, they may go to heaven". Yet English and American generals helped to smash the Tai-Ping in China. Why did God let it happen? He thereby closed a door. In his love for China Lillegard says that the white man did not always fight on the side of the good angels.

The Nationalist government in China was also for Christ. But Communism took over. Again the door was closed.

Thus Lillegard shows very ably, in my opinion, that God rules the world for the benefit of the church. In His ways that are often past our finding out He opens doors for mission work and in His judgment He lets them be closed.

In June 1920 Prof. J.P. Meyer delivered an essay at the Pacific-North west District Convention entitled: "The Mission Command of Christ". In his always precise and systematic manner he made these four points: 1) Jesus declares Himself empowered to mediate salvation to all; 2) Jesus wants the announcement made to all nations that the Triune God is ready to adopt all sinners as His children through the covenant of Baptism; 3) Jesus demands that all nations accept His saving word with undivided hearts and finally 4) Jesus promises that He Himself will provide guidance (Leitung) and protection for the work of evangelizing all nations".

He cites an example of this guidance of God: The sin of Israel in rejecting the Gospel. Through that rejection the Gospel was brought to the Gentiles.

In elaborating on the words: "Behold, I am with you always" Meyer stresses that Jesus is ever in control of every piece of mission work. He gives the open door. He guides to the particular mission opportunity.

The Home Mission Board (WELS) Handbook by the General Board for Home Missions 1973 has the following statements:-

"Paul surmises that Asia is still the place to be... But the Director of missions thinks differently... Paul's plans were sometimes overruled by the Lord... To state the opportunities that suburbs present to us, we could use a few choice descriptive phrases ... doors wide open at the clear direction of the Lord of the church".

Does the Lord always so clearly direct us to other fields that men feel we must enter just to have the glory of being represented on all continents?

Since the early sixties various articles have appeared on the subject of foreign missions written by Pastor Edgore Hoenecke. He addressed the WELS Convention in 1963. His Extension of Mission Endeavor appeared in the WLQ Vol 58 #4 and Vol 59 # 1 and his St. Paul's Missionary Approach To The Unchurched appeared in the WLQ Vol 61 #2.

In very eloquently declaring the whole world to be a field for our WELS he refers to the sending of Jonah to Nineveh. It must be remembered however, that men did nothing to get Jonah to Nineveh. Men did not seek out the town for mission endeavor. God had to push pretty hard to get Jonah to go there. This is a most clear example of how God opens the door and gets his men to enter it when, where and how He sees fit.

Again Hoenecke told the 1963 convention: "This is the world into which we have been born, the age into which we have been called by faith to labor in the Lord's harvest. Ours is an age like that of St. Paul. As Paul <sup>wrote</sup> ~~wrote~~ about his era, so it might be said of ours: 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me and there are many adversaries'".

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This was his first reference to an "open door" passage in addressing the convention. I do not believe, however, that Paul was speaking of his era. Rather he was speaking of his very definite individual situation at Ephesus. The Lord made it very clear to Paul that there was work for him at Ephesus at that moment and for that reason he could not go to Corinth at this time. Could we say that there was so much home mission work at Ephesus for the missionary that he could not be spared for the foreign mission work at Corinth at the moment? Paul recognized that the Lord was definitely directing his mission endeavor. Corinth belonged to the world as well as Ephesus did. Yet Paul was definitely directed by the Lord to tend to the open door at Ephesus at the moment.

Statistics are always interesting, maybe. But are statistics showing how many unbelievers there are in the world, on some continent, in some nation, or in some city an open door to do mission work there? Can we ever consider a given place a field white for the harvest until our Lord calls it that through a few interested souls in that field perhaps? If that is not correct, then why do our mission boards canvass? Does a large or a small mass of unbelievers in themselves even really constitute an opportunity to do mission work with success? Could it not be that the church in obedience to Christ must shake the dust off its feet as a judgment against large masses of unbelievers? If the Lord opens the door, we will win some. If He does not, we can open even so many mission stations, but gain nobody. Let's let the Lord direct our mission work. He will clearly show us open doors in answer to our fervent prayers. When He does so, then let us enter those specific doors with might and main and the harvest will not be lacking.

Hoenecke also points out that "at no time in history has the church ever accomplished the actual fulfillment of her assignment in complete, world-wide mission coverage; and we today are, due to the population explosion, farther from that goal than the church has ever been".

Without a doubt the world has always contained unbelievers since the days of Cain. And without a doubt their number is growing. But the Lord nowhere says that this world will ever be populated by Christians only. Rather the Lord's prophecies point to the opposite. Is that due 100% to the fact that the church is slack in its mission work? Paul said to the Romans that all the world has heard the Gospel and that there are very many without excuse for not obeying it. Certainly if the Lord gives a segment of the church an open door, and it refuses to enter, it can be scored most heavily. But otherwise let us leave it with the Divine Director of mission work and pray Him for open doors. "With might of ours

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can naught be done. Mission work is the Lord's doing. We must keep that in mind in our mission policy. He opens the door when, where and how He pleases and only He can bless with success.

We will close by referring again to an article by Karl Krauss entitled "Our World Missions" Vol 72 #4 WLQ.

While deriding the fathers and especially the administration of President Brenner who believed strongly that the Lord would give an open door to mission work where and when He wanted us to work, and while praising the greater zeal for missions of men from Michigan, Krauss still states quite clearly that at least most of our foreign missions were started as a result of calls from the Lord (Poland, Nigeria, Southeast Asia, Indochina, India, Mexico, Sweden, Cameroon). That is exactly what the Brenner administration advocated.

He also admits that, in part at least, the door to Africa was opened for WELS through greater support from the membership. Brenner, too, would have been agreeable to many more projects if the money had been there. He also would gladly have given men that were sent out more than \$25 a month!

Even Japan was started, in part at least, out of a call to take care of our men in service there.

The door to South America was finally opened <sup>for us</sup> by an extra-ordinary gift of money.

We agree that the fathers may not always have been as zealous in mission work as they should have been, perhaps. But comparing the means at their disposal with ours today, the glory may not be so unequal at all!

The fathers may indeed also have misapplied certain Scripture passages. But maybe we are doing no better when we seem to imply that our Synod is responsible for bringing the Gospel to every sinner living in the world today and not just to places and to people where the Lord in His guidance opens doors for us to work.

Krauss derides Adolph Hoenecke for saying that it was unsound to say that a church is not living up to its mission status unless it engages in heathen mission work. He also derides Prof. Koehler for these words: "The mission principle that heathen mission work is the best stimulus for the church's home endeavors is a slogan at best".

Krauss admits that we got into Poland through a call from two congregations there. Incidentally, the Lord has closed that particular door for our WELS through recent events.

There was a most clear call to the Synodical Conference to go to work in Nigeria. And how the Lord opened the door there!

There was a clear call to Southeast Asia through Peter Chang and his congregations. The work in Taiwan started through a call that resulted from the Radio Voice of Salvation. Two congregations called us to Indonesia. Mitra called us to India. Pastor Onee Luna and Pastor David Gonzales called us to Mexico. Sweden made direct contact with us. Cameroon also. Kraus exalts very correctly: "What God has wrought"! He clearly opened the doors through clear directives and He blessed our work!

Krauss also says that our home mission program more than doubled in ten years. This, too, was due to calls from people who wanted the services of our Synod. The Lord clearly opened these doors in our home missions. To my knowledge the calls to Japan, Puerto Rico, and South America were not quite that clear.

Scripture on the Open Door- Should It Guide Us In our Mission Policy? Apparently it guided various denominations in their mission work in the past, apparently it guided our fathers in the Synodical Conference and in our own synod as well. There seems to be no valid reason to disregard them in setting up our mission policy at any time. The Lord opens doors for mission work for individuals, for congregations and for synods when and where and how He pleases. The work is His all the way!

May our Lord be gracious to us and keep us faithful to His word as He did with Philadelphia and keep on opening doors for successful mission work to us. And may He always move us to follow His guidance and His call by entering open doors given to us with vim and vigor.

Otto W. Heier  
ca. 1975-7

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