

# **That I Might By All Means Save Some**

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## **Introduction**

“Mission” lies close to the heart of Christianity. For a great part of the last two thousand years the Church has had as one of its chief emphases the bringing of the Good News to men who had never heard about Jesus, their Savior. The story of Christian missions is as complex as it is long. This essay is concerned with but a small portion of that fascinating story. It examines, in two parts, the problem of cultural factors which were involved in the Christian mission to Africa during the period of evangelization which began in approximately the middle of the last century. The first part of the paper is a brief introduction to the cultural problem. Its purpose is to provide perspective through which the second part of the paper can be more readily appreciated and understood. The second and major part of the paper is a close look at cultural factors in the preaching and teaching of the Word by the Lutheran Synodical Conference in Nigeria, Africa. Its scope is limited to our first few years of mission work there.

It must be said at the outset that the problem of “Christianity and culture” is one of the most difficult and intricate problems of the Missionary Church. No segment of Christianity has ever fully solved the problem—has ever, in other words, been able to preach a Christ undiminished by men. And today one can and should look back at the problems of his forebears not at all with an attitude which seeks opportunities to point an accusing finger, but with an attitude which seeks opportunities to learn and to grow.

## **I. Perspective**

The words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian Christians, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some,”<sup>1</sup> speak both about the ultimate objective of all Christian missionary activity—eternal salvation for mortal men—and about what Paul and the Church discovered at an early date is a chief prerequisite for the accomplishment of that objective—the need for being “all things to all men,” a need for bringing Christ to every man in terms which he can comprehend, and a need for recognizing every man’s right to express his faith with his own various means of expression, and for encouraging him in that right.

The above-mentioned twofold need can be called the “problem” of culture in mission work. It is a problem, I believe, because there are unavoidable difficulties involved in the attempt to bring pure Gospel to others. The Gospel itself is pure; but humans have a way, and a very natural way, of adding to and detracting from its purity. I am speaking in this paper about “expression” of faith, and by that I mean a broad spectrum of express-ings, including for example the ways in which a man praises God with his voice, the ways in which he comes to God in public assembly, the ways in which he tells his children or his fellow man about God. Missionaries add to or detract from the Gospel when they limit the expression of the people to whom they are preaching. Sometimes that limitation comes about merely through a missionary’s failure to encourage his congregation to search out and live their Gospel freedom. Sometimes it is more overt, as, for example, when he provides his congregation with songs to sing—and songs, perhaps, that are light years removed from the cultural experience of the congregation—instead of encouraging them to make their own song to the Lord in whatever intonations are familiar to them.

The universal Church consists of an infinite variety of people expressing their faith in an infinite variety of ways. It is the cultural problem of every missionary to convey the Gospel in his own ways, but to let the Gospel produce reaction in its own ways.

The problem of culture has existed since the beginning of mission work to gentiles. The apostolic Church, for example, was tempted to preach not simply Christ, but Christ and Jewish tradition. It was tempted to put a cultural yoke upon the neck of the disciples,<sup>ii</sup> to limit the expression of faith of converts by constraining them to observe cultural expressions—such as circumcision—which, although they were very natural and meaningful to the Jews, who had been observing them for generations, were unnatural and meaningless to the gentile Christian converts.

And so also Christians who came to southern Africa starting in the mid-nineteenth century came with the ultimate objective of pointing out Christ and salvation. But, in varying degrees, many of them had forgotten or were ignoring the need for being “all things to all men,” and too often Christ had to be encountered submerged beneath layers and layers of Western culture.

It started in 1857 with the publication of David Livingstone’s *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, a book which created a tremendous upsurge of interest in the Dark Continent—as Africa was then called—among European and American Christians. Missionary societies sprang up all over Europe, and thus began an era of evangelization in Africa which has continued to the present day.

The Church of the nineteenth century, however, was a Church which had been expressing itself in terms of Western culture for hundreds of years. Its manners of sermonizing were founded upon Western manners of speech and thought; European church-goers sang to the Lord in the tunes, rhythms, and harmonies of the European folk; the Church’s manner of teaching its young people about Christ coincided neatly with broad patterns of Western education.

And to a great degree the Church—Catholic and Protestant—brought these, and many other, cultural expressions to Africa hand in hand with Christ. Speaking about the mission work of the Roman Catholic Church, Stephen Neill states bluntly: “[The] student is again and again amazed at the westernness of the missions.”<sup>iii</sup> And Walbert Buhlmann, also speaking specifically about Catholic missions, says:

After an initial opposition, most Africans became keen on imitating the Europeans in dress, in culture, in standards of living, in wealth and, understandably, in religion... During this period it was easy to introduce into Africa Western forms of preaching liturgy, Church music, Church architecture, etc.<sup>iv</sup>

And these Western forms became the rule rather than the exception. It is repeated for example, that “almost without exception”<sup>v</sup> African Christians were trained to sing European—not African—hymns.

Buhlmann hints that part of the difficulty of preventing the development in Africa of merely another Western Church was the eager willingness of Africans to assimilate everything the white man brought with him. The African’s sense of nationalism (or “Africanism”)—which is, in part, his recognition of the great strengths and beauties of his own culture—was not keen when white missionaries first came to his continent, and so for a long time he was content trying, for example, to sing the C-Major four-four time tunes of John B. Dykes.

But there were other complications. The Western belief—which is voiced on occasion even today—that Western civilization itself is the most perfect expression of the Christian faith caused many missionary preachers to advocate not just Christ, but Christ and a machine, Christ

and the almighty dollar (or pound), Christ and Michelangelo, Beethoven, and Her Majesty the Queen. Edward Pfeiffer, who was a professor of theology at the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, wrote in 1908 that “[The] Gospel does not aim primarily and directly at the improvement of the temporal, the social, civil, political and industrial conditions of mankind.”<sup>vi</sup> However, civilization, in his viewpoint, although not an objective, is a natural and desirable by-product of Christian missions. He says: There is a “wealth of accredited facts gathered from all mission fields and showing something of the fruitage of Christian missions in the sphere of civilization and culture...”<sup>vii</sup> And again: “Christian missions show large results along the line of civilization and culture and moral improvements.”<sup>viii</sup>

This belief, mixed in varying degrees with an opinion of white racial superiority created what Cragg, the English theologian and author of *Christianity in World Perspective*, calls “habits of dominance,”<sup>ix</sup> which not only stunted the native’s expressions of his new-found faith to God and his fellow man, but also provoke[d] the ‘native’ to instinctive, perhaps militant, re-assertions of himself...”<sup>x</sup>

And thus in a roundabout and negative way there developed that which should have been encouraged from the moment white missionaries set foot in Africa—native expression. Of highest importance was a twofold realization: First, that the experience of the Gospel can be expressible in and through patterns of African society and culture. Cragg writes: “Music is not irretrievably entangled with tribal warfare or sensual passion, nor vocabulary, rite and usage irredeemably profaned.”<sup>xi</sup> And second, that the imposition upon African Christians of “civilized” Western traditions such as Gregorian chant caused a real inhibition of their spiritual growth. But such a realization has by no means been a significant or effective characteristic of this era of African evangelization.

The Lutheran Church was not unaware of the great degree to which cultural factors were limiting the progress of the Gospel. The Synodical Conference came late to Africa, and perhaps the clarity of the vision with which it came had been increased through observations of the activities of others. At any rate, even before entering Africa, Synodical Conference Lutherans were pointing out the dangers of confusing “christianization” with civilization and were urging the furtherance of a Gospel unburdened by culture. An editorial in a 1916 issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* makes the following statements:

A well-defined feeling has developed and often it is given expression: the Christian missionary must also make it his duty to spread western civilization among those less enlightened people with whom he comes into contact. This is a very sad confusion and has needlessly hampered the work time and time again.

When Christianity emerged from the Holy Land it was not the bearer of any particular kind of civilization...If in the course of time Christianity was associated with the civilization that developed in the western countries of Europe, that was an unessential and later phenomenon...

To wrap the Gospel in western civilization and expect it to do its powerful work is lost labor...<sup>xii</sup>

In an article of 1919 the *Northwestern Lutheran* spoke also about the need for truly indigenous churches, recognizing the fact that mission congregations cannot simply be preached to and then abandoned; they must be helped and supported, and for a long period of time, while

they grow and learn to express themselves and to give a confession of faith which is not borrowed from the history and culture of the missionary, but which is their very own.<sup>xiii</sup>

Six years later, in 1925, American Negroes in the Synodical Conference began a movement to start a Lutheran mission in Africa. Various difficulties, including the Depression and the question of location, postponed the sending of a man until 1935. At that time, three men visited the Ibesikpo congregations in Nigeria for two months, reporting back to America and making recommendations for the commencement of mission work. One of the men, Dr. Henry Nau, stayed in Nigeria as the first Synodical Conference missionary to Africa.

Dr. Nau's opinion of the intermingling of Christianity and culture, based upon his contact with other missions, can be seen in the following statement:

Long-established missions were undoubtedly laying too much stress upon the three activities just mentioned ['educational, medical, and social purposes']. In some missions the time of the whole European staff was consumed in these activities...<sup>xiv</sup>

On the other hand, his hope for his own members was that at the same time that they received the Gospel undiluted either socially or culturally, they would be able to express their new faith and live their new life through and in their own traditions wherever possible. He said to the Christians of one congregation: "We are not against the good customs of your fathers. Those should be kept, and you should keep more of them."<sup>xv</sup>

The Synodical Conference sent its first African missionary, therefore, to a land whose peoples had for many years been confronted with the Gospel. One of the real problems of that African Church, however, was that their Gospel had too often and in too many ways been veiled by cultural impositions and by the failure of many missionaries to help and encourage the new Christians to speak and act for themselves and as the Spirit moved them. Synodical Conference Lutherans apparently recognized these problems, and went into Africa with a goal of avoiding them.

## **II. Cultural Factors in the Synodical Conference Ministry in Nigeria**

It has been noted thus far that the mission of the Western Church to Africa had a significant lack of success in dealing with the problem of culture, the problem of getting the mission church to make its own expression of its faith, and the problem of preventing a mere imposition of Western "civilized" traditions upon African converts. The well-known historical result of this failure is that the Western Catholic Church begot a Western Catholic Church—in Africa; the Methodist Church of the West begot another Methodist Church of the West—in Africa; German Lutherans begot German Lutheran Africans; and so on and on.<sup>xvi</sup>

The second part of this paper looks in detail at cultural factors of the Synodical Conference ministry in Nigeria. It has already been noted that members of the Synodical Conference, including its first missionary to Nigeria, were aware of the problem of cultural expression. I think that it is an indication of the complexity of the problem that, this fact notwithstanding, the Synodical Conference also was far from completely successful in dealing with it.

The information about the first few years of Synodical Conference mission work in Nigeria comes from writings of the missionaries themselves. A diary, called "Day by Day in Nigeria," was printed serially in various Lutheran publications in the United States. The first missionaries regularly sent other articles about their work to the United States which also were printed in various magazines. The diary and articles can be found in the *Northwestern Lutheran*,

and provide quite a good picture of the beginnings of our mission. The book, *We Move into Africa*, based largely on Dr. Nau's contributions to the diary, is another source.

The field to which our missionaries came was not an entirely new one. Many of the Ibesikpo people had been members of the Qua Iboe Mission, which had been active in the area since 1887. But in 1930 sixteen Ibesikpo congregations withdrew from the Qua Iboe Mission, primarily because they felt that the mission was not active enough in supporting the education of their children and in providing for the training of an Ibesikpo pastor. These congregations were the central group where our work began and from where it moved out to other areas.

The following paragraphs discuss various aspects of the ministry among the Ibesikpo Christians, including the music used in worship, the manner of preaching, literature provided by the missionaries for their congregations, general characteristics of the worship service, general characteristics of other congregational activities, and native contributions.

## Music

Musical expression was from the outset a matter of repetition of Lutheran hymns. The words, of course, were usually translated into Efik, the language of the Ibesikpo people. One of the first deficiencies noted by Dr. Nau when he visited the congregations was in the hymns then being used. On November 12, 1936 he wrote:

In none of the hymnbooks used by the churches, U.F.C., Qua Iboe or Methodist, are any Christian hymns. We shall try to translate four, if we can find the time: From heaven above...; Let us all with gladsome voice; Joy to the world, and Come hither ye faithful.<sup>xvii</sup>

Many other references indicate that much effort was expended in the translation of a variety of Lutheran hymns. Sometimes difficulties of translation necessitated modifications which could preserve the melody. Dr. Nau wrote concerning his translation of "Beautiful Savior": "To sing these words according to the usual melody several contractions are necessary, but they can be made without hurting the sense of the hymn..."<sup>xviii</sup>

Repetition of the Lutheran hymns was not easy for the Ibesikpo Christians. Dr. Nau's description of one Christmas service is illustrative:

Christmas. Went to Nung Udoe for service. Very little Christmas like. The only thing reminding us of Christmas was the sermon and the singing of the Christmas hymns translated by me. Our natives have a gift to corrupt everything, so also the tunes for the hymns. The tunes were sung very faulty, but the melody was recognizable...<sup>xix</sup>

Similar references are common. On one occasion Dr. Nau wrote about "trying to get the tunes into the heads and throats of the teachers."<sup>xx</sup> On another occasion Missionary Schweppe, shortly after his arrival in Nigeria, wrote:

From 10:00 to 12:00 I conducted my regular singing period at the school. This is something new. Of course, they have had singing before, but I am trying to organize a school choir and acquaint them with some of our good Lutheran chorals. The few familiar melodies they do have they have corrupted so badly that to hear them is an offense to the ears. We must think about introducing some good Lutheran hymns. I should like to suggest that, if possible, more suitable music be sent out... We can use both male and mixed choir arrangements.<sup>xxi</sup>

The significance of statements such as the preceding ones would be harder to evaluate if they were offset or balanced by statements describing efforts in the direction of encouraging the Ibesikpo congregations to create their own musical prayers. Such statements, however, do not

occur. These Christians were simply being taught to make a vocal expression of their faith in a manner which was difficult both to perform and to understand, in a manner that was foreign to their culture.

The imposition of Lutheran chorales upon the vocal chords of the Ibesikpo Christians was also the imposition of a burden upon their spiritual growth: How much more enthusiastically, loudly, and clearly they would have sung out their joys in their new-found relationship with the Savior if their songs would have employed the strong, beautiful, and familiar elements of their own—rather than German—musical heritage.

The desire of the missionaries to teach the hymns they knew and loved is understandable. Because the missionaries were far from home, the beauty and desirability of the German chorale were no doubt magnified. On the other hand, Missionary Nau betrayed a lack of understanding for the beauty and desirability of African music when he wrote:

We faintly recognize the tune, but so many drags and ups and downs have been added to it, according to the taste of our own people, that we can see how that which is foreign has become native; not by the latter rising to the height of the first, but by the former sinking down to the level of the latter.<sup>xxii</sup>

Another factor is that the creation of authentic African Christian music would have involved a difficulty of a somewhat different nature for the missionaries. The difficulties they did experience were primarily in the pattern of a teacher-student relationship. There was no reciprocity: the missionaries simply instructed, and then awaited response. The creation of authentic African Christian music would have necessitated a stepping down by the missionaries from their instructors' podium to a position of equality with their fellow Christians—to a position where genuine sharing and exchange could take place. Such action would perhaps have been initially more difficult for the missionaries; but I believe that it would have been latterly more profitable for the Ibesikpo Christians, as well as for the missionaries themselves.

## **Preaching**

The first Synodical Conference missionaries to Nigeria were enormously overworked, and evidence for this fact is nowhere more abundant than in the area of sermon preparations. Cramped as they were by too-full schedules, our missionaries frequently did not have enough time to adequately prepare their sermons. But the missionaries were, of course, preachers, and they felt that preaching the Sunday sermon was one responsibility which they could under no circumstances fail to meet. It appears that at times the formal carrying out of this responsibility seemed more important than what their sermons said. Dr. Nau says that the

sermons were not timely, nor did they especially take the circumstances of the people into consideration. Where every minute of the day, and almost everyone of the night, was taken up by ministrations of some sort to the people, days could not be spent in preparation of a sermon for Sunday. Hence we just took a printed sermon and translated it.<sup>xxiii</sup>

In a different place Dr. Nau indicated that he took the sermons he translated from "Klein's and Sieck's sermons for the churches."<sup>xxiv</sup>

We can sympathize with him, certainly: his noblest intentions to prepare meaningful sermons for his congregations simply were crushed by the rush of daily crises demanding immediate attention, and in the end the only possible recourse was to sit down and translate the sermon of another man for another congregation of some other time and place. But our object is not to sympathize with the missionaries, nor to criticize others for failing to provide help or

relief. It is only hoped that some acquaintance with this problem and other problems of culture and mission can provide a measure of growth and understanding for our Christian mission today.

Sermons of one culture do not translate automatically into meaningful sermons for another culture. Christ spoke in those translated sermons, to be sure; but He was a Christ who should have been speaking to Christians experiencing the tribulations, temptations, frustrations, and joys of Western civilization. To the Ibesikpo Christians He came cloaked. Dr. Nau reports: “We have just been discussing sermonizing according to Fritz’ Pastoral Theology: Daniel [a ministerial candidate] himself had noticed that the sermons do not take the special conditions of the churches sufficiently into consideration.”<sup>xxv</sup>

J. T. Mueller, in an article in the *Northwestern Lutheran* of September, 1936 said: “The need, first of all, is for sermons, *Lutheran* sermons, and this need Dr. Nau is supplying, using, among other guides, Professor Klein’s sermon book.”<sup>xxvi</sup> I submit that the real need, first of all, was for African sermons. Correct Lutheran teaching was necessary, but it could become truly meaningful only as it related to the African Christian congregations and personally to African Christians.

The ultimate in the depersonalization process of what should be a highly personal matter was the actual delivery of the sermons. The native preachers “would be given a mimeographed sermon for every Sunday, and this sermon would have to be preached in every congregation by every teacher. Whoever was able to memorize it should memorize it word for word and then preach it.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

All in all, the picture of the preaching situation in the first few years of our ministry in Nigeria is a picture of some very serious difficulties. But to look back and say, “It should have been done this way,” or “With more men it could have been done that way,” is both unfair and meaningless. What is meaningful is to act today upon a realization that our African preachers can provide a far more valuable service than reiteration—after all, they know the hearts of their neighbors far more intimately than any missionary—and to act today upon a realization that American sermons—based upon American thought patterns, American imagery, etc.—do not magnificently expose the risen Savior. Such actions, in our ministries today, would indicate that our reading of history has stimulated some growth.

## Literature

A brief look at some of the literature our missionaries supplied for the Ibesikpo Christians makes one wonder if perhaps the Synodical Conference was not trying to duplicate itself—in Africa. Missionaries Nau and Schweppe were busy translators, and references to the translation of a great variety of Lutheran materials are numerous.

Here is a partial list: “Concordia Sunday School Literature, genuine Lutheran sermons, the Lutheran Order of Service;”<sup>xxviii</sup> the *Lutheran Witness* and the *Walther League Messenger*;<sup>xxix</sup> “prayers selected from the prayer treasury of the Church;”<sup>xxx</sup> the *Concordia Sunday School Teachers’ Quarterly*;<sup>xxxi</sup> and Luther’s *Small Catechism*.<sup>xxxii</sup>

These religious materials are indelibly imprinted with the ink of Western civilization. They are centered on the Gospel, to be sure; but they are also oriented culturally to our society. And it must be remembered that the Ibesikpo Christians, being relatively new to faith in their Savior, and lacking a Christian tradition of their own, were in a somewhat vulnerable position: they were primarily receivers of the Gospel, and were never in a good position for telling their teachers, “Stop!” And at times the “teaching” should have stopped, the abundant supply of examples should have been limited. For our objective was not to have the Ibesikpo Christians

copy our traditions. But there was a real tendency of that abundant supply of examples from Western Lutheran literature to inhibit the expression of the Ibesikpo Christians by directing them toward the path down which we have come—a path perhaps not always meaningful for African Christians. More importantly such a strong emphasis on the translation of foreign materials did not permit an equally strong emphasis on encouraging the development of African Christian literature.

### **Externals of the Worship Service**

The information presented in this section and the following section of the essay will indicate that broad patterns of Synodical Conference worship and congregational life were transferred to the Ibesikpo congregations.

If, in reading the following sections, the reader should comment to himself (for example), “Why even mention Introits, or Collects? There’s certainly nothing wrong with Introits or Collects!” he is misunderstanding the intent of this paper. To suppose that any portion of this paper is attempting to pass a judgment on Lutheran traditions is to misunderstand the intent of the paper. I in no way wish to suggest that any tradition—be it the Introit, the Collect, or the Lutheran way of singing praises to the Lord—is in itself evil or even negative. What I am simply suggesting (and repeatedly) is that the imposition of my own traditions on another man of a completely different culture can sometimes be quite obviously detrimental. Further, the intent of the paper is not to try to point out as many of these potentially non-creative aspects of our mission work as possible. Its only intent is to provide an opportunity to scan what the Christian Church—and especially our Lutheran Church—has done with respect to proclaiming a Gospel wrapped in Western garb, in this one limited area;<sup>xxxiii</sup> and to prompt some evaluations for our continuing ministry, wherever it may be. If I am moved to ask, “Do I really want to give this part of my life to another man? Do I have to? Can a man of African heritage healthily exercise his faith in the medium of my tradition? Is it the best I have to offer him?”; and if I ever find the answer to be “No,” then it is possible that I will be motivated to search for a better way of giving the perfect Gift.

The worship service in Africa was patterned after the worship service in America. The weekly sermon paper which was distributed to the teachers of every congregation contained not only the sermon, but also the appointed Gospel and Epistle lessons and the Introit and Collect. (Mention is not made of the Gradual.)<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Dr. Nau provided information about Communion services when he wrote: “I preached a confession sermon on 1 John 1:8-10. We had the regular confession and then Communion service after the regular order in our English Agenda, everything in Efik, of course.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

Money offerings were collected, in accordance with the Lutheran Order of Service, and it is known that in at least one congregation the collection was taken in “a large brass plate.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

At one time (before the arrival in Nigeria of Dr. Nau) the Ibesikpo Christians gave an indication of difficulties they were encountering because of their unfamiliarity with the manner of worship. In a letter requesting more information about the worship service, they wrote: “We are now conducting services in our churches according to the Lutheran Order of Services as laid down in our Lutheran hymn-book.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> They wanted additional help, they said, because “the [service] in the hymn-book confused us greatly.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Worship in the African Lutheran schools, according to Deaconess Christine Rapier, was very similar to worship in American Lutheran schools. Their devotions included the singing of



hymns at the beginning, the praying of Luther's morning prayer, and the singing of the doxology at the conclusion.<sup>xxxix</sup>

### Externals of the Congregational Life

Dr. Nau introduced "Christian" marriage. He said, "While indeed a marriage between one man and one woman, as they had been contracted, was valid, it was not the God-pleasing way in which a Christian should make so important a step in life."<sup>xl</sup> He also suggested, just as judgmentally, that a God-pleasing marriage would be performed in church.<sup>xli</sup>

Along with the proper marriage came marriage certificates. Baptism certificates were also provided.<sup>xlii</sup>

Festival services such as "Harvest Thanksgiving" and "Dedication" services were introduced.<sup>xliii</sup> When Dr. Nau talks about celebrating Christmas, he appears to be talking about traditional Christmas, ritual rather than about true Christmas joy. He wrote:

The people have never been taught how to celebrate Christmas; and I had too much to do and could not work out a special Christmas liturgy for children's services. The people are foolish children and the teachers are asses who think with their feet and not with their heads. So this Christmas was not a thrill, but a sad disappointment.<sup>xliv</sup>

With respect to Communion announcements Dr. Nau reported:

"I am very strict in this matter, in order that in the future the people will follow good Lutheran practice."<sup>xlv</sup>

The *Small Catechism* was taught; as well as Bible history. Memorization of the materials had a more important role, at least initially, than instruction. Upon his arrival in Nigeria Dr. Nau had decided that no Catechism instruction would be given, because the teachers were unfamiliar with the material as well as with the "method of Catechism instruction."<sup>xlvi</sup> By September 9 of 1936 he was able to write in his day book: "We are now beginning to introduce Catechism instruction into the schools. Hitherto only Catechism memorizing has been done, but now we are almost ready to begin proper instruction."<sup>xlvii</sup> In November of the same year he had to write that the children "knew the facts of Bible Histories, but...no application of the truths..."<sup>xlviii</sup>

And so to an amazing degree the work of the first Synodical Conference missionaries was directed toward reproducing in Africa the characteristics of the church back home. The first and direct responsibility of any missionary is to Christ and not to his particular denomination. And sometimes a strong emphasis on the church back home is not the best way of proclaiming Christ. There is much indication from the writings of our first missionaries that there was perhaps a greater need for that proclamation of the simple Gospel than for the *Walther League Messenger*, male and mixed choral numbers, or even the memorization of the *Small Catechism*. Many problems of Christian faith and life abounded, as can be amply illustrated by even a casual perusal of a history of the early years in Nigeria. At one time Dr. Nau, having been with his Ibesikpo congregations for months, simply had to cry out in desperation: "There is no conviction of sin. In fact, it is not known at all what sin is."<sup>xlix</sup>

Writing in the March 7, 1943 *Northwestern Lutheran*, Mrs. J.P. Kretzmann (the wife of one of our missionaries) wrote: "We do not want to bring 'white man's civilization' to the black man—after all, just what can a white man's civilization offer?"<sup>1</sup> But her statement and question came a little late, I believe; for, as illustrated in the first part of this essay, the Western Church had already brought a significant part of the white man's civilization to Africa. The facts presented in the second part of the essay have shown that the Synodical Conference was also involved in this extension of cultural and traditional aspects of Christian expression, in a number

of areas of African Christian life. The emphatic direction of the first few years of our ministry in Nigeria was not toward the development of a truly indigenous church, with truly indigenous Christian expressions. Whatever the reasons or motivations may have been—whether the pattern developed here out of seeming necessity, or there out of a paternalistic feeling that our way is best, even in Africa—the evidence shows clearly that the early emphatic direction of our ministry was toward the development in Nigeria of the expressions—in the areas of religious music, preaching, religious literature, and externals of the worship service and congregational life—of the Lutheran Church of the Synodical Conference.

### Conclusion

The author of the *Northwestern Lutheran* article on “Missions and Civilization,” which was quoted from earlier in this paper, concluded his essay with an example from mission work to the Eskimos. He said:

The Eskimo has remained precisely what he was before Christianity came to him in everything but in his faith, which is the glorious Gospel faith he shares with all believers; of the converts of recent centuries he is the most true. It may require very humble men to carry out such missionary ideals—but it was always so, the greatest in the Kingdom have ever been those who were most humble.<sup>li</sup>

And we must be humble. How easy it is for our pride to elevate so many of the beloved aspects of our culture and traditions above Christ! How necessary it is for us in true humility to proclaim Christ first, and to always, diligently watch out for—and curb—in true realization that we can err—actions which add to or detract from the pure and thus powerful Gospel.

The author of a more recent *Northwestern Lutheran* article, Missionary E. H. Wendland, wrote the following about the African Independent Church Movement, a movement which has developed in part because of cultural impositions of the Western Church:

Our own position must be a sober one. It is well for us to examine carefully the causes of this fragmentation, avoiding as much as possible those which arise out of our own coldness, lovelessness, and ethnic pride.<sup>lii</sup>

And the author of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul, gives us the greatest reason we have for all of this humble examination: “That I might *by all means* save some.”

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22.

<sup>ii</sup> cf. Acts 15:10.

<sup>iii</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 438.

<sup>iv</sup> Walbert Buhlmann, "The African Church: The Council of Jerusalem to Vatican Council II," *Re-Thinking the Church's Mission*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), p. 49.

<sup>v</sup> Buhlmann, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>vi</sup> Edward Pfeiffer, *Mission Studies: Outlines of Missionary Principles and Practice* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1908), p. 68.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>ix</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Christianity in World Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 26.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>xii</sup> "Missions and Civilization," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 3, #1, (January 7, 1916), pp. 6, 7.

<sup>xiii</sup> "Christian Missions," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 6, #18, (September 7, 1919), p. 141.

<sup>xiv</sup> Henry Nau, *We Move into Africa* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946), p. 197.

<sup>xv</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #25, (December 5, 1937), p. 392.

<sup>xvi</sup> cf. Kenneth Cragg, *Christianity in World Perspective*, p. 30.

<sup>xvii</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #11, (May 23, 1937), p. 171.

<sup>xviii</sup> Henry Nau, quoted in "Missions," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 23, #19, (September 13, 1936), p. 297.

<sup>xix</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 25, #2, (January 2, 1938), p. 10.

<sup>xx</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #12, (June 6, 1937), p. 185.

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- <sup>xxi</sup> William H. Schweppe, "A Letter from Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #19, (September 12, 1937), pp. 297, 298.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Nau, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran* vol. 24, #22, (October 24, 1937), p. 343.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Professor J.T. Mueller, "Missions," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 23, #19, (September 13, 1936), p. 297.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Henry Nau, *op. cit.*, pp. 235, 236.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> "Missions," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #1 (January 3, 1937), p. 8.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Professor J.T. Mueller, "Missions," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 23, #19, (September 13, 1936), p. 297.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Henry Nau, *op. cit.*, p. 331.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 31, #4, (February 2, 1944), p. 55.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 23, #19, (September 13, 1936), p. 297.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> cf. Note 12.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Paul M. Volz, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Nigeria: 1936-1961* (Calabar, Nigeria: Hope Waddell Press, 1961), p. 17.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #12, (June 6, 1937), p. 185.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Nau, *op. cit.*, p. 247.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Quoted in *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 21, #11, (May 27, 1934), p. 169.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Christine Rapiet, "News from our Mission in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 31, #4, (February 20, 1944), p. 55.
- <sup>xl</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 23, #22, (October 25, 1936), p. 345.
- <sup>xli</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.
- <sup>xlii</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 24, #14, (July 4, 1937), p. 217.
- <sup>xliiii</sup> Mentioned in *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #11, (May 1937), p. 171.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 25, #1, (January 2, 1938), p. 10.
- <sup>xlv</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #12, (June 6, 1937), p. 184.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Nau, *op. cit.*, p. 234.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #8, (April 11, 1937), p. 123.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #10, (May 9, 1937), p. 154.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Henry Nau, "Day by Day in Nigeria," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 24, #22, (October 24, 1937), p. 343.
- <sup>l</sup> Mrs. J.P. Kretzmann, "The Old and the New in Nigeria, Africa," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 30, #5, (March 7, 1943), p. 77.
- <sup>li</sup> "Missions and Civilization," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 3, #1, (January 7, 1916), p. 7.

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<sup>lii</sup> E.H. Wendland, "What's New in Africa," *Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 59, #5, (February 27, 1972), p. 70.