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# REFLECTIONS ON SEVEN MEGATRENDS SHAPING 21ST CENTURY MISSION

by Albert B. Collver III

Timothy Tennent outlined seven megatrends that are helpful in diagnosing challenges to the Church. The answer to the challenges? Start with repentance and continue with the proclamation of the Gospel.

CHRISTIAN MISSION FUNDAMENTALLY TAKES place “where the Church and that which is not Church”<sup>1</sup> meet. Physically, of course, this line of demarcation could be represented by the inside and outside of the church building or by a national or geographical boundary that separate the heathen from Christians. In an era when the church held cultural and political sway, such a definition or such a line of demarcation appeared to make sense. In the era of so-called Christian nations, the Constantinian era when the church held a privileged place in society, generally speaking, Christians were located where the church was (often represented by a building), and where there was no church, there were no Christians. At least, this is the general or simplistic model often presented as the image of the institutional church holding sway in society. At least in the Western Christian world, the utopian view of the Constantinian era, when the church holds a privileged position in society and her clergy are respected, is passing way. Such a view, nevertheless, seemed to be one of the dominant positions at the time when the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910 was held. Here the modern Ecumenical Movement also was born. Fundamental to Christian mission at the beginning of the twentieth century was the question of what the Church is,

even if the question was not framed in this way.

The World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910 had some 1,200 delegates from the major Protestant denominations and mission societies represented primarily from Europe and North America. The goal of the World Missionary Conference was to address a practical approach to missions. The great twentieth-century missiologist David Bosch, describing the conference, said, “Edinburgh represented the all-time highwater mark in Western missionary enthusiasm, the zenith of the optimistic and pragmatist approach to missions.”<sup>2</sup> Looking back, although this is frequently denied in the current age, the World Missionary Conference of 1910 could be viewed in triumphalist terms. The European and American churches, for all intents and purposes, had taken the Gospel to every corner of the earth or at least believed that the task would be accomplished within a generation.<sup>3</sup> An emerging question in 1910 was how the churches could work together better. Practically speaking, this equated to discussions on how

The discussion of mission and the question of the nature of the Church cannot be separated. Any discussion of mission will inevitably involve a discussion about the nature of the Church, the purpose of the Church and the goal of the Church.

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Sasse. “The Question of the Church’s Unity on the Mission Field.” 2:179–195 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), electronic location 4944.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 338.

<sup>3</sup> Paul H. Cho. “Between Edinburgh 1910–2010: Changing Theological Views of Mission.” *Modern Believing* 51, no. 3 (July 2010): 16–24, 19. “The end of history will break in when all peoples have heard the gospel. Therefore, mission begins with the view of the end and prepares for the end. The missionary movement of the twentieth century received a tremendous inspiration from this theology of mission, which was also present in the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. John Mott believed that the goal of reaching all peoples was possible ‘in this generation.’”

churches established in the same country by different denominations might even perhaps become one, as the “mission field” made it appear as if the divisive distinctions back home (in Europe and in America) were no longer relevant on the mission field.<sup>4</sup> After all, churches existed within a couple of hundred yards of each other on the mission field, each half full in an area where there were 7 million people who were not Christians. Surely missionaries should be able to cooperate and or work to establish one church! The divisions of Christianity caused an offense to the pagan world. Ironically, among the 1,200 or so delegates at the World Missionary Conference of 1910 with representatives from every corner of the world, among the hundreds and hundreds of white faces, “There were only very few colored faces.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the takeaways from the World Missionary Conference of 1910 was the emergence of a greater awareness of the Church and her role in missions, the birth of the modern ecumenical movement and eventually the development of *missio Dei* theology, which states that mission belongs to and starts with the triune God and not the Church.<sup>6</sup> With the redefinition of mission as the sending of God into the world, “Then mission may be taking place outside of the church and even outside of the Christian dispensation altogether.”<sup>7</sup> A practical implication for the *missio Dei* mission theology was a de-emphasis on the professional missionary, on the clergy and on becoming a member

of a church.<sup>8</sup> These views provided the large structures or guideposts for mission in the twentieth century, even affecting the Missouri Synod, which remained slightly behind the latest “cutting” edge of missiological thought, which as far as I am concerned was not necessarily a bad thing.

Fast forward a century to the World Missionary Conference of 2010, also held in Edinburgh. Unlike the 1910 World Missionary Conference, the centennial conference had Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox representatives from around the world. Unlike 1910, the 2010 conference had materials available in Amharic (for Ethiopia), Chinese, English, French, Japanese, Swahili, Korean and Spanish. This is an interesting grouping of languages, including those of two of the fastest growing churches in the world: Ethiopia (Mekane Yesus) and China. The composition of the 2010 conference in Edinburgh reflects the reality that the majority of Christians no longer live in the West. More than thirty volumes of material were produced. (And I am perhaps presumptuously guessing that this event went largely unnoticed by the people attending this mission summit with the exception perhaps of the good Dr. Detlev

The mainline Protestant churches, in an effort to remain culturally relevant, have abandoned the historic confession of the Christian Church. This also has resulted in a general decline of mission work in foreign lands by mainline Protestant churches being replaced by justice programs and other humanitarian aid projects.

Schultz, professor of missiology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.) Again, while perhaps not a question in the forefront, the role of the church still remained a lingering question. The 2010 World Missionary Conference said of the church, “We believe the church, as a sign and symbol of the reign of God, is called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God’s mission of

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 17. “A divided witness to Christ was therefore a major stumbling-block to mission.”

<sup>5</sup> Sasse, electronic location 4944.

<sup>6</sup> Cho, 20. “Although the concept of *missio Dei* was a starting point for considering a theology of mission, it was not the mission of the Son and the mission of the church, initiated by the Holy Spirit, which were primary but the mission of God as such. God makes Godself known in *promissio* to the world. There is no ‘resident’ God, but only the God of the Exodus, who enters into history and reconstitutes it through the word of promise and so brings about the divine purpose. The goal of God’s work of salvation is a reconciled world. The starting-point for this theology of mission usually took the form of solidarity with the poor and oppressed.”

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 20–21. “The meaning of this theology in practical terms for missionary work is that it is not a question of going from the centre to the periphery, from the church to the world, but from the world to the world. The missionary is not the one with a special call, not the professional priests or ministers, but is first and foremost the layperson. Outsiders are not necessarily called to become members of the church: they should let themselves be brought into God’s mission in the world and stretching into the future, which belongs within God’s eschatological care. Only in this way can a human being find his or her true humanity, which is itself hidden in mission. Mission thus moves from sending to sending. Sending leads into the future, and the future leads to a new sending.”

love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

Much could and perhaps should be said about the 2010 World Missionary Conference’s confession of the Church, most notably how the phrase that the Church is a “sign and symbol of the reign of God” is vastly different from what Article VII of the Augsburg Confession says: “That the one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.” It should come as no surprise to you that most contemporary missiologies find Augustana VII as outdated, inadequate or simply wrong. (Most contemporary missiologies, for instance, do not believe that the church will endure forever but rather that the church is simply part of the present dispensation.)

For example, David Bosch writes, “The most famous of the sixteenth-century definitions of the church is the one to be found in the (Lutheran) Augsburg Confession of 1530. Its Article VII describes the church according to two distinguishing marks, namely as ‘the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly.’”<sup>10</sup> Bosch continues:

In all these instances the church was defined in terms of what happens inside its four walls, not in terms of its calling in the world. The verbs used in the Augustana are all in the passive voice: the church is a place where the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. It is a place where something is done, not a living organism doing something.... The church of pure doctrine was, however, a church without mission, and its theology more scholastic than apostolic.<sup>11</sup>

More recent missiologists such as Alan Hirsch also operate with a different understanding of the church and the role of the church. In fact, Hirsch is deeply distrustful

of the institutional church and holds that the church has been off the rails more or less since the age of Constantine. He would like to return to the purity and apostolicity of the church during her first three centuries, before it became institutionalized. Hirsch writes:

One of the core tasks of apostolic ministry is to plant churches, but we are increasingly convinced that the term church planting itself is problematic. That is partly because we are never actually commanded to plant churches. In the Bible, that is always considered to be Jesus’s job; for our part, we are called to evangelize the world by making disciples.... To get to the real heart of the Great Commission, we suggest that it might be useful to drop the phrase “church planting”; instead we should begin to focus on the approach of “gospel planting.” This is actually very useful because it takes us to the core of what missionary work is about in the first place: planting the message of Jesus and cultivating contextualized communities of faith that shape themselves around it.<sup>12</sup>

Hirsch views the institutionalization of the church as a death

knell for movements such as pietism, revivalism and the missional church. An example for Hirsch of the institutionalism of the church is the denominational seminary.<sup>13</sup> He writes:

For instance, we believe that making a church dependent on external institutions to do its theologizing lies at the root of many of the organizational as well as the missional problems we face. The denominational seminary is a classic case in point. If

The cause of a recession or extinction of the Gospel in a particular place was a lack of gratitude and thankfulness for the Gospel. This has been repeated throughout the history of God’s people. The answer to this is repentance. Repentance leads to reformation and renewal.

<sup>9</sup> “Edinburgh 2010 Common Call” ([http://www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/Edinburgh\\_2010\\_Common\\_Call\\_with\\_explanation.pdf](http://www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/Edinburgh_2010_Common_Call_with_explanation.pdf))

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Hirsch, Tim Catchim and Mike Bren. *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), Kindle location 5962.

<sup>13</sup> Hirsch notes that he did not find his seminary education particularly helpful to the challenges he faced in the ministry. “I have to say that nothing in my seminary training had prepared me for the experience of those years. Everything in my education was geared toward maintaining the established, more institutional forms of the church. The vast majority of the subjects on offer were theoretical and were taught by theoreticians, not practitioners.” Alan Hirsch. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006), 30–31.

one organization is set apart to handle all the ideas and leadership training, then the local church no longer believes it has to do the hard work of these itself. As a result, it becomes lazy and dependent on the external organization. If we are not careful, creating external training and licensing bodies can be a death knell to a movement and cultivate a propensity toward institutionalism.<sup>14</sup>

Once again, the discussion of mission and the question of the nature of the church cannot be separated. Any discussion of mission will inevitably involve a discussion about the nature of the church, the purpose of the church and the goal of the church.

Yesterday, I mentioned to a colleague that Dr. Joel Lehenbauer's fine paper had a lot of prolegomena. As a systematic theologian, I, too, cannot escape prolegomena, for it was in fact the World Missionary Conference of 2010 that provided the context for the Seven Megatrends Shaping Twenty-First Century Mission. The seven megatrends come from *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* by Dr. Timothy C. Tennent, a Wesleyan and current president of Asbury Theological Seminary. He wrote this book "in celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland," as a "call to faithful remembrance as we look back on those who have gone before us, and it is also a call to look ahead and reenvision what it means to be called into the world."<sup>15</sup> A century ago, Tennent notes, "Missions was conceptualized ... as moving outward from its sending center in the Western world to the unreached world. We were the bearers of the missionary mandate and message, and those outside the West were the object of missions, the mission field."<sup>16</sup> Tennent notes that the missionary world has been turned upside down. He provides some snapshots to illustrate his point:

For Lutherans, the Church is an article of faith. Jesus never fails, and He is the Lord of His Church. Jesus Himself promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church.

1. Yale University's Campus Crusade for Christ meetings are mostly made up of Asians, while the university's Buddhist meditation meetings are almost exclusively attended by whites.
2. More Anglican Christians worship in Nigeria in any given week than all the Episcopal and Anglican churches of Europe and North America combined.
3. More Christian churches exist in Nepal than in Spain.

4. "All ten of the most gospel-resistant people groups in the world are located in Western Europe, whereas all ten of the most gospel-reactive people groups in the world today are located in either China or India."<sup>17</sup>

Tennent states, "None of these developments were predicted fifty years ago."<sup>18</sup> Tennent's observation that none of these trends were predicted a half-century ago should remind us that missionaries in

general are horrible prognosticators of the future, tending to be either overly optimistic or overly pessimistic of the future, while frequently unable to see emerging areas of opportunities. This is not a criticism of missionaries but rather more a reflection on the fact that people in the midst of the battle of where the church is and is not do not always have the best perspective of what is occurring on the macro level. In terms of the Augsburg Confession, one also must confess that the Holy Spirit works when and where He pleases, and He rarely, if ever, consults us before He does so.

Tennent reflects, "As I survey the landscape of contemporary missions and missiological reflection, it is clear that those who live in the West are facing a serious crisis concerning missions and Christian identity within the larger global Christian movement."<sup>19</sup> To examine the "crisis" of Western Christianity, Tennent developed seven megatrends or major shifts that are interrelated.

### Megatrend 1: The Collapse of Christendom

- "The Western world can no longer be characterized as a Christian society / culture in either its dominant ethos or in its worldview. Christendom has collapsed, and the twenty-first century missions must be reconceptualized on new assumptions.

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch, Kindle location 6505.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Tennent. "Megatrends That Are Shaping Twenty-First Century Missions From Moratorium and Malaise to Selah and Rebirth." Preface. In *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 15–51.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 85.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 92.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

For Tennent, Christendom refers

to a political and ecclesiastical arrangement that reinforces a special relationship between the church and the state. The state strengthens the church by promoting Christian hegemony over the religious and cultural life. The church, in turn, gives legitimacy to the state by supporting the political establishment and tacitly granting divine sanction to the actions of the state.<sup>20</sup>

Hirsch makes similar observations about Christendom.<sup>21</sup> It should be fairly apparent that this privileged arrangement largely has fallen away in both Europe and the United States. In fact, the government is becoming increasingly hostile to the church in the West.

Tennent identifies three consequences of the loss of the church's privileged position in society.

1. When the church held a privileged position, the church and culture were at the center, while mission was on the periphery, beyond the edge of culture. With the loss of a privileged position, the church finds herself in the center of the mission field. The church is on the periphery or edge of culture and society. In fact, the Western church is increasingly finding itself on the edge of world Christendom.
2. The Western church has moved from Jerusalem to Athens. The church is no longer the center of society, nor does society generally hold the values of the church. The church exists in a pluralistic environment with competing gods seeking the attention of people in the "post-Christendom marketplace."<sup>22</sup>
3. Mission work is moving from a geographic, particularistic identity to a global identity. Tennent notes at the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference the world was divided into two parts: the Christian sphere and the non-Christian sphere. The lines of demarcation between the church and where there was not church were clearly marked. Today, there are no clear lines of demarcation. Tennent observes, "For the most part, we don't know how to think about missions without our-

selves being at the center (including sending structures, personnel, money, and strategic planning).<sup>23</sup> He states that missions must be rediscovered in the West apart from Christendom, where the church and Christian identity has no geographic center. Tennent notes, "Missions is about peoples, not places."<sup>24</sup>

## **Megatrend 2: The Rise of Postmodernism: Theological, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Crisis**

- The rise of relativistic pluralism, the loss of faith in the inevitable progress of the human race, and an increasing uncertainty about normative truth claims have resulted in a cultural, theological, and ecclesiastical crisis.

As a result of relativistic pluralism and the desperate desire for the church to retain its position at the cultural center of Western society:

The mainline churches felt that it was necessary to compromise the distinctive truth claims of historic Christian faith in order to retain credibility within the culture. What, under Christendom, had been a gradual, mild domestication became, under post-Christendom [sic] and postmodernity, a virulent attack upon the very heart of Christian identity.<sup>25</sup>

This is why the mainline Protestant churches have adopted the social causes of the day: civil and equal rights, pro-homosexuality and so forth. The mainline Protestant churches, in an effort to remain culturally relevant, have abandoned the historic confession of the Christian Church. This also has resulted in a general decline of mission work in foreign lands by mainline Protestant churches being replaced by justice programs and other humanitarian aid projects. Consequently, "Evangelism and church planting was largely discredited."<sup>26</sup>

Tennent also attributes the rise of the megachurch movement to the Western church's desire to remain at the cultural center. He writes:

The megachurch movement found that by abolishing the 'strangeness' of the church and not challenging the overt materialistic commercialization of life in the West, they could bring in large num-

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>21</sup> Hirsch, 66. "If it helps, the truly liberating thing to realize is that Christendom was not the original mode of the church, and hopefully it will not be the final one. It is high time for us to dethrone Constantine; as far as matters of church go, it seems he is still the emperor of our imaginations. The church now faces the challenge of discovering mission in a new paradigm while struggling to free itself from the Christendom mindset."

<sup>22</sup> Tennent, Kindle location 138.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 154.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 170.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 186.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

bers of people. Church services and programs became increasingly entertaining and pragmatic ... the megachurch movement had learned to make the gospel's entrance into one's life almost seamless and unnoticeable ... very little attention has been paid to cross-cultural missions, either in creating and sending support structures for full-time career missionaries or seeing themselves as a part of the wider global church. The megachurch movement unwittingly became just another illustration of popular culture, rather than a prophetic call to a radical gospel and the Jesus of prophetic imagination.<sup>27</sup>

Tennet's observations do seem to capture several characteristics of megachurches, particularly their disconnectedness from the denominations to which they are affiliated and their general lack of support for career missionaries, favoring short-term missions or their own international projects.

Tennet also identifies the "emergent church" movement as an outgrowth of his second megatrend. They, however, are in some respects a reaction against the megachurch movement. The emergent churches understand that they are living in a post-Christian society and have generally rejected the one-size fits all, bigger-is-better mentality of the megachurches. "Instead, they emphasize more intimate relationships, authentic experiences, and images. The sermon is not as central in the emergent churches, because postmoderns mistrust authoritative statements and regard metanarratives as nothing more than propaganda."<sup>28</sup> As far as Tennet is concerned, both megachurches and the emergent church movement are attempting to attract the same people — those people who are disenfranchised from the mainline Protestant churches. Neither the megachurch movement nor the emergent church movement focuses on evangelism or church planting, rather both are more interesting in attracting people who departed from the mainline Protestant churches. He writes:

The emergent churches, like the megachurches, have generally held an uncritical attitude toward postmodern epistemology. Like the megachurch, they are focused almost exclusively on those disillusioned with Christianity and the church in the

West, that is, the post-Christian.... It is too early to tell whether or not the emergent church will engage with the larger, world Christian movement and be willing to support long-term cross-cultural missionaries.<sup>29</sup>

For Tennet, both the megachurch movement and the emergent church movement is a continuation of the ecclesiastical crisis created by the mainline Protestant churches who sought to retain a central place in Western culture. He does not consider either the megachurch or the emergent church movements to be truly missional.

### **Megatrend 3: The Collapse of the "West-Reaches-the-Rest" Paradigm**

- Western Christians have been slow to grasp the full missiological implications of the simultaneous emergence of a post-Christian West and a post-Western Christianity.
- The old mission-sending center is collapsing.

Tennet notes, "Jerusalem, Antioch, North America, and Constantinople were all at one time at the center of Christian vibrancy, but today these places have only a very tiny remnant of Christianity remaining."<sup>30</sup> As the Western world become more post-Christian, it is not becoming more secular, rather it is returning to paganism with the movement toward a "dizzying array of new and old spiritualities."<sup>31</sup>

### **Megatrend 4: The Changing Face of Global Christianity**

- The simultaneous emergence of multiple new centers of Christian vitality has created a multidirectional mission with six sending and receiving continents.
- For the first time since the mid-fourteenth century, the majority of Christians (approximately 67 percent) are now located outside the Western world.

The Church is moving South and East. For instance, in 1976 it was estimated that there were approximately one million Christians in China. Today, "The Chinese church comprises over 90 million believers and is the fastest growing church on the planet with an average growth rate of 16,500 per day."<sup>32</sup> I would note that very few of the Chinese Christians are Lutheran. Another notion

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 227.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 235.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 235.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 249.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 258.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 294.

that Tennent challenges is that the spread of Christianity is “progressive.” The 1910 World Missionary Conference had a “progressive” view of the spread of Christianity. The Western church could advance the spread of Christianity to the entire globe. In contrast to this, Tennent notes, “Christian history has been one of advance and recession. Christian history has witnessed powerful penetrations of the gospel into certain geographic and cultural regions, only to later experience a major recession in that region and sometimes even wither away almost to extinction.”<sup>33</sup> The West presently may be experiencing such a recession, and perhaps even a future extinction. Lutheran theology has an explanation and an answer to this recession and possible extinction. Martin Luther described the movement of the Gospel from one people to another as a passing rain shower.

Luther writes:

For you should know that God’s word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it’s gone it’s gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it’s gone it’s gone, and now they have the Turk. Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it’s gone it’s gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year.<sup>34</sup>

The cause of a recession or extinction of the Gospel in a particular place was a lack of gratitude and thankfulness for the Gospel. This has been repeated throughout the history of God’s people. The answer to this is repentance. Repentance leads to reformation and renewal.

### **Megatrend 5: The Emergence of a Fourth Branch of Christianity**

- We can no longer conceptualize the world Christian movement as belonging to Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Eastern Orthodox communions exclusively. The twenty-first century is characterized by enormous changes in Christian self-identity, which influence how the Christian message is understood and shared.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 294.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther. Jaroslav Jan Pelkian, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds. *Luther’s Works, Vol. 45: The Christian in Society II* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 352–353.

Tennent observes that the five-hundred-year-old, threefold division of Christianity into Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox no longer holds as “many of the new Christians cannot be easily categorized under any of the traditional headings.”<sup>35</sup> He notes that Pentecostal-oriented movements are on the rise and are not easily categorized into any of the three groups mentioned above. The increasing dominance of Pentecostalism can be seen in the Roman Catholic’s attempt to begin ecumenical dialog with Pentecostals.

### **Megatrend 6: Globalization — Immigration, Urbanization and New Technologies**

- Globalization has fostered dramatic changes in immigration, urbanization and technological connectivity. The result is that the traditional sending structures and geographic orientation that have dominated missions since the nineteenth century are no longer tenable.

Tennent states that every local context is connected to and informed by the global context. Under the category of immigration, he notes that the people of European descent in the Western World are engaged in cultural suicide. The birthrate has dropped below the level necessary to sustain a population. As a result, social liberal Western governments have adopted immigration policies to an economic base for their social liberal policies. He observes that the West is declining “faster than it did during the worst years of World War II, when it suffered the brunt of Hitler’s atrocities.”<sup>36</sup> “Thus, one of the major trends in Western Europe over the last sixty years has been the collapse of Christendom and the rise of Islam.”<sup>37</sup> In regards to urbanization, Tennent notes that most Protestant mission strategies from one hundred years ago focused on reaching people in rural areas. The mission techniques were geared toward a rural people. Today’s world is urban, and mission strategies need to be adopted to reach people in a heavily urbanized environment. In addition to the difficulty in reaching urbanized people, urbanized people are more exposed to religious pluralism and are further removed from traditional biblical values. Technology also forces us to change how we communicate with people. He writes, “Jesus Christ and the biblical message do not change, but how we communicate the gospel effectively in

<sup>35</sup> Tennent, Kindle location 327.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 372.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



such a new context requires some significant changes.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Megatrend 7: A Deeper Ecumenism**

- The simultaneous emergence of post denominational identity among many, as well as the emergence of thousands of new denominations requires the forging of new kinds of unity that transcend traditional denominational and confessional identities.

Tennet would advocate for a deeper ecumenism for the twenty-first century. He views the old denominational lines as barriers to the Gospel. He would call for the church to listen to the perspectives of other confessions and unite under “Christ Himself, who is the Truth,” that is, to express more than the unity of a creed, but according to Tennet it should not be less than that. He would like for the church to develop an ecclesiology in a global context with a global Christian identity.

### **Concluding thoughts**

In one sense, particularly if one is enamored with cultural “Rome,” a person may be tempted to weep with Jerome at the fall of Rome. Even Jeremiah wept at the fall of Jerusalem. We may be weeping over the decline of Western Christendom. The demographic realities described both by Tennet and the speakers over the past day at our mission summit will not be reversed by new missional techniques or theories. For Lutherans, the Church is an article of faith. Jesus never fails, and He is the Lord of His Church. Jesus Himself promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. Apology Article VII speaks to both the past and the present realities of the Church. At the time of the writing of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, from the perspective of the Lutheran Reformers it appeared as if the Church no longer existed in places. Apology VII confesses:

And this article has been presented for a necessary reason. The article of the Church Catholic or Universal, which is gathered together from every nation under the sun, is very comforting and necessary. We see the infinite dangers which threaten the destruction of the Church. In the Church itself, infinite is the multitude of the wicked who oppress it despise bitterly hate and most violently persecute the Word, as the Turks, Mohammedans, other tyrants, heretics etc. For this reason the true teaching of the Church are often so utterly suppressed and

disappear, as if there were no Church, which has happened under the papacy; it often seems that the Church has completely perished. Therefore in order that we may not despair but we may know that the Church will nevertheless remain until the end of the world, likewise that we may know that however the great multitude of the wicked is, yet the Church exists, and that Christ affords those gifts which He has promised to the Church, to forgive sins, to hear prayer, to give the Holy Spirit this article in the Creed presents us these consolations.

The Church will endure just as Christ promised. He will raise up preachers of the Gospel. He has called us to repent and confess the faith to the entire world. The megatrends that Tennet outlines are helpful for us to diagnose the challenges and the Law that we need to preach to the people. It is a helpful diagnostic. The answer to the challenges begins in repentance and continues with the proclamation of the Gospel. He has called us to be faithful and to proclaim.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 420.