THE NON-PAULINE MISSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Northern Christians and the Global Christian Movement

Understanding the relationship between the New Testament canon and our view of early Christian mission can help us as Northern Christians work together in a more wholesome way with sisters and brothers in the global South. Northern Christians (a label sometimes used for those of us with roots in Europe, Canada, and the United States) have for at least a century been moving toward an acknowledgment that the Christian movement is global. The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, (the beginning of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement), while focused on the vision of evangelizing the world in their own generation, included fourteen delegates from the "younger" churches appointed by missionary societies. Apparently the World Missionary Conference executive, headed by John R. Mott, was sensitive to the fact that this representation was very small, for it directly appointed three other members from southern churches and assigned six of the 47 public addresses during the conference to them.[1] Since the 1970s, and with greater energy as we entered the twenty-first century, missiologists and sociologists have taken note of the explosion of Christian movements in the global South.[2]

Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren and Brethren in Christ, have come to this understanding somewhat slowly. A photo essay detailing the early history of Mennonite World Conference presented photographs of attendees from 1925, 1930, and 1936, all well dressed Europeans and North Americans. In 1948, however, a photograph was specifically taken of the delegates from "overseas," in which two persons dressed in non-Western clothing were visible in the front row.[3] International conference statements from Puerto Rico in 1975, Hesston, Kansas, 1978, and Strasbourg, France, in 1984 commented on the growing geographical and ethnic diversity within the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ community.[4] The formation of the International Brethren in Christ Fellowship in 1978 and

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[1] Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954) 359.

[2] Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis, 1978); Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Ben M. Carter, *A New Christian Paradigm: The Making of Post-Protestant Christianity* (North Richland Hills, Tex.: BIBAL Press, 2000).

[3] Cornelius J. Dyck and Robert Kreider, eds., "Mennonite World Conference in Review—A Photographic Essay," *Mennonite Life* 33 (1978), 4-23.

[4] Wilbert R. Shenk, *God's New Economy in Mission* (Elkhart, IN: Mission Focus, 1978), appendices 1, 2, and 3.

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the International Committee of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) in 1990 represent other examples of this growing awareness.

The Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) of Anabaptist-related churches and missions groups from around the world, formally initiated in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2003 during the fourteenth assembly of Mennonite World Conference, represents another stage of this awakening. The recent announcement of the second gathering of the GMF, made during the November 2004 meeting of the Asia Mennonite Conference in India,[5] represents an interesting return to one of the regions from which northern Mennonite mission began. It may also be a recognition by leaders of contemporary Mennonite mission efforts of the importance of a globally authentic witness in a twenty-first-century world torn apart by war and religious and ethnic violence. The location for the 2006 GMF is to be Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan, part of predominantly Muslim Central Asia but also the voluntary and involuntary home for many Russian-German Mennonites in the 20th century. This choice of location may be linked to the memory that among the first "northern" Mennonite cross-cultural missionaries was a group of Russian Mennonite who went to Indonesia in the late nineteenth century.[6] Today, in a climate where the most powerful nation in the world, thought by many to be a "Christian" nation, is making war among the Muslim peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia, we may hope that a group of people, committed to the gospel of peace and visibly not dominated by Northerners, can have meaningful opportunities for witness in that part of the world.

Throughout our history, Mennonites have based our missionary efforts in the New Testament. Foremost among the texts which inspire and shape missionary methods for cross-cultural settings has been the book of Acts with its portrayal of Paul's efforts in Asia Minor and the Aegean region. There is little question that Acts plays a central role in most contemporary Christians' views of the early Christian movement and its expansion. I am often struck and bemused by the observation that my students at Eastern Mennonite University—those with some level of biblical awareness—know about Paul's adventuresome travels as "the first missionary," as described in Acts. Yet they have very little idea of what Paul actually says in his letters.

Missiology of Acts as Shaper of Contemporary Thinking

That reality leads me to explore how contemporary Northern understandings of Christian origins intersect with and influence contemporary Christian missiology. If we assume that missiology and theology are intimately related, thus challenging the marginalizing of mission within the theological enterprise, then it can be useful to think

[5] "Plan global gathering," photo caption in *The Mennonite*, Dec. 21, 2004, 19.

[6] See Alle Hoekema, *Dutch Mennonite Mission in Indonesia. Historical Essays*, (Elkhart: IMS, 2001) chap. 4 for details. On the ancient Christian presence in several regions of Central Asia that have been home to Mennonites, see the entries on "Kazakhstan" and "Krygyzstan" in Encyclopedia of Christianity, vol. 3.

about Acts' influence on perceptions of contemporary missionary theology.[7] David Smith, professor in the department of Biblical studies at Taylor University, asserts that the theological significance of Acts is related to its role in the formation of the New Testament canon.[8] According to Smith, the traditional view has been that the inclusion of Acts itself in the New Testament canon was directly tied to its giving the majority of its space to the story of Paul. Yet looking at the content of Acts and its use among early Christian writers demonstrates a different reason for Acts' canonicity, that is, its function as "glue:"

> It takes in hand, so to speak, the 'predictions' of the prophets of Israel (as represented by the Old Testament), the coming of the Messiah (as represented by the Gospels), the teachings of Paul (as represented by the Pauline epistles), and the teachings of the Jerusalem apostles (as represented by the catholic epistles and Revelation), and ties them all together by uniting the *texts* of the Old Testament with the authoritative *persons* of the New Testament—namely, Jesus, the Jerusalem apostles, and Paul….(T)he unparalleled references to the Holy Spirit in Acts establish this unifying function above all else.[9]

Smith spends considerable time later in his work outlining the apocryphal Acts of Peter, John, and Paul, to show why they were not canonized: they did not offer a view of how apostolic authority was to be handed on, and they gave little if any role to the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the unity of all the scriptures, both Old and New Testaments.[10] Although in his earlier discussion of second- through fourth-century Christian writers he makes frequent note of their polemic against heretics (whose errors included more exclusive views of what texts were authoritative), Smith does not link the actual production of the apocryphal Acts with heretical groups, as the popular mind tends to do. He does, however, suggest that his understanding of the role of Acts in forming the New Testament canon offers insights for dealing with the diversity of contemporary "catholic" Christianity. Calling for "all voices to be heard," he refers to the geographical diversity of the patristic witness in "Palestine, Asia Minor, Rome, Gaul, North Africa, and Egypt."[11] Further, he perceives the characteristic Christian move to select a canon within the canon as useful in cementing the unity in diversity required for Christian witness. In the first century this move was reflected as Jewish Christians kept the Torah but decided Gentiles were not required to keep it, making the Torah "'authoritative' over Gentile Christians and nonbinding at the same time."[12]

Smith, then, sees the New Testament canon as represented in Acts' gathering

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[7] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 489-498.

[8] David E. Smith, *The Canonical Function of Acts: A Comparative Analysis* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002).

[9] Smith, 41, 49-50.

[10] Smith, 104-5.

[11] Smith, 120.

[12] Smith, 122.

together of the entire story of God's working with humanity, the story that the writer of Acts obviously wishes his readers to see themselves as part of. Missiological issues are not directly present in Smith's discussion. However, I suggest that the historical impact of Acts within the New Testament canon has created a missiological problem for contemporary Northern Christians. The canonical force of Acts, founded on its missionary theology, has over centuries also become the focus of Christian history and geography. Does an "Actsian" missiology require an Actsian geography and history? What has Acts done to our reading of the global Christian story, with its view of the sweep of Christian expansion from Jerusalem to Rome, and with Rome as the jumping off point for the expansion of the faith into Europe?

It is precisely at this point that I wish to turn to my primary task here, to offer an interpretation of the work of French exegete Lucien Legrand on the understandings that underpinned Paul's mission. I offer this focused attention to Legrand's work because it is written in French and hence less accessible to many North Americans. It is my perception that the canonical function of Acts, including, if Smith is correct, its "canon within a canon" role, has not been helpful to Christian understandings of the historical-geographical construction of the movement. A glance at the maps in the back of most of our Bibles helps to make this clear. Most of those map collections include one titled "New Testament world" or "Journeys of the Apostle Paul." When we look at the borders of those particular maps, familiarity may impede our ability to see what is missing. For the maps are usually cut off just at the Nile Delta and Damascus. Despite Acts' nod to the reality of a non-Pauline movement, in its recital of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian official in chapter 8, these maps do not have room to include Meroe, the capital of Nubia (in today's northern Sudan) where this official served the Kandakē of that land.[13]

Legrand, a long-time professor in India, rightly insists that "spontaneous generation" is inadequate as an explanation of the Christian movement east- and southward. Yet the narrative of Acts, even though it is called "of the Apostles," does not go in an eastern direction beyond the Jerusalem-Damascus-Antioch axis and, as we have already noticed, makes only a passing mention of the southward spread of the gospel. Any dependence on apocryphal writings to determine parts of that story not only carries the limitations identified by Smith's work, but also moves us even further in the direction of legendary and traditional literature. Thus Legrand proposes a renewed search within the New Testament canon itself for a different approach to the question of early Christian geography, one that goes beyond the map of Acts. Can the eastward movement of the Gospel be based in the biblical record itself? "Why," Legrand asks, "did (Paul), the Apostle of the Nations (Gentiles) turn toward Europe and not toward Asia?….Why, sent to the nations, did his vision push him toward Spain and not toward India?" With that question in

[13] See also Nancy R. Heisey, "Anabaptist Heritage and Faithful Diversity," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 26 (August 2003), 95-96.

mind, Legrand takes us to Galatians 2, where Paul in defense of his own apostleship outlines the strategy to which he and the leaders of the Jerusalem church agreed.[14]

Paul's Mission and Other New Testament Missions

Near the end of Paul's missionary career, at least from a canonical perspective, Paul summarizes in his letter to the Romans what he has accomplished and what he still hopes to do: "From Jerusalem as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ" (15:19). This comment sounds like an overstatement, since the circle Paul mentions runs only along the eastern Mediterranean coast, through Asia Minor, across the Aegean into Macedonia and through what is contemporary Albania. The fact that he makes this comment as he expresses the goal of traveling to Rome and then westward to Spain (15:23-24) does not change the fact that he makes no mention of significant other geographical regions known to residents of the Mediterranean region: Egypt and Ethiopia (the Hebrew Cush; today northern Sudan) to the south, and Persia and east beyond the Indus River. A map according to the description of the first-century B.C.E. Roman geographer Strabo reflects the known world from this Mediterranean perspective.[15] Strabo's geographical perspective has been understood to support the budding imperial worldview of Augustus.[16] Nevertheless, this map clearly indicates the significance of regions outside Roman control. The Jewish Diaspora, albeit with a very different self-perception, had for centuries been rooted both in Persia, and as far south as Elephantine, on the first cataract of the Nile River (the acknowledged southern border of the Roman Empire).

Another representation of the first-century Jewish perspective, the catalogue of nations in Acts 2:9-11, which frames a world centered around Jerusalem, includes the distant eastern regions of Parthia, Media, and Elam, and southern regions from Arabia (Jordan), Cyrene (Libya), and Egypt. Europe is only represented by Rome.[17] The impact of this geographical point of view, based on a biblical reading, can still be seen in a sixteenth-century map that is shaped like a three-leaf clover with Jerusalem at the center.[18] In a first-century letter of King Agrippa I to Emperor Caligula, reported by Philo, a more extensive list of regions where Jews lived mentions colonies in Europe, but only along the eastern (Aegean) coastline.[19]

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[14] Lucien Legrand, *L'Apôtre des nations? Paul et la stratégie missionnaire des églises apostoliques* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 11-12. All translations from Legrand are my own.

[15] Legrand, 20, 23.

[16] Nicholas Purcell, "Strabo," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1996); for more detail on Strabo's world see Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*. Vol. 1: *Beginnings to 1500*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, rev'd ed. 1998) 4-6; 30; Strabo, *Geographica*, English edition usually cited from Loeb Classical Library (London 1917).

[17] NRSV1990 Zondervan edition, 1231; see also J. A. Brinkman, "The Literary Background of the Catalogue of Nations' (Acts 2:9-11)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (October 1963), 418-427.

[18] Legrand, 25, 112.

[19] Legrand, Philo *Legation* 281.

Paul frequently describes himself as the "apostle to the nations/Gentiles"(Rom 11:13, Gal 1:16, 2:2, 8). This language has unconsciously conveyed to twenty-first-century Northerners the idea of Paul as a missionary to the world; but from the perspective of a first-century Diaspora Jew, as reflected in Acts 2 and the letter of Agrippa, clearly the whole world was not in view for Paul's mission. Japanese biblical scholar Takashi Kato argues that the dissonance between these two geographical perspectives, one Rome-centered and the other reflecting the traditional view of the Jewish Diaspora, comes from Luke's Euro-centric orientation. Thus Luke's orientation assumed that the gospel must first reach the capital of the empire, and only from that point would it be able to conquer the world. Although the overarching framework of Acts is Rome-centered, however, Luke himself in Acts 2 represents the Jewish Diaspora perspective, as we have seen. Further, Paul's comments in Romans also seem "Euro-centric." While Luke may have failed to critique the threat of Roman hegemony to the expanding Christian movement, it would seem strange that Paul, a Diaspora Jew, would share that perspective. These questions suggest the need to look more carefully at what Paul's understanding of his missionary mandate was.[20]

Central to how Paul viewed his mission is his statement in Galatians 2:9 that James, Cephas, and John "gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." What was the understanding that Paul and Barnabas outlined together with the Jerusalem "pillars"? Should the division of labor be understood as ethnic, geographic, or "kerygmatic"? Several New Testament scholars have proposed what Legrand labels a kerygmatic interpretation, an understanding that might more accurately be titled a religious praxis perspective. That is, the mission to the Jews assumed the continuation of Torah observance among Jewish Jesus believers, while Paul's mission to the nations proclaimed the law-free gospel spelled out in Galatians. Such an agreed-upon distinction between Peter's mission to Jews and Paul's to Gentiles could be suggested by the earlier statement in Galatians 2:7.[21]

Offering a slightly different perspective than verse 9, Gal. 2:7 notes that "the acknowledged (Jerusalem) leaders" (v. 6) "saw that (Paul—not Paul and Barnabas) had been "entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised," just as Peter (not all three pillars) had been "entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised." This hints that Peter was at the center of the Jerusalem leadership as well as primarily responsible for spreading the message of Jesus. Most scholars have read the report in verse 11 of Peter coming to Antioch as a sign that the Jerusalem leadership had passed to James, especially since verse 12 reports that people then came to Antioch "from James."

Legrand challenges such a reading as reflective of a later theology that assumes

[20] Legrand, 34-36. Takashi Kato, *La pensée sociale de Luc-Actes*, Etudes d'histoire et philosophie religieuses (Paris: Presses universitaires, 1997), 262-266.

[21] Legrand, 43-49; Michael Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions* (London: SCM, 1994); see also John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

church and mission leadership to be separate. Paul certainly does not understand things that way, proclaiming that he was "called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1); Legrand proposes that neither did Peter. Elsewhere in Acts, this early Christian belief that leadership in the church and responsibility for spreading the gospel go together is reflected by the itinerancy of Philip (ch. 8) after his call to help administer the life of the community in Jerusalem (ch. 6). Legrand summarizes:

> "The Jerusalem meeting was thinking of regions which, from an ethnico-religious perspective, that of the Israelites, could be considered as either Judaized or not.... Paul, traveling into Europe, was going to address himself to the world of the Nations, to the Uncircumcision. On the other hand, Alexandria and Egypt, Babylon and Persia were the world marked by the knowledge, and even in a certain measure the recognition, of what Israel meant. It was this vast world, and not Palestine alone, which became the province of the Jerusalem apostles."[22]

After establishing this ethnic and geographic base for Paul's mission to the nations, Legrand proceeds to the question of what the New Testament canon might reveal about the ongoing first-century mission to the Jewish Diaspora. Agreeing with Smith that the shape of the New Testament canon is strongly marked by its understanding of Paul's mission, he returns to the beginning of Acts to pursue the question about the mission given to Peter and the other Jerusalem apostles. Suggesting that the Lukan list of nations is tied to Peter as the Pentecost preacher, he adds, "Acts 2:9-11 enumerates the regions that Luke knew were touched by the gospel proclamation but were not part of Paul's evangelistic program." Of the five provinces of Asia that are listed, only Phyrgia and Pamphilia, according to Acts, were included in Paul's activity, and these, according to Acts, were in Paul's field of activity only before his agreement with the Jerusalem leaders (Legrand equates the meeting outlined in Galatians 2 with the Jerusalem Council account of Acts 15.)[23]

Following the Jerusalem Council, according to Acts, we find the puzzling passage of chapter 16 where Paul and his companions are "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (16:6). Immediately thereafter comes Paul's vision in Troas and the crossing over of his party to Macedonia. Legrand suggests that Acts 16 reveals an understanding of the agreement Paul described in Galatians 2, proposing that Luke indirectly underlines the division of geographical mission areas. He then turns to two other New Testament lists, first the list of the "exiles of the Dispersion" of 1 Peter 1:1. A striking correspondence exists between Peter's letter and the lists in Acts 2 and 16:

Acts 2 & 16	*1 Peter 1*
Cappadocia	Cappadocia
Pontus	Pontus
Bithynia	Bithynia

[22] Legrand, 56-61.
[23] Legrand, 63-65.

Asia	Asia
Galatia	Galatia
Phrygia	
Pamphylia[24]	

While 1 Peter has generally been understood to be addressed to Gentile believers, those believers were resident in a region with a strong Jewish population. Peter's use of the terms "exile" and "Diaspora," and the strong theme throughout the letter that the believing community are "strangers" indicate a clear identification with Jewish experience. Indeed, one study describes the letter, whoever the addressees, as bearing a strong "Jewish aspect," representative of a sending community in Rome.[25] Peter's letter, then, well represents a mission within the framework of Peter's Diaspora proclamation. Indeed, if Gentile believers first received the news of Jesus within a Jewish setting, they might later find themselves doubly exiled, both from their pagan background and the Jewish community who later repudiated them for failing to follow Torah.[26]

Turning to a second list, the letters to the churches in Revelation, it can be noted of the seven churches addressed—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—only Ephesus is connected with Paul's mission (Rev. 1:11). As evidence of a different character for these churches in John's orbit, it is noteworthy that the letters of Pergamum and Thyatira both strongly condemn members of the community who permitted the eating of food offered to idols (2:14; 2:20). While this approach clearly reflects the instructions of the letter of James in Acts (15:20, 29), it varies from Paul's comments on the same issue in 1 Corinthians, when he identifies those who are troubled by eating such food as those of "weak conscience." (See also Romans 14:2). While Paul does not disregard the counsel of James, he seems clearly to be addressing a setting where the degree of Jewish sensitivity on this question is less central to community life.[27]

Legrand concludes from these observations that the New Testament canon, while focusing on Paul's mission and his writing, offers evidence of the existence of other Jewish missionary movements within the early Jesus-believing community. Paul's letter to the Roman house churches, whom he had not met (Rom 1:8,13), is itself an obvious New Testament admission that others besides Paul spread the earliest message of Jesus. Acts as well, with Paul's pre-Christian desire to stamp out Jesus-believing communities already existing in Damascus, the dispersion of believers from Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen, and Peter's work in Antioch, insists that the first missionary activity was directed to Jews. Further, communities within the Jewish orbit such as Samaritans and an Ethiopian

[24] Legrand, 69.

[25] Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 133.

[26] Legrand, 70.

[27] Legrand, 71-72.

who had come to Jerusalem "to worship" (8:27) fill the early chapters of Acts. Legrand thus agrees with others that "the church which would become the 'great church' of the second and third centuries…opposed a privileged position for any one apostle."[28] Neither should the early Christian effort be framed as a division of labor solely between Peter and Paul. The New Testament witness is to different churches, shaped by the particular missions of Paul, Peter, James and John. [29]

Cities Where Apostolic Missions Intersected

Revelation's letter to Ephesus nevertheless calls us to think further about parts of the New Testament world where the activities of Paul's mission to the nations intersected with regions that were likely part of the mission to the circumcised; in addition to Ephesus, those cities included Antioch, Corinth and Rome. Beginning with Antioch, Acts reports that the city was reached by believers fleeing persecution in Jerusalem in the context of Stephen's martyrdom. In this capital of the Roman east, the text reports, "they spoke to no one except Jews" (Acts 11:19). The Jerusalem leaders send Barnabas to Antioch in response to reports of growth in the church there (11:22), and Barnabas in turn brings Paul to assist in the work (11:25-26). Antioch becomes the center of Barnabas' and Paul's mission until the time of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, after which time Paul and Barnabas separate, and Paul heads to Macedonia with Silas (Acts 16:1-10). According to Acts, the rest of Paul's travels are concentrated in the Aegean basin, which we have already seen is located geographically in the realm of "the nations." While it is not the the concern here to tease out all the recent debate about the relationship between the Acts and Galatians accounts, it must be noted that in Galatians 2, after outlining his agreement with the Jerusalem apostles, Paul reports his confrontation of Peter precisely in Antioch, over issues of other Jewish Christian teaching about how Gentile believers were to behave (Gal 2:11-14). Paul provides no further autobiographical detail after this comment, but his letter-writing career supports the Acts account that from then on his work was carried out primarily in Europe.[30]

Much of the later mission to the nations, according to both Acts and Paul's letters, was centered in Ephesus. Both Acts and Paul refer, although obliquely, to both his work there and to tension with other Jewish Jesus believers. There is the hint of a Diaspora mission from Alexandria, in the note about the powerful preaching of Apollos in Ephesus, and Paul's later meeting with this church (Acts 18:24-28; 19:1). Jewish exorcists who used "the name of the Lord Jesus" as Paul did were repudiated (Acts 19:13-16). Paul somewhat enigmatically describes his battle with "wild animals at Ephesus" (in 1 Corinthians 15:32)

[28] François Bovon, "The Canonical Structure of Gospel and Apostle," *The Canon Debate*, ed., Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002) 522.

[29] Legrand, 74.

[30] Legrand, 76-78.

but then proclaims "a wide open door for effective work" in that city (16:9). It is surprising that Legrand does not refer at all here to the traditional link between John and Ephesus. This may be because that tradition is reported only from the second century.[31] As far as the first-century mission, then, Legrand suggests that, in contrast to what took place in Antioch, in Ephesus Paul's vision for mission prevailed. Whatever approach one takes to the nature or degree of ongoing conflict between Paul and the other apostles, the record of Acts makes clear that Paul's Ephesus link remained strong, while the apostle to the nations made no further contact with the church in Antioch, even during his final trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17-35; 21:1-15).[32]

Corinth, a city mentioned in Agrippa's letter to Caligula as part of the Jewish Diaspora, was home, according to archeological evidence, to only a small Jewish community. Yet Paul's letters to Corinth provide ample evidence that this city was a point of intersection of the two missions, with a resulting significant degree of friction. Again, surprisingly, Legrand does not refer to the description of conflict that Paul lays out in his first letter, between the parties claiming allegiance to himself, to Christ, and to two other representatives of the Diaspora mission: Cephas (Peter) and Apollos. However, Paul does not seem to feel his own work threatened at this point; indeed, he views the Corinthian conflict as a sign of spiritual immaturity (1 Cor 3:1), presents his work as complementary to that of Apollos (3:6), and indicates in his conclusion an ongoing working relationship with the Alexandrian preacher (16:12). In 2 Corinthians 10-13, however, Paul is at his most defensive in response to criticism and challenge from other "false," "super apostles" (11:5, 13). While Paul does not use the key words "circumcision" and "law" in his reply to his opponents, it seems likely that they are also Jewish Christians. Paul tells the Corinthians quite firmly that he came first to Corinth understanding that he was within "the field that God has assigned to us" (2 Cor 10:13 NRSV). The Greek expression translated as "field," literally reads "the measure of the canon." Traditionally this expression has been given a theological sense, as in the King James Version's "the measure of the rule which God has distributed to us." However, an inscription discovered in Galatia clarifies that the term "canon" could also be understood geographically.[33] The following verses seem as well to refer to the agreement with the other apostles as Paul understood it: "For we were not overstepping our limits when we reached you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ….so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action" (again, here, the term translated "sphere" in the NRSV is "canon") (10:14, 16). Legrand thus proposes that

[31] Richard E. Oster, Jr., "Ephesus," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 548-9.

[32] Legrand, 78-80. On Paul's missionary journey see also David Wenham, *Paul and Jesus: The True Story*. (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 121-126..

[33] J. F. Strange, "Second Corinthians 10:13-16 illuminated by a recently published Inscription," *Biblical Archeologist,* 46 (1983), 168.

the geographical sense of the agreement dealt with situations like Corinth, which were primarily within the framework of the nations, even though they contained small Jewish populations.[34]

Rome, Paul's last reported destination according to Acts, was described by Paul in his letter to the Romans as a jumping-off point for his proposed mission further to the west. Since Legrand's analysis echoes much that I discussed earlier on Romans 13,[35] it is important to note only his argument that in Rome Paul accepts his mission as an intersection with the mission to the Jewish Diaspora. In the process, given the mixed nature of the group in Rome, he avoids the polemical approach of the letter to the Galatians and the sorrowful tone of 2 Corinthians. As in the other cities on the borders between the world of traditional Jewish presence and influence, the situation that Paul addressed in Rome was difficult. It is significant, finally, that Christian tradition eventually portrayed Rome as belonging to both Peter and Paul, marked by their common martyrdom there.[36]

Paul's Mission and the Collection

Having considered this variety of places where the text of Acts and Paul's letters sustain a geographical understanding of the Jerusalem accord, Legrand turns to the final element in the agreement with the Jerusalem apostles. As Paul describes it, some kind of condition was applied to seal their discussion: the "one thing" that they asked (Gal 2:10). Legrand notes that commentators traditionally gave little notice or significance to this phrase.[37] Recently, however, the connection between Paul's note in Galatians and his other references to the collection he was gathering for Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8-9; Rom 15:25-29) has received a great deal of attention. Legrand rightly insists that the call to "remember the poor," which Paul notes he has already been preparing for (Gal 2:10) was not a second thought, but central to the mission strategy of the early believers.

While this advice to "remember the poor" has often been described as essentially a financial obligation, Richard Longenecker sees it not simply as a gift of material resources, but rather "an idiomatic expression" meaning to "keep (someone) in mind as worthy of affection or recognition."[38] The "poor" were the saints in Jerusalem, whose situation reflected the material poverty of a region that had suffered from famine as well as a community who had sought to live out a radical view of sharing possessions (Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-37). Noting a parallel with several Dead Seas Scrolls texts (1QH 5.21, 1QM 14.7), where the community of the poor described a spiritual reality as well, Legrand suggests that the sense of material poverty and spiritual humility before God were joined in the manner

[34] Legrand, 80-87.
[35] See my "Thinking Again About Paul's Mission", in this issue, xx-xx.
[36] Legrand, 93-95.
[37] Legrand, 98, n. 1.
[38] Richard Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 60.

in which the Jerusalem church was perceived. The significance of linking this condition to "remember the poor" with the spiritual and material experience of the first believers was perceived in Augustine's commentary on Galatians:

> The apostles together took responsibility for the poor among the Christians of Judea who had sold their goods and laid them at the feet of the apostles. In the same way, when Paul and Barnabas were sent to the Gentiles, it was understood that the Gentile churches who had not participated in that first sharing would be invited to respond to the needs of those who first participated.[39]

This shared commitment showed the sense of both Paul and the others about the dangers of dividing the mission geographically; the potential for the evolution of two different, separate communities would be great. In response, they agreed on a long-term sharing plan with both theological and practical ramifications.[40]

Legrand concludes his study with a sharp critique of the perspective from which Northern Christians have long read the New Testament:

> "By reading Acts in a way that makes the 'conquest of the West' by Paul and the conversion of Europe the high point of the divine salvation project, the western world of the "pagan" nations commits the error against which Paul had already warned them (in Rom 11)….Paul's warning was not heard. The west came to perceive itself as the trunk (of the olive tree), including in the presuppositions with which it reads the Bible."[41]

Although the New Testament canon gives greatest visibility to the missions of Paul and Peter, the missions of James and John are also visible in its pages. Legrand notes that Indian theologians have long showed great interest in the Johannine writings and their missionary impact. This interest reflects that it is not a question of Pauline writings being missionary and the legacy of John being theological; rather, it underlines the presence of different streams of missionary interest in the New Testament.[42]

Conclusion

In a few concluding comments I want to outline several other aspects of Legrand's study that in my view call for further reflection.

1. This view of how the New Testament record reveals an agreement for both geographically and ethnically diverse missions pushes contemporary Northerners to understand why Christians around the world need a Christian story that is their own, and urges us to support their unearthing and telling that story. If the spread of the gospel in the

[39] Augustine *Commentary to the Galatians* in Migne PL 35, 2113.14.

[40] Legrand, 98-108. See also Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992); also Wenham, 125-126.

[41] Legrand, 115.

[42] Legrand, 116-119; 121-122.

first century was not primarily Paul's responsibility, we must be challenged to allow for stories of the planting and growth of the church that do not need to go through us; or, when these stories acknowledge a historical role for Northern churches, we need to learn to read them without making our role central to how Southern sisters and brothers read the Bible and seek to be faithful to Christ. Neither should we urge sister churches around the world to subscribe to a primitivism that leaps over 1500 years of messy western Christian history. Rather, we should acknowledge their participation in the community as a reflection of a Christian reality that has always been both a gift from outside to every region and is also linked to their own history, including their various religious pasts.

2. This reading of the New Testament record calls us toward a willingness to think about canon, biblically and historically, not so much as fence, but as "space." I do not mean to call for a reopening of the New Testament canon, but rather for an acceptance that reading it from different places will offer diverse perspectives, that, if shared in a way that respects the voices of all, can lead us to more truth. Readings may become useful to diverse communities of believers in a globalized context as they are perceived in the space created between taking our traditions seriously and opening ourselves to the radical newness of the message of Jesus in every place. While allowing the opening of such space may be frightening or apparently lead to chaos, for the descendants of the Anabaptists, a commitment to nonviolently hear each other in a way that makes our community a good news invitation to those around us seems well worth the risk.[43]

3. Finally, if for the first leaders of the Jesus movement, the freedom of the gospel had only one structural requirement, to "remember the poor," we should be asking ourselves whether the structures within which we currently labor are making a real contribution to economic sharing. If they are not, and if the economic realities of the 21st century will require all of us to live more simply so that the good news can be heard, then we had better get to work.

[43] See John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practice of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1997), ch. 5, "The Rule of Paul."