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Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements

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Center for the Study of World
Christian Revitalization Movements

Revitalization

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The Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements contributes to the vitality of Christian mission and local congregations by synthesizing learnings from past and present revitalization movements worldwide. Its approach is interdisciplinary, combining biblical studies, theology, history, anthropology, and sociology.

Revitalization is the twice-yearly bulletin of the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements.

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From the Editor

This edition of *Revitalization* marks the end of one chapter in the Center's work and also the beginning of a new chapter in our study of Christian revitalization movements around the world. First, the ending: in October, the Center held the last of three annual consultations around the theme of revitalization. A report on this gathering is provided below. Second, the new beginning: Dr. Steve O'Malley, the Center's director, shares great news that the Henry Luce Foundation has granted the Center a second grant that will generously support the extension and expansion of our work in identifying and learning from the emergence of renewal movements and renewing communities around the world. Also in this issue, Dr. Chris Kiesling of Asbury Seminary reviews an important work on the theology of church renewal by Jason Vickers of United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH. As another Advent season comes to a close, we will celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ by "remembering the future," recalling the tender mercy of God who is the source and end of all our yearning for the new creation which has already arrived and is yet to come in all the fullness of its glory. It is to this end that the work of the Center is devoted. We are grateful for your interest and support.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let earth receive her King!

Dr. Michael Pasquarello III
Editor, *Revitalization*

Editor's Report on the Last of Three Annual Consultations

Advancing Christian Revitalization in the Twenty First Century, a consultation graciously hosted by Tyndale Theological Seminary of Toronto, Canada, was held October 20 - 23, 2011. The consultation consisted of six case studies focusing on "diaspora" people living in the Toronto area. While this final consultation drew from the findings of the Center's previous consultations in 2009 and 2010, it was unique in testing our accumulative understandings by attending to the reality of diaspora in our time. In other words, we live in a time of unprecedented movements of peoples, both voluntary and involuntary, that are surprising signs bearing witness to the mission of God in

reaching global peoples. This gathering of diaspora community leaders, missiologists, theologians, practitioners, and representatives of the global church was one of the most informative and encouraging events I have attended. I was amazed in hearing of the surprising ways the Spirit is at work among communities of people on the move. Those who graciously allowed us to learn from their life and ministry included:

1) *Greenhills Christian Fellowship* (GCF) in Toronto. The GCF is the story of Filipinos in diaspora. Its origin is in Manila, the Philippines. GCF has been led by the Holy Spirit to follow a missional vision shaped by the Great Commission. This

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Editor's Report (continued from page 1)

has resulted in the sending of families to Canada as new immigrants. A Canadian church planting vision has arisen out of this global movement of people: a Missional Church, A Metropolitan Community, and a Multicultural Country. We learned much in hearing about GCF as "sojourners in Canada on a new journey among diaspora people." We were grateful for the representatives of GCF, and especially their pastor, Dr. Narry Santos, who shared with us the desire to interpret our present time in order to be responsive to God's movement in the world.

2) *The Jesus Network* provided us with a challenging case study emphasizing an "incarnational" model of ministry. Members of the Jesus Network seek to make their homes in communities of immigrants, many of whom are Muslims, sharing in their joys and trials, learning first hand of the cross cultural challenges and opportunities presented by this way of life and witness. As we learned from the case study, the Jesus Movement is a fairly young ministry in the diasporic community of Toronto, and as such, its leaders find they must be reliant on the leadership of the Spirit in an ongoing process of discernment. In other words, this form of ministry cannot be planned in advance and then "applied" to a chosen situation. They take seriously the scriptural admonition that Christians walk by faith and not by sight. Perhaps the most encouraging characteristic of this ministry is the strong desire displayed by new disciples of Jesus who return to and serve among the people of their own cultures. Much of the discussion revolved around the importance of hospitality, lasting relationships, the gift of children, and the importance of sharing difficulties in relationships of trust.

3) *Young Nak Korean Presbyterian Church* shared with us their story of ministry to other Southeast Asian communities. They have named this work, "Mosaic Cultural Ministry." The Young Nak Church, led by the Rev. John Cheng, sees its ministry as contributing to a great mosaic that comprises a beautiful whole through the work of the Holy Spirit. Their support of diaspora people in Toronto, specifically those from Southeast Asia, aims to assist their fellow ethnic minorities in forming and building up

autonomous congregations that serve and participate in the Kingdom of God. We were pleased to hear about the deeper theological convictions that have shaped this strong commitment to servant leadership, a ministry that supports and encourages congregations from Thailand, Myanmar, Viet Nam, and Laos. As Pastor Cheng pointed out in his presentation, this is not a cross cultural ministry but a ministry that seeks to nurture and strengthen particular ministries within a particular culture. The ministry, then, aims to serve people groups who are seen as a sign of God's providential work, rather than a sociological category to be studied, analyzed, and "reached."

4) *The Rahab Ministry* presented us with a very different kind of case study, a ministry with Asian women in the Toronto area who are caught in the sex trade. The model for the ministry has been the compassion extended by Jesus to sinners, outcasts, and prostitutes. In this manner, the witness of the gospel was the starting point for Rahab Ministry. Its members see their present work as a continuation of and participation in the mission of the Triune God who hears the cries of those in bondage and who delivers them from their captivity to enjoy the blessings of his reign in Jesus Christ. What was most informative about this case study was the strong theological foundation on which it is based. Much study and prayer has gone into the process of arriving at an appropriate and substantive theological understanding of the sex trade and the women who are bound by its power. Moreover, this strong theology of the human person is joined with an equally strong theology of salvation and the church. Thus, Rahab Ministry provided keen insight into the humanness of diasporan women, who, created in the divine image, have been caught in the dehumanizing grip of abusive and destructive powers.

5) *St. Maurice & St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church* in Toronto, led by Fr. Pishoy Salama, provided a wonderful study of a multicultural, missionary Coptic Orthodox Church in the diaspora. Fr. Pishoy described the way by which this congregation was established with the blessing and authorization of H.H. Pope Shenoude III of Cairo, Egypt. The ministry was seen as

a potential means of revival for the Coptic Church in Toronto and North America. The identity of this ministry is deeply rooted in the Coptic Orthodox faith, its doctrine, and its traditions. Yet this ministry has also been affected by its diasporan location, and therefore reflects and celebrates the diverse, multicultural ethos of Toronto. St. Maurice & St. Verena presented a good test case for our thinking about how diaspora communities remain true to the faith of their ecclesial traditions while moving their home and mission to a strange and distant culture. What we learned from Fr. Pishoy and others is that this challenge in ongoing and requires constant self-examination and evaluation to discern how to best carry out its commitment to evangelism, social ministries, and leadership development. Hospitality, an openness to graciously receive seekers and strangers has been a key to the flourishing of this ministry.

6) *The East African Revival*, a movement of the Balokole (Luganda for the Saved People) in the Anglican Church of Uganda, gave us much to consider in our discussion of revitalization movements. The designation of "saved people" or Balokole, points to the core identity of the East African revival, a call to all, both those within and outside the church, to head the call of God to salvation and a life of wholesale commitment. We learned that this revival was not organizational or institutional in form, but rather was a fellowship of brothers and sisters which comprises a distinct type of evangelical Christianity, not unlike the evangelical revivals in the UK during the 18th century. One of the unique characteristics of the Ba Balokole has been the strangeness of this call to ropean/North American and African sensibilities. This is because the cross has been central to this form of life, devotion, and experience which is marked by the confession of God's cleansing power.

The fruit of this confession has been a life of serious, ethical rigor, separation from the world and its values, and a willingness to sacrifice to remain faithful to the call of the gospel. We were prompted to consider how such movements might provide means of resistance to more culturally accommodated forms of revitalization and mission

A Book Review

Jason E. Vickers, *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal*.
Baylor University Press, 2011. Reviewed by Dr. Chris Kiesling

For several years I have wanted to find a book that could counter a prevailing skepticism that surrounds the Western church and that seems especially prominent among younger adults both within and outside the church. How pleased I was to have finally found it in Jason Vickers' book *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal*. Amidst a perplexing array of proposals for church renewal, most of which begin with an ominous diagnosis of what is wrong with the church, Vickers offers a theological framework by which to find our way through this apparently tangled mess. Equipped with an uncanny capacity to express far-reaching truths with an economy of words that is accessible to readers, Vickers work reminds me of the saying attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes "I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity; I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity."

Vickers contends that like other periods in church history, ours is an age characterized in the church by anxiety. Feeling herself to be in the midst of crisis, her leaders have offered proposal after proposal, most of which begin with a deflated ecclesiology. Fueled by declining membership roles, public scandals, church splits, secularization, competing demands of recreation and leisure time and the like, the church has internalized attitudes of skepticism and defensiveness. It was refreshing to discover that Vickers begins from a different vantage point, pressing us instead to consider the nature, the mission and the sacramental life of the church. Vickers believes that utilizing this as an orienting framework, reinforced by historical theology and proven practices of the church can prevent a blurring of our vision and orients us to a much more appreciative, constructive ecclesiology.

Vickers book is divided into three primary sections, the first of which is given

to a consideration of the nature of the church as it originates at Pentecost and as it comes to be identified in the creeds and confessions of the church through history. This section gives primary emphasis to the posture of a church waiting and relying on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Vickers regards this as a critical reclamation for addressing an overreliance on ourselves which is often implicit in many mission statements and which contributes to our anxiety. He presses us to move beyond debates over which style of worship will bring renewal, and instead prods us with deeper questions: does our worship flow from a miserly or generous pneumatology? Does our worship enable the Holy Trinity to address us? How do we as a church tarry together in prayer as a first step on the journey to renewal?

A useful transition into the second section of the book, which addresses the mission of the church, is Vickers use of the ancient dictum "the rule of worship is the rule of belief." In other words, how we think about and approach Jesus in worship largely determines what we say about him in our witness. This prompts a different set of questions that are often asked in church programming: What dispositions and liturgical resources are endowed by the Spirit that allow the church to experience and witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? How does the Spirit administer grace that helps us transcend ourselves and participate in the mystery and magnanimity of the mission of God in the world? Rather than narrowing options for worship and mission however, Vickers theological convictions concerning the creativity and generosity of the Holy Spirit compel wonderment at the abundant ways the Spirit is inviting us to participate in God's mission in the world. This theological angle of vision enables him to avoid railing against the flaws of an institutional church and to resist passively acquiescing to established structures.

The richest section of the book was the third section which focuses on the sacramental life of the church. Here Vickers contends that our frantic efforts that ask *how* do we get more people to come to church betrays a neglect of the underlying theological question *why* should people come to church - what does the church have to offer? Contrary to what has become the conventional wisdom of our time, that is, that salvation is an easy exchange between an individual believer and Jesus, Vickers argues for a much more robust salvation. Following Augustine, he contends that the struggle from which all other struggles arise is the struggle to know, love and enjoy God. It is when we fail to acknowledge the disordering of our loves and desires; when we foreground intellect and will before converting the affections of the heart; we truncate salvation and leave people frustrated. Church is then devalued because salvation is so easy to obtain, rather than a gift which must be worked out in fear and trembling with the assistance of the Holy Spirit in the company of fellow sojourners. I found myself inwardly applauding as I read Vickers' robust affirmation of the power of Scripture, the sacraments, and the historic practices of the church that are capable of producing in believers the mind of Christ; the virtues of faith, hope and love; and the fruit of the Spirit. hope and love; and the fruit of the Spirit.

Far from being irrelevant or outdated, these gifts are essential to restoring confidence in a church which is the bride of Christ. While the theological wisdom presented in *Minding the Good Ground* is not able to resolve every practical question a congregation may face in its common life and mission, Vickers' delightful interpretation goes a long way toward renewing the task of renewal by resituating the nature and purpose of the church within the gracious and sufficient work of the Triune God.

Director's Report

On October 20-23, the Center completed its third and final consultation in Toronto, where we were hosted by Tynedale Seminary, Canada's leading evangelical seminary. Thirty-one invited participants came together in North America's most ethnically diverse city to engage the theme of "Uncovering and Illuminating Revitalization in Twenty First Century World Christianity". They came from 14 nations, representing Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Anglican, evangelical Protestant, Pentecostal, and indigenous churches from the Global South and East. Working from the data of the previous consultations—as presented in the volume *Interpretive Trends in Christian Revitalization in the Early 21st Century*—the participants engaged six cutting-edge case studies featuring a range of revitalization movements serving within leading diaspora communities in Toronto. Their task was to probe the ways in which a set of new and uncharted expressions of revitalization are

extending, corroborating, or also challenging extant theories of revitalization, and what this means for the *missio Dei* in the present century.

The Toronto consultation was followed by a public forum hosted by a large Chinese congregation in Toronto, the Richmond Hill Christian Community Church, on the theme "Mosaic Ministry: Exploring the New Church". The revitalizing work of God amid the uniquely diverse ethnic diversity that characterizes Toronto was celebrated through worship, joined by choirs from several different ethnic congregations in the city, and also through workshops focused on lay mobilization and panel discussion that conveyed major insights from the consultation. This closing event was funded by a gift from the Center for Lay Mobilization at Asbury Seminary, working with the Revitalization Center.

As we close 2011, we also bring to a close the present Luce-sponsored proj-

ect, which began in 2007, and turn toward a new direction of research coming in 2012. In November the Center became the recipient of a second grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, in the amount of \$350,000, which enables it to shift its work to new level. We are grateful to the Luce Foundation for making this possible. In the next four years, a series of annual consultations will be held in leading megacities of the Global South and East, beginning with Nairobi in early 2013. This will enable us to learn from those most directly involved in the locales where Christian revitalization, understood as the *missio Dei* to renew the *imago Dei* within our fallen humanity, is being most extensively manifested in these times by the Holy Spirit. In all, our intent is to track with the directions where God is going in this new day for the sake of completing that great redemption for which our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth to inaugurate.

—J. Steven O'Malley, Ph.D, Director

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