

Oikodomē. July 10, 2011.

Why Bother Talking about the Baptized Nation...

By Pastor Christopher Seah

...when foreign missions seems so much more important and exciting? That may be the question on our minds after the missions-focused month we've just enjoyed. Like me, you would have been encouraged by what Lloyd and Eda Kim had to teach. But it might seem somewhat self-centered, even counterproductive, to return from the peaks of world missions to the valleys of what seems to be our own self-contemplation. This prompts me to ask the question: What exactly is the connection between this year's theme on Baptized Nation (which sounds very self-focused) and the idea of missions (which seems more outward-oriented)? Here's one answer: *Since missions involves planting or nurturing Baptized Communities outside our own country and society, we need to know what a Baptized Community ought to look like.* Thus, all that we have learned up to this point—the meaning of Baptism, the Baptized worldview, the Baptized vocation, the Baptized Code of Conduct, etc.—are important for missions. They are the content of our instruction and the way of life we seek to impart.

Of course, we can talk about the Church in a way that is little more than navel-gazing. That happens when we focus on all the unsolvable issues that continue to plague segments of the Christian world (Bible translations, millennial views, etc.). But there is a way to focus on the Church that generates energy and passion. That is by taking a Kingdom/National perspective, re-discovering the Church as God's Baptized Nation.

How would this large-scale, Kingdom perspective on the Church contribute to missions?

First, **it reminds us that our own Church is part of a larger Community of God.** There are other Communities of the Kingdom that need our encouragement. There are other Churches waiting to be born like new suns. As such, the essence of foreign missions is about encouraging and nurturing such Communities in cultures and societies other than our own.

Second, **it fosters a sense of unity with other Churches overseas.** One of the articles of our Christian Faith is, "the Holy Catholic Church." And one of the implications of the Church's Catholicity is that we transcend time, space, and ethnicity. Any Church that preaches the Word, administers the sacraments, and practices Church discipline is a true Church of Jesus Christ and part of the one Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). That means we (ought to) have many more things in common with our Kenyan brothers and sisters in Christ than our fellow Singaporeans who may be secular.

Third, by fostering a sense of unity, **this big-picture vision of the Church helps deepen our love for Churches overseas.** One reason missions seems so intimidating is due to the “foreignness” of the people and the new culture. I certainly do not want to underestimate the challenges posed by cultural differences. But if we allow the truth of the one Body-Temple-Kingdom-Nation of Christ to take root in our hearts, to shape the way we perceive things, I would think that we are in a better position to develop a deeper affection for brothers and sisters in other lands. After all, we are all of Christ. And Christ cannot despise himself.

Finally, **having a Kingdom/Nation perspective on the Church reminds us to remind our foreign brethren to retain that same perspective.** When we involve ourselves in the Churches of other lands, we ought to try to help them (if such help is truly needed) to develop their own cultural ways of expressing the Baptized Life. But then again, the Churches of Cambodia, Vietnam, or Myanmar must recognize that they too are not alone. They may not function as if the rest of the Church does not exist! God wants them to relate with other foreign Churches and share in the nurturing of Baptized Communities elsewhere. So keeping the Kingdom perspective in mind is necessary for nurturing healthy foreign Churches.

Hopefully, we now have a better understanding of how this year’s theme relates to missions. Keep Colossians 3:11 before you always: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”

----ooOOOoo---