



Discovering God's Mission



Robert Hunt, Director of
Global Theological Education

When I was growing up one of the most beloved sets of books in our house was Will and Ariel Durant's *History of Civilization*. It has been widely reprinted, and looks impressive on a book shelf. I've seen sets for ten dollars a volume.

I suspect that far fewer people read these books than buy them, but in our house books were for reading, and I read them all. They were nothing short of a revelation. Durant was a Catholic, and his volume on the Reformation was my first exposure to a different point of view about my reformer heroes. More mind boggling were the histories of China and India. For me, having grown up in the United States, it was incredible to realize that these great civilizations had developed, flourished, and contributed to human knowledge and commerce with nary a influence from the Greeks, Romans, and Europeans. And then there were

the Arabs, and the Turks. Why hadn't anyone told me about all the things they had been up to for thousands of years?

What the Durants didn't say, and I only learned when I moved to Malaysia as a missionary, is that there is another untold history. It is the history of what God has been doing beyond the boundaries of the Christian world. The Bible gives us hints of God's involvement with what it calls "the nations." Amos, in verse 9:7 of the eponymous book, reminds Israel that God has also been active in positive ways among the Philistines and the Arameans. The disciples of Jesus likewise find that God's Spirit has preceded them into the world. But that isn't the center of the Biblical story, so it is often overlooked.

Yet there is a way to learn about what God has been up to among the nations. That is to follow the apostles into the world. The immersion experiences of the GTE program make that possible for Perkins students, faculty and others. They begin to experience first hand the *rest* of the story of God with humanity, in the hope that our churches will join all God's people in writing the next chapters of that epic tale.

Immersion Courses in Bethlehem, Mexico City, and the Arizona Borderlands

In January and March of 2006 more than 40 Perkins students participated in immersion courses. These are their reports on what these experiences have meant.

Dennis Cates—Bethlehem: The Bethlehem immersion experience provided me with an opportunity to reanalyze my call to ministry. Where am I when facing the realities of a brutalized and torn world? How can I strengthen myself so that I will be an example for those I serve? Have I changed as a result of this experience? Without a doubt, my sense of being one of God's lost sheep has been reconfirmed. I have come face-to-face with desperation and despair. I have also come face-to-face with joy and hope. Solidarity with all creatures great and small prompts me to say, "Here I am Lord."

Sue Gross—Bethlehem: I didn't know how touched I would be by the experience. To a small degree, we experienced some of the oppression that is reality for Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Meeting and talking with Palestinians and beginning to understand their frustration and hopelessness has changed my life. Being in the Holy Land and seeing the Christian Holy Sites is life changing too. The experience has given me a whole new way to read the Bible; it is almost like I can now be there when I read the Bible.

Gloria McGee-Denton—Bethlehem: Anyone can be a tourist, but not just anyone is given access to the history making groups, leaders and information that we

2006 Immersions (Continued)

were. My time in Palestine awakened me to the realization that there is so much more to the world, that it goes far beyond my daily pressures and deadlines, but not too far for partnership and conversation and empathetic prayers, and certainly not so far as to be beyond God's embrace. I am a better Believer, a better Disciple, and a better Minister for my experience.



Antoni Luc—Borderlands: I have been fortunate to take a number of really great classes at Perkins, and to have a number of wonderful professors, but nothing at Perkins compares to the level of intellectual, theological and personal "stretching" I underwent in this course. The theological issues of sin, evil, nature of God, nature of humanity, the Incarnation, and the issue of the nature of salvation were all a part of the reflection and discussion of this trip. I came home from this trip with a number of theological, economical, po-

Global Theological Education for Volunteers in Mission

The Global Theological Education Program at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, will offer "Hearts and Minds for Mission: An Intensive Seminar for Lay Mission Volunteers" October 6th and 7th, 2006. The seminar will focus on ways that volunteers in mission understand and participate in restoration and healing as expressions of the missionary vocation of the church. Over the last three decades volunteer short term missionaries have become one of the most important groups in Christian mission, even as mission has become increasingly important to the self-understanding of Christian churches. In this seminar Perkins School of Theology faculty members will lead workshops focusing on missionary spirituality, scriptural guidance for missionaries, and the theology and history of Christian missions. The seminar will begin on a Friday evening and conclude Saturday afternoon. It will be held in Selecman Hall on the SMU campus. Dates and registration information are available at www.smu.edu/globaltheology.

litical and personal questions - . This particular course has had a direct impact not only on the way I think theologically but also on the way in which I intend to live out my life politically and economically.

Lance Dixon—Mexico City: The experience gave me an entirely new understanding of the word "immersion," which is now based on experience. I stayed at the seminary in Mexico City; I spent a weekend with a local pastor and helped him with his duties; I stayed with a pastor and his family in Mexico city for one night; and I was able to visit a wide variety of historical sites. The trip was much more than I expected it to be and I am grateful I went. By spending time in a different culture I learned a great deal about my own culture and I also learned to identify many things that are universal and cross-cultural. I would recommend an immersion experience to any person who wants to seriously reflect theologically on God's work and presence throughout the world.

Travel Stipends Offered for GTE Immersion Courses.

In 2005 - 2006 Perkins School of Theology offered more than \$20,000 in travel stipends to 40 plus students participating in immersion courses. Only a travel stipend makes it possible for these students to participate in a cross-cultural immersion program.

The Global Theological Education Fund is sustained by the generous donations of individuals, Sunday school classes, and churches that understand the value and necessity of cross-cultural experience for the leadership of a church in mission. Your contributions will be most welcome, and will make it possible for students called to ministry and mission to receive the best possible training.

Contributions should be mailed to Perkins Office of Development. Checks should be made out to *Perkins School of Theology GTE Program*.



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