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MISSION KNOWING,
EVANGELISTIC UNDERSTANDING
*A CREDO OF MISSION WITH EVANGELISM IN THE CONTEXT OF I
CHRONICLES 12:32*

ADAM W. ANDERSON
AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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Introduction

At its most basic level, it's not difficult for me to state a credo of mission and evangelism. I believe in them both. I believe that they are both important. I believe they should be integral parts of an individual's ministry as well as the church's corporate ministry; they are inescapable elements of who we are created to be. However, what I continue to be unsure of is how the two concepts work together in order to create the type of ministry that is both speaking and volitionally demonstrating the good news of the Gospel to the world. This paper's aim is to take a critical look at how I understand how the mission and evangelism may engage one another, developing a type of mission hermeneutics that dances between a deep knowing and insightful explanation. By basing this dance in the oft-overlooked passage of I Chronicles 12:32, I will argue that my credo of mission and evangelism lies in the deep knowing of *yada* with the understanding of *binah*, just as the tribe of Issachar is described as doing. In the end, this creates a credo that I can live into, and not just describe.

An Exegesis of I Chronicles 12:32

וּמִבְנֵי יִשָּׁשכָר יוֹדְעֵי בִינָה לְעֵתִים לְדַעַת מַה־יַּעֲשֶׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל רָאשֵׁיהֶם מְאֹתָיִם וְכָל־אֶחָיָהֶם
עַל־פִּיהֶם

NRSV: Of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, two hundred chiefs, and all their kindred under their command.

Personal Translation: And from the children of Issachar, the ones knowing understanding of the times, to know Israel's doing. [There were] two hundred chiefs, and all of their brothers at their command.

The passage at the center of my credo is part of the Chroniclers retelling of the different tribes that had allied with David as he assumes the crown following the death of Saul. Saul's death in I Chronicles 10:4 is one of the few moments that someone commits suicide, and as a

¹ Emphases for *yada* and *binah*.

result, his defeat and death of already seems important to note as unique. Moreover, “this is the only place in Chronicles where Yahweh directly intervenes to make a dynastic change... what happened in the transition from Saul to David... was divine retribution at work, and even more, divine providence.”² The Chronicler makes even greater note of this as he writes the strength of David’s army, which is “the fullest tally of the Israelite tribes in the Hebrew Bible.”³ Readers are meant to understand according the Chronicler that God’s movement was towards David and away from Saul.

The tribe of Issachar was a member of the army that David had amassed. They had been referenced previously by the Chronicler as mighty warriors that were numerous and growing. However, as the Chronicler retells the story of Issachar during David’s coronation, something more is revealed, as they are not just capable in war, but also having “had an understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.”⁴ Paul Hooker, in his commentary on I and II Chronicles notes how unusual the comment is, arguing that “the precise intent of this phrase is lost, but it probably implies that the Issacharites were perhaps more ready than others to come to David’s side or that they were instrumental in persuading others that the moment was right to join with David.”⁵ Both of Hooker’s arguments for the passage could be read as mission and evangelism – an ability to sense how God is at work, and ability to speak to others about the work God was doing in the world.⁶ This unique ability is expressed in the

² Yee, Page, and Coomber, *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, I. 14481. *nb* – The Amazon Kindle various only has location and not page numbers.

³ Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Third Edition, New Revised Standard Version*, 597.

⁴ I Chronicles 12:32, NRSV

⁵ Hooker, *First and Second Chronicles*, 60.

⁶ I would argue that this is in consonance with Bosch’s definition, especially as he unfolds his definition of evangelization primarily as one of witness, see *The Study of Evangelism*, p 17.

passage through two words that describe the type of knowledge that the Issacharites: *yada* (which in this passage is rendered in its participial form, יָדָעַי) and *binah* (בִּינָה).

While *yada* is a relatively common word within the Hebrew Bible, *binah* is less so, and even less common is their placement next to each other: only three other locations have these two words adjoining one another.⁷ All four instances relate to a type of deep, unique knowledge; one that is particularly prized amongst those who seek wisdom as well as those in positions of power. Additionally, each of these words individually are specific types of knowledge. Their proximity to one other and their translation indicate a relationship between the two. The resulting interrelationship enabled the Issacharites to be uniquely skilled in understanding and interpreting context and God's mission.

The first part of my credo of mission and evangelism, then, is to state that mission and evangelism are separate and unique categories and are drawn from two specific types of human knowledge: a subjective and embodied knowledge defined through *yada*, and an analytical knowledge defined by *binah*. Both are equally valuable. When they inform each other, they give rise to the witness of God, just as the Issacharites did with David.

Yada and Mission

In Hebrew Scripture *Yada* is a common word (used 944 times) that generally is defined in English as "to know". However, this knowledge tends to be more embodied: knowing something deep inside oneself, or "a multitude of shades of knowledge gained by the senses."⁸ It is not a knowledge of object of but of subject, including a sexual knowing⁹, a revelation of

⁷ 2 Chronicles 2:12; Proverbs 4:1; Daniel 2:21.

⁸ Harris, Jr, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, sec. 848.

⁹ Gen 4:1, Gen 19, I Sam 1:19, I Kings 1:4

self¹⁰, and an knowledge of the self and others¹¹. Interestingly, the knowing of *yada* is not always positive. When the term is used euphemistically, it has been within the context of sexual assault and rape, and “this may have greater implications on other texts where *yada* is found in that they may also be implying aggressive or violent activity.”¹² In other words, *yada* is not pure, but it is powerful, deeply connected to our knowing of ourselves, and its use can have serious consequences, both for good and for ill.

This, too, might be a fine summary for the history of Christian mission writ large. Our desire to share the Gospel has come from the incarnate Christ, who in his own body carries a unique sense of *yada* – fully human, fully God deeply integrated within his very being, who, especially in John, deeply knew and embodied his incarnation. Jesus Christ’s uniqueness was something to bear witness to, not analyze: “although the New Testament is not a systematic handbook of theology, its missionary character reveals that the early followers of Jesus believed they had a divine mandate to bear witness to what they had seen of his ministry, of his message, and especially of his stunning appearances after the crucifixion.”¹³ Even English synonyms to mission like “calling” and “vocation” reflect this kind of embodied *yada* knowledge as something separate and distinct from more descriptive job titles.

History demonstrates that just like *yada* in Hebrew Scripture, our deep sense of mission can be violent and oppressive, as many modern critics have rightly noted. When coupled with power, *yada* can become colonializing – forcing one’s deep self-knowledge on someone else,

¹⁰ Exo 6:3, Rut 3:3, Jer 31:19; all in the niphah tense of *yada*

¹¹ Gen 25:27 (Esau has a deep knowledge of hunting), 1 Sam 16:18 (David had a deep knowledge of music); Esther 2:11 (Mordecai was trying to know about Esther)

¹² Wheelhouse, “What Is Yādā Doing Here?” 131.

¹³ Robert, *Christian Mission*, 11.

because one believes it is the best and only way to understand the self, and by extension, Jesus Christ. A powerful example of this is Father Ivan Illich's criticisms of mission work in the 1960s and the creation of capitalist dependency and subsequent destruction of communities.¹⁴

The second part of my credo is that *yada* matters, but that it has to be in conversation with another type of knowing.

Binah and Evangelism

In contrast to *yada*, *binah* is used less (247 times), and primarily a word defined as "insight" and "refers to knowledge which is superior to the mere gathering of data... [it] is a power of judgement and perceptive insight and is demonstrated in the use of knowledge."¹⁵

The word is used frequently in Proverbs, which itself is an entire book of Scripture on gaining insight through wisdom. *Binah* has connotations of analytics and interpretation – the ability to look at what is happening externally and make meaning of it. In the context of this paper, this sounds similar to evangelism: looking at what is happening in the world and being able to make sense of where God is: "evangelism involves witnessing to what God has done, is doing, and will do. It therefore does not announce anything that we are bringing about but draws people's attention to what God has brought about and is bringing about."¹⁶

Evangelism is not necessarily about the sense of the self and the deep knowledge within, but instead looking outward and announcing in a thoughtful way. This calls to mind Paul at the Aeropagus. Paul looked around, interpreted the statues – including the one to an unknown God – and was able to interpret the circumstances to those gathered. The message

¹⁴ Robert, 92.

¹⁵ Harris, Jr, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, sec. 239c.

¹⁶ Bosch, "Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today," 11.

he relayed was bespoke to the people on the hill because it was contextual: *binah* knowledge requires context in order to occur, in order to have any relevant insight.

However, this kind of *binah* knowledge that expresses itself through evangelism is not enough on its own. Mortimer Arias argues that “we need to claim and to recover the totality of the biblical gospel... we need to recover the original message of Jesus on the reign of God and the kingdom perspective for our motivation and strategy... a purely Paulene theology – mediated through the Reformation and narrowed by some of our historical or sectarian reformulations – will not do it.”¹⁷ If we attempt to draw only from analytic views of God in the world, something will be missing – what we hope to help others understand will be incomplete. Evangelism becomes objects like the Evangecube – wholly modern, replete with script, PowerPoint¹⁸, and online video¹⁹ for the low, low price of \$8.00.

The Kingdom of God for \$8.00. If that is too cheap, the same company offers the stylized “THE BIG CUBE,” which makes “Sharing the Gospel nearly 3 TIMES BIGGER! [sic]” for \$25.00.²⁰

The third part of my credo: *binah*, too, is important, but it needs to be in relationship with another knowledge.

Spiraling Mission Hermeneutics: *Yada* and *Binah* with the Holy Spirit

As he unfolds his (re-)definition of evangelism, Bosch says that he “would align [himself] with those who regard mission as the wider and evangelism as the narrower concept. [He has]

¹⁷ Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God*, 115.

¹⁸ At the point of my writing, the script and PowerPoint were unable to be found on the publishing site: a 404 web return. The irony was not lost on me.

¹⁹ www.simplysharejesus.com, no less!

²⁰ “EvangeCube - The BIG Cube (Unassembled).”

problems, however with those...who... define mission as evangelism plus social involvement. Depicting evangelism and social action as two separate segments or components of mission is unsatisfactory, since it may... lead to a battle for supremacy.”²¹ While I would agree with Bosch’s assessment of a battle for supremacy, I disagree with his positioning of mission and evangelism. I would argue instead that mission and evangelism are two separate and distinct concepts that are equivalently broad. What eliminates the battle of supremacy is hermeneutics that engages both *yada* and *binah* in conversation with each other, reading each other, and developing new meaning for each.

Ideally, neither mission/*yada* nor evangelism/*binah* are ever singular forms of knowledge operating alone, but always either mission *with* evangelism or evangelism *with* mission.²² We as Christians recognize that there is something unique in our being, a part of us that relates to the wholly incarnate Jesus Christ. We also seek to investigate what is happening in the world and where the incarnation may be occurring contextually around us. Our *yada* is balanced by the realities of the incarnation happening specifically with specific people at a specific time, allowing our *binah* to speak insight to the world but also to ourselves, and perhaps less given to the violence of an overpowering *yada*. In turn, our *binah* is not just a simple description of events, but a deeper, meaningful unfolding of insights that are brought to life by the knowledge that only *yada* can possess. What is happening in the world speaks to our souls and intersects our bodies.

²¹ Bosch, “Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today,” 8.

²² And, if they are truly equivalent, it does not matter which comes before which.

This hermeneutic also helps me personally address the concerns raised in the Settles Lecture panel by Dr. David White – what are the limits of contextuality? The answer lies within the continuous dialogue between the insights gathered and how they interact with the knowledge of the incarnate. The response to White’s question may be just “you know it when you see it”: the particular type of understanding derived from deeper subjective knowledge in conversation with contextual insights. This isn’t as satisfying as some of the far more erudite and thoughtful responses from the panelists, but it may be more elegant and to the core of our current reality as Christians in the 21st Century.

However, it is easy to engage in the conversation of *yada* and *binah* together in a circle that excludes the other. An unmoving hermeneutic circle creates the darkest outcomes of both *yada* and *binah* – overpowering colonializing Christianity that is backed up by a reading of the world that only can reference back to the self. We sadly still carry the consequences of this stationary hermeneutical circle today: it ought not to surprise us as “nones and dones” continue to gain in number as we struggle to shift from a cultural moment from generations ago that claimed Christian hegemony.

What moves the hermeneutical circle of evangelism with mission is the Holy Spirit, *missio Spiritus*, creation, redemption, eschaton: “This tripartite pneumatological missiology... suggests that while we live in the world (the cosmos) even as we are not of it, we also abide in the present as informed by the past but yet anticipate the future... in other words, our present era is also the time of God’s proleptic revelation.”²³ The Holy Spirit becomes the path between

²³ Yong, *The Missiological Spirit*, 194.

yada and *binah*, and moves the circle into the past and future while remaining in the present – anamnesis and prolepsis together.

Practical Implications: Mission and Worship

A hermeneutic spiral of *yada* and *binah*, mission with evangelism, has a particular practical implication, which has its center in the worship moment. Thomas H. Schattauer, in his edited volume *In Side Out* helps to explain this through three modern categories of mission engagement in liturgy – inside and out, outside in, and inside out. The first category Schattauer argues is where “worship nurtures the individual and sustains the community in its life before God and in its life together, and from where Christians go out to serve the church’s mission as proclaimers and does of the gospel... worship spiritually empowers those inside the church who take up the church’s mission in the outside world.”²⁴ The second category “represents the outside-in strategies of both liberal and conservative Christians who seek to orient worship to specific social and political goals... the church’s worship is reshaped to take up the tasks of the church’s mission, constructed as evangelical outreach, social transformation, or both.”²⁵

Schattauer’s third category is when “the liturgical assembly itself [is] within the arena of the *missio Dei*. The focus is on God’s mission toward the world, to which the church witnesses and into which it is drawn... The *missio Dei* is God’s own movement outward in relation to the world... This community is created by the Spirit to witness to the ultimate purposes of God, to reconcile the world to God’s own self.”²⁶

In the worship moment, mission with evangelism becomes evident:

²⁴ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission,” 2.

²⁵ Schattauer, 2–3.

²⁶ Schattauer, 3.

At the center of the gospel stand two things together, the message of salvation for the ungodly – for all – in Jesus Christ, embodied in an assembly for all, an assembly defined not by the markets of difference – age, race, gender, wealth, or status – but by baptism into Christ. In this way, the *koinonia* of the church, constituted and manifest in its liturgical assembly, is the *missio Dei*, as it happens now and in acticiaption of the fullness of this communion in the kingdom of God. More than a collection of individual with concern for personal salvation, the liturgical assembly enacts the communion that is the church, in the hope of that wider communion that is God’s ultimate purpose.²⁷

Our assembling, our shared retelling of the stories of faith, of sacramental ritual, all become a series of feedback loops that help us understand both our mission in the world, our need to proclaim insightfully through evangelism, and how they speak to now and always. Even the assembly itself becomes a place to explore both *yada* and *binah*, as well as their interaction with the other – there are few places in Christian faith except the font that can help us explore our deepest sense of people who desire to be healed and connected through the incarnate Lord as well as a place to witness where others may need to hear that they, too, can be healed and connected.

As a result, I believe that the practical actions of mission with evangelism should be indexed to worship and liturgical action. For example, church I had interviewed with were very proud that they offered a Zumba class to the community. After revealing this in the interview, I said that I appreciated their willingness to reach out into the community and provide programs that helped to serve them. However, I realized later that I should have asked was how they understood Zumba related to their worship, and their sense of God within their community. Perhaps they understood that theologically, care for the body was important, and an integral part of living into Christian mission. They may have noticed that their community had a lack of

²⁷ Schattauer, 11.

class offerings that would allow anyone who desired to be healthier regardless of social position to live into that mission. They took the time to build relationship with people, following the Holy Spirit's movement, and thought Zumba was a wise choice. As a result, they may have connected it as part of a proclamation of the gospel and began to teach.

I hope they did. What's just as likely is they thought it would be a good idea and they did it. Of course, that's not necessarily wrong, but it doesn't bring attention to how *yada* and *binah*, mission with evangelism are interacting with each other. Not considering the hermeneutics of mission with evangelism makes it difficult to have a nuanced reason why, for instance, that same Zumba class should not cost \$50 a like other Zumba classes. That might make sense to the deep parts of us that still value capitalism, but it doesn't take into account the reality of the community (who might not be able to afford it), nor will proclamations like Jesus speaking in Luke 4 come into conversation. Indexing community programming to worship encourages interrogation of our knowledge of mission and our understanding of evangelism, as well as invites the worshipping community to sense where the Holy Spirit is guiding both within and outside the community.

Conclusion

My credo, in sum, is as follows:

I believe that mission and evangelism are two distinct, separate, and equivalent concepts that arise from two different types of knowledge of God in the world. One is a deep, embodied knowing of the self and the other, defined in Scripture as *yada*. The other is an insightful, analytical knowledge, defined as *binah*. When they are in conversation with each other, evangelism *with* mission, and mission *with* evangelism, both *yada* and *binah* are greater

than their parts, speaking a contextual truth right at the heart of individuals, in turn demonstrating where the God of creation is at work in and amongst them.

The Holy Spirit continues to move the conversation through time; not a static circle, but a spiral, speaking contextually over generations both in the past and yet to come but also still speaking to the innermost places that humanity and the Incarnate meet. I believe that it is in worship that the conversation between *yada* and *binah* can occur most readily, as the language of liturgy speaks to both *yada* and *binah*, and we can glimpse in ritual action a world yet to come. This worship is the same that gathers people from north and south, east and west as well as gives people of many languages the ability to hear one another.

Our work of mission with evangelism should always reference back to the worship moment. We must ask: where is our confession and pardon? Where are we re-membering the scatted people of God? How are we reminding them they are sealed and enfolded into a community? How are they continuously being sent? It is in that continued circle of exploration that we may live as people of faith who understand the times and what God may be doing.

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