

Lesson 1 Reflection Essay
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TH502: Christianity in the Global World
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As I read and reflected on the assigned readings for this Reflection Essay, and further reflected on the “cyclical relationship of missional praxis and theological reflection”, I am hopeful for the future of Jesus Christ’s Church around the world. I believe the cyclical nature of Christian practice allows for a deepening of Christian practice around the world and the refining of Christian praxis and theology. The balance between Andrew Walls’ pilgrim and indigenizing principles allows for the flexibility of Christian expression and revelation, while also staying true to Scripture. It is a reminder that God always does something new or brings dead things to life in all contexts, throughout history. There are places around the world where people believe nothing holy or sacred can come from, and just like in Isaiah 43, we are reminded that God can do all things in the people and places humankind has disregarded.

Tennent shares that the inherent “translatability” of Christianity is one of the main factors in the growth of Christianity throughout its history, and one of its main indicators of a global religion. This process of followers taking the gospel and sharing it with various parts of the world has happened throughout Christian history. This cyclical relationship between missional praxis and theological discourse/reflection in Christianity is the result of the call in Matthew 28:19 for all followers of Christ to go and make disciples of all nations. Tennent uses his “snapshots” of Christianity’s history of translatability throughout culture since the birth of Christianity. The disciples and early Church builders, like Paul and Simon, were the early mission workers who were taking an extension of the Jewish faith to the outward, Gentile world, and brought the Good News of Jesus into these Gentile/non-Jewish contexts, and the faith flourished in those unique places. Because of these early church leaders and their missional work, we have the theological reflection found in Paul’s epistles, which make up a large section of the Christian New Testament. In Kim's “Christianity as A World Religion”, Kim highlighted

the major shifts in the topography, geography, sociology, structure, and theology of Christianity, which further support Tennent's argument of the translatability of the Christian faith. As I read through the introductory chapters, Kim, and Tennent both present various examples of the way Christianity is taken to and practiced in other contexts, which has led to rich, deep practices of the Christian faith. I believe the cycle witnessed is both healthy and necessary for a balanced and growing theology. Without it, we would be left with a “dying” or dull expression of the Christian faith, where God and the revelations about the divine are constantly confined to concrete boxes and definitions.

As I think about my own ministry and work in my local context (youth ministry in the City of Pittsburgh) it reminds me that, wherever and whenever I have the privilege of sharing the gospel, the seeds will be planted and bear fruit that can bring. As the cycle continues and more diverse perspectives begin to be born, His people show a fuller and more beautiful picture of God's story in the world, as Terry Muck concludes in his article “The Missiological Perspective” (Terry 2005). When questions from new believers or hearers of the gospel arise, we should foster space to honor them because these new questions may also for new answers about God to arise. It's a reminder of the biblical writer who said, “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire, and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” God's doing work in every context, in every generation, in all people groups, and it will not return to Him empty.