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Correction: In regards to the article titled “‘Gifts-Offices’ from Our Ascended Lord: Toward a Christological Balance,” the second author, Paul Huneke, was inadvertently not included in the *Missio Apostolica* May 2012 issue.

Editor’s Note

Since 2008, in the month of January of every other year, Concordia Seminary has hosted on campus conferences specific to the Church’s ministry among the new immigrants in the United States. These symposia have been built on the foundational theme of Christian hope, each meeting exploring but one of its multiple dimensions such as expressions of hope, gifts of hope, and conversations of hope.

If immigrants of diverse ethnic backgrounds from all over the world are drawn to this land of opportunity with the hope of climbing the success ladder and building for them and their families better futures, the Christian Church that is already on its pilgrimage here has the unique opportunity to witness to them that their ultimate hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ’s blood and His righteousness.

On these pages, *Missio Apostolica* is presenting a series of essays on diversity as it impacts Gospel proclamation, some of which were presented at this year’s January symposium. The other essays in this issue complement the theme, representing the Latin American, African, and Korean contexts. The student research essays signify the importance of cross-cultural outreach, as our readers are about to discover, for congregations rooted in this culture generations ago. Together, we are eager to learn and willing to grow in God’s mission.

V. R.

Editorial

Communicating Across Cultures

Victor Raj

This issue of *Missio Apostolica* focuses on communicating the riches of the gospel in the cornucopia of cultural contexts. Many, if not most, of these contexts require, first of all, an ability and willingness to learn how to communicate in an unfamiliar language. It is common knowledge that the Bible is the most translated of all books in the world, and the ranking has remained unmatched in the history of literature. The number of languages in which Bible translations are available today surpasses that of any other book produced till now. Translation fundamentally is an activity that enables the thoughts, ideas, and feelings first conceptualized in one language to be transmitted to another without compromising the truth contained in the original. Availability of the numerous versions and translations of the Bible in the English language alone shows how translating Scriptures into any language is an arduous and unending endeavor. More often than not, rereading a translation shows that there is room for improvement. The reason is that, among other things, languages themselves are developing, and the cultures and contexts in which languages find their use are also changing.

Translation skills have been foundational for theological education and ministerial formation in the Christian tradition. Classical seminary education does not compromise competency in biblical languages. Theological educators, pastors, and missionaries further sharpen their skills at translation as they gain proficiency in other ancient as well as modern languages in which writings that relate to their fields of expertise and service are available. For missionaries and teachers of religion, an all-encompassing purpose of translating Scripture is to communicate the biblical truth in their mother tongues to people and communities who are otherwise alien to it. This experience better equips them to understand the mind and the processing of ideas and feelings of the people amidst whom they are privileged to serve and to communicate to them the truth of the Gospel that they are privileged to embrace (Eph 1:13; Col 1:5). A wholesome translation of a message is the outcome of a shared experience of several minds, so to speak, a coming together of various factors that shape the forms and meanings of words in the languages of the communicator/speaker/writer as well as of the listener/reader/responder.

One of the various commitments Christian missionaries over centuries have undertaken is to become conversant in the mother tongues of the people amidst whom they are sent to minister. Worthy of note is also the fact that in numerous instances Christians have been instrumental in putting into writing hundreds of languages that have previously existed only or primarily in oral form, one generation passing its story on to the next by word of mouth. Language experts produce word books, lexica, and other translation tools as they launch translations of texts from one language to another. As a rule, missionaries who serve those who do not share their

mother tongue first receive training from schools of linguistics and culture before they engage their respective missions. There is no substitute for this exercise for those who understand the intensity of the discipline that they are privileged to undertake. Translating is a shared experience, as it is a participatory undertaking that presupposes language proficiency and expertise in the art and craft of communicating cross-culturally.

Gospel proclamation entails heart-to-heart communication. What the tongue confesses is what the heart believes. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul states so clearly that those who confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead will be saved (Rom 10:9). Further along, Paul so beautifully ties together the synergy of justification by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and the confession of that truth for the salvation of all people throughout the world so that everyone may receive the righteousness that comes from God (Rom 10:9–13). Paul's own heart's desire is nothing short of the desire that God has for all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).

Christian mission and missiology, therefore, plead no exception to the challenging task of communicating the scriptural revelation of God's desire for all people in their own respective heart languages. Along these lines, missionaries are familiar with the Yale missiologist Lamin Sanneh's famous book, *Translating the Message*,¹ that surveys Christianity through the African continent. Tracing the history of the expansion of the Christian Church and its theology in Africa, Sanneh also calls to the reader's careful attention some of the epigrammatic ways in which listeners participate in the communication process as words embody meanings specific to their socio-cultural contexts. In some cultures, says Sanneh, "Behold I stand at the door and knock..." (Rev 3:20) needs rewording, lest the reader misinterpret the intent and misunderstand the knocker. In the audience's culture, only the thief knocks at the door to check if someone is home. Friends and visitors do not knock but rather announce their coming in a high pitched voice quite a distance away to let the owner know that they are on their way. Of much significance is the listener's role in interpreting language and its meaning. Context contributes so much to the communication process.

South African missiologist David Bosch has spoken of six significant paradigm shifts in mission since the ushering in of Christendom. Bosch expounds the mission paradigms founded on the paradigm theory that Thomas Kuhn had set forth, as well as the six paradigm shifts theologian Hans Küng has identified in ecclesiastical history. For Kuhn, a paradigm is "an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shaped by the members of a given community."² On his own, Bosch surmises that a paradigm grows and ripens within the context of an extraordinary network of diverse social and scientific factors.³ If the earliest forms of Christianity were built on the apocalyptic paradigm, the Hellenistic paradigm largely shaped the Church of the patristic period. Roman Catholicism was paradigmatic for the Church of the Middle Ages. If the Reformation served as the template for the many protestant churches, the Enlightenment brought new challenges and opportunities for the Church to rethink its relevance and service to the world. More recently, the ecumenical paradigm has emerged, as most mainline churches have

been coming together as a united front, willingly and intentionally shifting from their independent denominational underpinnings.

Bosch is cautious not to downplay or dismiss altogether the influence of culture and society in the formulation of Christian theology in all the epochs he has identified. Expressions of faith are bound to take shape in a certain cultural matrix, as the people who confess the faith themselves are molded and shaped in a specific culture. Even so, the post-enlightenment secular world and post-denominational ecumenical Christendom have perhaps been more attentive to the crucial role culture plays in religion and the religious experience of human beings. In the interest of missiology, through this analysis, Bosch prognosticates that the modern ecumenical mission paradigm resembles more that of the first Christians than that of any other. In fact, he believes that contemporary Christian theology and missiology will benefit if only they allow their self-definitions to be challenged by the self-definitions of their counterparts of the first century.⁴

Himself a South African and having shaped his professional life in Africa, Bosch has observed how significant a role colonialism plays in religion and culture. In *Transforming Mission*, Bosch is provoking his readers intentionally to transform the ways in which they engage mission in the twenty-first century. Gone are the days when the Christian West perhaps had an edge on world mission, as the institutional church for centuries was sculpted in the Western imperialist, romantic, and colonialist cultures. In the modern era, no one culture can claim superiority over another. Local and indigenous expressions of faith reflect the cultural milieu in which they are formed, whether in the West or the East .

Little wonder that Bosch was judiciously calling for a significant paradigm shift in mission in today's "pluriverse" of missiology, where various cultures, languages, worldviews, and religions meet and compete. Attempting to understand human beings outside of their culture, language, and religion is but a futile exercise, especially for those whose calling it is to communicate the truth from one domain to another.

Christians all over the world walk the tight rope between faith and culture. Christians are committed to being faithful to Scripture, the ultimate revelation of God's salvific plan for all people. In that mission, in every age, they have been also interacting with the culture of the time. If today's Christians have a great desire for the Church to return to the first-century model of Christianity, they are also conscious of their limited ability to return fully to the culture and lifestyle of the first century. The conveniences that science and technology have brought to today's world pale in comparison to the simple life with which those of who were blessed to walk with our Lord during His earthly ministry were comfortable. Technology has made it possible for people of our generation to hold the whole world in their palm(pilots)! God, through these means, is preparing His world to heed the one truth that all people across cultures need to hear.

The editorial staff of *Missio Apostolica* is grateful that paradigms are shifting in mission and ministerial formation even within our Confession, and we are becoming increasingly aware of them. Christian mission basically is making Christ known to those for whom He remains unknown. Once it was thought that being in mission was travelling to faraway lands in order to reach out to the unreached. For

the past several decades, however, we have been connecting well with the Hispanic population in our own neighborhoods. The Specific Ministry Program has been enabling indigenous leaders to further their education through training and mentoring so that they are ordained into ministry. Moreover, the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology has been equipping indigenous leaders, especially among new immigrants, through the distance education program coupled with short-term on-campus residency courses. Doors are opening in the local congregations, even if randomly, for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds to join and celebrate the love God has for all people in Jesus Christ.

We are privileged to welcome as friends and neighbors the new immigrants whom God is bringing to our shores and to enable them to become acclimated to the traditional culture of the United States. Doubtless, America, with its ample supply of technology and easy access to material conveniences, is the land of their dreams for most people. To add to this country's diversity, the new immigrants bring with them their mother tongues, lifestyles, and religions to foster in their new home in a new environment. Christian mission today is at the doorstep of each Christian.

The articles included in this volume address the opportunities that all Christians have to bring God's desire for all to the hearts of all, including our new friends and neighbors. In this issue, we highlight examples that demonstrate how an institutional church responds to mission opportunities in differing cultural contexts. We also hear voices of the relatively new immigrants who struggle to fit into the culture of the mainstream. We read heart-to-heart confessions from those at the frontline whose desire it is, with Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, to be the first to go all the way to others with the gospel of Christ (2 Cor 10:4), crossing boundaries across cultures and languages. Join us in that journey.

Endnotes

¹ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2009).

² David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), 185.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

Articles

Surfing Shifting Sands of Contextuality: Appropriate Flexibility in Handling Conclusions as an Approach to Communicating the Gospel

Timothy Dost

Surfing looks like great fun. It must be a thrill to meet that wave and riding it to the beach. But it is important that two points of contact remain for the entire trip. First, one must stay on the wave; second, one must stay on the board. Contact must be maintained with both, or there is no surfing, and it is in the very interaction between rider, board, and wave that the artistry of surfing occurs.

It is the same with good communication. Without properly appreciating the waves on the ocean of our context, without the solid basis of the Scriptures, the surfboard, without the wisdom and judgment and skill to ride the wave, surfing is impossible. In our communications and outreach we absolutely need to appreciate our shifting surroundings as well as the solid truth we bring through the Word of God by skillful discernment of our times. Without a balanced approach we fall right off the board. This essay will deal with examples within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in which issues of presuppositions and conclusions and the ways in which problems of their imbalance and a lack of concern for context have hindered the growth of the church, while also offering suggestions for improving our condition.

The recent attitude of the LCMS might be characterized as a mighty wrestling with the issue of restoring the greatness of our church body. There are at least two distinct schools of thought that have emerged around this theme. First, there are those who believe that a restoration of the nineteenth-century church body will accomplish the goal of growth; second, there are those who believe that it is this very quest that holds us back. We are like some great, injured beast, thrashing around in pain, ignorant of its malady—a situation that might actually make things worse.

There is a consistent message of growth in the church being equated with success. Because our church body is not growing, the implication is that we are failing at our task of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.¹ This theme is a constant refrain, with different remedies being proposed for our condition.

Timothy Dost is an Associate Professor of Historical Theology working in areas from the Reformation to the present at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, teaching there for ten years. His prior ministry experience includes seventeen years in full-time ministry including large city Hispanic, and African-American, as well as small town urban and rural ministry. He has also taught at an inner city Los Angeles area Lutheran High School and several colleges. He continues to help with vacancies when available.

Medically speaking, failure to thrive can be a real problem in children. If our children do not meet certain growth targets, they might receive diagnosis and treatment for their condition, which would help them both physically and with possible socialization and self-esteem issues in the future, but what about when a church body fails to thrive? Are we prepared to take a serious look at the conditions that cause or contribute to this problem, or do we just continue as though there is no real solution? In certain emergencies, one might even have to move someone with broken bones or other conditions that might cause permanent damage later in life, and the movement would certainly cause significant pain. The immediate pain of medical care can be initially worse than the discomfort of the condition that is being treated. So if the church body is broken and is therefore failing to thrive, there might be some pain involved in actually coming to grips with the real causes of our condition.

I suggest that there is a largely unspoken and undiagnosed condition within our church body that underlies many of the more superficial symptoms we experience. In the 1960s and 70s the LCMS was convulsed by the Seminex / Walkout matters, and it can be fairly stated that our church body more or less reached the conclusion that the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions were to be taken literally. In the case of the Scriptures, the terms “inspired,” “infallible,” and “inerrant” became the norm for a proper interpretative approach to God’s Word. In the case of the Confessions, the *quia* (**because** it agrees with the Scriptures) subscription was required and *quatenus* (**in so far as** it agrees with Scriptures) subscription was considered inadequate.

Although there are still people who disagree about these matters, the majority of the Synod has more or less settled the issue of the permissibility of challenging either the Bible or the Confessions as sources and norms of faith and practice, answering such challenges in the negative. Although significant pain and sorrow remain among many concerning the resolution of these matters, particularly about the way certain individuals and their positions were handled, there is something of a tacit consensus among most members of the Synod on these issues. Doctrine within the LCMS body can only be formulated on the basis of this literal meaning of the texts, as the many documents and Synod convention resolutions since the 1960s have in fact borne out. The matter of presuppositions, how they are to be handled, and whether they can be challenged is basically settled.

Another set of issues, however, has not been resolved in any meaningful way, and that is the issues surrounding the handling of doctrinal conclusions. I believe that this unresolved matter holds the key to understanding why the LCMS is broken, and discussion and resolution of this issue may lead to a remedy for the LCMS. Unresolved from the 1960s is the disposition of the relationship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) with their insistence on the Unit Principle of Theology.²

While the issue of presuppositions, including both the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, was largely dealt with in the aftermath of the Walkout / Seminex events, the issue of how fixed doctrinal statements and conclusions derived from those foundations are to be expressed has never really been adequately discussed. It is the position of this essay that there are vast constituencies within

Synod that deliberately or unconsciously maintain the position of the other church bodies in the former Synodical Conference (WELS and ELS), i.e., that once doctrinal formulae are derived, their language is completely adequate in every situation and should not ordinarily be altered. This basically represents one aspect of the position of the WELS and ELS on the Unit Principle of Theology.³ The point here is not that language can never be altered, but that the Unit Principle represents a very cautious approach to making such changes.

The alternative position is that it is more important that the expression of doctrine maintain the same impact as was intended in the original formulation. This position argues that the impact of the original teaching may be weakened by maintaining fixed terminology, because usage, context, and even thought patterns change; the result is that the message may be received with either a substantially different understanding or no comprehension at all.

These positions are at the same time represented by the two seminaries, which, while they teach largely the same doctrine, tend to place a different spin on how that doctrine is to be applied to ministry. It is not a matter of one seminary's operating according to fixed presuppositions and the other according to fixed conclusions, but the balance of each approach to constructing conclusions and its attendant application differs at the two seminaries.

To highlight how the current situation arose, a brief presentation of the historical background of the issue of the Synodical Conference and its aftermath is in order. The initial relationship between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods in the latter part of the nineteenth century could be characterized as one of mentorship. The Wisconsin Synod was initially the more liberal of the two church bodies, but it fairly rapidly adopted a more conservative point of view toward confessional subscription after working with Missouri. Eventually these two church bodies, as well as the currently named Evangelical Lutheran Synod, decided to form the Synodical Conference, a cooperative entity for fellowship purposes that nevertheless maintained the integrity of each church body's governance structure. Doctrinal positions were held in common, and pastors could be called to serve in the churches of the other members of the conference. In addition, certain agreements as to where church plants would be made ensured non-competition between the churches in areas like Arizona and California. There remained some minor differences in practice that would later precipitate the exodus of the WELS and ELS from the Conference, essentially resulting in its breakup in the late 1960s. Disagreements were basically over the matter of what was considered unionism. Significant issues included participation in Boy Scouting (which Wisconsin saw as akin to lodge membership) and issues of how to handle the matter of ministry to the Armed Forces. In this case the Missouri Synod used chaplains; the Wisconsin Synod, believing that unionism or syncretism would be the inevitable result, employed a ministry by mail. Prayer fellowship represented another area of disagreement. The Unit Principle was not, so far as I know, discussed between the church bodies, but was an assumption on the part of Wisconsin and remained the *de facto* practice of many in Missouri. Although these were the more apparent issues resulting in the breakup of the Synodical Conference, another factor that must be considered is the drift of the Missouri Synod toward fellowship with the American Lutheran Church in the 1960s, a relationship

that was eventually established and maintained for about ten years. In the meantime the ALC was drifting toward fellowship with the newly formed Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (a break-off from Missouri in the wake of the Walkout), as well as the Lutheran Church in America (itself a product of fairly recent mergers). Ironically, had the Synodical Conference held, and the ALC, LCMS, and WELS come together, more conservative Lutheranism might have predominated in America, but this was not to be.

The WELS and ELS position on the Unit Principle was never clearly discussed and accepted, modified, or rejected in the LCMS, but has merely remained an operating assumption in some circles. In turn, this has resulted in an undercurrent that needs discussion and resolution in the LCMS today so that the church body may be clear concerning how it intends to use means and ends as it addresses the world. This matter is crucial because, while issues of the Walkout were largely resolved (if in no other way than through the passage of time), friction caused by relative adherence or non-adherence to the Unit Principle remains.

The remainder of this paper will examine the effects of these two basic assumptions on the church body. It is not my intent to take a position on the rightness or wrongness of the Unit Principle itself, but rather to shine some light on the subject and call for a reasonable and open discussion of the matter of whether and to what extent it should form a governing principle for theology and its application. My evidence and argumentation is largely induced from observations I have made as a pastor and professor within the LCMS, and only occasionally punctuated by literature or official statements of the church.

In order to bring out a factor that prompted my thinking along these lines, I will briefly relate a tale. At one of our theological meetings I had the pleasure of hearing a presentation by a scholar of some note, who was from neither seminary. He decided that the wording we were using for certain of our ideas could use a bit of freshening up, as it would otherwise have a different impact from what was originally intended. Two prominent professors took to the microphone and informed the speaker that to change the wording would be tantamount to changing the doctrine involved. I wanted to stand up and say, "Auf Deutsch, bitte!" If we can't change the words without changing the impact, then why are we expressing ourselves in English rather than German, Latin, or Greek, since translation marks both a change in wording and, in most cases, a change at least to the range of meanings? Instead, as I was rather new to the St. Louis faculty, I sat in silence dumbfounded.

The point here is that these responding professors were maintaining, and even enhancing, the Unit Principle, although they were perhaps not conscious that this was what was happening. The Unit Principle, at the very least, parallels their opposition to this presentation. They framed their position as one of reasoned, modernist principles against what they conceived as postmodern relativism.

This is exactly the challenge that confronts the Missouri Synod when the idea is taken for granted that the proclamation of the gospel involves only the use of certain traditional phrases. In the attempt to not change doctrine by maintaining terminology, the danger always exists that the resulting fixed wording actually changes the intended impact of the very doctrine we are trying to preserve. Ideally there are two poles that need to be maintained: first, the need to bear witness

truthfully to God's Word and the implications properly drawn from it, and second, the need to communicate these timeless truths in ways that preserve their original impact.

Language and culture change are moving at a fantastic pace around us. This means that the raw meanings of words, of images, of thoughts and also their impact on individuals are changing as well. Take, for example, the term, "Christian." There was a time when being a Christian meant that one was a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and was ready to stand up and be persecuted for the name (see the book of Acts for example). With the rise of the early church and its fight against heresy, certain doctrinal content and creedal formulae would be attached to being a Christian. This is not to say that people did not believe these things before, but the matters became concretized in a different way. Following the legalization of Christianity, it became fashionable to be a Christian, which brought different implications to the term. Christians were then part of a faction or a congregation, or even part of an orthodox or unorthodox camp. Christians next became members of the only legal religion in the Roman Empire, a further change. Later Christians were seen as conquerors in crusades, as reclusive or active monks, as reformers, as individuals who made confessions, as bound to the tradition and hierarchy of the church or the monarch, as against the monarch and for individualism, as advocates of justice, as a moral damper on the fun society can have and many other things. Many cultic groups have also taken the term "Christian" as their own, including groups with significant deviations from a biblical faith.

My points are first, that changes to the understanding of the term "Christian" have generally accelerated over time, and second, that the use of this great term, when loaded with the wrong freight, hardly makes a case for the gospel likely, or even possible. While it may be possible to rehabilitate the term through education, what about other terms like "propitiation," "expiation," "election," or "predestination"? If the words that give meaning to the terms have changed or are no longer a part of the contemporary vocabulary, then the way people see the implications of those terms changes the message of the formulae and their impact and can even provide a jargonistic roadblock to the inviting presence the church wishes to maintain.

Two polarized approaches taken to combat this problem are as follows: some seek to reeducate people to the terms, to maintain a "correct" definition, and some abandon the terms or reword the formulae so as to have the intended impact. Of course, it is virtually impossible to employ one approach to the exclusion of the other, but the balance of their respective application can have a profound effect on the barriers raised for our hearers.

Rather than a simplistic, either/or approach here, people trying to communicate the message of the Scriptures need a combination of moving their hearers to proper understandings and moving the terms and language they use to the hearers' forms of expression. What communicators of the gospel are striving for is not the maintenance of formulae or terms for their own sake, but rather formulae that have the same authentic impact as was intended.

Within the Synod both approaches are employed with limited success. The first approach represents, once again, an alliance with Unit Principle thinking; the

second represents a sounder practice based on fixed source presuppositions but a more flexible communication of conclusions. So long as these conclusions have the same impact as the original statement to the new audience—or, to put it another way, bring the same message as was originally intended—they are orthodox, provided the original statements are orthodox. What is needed is a discussion of these strategies of thinking and the strengths and weaknesses and inherent problems of each approach rather than the condemnation or abandonment of either method. Balance is crucial.

The LCMS is blessed with two seminaries teaching essentially the same doctrine. Both seminaries certainly employ Unit Principle thinking and both teach longstanding doctrinal formulae; but the issue of the amount of flexibility in both communication and application is worthy of continued discussion. Moreover, the degree of application of the Unit Principle, including its attendant effect on ministerial formation and practice, would be helpful.

Subtle and not so subtle pressures are always at work in the teaching of theology. Some of the pressure is in part due to the constituencies each seminary serves, who provide needed financial support and receive their graduates. It would indeed be interesting to study in some detail where candidates are placed by which seminary and what the expectations of the congregations receiving the candidates for ministry really are. It is easily assumed that those who emphasize the exclusive use of traditional language are attempting to hold on to a traditional faith in a changing world, but is this so? Do those who are more open to the use of non-traditional language do so out of a concern to be effective in addressing the world with the Good News of Jesus, or are there other concerns? This kind of in-depth research could clarify complex situations and guide the seminaries in preparing men for ministry. An important aspect of seminary training is the actual discussion of real issues and not the characteristic dismissiveness that passes for discussion in so much of the modern world.

This matter of the seminaries' teaching is further complicated by the issue that different faculties teach in different ways. And so, while one might expect at least to get the same kind of pastor from each seminary over a given period of time, there are in fact differences in emphasis and approach over broader periods within the same institution. One could distinguish, for example, at Saint Louis differences in training between pastors who graduated in the 1950s, in the 1960s, in the 1970s during the Walkout who remained at Saint Louis, graduates of Seminec who colloquized, those who graduated in the 1980s, and those who graduated subsequently. Similar patterns could be noted for Fort Wayne over the given period. In fact, students from the same class can turn out differently depending upon the professors they choose to take or not take at the seminary. Students certainly have different approaches to the material they have been taught, and this variety has the added desirable positive effect that they are thereby made suitable for different ministry contexts by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So how do these differences work out in the parish or in missions within our church? In order to understand this, we need to take a look at what happens when doctrinal content is communicated to people. First, the pastor as reader of Scripture brings biases from his training and background to the twin tasks of preaching and teaching. It is not usually that he endeavors to be biased, but all pastors have some

biases in their lives. This is not a bad thing. When that content is presented to the people through, let's say, a sermon or Bible class, the hearers bring their own biases to the situation and understand the message according to those biases. In fact, those biases greatly affect what they actually do hear or not hear, when they drift off or follow the speaker, etc.; and the structure and wording of a message, whether it incorporates story, music, and visuals, or is erudite or even pedestrian, can have a tremendous impact on what comes across. Therefore, the utmost attention must be paid both to helping the people in congregations to understand what pastors are saying and to saying things in ways that promote the likelihood of developing a sound understanding in the hearers. Ideally, both the principles of appropriate content and flexible application should be brought to bear, but in different proportions in different places and times.

Take, for example, two congregations, both established in 1900, one in New York City and the other in rural Indiana.⁴ I will assume for our example that both have read and agreed to the principles and statements of the LCMS, although this might be a bit optimistic. Over the years both will be pulled along by their surrounding cultures and both will probably remain somewhat conservative in their positions vis-à-vis their surroundings. Both believe that they faithfully carry out the work of the gospel in their particular communities, and nobody has told them otherwise.

But what do we see after a number of years if we study these churches? From the point of view of the Unit Principle, both have likely deviated from what was originally stated. Because there is no requirement for reaffirmation by congregations of Synod, they both might have diverged somewhat from the original statements that they agreed to (probably in German). In fact, the whole Synod might have deviated, to some degree, from its previous self. But while in absolute terms, it is probable that the New York City congregation will be somewhat more liberal than the Indiana church, vis-à-vis its milieu, it will actually be far more conservative than its Indiana counterpart.⁵ In other words, while the congregation in New York will be probably be a bit to the left of its Indiana sister church in terms of dogma, politics, and other matters, it will likely be far further to the right of its own surroundings than the church in Indiana. As a result, it is also probably in far greater tension with its culture. For example, it is probably more difficult in New York City to hold an anti-abortion position than in rural Indiana. On the other hand, gaining the trust of the congregation in a tight knit rural community is a challenge that might not be faced by a pastor called to the hustle and bustle of a large metropolitan area. I am not trying to cast aspersions here, or to make any charges, but rather attempting to observe that in tension with culture, truth as expressed becomes alloyed to a degree by interaction with the biases of the pastor, the congregation, and the surroundings. It is in this tension that the gospel finds itself expressed, and alloys are typically stronger than their constituent metals independently.

What we have above is simply the tension with culture in which a congregation finds itself. Unionism and syncretism effectively occur when the messenger changes the message in a way that compromises it, not when it is heard wrongly, or changed, not in its presentation, but rather in simple tension with its hearers.

Problems can arise within the Synod when we do not recognize that when there are national events there might be different ways of handling matters locally that, while appropriate in that local context, would not be acceptable in another region of the country. We should be careful before judging what others have done, since there might be real issues that pastors outside have no way of knowing, let alone understanding. On the other hand, the impact on the truth of God's Word in such cases should never be ignored.

Problems of set presuppositions and flexible versus set conclusions also arise from the ways people approach the core polity documents of the Missouri Synod. Article Two of the Synod's Constitution indicates that Holy Scripture is the source, rule, and norm of doctrine and practice for all members of the church body and requires affirmation without reservation of the contents of the Book of Concord (they are listed). Members are constitutionally defined as congregations and rostered church workers of Synod.⁶

However, Article Six lists a series of quite specific conditions that must be maintained to retain membership in the Missouri Synod, including the renunciation of unionism and syncretism, the requirement that rostered workers hold a regular call and the exclusive use of doctrinally pure worship materials by congregations and schools.⁷ Although for this article I have used the 2010 version of the constitution, these matters stretch back into the nineteenth century and indicate that presuppositions and conclusions have both been important to our church body nearly since its inception.⁸

Interpretations of the weight of these clauses are not a matter of agreement. What we can see in the early versions of the constitution is the early enshrinement of ideas that would in fact lead to the development of the Unit Principle, both in terms of theology and operation. What became evident in the 1970s was that people became interested in these two constitutional articles in different ways.⁹ Some argued that they were in reality following Article Two by ignoring Article Six, the contents of which they considered to be unscriptural and non-confessional. Others sought to use Article Six without paying attention to Article Two, employing the conditions in Article Six as a sort of a set of shibboleths. While the one camp trumpeted walking together in faith and all its articles, the other heralded its adherence to the Reformation standard of *sola scriptura*. Both camps declared their orthodoxy, but what was in fact occurring was that some were interpreting matters in a Unit Principle kind of way (the Article Six camp) and others were interpreting matters in terms of the orthodox presuppositions, but more flexible conclusions, adhering more exclusively to Article Two. Some even resorted to challenging the Scriptures and Confessions as norms, but they were generally forced out of Synod, or simply left.

The Yankee Stadium prayer matter, following September 11, 2001, along with its attendant reactions across the Synod, is a further case in point. Here we find an example not only of the Unit Principle in action, but also of what happens when various constituencies, thinking they are allied with eternal truth, yet isolated by geography, come into contact with one another and make judgments about what others are doing in their particular context. Central to the matter for our purposes, however, is the fact that people believed they had truth on their side and were ready

to fight for it. Some believed that proper practice should be connected to a long established and agreed upon formulae of the church, the principle of avoiding unionism and syncretism a la Article Six of the constitution—a Unit Principle way of going about things.¹⁰ Others believed that they followed the proper practice of the church by exercising flexibility in a crisis, bringing what they saw as a message of comfort in Christ, in this case through public prayer (with other faiths at the same event, but not at the microphone at the same time)—a more flexible conclusions approach, adhering more exclusively to Article Two.¹¹ There was not a truly polarized either/or going on here, but there was certainly a difference of emphasis on both sides with different weight going to each article, by each group. A detailed analysis of such matters is not really germane to this paper; I believe I have provided the reader enough information to get the idea across. While this example represents a national issue for our church, in many situations, reactions along these lines can be much more localized, resulting in long-term communication breakdowns within circuits, between various congregations in a locality, within a congregation, or between boards and those they administer.

Having formulated some of the issues that might arise as a result of unresolved Unit Principle assumptions, what recommendations for remedy present themselves based on the opinions stated in this essay? How can we ease these divisions?

First, dialog is essential. We should not have an elephant this big in the room. We need to talk about whether and when to apply the ideas of the Unit Principle and when they are not profitable. This affects the place of tradition among us, as well as the flexibility or inflexibility in our application of formulae. Furthermore, we should discuss guidelines for when it is wise to maintain a formula or term, or when it is wiser to abandon such language and find a more useful expression to get our point across.

Second, we would all do well to lighten up a bit on our own importance. Christ is the Lord of the Church and reigns at the pleasure of God the Father and sends forth the Holy Spirit. By this I mean that those who believe that their call extends to all of Christendom might want to think about the fact that God has called them to a certain place and time, with particular gifts and talents, and that they have not been called to lightly and frivolously condemn or judge the ministries of others—“before his own master he stands or falls.”¹² Church workers in various parts of the world will face different tensions in ministry and will have to make different decisions concerning the proper expression of Christian truth. God has distributed and established different workers in the harvest field in different places and times to accomplish His good tasks and we should be circumspect about judging another man’s servant.

Third, we must adapt our formulae and our teaching to accommodate both the need to communicate the real and useful truths derived from the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions that must be taught, and flexibility in the communication of reasonable conclusions derived therefrom so that we are not locked into such rigid language and practice that it becomes impossible for our hearers to have even a chance to understand us. In short, we need to overcome our divisions on these matters and learn to appreciate one another.

Endnotes

¹ I have never actually understood the arguments around the LCMS growing or shrinking. Because about two-thirds of the people on congregational membership books rarely if ever attend, there is a buffer of far over a million people in our quoted numbers. It would help to use average weekly attendance (probably a number around a million) instead of membership rolls to obtain a total, although this would be a non-standard practice in American church statistics. Then it might be possible to actually determine whether the LCMS is growing or shrinking.

² For more on the WELS and ELS and the history and breakup of the Synodical Conference, see, Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events that Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003).

³ While this probably does not represent an official position of the WELS and ELS, it certainly forms an operating assumption of many within these synods. Much of the richness of this presentation on the WELS and ELS is based on conversations with my doctoral student, Rev. Timothy Schmeling. Any misconceptions remain my sole responsibility.

⁴ I choose these areas only for the sake of contrast. Both are areas of wonderful, faithful Lutheran Christians.

⁵ I recognize that the introduction of the internet has blurred many distinctions between the regions of this nation and indeed the world.

⁶ Technically speaking, the usually quoted “membership” of the Missouri Synod, around 2.3 million, is in fact the total of the members of its constituent congregations. Membership itself provides an excellent example of the divergence between those who would employ the Unit Principle and those who maintain more flexible conclusions in application, as there are parts of the country where membership is a commitment to certain beliefs and other areas where it comes close to being a fee for service arrangement (like joining a health club). The result is different assumptions about the term. This probably explains the variety of interpretations of the boundaries of appropriate pastoral discretion in admission and administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion as well, with some remaining much more tightly wedded to fellowship based on a common name and others more or less abandoning the idea of membership as a standard for communion while maintaining an insistence on common belief rather than formal allegiance to a moniker.

⁷ See Handbook, Constitution, Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2010 available at www.lcms.org, pp. 13, 15.

⁸ For an early (1854) constitution translated from German into English, see Carl S. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1964). 149ff. For our purposes, Articles Two and Six were combined into Chapter Two of the original constitution, but the contents, with the notable exception of a stipulation that German be exclusively used, are basically the same. See pages 149 and 150 for the pertinent passage.

⁹ One might consider the Statement of the Forty-Four, written following WWII (a document that stated that the Synod’s position was too restrictive and that unionism and syncretism were being used unbiblically and unconfessionally in the Brief Statement) and the reaction of Synod to this document, to be another instance of this divide over Articles Two and Six, as well as the divide over how flexible to be about conclusions. The Statement of the Forty-Four also represented a reaction to perceived overapplication of The Brief Statement of 1932, whose author was the renowned Franz Pieper. The Brief Statement itself provides another possible example. It was originally intended as a statement of talking points for possible union with the old American Lutheran Church, but eventually it was incorporated in its entirety into many congregational constitutions in the WELS (a highly fixed conclusion approach).

¹⁰ The avoidance of every vestige of unionism, syncretism, schism, and sectarianism goes back to the early history of the LCMS.

¹¹ These two positions could also be tied in with the longstanding two main agendas of Synod that have often been in some tension with one another—the concern for maintaining orthodoxy and for mission outreach, but that would require another article.

¹² Romans 14:4, partial.

Cross-Cultural Missions Is Building the Body of Christ

Don Hougard

This is a difficult paper for me to write. I hope that it doesn't come across as boasting about what we have been able to accomplish at Benediction Lutheran Church, Milwaukee. In fact, as I reflect on how things have transpired here in the last ten years, I can see how God has been at work despite our mistakes and weaknesses. When we first began cross-cultural ministry, we had no idea what we were doing. This is simply an account of how God has used our weak, trembling hands for His purposes in this place, along with observations that I have made along the way. It is my hope that it will provide encouragement in Christ to others who might be planning to undertake cross-cultural ministry.

How Cross-Cultural Ministry Began at Benediction

Benediction began like many of our congregations in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Various changes in our society were causing people to leave the cities and build modest homes in the surrounding suburbs. With the help of the South Wisconsin District, the congregation built a small chapel in 1959. Attached to a parsonage, it had a capacity of about fifty people. Within one year, the chapel was overflowing. The 72 charter members quickly grew to 405 members within two years. By 1963, a church that holds 350 people was dedicated. Benediction was not the only congregation in the area to see such a dramatic rise in membership. By 1970, there were nine LCMS congregations within a three-mile radius of Benediction. Most of them had over one thousand members, one of them being one of the largest congregations in the synod with over three thousand members. It was a glorious time for Lutheranism on the far northwest side of Milwaukee. This part of the city was also thriving economically, with car dealers, a huge bowling alley, and manufacturing companies. The largest mall in the Milwaukee metro area was within a few miles of Benediction.

But by the mid-1970s, things began to change. The desegregation of city schools caused families to flee the outlying parts of Milwaukee for the surrounding suburbs. Our congregations began to shrink. Two of the congregations closest to Benediction closed. Today most of our congregations are struggling to survive, with many on the verge of closing. Between 2001 and 2010, the average weekly attendance in the nine congregations closest to Benediction has dropped from four thousand to less than nine hundred. The demographics of the area have changed drastically. White (Anglo) families are being replaced by African-American, African-immigrant, Hmong, and Hispanic families. Sadly, the economy of the area

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has taken a direct hit. That largest mall in the city closed almost ten years ago. Many of the car dealer lots are vacant. Red Carpet Lanes has been closed for about twenty years. Each week, it seems as if another business in the area has decided to call it quits. Even one of the local Walmarts will soon shut its doors. Several of the factories that hired so many of the people of the area decades ago have closed their doors. Crime is a great concern among both businesses and residents. During the time that this paper was written, the drug store near our church was held up, and there were high profile shootings at an Aldi store and an area tavern. The social demographics are also changing. Fewer than 50 percent of the couples living together in the area are now married.

This situation seems dire with regard to the economy, crime, and social demographics. However, it is also a time of tremendous opportunity. God has brought thousands of people who have never heard of Lutheranism to this formerly staunchly Lutheran part of the city. The question is, How do we reach them?

At first, we had no clue what we were doing. We knew that many Hmong families had moved into our area and decided to try to invite them to a potluck meal. Pastor Faiv Neng Her and several of his members from Hmong Hope Lutheran came, and we sent postcards to several hundred Hmong families in the Benediction area. Members were encouraged to invite their neighbors. Except for the members of Hmong Hope, no other Hmong families came.

After a few months, we decided to take another route. Rev. Robert Hoehner, our district mission executive, asked Blong Vang, a member of Hmong Hope, if he would consider entering the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, to become a pastor and lead a new Hmong ministry at Benediction. Blong entered the seminary, and I became his mentor. Initially, our Hmong ministry was very small: only Blong's family and another family who had come from Hmong Hope. It was difficult for them. Although they had never worshiped in English, they began to attend our English service. Blong felt somewhat uncomfortable using English, but he began to help with the liturgy every Sunday. He did most of the liturgy in English but read the Gospel lesson in Hmong. The Lord's Prayer was done in both English and Hmong each week.

This was a transformative time in our congregation. We had no great influx of new Hmong members. My focus at the time with Blong was his seminary studies. However, each week the people of our congregation stood to listen to the Gospel lesson in a language which they did not understand. (The lessons in Hmong are also much longer than in English.) It was during this time that the people of our congregation learned patience and understanding. Blong was very nervous, but the people of Benediction came to love him and his family. No longer were the Hmong mysterious new neighbors. We came to understand them. We loved them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Hmong ministry did grow slowly. Another transformative moment occurred when a Hmong family of thirteen was baptized in our service. The family was very shy about associating with the rest of the congregation at first, but today they are one of the most active families in our congregation. They teach Sunday School, serve in our music ministry, and serve our youth program to the entire congregation.

Eventually, we saw the need to have a weekly Hmong service and changed our second service into the Hmong service. Sunday School for all of our members has been held between the two services since that time. We felt very strongly that there should be a connection between us. Blong was called to Oshkosh when he finished the EIIT program, but Moua Vang, another of our members, filled his shoes by entering the EIIT program and serving this ministry.

Since the beginning, we have baptized over thirty new Christians. Our Hmong service is growing. We have ESL classes, which our traditional members teach. Strong friendships have grown through those classes. We also have a summer program in which we teach Hmong culture and language in order to show that you can be both Christian and proudly Hmong.

A couple of years after we began the Hmong ministry, Rev. Dan McMiller, the South Wisconsin District Mission's executive, approached me about giving space to a French African congregation, which was interested in becoming Lutheran. Their pastor had been confirmed by one of our pastors in Milwaukee, Pastor Victor Fischer. They had spent several mornings at a George Webb restaurant going through Koehler's *Summary of Christian Doctrine*.

Primarily because of insurance requirements, the French African congregation had to become a part of Benediction if they were to use our facilities. This was a great risk for both of our congregations. Historically a Pentecostal congregation, many of their children had not even been baptized. Their style of worship was much different from ours. I love the hymns of Paul Gerhardt in German. The French Africans sing rhythmically, and I am living proof in that service that white men have no rhythm. Their service is extremely loud, with a lot of movement.

The entire congregation was instructed with Luther's *Small Catechism*. By God's grace, eventually all of the children were baptized. Elements of our Lutheran Divine Service, such as the creed, confession, and the Lord's Prayer, have been added to their worship. They have come to the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper. Best of all, the members themselves noticed a change in the way that Pastor Gui preaches. Their enthusiasm for a Gospel-centered sermon is something that could be an example to us all. They are so excited to be Lutheran that they have started several satellite congregations in their native lands in Africa.

Other congregations became extremely supportive of this ministry. Immanuel Lutheran, Brookfield, began to pay Pastor Gui's salary. Their pastor, Rev. Dan Schneider, became his mentor. Other congregations, including Trinity, Freistadt; St. Paul's, Grafton; Shepherd of the Hills, Pewaukee; Peace, Beaver Dam; and St. John's, West Bend, have donated school supplies in the fall and Christmas gifts for over 100 children.

In 2011, the French African Mission became an independent congregation of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. When they were officially welcomed, there was music, dancing in the aisles, and shouts of praise to God. Pastor Gui finished the EIIT program and was called by the congregation with the same enthusiasm. They have become a shining example of an immigrant congregation in our district.

By God's grace, Benediction has been able to adapt during the last decade. On Sundays at Benediction, the three or four services are in very different styles. We have a 9AM traditional service in English, a Hmong service led by Vicar Moua Vang, a monthly German service that began about ten years ago, and a French-African service led by Pastor Kasongo Gui Kabeo. On the Sundays with the German service, we have over 250 people in worship.

It has not been easy

While it is an exciting time at Benediction, the path has not been easy. We don't always understand each other. The Hmong knew almost nothing about Christianity when they first came to us. In my last adult instruction class, I asked what they knew about Jesus. One boy responded, "He was born in Europe." I have had to acquire a taste for Hmong cooking and learned to watch out for the tripe. There is considerable pressure on Hmong families who want to join our church to continue in their traditional non-Christian practices.

There have been issues of tidiness, long-distance calls to foreign lands on the church phone, multiple groups desiring to use the buildings at the same time, among other things. We have had members in immigration detention, facing deportation. I have also learned the hard way that you don't discuss finances at a voters' meeting of an African congregation and that I am not the best person to send to Walmart with the new immigrant family. (We spend far too much.)

It is very important to understand that mission never occurs without these costs. We often have the idea that we will march with the cross of Jesus and thousands will follow, but mission work is never easy. I have had to adjust some of my ways, and some of those adjustments have been uncomfortable. I have been physically and emotionally worn out and have felt very inadequate for the task. Throughout this entire process, I have often felt as if I don't know what I'm doing. Yet, God continues to give the needed strength and wisdom as we walk together in Christ.

Some of the Keys to Doing Cross-Cultural Ministry

As I reflect on our ministry at Benediction, I have observed several keys, which are important

- 1) A worker who understands the culture is of utmost importance.

In the past ten years, I have learned a lot about both the Hmong and African cultures, but there were many things that I did not understand about the cultures at first, and I still often need help. Many of the people to whom we minister do not speak English well. They have a different style of music. The Hmong have completely different marriage and funeral rites, and, as already noted, I had no idea that you can't talk about money at an African voters' meeting. It is of utmost importance to have a worker who is a part of that culture. The EIIT program has been invaluable to our congregation to train ethnic workers. In the same way, programs to train nonimmigrant minorities who reside near our congregations could prove valuable and should be explored. I strongly believe that we need to encourage

men of ethnic minorities to enter the regular programs in our seminaries and that they should become the pastors of congregations such as Benediction. However, until we have enough of them, we need programs such as the EIT to supply “emergency” pastors to new ethnic ministries, much like Pastors Loehe and Brunn prepared emergency pastors for the LCMS in Germany in the nineteenth century.

2) The workers need to be committed Lutherans.

Our styles might be very different, but each of our workers is committed to our Lutheran doctrine and practice. There is no better advocate for the *Small Catechism* than Pastor Gui. In a recent presentation on his mission trip to Africa, he emphasized how important the *Small Catechism* has been to his ministry. He stated that all churches claim to believe the Bible, but it is the Lutheran Church that understands the Bible correctly in our Confessions.

In a sermon to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the synod, C. F. W. Walther stated that the tremendous growth of his era did not come because of church bureaucratic planning (kirchenpolitische Pläne), but rather because “I believe, therefore I have spoken.”¹ They were simply sharing God’s Word and Luther’s teaching, and that Word worked to bring many people to faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Gospel burned in the hearts of the pastors and laity of the LCMS at that time. There was a burning desire in their hearts to share the Good News of what God has done for all people in His Son, Jesus Christ. Walther also shared this perspective in his first issue of *Der Lutheraner* in which he wrote, “God has also done great things for us and has brought us to a living knowledge of the one saving truth.”² Through that periodical, he desired to share the truth of the Gospel.

It is of utmost importance that our ethnic workers understand our Lutheran doctrine and that they are committed Lutherans. Some members of the French African congregation left because of our practice of infant baptism. However, that our Lutheran doctrine has become cherished by the vast majority of these French Africans is clearly demonstrated in their sharing their Lutheran faith with friends and family in Africa, leading even to the formation of several new congregations on that continent. People from throughout our district have been sending gifts for Pastor Gui to bring copies of Luther’s *Small Catechism* in French to Africa. The ethnic ministries have caused our congregation and sister congregations around us to rediscover what a treasure it is to be Lutheran. Far too often our long-time members take our Lutheran teachings for granted and long to follow the “pop” Christianity of our day. Our newest members have given them a new appreciation of being Lutheran.

3) It is important to have a mutual respect between the various groups.

The key for me was a recent study of Acts 11. In that chapter, Christians in Antioch began to share the Gospel with Greeks. Many Gentiles believed the Gospel and turned to the Lord. The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to encourage these new Christians. At the end of the chapter, the congregation in Antioch sent Barnabas back to Jerusalem with a gift to help their brothers and sisters in Christ, who were

struggling because of a famine. Note the mutual love and respect that was shown to the respective groups of Christians. The Jerusalem Christians sent Barnabas to encourage the new Christians in Antioch, and the Christians in Antioch sent Barnabas with a gift. Each was not a threat, but rather a blessing to the other.

With regard to missions, it is important that the “long-time” members are treated with respect by their pastor, by the new members, and by district officials. So often they are made to feel that they need to get out of the way, that they must change or this place will die, or even that they should consider abandoning this place for another area where they will feel more comfortable. But they love this place. They have invested a lot of money and sweat into the facilities. They have many fond memories of past years. For those who still live in the area, it is often the last bastion of what this part of the city once was. They need and deserve our respect.

Pastor Gui has drawn attention numerous times to the sacrifices made by those who went before us so that we now have this beautiful place of worship. The founders invested a great deal of time and money in these facilities. That means a lot to our long-time ethnic members. All of our ethnic workers have been extremely respectful of those who helped to found this congregation. In return, they have received the respect of all of our members. The group in our congregation most supportive of our ethnic ministries is our senior citizen group—a direct result of the respect that our ethnic ministries have given to those who built this congregation. These new ministries are not a threat to our old way of doing things. Rather, they have shown our founders and long-time members tremendous respect.

On the other hand, our congregation has been patient with many inconveniences with regard to these new ministries. We have had to find places to store the African instruments. Communion ware has been dented. Altar cloths have become stained. Lights and the heat are left on. I could make a laundry list of such inconveniences. It has not been at all easy. I have also had my share of frustrations. Yet, our people have been remarkably patient, considerate, and loving. New friendships have evolved, including among the pastors’ children. We have added a “cow fund,” so that when one of our Hmong members dies we will have the money to purchase a steer in honor of that person. Our best fund-raiser of the year is now the eggroll sale. Our Sunday School has grown tremendously, thanks to our large Hmong families. Our church council has several Hmong members. I have been astonished at how welcoming our people have been to these new brothers and sisters in Christ. They have truly received them as fellow members of the body of Christ. The respect that they have shown to these new members is a direct result of the respect that has been shown to them.

4) It is important that we see ourselves as one in Christ.

Here is the crux of the matter. Missions is not just sharing the Gospel. It is sharing the Gospel with other people so that they will become one with us in Christ. But is that really what we want? We may sincerely want to share the Gospel with others, but we may have no desire to unite with them in a Christian congregation. Several years ago, a new mission in our area was planned to bring the Gospel to people in new ways. We would assess the interests of the people in the neighborhood

and try to appeal to those interests. I asked whether we were going to try to bring these people into Christian fellowships, gathered around Christ's Word and Sacraments, and I was told that I had to think outside the box.

That is exactly how missions is often done today. We bring people to our congregations for a variety of social ministries. Their children attend our schools. We share the Good News of Christ with them. But do we really desire that they are one with us? They seem so different, maybe even inferior to us. Would we really want to call them our brother or sister?

It is a great blessing, however, when we there is that mutual respect and love as brothers and sisters in Christ. Many of the things that differentiated us become new and beloved parts of our lives. Others, like tripe, we learn to avoid. As we unite with people who are far different from us, we learn what is really critical to our faith: the blessed Gospel that Jesus Christ is our Savior. It is a treasure when we have that bond in Christ with people who are very different from us. It is a gift of God. It is what missions is all about.

Throughout the New Testament, we see how the church has broken these cultural barriers to build the church of Christ. Our Lord Himself broke these barriers in the way that He dealt with the Samaritans. He met with the Samaritan woman at the well, praised the Samaritan leper who returned to give thanks, and told the parable of the Good Samaritan. He made it a point to praise the faith of Gentile believers, including the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21ff) and the Roman Centurion (Lk 7:6). Early in the book of Acts, the Gospel began to spread to the Gentiles. Divisions quickly arose, based on ethnicity, language, or even the order in which people came to faith.

The apostles appealed to our unity in the body of Christ. When the Jerusalem congregation questioned Peter over his acceptance of Cornelius, he answered, "If God gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17). St. Paul asked the Corinthians, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" (1 Cor 1:13). When the Corinthians were divided over their spiritual gifts, Paul wrote, "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). When the Ephesians were divided among the Jewish and Gentile Christians, Paul wrote that the mystery of the Gospel is that the Gentiles, who believe in Christ, are one in Christ with Jewish believers. He wrote, "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph 3:6).

The Scriptures are clear that "The Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the people; the nations will rally to him and his place of rest will be glorious" (Is 11:10). They show us that in heaven people of every nation, tribe, people, and language are standing before the throne of God (Rev 7:9). Our unity in Christ is the goal of our mission work. We reach out to people who are very different from us to become one with them in Christ.

There are times when we would rather not live with these differences. For years, pastors and congregations have been told that churches grow according to the homogeneous model. We would rather be in a church with people like us, who share

in our interests, than to receive people who are different from us in any way. However, the church is never static. It is never homogeneous. It is always changing. At one point, we were the new “different” people whom Christ called. Today He is calling people who are different from us. He is forming one church out of many kinds of people. It is a blessing from God when our congregations are as multicultural as our Lord’s church.

Conclusion

Throughout my nearly twenty-five years in the ministry, I have attended many evangelism festivals and read several books on missions. To be honest, few of them have been helpful. At times, technique is emphasized. One must begin with mission and vision statements. One must follow a set of principles in order to grow the church. At other times, we have been shamed into doing missions: “Christ gave the Great Commission, but you’ve done a lousy job of fulfilling it. Now get out there and do better!”

My personal mission philosophy was shaped by an 1885 sermon of Dr. Georg Stöckhardt, delivered in an era of unmatched growth in the Missouri Synod. In the sermon, Stöckhardt makes the point that through our preaching of the Gospel the Lord is building one flock, which is led by our Good Shepherd. The Lord has other sheep, and He gives us the privilege of using our weak hands to bring them into His fold through the Gospel. The results are assured. Dr. Stöckhardt’s closing words of that sermon have been a source of comfort to me. They are also a good example of the keys to cross-cultural ministry that I have stressed in this paper. I would like to close with his conclusion to that sermon,

Wonderful! Our work appears to us to be patchwork and piecemeal. Our work often appears to be without plan and without goal. We do mission work according to no set plan. As occasion demands and the case may be and whatever the circumstances, we send preachers once in this direction, once in that direction. But through all these contingencies the Lord is carrying out his eternal plan. Out of this patchwork a whole is formed under God’s guiding hand. Thus the church is perfected. Yes, a miracle before our very eyes and an occasion for great joy! As a father rejoices when he once again has assembled all his children in the family home... as the aging Jacob rejoiced when he finally saw all his sons gathered around him and not a one was missing, thus will there be joy in heaven, joy before God, when once they all stand assembled about the throne of God and the Lamb! This is also a joy for the flock. Such blessed joy serves all our labors well. And the Lord our God, may he be kind to us and continue to promote the labor of our hands among us. Yes, the work of our hands, may he accomplish it! Amen.³

Endnotes

¹ C. F. W. Walther, *Brosamen* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1876), 556.

² C. F. W. Walther, *Der Lutheraner: Year One*, trans. Joel R. Baseley (Dearborn, Michigan, Mark V Publications, n.d.), 1.

³ Georg Stöckhardt, *Homiletical Aids, Sermons, Sermon Studies, Outlines*, trans. Erwin Koehlinger, vol. 2 (Ft. Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1984), 292.

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Christian Worship in the Context of Cultures

Jeff Thormodson

Throughout the twentieth century, America has undergone radical changes never before experienced in human history. Science and technology have made the impossible possible; much of what is considered routine today would have been considered miraculous a century ago. In addition, America has been transformed into a pluralistic society by great waves of immigration that have introduced many new ideas and religions into the “Land of the Free.” America has also changed in the way it thinks and perceives reality and truth due to the influence of modernism and post-modernism. These are but some of the many cultural changes that have greatly influenced the Christian church, especially in the area of liturgical worship.

While change is not new, it is helpful to realize that more change has occurred in the last six decades than in the last six centuries. Major cultural shifts and changes that historically used to take several generations are now sweeping the globe every few years. It is important to observe how rapidly these cultural changes are affecting language and cultural symbols. The Church is not insulated from its culture, as if it operated in a “cultural vacuum.” Liturgical worship is part of the surrounding culture, for in order to function, it “must assimilate various components of the culture.”¹ For our purposes, culture is understood as “the sum total of human values, of social and religious traditions and rituals, and the modes of expressions through language and the arts, all of which are rooted in the particular genius of the people.”²

Humanly speaking, an effective liturgy is a liturgy that contains powerful cultural symbolism and language that is able to communicate the Gospel without detailed explanation. While some liturgical catechesis is necessary for understanding liturgical worship, the best liturgical symbols and rites are those that have strong cultural connections and resonate with cultural meaning. On the other hand, an ineffective or weak liturgy is one that relies upon distant symbols or symbols that are foreign to the culture; the people cannot relate to it because its symbolism is divorced from their experience. Abstract symbolism that must be intellectually comprehended and retained in order to function properly in worship is ineffective; it is distant from the people and therefore loses its capacity to effectively communicate the message.

Thus, it is imperative that the Church stay abreast of cultural changes. It needs to examine regularly how cultural changes affect the current liturgical worship of the congregation. Do people understand the liturgy, or are they just going through the motions? Is the symbolism clear, or does it require extensive explanation to be

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comprehended? Is it reaching the older youth and twenty-something generation, who are perhaps the most impacted by cultural change? It is this process of relating the Gospel to culture that is called contextualization.³ My perspective and reasoning are based on the liturgical movement and insights gained from church history that demonstrate that liturgical worship requires an ongoing contextualization in order to maintain accurate symbols that effectively communicate the Apostolic faith. This perspective is especially needed now, as the rate of cultural change is accelerating.

Before continuing this discussion about contextualization and worship, it is important to understand the duality of liturgy. While liturgy consists of cultural symbols and human language, it is also an act of God. Peter Brunner wrote, “The human actions which fill the worship service from beginning to end are entirely dependent on the Triune God’s filling them with His action. . . [In worship, the Lord becomes present to His congregation only by man’s proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of Holy Communion in obedience to the command of institution.]”⁴ Recognizing God’s action in worship, the question regarding the human action remains: What makes a good liturgy? What makes a liturgy “authentically Christian and culturally relevant?”⁵ What should guide this process?

A useful metaphor to better understand the contextualization of liturgy is a “bridge.” That is, liturgical worship functions as a bridge to connect the Word of God to a specific people group. A liturgical bridge connects two “places”: the Apostolic faith and the local cultural setting. All liturgical bridges have one side that is immovable, the side that begins with the Apostolic faith. The other side of the bridge will touch down into a specific cultural setting; and so there are actually many bridges, since a different bridge is required for different cultures. Each bridge is built using building materials from inside the culture. The liturgy takes local languages and cultural symbols and creates a liturgical bridge that can bring the Apostolic faith into this new cultural setting. Not all words or cultural symbols are suitable for Christian worship. Contextualization requires that the construction of the bridge ensure that the liturgy produced is “authentically Christian and culturally relevant.”⁶ Research into the relationship between culture and worship has discovered that liturgical “worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways: transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural, and cross-cultural.”⁷ Understanding each of these dynamics will greatly assist those involved in liturgical worship.

The transcultural elements of worship are foundational and are above any specific culture; their source is Scripture, whose author is God. While each language may contain different vocables, the Word of God communicates and introduces transcultural elements into specific, local cultures. The Lutheran World Federation has produced a helpful statement that listed the transcultural elements of worship. A document called the Cartigny statement reads:

An examination of the tradition, from the Biblical witness, the early Church, and the Lutheran Reformation, reveals the core of Christian worship to be Word, Baptism, and Eucharist. The pattern, or *ordo*, of entry into the community is teaching and baptismal bath. The pattern of the weekly gathering of the community on the Lord’s Day is the celebration centered around the Word and Eucharistic meal. These core elements are clearly

evident in the historical witnesses of the Christian worship tradition. Further, it is evident that the purpose of this pattern of worship is faithfully to receive and faithfully to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁸

Vincent of Lerins said of the catholic faith that it has been held “everywhere, always, by all.”⁹ Vincent was recognizing the transcultural elements of the Apostolic faith already in the fifth century.

When critiquing the Cartigny statement, one must recognize that its focus was on identifying liturgical structure and liturgical elements in local congregational worship. Other transcultural elements also exist that are important, such as justification by faith through grace in Jesus Christ, or how God uses the means of grace by the power of the Holy Spirit, where and when He wills, to bring this justification to a person. These transcultural elements are very important, especially for Lutheran worship; however, they are really transcultural doctrines more than transcultural elements. While present in Scripture, many doctrines were emphasized only later in church history because of heresies. Many were not clearly enunciated in the literature of the early church, nor promoted in the liturgical worship of the early church, because these doctrines were not being contested. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize these transcultural elements and doctrines for they are the message of the Apostolic faith that Christian liturgy is seeking to communicate.

The second way worship dynamically relates to culture is contextually. In worship, contextual elements are those taken from local cultures and used in the service of the church.¹⁰ The incarnation of Jesus provides the best analogy for understanding how God works contextually in our world; for as the second person of the Trinity, He was outside of culture. When He took on flesh, He entered our world as a Jew. He spoke and understood Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. His teachings used symbols and examples that reflected the local culture and connected with culture’s most basic experiences. Water was used in Baptism, related to cleansing and life. Bread and wine were used in the Lord’s Supper, relating to table fellowship and sustenance for life. These contextual elements had meaning and symbolism before Jesus connected them with His promise of forgiveness. The forgiveness offered in the Sacraments was enhanced and supported by the already-present meaning and function of bread, wine, and water within the local culture.

Incorporating cultural elements into liturgical worship has followed two methods in church history: creative assimilation and dynamic equivalence. Generally, creative assimilation begins with the culture and imports cultural symbolism into Christian worship, whereas dynamic equivalence begins with the Christian liturgy and seeks to re-express it using cultural elements that have equal meaning or value.¹¹

Examples of creative assimilation from the rite of baptism include wearing a white baptismal gown or giving a lighted candle. These assimilations of cultural elements normally correspond to biblical typology, whereas local cultural elements are “reinterpreted in the context of biblical personages and events.”¹² Such assimilation is perhaps the easiest way to enrich a liturgical tradition in a local congregation, simply because there are many possibilities for creative assimilation. Assimilation must be balanced, however, by recognizing that there are many cultural

elements that should not be assimilated. There are limits to creative assimilation; Anscar Chupungco has provided some guidance for considering bringing in a new cultural element:

First, supposing the newly added cultural elements possess what one can call “connaturalness” with the Christian liturgy, have they duly undergone the process of doctrinal purification? Similarity is not always a gauge of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Second, are the biblical types used appropriate? It is possible that violence is done to the biblical text in order to accommodate culture. The opposite is violence as well. Third, do the local elements enhance the theological understanding of the Christian rite? It can happen that they divert attention from the Christian rite by overly evoking their cultural provenance or, worse, by sending a wholly different message. Fourthly, do they harmonize with other elements of the rite, and are they sufficiently integrated with them? Perhaps they are no more than useless decorative appendices or cultural tokens with little or no role to play in the unfolding of the rite. And fifth, we need to ask a question too easily forgotten . . . : do people accept them as an authentic contribution of their culture to the enrichment of Christian worship.¹³

By the making good choices about additions or changes to the liturgy, creative assimilation offers the potential for dramatically enriching liturgical worship.

The second method of incorporating cultural elements into worship is dynamic equivalence. Dynamic equivalence “involves re-expressing components of Christian worship with something from a local culture that has an equal meaning, value, and function.”¹⁴ Dynamic equivalence is a more difficult level of contextualization that often requires interdisciplinary collaboration and research. What makes it complicated is that every culture has its own identity, and every language has its own genius and special characteristics.¹⁵ Since each person is locked into his or her culture, it often requires a collaborative effort to achieve. The LWF suggests a procedure that may be followed when employing dynamic equivalence:

First, the liturgical *ordo* (basic shape) should be examined with regard to its theology, history, basic elements, and cultural backgrounds. Second, those elements of the *ordo* that can be subjected to dynamic equivalence without prejudice to their meaning should also be determined. Third, those components of culture that are able to re-express the Gospel and the liturgical *ordo* in an adequate manner should be studied. Fourth, the spiritual and pastoral benefits our people will derive from the changes should be considered.¹⁶

Whenever working with cultural elements using the dynamic equivalence method, one must be aware that almost every aspect of culture has religious undertones.¹⁷ One must be concerned not only about importing unwanted cultural meaning into Christian worship, but also about maintaining a proper distance from culture. When religion and culture become too close, that is, the line between them becomes hard to distinguish, there is a danger that Christian rituals will be culturally reduced “to mere

social affairs.”¹⁸ For example, baptisms in Russia are fashionable and have become more of a social celebration than a new birth into the Christian faith. Another example might be church weddings in Europe, which have lost almost all their religious meaning.

Another method that deserves mention is formal correspondence. Formal correspondence also begins with the liturgy when introducing Christianity into a new cultural setting. In contrast to dynamic equivalence, however, formal correspondence starts with the liturgy and translates it into the new culture without finding any dynamic equivalents. It “tends to be no more than a literal, word-for-word or phrase-by-phrase, translation to the point of ignoring the linguistic characteristics of the audience.”¹⁹ One evidence of this method is clearly visible when transliterations of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin phrases are used in the liturgy and church life. While formal correspondence is a doctrinally safe method of bringing the Gospel into a new cultural setting, it is unable to bring the depth and richness that dynamic equivalence offers.

The third way liturgical worship interacts with the culture is by challenging the culture, that is, being counter-cultural. Christian worship doesn’t seek to blend in with the culture and become absorbed; rather, it seeks ways to critique the culture by opposing those elements which are contrary to the Word of God. Scripture teaches that Christians are a people on pilgrimage, aliens traveling through this world on their way to their heavenly home. Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Rom 12:2). The LWF Cartigny statement put it this way:

The Church throughout its history, in its faithful proclamation of the Gospel, has challenged the status quo and the social injustices of the day (for example, Christ and his disciples sharing meals with the socially unaccepted people of their day). In the same way, the churches in every generation and in every context must ask what in their worship can/should be counter-cultural, challenging the culture in which it exists and ultimately facilitating its transformation.²⁰

In one sense, the Lutheran term of *simul justus et peccator* could be used to describe people as well as cultures.²¹ The Church needs to maintain a voice against sin and by its witness contradict cultural elements that are not of God. One vivid example comes from India, where it is reported that some upper-caste Christians refuse to commune if they cannot do so before Dalits in their congregations.²² While these Indians are acting in accordance with cultural norms, such a cultural teaching runs counter to the Christian culture. In the Church, there are no class or caste distinctions, there are no rich and poor, male and female, slave and free before the altar of the Lord. All kneel together as the body of Christ to receive the Sacrament, and so here is a good example of Christian worship that is counter-cultural. The Church is in culture and uses cultural elements in her liturgy, but the Church must maintain enough distance to be able to critique the culture.

Finally, worship has a cross-cultural dynamic; there is a sharing between cultures of liturgical ideas and practices that can enrich the liturgy, as well as strengthen the sense of the *communio* of the Church.²³ Cross-cultural dynamics of

worship are excellent ways of sharing the best of each culture, as well as stimulating creativity in other Christian communities. It must be said, however, that the same caution must be exercised to insure that any cultural elements being introduced through cross-cultural channels are culturally appropriate in the new culture and will enhance their liturgy. What works in one culture will not necessarily work in another, for not all cultural elements can be used cross-culturally.

To summarize thus far, Christian worship relates dynamically with its surrounding culture in four ways: transculturally, contextually, counter-culturally, and via cross-cultural elements. Methods such as creative assimilation and dynamic equivalence are able to incorporate new cultural elements into liturgical worship. What is most important is always to keep in mind the center of liturgical worship: Jesus Christ. Christian worship must be rooted in Jesus Christ and built upon the Apostolic foundation. From its very beginnings, Christian worship has been built upon existing tradition. As Eugene Brand has said:

Because of the historical and incarnational aspects of Christian faith, the Church's worship has remained anchored to the historical person of Jesus and the culture in which he lived. Since Jesus was a Jew, Christian worship has retained a Jewish character. . . . Adherence to liturgical forms rooted in the Judaism of Jesus' day is what marks Christian worship as authentic. The sharing of the loaf and the cup in the context of thanksgiving is the chief example.²⁴

Almost every textbook that traces the roots of Christian worship shows how our Christian worship was patterned after the traditions and worship patterns of the Jewish synagogue. The ancient pattern of synagogue worship that included gathering around a meal on the Sabbath has obvious parallels with the early church gathering on Sunday for the Lord's Supper.

As the worship tradition grew, the early church struggled to recognize what would be acceptable to use in worship and what was not. For example, candles were not used until the fourth century because of their association with idolatry and pagan temples.²⁵ White baptismal gowns are mentioned early on in the Christian tradition as representing forgiveness and purity, most likely because of a creative assimilation based upon the *toga candida* of the Roman citizens.²⁶ While almost every cultural element has a similar story behind it, the critical principle that has been learned over the ages is that any liturgical change or introduction of new cultural elements *must* be built upon what already exists. There needs to be a connection with the core elements of Word, Baptism, and Eucharist mentioned above. The Roman Catholics put it this way,

[C]are must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing. The process can perhaps be described as a tree that branches out, as a rite that develop into other different rites to form a . . . liturgical family.²⁷

This is helpful, for it reminds us that any cultural elements that are introduced into the liturgy must not add anything to the Gospel; rather they are to be brought in to fill up a cultural gap.²⁸ The liturgy is not about entertainment or simply adding elements for the sake of interest. It is to make the Apostolic faith available and

relevant to all people, in every culture. That is the purpose behind the ongoing process of contextualization, to insure that liturgical symbolism is effective in communicating the Apostolic faith.

A paradigm shift occurs for many people like myself when they discover that the liturgical movement is not working toward a repristination of ancient liturgies. Rather, their focus is on identifying historical norms for worship based upon New Testament and church history, and then using these insights to establish fundamental principles for ongoing, liturgical reform and contextualization. Their motive is pastoral, in that they desire the liturgy to once again become a vital element in forming the faith of believers. Part of the reason many congregations are turning to non-liturgical formats is because liturgical worship has become ineffective at conveying the faith. In Christian worship,

signs which no longer convey the message of the liturgy nor speak to the people are empty, lack efficacy and betray the very purpose of liturgical signs. One is perhaps tempted to conclude that they must therefore be changed. But such a conclusion without further qualification is open to debate. For there are signs which may not be understood, because they happen to belong to another cultural milieu or have been obscured by historical evolution. It seems that the right approach to the matter is catechesis, which situates liturgical signs in their cultural and historical context.²⁹

Catechesis in liturgical worship is important, for even the best cultural symbols need some explanation. While it is a liturgical truth that the best way to learn about the liturgy is to actively participate in it, it is also recognized that “participation was enhanced when it was informed.”³⁰ The better people understand their liturgy, the better they are able to, and desire to, participate in the liturgy. The past century of liturgical reform has shown that most “resistance to [liturgical] change often stems from ignorance and a lack of information, rather than anything else.”³¹ Therefore, it is important to remember that before any changes are introduced or suggested, there must be an appropriate amount of education beforehand.

Motivation is also an important factor, and it is helpful to understand the function that the liturgy originally had in the church. Before the days of the catechisms, it was the liturgy that was the principal means of religious training!³² Historically, it was the liturgy that functioned as the catechism (shedding new light on the familiar phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi*). As the church enters the post-modern era, the liturgy may be a formative ally in Christian education. Unlike the catechism that emphasizes the rational, intellectual powers of understanding and memory, the liturgy has “a far greater formative power with its appeal to the emotions, the senses, and the will.”³³ It is the desire of the liturgical movement to help the church recognize the power and influence of the liturgy to form one’s faith.

Architecture is also a powerful cultural element that the church has available in her service, yet it is a symbolic power that is seldom used. Consider the typical baptismal font used in many Lutheran churches. It is normally small, movable, and contains a small silver bowl that remains empty except on the day a baptism is scheduled. What does such a font say about baptism? Does it communicate the same degree of importance that is part of Lutheran sermons and

catechetical teaching? In recent years, attention has been given to the importance of the font, due to the influence of the liturgical movement. Baptismal fonts have become more elaborate to emphasize their importance, and they have been placed near the entrance to the sanctuary to symbolize how one enters the Christian faith and the family of God. Catechesis has taught Lutherans that it is acceptable to dip one's finger into the water as a reminder of their baptism, reinforced by making the sign of the cross. Some newer fonts have running water to emphasize baptism as the living water, while others are becoming large enough to allow full immersion to represent our entering the watery tomb and rising to new life.

These changes are brought about as a means to make liturgical worship more effective in forming the faith of the believers. In America, it is an unfortunate reality that most people spend only one hour a week in church. Why not work to make the liturgy as powerful as the sermon in communicating the message of the Gospel? Understanding the dynamics of contextualization and being able to analyze critically the cultural symbolism within liturgy are ongoing processes very important to maintaining a dynamic worship service.

As one begins reading in this area, it is helpful to know that a variety of terms relate to these processes, such as accommodation, adaptation, localization, inculturation, contextualization, and indigenization. Many of these terms have overlapping definitions, which may indicate that theologians have difficulty agreeing on a single term.

The single exception is the term indigenization, which is becoming the preferred term in the literature. While there is still a variety of definitions, the primary source for the current understanding of indigenization comes from the Roman Catholic Church, where it is

[d]efined in the Papal Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990:89), as 'the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human creatures.' Thus instead of a merely external relationship between the Gospel and culture, conceived in terms of 'kernel' and 'husk,' it urges instead a dynamic 'ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them.'³⁴

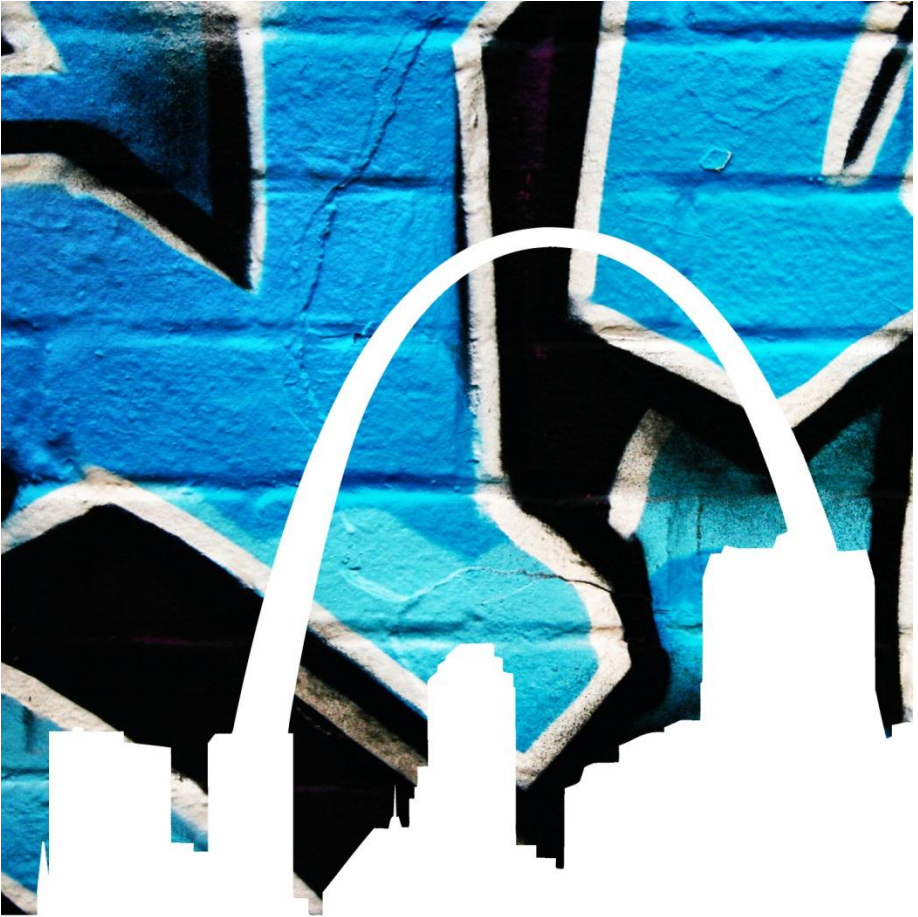
When one speaks about contextualization, localization, or inculturation, the classical understanding of bringing the Gospel into new contexts is understood. What is different about indigenization is that it often seeks to indigenize the Apostolic faith even as the Apostolic faith indigenizes culture. African theology is giving much attention to this area as Africans search for an authentic African theology. Many are putting the Apostolic faith into African categories and expressions, separating it from any cultural elements that have previously been part of Church tradition.³⁵ There is a general rejection of Western traditions that they see as being generated by Western categories that don't fit African culture.³⁶ The unanswered question is, "Is this use of indigenization altering the transcultural elements of the Apostolic faith?" Is indigenization as being used in Africa in such a way that allows the Gospel to transform culture, or is culture transforming the Apostolic faith? There seems to be a

double movement contained in the definition of inculturation that is significant and demands caution.

This issue is very complex and most likely will have an effect upon all Christendom as the center of Christianity shifts to Africa in the next fifty years. It must be observed that Africans are taking seriously Christian worship, seeking the same goal that is also being sought here: that liturgical worship contain accurate symbols that are effectively able to communicate the Apostolic faith. Cultures don't stand still; they are constantly moving. Hence, it follows that there must be now, as in the past, an ongoing process of contextualization.

Endnotes

- ¹ Lutheran World Federation, *Worship and Culture in Dialogue* (LWF: Geneva, 1994), 153.
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- ³ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 77.
- ⁴ Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M. H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 124.
- ⁵ LWF, *Worship and Culture in Dialogue*, 7.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Lutheran World Federation, *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity* (LWF: Geneva, 1996), 24.
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- ⁹ Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 47.
- ¹⁰ LWF, *Christian Worship*, 25.
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- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81–82.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ¹⁷ Chupungco, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* 78.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ LWF, *Christian Worship*, 83.
- ²⁰ LWF, *Worship and Culture in Dialogue*, 133.
- ²¹ LWF, *Church Worship*, 19.
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- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 151.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 178.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, 77.
- ³⁵ Sindima, Harvey J., *Drums of Redemption: An Introduction to African Christianity* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 162.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.



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Theology in Context: Music as a Test Case*

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.

The church's attitude towards music has not been without some ambivalence. In his *Homily on Psalm 1*, St. Basil (ca. 330–379) credits the Holy Spirit with the wisdom to use our human inclination for pleasure to teach us virtue through the singing of psalms. Since a catchy tune is likely to help the spiritually young retain what the words of the apostles alone might not, the Holy Spirit “mixed sweetness of melody with doctrine so that inadvertently we would absorb the benefit of the words through gentleness and ease of hearing, just as clever physicians frequently smear the cup with honey when giving the fastidious some rather bitter medicine to drink.”¹

Is music a necessary means for spiritually immature Christians to get hooked onto something more virtuous? Or is music a gift from above to be embraced as part of our creatureliness, along with the engagement of the senses and the enjoyment of sound, rhythm, and color? Basil moves along a spectrum that allows for both views. Doctrine is beneficial, but music can be sweet like honey too. Text and music together can serve in the “training of souls” of both “children in actual age as well as those who are young in behavior” by helping them commit to memory the psalms as they go about their business at home and the marketplace.²

On a good day, St. Augustine (354–430) praises the devotional use of music, realizing that when hymns “are sung these sacred words stir my mind to greater religious fervor and kindle in me a more ardent flame of piety than they would if they were not sung.”³ Other days, the church father is not so optimistic, aware of the seductive power of music to move, please, and stimulate our mood: “But I ought not to allow my mind to be paralyzed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray. For the senses are not content to take second place.”⁴ Like Basil, Augustine shows ambivalence in his attitude towards music in church, allowing for the tradition of church singing “in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion,” while forcefully warning all who “find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys” against committing “grievous sin.”⁵ Augustine wavers between the dangers and benefits of the marriage between text and music.

Is music a means to a greater end such as the worship of God or the reception of his gifts through life-giving words? Or, more than being a vehicle of the

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word, could music also express such greater ends in musical form, becoming a sort of life-giving musical word itself? The answer is yes. While music can be a means to communicate the text and bring it to light (and life!), the text may also allow for a range of musical settings that can elicit a corresponding spectrum of responses to the text.⁶ While the relationship between text and music can be explored in various ways, Basil's and Augustine's dilemma encourages us think about the nature and function of music from a theological angle.

In this essay, I argue that this type of reflection concerning the use and reception of music in the church represents a concrete form or test case for getting at the broader question of the relationship between theology and culture. This question calls for some confessional Lutheran response and contribution, as we become a more ethnoculturally diverse church where the gifts of various cultural groups are being brought to the church. What do these gifts bring to our church, fellowship, theologizing, and proclamation? How does the word interact with gifts of culture? When do these gifts get in the way of the gospel? When do they serve to illuminate and even embody the gospel?

Our argument proceeds in four stages. First, we will show that the history of Western music from the medieval to the Baroque period shows a spectrum of ecclesiastical attitudes towards music that go from seeing music suspiciously as an obstacle to the word to seeing it more warmly as a gift from God to communicate the word. Such attitudes towards music offer us a window into the church's various forms of engagement with the culture around her, giving us insight into the theological and cultural assumptions that shaped such engagement or lack thereof. In the overall narrative, the Lutheran tradition represents an approach that is not shy but rather bold in interacting creatively with the culture while remaining faithful to its theological commitments. Second, we will show how the Lutheran tradition offers, in the *Apology's* distinction between "sure signs of grace" and "signs instituted without the command of God," a promising framework for developing a theology of the sign (*signum*) that promotes the church's creative use of signs in culture while discerning their potential to communicate and embody the gospel.⁷

Third, we will bring a representative, trans-ecclesial body of music from the Latino Christian world (a *corpus Hispanicum*, as it were), as well as some lesser-known works (inclusive of both Latin American and U.S. Hispanic contexts), into conversation with Bevens's *Models of Contextual Theology*, where he shows various ways of conceiving the interaction between theology and context.⁸ The results of this interaction will yield a synthetic framework to assess from a Lutheran angle potential uses of music selections from a particular culture (in our case, music coming from the Latino Christian world) in the life of the church—either devotionally or, in some cases, liturgically—by ranking the range of theological orientations of the musical text (and its cultural associations) vis-à-vis the priority and centrality of God's word.

Finally, we will show how the Lutheran tradition exhibits a remarkable degree of balance when it comes to the evaluation of the use and reception of music as a form of culture in the church. Four factors for evaluation are the primacy of the word of God in the church's life, the congregation's capacity to receive and express the word in a particular time and place, the degree to which the church's music embodies its past theological tradition or heritage, and finally the degree to which the

church's music engages creatively and effectively the present contexts of the cultures in her midst.

I. Lutherans Meet Western Culture: A Brief Lutheran Reading of Music History

Music constitutes a form of culture in two ways. As artifact, music has the capacity to represent a set of values or ideals. As art, music has the capacity to produce and communicate meaning creatively and persuasively, and to foster a certain way of doing things.⁹ During the Renaissance era (c. 1420–1600), a church accustomed to singing monophony (the singing of a single line) for centuries—what is known as Gregorian chant—debated at length whether polyphony, the singing of independent lines of equal importance, served a good liturgical purpose. After all, the Holy Spirit had served the church well with monophony for centuries. Why change now? To be honest, there was also a cultural liking for monophony that filtered into the Eastern and Western church because this was the musical form inherited from the singing of psalms in Jewish worship and used in the Greco-Roman world where the church moved about for a long time.¹⁰ Like monophony, polyphony is out there among the folk before it begins to make it slowly into the church.

Theology had a role in assessing new polyphonic music. Would polyphony get in the way of the text, or enhance its communication and reception? Once polyphony slowly set in, there was yet another debate on what kinds of consonances or intervals constituted good and pious polyphonic music. But these arguments were not purely theological in their scope. Calls for perfect consonances and against certain kinds of dissonances in the church were often colored by philosophical assumptions held in Western culture about the nature of the universe as a mathematically proportionate and harmonious cosmos—an idea proposed by Pythagoras long before we hear it from others in the medieval age.¹¹ At first, it was better to stick to fifths, fourths, and eighths, the so-called “perfect” intervals (due to their simple mathematical ratios) that best bore witness to a perfectly ordered universe. Later on, the common folk, and then the church a bit more hesitantly, moved into thirds and sixths. These new consonances were used in folk music and started to sound good to late medieval and Renaissance ears.

Sixteenth-century theologians from Protestant Reformers to Catholic bishops at the Council of Trent (1545–1563) weighed in on polyphony. To various degrees, consciously or unconsciously, vocal and instrumental music was assumed to embody and transmit some worldview that could be seen as compatible or incompatible with the church's faith and life. Along the more Platonic line of the Augustinian warning against the power of the senses, Zwingli (1484–1531) does away with instrumental music in worship, highly suspicious of the sensual power and idolatrous use of music to derail sinners away from Christian piety but also committed to a philosophical preference for pure spirit over cumbersome matter.¹² While Zwingli, an accomplished musician, does have a place for music in personal devotion and education outside the church, he does not use it in public worship.¹³ In part due to the dangers of idolatry, but also as a reaction to the excesses of polyphony, Calvin advocates the singing of psalms without accompaniment, steering away from instrumental and choral music in worship.¹⁴ Cultural judgments are made

on the basis of theological premises and vice versa. Liturgical iconoclasm may be caused as much by Old Testament injunctions against the worship of images as by privileged philosophical commitments to a dualistic cosmology that is suspicious of the senses.

The Lutheran chorale is unthinkable without the development of polyphonic medieval *organum* and forms such as the motet and conductus—all forms of polyphony where a tenor voice, often borrowed from an earlier plainchant, carries the melody and is embellished by one or more upper voices. In Luther's day, the melody would not have been sung by a soprano voice accompanied by other voices in some synchronized harmonic and rhythmic fashion as we are used to today. The melody was sung by a rhythmically free and often syncopated tenor voice with other voices providing "lively runs."¹⁵ Luther thinks highly of Josquin des Prez (c. 1450–1521), an accomplished Renaissance composer, whose motet *Ave Maria virgo serena* bears all the marks of a flowing, canonic, chordal, and cadential form of multi-voiced polyphony. Luther praises Josquin for his ability to communicate the gospel through music, but also for his musical art.¹⁶ Josquin is a long way from monophony. So we know where Luther stood on the question of polyphony, even the kind where not all intervals were "perfect." He liked it, just like many of the folk in his day did, and found it useful to foster the speaking and hearing of the word in the congregation.

The Lutheran chorale, as we hear it today, also benefits from the move made in the Renaissance towards the *cantus firmus* (or "fixed melody"), which goes beyond early polyphonic *organum* by placing the main melody in the upper voice, making the other voices play a supporting role. The focus on the fixed melody gives the music of the time a homophonic chordal texture, like the one we are used to in traditional four-part Lutheran hymnody, which is later developed in the Baroque era (1600–1750) with the introduction of an improvised *basso continuo* (played by say, a lute, organ, and/or a viol or bassoon) as the main device for accompanying melody in the context of a now fully developed move to functional tonality and harmonic progression. Four-part harmony supporting the melody on top is also made possible by the rhythmic equalization of parts fully achieved by the Baroque period, allowing for more control and synchronization of voices in congregational singing. As Lutheran theology meets Western culture, we see a certain appropriation of the move from monophony to early polyphony, from homophony to full harmony.¹⁷ Lutheran hymnody never ran away from these cultural phenomena, but drank from the wells of the musical Western developments in service to the word.

Today we are somewhat removed from either Luther's day or the Baroque when it comes to our approach to hymns. In Luther's day, the folk would have likely been more used to rhythmic flexibility and complex syncopation in their hearing and singing of hymns.¹⁸ At that time, notation did not have the benefit of bars and accents did not always fall on the first and third beats of each measure. This free rhythmic quality is for the most part lost in our hymnody today, but not in some styles of folk music around the world. Global South Christians from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are notorious for falling outside the established Western harmonies and meters—not because they are less musical, out of tune, or can't keep a beat, but

because they are more melodically and rhythmically free in their approach to music.¹⁹

Our hymnody did not fall from heaven one day. It is a product of developments in Western music, which, though contested at times by some church official, were able with various degrees of success to serve the gospel and make it intelligible to some groups of people at a particular time. Today we are more harmonic than polyphonic. In some ways, we are closer to the Romantic spirit than the Baroque one in our singing of hymns, happy to follow nineteenth century conventions that aim at the use of “beautifully polished phrases and dance or march rhythms to create a certain mood and to give an ornate expression to personal religious feelings,” whereas Luther’s hymns fundamentally “were a confession of faith, not of personal religious feelings.”²⁰

Above all, Luther is interested in conveying the word, but he is not antithetical to cultural expression and communication in doing so. The rise of the Lutheran chorale suggests that Luther had benign assumptions about the possibilities of music as creative art and treasured artifact, considering music a divine gift second only to theology that can deliver and embody the Word to the German folk in his day and age.²¹ Luther liked what the senses heard in the polyphony of his day, welcoming the cultural developments. This is not to say all forms of polyphony were conducive to worship. Later Roman Catholic counter-Reformers also had their doubts at Trent (1545–1563) about certain forms of polyphony that encumbered the text with secular musical sources.²² Not every new cultural development makes it into the church.

In the Tridentine reform, the Catholic Church kept the use of Latin. Luther used Latin, but not in country or village churches where the vernacular ruled.²³ While Luther was not the first to bring music in the vernacular to the church—it had been at best tolerated since the Middle Ages for special feasts and occasions—he did give it a regular use and legitimacy in the church service.²⁴ There is no cultural iconoclasm. The embracing of the vernacular in language and music as vehicles of the word in service to congregations can be justified theologically in Lutheranism, perhaps with an appeal to the incarnational nature of revelation, which Luther also tied into the Holy Spirit’s work through visible means like water, bread, and wine. But its adoption can also be seen as a form of strong cultural engagement, bringing into the church and the liturgy both past musical church tradition and more contemporary forms intelligible and meaningful to God’s people. Luther can work with monophony and polyphony of various sorts. As a musician and composer, Luther would have been sensitive to their possibilities in the divine service.

Lutherans have drunk from other developments in Western music. In the Renaissance, a renewed interest in the recovery of ancient Greek oration explains why the *seconda prattica* (second practice) movement justified the composer’s use of unconventional musical devices, against rules of counterpoint at the time, to get the text’s idea across. When music theorist Giovanni Artusi (c. 1540–1613) complained of Claudio Monteverdi’s treatment of dissonance in his fifth book of madrigals, Monteverdi’s brother retorted that the critic had only looked at the structure of the madrigal without paying attention to the words.²⁵ The text rules and breaks the rules if needed. There are theological reasons for Luther’s preference for

the use of music to highlight the text of Scripture, but this move is also congruent with the philosophical and aesthetic spirit of the Renaissance.

Without the second practice and its preference for the freedom and flow accorded to the solo voice, we would have no operas like those of Monteverdi (1567–1643) or G. F. Handel (1685–1759). We would have no oratorios like those of J. S. Bach (1685–1750), which include solo passages that do not only aim at projecting the text even in the midst of an elaborate Baroque counterpoint but require great virtuosity to perform. Again, there are not only theological but also cultural preferences towards these musical forms which are grounded in the revival of what ancient Greek drama was thought to privilege in the move, that is, oration over structure.

In the Baroque, the doctrine of affections built on the Renaissance's interest in word-painting (where the music tries to "paint" an affect or emotion expressed in the text) and used such painting explicitly to move the hearer's mood, to bring about a desired effect in the hearer. While there may not be a strict one-to-one correspondence between specific notes or keys and corresponding kinds of emotions or affect (what makes one cry, makes another laugh!), research shows that there is an emotive reaction to music if one hears what one is not accustomed to hearing and is thus surprised by the unexpected. This alone suggests that response to meaning in music depends not only on the musical form *per se* and the meaning attached to the musical form by the composer-interpreter, but also on the music the hearer understands and thus can anticipate in his cultural milieu.²⁶

Like in all hermeneutics of aesthetics, there is both a composer/interpreter-oriented intent and a hearer-oriented response to any musical form.²⁷ We bring theological and cultural assumptions to our composition, interpretation, and hearing of music. What is heard and criticized as obnoxiously repetitive call-and-response in some North American cultures is heard and celebrated as wondrous simplicity in many global South contexts. Hearer-response sensitivity does not prevent the composer from wanting to tell us what he wants the notes to evoke or express either explicitly or implicitly in his music. If I listen to J. S. Bach long enough, and know what to listen for when he paints theological ideas in his music, I can anticipate to some degree what is coming. Programmatic music is an example of explicit music painting where you are told what to look for; J. S. Bach could be more implicit, allowing hearers to interpret what he is trying to communicate.²⁸ Renaissance and Baroque interest in the rhetorical use of music assumes a philosophical worldview about the power of music to affect people in certain ways.

How might certain cultures react to the same kind of music? There will be difference in the reception of musical forms not merely because of the message they embody but because the music itself—even "church" or sacred music—is a historical phenomenon that is appropriated differently by hearers from various cultures. Even our most cherished Western musical forms in Lutheran "culture" may get in the way of the message in some non-Western cultures, just as non-Western musical forms may embody or promote the Lutheran confession in some contexts over time.²⁹ Culture plays a role not only in the creation but also in the adaptation and reception of sacred music.

The Baroque focus on the power of music as such to move minds is tempered by the Lutheran focus on the word of God over the musical figures per se. Musical figures must, therefore, serve to describe musically what the word is saying to move the soul. Such focus on the word is helpful against the later Romantic temptation towards a purely subjective use of music to express personal feelings (music for individual pleasure, as it were). For J. S. Bach, like Luther, the aim of music is the glory of God and, yes, the enjoyment of man's soul too. After the Enlightenment, however, such enjoyment is understood no longer as a sacred delight in God's gifts, but is secularized as a form of entertainment where either the interpreter or the hearer becomes the focus of the musical act.³⁰ Yet such dangers of culture should not deter Lutherans from evaluating music as a cultural sign in every age for the sake of the gospel. No romantic return to the golden age of Lutheranism will realize this task for us. Herein lies the missiological challenge for the church as she engages various cultures with the Lutheran confession.

Our brief reading of music making and reception in various periods of Western history shows music's capacity for embodying and communicating a certain worldview, and thus its cultural character as art and artifact. We saw that debates in the church on the potential reception in Christian devotion of various forms of music included not only deeply held theological commitments but also philosophical assumptions about what kind of cultural expressions should embody and promote such commitments. The same is true today.

Debates on traditional vis-à-vis contemporary worship are not only theological, but cultural. People not only decide what is good and bad theology, but also what is good and bad culture. In a church with people of many cultures, the decision on what is good and bad culture is trickier than the question of what is correct theology. What is at stake here is not whether theological content should be distinguished from a certain cultural form, but rather whether Lutherans can engage in the critical and constructive use of cultural forms in terms of their capacity to embody and promote solid theological content today. Our brief Lutheran reading of Western music shows that Lutherans have been bold in cultural engagement while remaining faithful to the content of their confession.

II. Two Kinds of Signs: A Lutheran Framework for Engaging Theology and Culture

The Lutheran Confessions offer a promising framework for approaching cultural signs, and thus for thinking through the relationship between theology and culture. The *Apology* distinguishes between two kinds of signs, namely, the sacraments as "sure signs of grace" and other "signs instituted without the command of God." Therefore, signs instituted without the command of God are not sure signs of grace, even though they perhaps serve to teach or admonish the common folk.³¹

The *Apology* opens up the possibility of a theology of "signs" (*signa*). The confessors are mostly interested in drawing a contrast between "the sacraments as rites, which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added [and] humanly instituted rites."³² As a rite instituted by God, the sacrament is a sure sign (*signum*) of "God's will towards us, through which God moves hearts to believe,"³³ making us "certain" of his promises.³⁴ The sacramental *signum* is, and

thus affects the same thing as, the word to which it is united. The sacrament is a “visible Word.”³⁵

Further attention must be given towards developing the second half of the *Apology*'s distinction. What are we to make of those “signs instituted without the command of God” (*signa sine mandato Dei instituta*), which could be useful to teach and admonish? What would be an example of such religious-cultural signs? In the Spanish edition of the *Book of Concord*, Andrés Meléndez includes an example of such a *signum* offered by Justus Jonas in his German edition of the *Apology*—namely, the image of a cross.³⁶

The image of a cross, in and of itself, is ambiguous. It can communicate any number of meanings and evoke any number of responses, some less helpful than others when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel.³⁷ In a recent article, Douglas Rutt has noted that the historic post-Conquest reception in Latin America of portrayals of a *dying* Christ, such as Diego Velázquez's crucified Christ (1632), has privileged the image of the Christ “with us,” the one who is in solidarity with those who suffer.³⁸ He argues that, while this image of Christ “with us” does not yet point people to the Christ who has already *died* “for us,” it can still teach North American Christians, who live in a context of abundance where suffering is often downplayed and empty crosses avoid dealing with God in the flesh and the cross, to see the Christian life precisely through suffering and the cross.³⁹

Accordingly, Rutt speaks of such cruciform life in terms of the experience of *tentatio*, which God uses in life to bring us down to Sheol through repentance in order to help us depend solely in his grace.⁴⁰ But Rutt also suggests that the Christ “with us” image is potentially useful for developing a pastoral theology of solidarity with those who suffer; at the same time, he acknowledges that the image of the *dying* Christ “with us” is not yet the Christ who has *died* “for us,” reminding us that Christ is not only an example of cross-bearing for the needy but God's gift of salvation for sinners.⁴¹ We note how Rutt's analysis helps us see the potential ambiguity of a familiar cultural-religious sign to offer a clear witness to or embodiment of the Gospel. The useful or evangelical use of the sign depends not only on the intended message the sign might deliver, but on the recipient of the sign and the cultural baggage he brings to the table when reading such a sign.

Rutt represents an attempt to understand how a sign of significance to a people group functions before assessing its potential use to admonish or teach the folk. The sign may serve as a bridge to admonish with the law or preach the gospel. The sign may serve as preparation for the gospel (*praeparatio evangelica*). More broadly, at its best, the sign may illustrate or even embody some aspect of the Christian story. At its worst, the sign remains ambiguous enough to become an obstacle to all these aims. It may even serve a countercultural purpose by pointing people away from particular cultural assumptions hostile to the gospel. All cultural signs are, in a sense, religious signs for good or bad. Not all signs are created equal.

The *Apology*'s brief discussion of the “sign,” though not developed as such, serves as the sort of conceptual framework and guiding post that helps us engage culture theologically, promoting the church's creative missionary and pastoral engagement with cultural signs while also acknowledging that these are not God's “sure signs of grace” (*certa signa gratiae*). Admittedly, even the best or most

convincing attempts at teaching and admonishing the folk through visible and audible “signs” and “rites” other than the ones instituted and commanded by God, such as those offered through dance, painting, sculpture, poem, cinema, and of course music (or any combination of these), may or not serve the Word or be intelligible to the people of a particular culture.⁴² However, the *Apology* is at least, it seems to me, opening a door for pastors and missionaries to engage culture theologically by asking about the potential pedagogical use and evangelical reception of signs of significance in various cultures.

III. Dealing with Culture Theologically: Hispanic/Latino Church Music as a Test Case for Assessing Bevans’s Models of Contextual Theology

While the *Apology* offers us a framework for distinguishing between two kinds of signs (*signa*), its intention is not to offer a more in-depth schema for discerning the potential value of cultural-religious signs for use in the church. That task requires bringing theology and culture into conversation with one another. To illustrate the productivity of such an analysis, we will bring samples of music from the Latino world—including a trans-ecclesial *corpus Hispanicum* of devotional music—into conversation with Bevans’s classic work *Models of Contextual Theology*. We will suggest how music can serve as a test case for dealing with culture theologically.

Bevans introduces a variety of models—some creation-oriented, some redemption-oriented—that are potentially helpful for thinking through the relationship between theology and context.⁴³ In a creation-oriented theological approach, the world is basically seen as good because God created it and can reveal his power and care through ordinary words, events, and people. In a redemptive-oriented approach, on the other hand, the world is basically seen as bad because, though created by God, it is corrupted by sin and thus in dire need of God’s redemption.

These distinctions or “basic theological orientation” of Bevans’s models are heuristic and may have several variations, depending on how one appropriates them. A Roman Catholic theologian and former missionary to the Philippines, Bevans understandably defines the creation-oriented approach along Roman Catholic lines, emphasizing the capacity of human nature to respond freely to God’s supernatural grace. Therefore, he also associates the approach with Rahner’s more problematic notion of “anonymous Christianity,” which locates God’s grace generally in the world and thus apart from a clear proclamation of the gospel. On the other hand, Bevans speaks of the redemption-oriented approach in terms of the human inability to choose God’s grace, which Lutherans adopt. Yet Bevans associates the redemption-oriented approach with the notion that God’s grace should replace human nature—a conclusion that would raise at least some Lutherans’ eyebrows. Do Lutherans actually believe that? Moreover, do Lutherans have anything to say on God’s work through ordinary people and events in creation?

While Bevans offers his own “basic theological orientation” on what creation-oriented and redemption-oriented means, disagreement on the particulars should not detract us from the usefulness of this distinction and the possibility of appropriating it according to the Lutheran confession. Lutheran catechesis affirms

creation and human nature as God's gifts. While the confessors affirm our corruption by sin and need for redemption, they do not speak of replacing nature with grace.⁴⁴ Nature and grace are taught in different ways. While God reveals his power in nature, God's redeeming grace is not sought in nature but in the gospel. Lutherans also assert that God works through creation to sustain it with everything needful for life in this world. Through vocation, God uses humans as "masks" to cooperate in his work of preservation. Yet, only through the church, where sinners gather around word and sacraments, does God provide for the redemption of humanity. Lutherans can say creation is God's gift and needs God's redemption. Similarly, Luther speaks of music as God's gift along with theology though he is aware of the potential idolatrous abuse of both gifts.

Bevans draws artificial distinctions among his models for the sake of conversation, to show the obvious extremes, and for the sake of analysis. Models do not correspond exactly to the reality they represent.⁴⁵ Along the spectrum that goes from creation- to redemption-oriented options, Bevans presents six models of contextual theology, namely, anthropological, transcendental, praxis, synthetic, translation, and countercultural. Because the synthetic model is a certain compilation of the others, and the countercultural model may be seen broadly as an attitude that can be applied to other models insofar as they are deemed to have compromised the gospel in favor of culture, we will focus on the first four models, seeing how they might function in the *corpus Hispanicum* of church music.⁴⁶ We will assess how musical forms from a cultural context can be evaluated, in terms of the themes they communicate and the cultural associations they evoke, and ranked vis-à-vis the centrality of the word in the Lutheran church.

Bevans uses agricultural images to describe his models. The translation model evokes the image of the seeds of the gospel being planted in foreign soil.⁴⁷ The old time message is adapted into various cultural idioms. Translating "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" into the Spanish language, while maintaining a traditional four-part chorale form in place, is an example (*Culto Cristiano*, #129).⁴⁸ The translation model also comes to us in more present cultural musical forms, such as in the *Introit* and *Gloria Patri* from the Lutheran Cuban Mass (*Misa Cubana* 2), where the seed of the word is transmitted through genres of Cuban music—namely, the Habanera for the *Introit* and the Cha for the *Gloria Patri*.

Most music in the Lutheran church falls into the translation model. Some favor idioms from the past, others from the present. Both sides of the old traditional vs. contemporary music debate agree on the translation model, where the Christian message is seen as transcultural, even if they disagree on the best cultural medium to communicate it without doing harm to the message. The appropriate musical medium rests on factors such as the role of past tradition as a source of theological identity, the place of present contexts in the intelligible expression and reception of the message, and the positive or negative associations that both past and present musical forms might bring to our minds.⁴⁹

In the anthropological model, the seeds of the word are already in the garden (world) so that all there is to do is wait for them to bloom.⁵⁰ The goal is not so much to play the "Christian" message through some musical medium, but to see what God can teach us through musical offerings already in the world. An example

lies is the use of native Amerindian instrumental songs offered during processions or offertories in church. A more specific example is the use in Hispanic churches of the highly popular song *De Colores*, which typically speaks of the beauty of creation without necessarily making any explicit reference to the gospel. Is there a place for this kind of music in the church?

De Colores has likely been heard by almost any Latin American child at some point in his life. The song has positive connotations, evoking images of childhood, nature, and church. Under the anthropological model, the assumption in the use of such a song in a church setting is that God has revealed something of himself in creation that we can appropriate more fully. The song may potentially serve as a starting point for meeting a certain people group where they are in terms of their cultural familiarity with a piece. However, since the song only points to the natural knowledge of God in a popular form, the anthropological model may fall into a romantic view of culture and lose the centrality of Christ and the gospel in the church's worship. A way this danger is dealt with is by using the piece to set up a gospel stanza, a move made in ELCA's *Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* (1998), which adds a third stanza of the folk piece (LLC #494) that speaks of the joy of living under the grace of the King who does not die and calls the church to quench the thirst of souls for Christ by spreading his light of grace to many a soul.⁵¹

The praxis model sees the world as a garden that must be weeded out daily.⁵² One becomes a better gardener through practice as one takes care of a world plagued with evil. The model exhibits a critical stance towards an unjust society and calls Christians to work for the building of God's kingdom on earth. Canticles such as *Un pueblo que camina* (LLC #511) or *Enviado soy de Dios* (LLC #415) fall into this category. There is an interest in calling God's people to make the world a more humane place in the sphere of temporal righteousness before the neighbor—especially, the poor and vulnerable. The danger lies in confusing faith and works, failing to distinguish between active justice or righteousness before our neighbor through good works and passive righteousness before God through faith in Christ alone.

In global South communities where poverty, exploitation, and marginality are an everyday reality, there is room for music that speaks of God's care for those who suffer and the church's works on behalf of the suffering neighbor. The challenge is to see how music can paint for us what the Christian life looks like in a context of injustice without making our praxis a condition for justification before God or without making the Christian hope in the life of the world to come conditional on the building of a just society in the here and now.⁵³ The same principle applies to a canticle such as *Tú has venido a la orilla* (*¡Cantad al Señor!* #62), which calls modern day Galilean disciples and fishers of men to participate in, and indeed cooperate with, the Lord in his mission. The challenge is to portray textually and musically the Christian life, in its indicative (divine initiative) and imperative (our responsibility) sense, without compromising the centrality of the gospel.

Bevans's fourth model is the transcendental one, which parting from a particular life experience seeks to draw broader lessons for others.⁵⁴ The model assumes that if the gardener cultivates his garden, he will be able to inspire others to

do the same in their own contexts. We are now in the realm of the testimonial. A good example is Justo González's *De los cuatro rincones del mundo* (LLC #450), where he uses the Hispanic historic experience of multi-ethnic origins or geographical-historical *mestizaje* to teach the whole church about her *mestizaje* (catholicity) and God's love in Christ for the nations. The model shows that theology is done from some individual or communal context, which can serve to teach some aspect of the Christian story to the whole church.

A danger of the transcendental model is to make individual or communal experience the standard or ideal image for all Christians. One must be careful that an individual's life experience does not become necessarily normative or universal for all. In some cases, the musical expression may be too personal or communal to be grasped by a larger group, as is the case of the *Introit of Misa Cubana 4*, where a brief phrase from *Son de la loma y cantan en llanos*, a popular Cuban folk song, is used brilliantly to call people to gather in worship by evoking the descent of farmers from the hill (*loma*) to the plains (*llanos*) for dance and celebration. Such liturgical adaptation of folk song may be meaningful to the Cuban people and perhaps to Cuban Americans, but not easily understood outside of the island or Cuban-America cultural settings.

In the latest edition of his work, Bevans added a countercultural model.⁵⁵ Similar to the praxis model in its suspicion of the world, the gardener is to pull out the weeds from the garden (world) before he can plant the seeds (of the gospel) there. While one could associate certain forms of music with the model's critical assessment of culture as hostile to Christianity, it might be more helpful to see this model as an attitude towards certain moves in music. For example, the normative use of Latin in the liturgy in the Western Catholic church up to the time of Vatican II could be seen as countercultural. Despite the use of music in the vernacular in church all the way back to the Reformation of the sixteenth century and before, the use of Latin in the Catholic Church attempted in part to keep the church pure from the influences of the secular world where the vernacular ruled.

Countercultural proponents may argue for the preservation of the church's identity in the midst of an unholy world through appeals for uniformity in worship. A call for the preservation of "church culture" typically accompanies such arguments. While there is a salutary place in Lutheranism for liturgical unity and identity for the sake of the gospel and love, a narrow countercultural position might dismiss engaging present contexts for the sake of a broader catholicity in service to the word and people from various cultures in our midst. The statement is often made that hymnals today include musical offerings from non-European Christian cultures of the past, so new Lutherans should be grateful. This claim for catholicity in the liturgy is true to some extent, but the statement does not consider that such offerings have been filtered through Western European musical forms that, with the exception of Gregorian chant, are likely foreign to what the original music of these people groups would have actually sounded like in their own contexts.

The danger of countercultural attitudes does not lie in their concern for good theology, church unity, or even wholesome past tradition in the face of a culture that is hostile to the gospel. Rather the danger lies in seeing all culture as bad or hostile to God. In such cases, countercultural becomes anti-cultural and mono-

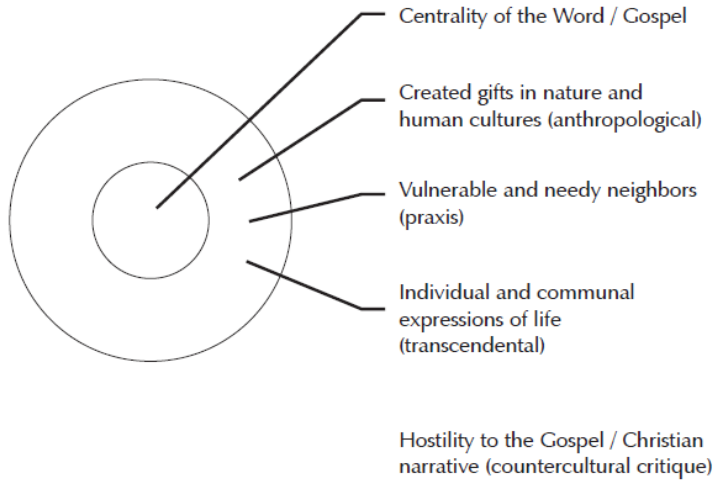
cultural, making the church sectarian rather than catholic, and leading her to summarily exclude the contributions of other cultures to the proclamation of the gospel in the church through various forms of music.⁵⁶ “Church culture” talk has arguably been used, consciously or unconsciously, to suppress important gifts from non-Anglo communities to the Lutheran church.

Bevans’s synthetic model is an attempt to bring the concerns of all other models into dialogue with one another.⁵⁷ Without seeking an unrealistic cohesion, let us propose a Lutheran synthetic approach to dealing with culture theologically. Keeping the gospel at the center of the church’s proclamation through music (a non-negotiable for Lutherans), we ask: when is it prudent to use music in church to paint the Creator’s revelation in the beauty and wonder of nature and human culture (anthropological)? When is it prudent to use music in church that focuses on personal and communal experiences in order to illuminate some aspect of the Christian story we all can learn from (transcendental)? When is it prudent to use music in church that yearns for the care of the vulnerable and calls the church to do works of justice (praxis)? When should some forms of music be used to set the church apart from other musical forms in the secular realm that might be associated with messages hostile to the Word (countercultural model)?

In our synthetic proposal, let us think of a target we shoot for in assessing the use of music in the church (see Figure 1 below). The bull’s-eye is God’s word, the Christian narrative, but also more specifically, the gospel that points us to God’s mercy in Christ. That is the center and foundation—the *signum* in the *Apology*—which directs us most clearly to God’s will and promise. While Bevans’s models tend to ascribe to them equal status, Lutherans give transcendental priority to the Word as the *norma normans* which serves as the grammar for assessing various models. Completely outside the range of the target lies all that is hostile to the gospel in any particular culture and should be kept out of consideration in the expression of the church’s faith and worship. Much discussion and disagreement might already take place at the level of what is outside the range. What musical developments in our cultural milieu might be hypothetically useful but practically detrimental to the church’s devotional life due to the anti-Christian images, experiences, or philosophies they embody or evoke? Making judgments at this level will require not only a theological understanding but also an understanding of the nature and function of music as a cultural art and artifact in a particular context.

Outside of the countercultural critique, there are still other areas within the range that, while not allowed to take the place of the center, might score some points in the direction of engaging cultures theologically for the sake of the gospel. For instance, music that bears witness to the beauty of nature and human life can help tell of the Father’s created gifts and their place as vehicles to praise his name. Music that calls for the need to assist the widow, the poor, the orphan, and the most vulnerable in society can serve to teach of God’s work in the world through his “masks,” and can help new Christians rejoice in the fruits of faith and their vocations among neighbors in need of the gospel and works of mercy. Last but not least, music that is representative of an individual or communal experience of the love of God may also be used occasionally in contexts where the same can be anchored in legitimate biblical narratives or themes.

A Lutheran Synthetic Proposal
Figure 1



While one does not buy into any model completely in a synthetic approach (including the translation model), there is a sense in which, on account of the centrality of the word in our Lutheran confession, we still give priority in our proposal to the translation of the message into some cultural idiom. What is most important is not to buy wholly into a model's potential assumptions and logical conclusions, but to take into account its main concerns and starting points as one assesses music as a form of culture theologically. One might think, for instance, about how the starting points and themes of each model may serve to set up or may follow from—either partly or wholly, and both theologically and musically in terms of meaning effectively given and received—some aspect or theme of the Christian story at the center of our lives as God's people. In a Lutheran framework, for example, a song of praise to God for the gift of life may set up a hymn that proclaims new life in Christ, which in turn may be followed by another hymn about living out the new life through vocation in the world. In the liturgical context of the church's worship, these choices would be made considering not only the flow among the individual musical forms in themselves, but also their strategic place in the overall flow and rhythm of the *ordo* in the liturgy where the service of the word leads to the service of the sacrament.

IV. Drawing Threads Together: Factors for Assessing the Use of Music in Church

In distinction from other Reformers, Luther shows a remarkable degree of balance in his assessment of music. He sees music a gift and grace of God, not a human gift. At the same time, in affirming that “God has preached the gospel through music,”⁵⁸ Luther clearly does not see music as an end in itself unless it embodies and communicates the word, the text, and the sermon that preaches Christ. Because fine arts, including music, can be used to “serve the gospel’s cause,” Luther fights “against all who would divorce the gospel from human culture.”⁵⁹ To praise Christ intelligibly to hearers, therefore, Luther also shows sensitivity to the language and music of the people, moving from monophony in Latin to polyphony in German. His chorales or hymns, which are adopted for the sake of congregational singing, can be based on pre-Reformation Latin hymn melodies, German *Leisen*, and secular and folk songs.⁶⁰ Though somewhat unique, “From heaven above to earth I come,” Luther’s adaptation of a pre-Reformation popular tune on the arrival of a messenger from far lands to bring news, serves the purpose of communicating the gospel to the people in culturally familiar ways. The original folk tune was part of a singing game well known to the young. In Luther’s adaptation of the popular song, the Christmas carol speaks of the message of the angel, who brings good news of the child to be born.⁶¹

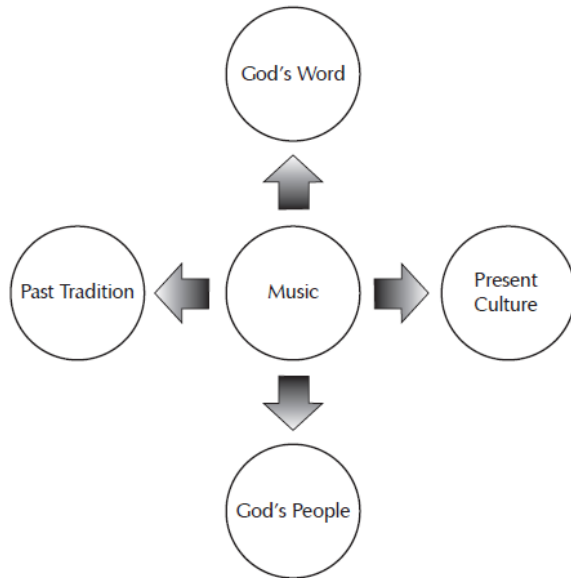
We have noted that in the reception of the musical culture of his day for devotional and liturgical purposes, Luther does not entirely leave behind the past tradition of chant and Latin. The broader lesson for us is that Luther can still make use of the best of the past liturgical tradition while not ignoring but rather engaging present cultural gifts. Everything is done in service to the gospel: “All our liturgical arts and forms, all our attempts to draw men into the orbit of Christ must therefore not be allowed to obscure the one who himself is both the subject and object of worship: Jesus Christ.”⁶²

But everything is also done in service to God’s people. If some may need more time to appreciate the Lutheran chorale, others will need more time to appreciate the introduction over time of new musical forms from around the world into the life of the church. Only the idolatrous abuse of the fine arts is condemned in Luther’s view of worship. But such abuse occurs both when liturgical arts obscure the gospel and when they no longer serve the neighbor in love. In assessments of music in devotion and worship, and especially in so-called worship wars, a measure of evangelical and cultural patience is needed for the sake of the gospel and love.

Believers are free to make use of them [i.e., arts] in service of others. The only rule to be observed . . . is a certain moderation lest the devout be absorbed by external rights, or place their trust in works of art . . . Churches ought to be built, pictures painted, and hymns composed in order to call men to the gospel, but not for men to do God a favor. And if ever should come when churchly ceremonial and pomp threaten the works of service and love, all the expenses of buildings, pictures music, and the like would have to be deferred in favor of practical works of mercy.”⁶³

It is evident in our discussion that Luther holds a number of factors together, and even in some tension, as he approaches the use of music in the church, namely, the church's past heritage, the present cultural contexts, the praise due God and the proclamation of his word, and the need of the neighbor. These four factors help us draw some threads together, which can be illustrated by placing music in the intersection of two different lines, one moving between God to man (vertical) and another between past and present cultures (horizontal) (see Figure 2 below). The *Apology's* distinction between two signs operates primarily along the vertical line, contrasting signs backed by the word of God from other cultural-religious signs that are not commanded by God but may serve to instruct and admonish the folk. Bevens's models of contextual theology operate mostly along the horizontal line that moves from transmitting the past to engaging the present, giving various weights to the influence of the past vis-à-vis the present in the church.

A Lutheran Fourfold Approach
Figure 2



A Lutheran fourfold approach to dealing with music as a form of culture theologically would ask four questions:

Along the horizontal line:

1. Past Tradition: How does the musical form embody the church's past heritage (e.g., Scripture, Lutheran Confessions, Lutheran chorale, or Gregorian chant)?⁶⁴

2. Present Culture: How does the musical form engage the present culture(s) in our midst in order to bring people closer to the Gospel or to highlight and teach some aspect of the Christian narrative (e.g., natural knowledge of God, yearning for peace and justice, the problem of theodicy, life experience or testimonials of God's love and goodness)?⁶⁵

Along a vertical line:

1. How does the musical form serve the word of God, the signs (*signa*) he has commanded and promised, and more broadly the teaching of the Christian story?

2. How does the musical form serve the people? How does a cultural sign help to communicate the word intelligibly to the people? How does it serve to admonish and teach the common folk? How does the sign help them worship God without making it too difficult or too thoughtless? What associations does the form bring to the people? How churchly are these associations?

Luther can hold these considerations in a healthy tension. Some musical forms engage present culture well but do not take into account the past tradition. So everything must be contemporary because historic is old-fashioned. Could a Lutheran identity be sustained in the long run by this one-sided approach? Others only repeat the past tradition but do not engage present cultures at all. Everything is historic hymnody and nothing addresses contemporary cultures. Could a Lutheran church avoid sectarianism and actually bring people of other nations into its fold by proceeding this way over the long run?

Some musical forms present the word without regard for its cultural communication or reception. Is this good proclamation? How can they *understand* if they have not *heard*? What cultural forms can best embody the gospel without watering it down? Other musical forms serve the people with what they understand and are familiar with, but do not go more deeply into the word. There is also the problem of giving people only what they are familiar with or want all the time to the detriment of not acquainting them with the past (or relatively established) tradition or the present (developing) devotional expressions of the Christian faith.

Our fourfold approach helps Christians recognize that they gravitate toward various sides of the diagram in their use of music in the church. A theologian can never achieve perfect balance, no grand synthesis. In some cases, he might want to move along a certain side of the spectrum depending on the context. In doing so,

however, he does not want to lose sight of other factors and will want to grow in areas that receive less attention. This is a more humbling attitude than arguing for the one way to resolve the tension inherent in the dynamic of theology and culture. There is no magic model for engaging culture theologically, but many possibilities, which are in part determined by the contexts God's faithful workers serve. Beyond cultural curiosity, we need pastoral, missional, or catholic flexibility, and not a one-size-fits-all approach, even if this means making mistakes along the way as we deal with cultural signs theologically in a world that is increasingly diverse in its ethnocultural makeup and increasingly in need of the word of God.

Endnotes

¹ St. Basil, *Homily 1*, in *Music in Early Christian Literature*, trans. and ed. James McKinnon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 65.

² *Ibid.*

³ St. Augustine, *Confessions* X, 33, trans. and ed. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 238.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁶ "Yes. The music does illumine the text, but its role goes beyond that of being a vehicle for the words. The reverse may be true as well: the text may enable the tune to 'speak' as the dominant element. For example, varied musical settings of the Kyrie Eleison will elicit quite differing responses to that text. The intensity of the lamenting or pleading quality could cover a wide range of emotions and place emphasis on the music." Mary K. Oyer, "Using Music from Other Cultures in Worship: A Conversation with Mary K. Oyer," in *Music in Christian Worship*, ed. Charlotte Kroker (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 165.

⁷ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, XIII, 3, in *The Book of Concord, The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [hereafter *Apology*], ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

⁸ Bevans speaks of "culture," which he describes as religious or secular, as a dimension of the broader category of "context," which in turn includes personal and communal experiences as well as social location and change. In this essay, I use "culture" in a more inclusive sense than Bevans's use and thus as a category that could potentially account for all dimensions of what he calls "context." Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), xvi–xvii, 5–7.

⁹ Brown questions the assumption "that music can be treated simply as a 'package' that contains the Gospel message instead of being treated as an art that embodies and interprets the Gospel message by its structure and the way it sounds." Frank Burch Brown, "Religious Meanings and Musical Styles: A Matter of Taste?," in *Music in Christian Worship*, 142; Saliers argues that "music is never an 'ornament' to worship . . . Rather, music which serves the worship of God is itself an embodied form of praying, proclaiming, and listening." Don E. Saliers, "Liturgical Musical Formation," in *Liturgy and Music: Lifetime Learning*, eds. Robin A. Leaver and Joyce Ann Zimmerman (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 387.

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that St. Basil's and St. Augustine's cautious endorsement of music is connected with the practice of singing psalms; Salazar traces both the scalar and melodic qualities of Western plainchant to influences from Hebrew, Greek, and other cultures. See Adolfo Salazar, *Conceptos fundamentales en la historia de la música* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988), 39–82.

¹¹ For a narrative of how this assumption played out in medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment debates concerning what constitutes proper tuning, see Stuart Isacoff, *Temperament: How Music Became a Battleground for the Great Minds of Western Civilization* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

¹² Don E. Saliers, "Liturgical Musical Formation," in *Liturgy and Music*, 385–386.

¹³ Robin A. Leaver, "Liturgical Music as Corporate Song 1: Hymnody in Reformation Churches," in *Liturgy and Music*, 286–287.

¹⁴ Calvin's conservative approach to the liturgy has not remained among his theological heirs today. See Robin A. Leaver, "Liturgical Music as Homily and Hermeneutic," in *Liturgy and Music*, 340–341, and Bert F. Polman, "Forward Steps and Side Steps in a Walk-Through of Christian Hymnody," in *Music in Christian Worship*, 66–67.

¹⁵ LW 53:204.

¹⁶ “God has preached the gospel through music, too, as may be seen in Josquin, all of whose compositions flow freely, gently, and cheerfully, are not forced or cramped by rules, and are like the song of the finch.” *LW* 54:129–30.

¹⁷ For an account of the evolution of Western music, see Adolfo Salazar, *Conceptos fundamentales en la historia de la música*.

¹⁸ *LW* 53:204–205.

¹⁹ In some non-Western cultures, for instance, the basic shape of a melody or its percussive sounds is more important than having a consistent pitch, the rhythmic complexity and vitality of music more important than its meditative or inward character, or the free and repetitive flow of the music more important than some evolutionary sense of development towards a goal. See Mary K. Oyer, “Using Music from Other Cultures in Worship,” in *Music in Christian Worship*, esp. 156–158, 177–182.

²⁰ *LW* 53:197.

²¹ “I am not satisfied with him who despises music, as all fanatics do; for music is an endowment and a gift of God, not a gift of men . . . I place music next to theology and give it the highest praise.” Ewald M. Plass ed., *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 980.

²² The venerable tradition of sacred polyphony or *organum* had already developed in Notre Dame Cathedral from about 1160 to 1250 with Léonin and Perotin, whose work is compiled in the *Magnus liber organi*. See Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, 3rd edition, vol. 1, *Antiquity through the Baroque Era* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2010), 59–67.

²³ *LW* 53:XVI–XVII.

²⁴ *LW* 53:XVI, cf. 195. Here the story of the German carol, which Luther used, is similar to the story of the toleration, demise, and ultimately popular reception of the fifteenth-century Spanish *villancico* still in use in Latin America today. The practice of the *posadas*, for instance, is inspired by the Christmas *villancico*. See Paul R. Laird, *Towards a History of the Spanish Villancico* (Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1997), and Tess Knighton and Álvaro Torrente, eds. *Devotional Music in the Iberian World, 1450–1800: The Villancico and Related Genres* (London: Ashgate, 2007).

²⁵ Thus Giulio Monteverdi states that “the oration is the mistress of the harmony.” For the Artusi-Monteverdi, see Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, 212–214.

²⁶ A classic work is Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956).

²⁷ For a recent work on music from the perspective of cognitive neuroscience, see Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Plume, 2006). For more composer/ interpreter-oriented treatments of musical aesthetics, see Enrico Fubini, *Música y lenguaje en la estética contemporánea* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994), and Aaron Copland, *What to Listen for in Music* (New York: Signet Classics, 2002). A chapter of Copland’s work above is included in Lee A. Jacobus, *Aesthetics and the Arts* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 164–169, along with other chapters by Eduard Hanslick, “The Effects of Music” (170–182) and Susanne K. Langer, “On Significance in Music” (182–212).

²⁸ For a vivid description of Bach’s rhetorical use of music, see James R. Gaines, *Evening in the Palace of Reason: Bach Meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Harper, 2005), 80–95; for a more scholarly description, see Friedemann Otterbach, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Vida y obra* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1990), 73–89.

²⁹ Marquart suggests that “‘local culture’ is to be absorbed by the liturgy in small doses rather than big chunks, and gradually, preferably in the course of centuries. ‘Small dosage’ coloration is virtually unavoidable, if for no other reason than that every translation is to some extent a cultural adaptation.” He also argues that “various components of culture must submit to the discipline of a sound ‘liturgical grammar’ to be of service in the worship of the church” (p. 68). Kurt Marquart, “Liturgy and Evangelism,” in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 58–76.

³⁰ For the contrast between J. S. Bach’s era and that of Frederick’s, see Gaines, *Evening in the Palace of Reason*; see also Otterbach, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 93–97, cf. 69–72.

³¹ *Apology* XIII, 3.

³² *Apology* XIII, 3.

³³ *Apology* XIII, 1.

³⁴ *Apology* XIII, 4.

³⁵ *Apology* XIII, 5; for a more in-depth look at Luther’s theology of the *signum*, see Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator: Luther’s Concept of the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953), 101–172.

³⁶ *Libro de Concordia: Las Confesiones de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana*, ed. Andrés A. Meléndez (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), *Apología*, XIII, 3, n. 274. The *Concordia Triglotta* edition of 1917 includes the reference in the German main text (“als ein gemalt Kreuz”). So does the Henkel English edition of 1854, which translates the whole passage as follows: “Signs, therefore, which are instituted without the command of God, are not signs of grace: although they may be memorials to children and to the ignorant, like a painted cross” (italics mine).

³⁷ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “God Against Us and for Us: Preaching Jesus in the Spirit,” *Word & World* 23/2 (2003): 134–145.

³⁸ Douglas L. Rutt, “Luther, Tentatio, and Latin America,” *LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 19/1 (Epiphany 2010): 7–11. In his reflections, Rutt draws in part from the work of Alberto L. García, “The Witness of the Cross in Light of the Hispanic Experience,” in *The Theology of the Cross for the Twenty-First Century: Signs for a Multicultural Witness*, ed. Alberto L. García and A.R. Victor Raj (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 189–215.

³⁹ Rutt, “Luther, Tentatio, and Latin America,” 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8–10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10–11; similarly, Martin Luther can speak of Christ as both gift and example in *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*, in *LW* 35:117–124.

⁴² For examples of theological engagement with North American cultural signs, see David Lewis, “Cinema and the American Mind,” and Anthony A. Cook, “Media as a Source of Information and Identity,” in *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 112–161.

⁴³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21–22.

⁴⁴ *FC*, Epitome and Solid Declaration, Art. I.

⁴⁵ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 28–33, 139–140.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that Bevans sees the countercultural model as a “model” in its own right and not merely as an attitude towards other models.

⁴⁷ For the translation model, see Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 37–53.

⁴⁸ *Culto Cristiano* (1964) maintains the past tradition in two distinct musical settings, namely, Luther’s original, more rhythmically syncopated version (not uncommon in sixteenth century polyphonic style), and the later isometric version more familiar in the West with more equalization of parts and rhythmic homogeneity.

⁴⁹ “The stronger and the more specific these associations are in nonchurchly directions, the less suitable the corresponding music is for congregational worship.” Marquart, “Liturgy and Evangelism,” 67.

⁵⁰ For the anthropological model, see Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 54–69.

⁵¹ *Jubilosos, jubilosos vivamos en gracia puesto que se puede.*

Saciamos, saciaremos la sed ardorosa del rey que no muere.

Jubilosos, jubilosos llevemos a Cristo un alma y mil más,

difundiendo la luz que ilumina la gracia divina del gran ideal;

difundiendo la luz que ilumina la gracia divina del gran ideal.

⁵² For the praxis model, see Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 70–87.

⁵³ For a confessional Lutheran engagement with the language of humanization, liberation, and kingdom-building in Latin American and U.S. Hispanic/Latino theologies, see Leopoldo A. Sánchez, “The Struggle to Express Our Hope,” *LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 19/1 (Epiphany 2010): 25–31.

⁵⁴ For the transcendental model, see Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 103–116.

⁵⁵ For the countercultural model, see *ibid.*, 117–137.

⁵⁶ I am in basic agreement with Bevans’s critique of the potential dangers of the countercultural model. *Ibid.*, 124–127.

⁵⁷ For the synthetic model, see *ibid.*, 88–102.

⁵⁸ *LW* 54:129.

⁵⁹ Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 186.

⁶⁰ For a list, see *LW* 53:208.

⁶¹ For an analysis of the hymn, see Jerónimo Granados, “Martín Lutero y la música”, *Cuadernos de Teología* XXVI (2007): 129–144.

⁶² Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, 187.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Similarly, Bevans speaks of the “experience of the past,” which is associated with the preservation and defense of God’s revelation in Scripture and the church’s theological tradition. *Models of Contextual Theology*, 5–7.

⁶⁵ Bevans’s description of what he calls “present context” is helpful at this point. It includes factors such as personal or communal experience (e.g., immigration), whether the culture is secularized or religious (e.g., North Atlantic vis-à-vis global South Christian), social location (e.g., poor, minority status), and social change (e.g., the move from modernity to postmodernity to postcolonial thought in the West). Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 5–7.

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Dealing with Theology Culturally: A Response to Leopoldo A. Sánchez

Jack M. Schultz

In the previous article, “Theology in Context: Music as a Test Case,”¹ Dr. Leo Sanchez demonstrated some of the many complexities involved in attempts to disentangle the cultural from the theological. I have been asked, as an anthropologist, to respond to Dr. Sanchez’s remarks.

As has been observed by others, the role of respondent is “an invitation to interfere in a good-natured way.”² I plan to do that, to interfere, in a good-natured way. I speak with no rancor, I have no bones to pick, or scores to settle. I am one of you. But I won’t speak like you.

Being on a Concordia campus, I have many opportunities to speak with theologians. I think they often don’t like what I have to say. I’m afraid some of you won’t either. As Clifford Geertz³ noted about anthropologists, “it has been the office of others to reassure; ours to unsettle.” Anthropology is comparative in its approach, and the act of comparison is by its nature critique; but critique is not inherently critical. Anthropology functions essentially as a cultural critique by juxtaposing a foreign (alternate) perspective. My task today is to invite alternative considerations as we attempt together to understand processes which allow us to proclaim more clearly the gospel of our Lord to the nations.

As an anthropologist, my vocation is the investigation of the human factors and cultural forces that circumscribe and permeate our entire being. Anthropology makes visible everyday practices and beliefs that appear neutral but systematically privilege some actions and thoughts while marginalizing and subordinating others. An anthropology of *religion* views religion as it does any other aspect of culture—as a human product. Because it views it as such, it can reveal the usually hidden human forces that are at play in the development, expression, and maintenance of religion—forces which are at play even if they go unrecognized or denied. To be sure, as a Christian, I recognize religion isn’t *only* a human product. But people are certainly involved in the maintenance, perpetuation, and replication of a religious expression. Religious expressions become institutionalized, and human institutions systematically privilege some actions and thoughts while marginalizing and subordinating others. Social science is interested in how that happens. Gospel communicators should be too.

John Calvin (perhaps it is unwise to quote him as support for one’s position at a Lutheran symposium!) observed almost five hundred years ago the importance of a consideration of the human dimensions when doing theology. He wrote:

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True and substantial wisdom principally consists of two parts, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves. But, while these two branches of knowledge are so intimately connected, which of them precedes and produces the other, is not easy to discover.⁴

While I don't assert that we need to recognize social science as an equal to theology, I will nonetheless maintain that an adequate understanding of the human is essential for an authentic theology that allows broad application.

Within our church, an anthropology, i.e., Calvin's "knowledge of ourselves," is virtually absent from our discourse. In our discussions about who we are, what our church will be in the future, and even in our so-called "worship wars," we tend to frame the issues along only theological lines, when perhaps we should also be willing to consider some of the human, cultural dimensions that are operative in our church. Our theological anthropology remains underdeveloped. For many, it is not much more elaborated than "man was created in the image of God; he is utterly fallen and sinful and in need of redemption." None of this theology is disputed. However, there is more that can and must be understood for accurate and full representations of Scripture in our theology.

Allow me to provide a compelling example: the racial makeup of Lutheran church bodies in America. In 2007, I contacted the Synod's head of research services for basic demographic and socio-cultural data of LCMS members (I was writing a paper that was later presented to the American Anthropological Association's Religion Section that included a discussion of the LCMS). I was surprised to learn that the Synod does not gather or maintain data regarding the racial makeup of its members. All that the research services could supply was a survey funded by Thrivent (then AAL), which collected only limited data.⁵ I later located a more robust picture of Lutheran demographics in The American Religious Identification Survey⁶ with its comparison of twenty-two American Christian religious groups. The two studies, both of which, unfortunately, lump all American Lutherans together, each disclose Lutheran church bodies as having the greatest proportion of "white members" (95%), identifying them as the least racially diverse of all the denominations in the US—to repeat, the least diverse! How are we to account for that fact? Certainly we must consider human forces to explain this phenomenon or else we are left to the preposterous conclusion that the Holy Spirit is calling a disproportionate number of people from predominantly one racial group at the exclusion of others. Obviously, if we are going to account for the racial makeup of the Lutheran church bodies in America, we must investigate human social processes and cultural practices. In other words, we need to determine what we as Lutherans are doing that attracts some kinds of people while putting off others. Certainly, there are human, social forces active within our own denomination. Isn't it prudent to determine what they are?

Regardless of one's awareness of social forces—whether acknowledged or denied or ignored—they are still present and impressing themselves upon us. When one becomes aware of these forces, they can be mitigated and manipulated, but they won't be mastered. However, without an awareness of the social and cultural forces, we can easily mistake our local traditions and preferred way of doing things for our

Lord's expected way. We may conclude that our way of doing things is simply "what the Bible says" (even if it's the use of a pipe organ, the English language, or the call *process*). We'll see our preferred way as the obvious right way and will expect others to accommodate us.

As human beings, we are born with very little definition of being and interacting. Animals have a built-in relationship to their environment and each other; human beings do not. The culture one is born into readily supplies these relationships and definitions. We desperately need meaning in the form of answers to such questions as, Where do we come from? Why are we here? What is worth dying for? What's my place in this all? Meanings are not built-in at birth, but our cultures provide that meaning for us. Even a cursory overview of cultural diversity demonstrates that human beings have no difficulty finding meaning in a profusion of alternatives. Through the processes of enculturation and socialization, a shared sense of reality, or worldview, is developed within a culture. The worldview is a meaning system. To its adherents, this worldview serves as their "basic reality." Through ongoing interactions and conversations and an entire cultural milieu, a worldview is perpetuated that appears to the people who inhabit it as absolute reality—and they have no reason to imagine it as anything else. Alternative worldviews are judged by them (as by us) as quaint, naive, absurd, or evil.

Culture is not something that one can take or leave; it is not something that can be avoided or embraced as a matter of preference. It is a context that frames all of experience, not something optional that may be avoided. Dr. Sanchez, referencing Augustine, considers in his article some of the "dangers and benefits of the marriage between text and music."⁷ It is even more problematic to consider the dangers and benefits of the inseparable union between culture and theology. For many, it is naively assumed that theology may be done in such a way that would transcend culture. But that cannot be done. All understandings, even theological ones, are contextual. In example of the challenge of separating culture from theology, allow me to consider one dimension of culture, language, to illustrate how the two are intertwined. Can we imagine a theology without language?

Language enables thought, but also confines and compels thought—even theological thought. Theology uses words. Words provide categories used for organizing a world—categories which prescribe, assume, and guide perceptions and inhibit and hide the alternatives from view. Words are spoken and used in a particular context by a particular group of people and understood within that context. Words are comprehended in reference to other words and shared experiences. Word meanings change through time. Words are limiting yet adaptable; discrete even while overlapping. As theologians, we may recognize the limitations of a language, exchange one language channel for another, but we cannot do theology without language. By comparing one language to others we begin to see their limiting and compelling dimensions, and then we can seek to temper those limitations. But in no way could we do a theology without using language. Neither can theology be done without the influences of culture, as language is but another dimension of culture. It is extremely difficult, and from the perspective of the social sciences impossible, to hold separate theology and culture. It must be recognized that we do not have a

culturally unbiased understanding of theology. We would do well to acknowledge this entanglement to mitigate its unacknowledged consequences.

In an investigation of human, social processes, it is necessary to distinguish the very human academic discipline of theology from the Word of God. Certainly the two overlap, but they are not the same thing. The academic discipline of theology, while based on the Word of God, is not equivalent to the Word of God. Theology is a human exposition of the Word of God, resulting in or affirming doctrinal constructs and dogmatics. While we rightfully maintain that doctrine is standard and unchangeable, we must yet concede that as a human endeavor, conducted by fallen man, theology is liable to error or misuse and correction. (I would point to the Reformation as one such correction of a human misuse of theology). That the Holy Spirit works by way of the Word does not preclude human misuse of that Word.

Even while affirming that scriptural texts have been canonized and by that definition are unchanging, we recognize that the readers bring a “something” to the text which influences how that text is read. That “something” includes an ever-morphing cultural context. We rightfully defend the authority and inerrancy of Scripture and affirm the veracity of the Symbols (the three ecumenical Creeds and the Book of Concord), but it must be acknowledged that our *reading* of these unchanging texts may, in principle, be incomplete or subject to a misunderstanding—readings may be improved.⁸

I am maintaining that it is critical to understand the distinction between the Word of God and the culture-specific formulations of that Word. My remarks here are made to impress upon you just how difficult that is to do, and yet how critically important it is to do. Admittedly, the distinction between the Word of God and a culture-specific understanding of that Word may be easily granted heuristically. The difficulty is in praxis. We must admit that this distinction is not cleanly cut. Indeed, my peers will not allow such a distinction to be made; there is no “cultureless” accounting or understanding of anything, especially ultimate truth. “Properly dividing” the two is an ongoing process that is best done with the input of many standpoints (especially “other” standpoints). Whose gospel is it? Certainly it is our Lord’s, not ours. As witnesses to and stewards of that gospel, we must be confident in exploring the breadth of its power and its appeal.

We (qua LCMS) are “cultured”; we are not neutral. Our theology is cultured, not neutral. We can embrace what we are even as we seek the input of other Christians, recognizing that we are all limited, as well as allowed, by our cultured understandings. We can approach our conversations to “properly divide” confidently, yet humbly. And those are conversations we must have if we are to be the church catholic and not only an ethnic enclave. The dialogue regarding the interaction of theology and culture requires protracted conversation. In this dialectic process, I offer here but an antithesis that anticipates a future synthesis.

Again, there is no such thing as a culturally neutral church or a culturally neutral theology. The LCMS is a “cultured” church. We have a way. We have an identity. We are not simply a group of diverse people gathered around the Word; there is a way we do things. When we bring others into our fold we expect them to make the adjustments and accommodate our conclusions and practices. It is not, as many of us understand, that we are “just regular” and the “others” are the ones with

the accretions of culture. We, too, have characteristic ways to think and speak. We have a *common* sense. We privilege the head over the heart. We have our values (especially regarding work, education, and home ownership). We have our mores, and foodways (with regional iterations to be sure), and dress. (I am told by non-Lutherans that we have a look; and once an airport shuttle driver picked me out of a crowd of thirty as the Lutheran). We have our traditional songs (some of which are only a decade old), and indispensable vocabularies. We have our recognized authorities. We know our heroes and our villains. We are prone to a slightly self-congratulatory ethos at our Reformation festivals. We are mindful that such “mispronunciations” as Synód and Cóncordia often mark those who were raised outside our church. We have a set of shared and unexamined institutionally supported assumptions. We have our gatekeepers and our institutions of enculturation and sanction (whether they be our seminaries, our Sunday schools, or doctrinal review). We have an underlying, organizing framework whose potency lies in its concealed ubiquity and assumed structures. These traits we can explain *theologically*—but that does not preclude their being a contextual (cultural) expression that may not be the only acceptable theological manifestation of the theological truth. Even if denied or spiritualized, we still have an identity. This identity structures our social relations, provides social cohesion, perpetuates our systems, organizes our ways of acting and interacting, and distinguishes *us* from *them*. It is an identity that functions, in effect, as ethnicity.

We have a way. I don’t think we need to apologize for it, nor should any group need to apologize for its identity. But let’s recognize it for what it is—it is *an* identity, specific to a time and place, not *the* identity that all need to adopt. It is an identity inherited, embraced, and adjusted. It is who we are.

As Lutherans we have a rich heritage. Our theological practices provide useful tools to access and communicate the Word of God. Our insistence on clarity, proper divisions of Law and Gospel, the Two Kingdoms, and especially our insistence on seeing the Word, Christ, as the center, beginning, and goal of all revelation is a legacy that must be responsibly stewarded. We must not apologize for that.

The response I’ve offered here must not be understood as an attempt to diminish or denigrate the richness of our theology, or to intimate that it needs to be changed. Not at all, but it is to remind us that our understanding is situated. Our view is not from nowhere, nor everywhere, but from somewhere. Through responsible exploration of social forces and considered interaction and dialogue with those outside our culture, we can broaden our understanding of the circumscriptions of our cultures. Culture is not something to be feared or denied; it is a context in which we go about the business of living and the context in which the Spirit of God is working. Asking what cultural forms can best embody the Gospel is like asking what language can best speak the Gospel. I know what language works best for me; but the limitations of the other languages result from my lack of competence, not some inherent deficiencies in the language. We will find that with study and mastery each language can be used to communicate the Word of God effectively. I contend that the same may be concluded regarding each culture.

The gospel is proclaimed to people, not cultures. God's Spirit seeks individuals, not cultures, not groups. Culture is but the context of the individuals. A nuanced understanding of the hidden, yet shaping, forces of culture is critical for a universally applicable theology. And that requires a nuanced understanding of those other cultures as well as our own. How can we become better aware of that context and make use of that context to proclaim the gospel authentically and construct a meaningful response to that gospel? We are taking steps in that direction by hearing from our brothers and sisters in Christ at gatherings such as the Ethnic Symposium as they speak of the dynamic interaction between their culture and their faith. These others among us are equally created, loved, and sought by our Lord. He knows their names; He hears their songs. And we mustn't fault them for not being us.

If I haven't made you uncomfortable, then I have failed to impress upon you a full recognition of the power of culture to shape us, even to the point of shaping our understanding of Scripture. And, as you can tell, I am willing to risk your comfort for the goals of a greater understanding of the work of communicating the gospel and a greater valuing of a variety of responses to that saving work of Christ. For Christ does not belong only to us. We belong to him. He is not ours, we are His.

Thank you for your considerations.

Endnotes

¹ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Theology in Context: Music as a Test Case" *Missio Apostolica*, 20, no. 2 (November 2012): 136–156.

² *Classical Philology*. Vol. 92, No. 2 (April 1997), 153–188.

³ Clifford Geertz, Distinguished Lecture: Anti-Anti-Relativism, in: *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 86, No. 2 (Jun., 1984), 263–278.

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Allen, trans. Philadelphia. 1936:47.

⁵ *Demographic Profile of Lutherans and Other Protestants: 2000*. Barna Research Group Study for AAL.

⁶ *American Religious Identification Survey 2008*. Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society & Culture, Leonard E. Greenberg Center, Trinity College, Hartford, CT.

⁷ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Theology in Context: Music as a Test Case," 136.

⁸ After discussing a common misread of Holy Week events which he argues resulted in the caricature of the "fickle Jews," Dr. Paul L. Maier, second vice-president of the LCMS, concluded that "Doctrine in the holy Christian church is standard and unchangeable, as is the basis for doctrine in the Holy Scripture. Understanding Scriptural passages accurately, however, may be subject to improvement as more and more evidence is discovered from the ancient world" ("Commentary: The most overlooked verse in the Bible: Luke 23:27" in *Reporter*, February 2007, 6).

Missiological Thoughts on Evangelizing “the Nations” A Response to Leopoldo A. Sánchez, with Further Reflections

Douglas L. Rutt

Missiology, by definition, is an integrative discipline in which theology is the foundation. But it also makes use of disciplines such as history, social science, communication theory, and, most would say, strategy. For these brief reflections I want to focus on just a couple of aspects. First, I would like to reflect a little on our LCMS historical background, which I believe will help us understand who we are as an “ethnic” protestant church in America. These comments are based on where we come from as an “immigrant” or “ethnic” church in America. Then, I would like to deal with some issues that I would call “strategic” in that they deal with why it is so difficult for us to operate in the non-Germanic milieu.

I thank Dr. Sanchez for his paper in which he examines the issue of cross-cultural ministry from the perspective of music. That music communicates powerfully there is no doubt. I was blessed once to have the opportunity to preach at a fairly large Lutheran congregation in southern Minnesota. It was a mission festival, and so the organist pulled out all the stops, so to speak, to illustrate the points of the text of the hymns, with melodic variations, changes in the settings on the mighty pipe organ, and a variety of militaristic rhythms when singing hymns about the advance of the gospel around the world.

The evolution of musical styles, and how styles, tonalities, and harmonies that were once considered inappropriate for worship eventually gained acceptance was insightful. The fear of the emotional impact of music, as if emotion in-and-of-itself were a bad thing, as Dr. Sanchez points out, could be traced back to a platonic dualism, in which pleasures and senses, indeed, our bodies themselves, are made of an inferior substance compared to the soul. We know that God created man as a holistic creature, body and soul, and saw that it was good.

A composer such as J.S. Bach knew very well how to elicit emotion through his melodies and harmonies. Just listen to the St. John Passion, for example. At one performance I attended, the program described it, and I paraphrase: “This most personal of Bach’s great masterpieces is music of exquisite beauty. *With an emotional and dramatic language and music that stirs the heart.*” Yet we still have a suspicion of music that stirs emotion.

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This brings up an important missiological challenge for those of us who make up the majority of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I don't think there is any doubt but that the dominant culture of our church body is “western-Germanic,” by which I mean that we are a culture that is primarily individualistic and formal. On the other hand, the majority world, two-thirds of the world, is more collectivist and relational based. Our culture tends to be more reserved, and the collectivist, relational based culture tends to be more expressive; and that emotional expressiveness, if you will, finds its way into worship and music. This can be very challenging for us.

Yet, music is not neutral. It really is a question of meaning—the meaning that it has for those who are making use of it. One ethnomusicologist, for example, went to Chile to conduct a workshop on liturgy and church music. He suggested to his Chilean students that perhaps they should develop a Zamacueca, or Cueca for short, liturgy. Basically the people were scandalized. They felt that there is no way that Cueca music, which is a traditional form of dance that revolves around the seduction of a woman by a man, could be used in church. The people wouldn't be able to get past the meaning of the dance in their culture. Now for those of us from the U.S., of course, that music probably wouldn't elicit any of those thoughts.

I agree with Dr. Sanchez when he says, “the decision on what is good and bad culture is trickier than the question of what is correct theology. What is at stake here is not whether theological content should be distinguished from a certain cultural form. What is at stake is the critical and constructive use of cultural forms in the church to embody and promote solid theological content today.”¹

To this, I would add that appropriate contextualization is more of an art than a science. The science of it is fairly simple, but doing it in practice can be very tricky. We all want the easy answers. Life is much less complicated if we simply opt for the easy answers, but faithfulness in ministry, and faithfulness in bringing the Good News to people of other ethnicities, cultures, worldviews and languages, is not easy. It requires getting your fingernails dirty, even your whole hands dirty, taking risks, making judgment calls, and trusting the Spirit of God.

Dr. Sanchez asks a series of questions in the end that should form our praxis. I would only add that the answers will never be easy. That's why it is important for theologians or people involved in the practice of communicating the gospel to others of different cultures and contexts to understand that the repetition of theological clichés and dogmatic formulations just won't do it. We as theologians are always seeking easy answers, but the true theologian is a reflective theologian, who is willing to do the work necessary to understand culture and people and to use some imagination in figuring out how to best help people understand the unconditional love of God. Albert Einstein famously quipped that imagination is more important than knowledge, because knowledge limits you to what is already known, but imagination opens you up to continued growth and discovery with limitless possibilities. As for knowledge, the apostle Paul said something similar, “We now see through a glass darkly” (1 Cor 13:12). To quote Dr. Sanchez, “We need pastoral, missional, or catholic flexibility here, and not a one-size-fits-all approach to culture, even if this means making mistakes along the way. . . .”²

I would now like to turn to a couple of points that I believe are crucial for those of us in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is plain that the LCMS has moved out of the era in which our U.S. mission efforts were concentrated among German immigrants. The responsibility to reach out with God’s message of free salvation in Christ Jesus to the increasing number of ethnic groups in our nation has been recognized by our church body, and we have taken the initiative to proclaim the gospel to those around us. When I was with the LCMS Board for Mission Services a few years ago, its U.S. mission efforts were focused specifically on the minority ethnic groups, assuming that church planting in the Anglo communities can be carried out at the local level, without too much outside assistance; whereas ministry to people of different cultures and languages is more complex and requires additional encouragement, resources, and training. I thank God for that, and for the initiatives of Concordia Seminary to recognize that the face of our nation is changing dramatically, and there is no turning back. Therefore I appreciate the way this seminary has supported initiatives such as the Center for Hispanic Studies and the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology.

But there are some things I believe we need to address as well, and we need to address them directly. We all know that during this political season and television debates, one of the real hot-button issues is immigration, and particularly what to do about all the undocumented aliens who have come to the United States. On the radio, television, in the newspapers, ethnic and racial issues have produced an extraordinary amount of political and social debate. The basic question before us, however, of ministry and mission to the ethnic groups in the U.S., is a theological issue. It is problematic when we allow ourselves as a church to be sidetracked by issues that have to do with civil society, or the political agenda of those who have very definite ideas about where our nation is going, or where it should go, or how our nation should address issues such as race, race relations, and ethnicity. The question of whether the English language should become the official language for the United States has been hotly debated, as has bi-lingual education for our nation’s children.³ Questions of the legal status of people who come here in pursuit of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” are totally legitimate issues that our nation has to face and settle. Issues of how our nation will define itself and how it will deal with the variety of languages and cultures have always been important. It is legitimate and necessary for the well-being of our country and her people that the debate take place.

However, as church, it seems that we must separate the political agenda from the church agenda. I have found this to be hard. This is not to say, of course, that the church has nothing to say to civil society. We have the responsibility to call attention to the sins of our nation, including the sin of racism, whether that be in its grossest or most subtle form. The CTCR Document on Racism of 1994 has pointed out: “Because racism is so much a part of the American worldview, it is often difficult for us to recognize it when we see it. We become insensitive to expressions of it.”⁴ Our church body always should be ready to examine critically the issues in the political arena and to speak out against any action that violates the God-given rights of our neighbor. As Luther said, we are to “defend him,” and “help him and befriend him in any bodily need.”⁵

When we seek to address how we as a church, the body of Christ, bought at a price, redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, are going to minister to those all around us of different ethnic groups, cultures, and languages, we must not allow ourselves to confuse what is a political issue with what is God's will "that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, for there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men . . ." (1 Tm 2:3–5).

It is one thing to discuss whether it is better for our nation that all speak the same language, or if it is more enriching for all and better for our nation that there be a variety of languages. That is one question, but as it pertains to the ministry of the church, God does not care what language we speak, for the gospel can be communicated and understood in any language. The Pentecost event clearly demonstrates this fact.

The celestial vision of St. John indicates the place of the various ethnic and linguistic groups in God's kingdom. John saw a great multitude of people assembled "that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev 7:9). "These were those who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14).

At one time, there were those who insisted that German was the only adequate language as a medium for theological study and reflection. One of the founding fathers of our Synod, for example, Pastor Ernst Buerger, who was a part of the first Saxon immigration and settlement of Perry County, gave ten reasons why he hoped his descendants would never forget the German language. He wrote in his memoirs: "If a German casts aside his language, because he hopes that the Lutheran Church will expand among the English American people, he has a false hope. Before that comes to pass, he can have died. That is God's affair, and who knows whether God will not withhold that treasure as a righteous judgment."⁶

It is interesting how the Sainted Pastor Buerger equated German culture and language with the teaching of the pure gospel. A loss of the German language, for him, meant a loss of pure doctrine. "Do not my descendants do wisely, then, to hold fast to the German language in order not to lose the Lutheran confession and to be able to remain with Lutheranism . . . ?"⁷

I do not cite Pastor Buerger to belittle or disparage him. He lived in a different time, under different circumstances, in a socio-cultural milieu much different than our own. But the attitudes he displays do make a couple of things evident to me: In the first place, we see how near and dear our mother tongue is to us. We see how tenaciously we hang on to the opportunities to hear the gospel and express our faith in what we call the "language of our heart." But it also says something about where we have come from as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I'm not saying that any people hold to the opinions of Pastor Buerger today, but it is part of our history and culture, and I believe we are, in a sense, still struggling to figure out how to adjust ourselves to the reality of ministry in our multicultural, pluralistic society when we come from a church that in many ways defined itself by its Germanness.

Jesus Himself challenged the longstanding prejudices and bigotry of His own people as He conducted His ministry in Palestine. He hit a raw nerve in His own

hometown of Nazareth when He pointed out that God sent Elijah to the widow in Zerahath in the region of Sidon, even though there were many widows in Israel; and that God healed Naaman the Syrian, though there were many lepers in Israel (Lk 4:24–27). The reaction of the people demonstrates that we, too, can expect tension and even opposition to ministry toward those who are different from us, even from our own people. Jesus totally amazed His disciples by not only traveling through the region of the despised Samaritans, who were considered to be of an inferior race and culture, but He even took the time to minister to the woman at the well, and the others she brought to Him (Jn 4). The same is true of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30–37).

What Jesus was challenging was the ethnocentrism and prejudice of a people who considered themselves inherently superior to others. Consider the story of the ten who were healed of leprosy. Only one returned to thank Jesus, and Luke adds incisively: “And he was a Samaritan” to show that God’s favor rests upon all men, even the most despised, and that all men are capable of responding to His love in faith and thanksgiving (Lk 17:11–19).

One of the most difficult issues to face the early church was how to deal with the reality that Christianity was not to be a Jewish sect, but a truly trans-cultural or supra-cultural movement that would touch all peoples, cultures, and languages. Peter had to undergo a tremendous paradigm shift before he could come to the point of saying: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34). The brethren in Jerusalem were shocked to hear that Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ and criticized Peter for his ministry to them. He even had to defend himself to the elders in Jerusalem: “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” (Acts 11:17). In total astonishment, and almost disbelief, they concluded: “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

Yet many practical questions had to be resolved and issues untangled. That which was cultural had to be separated from that which was absolute, such as the issues surrounding the incorporation of Cornelius and his family into the church, or the requirements to be placed upon the new believers in Antioch so that their presence would not be too offensive to the Jews (Acts 15).

These dilemmas that the early church faced are being faced by the church today. The relationship between Christ and the cultural milieu of the church will always need to be addressed. The Reformers attempted to deal with such issues when they made declarations such as Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: “For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere.”⁸

H. Richard Niebuhr has pointed that there are several approaches to this relationship. While we do not agree with all of Niebuhr’s conclusions, he is probably quite correct in describing the apostle Paul’s and Luther’s approach as “Christ and culture in paradox.”⁹ In other words, culture—in that it is an expression of man, who in this life cannot escape the pervasive influence of his sinfulness—like man, continuously will have to deal with the old Adam, even after the new beginning. I

have heard talk of a so-called “Christian culture,” but do not know where it exists. At best, it seems, a culture could be, like the redeemed human being, *simul justis et peccatur*. Therefore, all cultures contain both good and evil.

Our culture and our Christianity will always be in paradox—in tension—it seems. And therein lies the problem, for when we begin to associate our culture with the true expression of Christianity, we, again, are putting ourselves in the place of God and setting ourselves up to fall in the same ethnocentrism and self-righteousness of the Jews of Christ’s time.

Perhaps we could come to two conclusions based upon what is God’s desire for the nations and our situation as cultural human beings. First, it is God’s will that we proclaim His gospel to the nations, to people of every language, culture, or ethnic group; for He does not show partiality, but wants all to come to the knowledge of the truth. Second, as we do so, we must use sanctified reason, enlightened by His Word, but also imperfect, in working with people of different ethnic groups, to minister to them meaningfully with sensitivity and understanding. In other words, we have to take some risks, and we might make some mistakes, but let us not let our fear of making mistakes paralyze our witness.

I would also ask that we not let our fear of things like multiculturalism get the best of us so that we fail to be sensitive or we don’t even try to understand the perspectives, values, and worldviews of people of other ethnic groups and cultures. When those of us who work in cross-cultural ministry call for patience, understanding, and appreciation for cultures that are different from ours, we are not advocating cultural relativism, as if one must blindly accept aspects of a certain culture that are incongruent with God’s Word. We are not saying that sin is not sin, or that truth is not truth, just based on a societal acceptance of a practice, such as abortion or infanticide; rather, we are saying that one should be careful to be sure he or she truly understands the aspect of the culture of which he or she is critical. And one should be sure to examine his or her own presuppositions and prejudices before judging other cultures.

If we are going to reach out in a more effective and meaningful way, first, it seems, we must deal with the attitudes of our people. In other words, we must begin to help our people see that reaching out to the nations among us is our responsibility, or better yet, our privilege. Of course a law motivation will not change people’s attitudes. It must come from the gospel, as Paul said when he explained the reason he was willing to travel all over and suffer many things for the sake of the gospel. He said: “For the love of Christ compels us, for we are convinced that one died for all . . .” (2 Cor 5:14). I don’t think I’m being unfair when I say that when I was in Southern Minnesota, it didn’t even occur to most of the members of my congregations that they had any responsibility to approach the Hispanic people moving into the area with the gospel—as loving and mature as those people were, and it was a wonderful place to serve.

Perhaps they knew that it could only be done at a price. And I’m not talking about dollars, but at the price of having the complexion of their congregational life forever changed. Perhaps they knew that the adjustments they would have to make to reach out meaningfully to the Hispanic people in the area would be painful and

create tensions in the congregation. Perhaps they felt that the challenges of relating to the Hispanic people in the area would move them out of their comfort zone.

I know a pastor who some years ago suddenly had to face the challenge of two hundred Liberian refugees who moved into the area where his church is located and began to attend services at his church! It was a challenge to him and to the older members of the congregation. There have been some tensions, but it is working. Such situations are going to become more and more common. As we begin seriously to approach and minister to those of different ethnic groups and languages, we can expect tensions, misunderstandings, and even resistance to surface. As we have seen, the ministry of Jesus demonstrated the kinds of reactions we can expect as we reach out to those who are different than us.

A couple of years ago, a former student called me with a real dilemma on his hands. In his town, near the church, a group of Haitians had been getting together for Bible study. The group had grown to more than thirty adults. Leadership for the group was being shared by three men. The group had asked this young pastor to teach them the Catechism of Martin Luther and to teach them more about the Lutheran Church, for they were interested in becoming a part of a local Christian congregation. He asked me: "What do I do now?" It dawned upon me that we are providing very little orientation or preparation regarding how to deal with such situations at the seminary. At least he was wise enough to realize that he didn't know everything and needed some help. It's not so bad when you don't know something, as long as you know you don't know: It's disastrous not to know that you don't know.

Accurate and meaningful communication of the gospel has to do with much more than language, however, that is, with mere words. Translating and proclaiming the message of the gospel is more than merely repeating phrases that, while they are true, convey no real meaning to those who are hearing. The gospel must be preached to people—and this must be especially intentional across cultures—with the recognition that really two "texts" are involved. The "text" of God's Word and the "text" of the person or persons to whom we are attempting to proclaim God's Word. As Dr. Voelz has put it, "Meaning is interpersonal."¹⁰ What this suggests, in a nutshell, is that we must proclaim the message of the gospel in ways that are sensitive and appropriate to where the hearer is coming from, or has been, or is now. This is a general principle of any faithful proclamation of the gospel, but it becomes exceedingly more complex when we are dealing with communication of the gospel across cultures.

Even the very structure of a local congregation should be appropriate to the group that is being reached. A problem with many of our mission efforts to the ethnic groups is that they often depend almost entirely upon subsidy from outside sources. There are some Hispanic congregations that have been on subsidy for forty, or even fifty years. These churches have never been able to get to the point of supporting their own ministries. I believe that in at least some instances it is due to the fact that the model of congregational life that has been instituted is foreign to the context in which the congregation exists, and therefore there is no ownership, and where there is no ownership, there will not be much stewardship.

At any rate, we must continue to address the question of appropriate approaches to ethnic ministry. Unfortunately, some of the discussions I have witnessed have generated more heat than light, as, for example, the current debate over worship. Sometimes when I have made presentations on understanding culture to pastoral conferences or other groups of Lutherans, the question will inevitably come up, "Why all the talk about cultural sensitivity? Is the gospel offensive? Why should we worry about it?" To which I answer, "Yes, the gospel is offensive, but we should try to be sure it's the gospel that's the offense, and not us!" Or, as Dr. David Scaer once said to a classroom full of seminary students, "The gospel is already offensive enough by itself, without you guys making it worse!"

A genuine commitment to ethnic ministry in our church body will involve risk, tension, misunderstanding, and opposition. It is a complex and challenging matter to communicate faithfully and meaningfully the gospel to those who are different than us. Not all people can relate well to those of other cultures. Not all of us will be willing to take the initiative to cross barriers of language and culture to preach the gospel. Not all of us are willing to allow those who are different to incorporate into our midst. Yet, when we think of the great cultural distance that our Savior Jesus Christ was willing to travel, who "being in very nature God . . . made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death" (Phil 2:6–8), we can find the example, the motivation, and the resources so that we, too, as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, will find the way to a more faithful and meaningful proclamation of the gospel to the nations whom God has placed, not at our doorstep, but in our home.

Endnotes

¹ Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Theology in Context: Music as a Test Case" *Missio Apostolica*, 20, no. 2 (November 2012): 142.

² *Ibid.*, 153.

³ Mireya Navarro, "Bilingual parents dismayed by English's pull on children." *New York Times*, August 31, 1996, 1, 7.

⁴ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Racism and the Church: Overcoming the Idolatry*. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (St. Louis, Missouri, 1994), 32.

⁵ Theodore G. Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 343.

⁶ Ernst Moriz Buerger, *Memoirs of Ernst Moriz Buerger* (Lincoln, Massachusetts: Martin Julian Buerger, 1953), 86.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 32.

⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), 173.

¹⁰ James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean?: Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 208.

Diversity and Contextualization

John Loum

I come to the topics of diversity and contextualization as a person, pastor, and professor. As a person, I am myself one who chose a life in America over a life in the country of my birth, Gambia. In 1993, I left behind many wonderful people, a language and places I knew well, to go to a new place, with unfamiliar language, customs, and people. God has used my experiences to form me for the ministry I have had as pastor and professor. As a pastor, I served for fourteen years in a multiethnic congregation in St. Augustine Lutheran Church in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. As a professor, I am currently involved in preparing men and women for ministry through the Ethnic Institute of Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

I am writing this article primarily from the perspective of a pastor, with the goal of helping other pastors. My perspective is necessarily shaped by my personal experience and my scholarly research in missiology, but my chief goal is to offer to brother pastors some thoughts that have shaped my own ministry and mission work in multiethnic contexts. For, as we shall explore, within a generation if not already, ANY parish may be a multiethnic parish. And any parish pastor who is unready to minister in a diverse context may fail to do all that the Lord would have him do for the Kingdom.

Let us first consider how a pastor may understand diversity and contextualization in practice. It may help to begin with simple explanations for the terms “diversity” and “contextualization,” followed by an overview of the reality of diversity in America. The facts about diversity lead naturally to considering the theological and practical frameworks for ministering in a diverse community. It is not my intention to develop a new theory, but rather to offer from my ministry and extensive reading a sampling of what I have found to be useful ways to think about contextualization. But when one’s goal is to introduce lost sinners to the saving love of Christ, the most elegant theoretical framework still must be applied in practice. I began my ministry at a time when diversity was seen as an anomaly and contextualization was little recognized as the responsibility of a good pastor. Today, praise God, that perspective is much changed; and so I humbly offer the reader some of my own experiences as a pastor with the prayer that perhaps my struggles in the past will enable some others in the future to more effectively proclaim Christ’s love.

“Diversity” and “Contextualization”

For the purpose of this article, the term “diversity” needs little explanation. “Diversity” describes the degree to which the individuals in a group of people are

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different from one another. As a pastor, I'm interested in the diversity of people in my community and my congregation. These differences can have many forms and often involve perceptions. Today in the Midwest, a small town of white farmers may not strike any observers as an example of diversity. But one hundred years ago, the same town might have experienced the cultural differences between white German wheat farmers and white French dairy farmers as irreconcilably diverse. Diversity in any form sets the stage for "contextualization." In this small town of one hundred years ago, the local pastor might have had only to become familiar with another European language. Today, diversity is usually viewed in terms of the multiethnic/multicultural/multi-worldview realities of global, post-modern America. David Hesselgrave says simply that contextualization "is something which we do to the message and teaching to fit into other contexts."¹ If my congregants mostly share a single culture and worldview, my proclamation and teaching approach for one group in my congregation will likely fit other groups. However, when I seek to pastor people from significantly different cultures, having different experiences and worldviews, then I must contextualize—I must do something to the message and teaching to make them fit into different contexts.

Diversity: The Reality

If church leaders consider only the diversity they find within current congregations, they risk being unrealistic about the mission opportunities that God has placed directly outside their doors. Mainline denominational church attendance peaked at a time when Caucasians comprised the vast majority of Americans. As attendance has fallen, the faithful who remain often reflect less diversity than the neighborhoods right around the church. At times, the shared cultural heritage of their childhood congregation may even be part of what unites them. That is not all bad: such members have found a nurturing community within the congregation. But few congregations in any denomination are as diverse as the community in which their church building sits.

Here's the reality: In the U.S. today, there are more cultures and languages and religious values and traditions than at any previous time in human history. America, to her credit, is a nation that has opened her arms to nearly all peoples, cultures, and nations in the world. The Milken Institute states, "minority ethnic birth in the 12 months period ending July 2011 made up of 2.02 million, or 50.4% compared to 1999, 37%."² Let me translate: Already non-Caucasian births exceed Caucasian births, and the non-white birthrate is growing much faster than the white birthrate. In five years, American kindergartens will be only half Caucasian. Within a generation, white schoolchildren will be in the minority.

Of course, race is only the surface. In Los Angeles alone, there are people from 140 countries, speaking approximately 86 different languages.³ But language and ethnic diversity is no longer the special domain of states like California, Texas, and New York. In my own city of St. Louis, the metropolitan task force measures diversity within the St. Louis city schools and recently found that as many as eleven languages may be spoken in a single school.

This diversity challenges us to wrestle with the God-given opportunities and challenges.

First, the reality is that immigrants are open to the Gospel, and many have Christian roots from “back home.” The Pew Study of Faith on the Move states “that Christians comprise nearly half the estimated 106 million, or 49% of the world’s 214 million international migrants.”⁴

Given the demographic reality of a multiethnic/multicultural society, cultures must be both studied and appreciated. Paul Hiebert states that there are no “cultural vacuums,” by which he implies that cultural communication must also be seriously taken into account.⁵ As we value this reality, we must be warned against ethnocentricity, in which the dominant culture assumes that they are superior to other cultures. For example, the food and clothing of other cultures may be very different from ours. However, that does not mean that these cultures are inferior or to be looked down upon, but rather that we must learn to appreciate and, in so doing, be able to engage them in conversation and dialogue. A serious look at this whole area of ethnicity and culture vis-a-vis diversity and contextualization, Cornell and Hartmann’s book⁶ speaks of “psychosocial” identity; that is, people seek both meaning and belonging; meaning without a sense of belonging is not sufficient. Living in a society of diverse ethnic groups and social diversity, we must recognize this diversity if we are to disciple effectively and incorporate people into our congregations.

The missiological hope and inspiration of this article is to reveal the enormous mission opportunities and challenges as we seek to witness to the Gospel and bring all of these different ethnic cultures peoples groups into our churches and congregation.

What is new in the twenty-first century is the level of diversity. Nobody will argue that North America has not always been a mission field. But in the context of an unprecedented amount of diversity, we need to reassess how we equip church leaders and strategize in order to effectively communicate the Gospel in cultural settings and contexts that were unfamiliar to most seminaries even twenty years ago. The cultural context in which nearly every congregation operates has changed. We need to contextualize what we do.

Contextualization: Frameworks for Ministry

There are many places that today’s pastor can look to for help. Scientific studies offer insights that enhance our ability to reach out to people. Anthropological, ethnographic, and phenomenological studies can help missionaries to put themselves in the shoes of other cultures and worldviews. Alongside social sciences, David Bosch⁷ would direct us to consider the “international hermeneutical community.” Within this community, one can challenge one’s own social and ideological preconceptions, engaging as brothers and sisters and partners, not as rivals. Without this sense of community, so often what happens is that one is quick to see only the dark spot in another people’s culture.

Next I present three frameworks for contextualization that I have found useful. I owe a great debt to the writings of Hesselgrave, Kraft, and Bevans⁸ for shaping how I approach the challenge of contextualization.

Hesselgrave⁹ unpacks the challenge of contextualization by considering three buckets: context, message, and teaching. Your context is rooted in your

location: the details of context can be learned by observation on the sidewalks and in the shops and homes nearby. (Note that understanding your context usually does require you to leave the church office.) Understanding context takes work, but context is a given. The message is also a given. Unlike context, the message is not learned through observation but is revealed in Scripture and interpreted by our Confessions. Hesselgrave's third bucket, teaching, however, may vary widely. In fact, it should subject to change. The attentive pastor is alert for subtleties of context which he can reflect, or to which he can respond, in his teaching. The key take-away here is that it is not enough to get the message right. If your teaching does not reflect context, you're being lazy.

In considering *how* to match teaching to context, Charles Kraft¹⁰ particularly emphasizes the social aspects of context, which are more dynamic than simply one's location. Here he introduces another concept to my contextualization framework: "the dynamic equivalent." Two pastors in different contexts may communicate in very different ways, but the underlying substance of their messages may be equivalent.

Looking for dynamic equivalents takes into account the target audience's language as well as its concepts. In my particular area of research, Muslim evangelism, we will use Muslim terms in approaching Muslims (for example *Isaal-Masih* representing the term for Jesus Christ, the term *injl* for Gospel, and *Miriam* for Mary). The impact of this is that in communicating and learning about the other religion and its culture, the receiver must receive its information in the best way possible. There is only one Gospel, but there is no "one size fits all" in the way one presents the Gospel.

Such flexibility is difficult in practice. Different words are not all equivalent. We are trained to be extremely careful with our concepts and precise with our words. But I would add: when two audiences come from different cultures, the *same* words are not equivalent. If you do not dynamically adjust your teaching to your audience, they can miss the point. Or worse, they may hear something you didn't mean to say. Therefore, toiling to find equivalent but different ways to convey the Gospel message is sometimes the only way to keep the substance of the Gospel intact. For this reason, a mission expert¹¹ simply stated that, to communicate the Gospel, we must really understand the term.¹² Preachers and elders must be well trained or they will place more emphasis on being clever than on being clear. The underlying message must never change.

A third framework I would commend to the reader comes from David Bosch. The high point in his book¹³ is his forthright claim, "the Christian faith is intrinsically missionary." Thus we distinguish between *missio Dei*, God's involvement in the world, and a culture's seeing through the church's missionary activity. Bosch makes quite an innovative point when he says that mission is ultimately multi-dimensional. The "salvific event" involves all that Jesus experienced in the challenges and the struggles of being human, the crucifixion that demonstrates the completeness of His service and self-sacrifice, and the victory in His resurrection. His ascension calls Christians to a new order here on earth; lastly, Pentecost inaugurates the new era of the church as a distinct community.

Another framework that I would commend to the reader comes from Steven Bevans.¹⁴ He observes six different ways to approach context and theology. He provides names for these models: transitional, anthropological, homogeneous, transcendental, praxis, and synthetic.

My understanding of Bevans's framework and writing reflects my own ministry experience. In working with African immigrants, I find I may begin to understand their context as an anthropologist might, as an observer totally from the outside. I must be careful, however, not to minimize the degree to which each individual is continually in transition. Immigrants may leave home with a shared culture, but their new experiences shape their values and openness to the Gospel in directions that may be very different from the culture they left. Bevans's transcendental model reminds me to anticipate and address significant differences in the belief in transcendental phenomena. (In broad terms, Africans, considerably more than Europeans, expect to encounter "things you can't explain.") Bevans's synthetic approach seeks to balance features from the other five.

Bevans's translation model reminds me of the importance to a missionary of the six different models, especially the translation model, which recognizes that there is an indispensable core message that constitutes the essence of Christianity and that it must be expressed in a new cultural, linguistic, or historical context. Our task here is to express this core message in a meaningful way to its audience. Bevans goes on to introduce the anthropological model, by which he means that the missionary, who is from the "outside," must point to the predisposition of God's grace that is at work in the culture if the audience is to understand the meaning and the message within their own culture. In this way, the ethnic group gains understanding, both in terms of the Gospel and their culture at the same time. Bevans expresses the synthetic model in terms of its faithfulness to the Christian tradition, even as the local culture and the immediate community will refine the Gospel message through a process of reflection.¹⁵

In point of fact, the two last models described by Bevans, the transcendental and practice, are two distinct entities. The former takes into account a particular historical cultural context, which is shaped by human nature, and makes it possible for one to communicate the message for theological reflection to a wider community. In this way, the experience of an individual can lead to authentic theology and be shared with others who share the same cultural context. In some sense, however, the praxis model can also be compared to the anthropological, because it takes the view that Christianity addresses the problem of contextualizing, hereby at least gaining a foothold in the culture. This model looks at culture with a critical eye, judging the culture by its scriptural details.

From evidence provided in scholarly missiological articles,¹⁶ we acknowledge that the demographic realities must be considered. Statistical predictions for the United States include the forecast that by the year 2023¹⁷ half of all children born will be of foreign minority families. Even more to the point, it has been stated that by 2042¹⁸ minority families in the United States will become the majority. This time will be here sooner than we think, and it is undeniable that there will be enormous and far-reaching consequences and challenges, but also opportunities within America as a mission field. Facing this obvious reality, our

church body must be thinking ahead and planning for both the challenges and the opportunities presented by this multiethnic and multicultural diversity.

At this juncture, we use a biblical example of how our Lord took the diversity of His listeners into consideration. In Mark 4:33–34 (ESV), we read: “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.” That is, when a message directly relates to and affects people’s lives, it is necessary to develop a “contextualized interpretation” that speaks to the particular audience. It must function at the level where the meaning comes out of the message because the message is clear and appropriate to the context. Only in this way can the message be “translated” into the lives of the people, because it relates to the cultural context in which it is expressed.

A missionary, Caucasian or otherwise, whose vocation is to serve in the mission field of North America, needs to be properly equipped to work among the diverse ethnic groups in their various contexts: linguistic, cultural, environmental, and religious. He is sure to face complex and difficult challenges. First, he must recognize the inevitable shift in the mission paradigm. It may require the missionary to adjust or adopt skills that may reveal shortcomings. On many occasions, in reference to our topic of contextualization and diversity, it will require the missionary to present the gospel in the context of the God-given culture. Thus, understanding of the culture and mindset of the ethnic groups becomes critical. Here we must take into account George Bernard’s comments on “communication strategies.”¹⁹ In real communication, if the receiver has not understood the message, communication has probably not occurred. In such cultures as the global south, for example, and in the general ethnic worldview as it relates to faith, using the model of what I term “a move from the below” (inductive, or from within the culture) provides a more effective approach to articulating theological concepts and their meaning. This way of communicating is in contrast to the Western approach, which often starts from above (deductive), beginning with the abstract concept, and then applies the message to the various contexts.

For the missionary in the mission field, this aspect becomes so important. As Trevor McIlwain puts it, mission has helped us to see the importance of understanding the culture of a group and present the gospel in the context of that culture.²⁰ A gentle caution here to the missionary is that he or she will realize that even though we have one Gospel, powerful as it is, yet we cannot present it as a “one size fits all.” A cook, for example, would not cook a generic all-purpose meal, but rather a meal that suits the needs of the eaters. Presumably, other factors will be taken into account: the context in which they are eating, their health, age, background, and, most important, what is actually being prepared for the meal. Even so, in communicating the Gospel, a missionary must tailor his or her presentation to the needs and culture of every other group.

Diversity and Contextualization: Practice and Reflection

In the end, given the ever-increasing variety in the demographics of North America, we must consider contextualizing the message of the gospel as a prime goal and objective. Much importance must be placed on the ever-changing face of

ministry and the matter of inclusiveness. To that end, I would address the issue of diversity and contextualization on the basis of my own experiences as an ethnic pastor with a congregation comprising fourteen different African nationalities, in addition to Caucasians and African-Americans.²¹ The purpose here was to replicate what we find in Revelation 7:9, with all the nations and tribes coming together to worship and glorify God.

My strategy in principle was to develop the homogeneous and praxis models, taking into account the various cultural worldviews, languages, and meanings in order to make the Gospel narrative not only have an impact on them but also provide a meaningful purpose for their lives. It is what Paul Hiebert means when he uses the term “Transforming Agent.”²² The homogeneous principle must not be one that seeks to emphasize just one language or people. My specific “twist” on the principle was to underscore the importance of the total group because I was very much aware of the African emphasis on the community as a whole. That wholeness was then turned into the holistic principle, which emphasizes family, so much so that wholeness and family became the motor of the congregation. It became the philosophy and “lingua franca” of the congregation, intended to bond people with various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and languages together as one body under Christ, and enabled me to bring together many different peoples groups and cultures. They were able to see the great appeal and meaning in their own lives of Paul’s words in Romans 12:5, that we who are many are all one in Christ. The principle of homogeneity, addressing as it does the multiethnic and diverse people groups, can be a formidable principle in enabling us to reach out to the multiethnic groups within the demographic realities of our country and church.

Still realizing that I was working among multiethnic groups who were in many cases the marginalized groups, I went on to adopt the praxis formula. My reason for this was to get to that point or place where the “wow” or “aha” event can occur. When that happens, you are sure that meaning has taken place and that people of different cultures, either through scriptural narrative or what we do in practice, will, through the work of the Holy Spirit, want to embrace and follow the Christian faith. Context thus plays a uniquely important role in this aspect of our ministry and mission. Whether it be the language or the culture of the people, all must be done in absolute terms of taking their context into consideration. In this regard, we must remember the important fact that the Holy Spirit in many cases pre-exists in the language or the culture of the people. And thus our role is to speak to the context, to bring²³ to bear relevance and meaning.

The practitioner and missiologist, in particular, must pay attention to the cultural constituencies he will be encountering, especially with regard to the need to use elders and leaders in the community. This is essential for two reasons. First, it reinforces cultural identity when people see someone with whom they can identify or connect become involved in or connected with the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology or the Center for Hispanic Studies and make important contributions to our church body. In regard to the EIIT, a cutting edge program, its graduates are in many ways a symbol of the diversity and contextualized groups within our church body today. They are the gatekeepers and a point of entry into the multiple groups of people and cultures that reflect the demographic realities of our nation. There are

countless testimonies of how these men are changing the landscape of our church body and are also bringing life and enthusiasm into our congregations, along with a great missionary spirit as well. And so the leaders of our church body will need to invest much more into creating a space to include this group so that they can also have a voice in decision making and thus be counted and seen as belonging to this great church body of ours.

With the changing demographic reality come changes and unprecedented mission opportunities. And while we would recognize the “Lutheran way,” we must at the same time be prepared for a dynamic mission shift in our ways of doing things. In this mission shift within the context of these dynamic changes, new ways of communicating the gospel will be shared and expressed without violating our core Confessional principles. The audience and the context must always be given priority in how we listen and how we perceive speakers in an ethnic context. The missionary must consider the worldview and the environment within which the Gospel is expressed and communicated. I believe this is why we must give due recognition to the effort being made by the seminary to introduce the new *MissionShift* Institute. No doubt, many will come to learn new methods and skills for reaching the new people groups and cultures that God is bringing into our neighborhoods, our schools, our offices, and our colleges. They need to be reached for Christ. Think of our preschools, for example, where a young child may tell the story of Jesus to a young Buddhist, who may then go home and repeat that Jesus story to his or her parents. Imagine the impact of that simple seed that is being sown, how it could become a mighty blossom in the future for the Kingdom of God.

In conclusion, our topic of diversity and contextualization is about people, their context, and the Gospel message and its meaning. For all to whom the narrative is given, the obvious goal and aspiration is to bring people, within their respective cultures and languages, to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. No longer can we ignore the vital importance of ethnic diversity, nor should we disregard the context of cultures and worldviews. Rather, we should use all available scientific and scholarly resources, such as social and anthropological studies and ethnological and phenomenological principles, so that the intended audience—its listeners and readers—is always borne in mind. In the words of C. F. W. Walther, “We must reach the people with the Gospel where they are.”²⁴ As Lutherans, we must make all available adjustments or paradigm shifts with the goal of having the Gospel message proclaimed in clarity to the extent that all ethnic groups can grasp the message and its content and meaning, so that all may come to repentance in Jesus and have a redemptive turnaround and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Endnotes

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⁸ These authors helped me to consider context, message, and teaching when approaching contextualization.

⁹ David Hesselgrave, *Contextualization*.

¹⁰ Book Report: Models of Contextual Theology. November, 2000.

(<http://2natures.blogspot.com/2007/03/book-report-models-of-contextual.html>)

¹¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992).

¹⁵ Steven B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 23–63.

¹⁶ US Department of Commerce. (n.d.). 2009 National Population Projections (Supplemental). United States Census Bureau. Retrieved September 16, 2012, from

<http://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2009/2009hnmsSumTabs.html>.

¹⁷ Scientific Session. “General Information about Los Angeles.” 3–7 November. 2012.

¹⁸ Scientific Session. “General Information about Los Angeles.” 3–7 November. 2012.

¹⁹ Shaw, Bernard G., “Why bother with strategy?” Oct. 2012

(<http://www.internetevangelismday.com/strategy.php>) October 3, 2012.

²⁰ Trevor McIlwain, *Building on Firm Foundations Vol 1: Guidelines for Evangelism and Teaching Believers*, Revised Edition (New Tribes Mission, 2005).

²¹ St. Augustine Lutheran congregation, Fort Wayne: IN (started in 1999)

²² Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008).

²³ To make it resonate in the hearts and lives of the people through the power of the Holy Spirit.

²⁴ Dale Meyer, “Vague Rumors.” Walther Conference. St. Louis. 4 November 2005.

CONTEXTUALIZATION IN AN URBAN SETTING

Allan Buckman

INTRODUCTION

While contextualization is not a new term,¹ it is a term that has truly come into its own in mission circles and beyond—and for good reason. With the accelerating levels of diversity in this country, especially in urban areas, the contextualization challenge is no longer a matter for missionaries working in far-off fields. The mission fields have come to us and, along with them, the need for serious reflection regarding the realities and implications about the kind of effective contextualization required for incarnational ministry.

The purpose of this study is to identify a few key concepts from the domain of worldview and contextualization and to indicate how these have informed and facilitated the development of a cross-cultural ministry of service, witness and fellowship among the growing numbers of immigrants and refugees (mostly refugees) now residing in urban St. Louis (referenced in this study at St. Louis City). Consideration is also be given to a few perceptions or realities that have tended to hinder the development of this ministry.

Limiting factors are present insofar as consideration is given almost entirely to St. Louis City and the more than 30,000 New Americans (the term for immigrants and refugees used throughout this study) who reside there. We also observe a useful distinction between immigrants and refugees as follows:

- Immigrants arrive in the metropolitan area on work or family reunification visas, and almost always settle in the county.
- Refugees arrive on relocation visas from the numerous UN managed refugee camps worldwide, and almost always settle in the City.²

CONTEXTUALIZATION

For the purposes of this study, contextualization references the idea that we need to be translating biblical truth into the language and culture of the people receiving the message. A suggested definition for biblical contextualization is the following, as adapted from Paul Hiebert, “the embodiment of the living Word in human cultural and social settings in such a way that its divine nature and power are not lost.”³

The implications are that we must identify with the people we serve and link with them in ways that, to them, seem culturally appropriate. The significance of incarnational ministry is that ministry belongs to God and is His work, first and

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foremost. The goal of incarnational ministry would not be that people understand the gospel message in its entirety, but that they respond to it and are transformed by God's power.⁴

CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

In the Old Testament, God used the concept of the covenant to convey the full meaning and intensity of His relationship with the people of Israel.

There is strong evidence to suggest that, in the days of Moses, covenants were widely used by the people of the Near East. Indeed, most of the elements of the treaty documents uncovered by archaeologists from the Hittite Empire are to be found in the covenant God created with Israel.⁵ In particular, the invitation for covenant, conditions of the covenant, animal sacrifice, and the covenant meal are in evidence in both. (See especially Exodus 19–24.) Clearly, God took a concept known to the Israelites, though perhaps not previously used by them and, by putting new meaning into it, established His relationship with the people of Israel for all time.

In 1 Corinthians 9:22, the apostle Paul boldly declares that he has “become all things to all men” and in verses 20 to 23 elaborates by writing,

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel, so that I might share in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:20–23)

Paul's intentions here are clear, as is the importance of contextualization as a key component for effective incarnational ministry.

CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE WRITINGS OF MARTIN LUTHER

Dr. Martin Luther's writings definitely support the need for conversion with a minimum amount of cultural dislocation, especially as seen in his commentary on Psalms 117:1, where he boldly declares,

He (God) tells the heathen (nations) to remain heathen (nations); He does not ask them...to run away from their countries or cities to go to Jerusalem. He does not demand that they give up or abandon their secular laws, customs, and habits to become Jews, just as He does not demand of the Jews that they abandon their laws. What He demands is something different from and higher than, external, worldly laws or ceremonies. Every country and city can observe or change its laws. He does not concern Himself about this. Where laws are retained, they do not hinder His kingdom; for He says: “Praise the Lord, all you heathen (nations)!⁶ (parentheses mine)

All of this is underscored and given true urgency as we are reminded that “the Church exists for the sake of the unredeemed that are outside it. This is its *raison d’être*.”⁷

THE URBAN SETTING

The rapid growth of urban populations is well known and has been well documented. In 1800, for example, less than three percent of the world’s population lived in towns of more than 5,000 people. By the year 2000, half of the world’s population lived in cities of more than 100,000 people.⁸ As cities have grown, they have become more diverse with respect to culture and class, as well as professional and residential differences, and almost endlessly multifaceted.

St. Louis is no exception. Indeed, the flow of immigrants and refugees (especially refugees) into the city has become greater than that of several other large Midwestern cities. The Brookings Institution, as quoted in the September 10, 2010, issue of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, reported that of four large Midwestern cities in 1970 St. Louis was in last place regarding foreign-born population: Cleveland had 150,000; Pittsburgh, 115,000; Milwaukee, 65,000; St. Louis, 50,000. By 2008, with approximately 120,000 foreign born, however, St. Louis outranked all except Cleveland. Indeed, the rate of increase for St. Louis from 1980 to 2005 (101.2 percent) was greater than that of the other three cities.⁹

Moreover, the City has enjoyed a reputation for being welcoming and hospitable toward immigrants and refugees, and key publications such as the *Post-Dispatch* have gone on record encouraging an even greater number of arrivals. In other words, the considerable flow of New Americans into the City will almost certainly continue into the foreseeable future.¹⁰

KEY CONCEPTS

One concept that has greatly facilitated a better understanding of contextualization, as well as a sharper ministry focus, is Paul Hiebert’s concept of simplex and multiplex societies. Nearly all populations can be typed into one of these two categories.¹¹

Multiplex societies feature multiplex role relationships and define a way of life found in the small towns and villages. Here, for example, the pastor of a congregation interacts with a parishioner shop owner as a pastor, a buyer when shopping in the man’s grocery store, a friend as they find time to golf together, and as a parent when attending a PTA meeting, of which the grocery store owner serves as chairperson.

The pastor will, to be sure, have to take all of this into account when relating to this parishioner, as it could easily affect his role as a parent, his friendship with this person, or even his purchase of groceries. The grocery store owner will also have to regard the pastor with the same kind of consideration. In societies such as these, it is relatively easy to go behind social masks and get to know people as real people. Relationships established in this manner tend to be enduring, sometimes lasting a lifetime.

It is very much worth noting that in tribal and peasant societies from which the New Americans (especially the refugees) are derived, multiplex relationship predominate.

In simplex societies, relationships are task-oriented and efficient, forming much more on the basis of roles people play in society rather than on interpersonal relationships. A Christian meets with other Christians at church, other members of his or her profession at work, and people from the neighborhood while at home. In none of these will others look behind the social mask the person may wish to put on in any of these settings. Consequently, the interpersonal aspects of these relationships tend to be rather shallow, and few lasting relationships are ever established. In the vast metropolitan centers of American, simplex relationships predominate.

In the past, the challenge for a missionary from the United States sent to work among an unreached people group elsewhere was for a person from a simplex dominant culture to establish a dynamic ministry in a multiplex dominant society. When one works among the growing numbers of immigrant and refugee populations in the urban centers of the U.S., however, the challenge remains the same in essence, but with the roles reversed, i.e., how to establish a multiplex-focused ministry in a simplex-dominant culture.

FOCUS ON ST. LOUIS

During the past six years of ministry among the growing number of ethnic communities now residing in St. Louis City, services have been offered to hundreds of New Americans from more than thirty birth nations. The great majority of these are people from multiplex communities found in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, and more. When serving among them, one must remember that for people from these nations relationships are always key.

To help put a focus on this reality, Christian Friends of New Americans (CFNA) has adopted a ministry model that very much emphasizes the relational. It consists of just three words: DRAW, BRIDGE, and HOME.¹²

DRAW seeks to establish links with New American families as soon as possible after their arrival in the City. This is generally accomplished via services offered through the primary point of ministry, the Peace Center located in south City. Key “quick link” services include the delivery of home furnishings to enable those recently arrived to at least partially furnish often bare or sparsely furnished apartments.

Monthly health and wellness clinics function in much the same manner. The purpose is to enable new arrivals to determine if they may be struggling with unrecognized health issues, such as high blood pressure or vision problems. When necessary, this ministry also provides transportation to the needed medical service.

English classes, employment assistance, and after-school tutoring programs are also offered and function in much the same manner. The fact that combined attendance in these various programs now averages approximately 600 per month suggests that the services offered are needed and that meaningful links are being established.

BRIDGE seeks to extend the links established via the above-referenced ministries into meaningful relationships. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this is to engage with New Americans in terms of their immediate families as much as possible.

Parental consent forms, which inform parents of the services their children are receiving at the ministry center, while also requiring their signed consent, help to accomplish this. Open house events to which parents are invited, as well as other special events (picnics and musical events) to which families are invited, are other ways of realizing this as well.

Almost all programs at the Peace Center include devotions, often led by the pastors of neighboring LCMS (Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod) congregations. The devotions provide the opportunity for New Americans to make the transition to the third part of the model.

HOME—The Peace Center functions very much in the role of a mission station and, as such, serves as something of a halfway house for new arrivals as they make the transition to life in the States and also as they continue their spiritual journey.¹³

Relationships that have been established with the families of recent arrivals are intentionally extended to nearby LCMS congregations for any families that may be interested in doing so. For those that make the transition, the congregation then begins to serve as the focus for witness, fellowship, and service, thereby serving as their spiritual homes. The good news is that little by little this is becoming more of an established pattern.

During the past three months, for example, links have been established with 57 New American families. Of that number, 15 have been, or are in the process of being introduced to nearby LCMS congregations. The goal is to link with a minimum of 100 new families per year. It would be no exaggeration to say we probably have the capacity to expand that by a multiple of three or four and, correspondingly, the number of families to be introduced to congregations.

Ministries that help to intensify the “home” aspect of the relationship include ethnic fellowship gatherings during the Bible Class hour in LCMS congregations on Sunday mornings, as well as Home Bible Studies. As the Sunday morning Ethnic Bible Fellowships continue to grow, it is not difficult to foresee some of them developing into ethnic community worship services within these established congregations. Indeed, in at least one of the LCMS congregations, this seems to be on the verge of happening soon.

Home Bible Studies meet during weekday evenings and serve as a good indicator of the closer relationships and higher trust levels that have been built up with several of the New American families. Without the necessary level of trust, none of us would be allowed into these New American homes for Bible study or much of anything else. There would always be some justifiable excuse.

One learning from the development of multiplex/simplex ministry (multiplex ministry in a simplex dominant culture) has been the importance of *ethnic facilitators*. When the scholarship assistance ministry (Adopt A Student) was established, leaders from some of the ethnic communities were immediately brought into this ministry to help facilitate the registration of New American students into

Lutheran schools. We quickly learned, however, that they played an even more important role in facilitating the relationship between the schools and the families of the students.

Usually the parents did not speak English well; fortunately, the facilitators were bi- or even tri-lingual in the languages of the regions they represented. This enabled the program to get off to a quick start, with very few major disconnects. When this ministry began six years ago, eighteen students were enrolled during the first academic year. Presently, participation has grown to thirty students for the current academic year. Interestingly, approximately 80 percent of the students, together with their families, are now members of LCMS congregations. Of equal interest is the very low dropout rate, few if any over the past six years.

Another learning has been that *for most New Americans ministry tasks have little or no meaning or value except insofar as they occur in the context of personal relationships*. All of the Home Bible Studies, baptisms, and confirmations (more than 40 baptisms and confirmations over the past two years) are directly traceable to a meaningful relationship with a CFNA staff member or volunteer worker.

Yet another learning has to do with the great importance of communal decision making within multiplex societies. As noted by Hiebert, “in strong group oriented societies . . . decision making is a corporate matter.”¹⁴

This is especially true when it comes to spiritual matters such as baptism, confirmation, the establishment of Home Bible Studies, and church membership, if only because these relate to core issues such as identity. In this respect, it is helpful to remember that in the multiplex societies of Asia and Africa individuals have no identity except insofar as they are members of a group, be it immediate family, extended family, or community.

Another aspect has to do with the unmistakable *importance of group and community leaders* in multiplex societies. When attempting to develop a ministry or program among members of these communities, one must always receive some kind of approval of one or more of the community leaders. If a ministry is to be developed in a manner meaningful to the ethnic community you are trying to reach, it is obligatory.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY

It is also helpful to remember that worldviews are in constant change and “at the core of worldview transformation is the human search for coherence between the world as we see it and the world as we experience it.”¹⁵

There are likely very few experiences that generate more dislocation than to be transplanted from an environment in which you would have spent your entire life to another that you have never seen or even known before, and this in just a matter of hours. Without a doubt, this dislocation would definitely accelerate the search for coherence between the world you now see, and the world you have always known.

Almost certainly, there would be no time when the need for a friend would be greater—someone to whom a New American can relate, and can trust. Below are several suggested ministry implications for those working among people from multiplex societies and communities in the midst of rapid social, physical, economic, and spiritual change.

First is the importance of both neutral territory and sacred space. Hiebert defines neutral territory as “public space where secular people (or people of other faith communities) can look at Christianity without being pressured to convert.”¹⁶ (parentheses mine)

Neutral territory is a place that allows newcomers of any background and religion to step into a ministry of service, witness, and fellowship without having to make a decision about whether or not to become a member of, or even enter, a church. Also necessary is sacred space. This is a “sacred place where people gather for purposes of worship and fellowship. Here the Church reaffirms its identity as the body of Christ, though outsiders are of course, welcome.”¹⁷

From within the Lutheran community in St. Louis, a prime example of neutral space would be the Peace Center (CFNA ministry center), through which people of numerous religious persuasions (Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, animist) have passed during its six-year existence. They have done so without ever having had to give serious thought about becoming church members. In time, of course, many of them have.

There is also a need for rapid assimilation. By the time they arrive, New Americans, having already experienced considerable dislocation and might quickly move yet again if advantages could be theirs by doing so. Better job opportunities, less expensive housing, or the presence of family and/or community members in another urban location could readily be regarded as justifiable cause.

On the other hand, after residing in a new location for as little as six months, some of the anxieties that had been part of day-to-day existence immediately upon arrival begin to disappear. Indeed, new patterns begin to emerge and as stabilization becomes a reality and thoughts begin to focus on the “next big thing,” perhaps a move to some place in the near City, the county, or another urban location altogether.

If new relationships are to be established, the best time for doing so will be during those few months when the recently arrived New American is actively seeking just such relationships.

Mission societies are also significant. The church consists of many parts, including congregations, auxiliaries, service societies, and more. To engage a complex and multifaceted mission challenge decisively, resources from many parts of the church are required. Mission societies, in particular, should be given serious consideration, for they carry with them certain advantages. For example, they possess a demonstrated capacity for gathering resources (financial, as well as volunteer workers) at the grass roots level over a wide spectrum from within and beyond a particular denomination, something a single congregation might find difficult to do. Neither are they limited to a specific geographical area apart from their voluntary willingness to be so. This makes them uniquely suited to working with entire ethnic communities, whether they are heavily concentrated or widely scattered throughout an entire urban area.

As such, mission societies are in a unique position to greatly facilitate the “bridges of God” over which the Scripture message often travels. A current example would be the first baptism of an entire extended Nepalese family at the Peace Center a little over two years ago. Included in the baptism were parents and their children,

as well as the grandparents, aunts and uncles—twelve altogether. Three months later, we were informed that after the entire extended family had been baptized in St. Louis, close relatives in Nepal also decided to be baptized shortly after they found out about it. It doesn't take too much imagination to see how these bridges could easily lead to other parts of the city, or perhaps to other urban centers in this country and beyond.

Patience is everything. Any attempt to quickly combine interested and/or baptized members of these recently arrived multiplex communities with predominantly simplex members of established congregations should be undertaken with extreme care.

While the younger family members of these societies will probably feel somewhat comfortable in church gatherings in which the simplex members predominate, the older adults from among the recently baptized New American members will definitely feel more comfortable meeting among themselves. In order to establish these emerging relationships firmly, the New Americans members should be given the final say in the matter, if only because their levels of worldview change will be the greater.

It is also necessary to take another lesson from the Holy Scriptures by remembering that God is endlessly patient with all of us. He gave His son to be incarnate and live and work among us. The challenge for His servants is to do the same.

Endnotes

¹ Tullian Tchividjian, *Unfashionable: Making a Difference in the World by Being Different* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2009). From "Contextualization Without Compromise." As has been noted by missiologists and others, cross cultural missionaries and Bible translators have been engaged in meaningful contextualization for decades, and even centuries.

² For a more complete treatment of this concept and its implications for urban missions, see Allan Buckman, "The LCMS Missouri District and the City of St. Louis: An Assessment." Unpublished manuscript. June, 2011.

³ Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Menses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant and Urban Societies*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 370.

⁴ For an expanded treatment of this topic, see Hiebert and Menses, 373 ff.

⁵ Robert L. Gallagher, "The Hebraic Covenant as a Model for Contextualization" in Charles Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity* (William Carey Library, 2005), 138 ff.

⁶ Martin Luther as quoted in Ingemar Öberg, *Luther and World Mission: A Historical and Systematic Study* (St. Louis: CPH, 2007), 114.

⁷ Gustaf Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, as quoted in Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today* (CPH, 1995), 251.

⁸ Hiebert and Menses, *Incarnational Ministry*, 259.

⁹ Bill Jones, "The Changing Scene," (graph source: Brookings Institution), *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 5 September 2010, section A, p.1.

¹⁰ Tim Logan, "RX for St. Louis Economy: More Immigration," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 8 September, 2010.

¹¹ Hiebert and Menses, *Incarnational Ministry*, 274 ff.

¹² This model is adapted from the model Dr. James Tino developed for his work among primarily Hispanic immigrants in Florida.

¹³ Here we draw attention to an observations by Charles Van Engen that, "there are still thousands of unreached people groups. But there are no untouched people groups. Even unreached people groups have been impacted by the history of the interaction of churches and missions with their culture in their context at some point in the recent or distant past." Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity*, 210.

¹⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 326.

¹⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 315.

¹⁶ Hiebert and Menses, *Incarnational Ministry*, 332.

¹⁷ Hiebert and Menses, *Incarnational Ministry*, 333.

The Road to Diversity—An Evaluation of the Mission History of the LCMS

Yohannes Mengsteab

Matthew 28:18–20 is a proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity and the sacrament of Holy Baptism as it relates to “all people.” The Lord commands His disciples, the Church, to go and make disciples of all ethnic groups. In that “all” are included the little children, who are to be brought into the forgiveness of sins through the waters of Baptism.¹ Thus, Matthew 28:18–20 reveals the doctrine of the Trinity and the sacrament of Holy Baptism as the means of grace. Lutherans, however, did not fully recognize the implications of that message for the North American context until the later twentieth century.²

Beginning in the nineteenth century, the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in North America was to seek and find the German immigrants wherever they might be.³ This observation by no means minimizes the work of the LCMS among the Native Americans and Black Americans for more than a century. Simply put, the structure and practice of the LCMS, as a North American church body, was set up to serve the German immigrants. And this is manifested in two ways:

First, the LCMS spoke German until the World Wars, when the Germans were pressured to change to English as a part of the war effort by an English speaking nation.⁴ Regardless, the denomination basically remained intact as an English-speaking, Germanic community for decades.⁵

Secondly, the German communities were self-contained. They had their churches, their schools, and even their networks to serve the sick and the needy in their midst. These self-contained communities became powerful communities that built great institutions that continue to serve well even to the present.⁶

The LCMS began mission work to Native Americans in 1844,⁷ Blacks and other non-German speaking European immigrants in 1877,⁸ Chinese in 1875,⁹ and Latinos in 1925.¹⁰ Declaring North America as a mission field in 1992,¹¹ however, signaled the realization that the LCMS needed to be in mission to all people groups and transition from an ethnic church to a church for all nations.¹² Thus, there is a need to survey the mission development of the LCMS in the twentieth century:

LCMS National Mission—Historical Survey

The LCMS is an example of a successful ethnic mission movement in North America. It is a very good example of how the homogeneous unit principle works.¹³ The organizers of the LCMS met the needs of the German immigrants effectively and grew, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into a denomination that soon was to become one of the largest Lutheran church bodies in North America.¹⁴

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However, the LCMS founders also had a vision to do mission work across cultures. The Frankenmuth mission among the Native Americans, though not very successful, was one of the earliest attempts for the LCMS founders to be in mission in the new continent.¹⁵ The missionaries did not have the anthropological and cultural insights that modern missionaries have. Thus, one of the major challenges of the mission among Native Americans was the strategy, which required the education of the natives in the German language in order to proclaim the Gospel to them.¹⁶ Needless to say, LCMS work among Native Americans is still struggling at best. The leadership of Dr. Don Johnson, executive director of LAMP USA and a Native American, is welcome, and it seems that a mission movement among Native Americans is now on the horizon.

The work among the Blacks was more successful than among the Native Americans.¹⁷ The establishment of parochial schools to educate African-American children in the South proved to be successful.¹⁸ African-American leaders, who have made significant impact in the ministry of the LCMS, came into the system through these schools.¹⁹ And a number of the congregations which were planted in the earliest mission movement among Blacks are still in existence.

Even though the Blacks spoke English, the cultural difference was significant enough to warrant responsible contextualization.²⁰ The LCMS, however, used an approach similar to that used among Native Americans. Black Lutherans became very Germanic in their practice, which poses a major challenge to LCMS missional effectiveness in Black ministry.²¹

The other major challenge for the LCMS in mission to Blacks is leadership development. Pastoral leadership development was complicated by changing policies that disrupted the developments of institutions of higher learning for Blacks.²² After many attempts to educate Black leaders in Black institutions and failing, the LCMS has now incorporated Black pastoral candidates into her two seminaries. Dickinson has expressed the hope that this may become the beginning of the true incorporation of all people groups, both in membership and leadership, so that the quest to belong may once and for all be settled.²³

“The quest to belong” was not totally settled by integration. Blacks felt that they did not have the ability to lead mission movement among Blacks. They did not have equal access to power as their German counterparts and lacked access to resources to do the work that needed to be done.²⁴ Moreover, while White pastors have served Black congregations, not many Blacks have served or are serving White congregations.

The African-American leadership in the LCMS, consequently, felt that they had to organize institutions that would give them access to the decision-making processes of the Synod. They formed the Commission on Black Ministry and then the Board for Black Ministry Services, and they proposed to form a Black district or synod.

Furthermore, not many Blacks have served in executive positions in synod institutions except in units and institutions that served Blacks.²⁵ The very institutions that the Blacks felt would give them access to the system, such as the Black Ministry Board or Commission, in essence became the ghettos for LCMS Black leadership for a long time. The good news is that the Southeastern, the Michigan, and the Northern

Illinois Districts have since brought in Black mission executives to serve their entire districts, a step in the right direction.

Hispanics have also been part of the American experience for centuries. The LCMS, however, does not have a long history of mission work among the Hispanics. The first known work with Hispanics started in 1925 with the ordination of the first Hispanic pastor, Pastor Fernandez, in the Northern Illinois District. This work came to an end in 1937 for lack of funds.²⁶ The Hispanic Institute (now Center for Hispanic Studies), which started in 1987 in fulfillment of a convention resolution of 1979,²⁷ plays a major role in LCMS work among the Hispanics in North America in leadership development and as a voice for Hispanic ministry.

A desk for Hispanic ministry was also established in the restructuring of the LCMS Mission department in 1979,²⁸ and a director was called and served until he accepted a call to serve at Concordia Publishing House (CPH) in 1988.²⁹ The vacancy was filled in the 1990s by the counselor for Hispanic ministry. The desk for Hispanic ministry was closed during the restructuring of North American Missions due to the economic downturn following September 11, 2001. The function of the office of the Hispanic counselor is now filled by two organizations: the Hispanic Mission Society and the Hispanic Convention.

A congregation and/or a denomination that is intentional about becoming culturally and ethnically diverse will have to be very intentional about positioning diverse leadership strategically.³⁰ This is not multiculturalism in action. Strategically positioning gifted leaders in places of influence is missiologically the right thing to do so that the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ can be deployed in the Mission of God (Acts 13:1), and it is good stewardship.³¹

Dr. Robert Scudieri and the leadership of LCMS World Mission in the early 1990s realized the need for immigrant leadership in the growing and diverse mission field in North America. Task Forces of various immigrant groups (African, Asian, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.) were organized and leaders identified to lead the effort. These task forces gave LCMS ethnic ministries a place around the table.

The strategy for ethnic ministries proved effective, and the number of ethnic members in the LCMS grew to the extent that the Synod had to find a way to meet the demands for leadership development and inclusion. Scores of Asian and African immigrant congregations and ministries within existing congregations began to pressure the LCMS to look into alternative theological education programs to meet the leadership demands of a growing mission field. Initiated and proposed by the African Immigrant Ministry in 2002, Concordia Seminary began the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, which has become a valuable partner for missional communities within the LCMS as they continue to reach the diverse North American population.³²

A Survey of Synod Convention Mission Resolutions

The LCMS grew to a 1.2 million strong, German-speaking denomination before the World Wars. The growth in the 1950s and 60s was, however, exponential; combining a high birth rate and a church planting movement, with the result that the denomination grew to 2.7 million members in 1974.³³

Dr. Rick Marrs of Concordia Seminary thinks that the high rate of adult conversion in the 1950s and 60s might have been due to intermarriages, that is, Lutheran spouses asking their non-Lutheran spouses to be baptized and/or confirmed before or after they married.³⁴ However, the church planting movement of the 1950s and 60s is one of the contributing factors to the exponential growth in adult confirmations and cannot be fully attributed to the intermarriage factor only.

This phenomenal growth was not without its challenges, however. The growth in numbers and the resulting contact with the English-speaking world were factors in generating conflict.

First, the growth in the 1950s and 60s challenged the Synod culturally in that the moderates and conservatives began to harden their positions and solidify their groups.³⁵ These positions and groups continue to challenge the unity of the church both in vision and practice. The tension between the moderates and conservatives had an effect on the Concordia Seminary “walkout” of 1974, as well as on the departure of some congregations from the LCMS. It is no surprise that the membership decline of the LCMS that began at this time also provided an opportunity to open the conversation on the mission resolutions.

Second, the Synod began to recognize that church planting is critical to the Synod’s mission vitality in North America. A resolution to plant 1,500 congregations within ten years passed at the 1979 convention³⁶; this resolution would mandate the Synod to plant 150 congregations a year for ten years, almost 50 more congregations than the “boom days” of the 1950s and 60s.

Even though there was a realization that robust leadership recruitment and development would be needed to provide leadership for the growing mission outreach,³⁷ no decisions or plans were made to address the leadership needs of the congregations that the Synod intended to plant.

In 1986, when the LCMS realized that the goal of planting 1,500 congregations in ten years was not attainable at the rate that churches were being planted annually, the Synod in convention adopted another mission resolution to plant 1,800 congregations by 1993.³⁸ This revised goal also was not met.³⁹

The Wichita convention of the Synod passed the resolution on the licensed lay deacon to address the leadership needs of the church body.⁴⁰ This resolution is still controversial, and as a result, resolutions on restricting and defining pastoral ministry have become contentious in conversations and conventions of the LCMS ever since.

In the 2004 Synod convention, a resolution passed in support of the Ablaze! Initiative to reach 50 million people around the world and 50 million in North America. It included also the goals to plant 2,000 and revitalize 2,000 congregations by the year 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.⁴¹

Thirdly, the Synod has recognized the need to reach out to all ethnic groups in North America. President Bohlmann assigned a Blue Ribbon Task Force to study the mission opportunity of the Synod in 1989. The Task Force produced a document called the Mission Blueprint for the Nineties, and its recommendations were adopted at the 1992 convention.

The Blueprint for the Nineties provided the impetus for what was to come in ethnic ministry in the 1990s and early part of the 2000s. Under the leadership of

Dr. Robert Scudieri, LCMS strategy in ethnic ministry proved effective. By 2010, there were 258 African American, 173 African immigrant, 128 Asian immigrant, 163 Hispanic, and 95 Native American congregations and ministries.⁴²

A few ethnic leaders also rose to positions of Synod leadership after the adoption of the Blueprint for the Nineties; however, their positions were eliminated during the restructuring of the Synod in 2010. Except in a few districts with vibrant urban strategies, the future of ethnic ministries in the Synod seems to have reached a plateau.⁴³

Uniformity vs. Mission Movement

The LCMS seems to undergo major leadership changes when a momentum for a mission movement begins to build up. This is a classic example of the tension between the “bi-polar opposites,” institutions vs. movements.⁴⁴

The controversy in 1974 was building up during the greatest national mission movement ever to take place in the LCMS.⁴⁵ The period after the World Wars was the time the Synod almost tripled in size and is a wonderful example of the work of the Holy Spirit through the LCMS. As is the case with any congregation or denomination that may be experiencing growth, however, the infusion of new people into the system was and is bound to create cultural tensions.⁴⁶ During such times, the old timers feel overrun and the newcomers misunderstood, and a skillful and wise leadership is necessary for smooth transitions in life together as members of the body of Christ.

Moreover, this pattern of stressed relationship between the moderates and conservatives has become a pronounced personality trait of the LCMS. Whenever the Synod is making progress in the mission field, culturally conservative elements in the Synod organize and band together to defeat what they regard as a threat to LCMS culture.

For example, the Ablaze! Initiative was gaining momentum in 2010; more congregations were covenanting to plant new congregations, many agreed to go through the revitalization processes, more and more districts were gearing up to mobilize their members to reach 50 million people by the year 2017.⁴⁷

President Gerald Kieschnick supported the Ablaze! Initiative, and the church was finally starting to be united around a vision to reach 100 million people around the world by 2017. The goal was that this would be a mission vision that would transcend one administration and set the Synod on a mission movement in the twenty-first century. That was soon to change with the restructuring of the Synod and change of administrations.

The intention of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Restructuring, a task force organized by President Kieschnick, was to streamline national leadership in service of mission. What was not to like when the goal was to avoid duplication of services, ensure alignment of system-wide operations with the vision of the church, and exercise good stewardship. The restructuring passed, but Kieschnick was narrowly defeated on the first ballot by Harrison.⁴⁸

With the restructuring of the Synod, there is now no program board like the Board for Mission Services (BFMS) to nurture and guide the decisions that were made at the 2004, 2007 and 2010 conventions of the Synod on church planting,

congregational revitalization, ethnic and urban missions, and mission work among Generation Y and X⁴⁹; these resolutions have not become a priority for the new administration, which has come up with its own emphases: life together, witness, and mercy. It remains to be seen how the new emphases will accommodate the mission goals of the Kieschnick administration.

The Ablaze! Initiative attracted vehement opposition from “Confessional Lutherans” over its numerical goals and desire to count. The irony is that district mission boards continued to introduce mission resolutions requiring counting in their 2012 conventions, e.g., the Indiana district passed a resolution to challenge congregations of the district to invite 50 people a year in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary, and it was approved without any significant opposition.

When positions are hardened between parties, “who said it” becomes more important than “what is being said”; people fail to listen to one another. This is becoming a more prevalent form of discourse in the LCMS than one would like to admit. The impact of this impasse is usually the general decline in mission vigor and the decline of outreach activities to the people groups at the margins. Given the party spirit that is prevalent in the LCMS, a system to safeguard the mission vision of the Synod needs to be in place.

These questions need to be asked in the context of the new structure: Does a new administration have the freedom to ignore the decisions made by the Synod in convention? How healthy is it for the Synod to potentially change mission directions every three years? How will the Synod handle transitions from one administration to the other? How will the system continue to encourage mission momentum, which is very hard to get but easy to lose? What are the missiological implications of the Synod’s slogan words? For example, regarding the use of the word “mercy” in the new emphases, how did the exegetes manage to change the meaning of “service” (*diakonia*) into “mercy”? Is it the intention to turn poverty into a crime and the poor into criminals who would need “mercy” from the “mercy” givers?

The approval of almost all proposed mission resolutions in the last half of the twentieth century indicates that the Synod is united in her vision for mission. How mission is to be done, however, continues to divide the Synod. On the one hand, those who take the cultural plurality and changes as a critical challenge and a factor to be taken into consideration for how the Synod does her work are willing to allow for different approaches to mission. On the other hand, those who are interested in preserving uniformity have a lower view of cultural diversity and low tolerance for diverse mission and ministry styles, a major stumbling block for evangelistic outreach in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation.

Recommendations—Diversity in the LCMS in the Twenty-First Century

The apostle John saw a multitude in heaven from every nation, language, and tribe (Rev 7:9ff). Heaven is a place where one will not be identified as an Eritrean-American Lutheran Christian but as a brother of Christ together with all the brothers and sisters, who come from every nation, tribe, and language. This is the picture of the Church triumphant.

The Church militant, which is daily engaged in warfare against sin and the devil, however, will continue to struggle with the issues of diversity. Nonetheless,

the goal of Christian mission should always be in concert with the prayer of Jesus. As the Father and He are one, Jesus prays that the disciples may also be one so that they may be perfected in their unity so that the world might know that Jesus was sent by the Father, and that the Father loves them as He loves His Son (Jn 17:21–23).

Mark DeYmaz, commenting on the John 17:21–23 text, says,

Yes, in the twenty-first century it will be the unity of diverse believers walking as one in and through the local church that will proclaim the fact of God’s love for all people more profoundly than any one sermon, book, or evangelistic crusade. And I believe the coming integration of the local church will lead to the fulfillment of the Great Commission, to people of every nation, tribe, people, and tongue coming to know him as we do.⁵⁰

Of course, one may not agree with everything that DeYmaz says in his book, but one thing is clear. As North America continues to be a country of the “minority majority” ethnically, denominations and congregations will have to be intentional about mission and ministry in an increasingly diverse population. Intentionality in mission to the diverse North American scene will require the church to be skillful in communicating the unchanging message of the Gospel in ever-changing cultural contexts, focused in diverse leadership development, vigorous in church planting, and wise in transforming diverse congregations to be mission outposts.

Communicating the Unchanging Message of the Gospel in an Ever-Changing Cultural Context

Communicating the Gospel across cultures is very complex. It is even more complex and complicated when it involves multi-cultures. People can be misunderstood or can misunderstand if the Gospel message is proclaimed in a manner that is foreign to the receptor culture.

Paul Hiebert defines culture as “the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and value and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people that organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do.”⁵¹ Furthermore, Hiebert explains the dimensions of culture: cognitive, affective, and evaluative.⁵² The Gospel includes all the dimensions of culture, but, ultimately, the proclamation of the Gospel and the change it calls for has to do with “values and allegiances.”⁵³

In contexts where multiple languages are spoken in one school district in the world-class cities of Western countries, it seems impossible to speak of a singular Western culture without considering diversity. A number of approaches have been taken to reach out to people with the Gospel in our cities: ethnic specific ministry/church planting, multi-cultural / multi-ethnic congregations, mosaic congregations (a single congregation made up of multi-ethnic / multi-cultural members).⁵⁴ The context will determine how ministry is to be done, thus the need for an apostolic contextualization.

One thing that does not change in the process of contextualization is the message. The Church must always be faithful to the teaching of the Apostles as it has been passed on to us in the Scriptures. Moreover, it is important to take into account the culture in which the message is proclaimed, since this is critical for the Gospel to

find a home in the new community, that is, to be contextualized. For Lutherans, responsible contextualization is rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and uses cultural context so that the average man and woman is able to understand.

Development of Diverse Leadership

Candidate Harrison, when he addressed the Black Family Convocation in Houston days before he was elected president of the LCMS, quoted Richard Dickinson's observation on what LCMS work among Black Americans had produced: "The church is a Black body with a White head," a situation that has certainly continued in the present administration.

Richard Dickinson lamented the fact that he and Black leaders like him were engaged in a lifelong quest to belong. The church created this "monstrous body" that he referred as "the Black body with a White head" and does not know how to use Black leadership strategically.⁵⁵ Dickinson loved the Church and his Lord, and he wanted to proclaim the Gospel to all people, including Blacks in North America and on the foreign mission field; he wanted his Synod to be a good steward of the gifts that the Lord had given her, including involving the Black church as an active part of the "White head."⁵⁶

Any movement falls and rises on leadership.⁵⁷ Our Lord invested most of His time in His ministry on the twelve disciples. The LCMS, because of her understanding of the role of the office of public ministry, dedicated herself to the training of her pastors by investing heavily in theological education. Leaders in mission to the diverse world need to be as diverse as the leaders in Antioch during the Apostolic church (Acts 13:1–3). Likewise, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which is perceived as a German ethnic denomination,⁵⁸ has to be strategic in developing leaders in all sectors of the denominational leadership: the head needs the input of diverse leadership to reach out to all people groups.

Vigorous Church Planting and Congregational Transformation

Christians are called into life together as a community of faith through the Gospel of Christ (1 Cor 12). When the seed of the Gospel is proclaimed in a community and believers begin to gather in the name of Christ, a congregation is planted. Jesus is present in this fledgling community as He promised to His disciples of old and new (Mt 18:20).

However, the natural tendency of groups is that they become closed in time, especially if the missional purpose for their coming together is forgotten. Congregations erect walls around themselves and become islands in the midst of diverse communities.⁵⁹

In fact, the Church is the hope of the world. All communities need the Church to be open and reaching out. Thus, even though it is hard to transform congregations, it is important that time and resources be invested in transforming congregations so that they become mission outposts.

Moreover, church planting is the most effective way to reach new people with the Gospel.⁶⁰ Thus as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod invests in congregational transformation, it is important to invest even more resources and

leadership in church planting. While strengthening and transforming existing congregations is important, new congregations need to be planted for all types of people and cultural groups.

Finally, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has come a long way: from a German-speaking ethnic denomination, whose mission was to gather German immigrants, to an English-speaking North American denomination. She continues to struggle with how to remain faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and to fulfill her mission calling. When the pressure of diversity stretches her cultural limits, the forces of uniformity have asserted themselves and will continue to do so. But the Spirit of God’s mission is more powerful than the pressure to inappropriately conform and will always prevail. In the words of Richard Koenig, “the [S]ynod’s blend of classical Lutheran Orthodoxy and a type of Christianity deeply interested in religious experience, called Pietism, combined with a flair for practical affairs, made the LCMS a force to be reckoned with.”⁶¹ The giant is waking up empowered by the Holy Spirit for a mission movement! To God be the Glory!

Endnotes

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³ *Ibid.*, 98, 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁵ Richard C. Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns: The Centennial Edition of Black Lutheranism and Ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 195.

⁶ Richard E. Koenig, *What Is Behind the Showdown in the LCMS? Church and Tradition in Collision*. In *Lutheran Forum*, 6, no. 4 (November 1972), 17. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 349.

⁷ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 97.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹¹ LCMS, *Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 156.

¹² Mission Task Force, *Mission Blueprint for the Nineties: Report* (St. Louis: LCMS, 1991), 7.

¹³ Koenig, *What Is Behind the Showdown in the LCMS?*, 17.

¹⁴ Richard Marrs, “Essay #2” Nebraska District Convention, June 9, 2012.

<http://www.ndlcms.org/news/convention/Marrs-essay2.pdf>.

¹⁵ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 97.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁷ Rosters and Statistics, LCMS. 1970-2010.

¹⁸ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 59.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 84, 176.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

²² *Ibid.*, 154–156

²³ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁶ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 313.

²⁷ LCMS, *Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹ LCMS, *Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 12.

³⁰ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 23.

- ³¹ Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns*, 156.
- ³² AIM, LCMS. 2002. Concept Paper on An African Immigrant Institute of Theology - Presented to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO.
- ³³ Rosters and Statistics, LCMS. 1970–2010.
- ³⁴ Marrs, “Essay #2.”
- ³⁵ Koenig, *What Is Behind the Showdown in the LCMS?*.
- ³⁶ LCMS, Convention Proceedings (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 7.
- ³⁷ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 313.
- ³⁸ LCMS, Convention Proceedings (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 11.
- ³⁹ Rosters and Statistics, LCMS. 1970–2010.
- ⁴⁰ LCMS, Convention Proceedings (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 72.
- ⁴¹ LCMS, Convention Proceedings (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 121.
- ⁴² Rosters and Statistics, LCMS. 1970–2010.
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- ⁴⁴ Christian A. Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church: How Natural Church Development Can Transform Theological Thinking* (Carol Streams: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 16.
- ⁴⁵ Koenig, *What Is Behind the Showdown in the LCMS?*, 18.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 18–20.
- ⁴⁷ LCMS, Convention Proceedings (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010).
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ LCMS, Convention Proceedings (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004, 2007, and 2010).
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- ⁵¹ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 30.
- ⁵² Ibid., 30–32.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 34.
- ⁵⁴ Yohannes A. Mengsteab, “Multicultural/Multiethnic Ministry: A Challenge for Congregations In a Changing Community.” (Holland, MI: ThM. Thesis, Western Theological Seminary, 1997), 39–49.
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- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 195.
- ⁵⁷ Yohannes A. Mengsteab, “Effective Urban Congregation: A Study of Ministry Factors That Contribute to the Effectiveness of a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Urban Congregation.” (Ft. Wayne, IN: Doctoral Diss., Concordia Theological Seminary, 2007), 231.
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A Church for All Nations: Christian Unity from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Yared Halche

Introduction

Culture change, fueled by unprecedented global migration and generational transitions, has revolutionized the religious landscape of our world. Mainstream denominations that have a heavily predominant mono-cultural base are confronted with the challenges of cultural “tugs of war” that have been surging over the course of the past centuries.

The objective of this writing is to encourage people to rest their personal and communal identities upon Christ—the only anchor who is able to bear the true weight of who they are in a culturally ever-changing world. In a world that is torn apart because of cultural differences, a Christ-centered identity is the only unifying factor. This writing echoes an invitation to a genuine “life together” rather than “doing together,” as the latter flows from the former.

This presentation mainly reflects the cultural frame of reference of African immigrants. The scope has been narrowed with the view to insure clarity and better grasp of the subject matter. Furthermore, while African Christian immigrants play a remarkable role in our society, there are no satisfactory literary works that directly address the subject. Therefore, it is vitally important to bring stories of these “invisible sojourners” in order to establish harmonious partnerships with other churches to further Christ’s mission in the world.

Current realities on the ground compel us to approach the notion of unity in a different way. There are more than 174 million immigrants in the world.¹ Their growth in the United States is unprecedented. There are 31 million migrants in the nation, in addition to 11 million undocumented migrants.² Refugees and migrants comprise about 11 percent of the total population, and an average of one million migrants enter the country each year.³ Degnesh Worku, citing Berger’s work, states that “the foreign-born population in the United States has soared from 5.1 percent in 1970, to 6.6 percent in 1980, 10.4 percent in 1990, and 11.5 percent in 2002. Now, more than 10 percent of people in the United States were born abroad, and another 10 percent of the population grew up with at least one foreign-born parent.”⁴

African migration to the United States has immensely increased following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which gave rise to the numerical growth of non-European immigrant population in the United States. “Approximately 50,000 Africans arrive in the United States annually.”⁵ The higher percentages of African immigrants come from West and East Africa. According to John Arthur,

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“Nigerians alone now constitute 17 percent of the African immigrant population in the United States. They are followed by Ethiopians, who account for another 13 percent.”⁶ He further notes that “[t]he majority of Africa’s refugee and asylum seekers are from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Ghana and Liberia.”⁷

The God of heaven and Earth ultimately determine and controls people’s movement. Recent African migration to the United States is a stunning historical phenomenon of great proportion. It is vitally important for host society churches to seize the opportunity and create intentional partnerships to expand God’s kingdom in the world.

African Immigrants in LCMS

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which had only a handful of African immigrant members in 1995, has witnessed unprecedented growth in immigrant membership. The number of “ethnic” congregations increased from 48 in 1998 to 204 in 2004.⁸ Today, the ministries of LCMS African immigrant churches are visible in almost every major city of the nation. Even if, the number of African immigrants in the United States is statistically small compared with Hispanic and Asian immigrants, they are one of the fastest growing ethnic populations. Since African immigrant communities by and large constitute young, educated, and professional families and individuals, their impact in the society is inevitably noticeable. Shelly Habecker notes that “Hispanic immigrants still make up the largest group of the US’s 38 million immigrants. Asians and Europeans come next. Africans are one of the smallest groups but also one of the fastest growing! . . . African migration = 3 percent of all migrants. But their numbers went from 574,000 in 2000 to 1.1 million in 2009—doubling in a decade.”⁹

Many Lutheran African immigrants joined LCMS congregations, a denomination that has strong immigrant roots, because they believe that the faithful confession of the church body coincides with their desire to maintain and promote theological purity and clarity. Especially in light of radical liberalism, pushing and sweeping away mainstream denominations, including Lutheran churches, the LCMS has become a safe haven to many disillusioned and disappointed African immigrant church members and leaders. Furthermore, the LCMS was one of the first mainstream denominations in the United States to adopt and implement intentional outreach ministries to African immigrants in local and regional levels. Many churches opened their hearts and buildings to host new church communities. Educational institutions have trained a growing number of future African church leaders. Districts have facilitated financial assistance to keep the work growing by supporting or subsidizing the salaries of missionaries and pastors. As a result, thousands of people’s lives have been changed by the power of the Gospel. Many churches have been planted. For all the above, African immigrant churches and communities will be eternally grateful.

Personal Remarks

I was born and raised in an ethnically diverse family and society in South Ethiopia, the most culturally diverse region in the country. My father and mother

came from different tribal and religious backgrounds. Despite sharp cultural and religious differences, they decided to unify their lives through marriage.

Yet, true unity came into their lives when my then Muslim father and his children were baptized the same day in the Lutheran church in Ethiopia in a very surprising way. He initially came to church to attend his children's baptism. However, with the amazing lead of the Spirit working through the preaching of the Gospel, he was convicted of his sins and gave his life to his Savior. He immediately asked to be baptized with his children.¹⁰ Yes, he was baptized with us the same day and continued to receive adult instructions. Ever since, Christianity has been the primary and integrative source of identity in our family. In a society that was severely divided because of tribal differences, we early understood that our identity in Christ is the only stable foundation we can rely on.

In addition to my multicultural upbringing in Ethiopia, I have had the privilege and challenges of being educated in three different continents: Africa, Europe, and North America. I have been involved in pastoral ministries and new church planting endeavors. To some extent I have experienced the ups and downs of cross-cultural encounters in the society and in church. Nonetheless, I am more convinced today than ever that it is Christ and Him alone, through His time-surpassing values and gracious provisions, who enables us to be in harmony with ourselves and others to make His name known among all nations.

Biblical Remarks

The story of Jesus' cleansing of the temple set the tone for His consequential emphasis on His Father's house being "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:15–17). As Jesus boldly affirmed, the temple was meant to be a house of prayer for all people to authentically and humbly respond to God's glorious and gracious call in their lives. However, the house of prayer was turned into a den of thieves, only to become a place where institutionalized or "spiritualized" plunder was crafted, designed, and possibly promoted. As a result, the religious system lost its fundamental nature and purpose and was reduced to an ordinary profit-making machine.

Lack of spiritual sensitivity in turn brought about disunity, resulting in disharmony and divisions along cultural lines. Selfish gains replaced the place of passion and vision that God's people were supposed to have for all nations. The temple that was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations became a divisive device among various ethnic groups. Jesus' action is a firm reminder for us to realign our attitude and passion according to God's will and purpose, as we serve Him in an ever increasingly diverse cultural world.

Nonetheless, the same Jesus who picked up a whip to clean the temple laid down His life for us and received our punishment. He paid the price so that we can fully realize and enjoy our life together. He dismantled and destroyed sin and its dividing power through His death and resurrection. As a result, we are set free from the power of sin that divides us, and we are made new creatures, fit to embrace spiritual unity. This unity is rooted in our oneness as God's children. It goes beyond functional or pragmatic alliances. Christ has become flesh in us through faith. He gave Himself to us as He also took our humanity. We individually and collectively

have His mind (1 Cor 2:16). We died with Him. We no longer live for ourselves (Gal 2:20). What was ours has been crucified on the cross.

Therefore, Christian unity is profound, all-encompassing, and integrative. It is never meant to be legalistic, compartmentalized, or seasonal. We are made one body with and without seasons. Our unity is not a matter of annual multicultural festivities or celebrations. It is not a matter of Sunday's recitation that is robbed of social responsibilities. Nor is it a matter of connecting or disconnecting people groups across ethnic lines. Our communal faith journey started when we were baptized into Christ. It is part and parcel of our daily baptismal living in Christ as we believe in one apostolic church and the unity of the saints. Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly said that a church is a church only when it exists for others.

As we lead harmonious and integrated lives in the world, others will be drawn to Jesus. The Scripture says, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:35). As a result, we become agents of peace, love, and harmonious unity in the world.

Cultural Remarks

The classic melting-pot theory of assimilation, which describes a total absorption of immigrants into American mainstream culture, has been a widely discussed and debated theory in the last almost half-century. However, a number of recent studies have indicated how the melting-pot theory lacks in-depth academic insight as well as practical relevancy. As a result, other social interaction theories have been adopted.

Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, in *The Age of Migration*, discuss the theory of the social adjustment process of immigrants within a changing cultural context. They mention various models in the immigrant's adjustment process: exclusionary, assimilative, and multicultural models.¹¹

Exclusion is a self-made or externally imposed alienation from a larger social network. First-generation African immigrants by and large maintain home country ties by reproducing ethnic associations, religious institutions, restaurants, and community organizations. African immigrants also experience exclusion as a result of discrimination and stigmas. On the other hand, assimilation as a process of acculturation embraces the notion of cultural segmentation and diffusion. John Arthur states: "For most immigrants, Africans included, the preferred approach . . . is the blending of immigrant expectations and values with those of the host or dominant society."¹² African immigrants, particularly the second generation, selectively participate in cultural interactions. Even though mainstream culture indexes second generation as blacks or people of color, most of them define their identities with words that reflect segmentation or compartmentalization. Lastly, multiculturalism, as an integrative perspective, is believed to promote harmony and cohesiveness among various cultural communities. This concept, even though it sounds very attractive and appealing, is a fairly new idea that requires the test of time.

Opportunities

Most Christian migrants who reside in the West came from parts of the world where Christianity is rapidly growing. The shift in the growth of Christianity

to the Southern hemisphere is a remarkable phenomenon in the history of modern Christian mission. Ray Bakke states: “In my continued study of global urban migration, I was forced to confront the greatest migration in human history, the Southern hemisphere coming North, and East coming West, and everyone coming to the cities.”¹³ Philip Jenkins notes that the largest most vibrant communities of Christian faith are no longer found in Europe and North America, but rather in Africa and Latin America. He states that a century ago Africa constituted ten million Christians. Today, the number of African Christians exceeds three hundred sixty million.¹⁴ Jenkins projects that by 2025 there will be around 2.6 billion Christians in the world, 640 million in Latin America and 633 million in Africa, with Europe in third place at 555 million, followed by the United States. The Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church, a Lutheran church body in Ethiopia that was established as a national church with 20,000 registered members in 1959, has grown to two million in less than half a century. Today Mekane Yesus membership exceeds 5.5 million, making it the largest Lutheran church body in Africa and the second largest Lutheran denomination in the world.

Southern Christians’ migration to the North has changed the religious map of North America and Europe. There are 3,500 parishes that hold their masses in Spanish in the United States.¹⁵ There are seven thousand Protestant Hispanic congregations across the country.¹⁶ Philip Jenkins stated that one of the largest congregations in London is established and led by a Nigerian missionary.¹⁷ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which started as an immigrant church, has continued spreading the good news to the whole world. It is obvious that the presence of vibrant Christian migrants revives the declining Christian influence in the West. Particularly, Christian migrants’ strong zeal and experience in evangelistic outreach are assets that can be tapped and utilized for God’s glory. The United States has become a place where people from every walk of life meet. The demographic environment is conducive to mission. For example, an Arabic-speaking Sudanese Christian in the United States can easily connect with migrants from other Arabic speaking nations. Shelly Habecker states:

God may be gearing up to evangelize the North through Southern migrants but don’t put it past him to use Southern migrants to bring the message of salvation of other Southern migrants as they meet one another in the North...Immigrants of different faiths may be much better able to relate to one another on the basis of their shared immigrant experience—better at it than a white Christian American could ever be. But once these connections are made, it seems there is so much potential for partnering with mainstream churches here!¹⁸

Furthermore, Southern Christian migrants bring alternative and fresh insights on worship, ministry patterns, laity involvement, and leadership structures to the churches in the North. Their experience with diversified ministry styles and functions can enrich host country churches that seem to be losing ground, partly due to rigid ministry patterns and traditions.

In addition, rapid transportation systems and global cyber-connections have made the world easily accessible. Christian migrants utilize these opportunities to

keep close ties with home countries and churches that can make overseas missions more efficient and “within our reach.” Shelly Habecker notes:

Scholars are keenly interested in the social, economic, and political implications of the transnational ties immigrants maintain with their home countries. The big buzzword in international development circles these days is ‘Diasporas and Development’. . . . Economists are especially concerned about how much money is being sent in remittances and what that money is doing. Anthropologists are more concerned about how immigrants are changing not only economic realities but social, cultural, and religious ones as well. World Bank African Diaspora Program was established in 2007 to provide African governments and the AU to assist in 1) diaspora policy formation, 2) leveraging remittances, and 3) utilizing skilled professionals in the diaspora. As of 2011, 25 African countries have benefited from this program. . . . If the World Bank thinks diasporas are important for accomplishing the mission of development, I wonder what God must think about the importance of diasporas for accomplishing his mission in their homelands?¹⁹

However, involvement of the diaspora in a home country’s development needs to be carefully assessed, as it might also cause possible misgivings or backlash.

Saint Augustine Lutheran Church

I have witnessed the unifying power of the cross at St. Augustine Lutheran Church, where I currently serve as a pastor. Church members come from thirteen different countries, representing people from four different continents: Africa, South America, Asia, and North America. The leadership and the order of service at the church reflect both our unity and diversity in Christ. I have had the privilege of seeing the work of God as people who speak different languages and have different cultural and experiential backgrounds bond together in brotherly love and enrich the work of the Lord. I am often reminded of the Scripture in Revelation: “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Rev 7:9–10). This is a true taste (in smaller proportion) of what heaven and a church for all nations look like.

The vision of St. Augustine is to see that one day multicultural communities are fully empowered in an enlarged and extended assembly of Christ that shines with vibrant worship and passionate caring ministries in the world. We encourage every member of the congregation to continuously remember their missionary role in the United States and beyond. It is our desire to promote Christ’s universal mission in the world in all what we have and what we do. There is a story behind the building that St. Augustine Lutheran Church currently occupies. Years ago, it was occupied by a different church, but somehow, the building was sold to a non-church entity. By God’s grace and by partnering with mission organizations, we were able to purchase the building, and today the good news is proclaimed again there every single day.

The Lord has brought Christian migrants that they may also take part in restoring the Christian faith that has been in a declining motion in the West.

Challenges

One of the major obstacles of Christian unity is racial problems. Negative social stereotypes or orientations, fueled by sinful human nature, foster divisions and conflicts along cultural lines. Moreover, these forces compel people to lose sight of productive ways to engage in peaceful conflict resolutions. As a result, racial conflicts worsen. Thus, it is critically important for churches to continuously engage and equip themselves with God's word to co-exist peacefully and productively with other people. Even so, it is beneficial to learn also from nature and science as they, too, can manifest God's holy desire for His people.

Ethnic identities are socially constructed. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann state that identity as a key element in subjective reality is a social make-up.²⁰ However, many societies view cultural identity in biological, territorial, or supernatural terms. Such identity is then believed to be inherited. With its transfer to subsequent generations, institutionalization and legitimation occur.²¹ At this stage cultural identity becomes a norm and way of life. Uncritical allegiance to racial identities then leads to competition, division, and potential conflicts. As racial tensions prevail in various levels and forms, they affect Christian unity and impede cross-cultural mission. For example, concern that immigrants' full inclusion into the religious "make-up" might diffuse or shake up core cultural values and interests is not only counter-productive for communal mission but also unbiblical. On the other hand, the flight of immigrants into their own cultural spaces, restaurants, churches, organizations and other fragmented ethnic entities cannot foster true Christian unity. Such stigmatizing attitudes of fear and mistrust do not only intensify social alienation and exclusion, they place God's greater kingdom in a defensive and disadvantaged position.

The Bible provides an alternative way to unity in a cross-cultural context. While God works through human cultures, He is at the same time above them. He incarnated Himself and became a human being through His Son, Jesus Christ. He respects and values human cultures so long as they are within His holiness parameters. If not, He condemns them. Therefore, God has called the church to surrender its ultimate loyalty to Him and deal with cultures accordingly. God wants His people to worship, trust, love and fear Him more than anything else. True unity results from abiding in Him and living the sanctified life, having been declared righteous through His atoning sacrifice.

Conclusion

True spiritual unity is not about creating or imposing some form of cultural or ideological compatibility. Rather, it is about letting the power of the Gospel transcend our differences, and even similarities, and bring us together as one people for God's glory. Christ, through His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, created a sphere of freedom, trust, and humility among His people. He affirmed this by pouring out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and set the church free to come out of a place of fear and suspicion to take the message of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The same Spirit that made them courageous and bold witnesses helped them to be humble and accept others.

Christian unity prevails as we humbly recognize and affirm each other's baptism, regardless of cultural differences. Whether the water of baptism is drawn from Africa or America, the source and power of our baptism, Christ, is the same and remains the same forever. The Scripture says that we "drank from the same spiritual rock . . . and that rock was Christ!" (1 Cor 10:4). And God made Christ the head of His church so that we can honor Him and live harmoniously as members of His body (1 Cor 12:1–10).

Endnotes

¹ David Claydon, "The New People Next Door," Study by Lausanne Committee for Mission, No. 55 (2005), accessed August 30, 2007, <http://www.lausanne.org/documents.html>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Helen Ebaugh and Jennet Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and adaptations in immigrant Congregations* (London: Altamira Press, 2000), 3.

⁴ Deginesh Worku, "Acculturation of Ethiopian Women Refugees/Immigrants with Families in the USA from 1989–2004" (Doctoral Dissertation, Capella University), 24.

⁵ Salih Eissa, "Diversity and Transformation: African Americans and African Immigration to the United States," Immigration Policy Center. (2005), accessed November 1, 2006, <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Diversity%20and%20Transformation%20March%202005.pdf>.

⁶ John Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States* (London: Praeger, 2000), 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ Hanciles Jehu, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2008), 294.

⁹ Shelly Habecker, "Migration and Mission" (Paper presented at A Mission Forum of St. Augustine Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN, April 21, 2012).

¹⁰ This practice continues to be a common occurrence especially in cultures built on family and social connections, unlike in the West where adult baptism presupposes catechetical instruction.

¹¹ Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), 244.

¹² John Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners*, 87.

¹³ Ray Bakke, *A Theology As Big As the City* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 27.

¹⁴ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 3.

¹⁵ Helen Ebaugh and Jennet Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 99.

¹⁸ Shelly Habecker, "Migration and Mission."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology Knowledge*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 173.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

TOWARD UNDERSTANDING THE MATRIFOCAL AFRICAN-AMERICAN URBAN FAMILY

Ruth McDonnell

Perspective and Presuppositions

Rather than ask the reader to attempt to uncover the author's perspective and presuppositions by reading between the lines of this paper, I prefer to state them from the onset. I am a conservative Lutheran Christian. I come from a white middle-class family of predominantly German descent and grew up in a small coal-mining town in southwestern Virginia. My parents, however, were from the North—educated and middle class. From the perspective of the years, I can see that they were not a welcome part of the mainstream society and culture in the little mountain town of Wise. They were outsiders, Northerners, college people. My dad was a professor at the college in town, a branch of the University of Virginia and a mission to help the poor, uneducated mining community.

My brother and I, on the other hand, were raised in Wise. We were just as comfortable with the children of mining families as we were with the sons and daughters of the college faculty. We were kids. To us there was no difference. There were and still are very few African-Americans¹ in Wise County; however, contrary to the usual bias in the Appalachian Mountains, our parents taught us that there was no difference between black and white. The only difference between us and them was the color of our skin. We were raised not to have the typical prejudices which surrounded us.

My marriage to a “damn Yankee,” a wonderful man from New York City, took me not only into Lutheranism but to the North. A year in New York and two in Massachusetts did nothing to change my opinion that there were no differences between races. We are all the same underneath. After three years in the North and another fifteen back in the South, my viewpoint remained solidly intact. Then I took a call to be the mission facilitator for Metro St. Louis. I began to wonder why, if we are all the same, African-Americans tended to be so poor, many living in such terrible conditions in the worst parts of our metropolitan community. Why the difference? Why do the blacks live on the north side, while the whites live to the south and to the west? Why is there so much crime in north St. Louis compared to other parts of the city? Why are the homes so run-down? Why are there very few supermarkets and shopping centers? If we are all the same, why is there this huge difference? I'm sure that, for the first forty-nine years of my life, I had sounded just

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middle-class evangelicals who were surveyed in Emerson and Smith's book.² My upbringing had taught me a strong sense of individualism. I had the opportunity to be whatever I wanted to be, and everyone else had the same chance. Why didn't these people just work harder? What was the problem?

In my work in urban ministry, I observed that a huge number of factors are in play for African-Americans. As I began to study cultural anthropology, I began to realize the extent to which these factors affect their lives. To be frank, I was disturbed by Emerson and Smith's assertion that my previous attitude had been "inexcusable for Christians."³ For almost my whole life, I had been completely unaware of the class and power relationships, the social structures and economic factors that make it nearly impossible for people of color to be whatever they want to be and accomplish their hopes and dreams. My cultural experiences encountered no such hindrances to achieving my goals. If I have learned nothing else from the study of anthropology, I have learned that we must recognize our own cultural bias and attempt to engage in cultural relativism. I cannot pretend to set my own background aside; therefore, I reveal it here.

The History of the African-American Family

Just as one cannot appreciate my worldview without understanding my personal and family history, one cannot understand the culture and context of the urban African-American without understanding African-American history. Many histories of the African-American experience do not adequately take into account the anthropological factors that contribute to the situation of African-Americans today. Some attribute any and all problems to the subjective category of racism without considering the issues of class, power, language, education, etc.⁴ However, an examination of American history, particularly the history of slavery, freedom, and the decline of rural America may help us to uncover how these dynamics have influenced modern urban life.

Slavery, Family Life, and the Emergence of the Matrifocal Family

Neither the Western white man nor the black man is native to North America. The white man came and took what he wanted from the Native Americans. A little more than one hundred twenty-five years later in 1619, the first blacks were brought from the west coast of Africa. Originally they were considered indentured servants, but by 1641 legal statutes were on the books declaring them life-long slaves. Slavery was sanctioned and practiced in all the colonies, but in the north, where there was a predominance of small family farms, the number of slaves was fewer. In the south with its large plantations, the slave population was considerably higher.

The family life of a slave could be far from stable. As a slave, one was not able to enter into a contractual relationship, and so marriage among slaves, although commonly practiced, was not legal. Some slave owners would accept these relationships and not break up couples in buying and selling slaves, but the practice was strictly the prerogative of the slaveholder, causing the marriage relationship to

lack stability. There were, however, laws in some states restricting the sale of children away from their mothers.⁵

Campbell, Miers, and Miller note that the circumstances of slavery may have contributed to the development of a matrifocal family structure.⁶ While the power structure of North American slavery made it possible, although not probable, for male slaves to revolt or escape rather than submit, circumstances made it much less likely for female slaves to attempt either of these two options for obtaining freedom from slavery. However, female slaves were not without options in terms of asserting their own agency. Unlike male slaves, female slaves were valued for their capacity to bear children, for their ability to serve as nannies and wet nurses, for their skill as household servants, and for sexual service to their white male masters. These were the “bargaining chips” that female slaves could use to assert some control over their present treatment and the future for both themselves and their children. There were a number of ways in which they could use these assets. Examples are manipulation through rumors, refusal to bear children (through methods of reducing conception or inducing early abortion), and, most importantly for the purposes of this paper, the development of matrifocal kinship systems.⁷

Although some have asserted that the matrifocal family was simply an extension of the same structure in the African family, Campbell, Miers, and Miller assert that it actually has no precedence in Africa. The system consisted of a network of women, both kin and fictive kin, who relied on one another for a social and emotional support. They cared both for one another as well as for one another’s children. This kind of network was vital for them to survive the hardships of slavery. Campbell, Miers, and Miller call it an “entirely new and creative [response] to the otherwise disabling conditions in which they lived.”⁸

The matrilineal descent rule of western slavery also contributed to this shift to a matrifocal system. Determination of the status of a child was determined by the status of the mother, not the father. If the mother was a slave, the child was a slave of the same owner. If the father was white or a freedman, but the mother was a slave, the child was still a slave. This rule basically served to release the father from any responsibility for a child.

This matrifocal kinship structure was resisted and even actively opposed by white slave owners, who preferred the traditional patrifocal model. In the matrifocal system, women gained a degree of prominence and power, not more than the males, but a level of power and prominence that was viewed as inappropriate for a female. Some black women were even able to work to secure self-manumission through enterprise. Often they would also be able to secure freedom for their children as well. These black women were able to assert themselves in ways that were a sharp contrast to the typical female submission of most of society in that era of history. Such assertion was not popular with the white society, which tried to alter the matrifocal trajectory. One example of trying to force Western ideals on these women comes from post-emancipation legislation. Marriage laws made the freedwoman the property of her husband in an attempt to establish the patrifocal “ideal” for blacks.

Freedom and the Change in Economic Situation⁹

The effects of the Civil War were devastating on the economy of the South. With the freeing of the slaves, the economic structure collapsed. Ex-slaves were now uprooted and faced a life for which they were not prepared. The land was still owned by the whites, and the blacks had no economic capital except their labor. The white landowners did not have money to hire the ex-slaves as workers. As a result, many blacks were left with a new form of the “slave-master system”¹⁰—sharecropping.

During this time, laws were changing in regard to the rights of blacks. At the same time as laws were enacted to give blacks rights such as the vote, other laws were being passed to keep blacks in a subordinate role in society. Laws such as the “Jim Crow Laws” were used to subjugate blacks to a lower rung of humanity. Educational opportunities were separate and substandard, and the advent of industrialization was rapidly changing economic systems.

Migration to Cities

Industrialization had a tremendous impact on life in the United States. Industry provided an abundance of unskilled jobs in the cities. Although newly freed slaves had competition from unskilled immigrants from other countries, there was still much more work to be had in the cities than on the rural farms and plantations. With these jobs, came the promise of a better life and the hope of a change in status.

Industrialization also led to the mechanization of farms. As farm equipment became cheaper to produce, it became more affordable to rural farmers. They could now produce the same amount with far fewer laborers, thus contributing to the movement of workers to the cities where industrial jobs were plentiful.

Unfortunately, the move to the cities was not all sunshine and roses. Much more could be written on the effects of industrialization and urbanization on the family. Jobs were plentiful, but so were workers. The influx of people led to problems in public health, education, and housing. All of these things contributed to poverty and disruption of family life. Suffice it to say that city life promised much more than it delivered. Life was still hard for the African-American family.

Contemporary Urban Life

As we consider the present conditions of black family life, John Nunes provides a poignant description of the urban context. Identifying three key characteristics as poverty, violent crime, and diversity;¹¹ he goes on to say

What ails cities is not hard to detect. The symptoms are easily discernible. Too much of what we see and hear of urban life is defeat.

- Streets are strewn with broken glass.
- Streets are lined with a surplus of liquor stores.
- Streets are dotted with stores suffering from a famine of necessities such as fresh milk and bread without mold.
- Streets [serve] as backdrops for defeated existences eked out in crumbling buildings tagged with the script of gang machismo, hieroglyphics of hate that boastfully promise death to rivals.

- Streets populated by preadolescent boys, who are too young to be so radically alienated from human values, yet are lifelessly living defeated existences.

To all appearances, it is defeat when children unconscionably commit murder for something as intangible as honor. It is defeat when young boys, not yet men, die prematurely, holding guns too big for their not fully formed hands. It is defeat when pubescent girls, living prematurely in grown women's bodies give birth to inheritors of multigenerational poverty and dependency. It is defeat when those who rightly draw our greatest sympathy, defeated senior citizens cower in fear, prisoners in their own homes...¹²

What Nunes says so eloquently here is that life in the city does not live up to the promise which it held for those who went there seeking jobs and a better life. In fact, "[t]he crisis of life in modern American cities tend to imprison rather than liberate."¹³

The Urban African-American Woman and Her Family

Only in placing the African-American woman in this history and this setting can we truly see her plight and begin to understand her context. In her seminal work on black women and feminism, *Ain't I A Woman*, Bell Hooks discusses race and gender and clarifies some of the issues regarding male and female roles in the African-American family. Her assertion is that both race and gender have functioned together to oppress the black woman to a greater degree than either would have alone. While some talk of the emasculation of the African male through the institution of slavery, Bell insists that this is not so. The maleness of the slave was actually something to be valued. His physical strength and prowess added to his value. A male slave would generally not be put to work in the slaveholder's household doing "women's work." On the other hand, female slaves worked both in the farm *and* in the home, their own and that of the slave owners. Although, as a feminist, Hooks would probably not agree with the latter part of this statement, my own assessment is that male slaves were not emasculated, but female slaves were defeminized. While white women were seen as the weaker sex and in need of protection, black women were, for the most part, seen as genderless chattel. The fact that they were often used for sex does not override the categorization. In fact, the sexual abuse that they have suffered has only added to the difficulty of gender identification. If one is compliant, she is considered loose. If one fights back, she is labeled overbearing or something worse! She was never in any position to celebrate her sexuality.

In the job market, African-American women have always worked, and no job was beneath them. Consider the dichotomy. During the civil rights movement, black men received sympathy when they rebelled against working for "the man." Try to understand the contradiction: Black men have been supported when they assert that some jobs are "beneath" them, while black women have done whatever it takes to provide for their families—even to the point of putting themselves in situations which put them at risk for sexual abuse.

The brunt of all of this is that African-American women have been left feeling deeply discontented. Jones and Shorter-Gooden describe the feeling like this:

As painful as it may be to acknowledge, their lives are still widely governed by a set of old oppressive myths circulating in the White-dominated world. Based on these fictions, if a Black woman is strong, she cannot be beautiful and she cannot be feminine. If she takes a menial job to put food on the table and send her children to school, she must not be intelligent. If she is able to keep her family together and see her children to success, she must be rough and unafraid. If she is able to hold her head high in spite of being sexually harassed or accosted, she must be oversexed or promiscuous. If she travels the globe, she must be ferrying drugs rather than simply trying to see the world.¹⁴

Add this to Nunes's description of urban life, and one has a none-to-pretty picture of life in the city for the African-American woman.

Interpreting the Context

All too often, white Americans look into the African-American culture through our own cultural lenses. We do not interpret the black experience in its own context. After reading a variety of authors who have tried to interpret African-American culture, I have made several discoveries, the most important of which are expounded below.

Ethnocentrism

We must all work very hard to overcome our ethnocentrism. It is far too easy to neglect to take the time to learn about those with whom we share our city, our country, and our world. A few weeks ago, I might have told you that one simply needs to get to know people. I realize now that this is a rather individualistic approach. I know African-American women, but prior to this research, I had no idea of the complexity of issues which contribute to their current situation. I may have learned a bit more from friendly conversation, and I would have loved to be able to do some field research to add to my learning, but much of my understanding now comes from what I have read and studied from a variety of sources and from a variety of viewpoints. This kind of study will benefit anyone who wants to try to overcome his own ethnocentrism in order to work among those of a different culture.

The Importance of the Insider

The best ethnographers are those who have lived it. Bell Hooks's book made a huge impact on my understanding. While I would not agree entirely with her feminist ideology, her perspective on what it is to be a black woman in America was invaluable. Other texts did little to help one understand the culture and context. Their ethnocentrism was glaring. Their authors basically said, "Here are their problems. Let's fix those, and then they will be happy like us." To properly do anthropology, one cannot be an aloof outside observer. This may seem contrary to the scientific method, which seeks to remain external and objective to the object of study, but it

will simply not work in anthropological study. Getting as close as one can to the group one wants to study and relying on "inside information" is the best way to gain true understanding.

The Value of an Interdisciplinary and Diachronic Approach

I have examined the evidence from historical, anthropological, and psychological approaches and, in conclusion, will attempt to take my findings and use them to critique a St. Louis Lutheran congregation's mission approach. It was invaluable to begin with the period of American slavery. A synchronic examination would not have worked in this case. To understand the situation of the matrifocal, urban, African-American family, one has to know all the circumstances that have contributed to its development. One must also understand the issues of power, gender, racism, economy, etc.

Conclusions Regarding the Urban African-American Matrifocal Family

All of this necessary background has led to a number of conclusions. First, although the African-American urban family has a tendency to be matrifocal, it should not be regarded as matriarchal. As with the typical matrifocal family structure, in which relationships with the mother and her kin are key, the male still retains the power within the family structure. Some black women have embraced this false image of the matriarch. It does carry with it some coveted positive implications, e.g., ideas such as the strong African-American woman; but as much as black women may want to be seen as strong, this matriarchy myth has been used "to impress upon the consciousness of all Americans that black women were masculinized, castrating, ball-busters."¹⁵

One often hears of the absent father in African-American urban households. While it is frequently the case, however, it does not appear to be the preferred norm. There are a number of reasons why the African-American urban male may be absent from the household. The scope of this paper, however, does not allow for a thorough investigation of the situation of the black male. For our purposes, it is sufficient to recognize that, even though the male is often absent, the role of "man of the house" is nonetheless important to the matrifocal black family structure. Even in households where the male is absent, a male child, the woman's brother, or a visiting male friend or lover will be considered the "man of the house." Usually black women do not adopt the male role in the household.

The overarching theme in both urban life and the experience of the black woman is one of powerlessness and defeat. "Systematic devaluation of the black women . . . was a calculated method of social control."¹⁶ She has always been at the bottom rung of society. In the civil rights movement, she remained quietly behind the scenes supporting the fight for the rights of the black man. His more privileged position only pushed her further down in contrast. In the feminist movement, she has also been cast aside and left at the bottom. Anna Julia Cooper, a black woman who promoted women's right, put it this way:

The colored woman of today occupies, one might say, a unique position in this country. In a period of itself transitional and unsettled, her status seems one of the ascertainable and definitive of

all the forces which makes for our civilization. She is confronted by a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or unacknowledged factor in both.¹⁷

It is into this powerlessness and defeat which the church must speak the Gospel; and, having spoken the Gospel into this context, it must be released to find its own expression.

The Meaning of the Gospel for the Urban African-American Matrifocal Family

As one can see from the bibliography, I have looked at a number of texts which address ministry in the African-American context or ministry to urban communities. It is disheartening to see that the vast majority, even those coming from my own Lutheran perspective, err on either the side of a social gospel or a completely spiritualized gospel. The first makes the church nothing more than a social service agency, while the latter removes the church from the world. We have fallen so far into a dualistic perspective that we have difficulty pulling flesh and spirit back together again. We cannot simply “do things” for poor city-dwelling blacks. Nor should we simply speak the Gospel and do nothing else.

Mission work in our cities with people who may not be like us begins with gaining a deep appreciation for their lives and circumstances. An African-American woman’s life and experience is nothing like mine. A city-dweller’s life and experience is nothing like mine. If I am to reach the African-American woman in the city, I must take the time and make the effort to understand her life situation. I must abandon my preconceived notions. I must study and listen and learn. Unlike mine, her life has been fraught with structural obstacles that have prevented her from having the opportunities I have had. Although women in general may still struggle with some issues of power and identity in a male-dominated society, I have never felt that. How different her experience is! I have rarely experienced discrimination on the basis of my gender, but she has experienced discrimination on the basis of both race and gender, working together in a way that accentuates the worst of both. What we have in common is our desire to provide for our families and to live in peace and security, but this comes so much more easily to me. How can I, how can our predominantly white middle-class church body bring the Gospel into this situation in an incarnational way?

I believe that we must combine word and deed, or better said, the Word and deed (Jas 2:16). This may seem simplistic, but what I am suggesting is that the church provide social services that are integrally connected with an appropriate and contextualized expression of the Gospel. As Donovan insists, the goal of the missionary must be to leave and allow the ministry to grow in its context.¹⁸

This might look something like the ministry at Bethlehem Lutheran Church. Bethlehem is a congregation in the predominantly African-American community of Hyde Park in North Saint Louis. If you watch the daily activity at Bethlehem, you will see local women dropping their children off at Better Learning Communities Academy, a mission outreach of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, for school and then heading to their jobs. And you’ll see Bethlehem’s pastor, John Schmidtke, there

greeting them and visiting with them. The church is addressing the historical problem of unequal educational opportunities by providing an excellent and free Christian education to the community's children. Look across the street from the church and you will see the result of another mission outreach of Bethlehem, houses built by Better Living Communities. (Are you seeing the pattern—BLC?) These well-built and affordable homes are occupied by African-American, low-income families—families who are intentionally visited and cared for by members of Bethlehem. The church works with the community and community leaders to provide safe and affordable housing, contributing to the stability of the family. On Sundays at Bethlehem, you will see the community coming together for worship. The service, although it remains very Lutheran in content, is very African-American in context. They gather around Word and Sacrament and, in their own unique way, bring their cares to the cross and receive God's mercy. The ministry of Bethlehem Lutheran Church speaks in word and deed. The community is not a "mission project" of the church. The community is a *part* of the church, and the church is a part of the community. This is contextualization!

Conclusions

We cannot and should not deprecate our historically white middle-class Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for not understanding the culture and context of urban African-Americans. The problem is ignorance, and ignorance should not be condemned, but overcome with knowledge. Our church body, which places such a high value on education, must teach our members about the social structures that create racism, poverty, and division. We must teach our people that our calling to love and serve our neighbor must necessarily involve learning about our neighbor's situation and striving to understand them from within their cultural context, not judging them by the standards of our own. We must understand the Gospel well enough to see its application for all situations. And we must trust God enough to release the Gospel into the urban African-American context and allow it to take on its own contextualization.

S.D.G.

Endnotes

¹ The author uses the terms "African-American" and "black" interchangeably.

² Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 69–91.

³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴ See such authors as Bakke and Barnde.

⁵ Roger H. Crook. *No South or North*. (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1959), 15–19.

⁶ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller, Women in western systems of slavery: Introduction. *Slavery & Abolition* [serial online]. August 2005; 26(2):161–179. Available from: *Academic Search Elite*, Ipswich, MA. Accessed July 18, 2012.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Crook, *No South or North*, 19–24.

¹⁰ Crook, *No South or North*, 21.

¹¹ John Nunes, *Voices from the City* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20–21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴ Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York: Perennial, 2003), 2–3.

¹⁵ Hooks, 80–81. (The author apologizes for the vulgarity of the quote; however, it expresses Ms. Hooks's extreme contempt for the labels with which African-American women must contend.)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59–60.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁸ Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 98.

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The Neighbor Among Us: Hispanics and the 2010 U.S. Census

Mark Kempff

The emerging nation of Israelites understood the importance of their numbers for economic and military potential: the census for offerings (Ex 30); the count of young men to measure military strength (Nm 1 and 26); the census of fighting men of Israel and Judah (2 Sam 24). The Romans also took a census at the time of the birth of Jesus (Lk 2). Though the instances are few, they mark important moments in the narrative of our salvation.

Today, when the issue of “diversity and contextualization” captures our attention as we explore the 2010 census of the United States and engage in studying mission paradigm shifts, we need to know and grasp the results of this census in order to understand the demographic scenario within the United States—our very “backyard and next door neighbor” mission field. For the first time in its history, there are more black, Hispanic, and other minority babies being born in the United States than Caucasian babies, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010–2011). It is projected that by the year 2023, one-half of all children will be from minority families, and that by 2042 the minorities will become the majority and Caucasians the minority. The nation has an ever-growing number of people from all countries of the world. This demographic reality brings significant challenges to any church body where there are strong traditions in place. The 2010 census can mark an important moment in history. There certainly is no exception for the Lutheran Church. We have no excuse for not knowing the neighbors among us, nor can we ignore their presence. As it has been said, “The world’s people are moving into our communities and they are here to stay.”

At the bi-annual meeting of the *Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana*¹ (Association for Hispanic Theological Education or AETH) in August 2010 in Decatur, Georgia, its executive director, Rev. Stan Perea, shared a preliminary analysis of the 2010 census of the U.S. Census Bureau of Statistics related to the current Hispanic population in the United States. In terms of birthrate:

- For every death of a white “Anglo-Caucasian” person there is at least one birth (about 1=1.3).
- For every death of an Afro-American / Native-American / Asian-American, there are three births.
- For every death of a Hispanic-Latino, there are nine births (about a third are from foreign born parents, two-thirds from second and third generation)

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Hispanic-Latino parents).

- A more recent statistic has stated that there are more births among Hispanic-Latinos than white “Anglo-Caucasians.”²

Two years later (2012) at the bi-annual AETH meeting in Denver, again Rev. Stan Perea shared a series of statistics related to the current Hispanic population in the USA and its effects on the nation. Some of the statistical tidbits were:

- According to projections, by the year 2050, there will be 133 million Hispanics in the United States—over 25% of the overall population.
- Between the years 2000 and 2010, there were 7.2 million births of Hispanics while 4.2 million came to this country through immigration.
- About 349,000 Hispanics attend college.
- The purchasing power of the Hispanic population will grow from \$99 billion to \$1.3 trillion by the year 2015.
- There are more tortillas consumed than white bread; more salsa than regular tomato ketchup.

As the data of the 2010 U.S. Census is analyzed, some remarkable numbers have emerged. For example:

- 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants were living in the United States, nearly unchanged from a year earlier, according to new estimates from the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Pew Research Center. This stability in 2010 follows a two-year decline from the peak of 12 million in 2007 to 11.1 million in 2009 that was the first significant reversal in a two-decade pattern of growth. Unauthorized immigrants were 3.7% of the nation’s population in 2010. Roughly 23% of the Hispanic population is unauthorized immigrants. 77% of Hispanic-Latino are either born as US citizens, or are residents, and this country is their home.³
- As of July, 2011, the estimated Hispanic population of the United States is 52 million, making people of Hispanic origin the nation’s largest ethnic or race minority. Hispanics constituted 16.7% of the nation’s total population.
- More than one of every two people added to the nation’s population between July 1, 2008, and July 1, 2009, was Hispanic. There were 1.4 million Hispanics added to the population during the period.
- The Hispanic population increased 2.5% between 2010 and 2011.
- The projected Hispanic population of the United States for July 1, 2050, is 132.8 million. According to this projection, Hispanics will constitute 30% of the nation’s population by that date.
- The nation’s Hispanic population during the 1990 Census was 22.4 million—less than half the current total.⁴
- Among children ages 17 and younger, there were 17.1 million Latinos, or 23.1% of this age group, according to an analysis by the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Pew Research Center. The number of Latino children grew 39% over the decade. In 2000, there were 12.3 million Hispanic children, who were 17.1% of the population under age 18.

- Although the numerical growth of the Hispanic population since 2000—more than 15 million—surpasses the totals for the previous two decades, the growth rate of 43% was somewhat slower than previous decades. Growth rates topped 50% in the 1980s (53%) and 1990s (58%).⁵
- As of April 2011, Hispanic voters are an ever-increasing force in any given election.⁶

One of the major Hispanic television stations in the country, UNIVISION, recently ran an advertising piece in an attempt to encourage companies to seize the opportunities within the Hispanic consumer market. The two-and-a-half-minute video, “The New American Reality,” is remarkably straightforward and powerful.⁷

That the advertising industry is beginning to understand and work with these trends can be seen in a recent publication by the Nielsen Group: “State of the Hispanic Consumer”—The Hispanic Market Imperative report about the U.S. Hispanic population as well as distinct product consumption:

The U.S. Hispanic population is the largest minority segment and is growing at a dramatic rate towards ethnic plurality, which has already occurred in the most populous states and is beginning to occur among the U.S. baby population. The future U.S. economy will depend on Hispanics by virtue of demographic change and the social and cultural shifts expected to accompany their continued growth.

It has become increasingly important to challenge commonly held misconceptions about the Latino market that undermine the importance of its size, uniqueness, and value. The topics of this report draw on compelling evidence of market change and the perspective of marketers who have proven success in the Hispanic-Latino marketplace:

- Latinos are a fundamental component to business success, and not a passing niche on the sidelines.
- Rapid Latino population growth will persist, even if immigration is completely halted.
- Latinos have amassed significant buying power, despite perceptions to the contrary.
- Hispanics are the largest immigrant group to exhibit significant culture sustainability and are not disappearing into the American melting pot.
- Technology and media use do not mirror the general market but have distinct patterns due to language, culture, and ownership dynamics.
- Latinos exhibit distinct product consumption patterns and are not buying in ways that are the same as the total market.

Hispanics already account for an important share of consumer expenditures and given their youth, educational advances, and increasing spending capacity, Hispanics are fast becoming preeminent drivers of growth and likely trendsetters in the marketplace. Marketers will need to understand the what, where, how and why of their role in tomorrow's consumption space.

In forecasts of future consumption growth, the Hispanic share is significantly greater than that of non-Hispanics. The evidence for the distinctiveness and sustainability of Hispanic culture is convincing and implies a future American culture with a strong Hispanic flavor.

Finally, it is instructive to recognize that unique and useful vehicles for reaching Hispanics exist around language, media consumption, and technology adoption. Given the total market's dependence on Hispanics for future growth, tapping Hispanic preferences and purchasing behaviors is essential for any strategy or marketing plan to be successful.⁸

Again, in reference to other portions of Rev. Stan Perea's presentation at the AETH bi-annual meeting in Denver, he spoke of global trends that have direct and indirect effects on ministries among Hispanics.

- The rapid and accelerated process of change affecting the "things" we have and use has prompted a constant need for restructuring, redesigning, reshuffling of the patterns and behaviors as they pertain to our everyday life. For example, electronics are deemed obsolete after a very brief amount of time, and any new product is "much better and faster".
- There is an information overload. For example, Wal-Mart has over 1 million transactions every hour, and we are exposed to millions of possible bits of information in the palm of our hand.
- Planned obsolescence means that a product produced yesterday is improved and produced today; and "if we wait for tomorrow, that product has even more improvements."
- The complexity of our intelligence transference is increasing. Our world is becoming more and more a global village.
- The emerging middle class around the world will stretch consumption and further strain our natural resources and environmental stability. Competition for energy and water resources can become reasons for crisis.
- An emotion, anger,⁹ is increasingly becoming evident in individual acts of aggression and collective violence. Anger makes the world seem more threatening; anger makes us interpret the world as a threatening place.¹⁰ As Scripture clearly states: creation is in the bondage of decay (Rom 8:20-25).

In the context of these trends, as well as the statistical analysis of our Hispanic neighbor among us, we are faced with the complexity of discerning issues

of “diversity and contextualization” as we are involved in the Lord’s mission. Where does the church situate itself in such a complex and changing world? Are we willing to ask hard questions and search for creative and relevant answers without losing the catholic nature of the church or watering down the Gospel? How can we teach and preach a contextualized message and presentation of the Gospel in all its clarity whose content is fully Christocentric and yet with the necessary cultural narratives that allow Hispanics to identify and relate to thoughts and experiences of their cultural heritage? How can the church resonate with Hispanic culture and with the hearts of its people?¹¹

What does this mean and what can we do?

The numbers are in, statistics are challenging us, and ongoing studies are revealing the complexity of our world—obviously many more than we can handle in this article. Where do we begin? What is the church to do as it faces the realities of the Hispanic neighbor? Some discussion points:

1. Stop, Look, and Listen—and then Think and Discuss

Congregations can begin learning about how to reach out to Hispanic families, serving with and among their Hispanic neighbors. The church needs to believe, testify, and act as an “us together,” rather than with a “them and us” attitude. The following three stages to enhance discussion can assist in the process.

My Hispanic Neighbor:

- What is the Hispanic population in my community?
- How many Hispanics live in my community and where do they live?
- Resources that can assist in the dialogue:

<http://www.pewhispanic.org>

<http://projects.nytimes.com/census/2010/explorer>

My Neighbor’s Needs:

- Do I know a Hispanic family? How have I interacted with my Hispanic neighbor?
- What are the needs of my Hispanic neighbor¹² and who might be meeting them?

Education?

Poverty?

Immigration issues?

Employment?

English language acquisition?

Family ministry?

Sharing the faith in Jesus?

- What agencies and ministries in my community are meeting those needs?
- Who is doing Hispanic ministry in my community?

The Resources that God Has Given Me and My Congregation:

- What resources has God given me and my congregation to meet the needs of the Hispanic neighbor among us?
- How can these resources be used to serve the Hispanic neighbors among us?
- How can I encourage others to have this conversation within my congregation?
- What do we need to engage us in further knowledge and action?

2. Interacting With and Serving Hispanic Families

Even though everything points to the seriousness of brokenness in all families, including Hispanic *familias*, one thing remains true: The recognition of God's design for the *familia* generally continues to be upheld among Hispanics. It remains true that for the majority of Hispanics, deep down inside, family is still more important than anything else in life. It is more important than recreation, status, or career. Every person is intricately shaped by his or her family. So dealing with family issues is much more than just attaining stability or renewal for the sake of the family. As Christians we have gained a new perspective, one of understanding that the family is at its core a gift of a loving God and Father who preserves it, redeems it through His Son, and sanctifies it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Congregations who want to work among Hispanics must not assume romantic visions of the family, but rather be ready to engage families as needed in the process of restoring harmony, exercising forgiveness, rebuilding understanding, building relationships, deepening intimacy, and improving communication.¹³

3. Serving Children, Youth, and Young Adults

It has been said that "the next president of the United States has already been born." The question for us is where is he or she spending their formative years? Will we have a direct participation in his or her spiritual formation? How can our Lutheran schools and institutions of higher education provide opportunities to Hispanic children and youth since most of them speak English fluently? How can a Lutheran congregation become a "home" and a "family" for those whose lives are becoming integrated into a different society and culture? Some of the greatest needs as expressed by Hispanic youth are:

- A desire to belong; how to build trust without having "to prove themselves to others before being fully accepted"; an openness to walk in two worlds, knowing that both have so much to offer; developing a sensitivity and willingness to adapt and accept.
- A desire for opportunities to learn: How to learn together to serve others?
- A desire to celebrate their history and heritage as a living proof of the saga of their *familias*: How does recent history and the "never before" connection with the future become real in their lives today?
- A desire to build community: How do they foster healthy relationships and repair damaged ones? What is the meaning of home versus just a place to

reside? How can they weave the threads of their parents' and grandparents' heritage into their own lives?

- A desire to meet the ongoing challenge of developing their own identity and learning to deal with adaptability issues: How can they learn from hardships and learn to cope with rapid changes?
- A desire to learn to be leaders: How can they acquire the ability to influence others and lead others?
- A desire to learn about Jesus Christ: How can they listen to Him, know Him, and follow Him?

4. Changing Demographics Have Meant Urban Flight

Many “Anglo-Caucasian” congregations have left the city and moved to the suburbs. Roger Greenway put it this way: An inadequate “theology of the city” creates a lack of strategies for urban missions and ministries.¹⁴ Church buildings have been abandoned, sold, or “left” for others, often for Hispanic ministries. Left with aging buildings, Hispanic ministries have seized the opportunity, yet become burdened with restoration, renovations, and overhead. Hispanic leaders face daunting financial challenges when forced to fend for themselves without the ongoing support of others working together, creatively and with long-term goals. A mission shift to work together (including all aspects of the LCMS’ life and walk together) is needed to provide an ongoing commitment to God’s mission as He has entrusted it to us, His church.

5. Leadership Formation

Yohannes Mengsteab affirms:

Unless there is an intentional inclusion of leaders from various ethnic groups in the life of a congregation, the dominant group in the congregation will be the ethnic group of the leaders. A heterogeneous leadership team is a must for a multi-ethnic or multi-cultural congregation; however, the cross-cultural tensions will be intense if the team does not take time to learn each other’s cultures. It is easier to have an ethnic group with an indigenous leader.¹⁵

Contextualizing theological formation for Hispanic leaders is not easy work. It entails a serious knowledge of the people, their language and culture(s), their realities and hopes, as well as a serious study and creative application of the best and most faithful ways Scripture can be communicated intelligibly and meaningfully through worship, teaching, preaching, evangelism, meeting needs, and church-planting. Hispanics are only 0.04% (less than one tenth of one percent) of those claiming membership in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This almost infinitesimal number presents an enormous mission opportunity for the LCMS, particularly in the area of providing a stable, ongoing and self-sustaining theological education program. In order to minister among the growing Hispanic communities with the Gospel of Christ, the Center for Hispanic Studies of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for example, is committed to form Hispanic students for pastoral and deaconess ministries.

Aside from how current statistics are interpreted and applied, many Hispanics still remain among the “poorest of the poor” when compared to other ethnic groups living within the United States. It is not that Hispanics suffer from higher unemployment rates, or are challenged to hold down a full-time job. As a cultural group it can be argued that they are among the hardest working people, willing to take on jobs that no one else wants to do, and endure tremendous entrepreneurial risk to start their own businesses. Being the “poorest of the poor” means that, unlike the traditional seminary students, they do not enjoy the benefits of a support network—grandparents, relatives, friends or established home congregations—available to provide financial support while they study for the ministry. Being the “poorest of the poor” also means that Hispanics are denied access to opportunities for education, jobs, and stability because of language and other societal barriers.

Today, the issue of “diversity and contextualization” must capture our attention. We certainly need to explore and engage in mission paradigm shifts. We need to take the results of the 2010 U. S. Census (and its projections for 2012), understand the demographic scenario within the country, and accept “our next door Hispanic neighbor” as part of the mission of the church. So, where do we go from here? How is the church to serve among its Hispanic neighbors? When we take a census of our church, where does it take us? What is our follow-up strategy?

No strategy is an end in and of itself, but rather actively directs our response of faith in the proclamation of the Gospel and service to the neighbor in gratitude to our triune God for the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, Lord of all. This gift is for all, the world, the community, the church, the family, marriage, and the individual. Through our calling and vocation to serve as Christ served us, Christians express to the world their belonging to one another under God’s design as well as their belonging to Christ. In Christ, the congregation of believers becomes the Holy Spirit’s “place” where all are gathered, enlightened, and sustained through Word and Sacrament as a part of God’s family to His glory and for service to the neighbor. In and through the church we are called to serve our Hispanic neighbor.

We are certainly compelled to meditate with St. Paul on the marks of the Christian as we all live our lives in a world surrounded by “the neighbor among us,” whom we serve with gladness, in Christ’s name:

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:9–18 [ESV])

A census can make a difference. In Christ's precious name. Amen.

Endnotes

¹ www.aeth.org. "AETH was founded as a result of a meeting of Hispanic theological educators that took place in August of 1991. AETH has since experienced a dramatic growth. It has had an impact on the ministry of some 1200 individual members, 100 institutional affiliates and over 100 local church pastors. The mission of AETH is to: 'Develop leaders to radically transform the Latino church and community contributing to their vibrancy, health and growth.' Membership and partnership is open to all who are interested in advancing the mission of AETH. Membership includes individuals from many different denominations. Some of our members are educators and students from seminars, Bible colleges and institutes and other similar institutions. Many of our members are pastors or lay members of local churches."

² Jeffrey Passel, Gretchen Livingston, and D'Vera Cohn, "Explaining Why Minority Births Now Outnumber White Births" PewResearchCenter. May 17, 2012.

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/05/17/explaining-why-minority-births-now-outnumber-white-births/>.

³ Pew Hispanic Center. PewResearchCenter. www.pewhispanic.org.

⁴ Read more: Hispanic Americans: Census Facts—Infoplease.com.

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/hhmcensus1.html#ixzz1GFLgeStE>

⁵ Pew Hispanic Center. PewResearchCenter. www.pewhispanic.org.

⁶ Mark Hugo Lopez, "The Latino Electorate in 2010: More Voters, More Non-Voters," Pew Hispanic Center. April 26, 2011. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/04/26/the-latino-electorate-in-2010-more-voters-more-non-voters/>.

⁷ Univision, "The New American Reality," YouTube. April 7, 2011.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOnhuj11zGI>.

⁸ "State of the Hispanic Consumer: The Hispanic Market Imperative," Nielsen.

<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports-downloads/2012/state-of-the-hispanic-consumer-the-hispanic-market-imperative.html>.

⁹ Reported in: Potegal, Michael, et.al. (eds). *International Handbook of Anger: Constituent and Concomitant Biological, Psychological, and Social Processes*. Springer Science+Business Media, New York, 2010.

¹⁰ Anger makes the world seem more threatening. Published on October 12, 2010 by Art Markman, Ph.D. in *Ultior Motives*, Psychology Today.

¹¹ From thoughts and comments made by Rev. Eloy González, pastor at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church Irving, Texas.

¹² To know more of the needs within Hispanic ministry in the LCMS, go to the Blue Ribbon Task Force for Hispanic Ministry: <http://chs.csl.edu/files/2012/08/BRTFHM-ENG.pdf>.

¹³ "Reflections on the Hispanic/Latino family today." Latin American and U.S. Latino Lutheranism. *LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology*, 19, no. 1 (Epiphany 2010), 55.

¹⁴ Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma, "Barriers to Reaching Urban Ethnic," *Cities: Missions New Frontier* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

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Pastor Eloy González speaks Spanish at home. So do one in four people he serves at Our Redeemer in Irving, Texas.

So do a *lot* of people. It's no surprise these days: 16% of Americans are Hispanic.

What may be a surprise is how many LCMS congregations are discovering that they have Hispanic neighbors who need a church home and eagerly welcome the message of God's grace.

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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, POWER, AND CONTEXTUALIZATION: A PERSPECTIVE FROM LATINO THEOLOGY

Eric Moeller

THEOLOGIZING IN THE CONTEXT OF POPULAR RELIGION

Latino theology has been particularly insightful in its analysis of issues relating to social stratification and power. In this it is related to its close theological cousin, liberation theology. When we think of the historical and social context of Latin America, we can see that these issues are central to the experience and development of Christianity in Latin America, perhaps to a degree shared nowhere else. It was, above all, in Latin America that Christianity was imposed by military force on previous civilizations. When Spain, fresh from the triumph of the Reconquista, becomes an imperial power through the discovery of the Americas, cross and crown are linked in an ideology of conquest. Through the centuries that follow, the alliance of imperial power with the Roman Catholic Church imposes a particularly Constantinian mold on Latin American Catholicism. Furthermore, it does so in such a way that there is tremendous social distance between Spanish conqueror and overlord and the Indian peasant and peon. The mestizo emerges from this confrontation as a being mixed not only racially, but also culturally and religiously, resulting in a different orientation toward life and toward the Catholic faith than that found in Iberian Catholicism. When Latino mestizos encounter Anglo American culture, there is a further clash of assumptions about race, religion, and the meaning of human existence. Though extreme social inequality, racial mixture, and religious syncretism are found in many cultures and societies around the world, perhaps nowhere else have they so strongly shaped an entire social universe in an officially Christian society as they have in Latin America. These historical and cultural realities provide the starting point for the theological reflections of Virgilio Elizondo, Justo Gonzalez, and other Latino theologians.

Robert Redfield, the mid-twentieth century North American anthropologist, discussed the distinction between what he termed the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition in societies with great divisions of social class and caste. The Great Tradition is that form of a culture as expressed and developed by a society's elites. It is a literate tradition and it is nurtured and developed by highly trained

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religious specialists. It is intellectualized in nature and tends to deal with ultimate questions about human destiny and origins.¹ The Little Tradition represents a popular, folk form of the Great Tradition. Because those in power shape the institutions of the society, their perspectives are transmitted to the lower social classes; however, because the social distance is so great and the world of the poor is so different from that of social elites, the Great Tradition is not transmitted to them intact but rather filters down to the masses in altered form. It is also invested with new meanings which suit the needs and experience of the poor and can even be reshaped to express resistance and rebellion against their social overlords.

The Conquista and subsequent rule of the Spanish over Indian and African slave populations produced a number of societies that were shaped by this dynamic. They were characterized by a small and usually white European elite, a large poor mestizo and/or mulatto population, and a more severely oppressed Indian or African population at the bottom of the social pyramid. The culture of these societies was characterized by religious syncretism and the mixture of other Indian and African elements with the culture of the Iberian overlords. Language, customs, worldview, and religion were all shaped by this encounter, and the result was cultural mixture rather than complete assimilation of one culture to the other. The world of the masses was shaped by a society in which they were removed economically, socially, and culturally from the wealthy European elites. While the Great Tradition did percolate down to the masses and the folk traditions of the people also affected the culture of the elites, popular religiosity developed in ways widely divergent from that of the Iberian Catholicism brought by the conquerors.

In this context, the Virgin of Guadalupe, for example, represents the assertion of equal value by the oppressed Indian within the realm of religion. Virgilio Elizondo's discussion of the account of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego accents this dimension. As Elizondo puts it,

The cultural clash of sixteenth-century Spain and Mexico was resolved and reconciled in the brown lady of Guadalupe. In her, the new mestizo people finds its meaning, its uniqueness, its unity. Guadalupe is the key to understanding the Christianity of the New World, the self-image of Mexicans, of Mexican-Americans, and of all Latin Americans.²

The account of the Virgin of Guadalupe appearing to Juan Diego provides a symbolic perspective for viewing Roman Catholicism, the religion of the conqueror, becoming the religion of the conquered. It embraces and validates Indian and mestizo identity and also provides a bridge to the pre-Conquest religious past inasmuch as the Virgin of Guadalupe is linked to the previous Aztec cult via the goddess Tonantzin. The account also demonstrates the social divisions of sixteenth-century Mexico, since the poor Indian, Juan Diego, goes to report his vision to the Spanish bishop. These social divisions continue to be dramatized around the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe throughout Mexican history. At the time of the Revolution against Spain, the revolutionary armies brandished the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe while the royalist forces carried the banner of the Virgin of Remedios. Even today, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans see the Virgin of Guadalupe as emblematic of their identity vis-à-vis Anglo-American society.

Because popular religiosity reflects the life situation and perspectives of the marginalized, it has become a focus of theological reflection among those who call themselves Latino theologians. What is problematic about this is not that theological reflection concerning popular religiosity takes place. Certainly, contextualization requires reflection upon and recognition of the symbols of a people's religious life. This is a first stage in the process of contextualization, which should include both careful study of God's written Word and of the human context.³ For evangelical Protestants, however, the Scriptures must be the final source and authority for theological reflection. We can and must examine the teachings of God's Word in relation to that human context; but the Word is to judge that human context, not the human context the Word.

For a number of Latino theologians, the human context is itself revelatory. For example, Roberto Goizueta, in his book, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*, suggests that "this schizophrenic, 'in between' life of ours [that is of Latinos/mestizos] is not something to be resolved, solved, or transcended; it is, instead, something to be cherished and nurtured, for *it is indeed the revelation of God.*"⁴ (italics mine)

That God comes to people in their cultural context and reveals Himself to them through His Word and enables them to live out their faith in a unique way according to the patterns of their culture is one thing, but to state that this human response is in itself God's revelation is overstating the case. This kind of *locus theologicus* attempts to make revelatory both popular religiosity and the emergence of a mestizo people in and of themselves. Orlando Espín is one writer who attempts to provide a theological rationale for this approach. He views popular religion as a particular form of tradition, and, since the Roman Catholic Church sees tradition as lending authority to teaching, he argues that popular religion should be understood theologically "as a cultural expression of the *sensus fidelium*."⁵ He argues that "the living witness and faith of the Christian people" should be held on a par with written tradition and claims that this *sensus fidelium* "is infallible, preserved by the Spirit from error in matters necessary to revelation."⁶ He does not argue that popular religion in and of itself is infallible, which of course would land him in absurdities. He says that popular religion expresses the *sensus fidelium* in symbols and culture which must be studied carefully in order to extract the underlying truth. They must be tested against Scripture, the written texts of tradition, and the historical and sociological contexts in which they appear.⁷

For a Roman Catholic, who accepts tradition as a valid source of doctrine as well as the decrees of the Pope and the church magisterium, it is a logical move to argue that the oral and popular tradition must also have authority, particularly when there is a desire to do theology "from below," that is from the context and perspective of the poor. However, for a Lutheran, the principle of *sola Scriptura* must apply. Tradition can err; church councils can err; only the Word of God is fully reliable.

Though some Latino theologians' arguments about popular religiosity as revelatory are inadequate, they are grappling with an important principle: theology that does not take into account the poor and disenfranchised is often warped. The problem is that human traditions, be they the literate traditions of the elite or the oral

traditions of the powerless, cannot be an authoritative voice in theology. Scripture alone brings us the voice of God. *Vox populi non est vox Dei*.

Elizondo also makes an eloquent argument for the validity of popular religiosity. He defends it against both Protestant and Roman Catholic critics. He states: "When there were no clergy to minister to us, our grandmothers were around to bless us, to pray for us, and to offer a *velita* (candle) as the sacrifice of the poor. Our faith was not false! It was simple and profound. It was not cerebral, doctrinal, or clerical. It resided in our hearts."⁸ Elizondo is right not to despise the folk religion of the poor. He is also right to recognize that in the midst of folk religion there may be genuine faith and trust in Jesus Christ. But to recognize and appreciate the simple faith of the poor is not to grant their perceptions an infallible authority in theology. Where the perceptions of popular religiosity agree with Scripture, they are to be accepted. Where they disagree, they are to be rejected. And when they neither agree nor disagree, they remain what they are, popular perceptions, perhaps valid and perhaps not, but not a part of Christian theology.

Similarly, Virgilio Elizondo uses the reality of *mestizaje* as a *locus theologicus*. In so doing, he is right to recognize that though historically marginalized, the *mestizo* people have a unique and valuable perspective on the human condition. The insights they may bring to our reflection upon God's revelation should be carefully considered, but they are not *ipso facto* true. Elizondo goes to the extreme of equating the reality of *mestizaje* with the revelation of God. He states: "For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, the *mestizo* is the *gospel* in today's world: the proclamation in flesh and blood that the longed for kingdom has begun."⁹ (italics mine) This is a confusion of categories. Such a statement can be made about Jesus Christ and derivatively about the church, the people of God, who are washed in the blood of the Lamb and shine His light into the world. But such a claim ought not to be made about any ethnic group in the world. This kind of statement confuses not only what is the true source of God's revelation but also Scriptural ecclesiology and eschatology.

Having made these criticisms, there yet remains something very significant about Latino theology, and that is its attempt to think theologically about social stratification and marginality in the Scriptures and in Latin American and North American history and culture. In this endeavor, the Latino theologians can make a contribution to our thinking about the task of contextualization. Too often missiological reflection on the nature of culture and contextualization has tended to be somewhat dualistic. Culture is viewed as something that people carry in their heads and we bring a new message and worldview to reorient their thinking. I remember that in my own missionary orientation before being sent to the field we talked endlessly about culture and worldview. Yet, the powerful issues of poverty and social marginalization were only touched upon. Nevertheless, these realities powerfully condition the lives of people who hear the Gospel message. Therefore, their "culture" cannot be truly understood without considering the economic and social realities in which they live. Theologically conservative, Bible believing evangelicals have been so leery of the social Gospel and Marxist liberationism that we have not always clearly addressed or even carefully thought about the concrete material reality of the people to whom the Gospel message is being proclaimed. Our

practice and our preaching suffer as a result. The Latino theologians encourage us to think theologically about these matters. Such thinking can only be of benefit to our efforts to contextualize message and practice effectively.

CHRIST AND THE MARGINALIZED

In his book, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, Elizondo focuses on Jesus' identity as a Galilean and His ministry in Galilee. He considers the fact that Galilee and Galileans were considered to be of lower status than Judea and the Judeans. A priest in Jerusalem considering the people of Galilee would typically have considered them to be poor, unsophisticated, theologically suspect, and racially impure. Galilee was referred to as Galilee of the Gentiles. Elizondo uses this reflection on the dynamics of power and social stratification in first-century Palestine in ways that illuminate the text. While Galilee represented for the social and religious elites a place of impurity and inferiority, Jerusalem, says Elizondo, "stands as the symbol of absolutized power that cloaks the crimes of the powerful in multiple ways—and worst of all, it does it in the name of God."¹⁰

He examines the dichotomy between privilege and power, on the one hand, and weakness and social inferiority, on the other, throughout his discussion of Jesus' ministry. He ties the marginal status of Jesus as a Galilean to the meaning of the Incarnation itself and also links it with the apostle Paul's discussion of the lowly status of Christian converts. "That God had chosen to become a Galilean underscores the great paradox of the incarnation, in which God became the despised and lowly of the world. In becoming a Galilean, God becomes the fool of the world for the sake of the world's salvation."¹¹

The recent film "The Nativity Story" depicts well the contrast between the lowly people of first-century Palestine and the lofty powers of Jerusalem and Rome. Mary and Joseph enter Jerusalem where Herod broods in jealous suspicion of any threat to his royal power. Jerusalem is portrayed as a place of worldly power but spiritual poverty, while Jesus is born in the lowly, insignificant town of Bethlehem. The shepherds are depicted as the poor and socially marginalized 'am ha aretz, "people of the land," that the Pharisees regarded them as being.¹²

The truth of the Gospel, while certainly not a message of social or political liberation, nevertheless addresses and is framed by very real and powerful social circumstances of the New Testament world in the Gospel narratives. Jesus does not teach an otherworldly message like that of the Buddha, but rather a message that not only transcends but also challenges the social realities of poverty and marginalization.

Elizondo points out that in Jesus' parables "the very ones who were commonly thought to be the proof of moral reprobation are now treated as privileged guests."¹³ Jesus deliberately challenges the ideas of the privileged of His society about moral, social, and spiritual worthiness. The realities of Latin American life lead us to this kind of reflection because of the depth of social division and the experience of marginality in the lives of the people. Elizondo sees their circumstances reflected in popular religion, not only in the account of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego, but also in the bloodied images of Christ found in the

churches and in such folk customs as the *posada*, where the drama of Joseph and Mary being unwelcome in Bethlehem is acted out in annual processions. The mestizo and Indian masses of Latin America viewed the Christian faith from the perspective of their own poverty and marginalization and this has left a deep imprint on popular religiosity.

John Nordling, an authority on first-century slavery in the Roman world, argues that New Testament Christianity was also shaped by the experience of social marginality, that of slavery, the social condition of many first-century Christians. Crucifixion itself was largely viewed as a form of execution to be used for slaves. Nordling writes,

The vigorous Christianity revealed in the texts of the New Testament was quintessentially a slave's religion in that so much of it—epitomized by the death of Jesus upon a cross—could not help but strike a responsive chord in the experience of countless slaves, who themselves could have served under a constant threat of crucifixion in the early centuries AD.¹⁴

The Gospel narrative is inextricably intertwined with these realities of social marginalization and stratification, whether we are speaking of the *'am ha aretz*, the people of the land, like the shepherds, or of the socially unfit and religiously despised Samaritans. Elizondo's discussion reminds us of these social phenomena, and he suggests that our modern society, and indeed all societies, are much the same in this respect. We draw social boundaries and frequently justify them on the basis of moral and religious understandings, though often times they emerge as a consequence of efforts to preserve and exert power and privilege. These realities have an impact on our lives and even distort the life and work of the church. Elizondo says, "Even the most democratic of modern societies structure themselves on relationships of equality and inequality, superiority and inferiority, *and* think that such exclusivism was operative only in ancient times."¹⁵ Certainly, our society—divided as it is by race, social class, and immigration status—cannot claim to be so far away from the world of first-century Palestine in this regard.

Though the Gospel is most definitely a message of eternal salvation, not of political or social liberation, we ought not to spiritualize our theology to the degree that we fail to recognize these powerful social realities in Jesus' ministry. The task of contextualization requires us to address structural issues of power and social stratification with theological reflection. When we fail to look at the way issues of privilege and power shape our churches and even our theology, we end up with a warped and distorted church and mission. As Orlando Costas put it, "When evangelization begins at the centers of power, working from the top down, its content usually ends up being an easy and cheap accommodation of the vested interests of the mighty and wealthy."¹⁶

When I began to work in the Latino community of South Texas as a student pastor in 1984, one of the things that made a great impression on me was the contrast between the Anglo-American tendency to believe "I am the master of my fate and the captain of my destiny" and the Hispanic "*Hasta mañana si Dios quiere*" (See you tomorrow, if it be God's will). I came from the middle-class Anglo-American world, where prosperity and technology give us the illusion that we control and chart our

own lives. Even Christians seem to view their lives as their personal projects. When we are sick, we go to the doctor to seek a cure and often do not turn to prayer until we are frustrated by the limitations of modern medicine. In the lives of many Latinos, even of those who did not have an understanding of the results of Christ's redeeming death or what I understood to be saving faith in Him, there was yet a deep sense of dependence on God for daily life and protection in the face of the vicissitudes of life. In part, this difference can be seen as one of social stratification. The poor of the world learn to look to God for daily bread because they must, while the prosperous often take their daily bread for granted. Their view of prayer and attitude toward daily life is shaped by their social circumstances. As Goizueta puts it, Latino culture and theology are not shaped by "the illusory and ephemeral strengths of the 'self-made man' but on the contrary, the true and profound strength of the person who knows that he or she is not 'self-made.'"¹⁷ Though our cultural consciousness will not change the basic doctrines that we hold from Scripture, it does tend to shape the perspective from which we view those truths and the texture and tone of our application of them to daily life and human experience. In our contextual reflection, we must consider the dimensions of power and social stratification in the formation of our own cultural and theological consciousness.

Justo Gonzalez argues that there is much in the Great Tradition of Western theology or of Anglo-American theology that tends to be Constantinian in nature because the Scriptures are approached from the perspective of power and privilege. Drawing from Martin Luther's conceptual distinction between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross, he writes: "A Constantinian theology will necessarily be a theology of glory. It is written in endowed chairs and preached from prestigious pulpits."¹⁸ In contrast, the popular religiosity of Latin America has traditionally focused on the bloody death of Christ on the cross. Human suffering is not passed over lightly but is recognized and faced because it must be. Justo Gonzalez identifies two ancient heresies that may tempt the privileged, Docetism and Nestorianism. Docetism, the belief that Jesus only seemed to be a man, is reflected in the tendency to divorce religious concerns from the concrete realities of this world. It is reflected in an approach to contextualization that views culture as something immaterial and neglects to look at the realities of economics and power that shape our lives and social worlds and in the midst of which the life of the Church is lived and mission is carried out. Nestorianism tended to do the same thing, to separate the divine from the human in Christ. Analogous to this is the way in which we can view the work of the Holy Spirit as something which operates in splendid isolation from the realities of everyday life. Conversion, the life of the church, and our theology seem to rise above it all, when in reality God works in and through flesh and blood human beings who live and breathe and struggle in the midst of the world. Gonzalez suggests that "Nestorianism has never been a temptation for Hispanic Christians. The reason for this is that we feel the need to assert that the broken, oppressed, and crucified Jesus is God."¹⁹ And this Jesus comes to us in the concrete realities of our lives, addressing the divisions of our social worlds, rather than merely transcending them.

POWER AND CLASS IN CONTEXTUALIZATION

In his recent book, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today*, David Hesselgrave discusses the issue of holism versus prioritism in evangelical missiology.²⁰ He argues that there are essentially three positions regarding how Christians should address questions of social justice versus evangelism in their mission efforts. The first of these, radical liberationism, represented by liberation theology, considers the mission of the church to be one of participation in the struggle for a more just society. Political means become primary in the effort to bring this about. Prioritism argues that the primary task of the church is to make disciples of all nations. Thus, church planting and evangelism are the means to bring this about. Holism theology argues that both evangelism and addressing physical needs and social problems should be included in the task of mission. He further subdivides this orientation between revisionist holism, which sees evangelism and social action as equal partners, and restrained holism, which believes the priority should be evangelism, but still with an emphasis on social action. I agree with Hesselgrave that Scripture supports the idea of a clear priority for evangelism over social action in the mission of God. There is no question that the salvation that Christ brings transcends the life of this world and its injustices and brings a new life in Christ with God that is eternal. Political involvements have distracted many Christians from the reality that we are “resident aliens,”²¹ that church and state are occupied with distinctly different concerns, and that confusing them weakens the mission and distorts the life of the church. However, evangelicals must also recognize that a dualistic or docetic missiological reflection does not do justice to the salvation our Lord has brought us, nor does it adequately address the mission task, particularly in a world where the greatest growth of the church is in the underdeveloped world among the poor. Though evangelism must be given priority as a task, we must reflect on our task from a holistic perspective. Our contextualization must include careful reflection on realities of economics and power. Too often, dualism has allowed conservative, evangelical Christians not only to ignore, but also to be complicit in, grave injustices and in the perpetuation of ungodly social divisions that mar both church and society. Witness the complicity of the Christian church in *Apartheid* South Africa just a few short decades ago or the silence of Christian churches in America in the face of the dehumanizing regime of Jim Crow. During those times, evangelism was given priority in many churches, but it was a diminished and distorted “gospel” that was conveyed, a “gospel” that confirmed in many a belief in self-righteous superiority and denied the love of the Savior who died for the sins of the world.

Emerson and Smith in their book, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, argue that white evangelicals have an individualistic perspective that keeps them from viewing America’s racial divisions realistically. As a result, their thinking about race in some ways helps to perpetuate America’s racial divide. They argue that “theologically rooted evangelical cultural tools . . . tend to (1) minimize and individualize the race problem, (2) assign blame to blacks themselves for racial inequality,” and “(3) obscure inequality as part of racial division.”²² If they are right, and I believe they are, then theological reflection on

matters of social stratification and power are vital to the task of contextualizing the message and mission of the church. Often times what we do and how we do it speaks louder than what we say. Because we believe that evangelism, bringing human beings into fellowship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, is the highest priority of Christian mission, we must seriously reflect on the social divisions that impact and often distort the work of the church. Liberationism is off track largely because it is confused about eschatology, that is, when and how the Kingdom of God will come and also about the relationship between the church and the world. It is a kind of Constantinian heresy. We await the new heavens and the new earth that Christ will bring. But as we wait, we must not divide soul from body in a dualistic way that hinders our understanding of the human reality and God's work in the world. Here the Latino theologians' reflections on marginality and social hierarchy and how Jesus addressed them can be quite helpful to us.

Endnotes

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⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

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⁸ Justo L. Gonzalez, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 18.

⁹ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 125.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 147.

¹³ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 71.

¹⁴ John Nordling, "Identity in Christ: Pauline Perspectives on Slavery." Unpublished manuscript (2007), 23.

¹⁵ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 61.

¹⁶ Orlando E. Costas, *Liberating News: A Theology of Contextual Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 62.

¹⁷ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 68.

¹⁸ Justo L. Gonzalez, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 50.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁰ David Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005).

²¹ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in a Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

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History of Lutheranism in Korea

Jin-seop Eom

I have a mechanical pencil that was made out of a discarded Coca Cola can. When I first saw it in a mud-floored shop in *Seoul*, it took my breath away. What a miracle! Here was a little scrap of colored tin another world had thrown away. Other eyes had seen beyond the empty can. Other hands had cut and shaped it into treasure.¹

Written in 1998, by Aili Voss Griffiths, second daughter of Kurt E. Voss, one of the first Lutheran missionaries to Korea, this reminiscence describes well the situation of the impoverished Korea still affected by the Korean War (1950–1953) when the Vosses came to Korea in 1958. Before the war Korea had already suffered enough under Japanese occupation for thirty-five years from 1910–1945. Especially Korean Protestants suffered from religious persecution because of their resistance to the “japanization” of Korea. Korean Catholics who had existed for one hundred years before the start of the Protestant mission also suffered from religious persecution by the government, mainly because of their refusal to practice ancestor worship. As Tertullian said, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,” and the hardships served to strengthen the Church. Thus, William J. Danker, former Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod missionary to Japan, wrote in 1964: “The Korean Church has steel in its backbone. It has been tempered in the fires of severe persecutions under the Japanese and under the communists. Thousands of martyrs, including many hundreds of pastors, have shed Christian blood for the testimony of Christ.”²

The first Protestant missionaries to Korea came from the United States. Rev. Horace G. Underwood (1859–1916), a Presbyterian, and Rev. Henry G. Appenzeller (1858–1902), a Methodist, arrived in Korea on Easter Sunday of 1885. Since then, the Korean Church has grown remarkably. According to the national census of 2006, the Korean Protestant Church makes up 18.3 percent of the national population of 47,041,434, while the Roman Catholic Church comprises 10.9 percent. Twenty-three out of the world’s fifty mega-churches are in South Korea, and the Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul has over 700,000 members, earning it a place in the *Guinness World Records* as the world’s largest single congregation. There are almost twice as many Presbyterians in South Korea as in the United States.

In 1832, fifty-three years before Underwood and Appenzeller, however, Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff (1803–1851), the first Lutheran German clergy missionary, had visited Korea for about one month.³ It is significant that Dr. L. George Paik took the beginning of Protestant work in Korea from the year of

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Gützlaff's visit, as the title of his Ph. D. dissertation in 1927 at Yale University shows: "The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832–1910." The English ship "Lord Amherst," with Gützlaff on board, was anchored off *Godae* Island on the west coast of Korea on July 25, 1832, following shorter visits to *Jangsan* Cape and *Nog* Island. From there, he sent to King *Sunjo* a Chinese Bible, books, and gifts, including a petition for trade. Waiting for a reply from the Royal House, he distributed to the islanders Chinese Bibles, evangelization booklets, and medicine, and taught them how to plant potatoes and to make wine from wild grapes. He also translated the Lord's Prayer into Korean with the help of a Korean native. When their request for trade was rejected, however, he and his company had to leave this "forbidden land" on August 11.

It was one hundred twenty-six years after Gützlaff's visit to Korea and seventy-three years after the first Protestant missionaries' entry into Korea that Lutheran missionaries came from the United States. Kurt E. Voss, a veteran missionary in China, 1939–1946, L. Paul Bartling, and Maynard W. Dorow, sent by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), arrived in Korea on January 13, 1958. Dr. Won Yong Ji, a Korean native, joined the team in September of that year. The four formed the Korea Lutheran Mission (KLM), which phased out when the national Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK) was organized in 1971.

"Clean Start"—Korea Lutheran Mission (KLM)

"How insignificant and inadequate we felt. How could we ever help in reclaiming people for Christ?"⁴ This reminiscence by L. Paul Bartling in 1998, four decades after the start of the Lutheran mission in Korea, reveals the uncertainty the first missionaries felt in the face of enormous challenges. For reasons explained below, the KLM set a mission strategy that concentrated on mission through mass media, such as literature, radio, and television, a strategy later called "A-approach," to distinguish it from the traditional church planting mission, "B-approach." This mission principle has shaped, to a large degree, the present form of the LCK today.

What led to this "clean start," as characterized by Dr. William J. Danker, was the missionaries' experience in the earliest months of their arrival. At the airport, they were greeted by a group of Koreans claiming to be Lutherans who soon turned out to be a dissident group of Protestant clergymen and laymen. There were, in fact, more groups like this. The Korea Lutheran Mission did not want to be associated with any religious brokers in the midst of church factions and schisms of Korean Christendom in the 1950s. Among the last in the line of Christian denominations to enter the country, the KLM decided to be a "plus" to the "total" or "entire" church rather than adding one more denomination to fortify the already existing confusion through divisive and "sheep-stealing" activities. On March 11, therefore, the newly organized KLM made an "open statement" to the public through various church newspapers. It stated clearly its mission: "Our earnest wish is to bring Christ to the un-churched and in due time an indigenous Korean Lutheran Church."⁵

Mass media mission, "A-approach"

This emphasis on mass-media mission was a "departure from the traditional procedure and approach,"⁶ as former missionary Hilbert W. Riemer (serving 1961–

2004) said, or a “new’ thing for the sending body, LCMS in America,”⁷ as James Zimmerman, a graduate student at Concordia Seminary, observed after extensive research on the KLM during 1984–1985. The traditional mission strategy is church planting. And to Korean Protestant ears church planting was intimately associated with the “three-selves” of the “Nevius Method” as the main emphases: self-government, self-support, and self-propagation. The method was developed by John Livingstone Nevius (1829-1893), a Presbyterian missionary to the *Shantung* area of China, and adopted by Presbyterian missionaries in Korea in June 1890, while he was visiting them. The “Nevius Method” came to be regarded as identical with the “indigenous principle.” The KLM did not follow this identification, and instead interpreted indigenization in the sense of self-theologizing, thinking oneself,⁸ which led to “some tension between the Board of World Mission of the LCMS (BWM) in the United States and the KLM.” Dr. Ji writes: “The BWM expected more of a ‘B-approach,’ meaning the establishment of more congregations and the strengthening of the denominational Lutheran aspect.”⁹

With the strategy to be a “plus” to other churches, the KLM began a mass communication mission. The Korea Lutheran Hour (KLH) is an “A-approach” par excellence, using electronic media. Before the KLH was officially started in November 1959, there had been contacts between the International Lutheran Hour (ILH) and the Korean government. In June 1954, Dr. Syng-man Rhee, the President of the Republic of Korea, sent a special “greeting” to the thirty-seventh National Convention of the Lutheran Laymen’s League in Detroit, which sponsored the ILH: “Would that all men carried a Bible instead of the sword.” The newly established KLM, therefore, considered it wise to “put their finger on radio ministry at a very early stage” when there was also considerable confusion caused by the schisms in the church bodies.¹⁰ Lutheran radio ministry covered all of South Korea, was beamed into North Korea, and was heard in northern China.

A variety of formats have been used at various times for the programs. The prize-winning *This is the Life*, a half-hour Christian situation radio drama, was aired by Christian Broadcasting System (CBS) from 1959 and by the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation from 1969. Added later were *Crossroads of Life*, a ten-minute music and message program (via CBS); *The Black Cross*, a daily serial drama (via the national Korean Broadcasting System); *Christianity’s Bright Dawn 200 Years*, a daily radio drama serial depicting the two hundred year history of the Korean Church, both Catholic and Protestant (via CBS); *New Acts of the Apostles* (1,200 episodes); and other programs from time to time. The KLH also did pioneer work in the use of television for proclaiming the Gospel.

As a follow-up to the KLH, a Christian Correspondence Course (CCC) began operation in 1960. By March 1996, a total of 700,000 individuals from every province in South Korea had enrolled in one or more of these courses to study the basic truths of the Christian faith. Through a Braille literature program, the KLM helped blind people to take the CCC.

Concordia Sa, the publishing arm of the LCK, was started in 1959. It has published over 500 books, pamphlets, and parish education materials including Luther’s catechisms, the *Book of Concord*, books on the Reformation and Luther’s theology, and *Luther’s Works-Korean Edition* (LW-KE, 1981–1989) in twelve

volumes. It has also published books for children, such as the *Arch Series* in 75 volumes.

The monthly magazine *New Life* began in 1961, carrying editorials, Christian news items, Biblical studies, and short stories relating the Christian faith to contemporary life. The first magazine of its kind in the country, designed for Christians and non-Christians, it continued for 19 years until 1979, publishing a total of 203 consecutive issues.

The KLM's ministry of social service was begun in 1966 when Gotfred Rekkebo (1911–1993), a veteran Norwegian *diakon*, who had worked in China and Norway, approached it and suggested initiating a social service program in the KLM. It welcomed him. He established an outreach of mercy and service in the KLM. It concentrated on distributing rice to the poor, helping the sick to get treatment at hospitals, and providing the unemployed with jobs. The KLM established the “*Wichern Service Prize*” for people who distinguished themselves in diaconal service. In recognition of his service for the KLM for seven years and for the United Nations for many years in Korea, Rekkebo and his wife, Rannei, a nurse, received from the Norwegian government the Highest Royal (St. Olav) Medallion.

Assessing the first five years of work of the KLM, Dr. F. Dean Lueking wrote in 1964: “[N]o other Missouri Synod missionaries have shown more resourcefulness and versatility in reaching to the roots of national life abroad than the trio of American missionaries working with Ji in Korea.”¹¹ On balance, one needs to supplement it with the assessment made in 1985 by the above mentioned Zimmerman that KLM was “overcautious” in some areas in the formative years.¹²

Church Planting, “B-approach”

Dr. Ji wrote in 1988, three decades after the start of the Lutheran mission in Korea: “KLM did not ignore nor overlook the value of the ‘B-approach,’ but its priority was placed in the early years on the ‘A-approach.’”¹³ On Sunday, February 15, 1959, the first “historical” worship service was held in the Conference Room of the YMCA Seoul. Dr. Ji officiated at the service with 34 people in attendance and after the service gave instruction about Lutheran teachings. On May 17, 1959, in the same room, five adults and one infant were baptized and seven adult Christians were admitted into the Lutheran Church through the rite of confirmation; thus, Immanuel (now Tobong) Lutheran Church was established. It had been the only local congregation for four years until St. John (now Wangshimni) Lutheran Church was formed in 1963. Three more churches were established under the KLM: Trinity (now Joongang) Lutheran Church in 1967, St. Luke (now Oksudong) Lutheran Church in 1968, and Daejodong Lutheran Church in 1970.

For years, candidates for ministry had been trained at the small Lutheran Theological Academy (LTA, established in 1966), which operated as a “house of studies” in cooperation with the Theological College of Yonsei University and its United Graduate School of Theology. The LTA recruited men with a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Theology degree and gave them a course of fifty credits in Lutheran theology over a four-year period. At the same time, LTA students were enrolled at the above-mentioned institutions and received their respective degrees there. In order to provide the candidates with practical experience, the LTA

administered a “field work” program in cooperation with local Lutheran congregations.

Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK, 1971 -)

The Korea Lutheran Church was officially organized as a national church in 1971, with five congregations under the new name of Han-Kuk Rutu-Kyo Sunkyo-Hoi (Korea Lutheran Mission Assembly), to be changed into “Lutheran Church in Korea” (LCK) two years later. The Lutheran Church in Korea polity combines congregational and synodical elements. The annual assembly reviews the work of the church and sets policies. Among the officers it elects is the president, whose term in the office is four years. Rev. Won-sang Ji, Dr. Won Yong Ji’s younger brother, had been elected to the presidency regularly until 1993. After him it has been filled, in turn, by Rev. Hae-chul Kim (1993–1997), Rev. Song Huh (1997–2001), Rev. Hong-ryul Lee (2001–2005), and Rev. Hyun-sub Um (2005–present).

Church headquarters are located in the Lutheran Church Center, a multi-ministry center, near Seoul Central Railway Station. It was built in 1975 with contributions from the Lutheran World Federation and the LCMS as well as the LCK. For almost two decades, practically all programs that went under the “A-approach” were housed there: administration, KLM, CCC, Concordia Sa and its bookstore, and the theological training program. Adding Joongang Lutheran Church to the center complex represented an effective blending of the “A” and the “B” approaches. The construction of another main building, Luther Building, in another business section of Seoul south of the Han River, began in June of 2008 and was completed in July of 2010. That building, with its twenty-four floors above ground and five underground with a total floor area of 110,000 square meters, will be an efficient tool for the mission work of the LCK.

“B-approach” strengthened

The KLM/LCK has periodically held workshops or seminars on evangelization. In January 1966, with two local congregations at that time, it convened the first workshop on evangelization and prepared a four-year plan (1966–1970) to plant five churches. Three new churches were planted, one each in 1967, 1968, and 1970. In October 1971, the newly established LCK held a “Consultation on Christian Education,” which articulated the nature and purpose of the church in general and then also specifically the nature and purpose of the LCK. *Missio dei* thinking laid the foundation for the ecclesiology of the LCK with the four basic functions of the church identified: evangelism, education, service, and worship. In October 1977, the LCK, with a total 1,042 baptized members in seven congregations in Seoul and two in Pusan, convened a “Seminar on Mission” to lay out a ten-year plan. The major follow-up to the seminar was the “Capital Project Planning, 1978–88” (updated November 1980). It was an ambitious plan to plant new churches throughout the country during the ensuing decade. By 1987, however, LCK had reached only twenty congregations. In October 1994, at the twenty-fourth convention, “VISION 2000” was set forth to increase by its fiftieth anniversary in 2008 the number of congregations from 25 to 50 and the membership from 4,000 to 10,000. By 2008, however, the total number of congregations had reached 42, with a

membership of 5,060. In 2008, the KLM celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Lutheran mission in Korea. Some 1,700 adult members with children were gathered in the auditorium of Soongsil University in Seoul with former expatriate missionaries and their families invited. It set the plan to plant 500 new churches by 2070, the centennial of the LCK's official organization as a national church in the reunified Korean peninsula.

To supply pastors in line with the LCK's long-range goals, the theological training institution also underwent considerable changes. While the LTA was still in operation, the new Luther Seminary was begun in 1980 as a night school for those who held jobs during the day. The night program continued to exist until 1984, when Luther Seminary moved to a new site in Yongin City, some 40 kilometers south of Seoul. It received academic recognition from the Korean government Ministry of Education in 1986 and full accreditation in 1997 to give the B.Th. degree. Having started with only a Department of Theology, it added a Department of Social Welfare in 2002 and Departments of Counseling, English, Performing Arts, Elderly Care, and Speech-Language Pathology in 2007, with the right to admit 200 new incoming students each year. During that time period, its name was changed from LTA to Luther Theological University (LTU, 1997) and Luther University (also LTU, 2003). Meanwhile, the two years of M. Div.-level pastoral training program was replaced by three years of an international standard fully-accredited M. Div. course of studies in 2003. In the same year, a graduate school M.S.W. degree course in Social Welfare was started, followed in 2008, by an M.S.L.P. degree course in Speech-Language Pathology.

“A-approach” continuing

The “A-approach” type continued, as the “Vision Declaration at the Lutheran Church in Korea’s Fiftieth Anniversary” of 2008 shows: “Fourthly, we will continue and develop the existing mission strategy to serve the entire Korean church rather than competing with other denominations.”¹⁴

One of the most successful enterprises of the “A-approach” would be the Korea Bethel Series Bible study program. Started at Bethel Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin, it was adapted into the Korean situation in 1974 under the auspices of the LCK. Participants for the leadership seminars came from diverse backgrounds, including Roman Catholic sisters, thus making the program a truly ecumenical enterprise. Enthusiasm also ran high among participants at the grass roots level. Diligence and serious commitment were expected. Participants were jokingly admonished, for example, not to get sick, die, or move into a new house during the program. A lady from a Presbyterian church in Seoul was so appreciative of God’s Word that she gave a Bible to her son, Sang-don Koh, an alpinist, and asked him to bury it in the snow of Mount Everest. He did so in 1978, making that Korean Bible the first Bible in any language to be left on the mountain. Korea Bethel Series Life Dimension courses were added in 1980. As a further extension to the basic overview course on the entire Bible, the LCK has developed three additional courses of its own entitled *Salvation, Faith, and Worship*. As of December 2009, some 16,000 church workers have participated in a total of 210 different leadership

training seminars. They, in turn, have taught Bethel Series classes to some 460,000 individuals in their respective congregations and other places.

The Lutheran Church in Korea has continued diaconal work in various forms. In 1992, it played a leading role in forming the “Love in Action” program that encourages churches to donate blood. Diaconal works are also carried out through local congregations. One good example is the work by Pastor Taek-joo Hong of Bethel Lutheran Church in Daejeon City in the central part of South Korea. It was occasioned by the financial crisis that hit the country in 1998, letting the country go under the tough control of the International Monetary Fund. Losing jobs overnight, many people were forced to the streets. In May 1998, Pastor Hong began distributing breakfast to those homeless “street people” before they headed off to whatever work they could find day by day. Two months later, he moved the feeding station to the plaza of the Daejeon Railway Station. The “Sharing Food of Love” program, thus started, was carried out in cooperation with the food bank of the city and Lutheran World Relief of the LCMS. In 1999, the program became the more stable “House of Sharing” by moving into a local rented facility with contributions from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany, (ELCB) and the International Lutheran Church in Seoul. In recognition of his dedicated work for the poor, Hong was invited to the presidential “Blue House” residence. Several other churches of the LCK have been doing similar diaconal works, such as running daycare centers or afterschool programs for children from underprivileged families, a short-term resting place for cancer patients and their families, a counseling program, a community library, etc., sometimes in cooperation with local government offices.

Ecumenism

As the LCK has played a faithful role of being a “plus” to the “total” Church, so has it been active as a “part” of the “total” Church. While not a member of the National Council of Churches in Korea, the LCK is a member of the Christian Council of Korea, which is more conservative and has more member churches than the former. It also participates in various ecumenical enterprises: Korea Education Association, CBS, Christian TV/CTS, Korean Bible Society, Korea Christian Service, and the Joint Hymnal Committee. Korea Lutheran Women United has been active in Korea Church Women United since 1973.

On an international level, the LCK became a member church of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in July 1972, one year after its formation. Members of the LCK, male and female, have actively participated in LWF agencies and activities, both on the international and regional levels. The Lutheran Church in Korea is also a member of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) ever since it was formally constituted in 1993. The LCK hosted the ILC conferences in 1989 and 2009.

The Lutheran Church in Korea enjoys a close relationship with the LCMS as a partner church. The number of expatriate missionaries from the LCMS has decreased, the last expatriate missionary leaving the country in June of 2010. However, a lay missionary arrived in August of 2010. From 2002 to 2009, the education subcommittee of the LCK held seminars on pastoral leadership in cooperation with the Pastoral Leadership Institute, an independent organization of

the LCMS pastors in the United States. Many pastors and their wives completed the program. In recent years, LCK youth have participated in National LCMS Youth Gatherings in the United States.

The Lutheran Church in Korea has also enjoyed an especially close relationship with the Mission OneWorld (*Mission EineWelt*, former *Missionswerk*) of the ELCB. Ever since 1979, **Missionswerk**, as well as its successor, has arranged and sponsored a “Seminar on the Reformation in the Land of the Reformation” for church leaders and pastors from Asia and other continents. Several pastors in the LCK have participated in the seminar, which is now held for four weeks every other year. In recent years, pastors in the LCK have participated in the *Kirchen Tag* in Germany, which helps them to widen their perspectives. One German expatriate missionary sent by the ELCB has been working with the LCK and LTU since 2000.

Luther Studies

One of the areas in which the Lutheran Church can best contribute to Korean Christendom is in sharing the theology of Martin Luther. Luther Study Institute (LSI) was formed in 1996 as an adjunct institution of Luther University & Seminary. In 1999, it resumed the annual publication of its journal, *Luther Study*, of which eleven volumes had been published quarterly from May 1965 to 1968. It also began hosting a special Luther Lecture during the fall Reformation season, to which renowned Luther and Reformation scholars from Korea and abroad are invited as special guest lecturers. In 2008, to make Luther studies more of an ecumenical enterprise, the LSI took the initiative to establish the Korea Luther Study Society (KLSS). Besides co-hosting the annual Luther Lecture with LSI, the KLSS holds a monthly colloquium. Moreover, in preparation for the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, the KLSS, along with others, is planning to translate more of Luther’s works into Korean, to hold popular meetings for laypeople, and to arrange a study tour to the Luther sites.

Universal Priesthood of All the Baptized

In church polity, the LCK is influenced by the Presbyterian Church with its elder system. The “church council” system gave way to the elder system in the mid-1970s because the latter proved more suitable for the Korean cultural context with its long (five hundred years) dominance of Confucian culture: “Christianity in Korea has been and is thoroughly indigenized into the Korean religious cultures. The hierarchical structure of the Korean churches is more Confucian than Christian. . . .”¹⁵ Male elders are elected by baptized members in each congregation and constitute, together with the senior pastor, a *danghoi*, or leadership council. Unlike elders, deacons and deaconesses are appointed by the senior pastor every year. Women over 40 years of age, who served as deaconesses for at least five years, are eligible for being elected as *kwonsa*, that is, highly respected women lay leaders. Deacons, deaconesses, *kwonsas*, and elders constitute the *jeijikhoi*, the large leadership group which meets every month to discuss important matters of the church. The *kongdonggeuhoi* is the congregation’s plenary voters’ assembly, which includes all the adult baptized members, meeting usually in the beginning of the year.

Members in each congregation are divided into volunteer groups according to gender and age. Men's and women's groups in each congregation, in turn, are combined into respective united groups to strengthen their Lutheran identity in a vast sea of Protestantism. Among the most active, the women's groups do fundraising for LTU and invite Lutheran sisters from Japan to the summer retreats. The Lutheran Church in Korea does not ordain women as pastors. However, making up 54 percent of the membership, their role is indispensable for the life of the church in evangelizing new converts, praying for the church, leading small group meetings, visiting the sick, etc. Some women have served in ecumenical contexts both on the national and international levels.

Challenges

"The Lutheran Church was a small fish in a large Calvinist ocean."¹⁶ This statement of Maynard W. Dorow is as true today as it was a half century ago. One of the major challenges, especially for the LCK, is church growth, as Chi-mo Hong, retired professor at a Presbyterian university once remarked: "The [Lutheran] church membership needs to be expanded. It is not in order to compete with other denominations, but it needs energy to spread the Gospel more powerfully."¹⁷ Protestant churches celebrate the Reformation in the last week of October. Luther's name is frequently mentioned from the pulpit. Luther is used as an example in prayer for supposedly having said "I pray more when I am busy." The Lutheran Hour is known, too. However, knowledge about the Lutheran Church is minimal.

Though pressed hard on the home front, the LCK, now a grown-up, should not delay overseas mission in obedience to the words of the Lord, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Mt 10:8). Korean Christianity has a deep commitment to evangelism and mission work. According to the report of The Korea World Mission Association in January 2010, some 20,445 South Koreans are engaged in mission work overseas in 169 countries, a figure second only to the United States. In the LCK, there have been sporadic attempts for overseas mission, which, however, have not yet materialized. One exception is Rev. Seong-wan Park, pastor of Oksudong Lutheran Church in Seoul, who, on his own, has been running a Church Leaders School among ethnic Koreans in the northern part of China since 2002. Volunteers from Korea and the LCMS assisted him with eye-glasses, hair styling, medical treatment (internal, dental, and Oriental), and leadership in praise worship, etc.

Strengths

Korean Protestants are active, vibrant, committed, and self-sacrificing. However, they have become a subject of criticism in recent years from both inside and outside. In this situation, the Lutheran Church, with its sound Reformation theology, can truly be a "plus" to the Korean Protestant Church. Its theology of the cross can be a corrective to the theology of prosperity; its principles of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* to Calvinistic legalism; its understanding of a Christian as being simultaneously justified and sinner to the Methodist notion of perfectionist sanctification; its principle of *sola scriptura* to the Full Gospel Church's enthusiasm (God-within-ism) and mysticism; its Law and Gospel dialectic to the fundamentalistic view of Scripture in general; its ecclesiology and sacramental

theology to the low view of church and sacraments; its liturgy to simplistic worship; its two-kingdoms teaching to the mixture of religion and politics, etc. However, a Lutheran paradigm shift is called for, before anything else, in the LCK's theology and practice. Lutheran identity should be strengthened both among the laypeople and among the pastors, many of whom came originally from other denominations. Lutherans will be able to serve the entire church most effectively when they are equipped with a strong sense of their own authentic Lutheran identity.

List of Abbreviations

CCC	Christian Correspondence Course
ELCB	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany
ILC	International Lutheran Council
KLH	Korea Lutheran Hour
KLM	Korea Lutheran Mission
LCK	Lutheran Church in Korea
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
LTA	Lutheran Theological Academy
LTU	Luther Theological University, Luther University & Seminary
LWF	Lutheran World Federation

Endnotes

- ¹ Aili Voss Griffiths, "Memories of Korea for the 40th Anniversary of the Mission," *Theology and Faith* (Yongin: Luther Theological University), vol. 9 (1998), p. 26.
- ² William J. Danker, *Two Worlds or None* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 264.
- ³ Ho-ik Huh, *The Life of Gützlaff and His Mission Work in Chosun* (Kor.), (Seoul: the Institute of Korean Church History Studies, 2009), pp. 54–66.
- ⁴ L. Paul Bartling, *Theology and Faith*, p. 34.
- ⁵ Won Yong Ji, *A History of Lutheranism in Korea—A Personal Account*, (Seoul: Concordia Sa, 1988, 1991), 103.
- ⁶ Hilbert W. Riemer, "Forty Years of God's Grace and Blessing," *Theology and Faith*, p. 79.
- ⁷ Won Yong Ji, *A History of Lutheranism in Korea*, 163f.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130–133.
- ¹¹ F. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making: the Missionary Enterprise among Missouri Synod Lutherans 1846-1963* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 301.
- ¹² See Won Yong Ji, *A History of Lutheranism in Korea*, 164.
- ¹³ Won Yong Ji, *A History of Lutheranism in Korea*, 111.
- ¹⁴ It is on the home page of the Lutheran Church in Korea: <http://www.lck.or.kr/lck/main/>.
- ¹⁵ David Kwang-sun Suh, quoted in Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 21.
- ¹⁶ Maynard W. Dorow, "Lutheran Church in Korea: Its Background and Confessional Stance," in *A History of Lutheranism*, p. 335.
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Divine Safari—Kenya and the *missio Trinitatis*

Thomas V. Aadland

“Witness—Mercy—Life Together.” These three dimensions of the Christian life are bound together in a unity. We experience this unity as God grants us to share in His triune life, *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. God grants that we hear the clear and compelling witness to what He has done in Christ and through His Spirit continues to do for us. We hear this witness in Holy Baptism, in the Lord’s Supper, and in the Gospel proclamation (1 Jn 5:6–12). God leads us to show mercy as we ourselves have been shown mercy. And He enables us to do so in concert with one another in the fellowship of the saints as we worship and work together. This is the heartbeat of life granted in the living God, the Holy Trinity.

What does this mean for world mission and for global Christianity as a whole in these last days? Countless millions do not know that life of grace, mercy, and peace in the Holy Trinity. Virulent forms of Christ-less religion, demanding submission to an absolute and distant god, threaten to dispossess the minds and hearts of men and women and continue to rob them of the joy that is found only in Christ. Secular indifference lulls them to sleep, surfeited with things, but mindlessly unaware of their hunger for the bread that does not perish, for relationship with the living God through the sharing of sacred gifts known as “the communion of saints.”

With a new constitution and a teeming population, the nation of Kenya is pulled in both directions. It has all the aspirations of a young and developing country and a plethora of religious options, ranging from the neo-Pentecostalism proffered by the street preachers to the legalisms of the entrenched Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah Witnesses, to a fierce devotion to secular humanism or Islam. Despite heroic efforts at public education and admonishment, the rate of HIV/AIDS infection among its population in the western counties has been reduced only from 17 to 15 percent in the last decade. Tribal traditions of polygamy and levirate marriage compound the devastation, producing countless double orphans and aching homelessness. Kenya serves us well as a case study in missiology. But first, we turn to reflect on a long-neglected but most holy mystery of Christian faith and life—the sacred reality of the triune God.

1

Roughly six hundred years ago, a Russian monk completed his life’s consummate work and the only piece to be authenticated as entirely his own: the remarkable icon by Andrei Rublev (c. 1360–c. 1430) *The [Old Testament] Trinity*,

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painted ca. 1410, now hanging at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. Considered by many scholars to be perhaps the most perfect icon ever painted, it was based on an earlier model known as the *Hospitality of Abraham*, illustrating Genesis 18. Rublev has removed the figures of Abraham and Sarah in order to construct a meditation on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. His teacher was the renowned Theophanes the Greek. With Byzantine mannerism he depicts the three Figures in a state of calm repose at a table, yet each strikingly inclined One to the Other, walking staff in hand. The tranquility is an image of that *hesychia* (h`suci,a), the peaceful state defended by Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) as the ideal for the Christian. Yet there is also movement here. God goes on a journey. He takes the word of promise to His friend Abraham and, this time, brings it in person.

The Orthodox find deep meaning in the icon as theophany. Without presuming to participate fully in this, we can at least attempt a first step toward appreciating the icon as it conveys the Word of God in pictorial form—Light and Word conjoined. Where the Word of God is, there is the Holy Trinity. God graciously makes His presence among us. Rublev’s icon asks in this scene, “Who is the host—Abraham or the Holy Trinity?” God is surely the Host, always taking the initiative, always inviting. God wants to take us into His dwelling place, into His space and time. But this space is a place inhabited by Persons who live in eternal communion with One Another. His time is a dynamic movement given in the death and resurrection of the Promised One, drawing us forward to its certain consummation, into eternal life with God. The icon is done in “inverse perspective,” where objects in the background are relatively larger than those in the foreground, thus drawing the observer into itself.¹

One might expect the Russian Orthodox monk to place the Father in the center, with the Son and the Holy Spirit to each side, “God’s two Hands,” as it were, to borrow an image from Irenaeus, perhaps a kind of scalene Trinity. But it is not so. The Son is clearly the One in the center. Rublev gives us signals. He shows us in his iconography the divine Persons of the Holy Trinity—the Father with His index finger on the right hand of favor indicating as He inclines toward the Son; the Son, the second Person, with two fingers extended toward the Holy Spirit, yet inclining toward the Father; the Holy Spirit with an open hand, inclining toward both and gesturing toward the golden vessel in the center of this table or altar, suggesting the Holy Food and Drink of the Eucharist. The holy circle, the Unity of the Three, is complete, the divine life unending.

Each of the ageless Figures has the same face. Our God is One Lord. Each wears a blue garment, the color of heaven. Yet there is something distinct about each Person. There is One at rest within Himself. The Father’s garb is almost completely hidden by a shimmering and ethereal robe. No man may see God and live. Both hands clasp the staff. The Father is the Unbegotten, the Origin of Deity, who grants what He first possesses, all authority in heaven and on earth, to His Son. Behind the figure of the Father is a house, the dwelling place of God. “*In My Father’s house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you*” (Jn 14:2).

Moving from left to right, in the order of the creed, the second Figure is the Son. He says, “*Those who love Me will keep My word and My Father will love them and We will come to them and make Our home with them*” (Jn 14:23). The Son

wears the blue of divinity, underlain with a reddish brown garment that tells of the earth, of His humanity. He rests two fingers on the table, to indicate His two natures, true humanity and true divinity, in the perfect union of the Word become flesh. The gold stripe in His inner tunic speaks of royalty, a King who will receive stripes in His very flesh: “*by His stripes we are healed*” (Is 53:5). Behind the Christ is a tree. The three angelic visitors rested under the oak tree at Mamre, where the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah was met by the gift of a son. The ancient paschal prayer praises Christ for willingly enduring death on a cross to defeat the one who defeated Adam by tempting him with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “that he who once overcame by a tree might likewise by a tree be overcome.”² The tree of death on Calvary has become the tree of life, as promised in Revelation 22:1–2, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. In the words of Stephen P. Starke’s (b. 1955) hymn:

Now from that tree of Jesus’ shame Flows life eternal in His name;
For all who trust and will believe, Salvation’s living fruit receive.
And of this fruit so pure and sweet The Lord invites the world to eat,
To find within this cross of wood The tree of life with ev’ry good.³

The tree of life, lost by the disobedience of Adam and Eve, has been restored to us by the perfect obedience of Christ, who humbled Himself in time in willing subordination to the Father’s will.

With the blue robe of divinity, the Spirit wears a garb of light green, the color of spring and new life. He is the One promised who will bear witness to the Son and so glorifies Him, taking what belongs to the Son and declaring it to His own (Jn 15:26; 16:14). His open hand touches the table, extending toward the sacred vessel in the center, which offers the lamb Abraham sacrificed for his heavenly guests. In the theological meaning Rublev has written into the icon, this is none other than the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That offering is central, and the Spirit’s work, through Word and Sacrament, is to bring to earth the life of God, proclaiming and bestowing the body and blood of Christ, His flesh He gives for the life of the world (Jn 6:51b). Behind the Spirit is a mountain, the visual representation of heaven touching earth, as it does in the Divine Service. Moses met God on Sinai. On Mount Horeb, Elijah did not find God in the earthquake or the wind or the fire, but in the gentle breeze that carried the still, small voice of God deep into his being. Before His Lenten journey, our Lord was transfigured on a high mountain before Peter, James, and John. Baptized into Christ, we have come, not to the fears and terrors of Mount Sinai that Moses endured until he could stand no more, but rather “*to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel*” (Heb 12:22–24).

There is one last detail of Rublev’s icon, whose meaning may not be so self-evident. It is the small rectangular opening in the front of the table. Some have suggested it is the place beneath the altar where the relics of saints are treasured. Might it not be rather a representation of that “narrow gate” into life with God (Mt 7:13–14), whose “narrowness” is defined by the exclusive and uncompromising

terms of our salvation “by grace alone, through faith alone, for the sake of Christ alone”?⁴

2

These reflections on an early fifteenth century icon may serve as a point of departure for further reflections on the nature of Christian mission. That mission is preeminently God’s mission. In 1934, Karl Hartenstein (1894–1952) coined the phrase *missio Dei*, the sending of (by) God, in response to the emphasis by Karl Barth on the *actio Dei*, the action of God. *Missio Dei* can be a fruitful concept, a guiding principle for Christian people. Especially it serves to remind the church that mission is not a department of the institutional church, a human activity reducible to political goals. But, as with any unspecified concept that is open to manipulation, *missio Dei* can itself be reduced, even lost in talk of multiform *missiones Dei*, and the true eschatological aim of the Gospel obscured in secularist, feminist, or other more perverse goals. One has only to think of the recent agendas of the Lutheran World Federation and of the ELCA disaster of 8/21/09 to know what this can mean. The adequacy of such coinage is quickly lost, unless normed by Holy Scripture.

We confess not an unspecified *missio Dei* but, more properly, the mission of the Holy Trinity—*missio Trinitatis*. Our concepts need clear and certain biblical mooring. “*Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Me*” (Is 48:16–NKJ). Jesus is the God who is sent—both sent by God the Father and the One through Whom, at His bidding and in His name, God the Holy Spirit is sent.

The love of God is a seeking and finding love. It goes out from Himself and brings back the one who had strayed. But this love is not an “it.” God’s essence and His attributes are one thing. It is not so much the case that “God shows love,” nor even that “God has love,” but that “God *is* love.” God’s love is incarnate in the person of His Son, Jesus. “All three persons of the Godhead have been occupied in the procuring of human salvation. The Father loves those who have fallen, the Son redeems those who have been loved, and the Holy Spirit calls and teaches those who have been redeemed.”⁵

This going forth in time, the mission of the Divine Persons, reflects who God is from eternity. The Father begets the Son. The Son is begotten of His Father before all worlds. From the Father and the Son proceeds the Spirit. These relations are eternal. As in Rublev’s icon, the Persons in relation are inclining One to Another; none exists in isolation. To borrow a phrase from the noted Greek Orthodox theologian and Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas (b. 1931), the being of God is communion.⁶ Relationship with others is constitutive of personhood. It cannot be otherwise. The triune God has made it so.

Colin Gunton (1941–2003) put it aptly: “Without the doctrine of the Trinity, we might have a God of power, or a God in some way identical with the world, but not the God of the Bible, who is a God of love, and whose love takes shape in the story of creation and redemption.” “Without the Trinity, we cannot know that God is

love ... the doctrine of the Trinity is the teaching that God is love, not only towards us, but in his deepest and eternal being.”⁷

3

The nineteenth century witnessed great gains as an exemplary missionary age of the church. Yet it also saw the concomitant loss of proper focus for missiology during the era of classical theological liberalism in the universities. That era’s reduction of mission to the white man’s burden and cultural supremacy can be correlated directly with obscuring the central mystery of the faith. For much of the past two and a half centuries, the dogma of the Holy Trinity has suffered neglect, reduction, or outright denial. Where this happens, missiology eventually suffers as well.

During the time of Reformation, some criticized the doctrine of atonement, among them the Italian Lelio Francesco Maria Sozini (1525–62), or Socinus, and his nephew, Fausto Paulo Sozzini (1539–1604), for whom the anti-Trinitarian movement Socinianism is named. They had no use for the doctrine of the Trinity since, as they argued, there is no need for a divine atonement. With a shallow view of what is at stake in healing the serious rupture between God and humanity, the Socinians held that God might simply grant His forgiveness as He wills, even as humans do. While the Roman Catholic Church suppressed their organizing efforts in Poland, Unitarianism found its way into the Netherlands and England, and from there into New England.⁸

This mere monotheism continued in English Deism. Though himself a member of the Church of England and the brother of the churchly poet George Herbert, Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), popularized in his book *De veritate* (1624) the notion of natural religion, common to all humanity apart from any special revelation, and summarized by five propositions: there is a God, a highest being; this highest being ought to be worshiped and served; this worship consists above all in piety and virtue; deviations from virtue (sin) must be repented, and if there is repentance, there will be forgiveness; the evil will be punished and the good will be rewarded in a life to come. Clearly, involved in this notion is a failure to come to grips with original sin. Thus, the basic desiderata of Enlightenment metaphysics and theology were “God, virtue (or freedom), and immortality.”⁹

In the nineteenth century, in the aftermath of Pietism and the Enlightenment, the doctrine of the Trinity suffered general neglect. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the son of Lutheran pietists, had not found any real importance in it for what he saw as essential to the practice of religion.¹⁰ Subsequent writers in the periods of German Romanticism and Classical Liberalism that followed each tend to correspond to one of his three major critiques of the human faculties.¹¹ One may note the striking contrast between the two major figures who follow Kant—Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), each dominating the intellectual life of Berlin. Schleiermacher gave no prominence to the doctrine for the meaning of religion, the intuited feeling of absolute dependence on the infinite. He therefore relegated discussion of the Trinity to a few concluding paragraphs in an appendix to his presentation of doctrine.¹² For Hegel, on the other hand, the Trinity is

a rational necessity for the self-actualization through negation of Absolute Spirit in the unfolding process of history. One might say that his entire output in philosophy is an extended meditation on the reduction of the immanent Trinity to the economic Trinity, whose being is imprisoned in the Hegelian logic.¹³ Of these two, Schleiermacher's influence has been more pervasive and enduring, especially among American Protestantism.

If one may risk oversimplification in order to make a point the more emphatically, the renewal of deliberation on the doctrine of the Trinity begun in the last century reflects that, of the two contrasting heresies, tritheism has been less an issue for modern theology than mere monotheism. The liberal tradition of the nineteenth century—Schleiermacher through Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack and Walter Rauschenbusch—famously excoriated by H. Richard Niebuhr as that religion in which “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross,”¹⁴ engendered a careless disregard for the doctrine. The *Ichtheologie* of which Francis Pieper warned took root and has long fostered a subjectivizing displacement in Christian thought and life, even among those who have wanted to disavow Schleiermacher as their father.¹⁵

We reach here an important conclusion. Where the Trinity is disregarded as the most sacred mystery of the faith, there religion is fundamentally moralistic, inspired by nothing more than the platitude: “It is good to be good and bad to be bad.” But more than this—since such moralism (nomism) has no life in it (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:21b), it inevitably tends toward anti-nomianism and lawless narcissism. That is the stinking slough into which we have come.

4

When one considers the sheer inertia of this long, anti-Christian movement in modern theology, steadily “slouching toward Gomorrah,”¹⁶ it is remarkable that there has been any recovery at all in the last century. Though the Cartesian methodological doubt and practical atheism inherent in the historical-criticism of sacred Scripture has had corrosive effect in the hearts and minds of many who once confessed the faith, and though much has been lost that remains to be recovered, still there are blessings to be counted.¹⁷ God's Word has power to change the course of history, even among peoples where it had long lain in disuse. Two events shattered the careless worldview of those who had been at ease in Zion: the Great World War (1914–18) and the publication of a commentary on St. Paul's great epistle to the Romans by the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) that “fell like a bombshell on the playground of the theologians.”¹⁸

Barth credited his reading of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) with helping him to break from the grip of the classical liberal tradition. He deliberately structured his *Church Dogmatics* around the affirmation of God's triune nature. The German Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (1904–84) also has helped to inaugurate a renaissance of reflection upon the mystery of the Holy Trinity. His axiom—the ‘Economic’ Trinity is the ‘Immanent’ Trinity and the ‘Immanent’ Trinity is the ‘Economic’ Trinity—while serving to renew interest in the doctrine, needs

qualification.¹⁹ For what we are given to see of God and the inner Trinitarian relationships in the divine economy through its revelation in time does not exhaust the unfathomable depths of the divine life in the eternal communion of the three Persons.²⁰

Barth and Rahner were early precursors, imperfect in their execution, but fecund progenitors of a renewal of reflection on the triune God that continues in our day. For the last quarter-century, not a year goes by but that some major work is published on the locus *De Deo Trino* by Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed writers.

In the ambiguities of history, there is always a dark side. Feminism has made its mark in the witch-hunt for “non-inclusive language” in the Bible and the Divine Liturgy. Four years prior to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988, a discussion took place within the seventy-member Commission for a New Lutheran Church regarding the statement of faith to be placed at the beginning of the new constitution. Objections were raised against the “exclusive” nature of the traditional language used to confess faith in “God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The triune God, whose praise shall endure for the ages of ages, world without end, was, in the discussion’s end, “elected” by a slim margin of 33-30.²¹ Did the holy angels rejoice or did they weep?

Those who begin with their own predilections, affinities, and presuppositions to determine what constitutes an acceptable utterance by the Almighty inhabit a universe of their own making. The proper name for this place is not feminism. It is paganism. Paganism is the human attempt to give a name to God. This is the effrontery that is humankind’s knowledge of good and evil.²²

God graciously gives us His name as He once did for Moses. When God speaks His name, we are standing on holy ground. In the Divine Service, God puts His name on His people. In both the invocation and the benediction, the triune God is not the absent referent but the Giver who identifies Himself and who certifies that all that is bestowed upon the recipient believer is granted “*In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” God is the One who guarantees His faithful service to redeemed sinners, according to the word given through Moses to the sons of Aaron: “*So they shall put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them*” (Nm 6:27). With God’s name come God’s gifts. The name *of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* is God’s proper name. And God’s proper gifts are not judgment and damnation but forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

We see God’s eternal triune nature revealed in His action to restore a lost creation. The Father sends forth His Son. In Jesus we are met with One not less than God—the God who is born of and suckles at the breasts of the Virgin, who suffers, is crucified, rises from death, ascends to the Father, and sends forth His Spirit. With the coming of His Spirit upon the church, the church worships “the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity,” as she confesses in the Athanasian Creed.

For monotheistic Islam it is not so. In the imagination of the imams, Allah dwells absolutely alone. In Islamic tradition, man achieves salvation through the five

duties incumbent on every Muslim – the *Shahadah* (profession of faith—“There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet.”), the *Salat* (ritual prayer), *Sawm* (fasting during Ramadan), the *Zakah* (communal tax for the poor), and the *Hajj* (the holy pilgrimage to Mecca). For Islam and, by extension, for human religiosity in general, man makes his way to God by his own effort, submitting to the implacable will of Allah. In Christian tradition, salvation comes to man by God’s own *hajj*. His mission into the world, to seek and to save that which was lost. There is nothing in the Quran comparable to the passion embodied in the parables of Jesus. God is like a woman who searches for one lost coin, sweeping the house over until she finds it. God is the shepherd who leaves His ninety-nine sheep in search of the one that was lost. God is the One who sends His own Son into His vineyard, who is shamefully mistreated and killed by wicked tenants. This God is not passive and aloof in pure transcendence nor self-satisfied with the swollen belly of a happy Buddha, but lean, gaunt, and hungry, He strains forward to go into the depths of human misery, in His passion bearing all human depravity in His own Person. To make us participants in His divine and Trinitarian life, *sola fide* and *sub signo crucis tectum* in this present age and in full-bodied glory in the life of the world to come, “*He endured the cross, despising its shame, for the joy that was set before Him*” (Heb 12:2). We are either ushered into the divine life of the Holy Trinity, or we live not at all.

6

May we speak of the church’s mission in Trinitarian terms? We cannot speak properly otherwise. How is the church “inclined” today, its members toward one other, in mercy and in love?

When the apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians, he reminds them how, when his missionary work was done among them to establish the church in that place, “*we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us*” (1 Thes 2:8). As with the Holy Trinity, so with the mission of the Church. The mission of God is not a mere imparting of information, but the movement, empowered by the Gospel, toward a communion of persons in that fellowship we confess as the *Una Sancta*. The church sends, not merely money and supplies and books, but people, a human voice and face.

In many quarters of the world today, the church suffers martyrdom, or it is going through a process of recovery and even incredible growth. In such places as China, Siberia, Latvia, Sudan and Kenya, the church is experiencing something quite different than its usual fare in much of the West, where it is largely undergoing marginalization and contraction, or self-immolation. I paint here with a very broad brush. Surely there are exceptions. Let us just say we are seeing an instance of that general rule that Luther laid down in warning to his fellow Germans: “*God’s Word and grace is like a rain which falls on one place and then goes on to fall on another, not returning again to where it once was before.*”²³ There are large territories on this earth that once were alive with Christian faith in the ancient Church but which have long since slipped back into paganism or virtual atheism.

Today, there are more practicing Christians in Africa, and more Lutherans in particular there, than in Europe and North America combined. According to the April 2009 issue of *Lutheran World Report*, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya is growing at a rate of 17.6 percent per annum, making it the fastest growing Lutheran church in Africa, perhaps in the world, tripling every ten years. It has 700 congregations, but less than 150 pastors. Similar growth is reported in Malawi and Zambia. The training of faithful servants of the Word is desperately needed in this part of the world.

In these last days, let me suggest a compelling twofold strategy for sharing in the *missio Trinitatis* that is comprised of personal mutuality in theological education both at home and abroad. First, we may send our teachers to the younger confessional churches that are in desperate need of well-trained pastors. Already, capable theologians have been deployed from theological seminaries at home to the theological institutions of sister and partner church bodies abroad. Such assignments can last weeks, months, even years. Secondly, we may help these churches identify current or potential candidates for advanced degrees and train them in our own institutions on condition they return home and teach, so fostering accreditation for the indigenous seminaries themselves. LCMS President Matthew C. Harrison's vision for doing just that deserves full support. There are further ways to help, as funding student scholarships. But what I want to stress here is the irreplaceable character of life together in our churchly tasks.

At Matongo Lutheran Theological College, for example, where I teach, the seminary for the ELCK, visiting pastors and professors from America, frequently from Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, IN, enrich the training students receive in hymnody and liturgy, catechesis and the diaconate. In addition, full-time adjunct faculty, from Finland and America, live and work alongside their Kenyan colleagues to insure the confessional integrity of such instruction is not lost in the shifting cultural context. Such help enables native faculty to take study leave to pursue doctoral programs at the seminaries in Ft. Wayne or St. Louis.

No one can do this alone. None of us lives to himself. None of us dies to himself. My own work, Project Timothy—Kenya, is enabled by the oversight and encouragement of The Saint Timothy Society, as well as by the prayers and support of many, many congregations and individuals. I realize I am but sent on their behalf and for the sake of those with whom I live and work. The Father lives for the Son, the Son lives for and from the Father, the Spirit lives for and from and with the Father and the Son. Does not the Christian do the same – inclined to the other?

We ought not think that mission today is a one-way street. Help is as desperately needed from Africa today as it was needed by the early Church in the patristic era. One has only to recall the names of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215), Tertullian (c. 160–c. 220), Origen (c. 185–254), Cyprian (c. 208–258), Athanasius (c. 293–373), Augustine (354–430), and Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444)—seven pillars of the Church, all of them Africans – to appreciate what God chooses to do through one people and now another in the preservation of the truth of the Gospel.²⁴

In 1980, the year of my ordination into holy ministry, the first missionaries arrived in America from Africa, two Roman Catholic bishops, sent to Maryland. In

February of 2005, Walter Obare, now Archbishop of the ELCK, at the request of the Mission Province of the Church of Sweden, helped consecrate Bishop Arne Olsson in Göteborg, who later ordained faithfully confessing pastors for congregations in Scandinavia. In Rome, on November 7, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI warned LWF President and ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson of “a general climate of uncertainty regarding Christian truths and ethical principles which formerly went unquestioned.”²⁵ In August of 2010, African Anglican bishops, meeting in Entebbe, remonstrated with Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams over the growing global split in that communion over lack of church discipline following the consecration of openly gay Bishop V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire in 2003, and that of lesbian Mary Douglas Glasspool in Los Angeles, May 15, 2010. On September 9, Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion of Moscow delivered a serious and apostolic reproof to the Archbishop in Lambeth Palace in London over Anglicanism’s uncorrected drift and jeopardizing of the Anglican-Orthodox ecumenical relationship. If Christianity is to survive in the North and the West, it may be in part by divine provision of help from the South and from the East.

Currently, that trans-global help is taking a form perhaps not seen on such a scale since Pope Leo the Great addressed his *Tome* to Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople in AD 449—the reassertion and definition of orthodoxy. What we yet desperately need is the solemn and public anathema pronounced against this hellish apostasy before we can hope for the restoration of true spiritual life in the West (Gal 1:8–9). Meanwhile, we hear and bear witness, receive and give mercy, and live together as we were meant to do in fellowship with the triune God and with one another.

As did Augustine before him, the English writer Charles Williams (1886–1945) saw human history as the contrasting story of two cities, the incoherent city of men, dominated by self-seeking love and so falling into ruin, and the order of the coinherence, enlivened with an everlasting *caritas*. In his essays, poetry, and seven novels, he portrays how substitution and exchange characterize both the orders of nature and grace. In childbirth, a woman, in her yielding and bearing, substitutes herself for the man, and the man, in his giving and providing, substitutes himself for the woman. Life is exchanged for life.²⁶ Christ substituted Himself for us on the Cross and there exchanges His righteousness for our sin (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pt 3:18). In the mission of the church, there is such Incarnational substitution and exchange, and Trinitarian sending and being sent, so wonderful that we shall only be able to see it all in heaven.

About a two-hour drive south of where I write stands the church of the congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya in the village of Itierio, where Swedish missionaries Martin and Gunborg Lundström first sang the Gospel into the hearts of the Kisii people in Suneka market on July 25, 1948. Others followed in their path. They came with the Swedish Lutheran Mission, otherwise known as Bible True Friends (abbreviated BV for *Bibletrognavanner*).

In the churchyard, under a stand of cypress trees, is a single large white marble gravestone. Its headstone reads:

IN LOVING MEMORY
OF
ANNA-BRITA ALBERTSON
BORN: 4TH SEPTEMBER 1921
DIED: 22ND JULY 2005
NURSE/MIDWIFE & EKEGUSII BIBLE
TRANSLATOR
TO THE GLORY OF GOD!
BORN IN BJÄRNUM, SWEDEN
CONSECRATED ON 23-4-1950,
SENT AS MISSIONARY BY SLM (BV)
AND ARRIVED IN KENYA ON 5-5-1950.

The full grave marker (see Figure 1)²⁷ is simply adorned with sculpted stone pages of text from 1 Corinthians 2:2 and Revelation 22:20, written in both English and Ekegusii, the language of the Kisii people: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” and “Yes. I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” A young woman leaves her home and goes on a long safari. Sending and being sent. Life with life. Spending and being spent. Her hands had brought into this life so many babies of African mothers and also labored to give them that which tells of the living Entrance into that Life that will never end. Is there not something Trinitarian about the shape of such a life? *Missio Trinitatis*.



Figure 1

Endnotes

¹ For an erudite treatment, cf. Gabriel Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-painter Andrei Rublev* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008).

² Lutheran Liturgy, "Preface for the Passion," in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: CPH, 1982), 147.

³ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006). No. 561, "The Tree of Life," Stanza 4.

⁴ Such was suggested in part by Sr. Mary Charles McGough, OSB (d. 2007), the gifted artist of the Monastery of St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN, who made a wonderful restoration of Rublev's icon, based on a twentieth century icon that follows his design very closely and is easier to study than the original, which is heavily damaged.

⁵ Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, III, 1, as quoted in Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 269.

⁶ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

⁷ Colin Gunton, "The Forgotten Trinity," in *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 18.

⁸ With common roots in congregationalism, Unitarians have today become associated with the United Church of Christ. Robert B. Tapp, then chairperson of the humanities program and professor of humanities and religious studies at the University of Minnesota, wrote of the Unitarian-Universalist Association in "The Unitarian Universalists: Style and Substance," in *Christian Century*, March 14, 1979, p. 274: "a few ministers have joint fellowship with the United Church of Christ." On September 30, 2006, the webpage "Philocrites: Religion, liberalism, and culture" announced "an historic dialogue" between national leaders of the UUA and the UCC to be held the following October 25, at Andover Newton Theological School, noting, "On a number of issues of progressive religious conviction and social justice the two share common perspectives, and in some communities there are some churches that have become aligned with both denominations." The archivist of the UUA, in an e-mail to the author, confirmed that a number of ministers of the UUA possess dual-rostered status with the UCC, but declined to answer a subsequent inquiry into their number and identity. To discover that answer is now bishops' work.

When the 1997 churchwide assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopted *A Formula of Agreement*, signed also by the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the UCC, each signatory recognizing in the others churches "in which the Gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered according to the Word of God," the ELCA thereby opened its pulpits to those who deny the deity of Christ and the sublime mystery of the Holy Trinity, and thus itself, wittingly or not, made assault on the article of the divine majesty. The UCC "receives the historic creeds and confessions of our ancestors as testimonies, but not tests of the faith" (<http://www.ucc.org/beliefs>). Had the church fathers so regarded the *regula fidei*, they would not have withstood Gnosticism and Arianism, nor any of the other heresies troubling the ancient church, nor would the creeds and confessions the UCC claims it receives "as testimonies" have ever been produced in the first place.

From such a standpoint, one could never say, as did the apostle Paul, against those who preach another gospel, "*Anathema esto!*" (Gal 1:8-9). One can only conclude that the UCC does not intend to confess the faith in the same sense as did the apostles and martyrs, as Athanasius or Luther or Chemnitz. What good is a subjective "testimony of faith" (*fides qua credit*) if it is not itself, or if it is not at least rooted in, a thetic assertion constituting an objective "test of the faith" (*fides quae credimus*)? *Homoousion* was a test of faith for the 318 fathers assembled at Nicaea in AD 325, and Emperor Constantine sent the Libyan bishops Secundus and Theonas into exile along with Arius for denying it of their Lord. Cf. Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 63. Because the UCC virtually regards no creed or confession as binding, those now in fellowship with it can only be regarded as making with them at best a historicist subscription to the *norma normata*. With such a cavalier attitude toward the meaning of confessing the faith once for all delivered to the saints, the identity of these religious bodies must be seriously questioned.

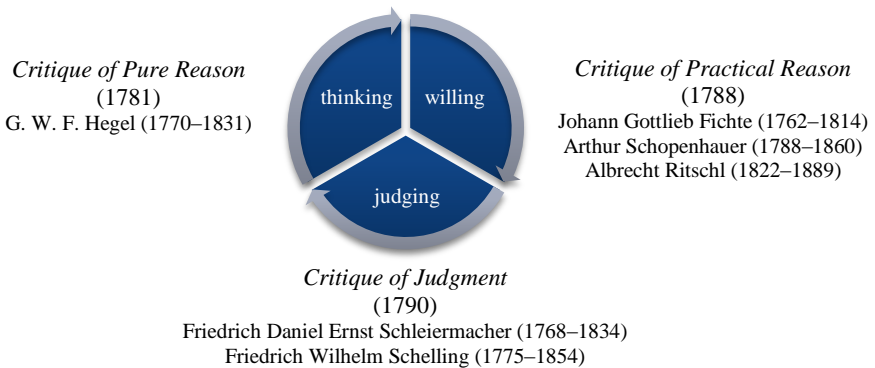
⁹ Bengt Häggglund, *History of Theology*, trans. Gene J. Lund, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 338.

¹⁰ Kant's doctrine was the very opposite of what Lutherans confess; thus, "True religion is to consist not in the knowing or in the considering of what God does or has done for our salvation but in what we must do to become worthy of it." Cf. also, "The right course is not to go from grace to virtue, but rather to progress

from virtue to pardoning grace.” When shall we be pardoned? Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 123, 190. A rational consistency was the hallmark of Kant’s life. It is perhaps a commonplace observation that, while the citizens of Königsberg could set their clocks by the regularity of his daily walk, it was not his habit to attend the Divine Service. A religion within the limits of reason alone is a bloodless and a lifeless thing.

¹¹ The relationships may be shown as follows:

Tripartite Selfhood according to Immanuel Kant



¹² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. and trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1948).

¹³ The distinction is between the *immanent* Trinity and the *economic* Trinity, between God as He is in Himself from all eternity and God in His relationship to the world (from the Greek *oikoumenē*—the inhabited earth). The distinction probably goes back to Theophilus of Antioch (second century) who divided between the immanent *Logos endiathetos* and the uttered *Logos prophorikos*, the Wisdom that goes forth from God into creation. Cf. Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Hutchinson & Co./Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 49.

¹⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 193.

¹⁵ One may note here the incisive critique of this tendency as it appears methodologically in the theologies of Anders Nygren, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann as given in Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict*, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958).

¹⁶ The chilling diagnosis of Irish poet W. B. Yeats, “The Second Coming.”

¹⁷ René Descartes (1596–1650) founded his philosophy only on what he could regard as clear and distinct ideas of which he could be certain. In his *Meditations*, beginning with all possible doubt, he reasoned his way from his famous *Cogito, ergo sum* (“I think; therefore, I am.”), grounding his own existence, to that of other minds, and from thence to God’s own reality.

¹⁸ *Der Römerbrief* (1919). A contemporary report as quoted in Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 67.

¹⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 22.

²⁰ So also Ralph Del Colle, “The triune God,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 137.

²¹ “The document’s introductory sentence, which concludes with the words ‘...we confess our faith in the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,’ provoked prolonged debate. Ewald (Elwyn Ewald, AELC representative from St. Louis), voicing a concern for inclusive language, proposed ending the sentence with ‘...one Triune God,’ dropping references to ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’ Dr. H. George Anderson

of Decorah, Iowa, opposed the change, stating that the church's language is in a time of transition and that the terminology is taken directly from the Scriptures, creeds, and Lutheran confessions. Similarly, Dr. Fred Meuser of Columbus, Ohio, said it 'would be fatal' to drop the words. He pleaded for more careful study of inclusive language issues. Others, like Nilssen (June Nilssen, a campus clergy person at the UW-Milwaukee) and Lois Quam, currently a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, England, said the male characterization of God is found to be exclusive by many people. Ewald's amendment eventually lost, 30-33.²² The American Lutheran Church, Office of Communication, News Release, 27 February 1984.

²² Feminism continues to work its own unbridled mischief in this neo-paganism. Witness the publication of Elizabeth A. Johnson's *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. (New York: Crossroad, 1992). Putative Lutherans in this country began ordaining women into holy ministry in 1970. Since those in pastoral office represent Christ to His Church (Lk 10:16), and since the Church is the Bride of Christ (Jn 3:29, Rev 21:2, 9; 22:17), the ordination of women, exchanging this order for an unnatural one, is tantamount to spiritual lesbianism.

²³ As quoted in Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Church*, "Jesus Intercedes for His Church" (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 12.

²⁴ See for example Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

²⁵ "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Representatives of the Lutheran World Federation," 7 November 2005. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/november/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051107_lutheran-federation_en.html.

²⁶ Cf. *The Image of the City (and Other Essays)*, edited with critical introduction by Anne Ridler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

²⁷ Figure 1 is a photograph taken by the author.

Under One Roof: One Faith Many Cultures

Mark Koch

The idea of two or more congregations sharing facilities is not new. When a contingent of Saxon immigrants who were among the forebears of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS hereafter) arrived in St. Louis in 1839, they were in need of a place of worship, but in no position to quickly purchase or construct one. After being initially rebuffed by other German congregations in that city, they turned to the Episcopal congregation of Christ Church and were given permission to use their basement for a temporary place of worship. The original expectation was that this arrangement would last only a few months, but in fact continued for three-and-a-half years until the construction of Trinity Lutheran Church was complete.¹

Since that time, many LCMS congregations have also started with the help of some type of shared-facility arrangement. It has often been done, as with the case of historic Trinity, for pragmatic reasons. A mission congregation is typically small and cannot afford its own building until they have more fully developed their financial stewardship and taken other preliminary steps. For most congregations, however, it is a foregone conclusion that constructing and owning one's own facility is the goal. At times, members (and pastors) feel that it's not really "church" until they have a sanctuary to call their home.

In this day and age, however, congregations are increasingly aware that the costs involved with maintaining a facility—one that might be used only a few hours a week—is a costly endeavor. Insurance costs alone have risen in some places by as much as 50 percent in just the last two years, as they have in the congregation this student currently serves. In the meantime, the economy across the country continues to struggle, and many fully expect that it is only a matter of time before the tax-exempt status for churches goes away, further compounding financial strains. In addition, every dollar that goes toward overhead is a dollar that is not being used for the church's real purpose of mission and ministry. However, many congregations also find themselves becoming smaller, a trend reflected in the overall membership numbers of the LCMS, which have been in decline for almost forty years.

How do we make better use of our facilities and our finances, while effectively reaching people in a country that seems less interested in church every year? How can we be faithful to our mission, God's mission, of growing His kingdom while making the best use of the gifts already in hand? One answer would be in sharing facilities. Not simply as a means of financial solvency, but as a technique to grow and vitalize the church in ways that more authentically make disciples of all nations. In other words, plant congregations whose primary ethnic make-up is different from our own predominantly Anglo constituency, and bring

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them alongside our current congregations as a means of more effectively reaching immigrant and ethnic communities.² There is, after all, an increasing diversity in our country, a diversity that is having huge impacts in our culture. We see this diversity almost everywhere, not just in urban cores of large metropolitan areas, but also in small towns and even rural spaces.³

What has been done in the way of studying the possibilities for shared church facilities among divergent ethnic groups? Not too much. This writer was able to find and retrieve a total of eight graduate-level papers from 1980 which touch on this topic. What follows are brief synopses of these studies, taking them in chronological order of their writing.

“Uniting Christians for the Purpose of Mission from within a Multiethnic Urban Society through the Formation of a Multicongregational Church Ministry” is a doctoral dissertation by Frederick C. Moore, submitted at Fuller Theological Seminary in June of 1982. His is a case study about Salem Evangelical Free Church in Chicago, Illinois. Salem had for a number of years prior to his paper been holding services in four different languages, but then cultural divisiveness reared its head and the church nearly collapsed in on itself. The assertion of Moore’s paper is that “the revitalization of mission through Salem Church can best be accomplished at this time through the uniting of Christians of different ethnic identities for the purpose of making disciples through the formation of an intentional multicongregational church ministry” (3).

He begins his paper by establishing the biblical nature of mission. This is done not only by the appropriate application of various Scripture passages, but also by describing the nature of discipleship. Once he has established what it means to be a disciple, he also addresses what exactly it means to be in mission. He states that, as a general principle, “the ethnic diversity represented in a local church must parallel the ethnic makeup of that church’s field of mission” (61).

With that, he goes on to point out some of the inherent challenges in bringing people together under one roof. He asserts that there are basically three options when it comes to interaction among ethnic groups in a church setting. The first is to mix the groups into one whole. The second is to not interact at all, but focus on only one ethnic group. And the third is a middle road that allows the ethnic groups to retain their respective identities by cultural expressions of faith, all while coordinating their overall mission efforts. The thrust of his paper, as well as that of this writer, is the third option. Moore refers to this as a symbiosis, each ethnic group supporting and being supported by the others.

The next significant part of this paper covers the history of Salem, founded in 1926 as the Salem Mission Home. Their long history of being a missional church had initially instilled a strong sense of openness to people of various backgrounds. Yet when a new influx of Hispanic people came into the neighborhood in the 1960s, somehow they were unprepared for the transition. Moore reports that the problem which they identified in hindsight was that they did not “bring the people (including the leadership) through a process of redefining the biblical nature of their mission in light of a neighborhood which was rapidly becoming multiethnic” (76). As a result of the evaluation of their failures in this regard, the congregation then called a

Hispanic pastor to lead their Spanish language ministry, resulting in far more success in that demographic.

The paper concludes with detailed recommendations under five categories:

1. Recommendations for planting ethnic congregations;
2. Recommendations for inter-congregational interfacing;
3. Recommendations for visible expressions of Christian unity;
4. Recommendations for personnel; and
5. Recommendations for property (149).

For a study that is thirty years old, and a case study of only a single congregation, Moore hits on all of the main challenges and issues. His approach is well-directed, beginning with an investigation into the biblical mandates regarding missions, and then uses that to inform the congregation's Mission Statement. Beyond that, the study deals primarily with the "nuts and bolts" having to do with finances, property, and the like.

"Incorporation of Members into the Life of a Multi-cultural and Multi-racial Congregation" by Eric G. Peterson is another case study. Submitted in February 1990, as a project thesis to Wesley Theological Seminary, Peterson pastored at Redeemer Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Hyattsville, Maryland, during the 1980s and 90s. Initially, Redeemer's community, a suburb of Washington, D.C., experienced a classic "white flight" scenario, as African-Americans moved into the area, equal numbers of Anglos moved out.

In the mid-1980s, the congregation recognized that it would have to become more intentional about reaching across ethnic barriers if they were to be a true ministry presence for their community. Following a leadership retreat, the congregation rewrote their mission statement. It now included this sentence: "Redeemer Lutheran Church is a fellowship of people from every walk of life and from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds which finds its strength in the gospel of Jesus Christ and its purpose in serving in His name."

With this principle established, the congregation designed an outreach program to interact more effectively with their community and, at the same time, held seminars for the members to help them identify and deal with latent prejudices. Eventually, the congregation looked for even more help and resources from their District office but discovered that there were none to be found. Although District officials were supportive of Redeemer's movements towards having a broader ethnic identity and, in fact, wanted to promote such movements across the District, there was no history on which to base this kind of new and different activity.

Pastor Peterson and his leaders decided that they would record and share their experiences so that they might serve as a model, whether positive or negative, for other congregations. Their goal was not to provide a step-by-step how-to manual for creating multi-congregational ministries, so much as to create a guide for thinking through the various aspects such ministry might entail. As a result, not only did Peterson produce his thesis, but they also developed a video featuring interviews with those involved when the changes took place, gleaned a wide divergence of perspectives.

As is always the case for a study such as his, Peterson begins with a theological analysis on the biblical mandate for mission and then addresses what the

Bible says about diversity and inclusiveness. Redeemer realized early on in this process that one of the questions they needed to wrestle with was “Is our ministry to make good Lutherans out of people? Can certain practices or traditions be relinquished for the hope of helping those in the community grow in their faith in Jesus Christ and to know of His love?” (28).

This is a question that almost any LCMS congregation must address these days. With the growing amount and rate of diversity, some kind of intentional description about the end goal is necessary. For Redeemer, their conclusion was that “The appreciation of the diversity of cultures and races is a natural response to the understanding of God’s inclusive love for all nations and peoples” (37).

From this point, Pastor Peterson developed a Bible study to use with the entire congregation, but not with members only. He intentionally invited people from the community of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds to be part of these studies. They were able to respond to and react with the members as they dug into God’s Word together.

The result for Redeemer was that they ended up pursuing their development into a single multi-ethnic congregation. While different than the multi-congregational model being studied by this writer, there is a great deal in Peterson’s paper about dealing with cultural differences that can be applied. It is clear that Peterson has a heart for ministry that reaches all people, and his intelligent use of Bible classes and surveys can be helpful to condition any congregation that is considering ministry across cultural barriers.

One point that Peterson makes (with a nod to Lyle Schaller) that this writer appreciates is that “A sign of institutional blight is when new members are viewed as a means toward an end. They are viewed as sources of new finances and a ready supply of workers to carry on its ministry” (107). In other words, it is important to do the right thing, but it is also important to do it for the right reasons. Throughout his paper, Peterson continually promotes the right reasons, leading to the conclusion that “the more intentional the congregation becomes in providing a wide representation of cultural and racial groups, the stronger will be the message of the gospel which is heard in the pew” (123).

“Theology and Ministry in a Shared Facility” is a doctoral dissertation submitted to Fuller Theological Seminary by Sandra A. Heer in January 1993. Heer is pastor in the United Methodist tradition, where there are relatively many congregations which share their buildings. Her place of ministry at the time of her paper was southern California, which has some of the greatest cultural diversity in the country. She was frustrated by working with congregations employing shared facilities that, in her view, had an inadequately expressed theological basis for their sharing arrangement or lacked denominational help in navigating the unique challenges of housing more than one congregation under one roof.

Her first goal was to enunciate a biblical theology as a basis for how to approach shared facilities. Her writing on this subject meanders a bit and at times loses sight of its own point, becoming overly abstract. For example, at her conclusion to the theological portion of her paper, she writes: “As God’s people share the blessings of grace which have come to them, the world is blessed and turns to seek the God of blessing. In this God is blessed and glorified” (76).

Although this writer often found it difficult to decipher Heer's theological writing, the second half of her paper offers a number of practical helps. She is honest in assessing that most problems which arise in a shared facility are "people issues," not contractual ones. And thus she shares those areas which, in her experience and research, make or break most shared arrangements. Briefly, these come under the headings of cultural problems, authority, change, and leadership.

The most interesting part of the paper, however, is the classifying of different types of shared ministry. First, there is "community," in which the entities (congregations) are connected through occasional events, but not interacting on a regular basis. Second is "contractual," in which the entities have a relationship defined by their contract, but have no shared activities or ministries. Third, she describes "co-mission." In this model, one entity nurtures and helps the other, offering support of facility and perhaps also of finances. The fourth model is named "covenant" and occurs when one congregation absorbs another. Heer is quite negative about this model, observing that it is most often done as a "marriage of convenience" with the result that feelings are hurt and negatively affect the congregation for years to come. Fifth is the "companion" shared ministry, when two or more fully independent congregations join together in such a way that "their paths are parallel but individual" (175).

Although she is more critical of some models than others, Heer does not endorse one over and against the others. Instead, she points out certain strengths and weaknesses, allowing that each situation must be evaluated on its own merits and discover for itself which model will fit best. But in general, "it seems best to proceed with some type of structure which allows both internal freedom and flexibility, but also enough control so that lines of responsibility are clear" (230). She also opines that, "Much like individuals about to be married, the better each knows the self, the easier it is to share that self with another" (230).

This last point is telling, for, compared with most of the other authors, Heer gives more attention to the psychological and emotional aspects of what it takes to share a church facility successfully among two or more congregations. While her theology is somewhat weak, she seems to have an innate understanding that being clear about who you are as a congregation is key. If a congregation possesses that clarity, then it can also be flexible and absorb changes without feeling threatened.

"Multicultural/Multiethnic Ministry: A Challenge for Congregations in a Changing Community" by Yohannes Mengsteab is the only Master's thesis in this review. It was submitted in July 1997, to Western Theological Seminary. Because it is a Master's thesis, it is constructed somewhat differently from the dissertations, but certainly not so much as to take away from its usefulness.

Coming to the United States as an Eritrean refugee, Mengsteab reflects on what cross-cultural ministry looks like to an "outsider." Mengsteab points out that although homogeneous congregations may run more smoothly, in that they don't have to contend with cultural barriers, they are often incapable of dealing with the ethnic transitions that take place in their communities. Thus, for example, when an Anglo community becomes predominantly Hispanic in a few short years, the Anglo congregation there may be hard pressed to adapt to such change and as a result can find itself in danger of closing. But a congregation that intentionally seeks ways to

create bridges into other cultures will be better able to adapt quickly when the need arises.

That sense of mission, especially in the incarnational sense, is all-important to Mengsteab. “When the Church ceases to be a movement and turns into a mere institution that exists for its own sake, it loses [sic] its incarnational nature” (21). Further, he bluntly states that “it is incongruent to claim that a congregation is missionary when it refuses to embrace its calling in the city or among all people groups in its neighborhood” (23).

Of most interest to this student were Mengsteab’s recommendations for models of ministry. He makes Redeemer Lutheran in Hyattsville (referred to above) his first example and lauds their ability to incorporate people of various ethnic backgrounds into their congregation. But he also notes that the primary language used there is English, which can be problematic for many immigrants.

His second model is First Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles. It was one of the first, and is still one of the only, multicongregational churches in the country. Mengsteab also makes this church the subject of a “mini-case study” later in the paper. Not unlike Salem, the subject of the paper by Moore, First was founded in 1895 with the commitment to reach all people, regardless of race or other classifications. And just like Salem, they floundered in the 1960s, in particular as the Hispanic population gained predominance in their neighborhood. The congregation reevaluated itself and made a determined effort to develop the model they now use to house four congregations of divergent backgrounds (Anglo, Hispanic, Filipino, and Korean) under one roof. Mengsteab’s criticism of this model is that it can overlook smaller groups and that it is limited by the size of the facility.

The third model, and clearly his favorite one, is a meta-church model, in which cell groups of ten people or so cluster together in groups of five to ten cells, all under one congregational umbrella. This theoretically allows cross-cultural outreach even to small groups that cannot exist as independent congregations, but who will be able to grow indefinitely since they are not tied down by the size of the facility. Like Heer, however, Mengsteab admits that “any congregation that is in a multicultural and multiracial setting has to adopt the model that is suitable to its own makeup and temperament” (34).

“The Multi-congregational Church Model: An Urban Church Planting Strategy for Discipling Ethnic People” was submitted to Concordia Theological Seminary in April 1997 by Nai-Ho Tan, a native of Singapore. This is the most thorough-going in its research of all the studies located by this student.

Citing growing ethnic diversity in our country due to strong immigration, coupled with the challenges of our congregations to maintain themselves in urban areas, Tan expresses the need for creativity in outreach and church planting. The solution, he believes, is in multi-congregational churches (MCC). He admits that there are drawbacks, but “despite its potential problems, remains an effective urban church planting strategy for discipling ethnic people” (9).

In Tan’s dissertation, there are three types of MCC models he refers to. There is the Host-Guest model in which one congregation essentially rents to another, often of a different denomination. There is the Guest-Missions model in which a mother congregation grows an ethnic ministry to exist within its

congregation, but simply worships separately. And there is the Covenantal model in which two or more congregations function independently, but cooperate as more or less equal partners.

The theological basis of Tan's paper is somewhat underdeveloped (only 20 pages in a work of over 400). Instead, more space is given to the actual research, which this student found to be unparalleled. Although this was done as qualitative research, the quantity is impressive. Multiple surveys were done with dozens of church leaders representing 19 ethnic groups from 57 congregations in partnership arrangements of one sort or another. Altogether the survey results, neatly coded and organized, take up 66 pages of appendix space. The result is a highly analyzed body of input taken from people with various perspectives on partnering with an ethnic congregation in a single facility. For example, Tan lists "Characteristics of a Healthy MCC" based on the frequency of responses received. There are 32 items on this list, some mentioned by as many as 43 respondents, others by only 1.

The result of all this is a dissertation which is strong on numbers and survey input, almost to the point of being overwhelming, but short on the kind of hands-on analysis that other writers offered as they reflected on their own experiences with multicongregational models.

"Ministry in the Midst of Cultural Diversity" was written by Kenneth W. Behnken as a doctoral student at Concordia Theological Seminary. Like the previous two papers mentioned, it was submitted in 1997, an apparent peak for these kinds of studies. Behnken was the mission executive for the Pacific Southwest District when he wrote this paper. It was intended to help congregations of that culturally diverse district consider the possibility of sharing ministry and facilities with another culture group and to offer a process for developing such a relationship.

The result was not only the dissertation, but also a set of usable materials that include a series of workshops to be used in the congregation, worship and preaching resources, scripts for doing skits, even guidelines for a congregational prayer walk. Behnken's District used his research and materials to produce presentation materials complete with Power Point slides and three-ring binders.

Like Tan, Behnken conducted thorough research—not as much pure research as Tan, perhaps, but with arguably more usable results. The main reason for this perceived usability is the simplicity of Behnken's surveys. Many of Tan's survey questions were open-ended, whereas Behnken makes more use of Likert Scale responses. The results identified many of the same joys and challenges as found by other authors, but one specific conclusion reached by Behnken has to do with the positive result of using Bible study to prepare a congregation for sharing its facility. "Testing between the experimental and the control group showed that the participants in the experimental group who went through the six-week process had a significant change in their attitudes and cultural biases" (112). Are those changes in attitude long lasting, or do they fade with time? Behnken admits that only time will tell, and further follow-up research will be necessary.

For this writer, Behnken's paper stands above the rest for its use of solid theology, exemplary research, and careful application resulting in the development of materials usable at the congregational level. So while Behnken used only 3 congregations in his research and 54 survey participants, the quality is impressive. It

is especially worth noting that one of those three congregations was a predominantly Anglo congregation partnering with a Korean one, a situation which mirrors that of this writer, who is especially interested in following up on their experiences.

“Development of the Korean Component in a Model for Multi-ethnic Ministry in an Urban Setting,” by Sandy Y. Ahn, was submitted in February 2000, to Concordia Theological Seminary. This paper is of unique interest to this student because his own congregation is developing a partnership with a Korean Lutheran congregation in Houston, similar to the situation Ahn writes about. The actual research in this paper is minimal, and in some ways, it is more an exploration of how people adapt to living in a foreign culture. Nevertheless, what makes this paper important is the fact that it is written from “the other side.” That is, it is not written by and for Anglos who are considering multicongregational churches as viable models for ethnic outreach. Rather, written by a person of an ethnic minority whose congregation has partnered with an existing Anglo congregation, it reveals the angst that he, as their pastor, must help them deal with as they wrestle with maintaining Korean identity while also embracing Canadian (in this case) culture. Thus, it provides a perspective not often communicated with such detail and careful thought.

Ahn is associated with the Korean Brethren Lutheran Church (LCC) in Vancouver, Canada. At the time the paper was written, they had just celebrated fifteen years in their partnership with Bethlehem Lutheran Church. During that time, he had observed that “Korean people want to worship God and yet, at the same time, they want to retain their identity, customs and style of Christian life” (15). One might note the similarity with the history of our own LCMS, which grew during its formative years in large part by identifying and reaching recent German immigrants. It was the same for many churches in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century America which identified with specific cultures or nationalities.

As is the case in Houston, Ahn points out that many Korean congregations want to preserve their heritage intentionally and pass it along to their children. But in some cases, the children bear the stress of being torn between the culture of their fatherland and the culture of their new home. “Sometimes there is a terrible conflict for young people who ask themselves, ‘Whom should I follow, my parents or my peers?’” (33).

Besides identifying the stressors that can be experienced in the Korean immigrant community (as well as among many other immigrant groups), Ahn also devotes much of his paper to describing Korean culture and values. He includes informational sections about everything from art and literature to gender roles and traditional virtues. All these details are helpful for a non-Korean, such as this writer, to grasp in order to better develop an effective ministry partnership with a Korean congregation.

The research done for Ahn’s paper, though minimal, as previously stated, is also unique in that it was done solely among the leadership in Pastor Ahn’s congregation. One of the statements they were asked to respond to was: “I prefer joint worship services with the Caucasian members.” Out of twelve respondents, nine answered in the negative and three were neutral. That, itself, is an interesting commentary on the desire of that culture to retain their identity; it also reflects this writer’s experiences.

“A Paradigm for Leading a Steering Committee in Establishing a Multicongregational Structure” is yet another case study in cross-cultural shared ministry. The most recent of any works found on this topic, it was submitted in September 2003, to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary by Alvin L. Southerland.

At the time of his writing, Southerland was the pastor of Southwayside Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, a predominantly Anglo congregation. During the 1990s, their area of town experienced explosive growth in the Hispanic population. The congregation had attempted to reach out to the Hispanic community, but with little success. Recognizing that their membership was aging, and that their viability was decreasing, they assembled a task force to consider various options. They soon concluded that their best option was to seek an already-organized Hispanic congregation to share their facility with, and a steering committee was organized to lead the congregation through this process. Southerland’s paper, then, was written as a direct result of that set of decisions. Specifically, he cites two main objectives: One, to increase the understanding of cross-cultural ministries, primarily with Hispanic cultures; and, two, to create a guide and a covenant to establish and explain the immediate and future parameters of a multicongregational venture (8).

The theological basis for this project as described in the paper notes the plurality of culture groups that the Old Testament Israelites lived and walked among during their history. He summarizes his views by saying, “Christ calls his church into a world of cultural diversity. Through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and the application of kingdom principles, the church tears down ethnic barriers that restrict personal, relational, and theological freedoms” (86).

Although the congregation in the study was forced by circumstances into considering a multicongregational model, and although the theological basis could be stronger, Southerland records helpful information about their experiences. In this case, however, the experience proved to be negative. After the prep work was done by the steering committee, the Hispanic congregation they were courting decided not to enter into a covenant with Southwayside. Even though they had voted 60 percent to 40 percent to approve, that margin was deemed too small to proceed without risk of splitting the church. However, the congregation ended up splitting anyway, and several members of the Hispanic church became members of Southwayside, and some were soon strategically placed in positions of leadership. Within a few years, there was a Spanish service and an English service each Sunday, and most recently, Pastor Southerland accepted a call out of state, at which time the congregation elected a Hispanic Senior Pastor. Thus, even though the steering committee did not achieve their objective in the way they anticipated, the congregation nevertheless succeeded in achieving a cross-cultural connection that allowed a fairly successful transition of ministry.

While Southerland developed various resources to help his congregation in this transition—such as copies of their covenants, sermon outlines, scheduling procedures, and more—there is very little actual research in this paper. There was one Multicultural Response Assessment administered, a tool supplied to them by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, but this appears to have been of limited use.

Although the amount of recent literature on the topic of multicongregational ethnically diverse churches has proven to be limited, collectively the sources have shown themselves to be of no small value. Each author has approached the task with a unique perspective and different objective. But as each one has worked through the task, it has been very useful in bringing the issues into focus for this writer. For one thing, there is the importance of having a firm foundation on Scripture; this cannot be shortchanged. For another, it is critical for a congregation to be secure in itself and its identity in order to withstand the changes that are bound to come when starting a sharing relationship. Also, understanding a foreign culture from the inside can be invaluable when it comes to developing a constructive partnership. Finally, as much as anything else, the congregation must be ready to be flexible.

Endnotes

¹ Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 320 ff., 460 ff.

² It is important to be clear that we are not talking about the idea of culturally blended or multiethnic congregations, which has relevancy all its own, but multiple congregations, each with its own distinct cultural characteristics, partnering together to some degree that includes sharing facilities as well as mission and ministry objectives.

³ Houston, this student's current home, was recently named by the [Kinder Institute for Urban Research](#) as the country's most diverse large city.

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Book Review

What It Is Like to Go to War. By Karl Marlantes. Atlantic Monthly Press, New York, 2011. N.B.: Citations from Kindle e-reader

Military chaplaincy is part of the traditional mission work of our church. Thousands of veterans are returning to our neighborhoods, churches, and campuses. Do we understand them? *Can* we understand them?

I have never been a soldier. I have never been in combat. I have never been in a situation of “kill or be killed.” I have never had to kill anyone. I am not a member of “the Club,” which has “always been a club with its own secrets and its own societally imposed rules of silence.” (location 2769-73)

I can never understand the combat veteran because I’ve never been there. Anyone involved in mission and ministry knows the truth that only people of the culture can understand the culture:

- Only alcoholics can understand alcoholics.
- Only Native Americans can understand Native Americans.
- Only victims of abuse can understand other victims.

I can sympathize with the vet, but I cannot empathize, and s/he knows it. Yet, we have to be in ministry with this very needy portion of our society. This book can help us realize why we can’t understand.

Marlantes is a decorated Vietnam War veteran. He has been there. He’s a member of the Club. Very honestly and courageously he tries to help us understand why we can’t understand, why vets typically just don’t talk with us about it. “Not talking about it... is the veterans’ protection against our great fear of being misunderstood.” (location 2865-70)

The chapter topics help us realize the dimensions of this sub-culture:

- Killing
- Guilt
- Numbness and Violence
- The Enemy Within
- Lying
- Loyalty
- Heroism
- Home
- The Club

With a great deal of introspection and real-life experiences, Marlantes brings us into the powerful world he entered as a young man and still lives out of:

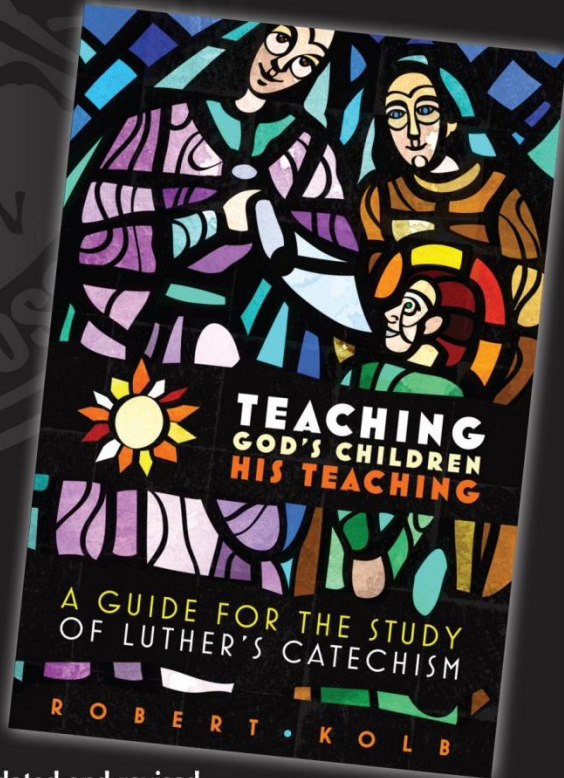
The combat veteran is still not out in the open where the whole of culture can benefit from the sorrow and price and society’s attitude toward war and fighting can mature psychologically and spiritually. (location 2925-30)

I strongly recommend this book to anyone who is dealing with vets, particularly those who have been in frontline combat. It is a great book for group discussion. Probably vets will not want to be there at first, for fear of judgment and

pressure to share what s/he wants to keep secret. However, I guarantee that readers/discussers of this book will look at vets differently—and sympathetically, whether mainstreaming in their churches and classrooms or opting out along alleys and street corners.

Herb Hofer

New book from Robert Kolb and Concordia Seminary Press



Author and theologian

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God Sends His Servants into Ministry: Call Day and Theological Diploma Service Sermons Commencement Address Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2012

That the United States is becoming a more ethnically diverse nation is clear to everyone. That Lutherans are not keeping up very well with these demographic shifts is also clear. It is also clear that Lutherans are having difficulty retaining the young people born into their own congregations as well as substantial difficulty in reaching out to young people who have never been a part of the Christian community.

When students graduate from their seminary course of studies, their graduation is accompanied by three important events: the seminary call day service, the theological diploma service, and the graduation ceremony. The speakers at these ceremonies frequently use these occasions to congratulate the students on what they have already accomplished and to encourage these candidates for ministry to be faithful and creative in their service to the church.

In May of this year (2012), all three events at Concordia Seminary had a strong missional emphasis. *Missio Apostolica* offers these three addresses as specific examples of what is said to seminary students as they leave the seminary and prepare to begin their ministries and as examples of how mission outreach is talked about in the year 2012.

The Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler was the preacher for Concordia Seminary's Call Day Service. Dr. Diefenthaler served as president of the Southeastern district until he came to the end of district term limits in 2012. He is a graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and holds a PhD degree in History (Religion in American History) from the University of Iowa, Iowa City. He has served the church both as a parish pastor and as a teacher of historical theology. Dr. Diefenthaler is the author of more than 40 published articles and reviews.

The preacher for the Seminary's Theological Diploma Service was the Rev. Dr. William Utech, associate professor of practical theology and director of resident field education at the St. Louis Seminary. He holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He has served parishes in Minnesota and Missouri and has also been active in service outside the seminary, serving on the board of directors of the Lutheran Haven Retirement Center in Oviedo, Florida, on the Missouri Synod's Commission on Worship, and on the board of directors of Grace Place Lutheran Retreats.

The speaker at Concordia Seminary's Commencement Ceremonies was the Rev. Dr. Hector Hoppe. Born in Argentina, he was ordained in the Lutheran Church of Argentina and served as a faculty member at Seminario Concordia, Buenos Aires. He has served as manager of multilingual resources at Concordia Publishing House since 1993. He is also an adjunct instructor in practical theology for the Center for

Hispanic Studies (CHS) at Concordia Seminary, and he is the voice of Para el Camino, the Spanish version of The Lutheran Hour©. Rev. Hoppe is the author of *Jesús de Nazaret, mi Señor* (the English edition, *Jesus of Nazareth, My Lord*, will be available in 2013). Dr. Hoppe received an honorary doctoral degree as part of the commencement ceremonies.

Daniel Mattson

Call Day Sermon

May 1, 2012

Text: John 10:11–16

Theme: “A Beautiful Pastor”

The Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler, President of the Southeastern District of the LCMS

Dear families, friends, and guests, Presidents Harrison and Meyer, esteemed colleagues on the Council of Presidents, members of the faculty and staff, and above all candidates, my sisters and brothers. Christ is risen!

About a hundred years ago, the unsinkable ship *Titanic* went down in the frigid waters of the north Atlantic. So did Concordia Seminary in a debate here in St. Louis with Eden Seminary. It was utterly unthinkable that this would ever happen. Franz Pieper and the rest of the faculty had told their hand-picked student team they had better trounce little Eden. But when the Concordia team arrived for the debate, they found that the captain of the Eden team was a student named Reinhold Niebuhr, backed up by his younger brother Helmut, known to more of us as H. Richard Niebuhr.

When they got back from this debate and the beating, the Concordia boys may well have figured they would be sitting in their dorm rooms on this night rather than in the pews, as you are, awaiting their calls. It didn't happen. Instead, the faculty declared that never again would Concordia participate in any such debate with Eden Seminary.

Meanwhile, the all-star debaters and soon-to-be famous Niebuhr brothers from Eden also received their assignments and confidently entered the world of ministry in a congregation. But in his diary, later published as *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, Reinhold soon wrote, “Now that I have preached about a dozen sermons I find I am repeating myself....The few ideas that I had worked (up) at the seminary have all been used...(N)ow what?”

For H. Richard Niebuhr, the iceberg appeared on a winter day not far from here at Creve Coeur Lake. Three boys from the church were attracted by some fish splashing in an opening on the frozen surface. They foolishly ventured out on to the ice and plunged to their deaths. Young Pastor Niebuhr, while carrying the heavy burden of being there and failing to save any of the three, was then called upon to conduct their funerals.

What any student receives at a seminary is absolutely essential and terribly important. But as the word “seminary” implies, this education is a seed. A seed that

still has to be planted in the soil of ministry! It has to take root, grow, and develop and eventually blossom into the “beautiful pastor” we so hope and pray each of you will become.

“A Beautiful Pastor” is not only the title of this message. It’s my translation of the “good shepherd” described in our text from John 10. We don’t often juxtapose the words “beautiful” and “pastor.” We more readily identify someone, as I do my wife Vivi, as a “beautiful woman.” And that she truly is because what she understands, better than I do, is that daily life is primarily about relationships. And so, if there is anything that you remember of what I have said about ministry on this night, let it be that *ministry is all about relationships*. Yes, say the key word with me one more time: *relationships!*

Always starting with the relationship that *the* Good Shepherd has chosen to establish with his sheep! “All we like sheep have gone astray,” it says in Isaiah 53, “and have turned everyone unto his own way.” Whenever we see the evidence of this, it’s a “turn off” for any of us. But God chose not to turn away from us. God sent his Son to come after us. At the first sign of trouble, says Jesus in our text, the hireling abandons the sheep. But the Good Shepherd does not. At the cross, Jesus went so far as to put his life on the line, and as “the iniquity of us all” was laid upon him, he made the ultimate sacrifice of himself.

I don’t know much about actual sheep. But I do know that we, like sheep, can be “high maintenance.” I also know that the Good Shepherd’s relationship with us is and remains one in which we can count on him not only to pull us out of the trouble we can get ourselves into, but to transform it into something good, the defeat or beating into “the best thing that could have happened” to us, or at least a valuable lesson going forward. For Christ is risen!

From this primary relationship, everything else flows in ministry. Jesus not only knows his sheep better than the best of shepherds. He tells us in John 10 that “my sheep know me.” The gospel that you, my friends, are called as pastors to preach to the sheep entrusted to your care is also for you. If you are like me, there is a multitude of mistakes that you are likely to make. But the love of God in Jesus Christ covers them all. The burden of guilt that can get as heavy for us as it most certainly did for young Richard Niebuhr. Yet at the same time, we know the Good Shepherd takes this off our backs as well.

Or do we? The soil of ministry for me got dirty enough at times to drive me to my knees. In that context, prayer for me became more than ritual or duty. In the process, I eventually came to realize that my own relationship with Jesus and his Father was one I needed to tend as much as any other. If you, my friends, are not quite there yet. I hope and pray it will not take you as long as it did me.

There are likewise the relationships that the sheep have with you and you with them. It doesn’t happen very often in the Southeastern District. But not long ago, a pastor right out of seminary “crashed and burned.” When in his frustration he told the church council one night that it might be time for him to seek a call elsewhere, they let him know for a change they agreed with him, and that regardless of whether the Holy Spirit managed to broker one for him or not, he would have 90 days to vacate the parsonage.

What went wrong? From some place, this young man had apparently gotten the idea that a pastor is the exclusive dispenser of word and sacrament, and that other than the formal occasions this responsibility creates, he should avoid getting too close to his people. As I sat across the table from him, one old guy from the congregation in bib overalls said to me, "Our pastor was a smart man. But I wish he would have just stopped by my house once in a while and talked with me."

Even the cold, hard world around us, my friends, "gets" this. Where I live, first it was Sun Trust Bank that told me over the radio as I navigate Washington traffic that it now has replaced its loan officers with "relationship managers." Then it was Hundai asserting that the workers in their plants were like a family engaged in teamwork. "We build more than cars," or so the ad boasted. "We build relationships." Much of ministry in any congregation is in fact about intentionally doing this as well. The relationships you build with people, and they with you, also provide all the grist you will need, as much as Reinhold Niebuhr did, for your 13th or your 300th sermon.

There is one more relationship Jesus underscores for us in John 10. "I have other sheep," he says, "who are not of this sheep pen (or fold). I must bring them also." In my view, any pastor today is as much a missionary as he is a caretaker. If you do not know this by now, you will soon find out that the reports on the sinking state of the church in North America are not exaggerated. Any community in which you are placed tonight is a mission field. Less than 20 percent are attending church regularly, and most of the rest will not "darken the door" no matter how good your sermons are. "Suppose a shepherd loses one of his one hundred sheep," says Jesus in Luke 15. "Does he not leave the 99 and go after the one who is lost." That's the way it used to be. Today, ministry is closer to leaving the one, and going after the 99 who are lost.

On March 25, I installed a winter graduate of this great seminary at his wee little church in my Southeastern District. There I challenged him to see how long it takes for the number of people in the community he gets to know by name to surpass the total number of people in the congregation. Not too long, I hope and pray for him as well as for each of you. For ministry is about what? *Relationships!* First, the one the Good Shepherd has with us all. Then the one we can have with him! As well as the relationships you will have with people in the church and in the community, and they with you! My friends, take all the seed imparted to you at Concordia seminary, let it develop in the fertile soil of the ministry to which are being sent, and I daresay, you will blossom. You will become a "beautiful pastor." Amen.

Concordia Seminary Diploma Service

May 18, 2012

Text: Luke 19:11–27

Theme: “More! And More! And More”

The Rev. Dr. William Utech

GOAL: That the hearers, and their congregations, engage whole-heartedly in the business of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text for this auspicious occasion, when the church is joyfully receiving another cohort of brand-new servants, is the Gospel lesson read to you earlier, Luke 19:11–27. It is printed out for you in your worship folder, and I invite you to follow along as I read it to you once again...

11) While they were listening to *this* (and I’ll have more to say about this *this* later on in this sermon... But let me point out at this point that Luke is front-loading this *this* into the heads and the hearts of the people who are hearing this parable, and he’s doing so for a very important reason. You see, Luke is doing what he’s doing with this *this* because this *this* is important for understanding everything that follows this *this*. In fact, this *this* identifies the reason behind, and the focus of, Jesus’ entire ministry, and this *this* explains why, in the words of Philippians 2, Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” ... That’s how important this *this* is for understanding what’s going on in this text, but like I say, more about this *this* later on in this sermon...)

So, back to our text...

11) While they were listening to *this*, Jesus went on to tell them a parable, because He was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. 12) He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. 13) So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Do business with this,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’

14) But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’

15) He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what business they had done. 16) The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has made ten more.’

17) His master got an incredulous look on his face and exclaimed, “Holy bananas! What have you gone and done? This is alarming! This is upsetting! This is just plain wrong. I smell a rat,” the King exclaimed!

“There has to be something shady and unsavory going on here! What kind of questionable, unproven, and unorthodox tactics have you been using in order to make this kind of money,” He asked? “What corners have you been cutting? What

risks have you been taking? What kind of long odds have you been playing, that his should happen?

And what were you thinking?” the King continued. “Don’t you know that this kind of increase makes for nothing but headaches? Have you any idea how expensive it is to manage, maintain, and control this kind of wealth? Have you any idea the problems that this causes—the chaos that ensues when too much is added too fast? It upsets the equilibrium! It distresses and disturbs the status quo! It severely degrades all of our standard operating procedures. And, it makes it nigh unto impossible to plan for the future, since none of our financial forecasts or strategic plans have ever taken this kind of unnatural increase into account!

You are a menace, boy!” the King concluded. “You are a menace to the peace and tranquility that we’ve fostered around here for decades, and you have recklessly endangered our comfortable and familiar way of life! So away with you! Go on and get out of my sight before I get really angry!”

18) The second servant came, and with a sheepish look on his face, said, “Sir, your mina has earned five more.”

19) “Great balls of fire!” the master exclaimed, “not you too! What, in heaven’s name, got into you and your fellow servant that you thought you could just go out there and make that kind of money? More, and more, and more! Is that all you guys ever think about? What is it? Is it pride? Is it arrogance? Is it ego? Is it some kind of sick desire to make everyone else look bad?

What are the two of you trying to prove? That the traditional methods of managing money aren’t good enough for you? What am I supposed to do with a 500 percent growth rate? That’s not normal! That’s not sustainable! That’s not even healthy! All you’re doing here is raising up unrealistic expectations that can only end up frustrating and disheartening your fellow servants. Don’t you care about their feelings? Don’t you care about the peer pressure this puts on them to perform?

This can’t help but create contention within the ranks. You’re fracturing our fellowship! You’re undoing our unity! You’re messing up our metrics. Good Lord, how I miss the old days when there was at least some consensus and uniformity among all you servants about the way you would manage the money I gave you...

But those days are long gone, it would appear, and the damage has been done. All I can do now is try to keep your fixation on increase from spreading to the rest of the servants by assuring them that your kind of aggressive, entrepreneurial approach is, in the end, off-putting and counter-productive to the kind of stable, conservative, and incremental approach to growth that we’ve always fostered around here. So thanks for nothing, buddy! You’ve complicated my life in ways you can’t even imagine. So go on and get out of here, before I really lose my temper!

20) Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of taking any chances with it whatsoever, because your money is very valuable to me. I thought it better, in the long run, that maintaining what you gave me was preferable to putting any of it at risk. Because, who knows? If we take risks today, and things go south, then we might lose too much too fast, and then there wouldn’t be enough left over to keep the lights on tomorrow, right?’”

22) His master replied, ‘Finally, somebody who gets it! Finally, someone who understands that conserving and controlling what we have is always better than the chaos that comes with increase! Finally, someone who perceives that money management is always a zero sum game—that you can’t gain new money without losing old money, and that the old money is always to be preferred to the new...

Finally, I’ve found a servant who is as sensible, reasonable, responsible, conservative, careful, and cautious as I am—someone who will always proceed in a measured and meticulous manner—someone who values predictability and stability and harmony in the treasury! I like the way this guy thinks!” the King proclaimed... He doesn’t take chances. He doesn’t rock the boat. He doesn’t ruffle feathers. He is a team player—a true company man, if ever there was one! And because he tests neither the boundaries nor my patience,” the King concluded, “I’ll just let him keep doing what he’s always been doing the way he’s always been doing it.”

25) “Sir,” they said, “won’t that prove counter-productive and self-defeating in the long run? Won’t that lead to nothing but decades of plateau and decline?”

26) He replied, ‘Oh, you’re probably right about that, but it would be too hard, and it would cost too much, and it would traumatize way too many people if we tried to change the old paradigm now. 27) But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—well, let’s just let by-gones be by-gones... Come over here you guys, it’s time for a group hug...’ This is the word of the Lord!

No, it most certainly is not! Because this isn’t the way the Parable of the Ten Minas reads in the Bible, is it. My version of that parable is nothing like the one that Jesus told, and for that we should say, “Thanks be to God!”

But that doesn’t mean that deep down inside we sometimes don’t wish that Jesus had told the parable the way that I told it. We’d like it if the King in the parable was not so intent on increase—unbending and unyielding in his desire for more, and more, and more. “Put this money to work,” he tells His servants. That’s how it reads in the New International Version. The ESV renders it, “Engage in business.” The NASB says, “Do business with this.” And the New King James version simply reads, “Do business.” The Greek word here is *pragmateusasthe*. It sounds a lot like our English word “pragmatic.” And it is an imperative! Which is why you can’t help but get the impression that the King in the parable has serious expectations of His servants doing something positive with His resources while He is away.

But that doesn’t mean that deep down inside we sometimes don’t wish that Jesus had told the parable the way that I told it. We’d like it if the King in the parable did not talk and act so much like a King—willing and eager to reward those servants of His who bring Him increase and extend His holdings— judgmental of those servants who do not, and ready to hold them accountable for their inaction—absolutely ruthless with those who work to thwart His kingly rule and reign. We wish the King didn’t talk and act so much like a King: “But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.” That makes us really uncomfortable...

But that’s what the King says, and that’s what the King does, because that’s how the King feels about His rule and reign. He is King. There will be no other. And He wants more, and more, and more. And His servants, who get that—who focus on that—who give themselves over to that... They find out that those who actually *use*

the riches of the King; those who use the Gospel for their gain and for the gain of others, they become all the richer! And those who don't use those riches as those riches were intended to be used, well, they become impoverished, losing even what they have.

And it works this way because of the "this" in verse eleven of our text. "As they were listening to this, [Jesus] went on to tell them the parable of the ten minas...." The question thus becomes, what is the *this* that they were listening to? Well, as I mentioned earlier, this *this* identifies the reason behind, and the focus of, Jesus' entire ministry...

Jesus had just entered the house of the despised and detested tax collector, Zacchaeus. He had gone to be the guest of a "sinner" in order to save and rescue and redeem and restore that man. In doing so, Jesus defied the status quo, broke all kinds of social and cultural morés, and gotten Himself into deep, deep trouble with the religious "insiders," that is, with the so-called "good" people. And Jesus did it all because, in His own words...because "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Have you ever been lost? I don't mean slightly disoriented, or directionally confused, or temporarily inconvenienced due to road construction, or anything like that. I mean lost! Have you ever been really lost?

Every year Dr. Schumacher and I go ruffed grouse hunting up in the big woods of Northern Michigan. This is a place where there are hundreds and hundreds of square miles of uninhabited forest. You get a hundred feet off the road on a cloudy day in a place like this, and everything looks the same! You get turned around out there, and you wander around in circles for a good long time before anybody finds you. If they find you at all...

Compounding this danger is the fact that about 12 years ago the Michigan Department of Natural Resources reintroduced timber wolves into that area of the Great North Woods, and over time those wolves have been fruitful and multiplied to the point where it is not unusual for my neighbors up there to report regular sightings of them.

Let me tell you... There is something very sobering about sitting by the fire on a dark, starless night when a pack of wolves just on the other side of the lake—a distance no greater than between here and Kaldi's Coffee Shop—when a pack of wolves that close starts howling and singing together because they've just killed their evening meal. It'll make the hair on the back of your neck stand up because you know that when you strike off into the big forest to go hunting, you are not the only predator in the woods. There are creatures out there that will eat you, if they are hungry and they get the chance...

So in order to keep this from happening, when Dr. Schumacher and I go hunting, we both carry a handheld GPS—a device that uses the Global Positioning Satellites in orbit above us to keep track of where we are and which direction we need to walk when we want to get back to the truck. We **each** carry a GPS unit because over the years we have learned that one GPS unit may not be enough to keep us from getting lost...and subsequently eaten.

There was the year when his unit just stopped working for a while. Try as we might, we couldn't get it to stay on. Then there was the year we learned that if

you drop your camouflage-colored GPS on the forest floor, that camouflage coloring works really well! It is very difficult to find even when you're certain that it should be "right here."

But the worst year was the first year that we ever hunted with a GPS, when all we had was one unit between us! Schumacher had gone out and purchased one of the first hand-held units ever made available to the general public. It was large and clunky. It ate through batteries like we go through beer nuts on Friday night. It took forever to get a fix on the satellites above, and because we were surrounded by tall trees on every side, all we had to do was move just a little bit, and it would lose its fix on those satellites and become as disoriented as we were. That GPS would take us in one direction, and then it would take us in another, and then it would take us in another, and then an hour later we'd find ourselves back at a spot where we'd already been. I have to tell you, I was getting a bit panicky. I was getting a bit anxious. I didn't want to be lost in the woods, and I certainly did not want to be the main course of anything that lives in the woods.

And then a minor miracle happened...the sun broke through the clouds just enough that we could get our bearings and walk in one direction long enough to find our way back to a road, and from there, find our way back to the pickup truck...

Have you ever been lost? Have you ever been alone, disoriented, and hopeless? Have you ever had the feeling that something unseen was watching you, following you, hunting you? If so, then you have a feel for why Jesus is so important for you, for me, and for the whole world. You see, Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost."

That's the reason Jesus had lunch with Zacchaeus. That's the reason He visited with the Samaritan woman by the well. That's the reason He rescued the woman caught in adultery. That's the reason He healed the daughter of the Syro-Phonician woman. Jesus reached out to the lepers, the prostitutes, the demon-possessed, and the "least of these," because Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost."

That's the reason He reached one arm over here, and one arm over here and allowed Himself to be pinned to a cross. Because Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost!"

That's the reason Jesus suffered and died and rose for you. That's the reason He met you in the waters of holy baptism and made you His own. That's the reason He's called you into THE Ministry and given you the task of equipping the saints in your congregation FOR ministry. He did it, because Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost." And as the parable of the ten minas makes clear, when it comes to seeking and saving the lost—when it comes to Kingdom growth—increasing the size of the Kingdom, extending the boundaries of the Kingdom, populating that place with precious souls—when it comes to Kingdom growth, Jesus our Lord, our Savior, our King wants more, and more, and more.

All your education, all your theological formation, all your consecrated wisdom is to be used for that. All your talent, all your skill, all your God-given savvy, insight, and street smarts are to be used for that. You are pastors, missionaries, and leaders who have more, and more, and more as your cause,

because you once were lost, but now are found, and because Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Commencement Address
Concordia Seminary, St Louis
May 18, 2012
The Rev. Dr. Hector Hoppe

Thirty-four years ago I was sitting in a church listening to a sermon based on these words of Saint Paul: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). It was on my graduation day. That day was one of the most fulfilling days of my life, and the theme of the sermon shaped my life and my ministry. I pray that this is a fulfilling day for you also, and that the Word of God will shape your life and your ministry.

Some weeks ago, Dr. Dale Meyer took me out for lunch. During our time together we went over the details of these commencement exercises, and among other things he said: “Everything is ready, it is going to be a great night, the students are ready, their families are ready, the faculty is ready, and the sound system is all set. You should have no problems speaking to the crowd.” I told him: “Well, even if the sound system works fine, usually people who never heard me before need a few minutes to adjust their ears to my accent.” So he said, “Okay, don’t say anything important the first five minutes.” Therefore, in the first five minutes I am going to share with you my own experience.

After I finished high school, I didn’t know what to do with my life. Being born in a Lutheran family, with Dad being a pastor, I knew what the pastoral life was like. So, should I become a pastor? I thought about it, but I had two major problems. I was very shy and embarrassed to talk in public. Three or four people in front of me were a multitude! I thought I could never be able to preach! The second issue was with funerals. I didn’t like them. After a funeral I had nightmares with corpses and caskets and tombs. How could I handle a funeral?

For some divine reason that I cannot explain, I ended up at the seminary. My first sermon was in my home parish with Dad in the audience. They all survived. I almost died. Then it was time for my vicarage. I went to a church in a neighboring country. Not many friends around. As soon as the pastor saw me, he said: “Great, now that you are here, I am going on vacation.” And a week later I was by myself serving this congregation ... and guess what happened? A member of the church died ... and they buried him the next day! I survived, and the family of the one who died survived too.

During these 34 years in the ministry, I went through some great times and through some very hard times, but I did not regret one single day becoming a pastor. It has been a very exciting and fulfilling life. I also learned one lesson (among many

others). God has provided all the gifts that I needed for the ministry. Keep this in mind—the God who called you and is sending you out there to do ministerial work, will provide you with everything you need to carry out your ministry.

Now that my first minutes speaking are over, I will try to tell you something important. You may have heard lately that we are an aging church, and that unless we become a multiethnic church we will die. This aging, mono-ethnic church is the church you are part of, and the church you are going to serve. I believe this is a very exciting challenge, because you are a baptized child of God, and as such, you are part of the eternal church that will never die. A congregation may struggle to survive, a denomination may struggle to survive, but the Church of our Lord will never die. You hold on to Jesus' promise: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church" (Matthew 16:18).

You are going out to an aging church, and to a multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic society, and you have no excuses because God promised to give you all the gifts you need to do His work. How exciting!

The seminary has focused this year on "translation," with the intention that all students and faculty become more aware that we need to "translate" the gospel into other cultures, that we need to become more multicultural, and if possible, multilingual, or at least bilingual. This year Concordia Seminary celebrates 25 years of working in Spanish with Hispanics through the Center of Hispanic Studies. The seminary is aware of the need out there, the need for having workers trained for a changing society. Now, I don't expect you to learn the 269 languages that are spoken today in California. I don't expect you to be bilingual. But please, at least, be bifocal.

Did you notice that Jesus was bifocal? Matthew points it out so clearly. He starts recording the Sermon on the Mount with these words: "Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them ..." (Matthew 5:1–2). Do you see? Jesus looked at the crowd and then looked at the church. Jesus taught the church with the crowd in mind. The crowd inspired him and moved him to teach the church. It is for this reason that he says to the church: "You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13–14). We don't need more light for ourselves; in fact, we will blind ourselves if we don't use the light outside the church. Be bifocal, think of the crowd, and teach the church. Teach the church for the sake of the crowd.

Let me also suggest that, if after some time, you do not see that the crowd around you is being impacted by God's Word, you change something. Clean your glasses and check to see if you are still bifocal. The crowd needs to be impacted, like Jesus impacted them. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew says that "...when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching" (Matthew 7:28). You need to impact the crowd through the Word of God and the church in such a way that sinners will come to repentance,

What kind of crowd will you find out there? You will find a multicultural crowd, but also a sinful crowd, a lost crowd, a crowd that suffers sour disappointments, sour frustrations, and sour relationships. How would you define a crowd that suffers so many sour experiences? It is a "sour crowd!" I hope you remember this every time you have a potluck at church.

With salt and light, the “sour crowd” becomes the church of our Lord. Isn’t it exciting to know that God appointed you to be part of this transformation?

Allow me to give you one more tip, from my own experience in dealing with different cultures. You will hate people of other cultures or you will love them, depending on how you approach them.

It is very well known that we Hispanics are usually late for meetings. This frustrates those who belong to a culture that is driven by the *chronos* type of time. We, Anglos, are *chronos*. We measure time by the minute. But we Hispanics measure time more in God’s way. We are more *kairos* people. At the opportune time, we will be there!

Deal with the people of other cultures with love, acceptance, and with some sense of humor. It will make your life much easier and your ministry more exciting.

I pray that, to whatever place you are going, you will be a blessing to many, to the church and to the crowd. I pray that the Lord, who has filled you with His treasure of grace, will keep you, empower you, and sustain you for a faithful ministry.

You are a jar of clay but you carry a precious message, and you are in God’s hands.

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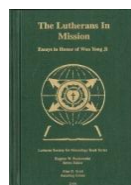
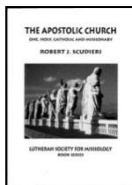
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A Note for Contributors

We welcome your participation in contributing to *Missio Apostolica*. Please observe the following guidelines for submission of manuscripts.

Missio Apostolica publishes studies of missiological issues under discussion in Christian circles across the world in the twenty-first century. Exegetical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the apostolic mission of the church are to be explored in these pages.

The editors submit every manuscript to the editorial committee for examination and critique. Decisions are reached by consensus within the committee. Authors may expect a decision normally within three months of submission.

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Professor Victor Raj, rajv@csle.edu. A submission guarantees that all material has been properly noted and attributed. The author thereby assumes responsibility for any necessary legal permission for materials cited in the article.

Manuscripts should not exceed 5,000 words. Manuscripts of less than 3,000 words will be considered for the “Mission Reflections” section of the periodical.

Authors should include an autobiographical description of not more than fifty words.

Direct quotations exceeding four manuscript lines should be set off from the text in an indented paragraph, without quotation marks. Omissions in a quotation should be noted by ellipsis, with an additional period to end the sentence.

Spelling should follow the latest edition of *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*. Words in languages other than English should be italicized. Numbers from one to twenty and round numbers should be spelled out. Full page references (123–127, not 123–7) should be used.

The Chicago Manual of Style defines the manner of documentation used in *Missio Apostolica* and should be consulted for details beyond the following basic guidelines:

David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 243–255.

Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 184–186.

Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, et al., “Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement,” *Missiology, An International Review* 34 (2006): 431–450.

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Consider Contributing to the May 2013 Issue on Millennials

We are aware of your concern that the Lutheran church must reach out to the members of the Millennial Generation, those who came of age and are coming of age in these early decades of the twenty-first century. We are using the term *Millennial Generation* because of its increasing popularity in social science research contexts and its increasing use in church and mission circles as well. The intention is not to identify a certain segment of the population that is alleged to have certain unique challenges that exist only within people of a particular generation. Rather, Millennial Generation appears to us to be a sufficiently broad term to describe the phenomenon that a growing percentage of the American population is growing up apart from the influence of Christian faith or, what is perhaps worse, living as people alienated from Christian faith. Because of your concern, and because you have been involved in outreach efforts to people living in these circumstances or in efforts to raise awareness of the needs and interests of the Millennial Generation and/or have suggested strategic approaches, we are inviting you to use the pages of *Missio Apostolica* to encourage the Lutheran church in its efforts to find ways to approach these people.

Relatively little attention has been given to the phenomena that are creating a large mission field in our midst. The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life called attention to the phenomenon in its 2010 report entitled, "Religion among the Millennials." That report pointed out, "Fully one-in-four members of the Millennial generation—so called because they were born after 1980 and began to come of age around the year 2000—are unaffiliated with any particular faith." While noting that Millennials who take the Christian faith seriously tend to be as dedicated as or even more dedicated than Christians of previous generations, the report emphasized that, by several measures, the Millennial generation was opting out of Christian faith in dramatic numbers.

Faithfulness to Christ's mission to the whole world requires that the church respond to this challenge. In Lutheran circles, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's 2010 convention adopted an overture "To Make a Concerted Effort to Reach Generation X (born in the late 60s through the late 70s) and the Millennials in the U.S. (those born after 1980 who are coming of age around 2000 ff.), with the Gospel of Jesus" (2010 Convention RESOLUTION 1-10), and with that title, the LCMS acknowledged that the challenge involved more than a single generation of Americans. The resolution urged congregations to "strive to understand better these generations" and to search for and develop "the effective means to reach them," and resolved "That

congregations be encouraged to actively communicate the Gospel message in a manner that connects with these generations.”

The Editorial Committee of *Missio Apostolica* has decided to dedicate the May 2013 issue to encourage Lutherans to attend to the need for mission to this segment of the American population. To that end, the committee encourages you to take part in this effort.

The committee suggests the following questions as some that should be addressed and answered by the articles in this issue:

1. What is the Millennial generation and how do various Christians individuals and groups show that they are concerned about it? (A survey of the topic)
2. How and why should Christians be concerned about the Millennials among us? (This is the basic question this issue should address)
3. What strategies/tactics are churches/Christians using to try to reach the Millennials? What strategies/tactics should be used? (Responses may be theoretical or experiential)
4. What does it mean to “reach” the Millennials, or, does it makes sense to think in terms of “outreach” and, if so, how? (A “missiological” question)
5. What does the existence of the Millennials say about earlier generations? What does it say about the churches in the United States? (Reflecting on what the church has done or not done to arrive at the present situation)
6. In what ways does the existence of a group as large as the Millennials suggest that the churches need to assess their message, their teachings, their lives together, etc.? How can churches do this? (Reflecting on questions the churches might ask themselves)

There are undoubtedly many additional questions that should be considered as a part of this topic.

If you are prepared to write in this subject area, either dealing with these questions or related questions of your own choosing, we urge you to be in contact with *Missio Apostolica* editor, Dr. Victor Raj (rajv@csli.edu).

We hope that you will contribute your valued insights in addressing this critical topic.

The submission deadline is **March 1, 2013**.