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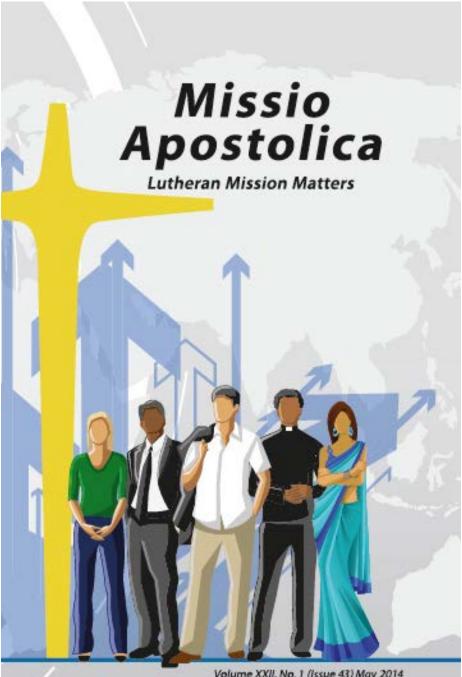a print copy of this issue
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Missio Apostolica

Lutheran Mission Matters

MISSIO APOSTOLICA

Lutheran Mission Matters

Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology

Missio Apostolica is published twice a year in the spring and fall by the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc. (LSFM). *Missio Apostolica* serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally. The views expressed by the individual writers, however, are not necessarily the views of the editors, Editorial Committee, or the Board of Directors of LSFM.

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MISSIO APOSTOLICA

Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc.

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MISSION OBSERVERS

LUTHERAN SOCIETY FOR MISSIOLOGY

About The Cover: You Can Judge This Journal By Its Cover

"Lutheran mission matters." Yes, it does; and yes, Lutheran mission matters are what you read about in *Missio Apostolica*, now in its twenty-second year of publication. Ambiguity, double meaning—call it what you will. The journal's subtitle packs much meaning into few words. Lutheran mission matters because it is based on God's gracious gifts: His Word and His Sacraments. The Spirit plants faith in hearts as He wills, and so Lutherans ground their work of God's mission in the tools that His Spirit supplies: His saving Word and Sacraments. The Lutheran mission matters in *Missio Apostolica* reflect the thinking and practice of Lutherans in many walks of life: theologians at seminaries, missionaries in the field and retired missionaries, pastors in the parish, teachers in classrooms, laypeople who bring God's Word to their neighbors.

The new cover illustration, the subject of extended discussion by the editorial committee, is intended not to supersede the LSFM logo of a cross on an open Bible against a background of the globe. Rather, it is to expand on it—to display graphically that mission is about people, people of all cultures and colors. The stylized gathering on the cover depicts a representative sampling of all those who spread the Word and those who hear it. That the people stand in the southern hemisphere is no accident. It reminds us of the growing vibrancy of Christ's church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, even as Christians in the "old" countries of Christendom, and even the "new world," in the north struggle to maintain a vital presence. Mission is not a one-way street from north to south or from west to east. The arrows point in all directions, and the cross remains at the center of it all. God's mission is everywhere, just as it always has been.

David O. Berger

Inside this Issue

Missio Apostolica, now in its twenty-second year, is headed consistently in the right direction. As the journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, it strives to make the love of God in Christ known throughout the Church and world by presenting on paper and in cyberspace the most up-to-date challenges and opportunities for the proclamation of the Gospel locally and globally. It builds on the core value that the Word of the Lord never returns void—that people heed the Word and respond to it in their own respective ways as the Spirit leads them, in His good time, to mature faith. Furthering the vision cast by the journal's pioneers, *Missio Apostolica* contains a commendable representation of contributors and readership from all over the world. The writers address theological issues of contemporary relevance, their thoughts and reflections rooted solidly in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

This issue is replete with contributions of pastors, missionaries, church planters at the seminary, and scholars, many of whom are serving the church internationally. Their expertise and experience inform readers about how Christians confess Christ both within and outside their own cultural and linguistic comfort zone. They, with humility and devotion, acknowledge that it is Christology that matters most as they witness to what God has accomplished for all people in Jesus Christ, as Savior from sin and death. The essays here presented are but a sampling of how people and people groups come to faith in Christ and confess Him as Savior and Lord.

The contributions address how fundamentally theological matters function in specific, practical ways to transform people's lives. The writers recognize that, even within a culture that is reputedly predominantly Christian, speaking the Gospel necessitates seasoned approaches that take into serious account the specific socio-economic and cultural contexts in which people live their daily lives. One writer compares and contrasts the incarnation of God in Christ with a similar idea and term in another major world religion. A Brazilian couple study in the original biblical languages the mission of Jesus and the mission of the Church in Acts to see how God's people open doors for outsiders to enter, and even in Old Testament times, God's people had a mission to reach out to the Gentiles as light to the nations. An expatriate missionary approaches the task of contextualizing the Gospel in Africa from a confessional Lutheran perspective. One writer presents the challenges of reaching out to atheists in America. Yet another addresses the obstacles of doing ethnic ministry in the Church's own backyard.

One contributor looks at Nietzsche's nihilism and its perpetual influence, especially on the Western way of theologizing. How do we as God's most valuable possession address the pervasive feeling of valuelessness in the contemporary world, where things are "no longer as they used to be"? One contributor, a district president

of the LCMS, reflects on the Synod's strategies for addressing mission opportunities in the twenty-first century. The essays conclude with a debriefing on how the biblical record of Christ's witnesses engaging the world parallels the challenges and opportunities that Christian missionaries of all time face as witnesses in the service of the Gospel.

Even as one author's research shows that house churches were not uncommon in Luther's time, a Lutheran anthropologist envisages that the variables of culture must be distinguished from the constants of theology for a meaningful proclamation of the Gospel across cultures. With more than twenty-five years of service as a Lutheran mission executive in North America, yet another author reiterates that the "Macedonian call" today is a clarion call for all Christians in this country. Is cross-cultural ministry an afterthought for Lutherans? Have mission opportunities come to the institutional church, or has the Church reached out with the Gospel? Why, as one writer maintains, has the institutional church had to have "unusual missionary motivation" to reach out to the native Americans in this country?

The mission is the Lord's. He creates opportunities for His Church to do His mission wherever He places her.

<div align="right">V. R.</div>

Editorial

Faith Expressions

Victor Raj

From the beginning, the Gospel of God has transformed the lives of people of humble beginnings and living on the edge, such as fishermen and tax collectors, as well as men and women of status and intelligence in high places, such as governors and businesswomen (Acts 12:7; 16:14). In Acts we read that the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of the early Jewish Christians to include in the faith community non-Jewish believers, imposing on them "no greater burden" (Acts 15:25). Acts goes on to illustrate how both Peter and Paul and their companion missionaries were instrumental in bringing the Gospel out from its initial command center in Jerusalem to Rome, the capital of the then-known world. Both history and tradition confirm that the Apostle Thomas reached India before the Apostle Paul set out on his third missionary journey into Europe. Tradition also informs us that the Apostle Thaddeus established the church in Armenia and Andrew was crucified in a peninsula of Greece. The first Christians in France were reported already by AD 80. Since apostolic times, Christians have been reaching out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to non-Christians in their neighborhoods and in faraway lands with intentionality, letting the Gospel light shine brightly in the lives of those who sat in the darkness of ignorance, doubt, and death.

Early in the fourth century, Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and allowed religious tolerance in the Empire. The creeds and confessions formulated over centuries gave the Christian faith a unique identity that distinguished the vast majority of Christians, especially in the western hemisphere. As the number of Christians increased and spread to new nations and cultures, translating Scripture into various languages also followed. Through the Middle Ages, Christianity spread farther into much of Europe, especially as many of the monarchs and royal families first converted to the new faith. Medieval Christianity had to combat Islam in various places as that new religion was employing its political might to bring to it new converts. Reaching out with the Gospel to nations beyond the seas was not on the Church's radar, perhaps until the Franciscans in the thirteenth century intentionally launched their own mission activities to Egypt, Mongolia, and China. Numerous other orders have followed suit since.

The Reformation and the Enlightenment eras generated great eagerness for Christians at large to spread the love of God in Christ intentionally throughout the world. Mission societies burgeoned, both independently and under the aegis of

institutional churches, primarily to propagate the Gospel among the unreached peoples in faraway lands. In 1792, for example, Baptist missionary to India, William Carey, wrote *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen,* challenging Christians to bear witness to the Gospel of God beyond the borders of their homelands. Christian missionaries looked at life more holistically. They would have on their team, along with their families, gifted specialists—nurses, doctors, experts in agriculture, publishers, academics, and practitioners of various vocations in life—all demonstrating a lifetime of service for the bodily, spiritual, economic, and communal life of the people.

Historians celebrate the nineteenth century as the greatest century of Christian missions, as Christians began to intensify concerted efforts at reaching the whole world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christian mission began to spread throughout the world more intentionally and organizationally, initiated by dedicated Christians and Christian student volunteer organizations. Eventually, the institutional churches followed in the grand scheme, initially delegating ministers to serve as chaplains to serve expatriates who worked overseas on behalf of their country. Already in 1706, the Saxon-born Lutheran, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, reached the southeastern shores of India with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Ziegenbalg's ship came ashore at Tranquebar, it is said, the captain of the ship disembarked him and asked him to go find his place somewhere in India on his own. The young missionary learned the vernacular, prepared two lexica for the Tamil language that he acquired under the tutorship of Brahmin scholars, and translated the New Testament into Tamil in 1716. Ziegenbalg set up a seminary to train national pastors and built the first indigenous church in Tamil Nadu in 1718.

Credit is given the Baptist missionary William Carey as the first Protestant missionary who actually reached India's northeastern shores in 1793, seven decades after Ziegenbalg landed in Tranquebar. Carey is famously known as the major figure who pioneered the modern Protestant missionary movement. For Ziegenbalg and Carey, along with other pioneers who followed them, translating Scripture into the vernacular, establishing indigenous congregations for worship and nurture, raising up indigenous leaders for a lifetime of serving believers and the world around them, and equipping congregants to grow holistically in all walks of life were the declared goals to strive for and live by.

In consonance with the nineteenth-century vision, vernacular translation of Scripture multiplied exponentially, the number of mission organizations increased considerably, and more missionaries of various vocations were deployed to every corner of the world. Especially in the two-thirds world, Christian missionaries from the West began to notice a preponderance of people building their lives together as tribes and communities historically conscious of their rootedness in their religious traditions and value formation. Before their eyes, they witnessed the Holy Sprit's work in penetrating the human conscience and drawing new people and tribes to

faith in Jesus Christ. Indigenous Christian faith communities were forming, and the new believers were confessing the faith in the vernacular, giving expression to it in their heart language. With this expansion to the East and the Far East, the church more than doubled its membership in one hundred years.

Christian mission outreach to the traditionally non-Christian world advanced enormously in the twentieth century. On the one hand, missionaries from the Western world were returning to their homeland for good from the places they had been serving for generations. On the other hand, indigenous churches were taking deep root in places hitherto new to the Gospel, and they, on their own, were forming mission societies for the propagation of the faith in their homelands and faraway places. The new churches increased in number and grew in God's desire for all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). These faith communities began to confess the faith in *their* heart language(s), giving expression to the one common faith in the language, music, and liturgy indigenous to their culture and context so that their neighbors and friends would know and understand the prayers, praises, and thanksgiving that they were privileged to offer to the One True God.

The twentieth century is, in fact, the century of Christian unity. For the reasons mentioned above and many more, Christians, particularly in the two-thirds world, in lieu of their individual denominational affiliations, are called upon to demonstrate their faith in the one Lord together against the pluralism of cultures, religions, philosophies, and worldviews that they constantly encounter in their life and witness in an environment that is vigorously antagonistic to Christ and the faith He so graciously imparts to all who confess Him as Savior and Lord. A united witness of the one true faith is also a primary step toward attracting unbelievers to the cross to which the Crucified One draws all people to Himself (Jn 12:32) for their salvation. The expatriate missionaries and the churches in the West have called for such unity by way of supporting and encouraging their overseas counterparts for life and service in a hostile world. Bridges are being built between young and old churches and their leaders, encouraging cooperation and partnership among Christians who share the common faith and confession, purely for the sake of making Christ known among those who do not yet believe in Him, as more than two hundred years ago Carey noted, by using *means for the conversion of the heathen.* Already at the turn of the new century (the twenty-first century), numerous evangelical movements throughout the world have proposed for the entire Christendom a more holistic approach to Christian mission. They include Gospel proclamation as well as an active involvement in people's lives empowering them for a productive and prosperous life in the world. They call for the churches to become agents of social transformation as a demonstration of the Lord's promise of new creation.

The exit strategy that most expatriate missionaries and their sponsoring mission agencies developed for their mission fields was to educate the new Christians and

their indigenous faith communities to practice on their own in propagating the faith, governing the indigenous churches, and resourcing their ministry opportunities with their own time, talents, and treasure. In that vein, especially since the latter half of the twentieth century, the vast majority of the expatriate missionaries began to return to their home lands, leaving the leadership and administration of their mission fields in indigenous hands. The locally established congregations multiplied and grew into independent church bodies taking deep roots in their own native soil. Consequently, the relationship and interaction between the parent churches organizations that had sent missionaries to foreign lands and the newly emerging churches went through various states of development such as that of a mother-daughter nature to a sister to sister, and much later, to a partner level. Indigenous churches have also demonstrated their ability to give expression to the faith in indigenous terms and expressions, even as such change has been sufficient cause for fear and trepidation for all parties involved in this daring and necessary adventure.

The Apostle Paul's counsel to the congregation in Rome applies equally to missions, mission societies, and to those who are reached for Christ through their services in our time: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom 10:9–10). Confessing the faith is best done when it is confessed in one's heart language.

Articles

Response to "A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century"

Robert Newton

Abstract: In this article, Newton reviews "A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century," written by President Matthew Harrison at the request of the LCMS at its 2013 Synodical Convention. Newton affirms the Christ-centered foundation laid down by the "Statement" noting the solid Biblical and Confessional theology upon which sound Lutheran missiology must build. He raises the concern that the "Statement" seems informed more by certain issues of LCMS doctrine and practice than by theological and practical issues particular to the global missionary enterprise. That limits its value for charting the course for LCMS missions at home and abroad.

"According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:10–11).

The LCMS in its 2013 Convention passed a resolution with overwhelming majority calling for the development of a "Theological Statement for Mission for the 21st Century" with the intention that all of the members of the Synod engage in an "in-depth study of the mission of Christ's church," the ultimate hope being for all LCMS Lutherans to "develop a clearer understanding of their involvement in God's mission and be moved to participate in it with greater joy and fervor."[1] While the resolution tasked the Offices of National and International Mission with their respective boards to develop the statement, President Harrison must be commended for taking the lead in this endeavor. His personal leadership punctuates the significance and priority that Christ's mission to "seek and to save the lost" holds for the Missouri Synod.

Robert Newton is the President of the California-Nevada-Hawaii District. Previously, he served as an evangelistic missionary in the Philippines, a professor of missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, and Senior Pastor of First Immanuel Lutheran Church, San Jose, CA. Robert and wife Priscilla have four grown children and eleven grandchildren.

"A Theological Statement for Mission for the 21st Century" ("Statement") formally appeared in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, alongside several papers and responses from The Summit on Lutheran Mission held last November in San Antonio, Texas. The journal's publication evangelically prods and encourages scholarly conversation focused on Lutheran mission with a view toward biblically and confessionally sound missionary theory and action. President Harrison notes that the desire behind the publishing of the journal is "to highlight and expound good examples of Lutheran missiology and to raise the height and breadth of discussion on mission so that every member of the Missouri Synod prays for the mission of the church, engages in it him/herself and supports it each according to their vocation."[2] It's in this spirit that I accepted the request to write a response to President Harrison's "statement" for *Missio Apostolica.*

I am pleased to see the development of two different journals emerging from the ranks of the LCMS dedicated to the scholarly and practical dimensions of sound Lutheran missiology.[3] The LCMS has a unique and essential contribution to make to the church's conversation regarding the Mission of God. However, until about 25 years ago,[4] our voice was fairly quiet in the scholarly circles of American missiology, leaving its development for the most part to mission thinkers from Reformed and Evangelical traditions.

Lutherans, however, have much to contribute to the conversation both to ourselves as we, the LCMS, continue to grow in understanding our particular role in the global mission movement, and to the other churches involved in Christ's mission around the world. Our confessional moorings promote a Christocentric orientation to theology. This orientation is essential for missiology just as it is for the other arenas of theology and practice. Consider the theology of worship. Lutherans speak from the vantage point of God's serving us, His baptized, with His gifts. His gracious presence in Christ forms our theology of worship and shapes our response to Him in worship. Our sacrifice of prayer and praise is built solely upon the great "Therefore" of God's mercies (Rom 12). Justification by grace through faith alone orients, defines, and teaches us what true worship is and forms the profound interplay between Divine Service and Christian sacrifice. The Lutheran understanding and teaching regarding divine worship reflects our confessional theology, a standing unique within the Christian church.

Unfortunately, when we think missiologically, we have tended to fall in line with the theological orientation of Christian churches that think of missions more as the human service of Christians (in response to the Gospel) than as the Divine Service of Christ. How do we bring to the conversation of missionary outreach the same insistence of Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone that we have come to understand of worship?

In no way does Lutheran missiology intend to discount the human element in the Missio Dei. The Lord Jesus extends His Kingdom throughout the world through the

ministry of His Body, the Church. And the Church is a very flesh and blood reality. What Lutheran missiology intends to do is build sound mission theory and practice, norming it by its foundation, Jesus Christ. *"Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor 3:10–11). President Harrison attempts to do that in his theological statement for mission. He roots his "Statement" deeply in the theology of our Lutheran confession, manifest in at least three significant ways: (1) conformity with the structure and content of the Augsburg Confession; (2) focus on the Word and Sacraments as God's missionary means; and (3) the preeminence of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout.

Confessional Conformity

The Statement so closely follows the confessional pattern laid out in "Part I" (The Chief Articles of Faith and Doctrine) of the Augsburg Confession (especially Articles I-XIV), that it might be considered a "missional reflection,"—a "What does this mean missionally?"—on the Augustana. It affirms the fact that the Augsburg Confession intentionally speaks missiologically, that is, it is ordered deliberately to present a clear, succinct account of the Gospel and, therefore, the Missio Dei as taught in Holy Scripture. Like the Lutheran Reformers, President Harrison anchors missions to the person and work of the Triune God, especially His gracious will for all people. He proceeds with the necessity of God's mission—the helpless condition of natural man, "blind, dead and an enemy of God,"[5] who without God's gracious intervention is eternally damned (AC II). He immediately follows with God's missionary action through the sending of His Son, whose once-for-all "offering . . . for the sins of the world"[6] reconciled all creation to Himself (AC III), and procured a right standing (justification) before God for everyone who has faith (AC IV). President Harrison stamps in bold relief, "Christ Himself is the content of the Gospel,"[7] the confession of faith that may never be assumed, especially in light of the myriad notions of Christian mission and definitions of gospel advanced in the last century.[8]

> The Gospel is defined by Christ's person, words and works, and it transcends time and space. Just as "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow," so the Gospel is the unique once-for-all offering of Christ, the God-man, for the sins of the world (Heb. 10:10). "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "The work is finished and completed. Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection" (LC III 38). The communication of the Gospel may vary culture to culture, but the fundamental definition of the Gospel as justification is timeless because it is biblical (Rom. 3:21–26; 4:5).[9]

God personally communicates His Gospel, through His Spirit, who by that Gospel works faith in the hearts of people where and when it pleases Him (AC V). It is His ministry of Word and Sacrament that builds His Church and marks its true identity for itself and the world (AC VII). "That is why the Church is not recognized by individual faith or works, which may be invented or contrived, but by these external marks, 'the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ' (AP VII and VIII)."[10]

Focus on Word and Sacrament

With equal clarity President Harrison holds up the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments as God's means of bringing this message of salvation in Christ to the world and His promise that He will bless it.

> The Word of God—read, spoken, proclaimed—will not return to God empty but will accomplish His purpose (Is. 55:10–11) and will bring people to faith in Christ "where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel" (AC V). That is why the Church is not recognized by individual faith or works, which may be invented or contrived, but by these external marks, "the pure teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the gospel of Christ" (AP VII and VIII).[11]

Over and over again, he holds up the centrality of God's means of grace in His mission which drives home the truth that they alone lay the foundation (Christ) upon which the Church stands and that they alone define the fundamental task of Christ's Church on earth. Lutheran missiology allows no ambiguity in this matter. Dr. Robert Preus in his essay, "The Confessions and the Mission of the Church," makes the case,

> The clear implication of what we have said is that the work of the church is the work of the Spirit; and anything which is not clearly the Spirit's work is not the work of the church. Luther likens the church to "the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God." This is the work of the church. But Luther goes on immediately to say, "The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it He illumines and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it" (LC II, 42; Ap. IV, 132). Needless to say the preaching of Christ is fundamental to the Spirit's (and church's) activity (ibid. 45; FC, SD 56). Luther is most explicit on this point: that the church as community, as fellowship, is both the creation of the Spirit and His locus for activity, and that His activity in and through the church is the only activity worthy of the church.[12]

Quoting Luther's emphasis on the enduring work of the Spirit through His church[13] Preus goes on to ask,

> How far are we to press this statement of Luther's? Not a word about social action here, building hospitals, schools, etc., etc. Is such action, then, not the work of the Spirit, and therefore of the church, for Luther? It would appear not, in the present context.[14]

Particularly helpful is the Statement's emphasis upon the missional character of God's Word and Sacraments. Under the section entitled, "Word of God" President Harrison reminds us that "The Triune God is a speaking God." He communicates personally with His world for the purpose of restoring all things to the loving relationship with Him (2 Cor 5:18–21).

> By His spoken Word, the Father brought creation into existence (Gen. 1:1–2; Ps. 33:6; John 1:1–3). Christ who is the eternal Logos speaks His words, which are "spirit and life" (John 6:63). . . . The Holy Spirit breathed out by Jesus to His apostles on Easter evening (see John 20:22) and inspired them to put His Word into writing "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). It is through the prophetic and apostolic witness to Christ delivered to us in the Holy Scriptures—the Spirit-inspired and inerrant Word of God—that we have access to Jesus and life with Him (see 2 Tim. 3:15 and 2 Pet. 1:16–21).[15]

The Statement affirms that Lutheran missions values the languages and cultures of all peoples,[16] a reflection of God's own love for every family on earth. At the same time, it recognizes the confessional truth that "we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him." Our Lord, however, longs to have us. Thus the Holy Spirit enters our culturally defined worlds, graciously calling each of us to faith through His Saving Word spoken in the language of our hearts. "We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God" (Acts 2). Furthermore, this point acknowledges that God not only calls people to Himself from every tribe and nation, but enlists them as full members of His priesthood. As His priests they possess His Gospel treasures and are equipped by His Spirit to be His church, His missionary community in that place and beyond. As St. Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians, "For all things are yours" (2 Cor 3:21).

The missionary nature of the Word is further evidenced by its effectiveness, that is, its power to effect God's purposes, giving life to the dead and calling into existence the things that do not exist. "Preaching is never merely descriptive but always a kerygmatic, efficacious proclamation that delivers condemnation to secure sinners and consolation to those broken by their sin."[17]

He likewise points us to the missiological intention of the Sacraments, that is, God proclaims through the media of Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar His explicit and personal promise that He has called us to Himself and that we belong to Him forever (Jn 10:27–29).

> Baptism is the Triune God's gift whereby He demonstrates His mercy by bestowing on us a new birth (see John 3:3–6; 1 Pet. 1:3–5; Titus 3:4–7). Baptized into His own name (Matt. 28:18–20), we have God's own pledge and witness that we belong to Him through the forgiveness of sins (see Acts 2:38–39) and are heirs according to the promise (Rom. 6:1–11; Gal. 3:26–29; Col. 2:12–14).[18]

And again,

> Luther underscores the forgiveness of sins in the Small Catechism as he engages in a threefold repetition of the words "given for you" and "shed for the forgiveness of sins." These words show us that the Sacrament of the Altar is the testament of God's sure mercy for sinners.[19]

President Harrison underscores the fact that the sacraments are God's gracious action toward us. God comes near to each of us to speak His personal word of unconditional mercy and grace as He washes us with water and His Word (Ti 3:5) and feeds us with His own Body and Blood (Lk 22:19, 20). His word speaks faith into our hearts so that we may truly believe and confess, "He died for my sins and rose again for my justification" and by that faith be saved (Rom 10:8–11). The "for me" assurance of faith is the intention of God's Mission. "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? (Rom 10) This "for me" intention is essential to Lutheran missiology. Dr. Preus notes,

> Werner Elert speaks often of the notion of "Heilsegoismus," the personal concern for one's salvation, which is typified by the "for me" in Luther's works and in our Confessions. This notion, so often cast into the teeth of Lutheranism, is of the very essence of the evangelical faith, according to Elert. For it is a result of the soteriological burden of Lutheranism, a burden made clear in our Confessions with their stress upon the centrality of the Gospel in the church's theology and worship and life (Ap. IV, 3 10). Structurally the Augsburg Confession is built around Articles III and IV on Christology and justification through faith. The same is true of the Smalcald Articles. . . . The soteriological concern dominates and pervades our Lutheran Confessions. . . . Thus, we see our Symbols as an act of confession carrying out the mission of the church to proclaim the Gospel.[20]

At the same time, the Statement reminds us that God's "for me" intention of His Word and Sacraments always bears His "for all" intention as well. The Holy Spirit draws each of us through these means into His Holy Church, the communion of saints, "a company of priests, a priesthood."[21] God established His holy priesthood within the arena of "all the peoples of the earth," built on His Divine premise, "for all the earth is mine" (Ex 19:5). Thus, President Harrison recalls C. F. W. Walther's

reminder that "through Holy Baptism we have all joined the mission society which God Himself has established,"[22] and St. Paul's assertion that by our participation in the Lord's Supper "[we] proclaim (καταγγέλλω) the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

Preeminence of the Gospel

The Statement reflects its Lutheran moorings in the fact that the Gospel in the "strict sense" (FC SD V, 21)[23] permeates the whole. Following the Confessors intent, the Statement sets forth the Gospel, even when discussing secondary concerns. The Gospel remains the foundation upon which every word and activity of church or individual Christian is built. It seems at times that works of "mercy" and "life together" are given equal footing with the "witness" of the Gospel (Articles 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12). Such commingling may suggest to the reader that other activities, worthy as they are in themselves, have been added to the "sola" of the Gospel, thus confusing the clear purpose of Christ's mission as taught in Scripture (Lk 24:44–45) and confessed by our fathers.[24] A careful reading of the Statement, however, would indicate President Harrison's commitment to maintain the biblical and confessional priority of Gospel proclamation. In Article 11, "On being Lutheran today for the sake of *Witness, Mercy, Life Together.*" He states emphatically,

> "The Gospel and Baptism must traverse the world," said Luther. This is what Lutheran missions cares about—faithfully preaching repentance and faith in Jesus' name, baptizing and teaching so that those who belong to Christ in every nation are built up in His Word and fed with His body and blood. Mission is, to use the words of Wilhelm Löhe, "the one church of God in motion," calling, gathering and enlightening unbelievers through the pure teaching of the Gospel. This definition lies at the heart of what it means to be Lutheran in mission.[25]

Later, under "The Church as a community of Witness, Mercy, Life Together," he affirms the fundamental nature of the Gospel "Witness" in which "mercy" and "life together" find their proper place.

> Lutherans are glued to the scriptural truth that the Spirit works faith in the hearts of those who hear the Good News of Jesus crucified and risen when and where it pleases Him. Faith is not created by human enthusiasm, crusades for social justice or strategic planning. Faith comes through the word of the cross. That's what Lutheran mission is given to proclaim. It is precisely in this Lutheran understanding of mission that mercy and life together converge.[26]

With this distinction in mind, the Statement mindfully lifts up of the role of "Mercy"—expressing Divine compassion for the needy within and without the household of faith—as it relates to Christ's mission, a helpful contribution to

Lutheran missiology. "The Church can no more ignore the physical needs of people than Christ could have refused to perform healings or persons can be separated into body and soul in this life."[27] While "mercy" ministry is prominent in previous mission statements of the LCMS,[28] President Harrison provides helpful biblical instruction. Of particular significance is the recognition that "mercy" is highly valued within the mission work of the church for its own sake, and not simply for the opportunity it might present to proclaim the Gospel.

> We care for people in need, not with any ulterior motive, nor even in order to proclaim the Gospel. We proclaim the Gospel and care for the needy because that's who Christ is, and that is who we are as the Church in this world (John 14; Acts 4:12).[29]

While the Priesthood of All Believers is not specifically treated in the Augsburg Confession,[30] it is a critical component of Lutheran mission, and happily we find it addressed in the Statement. Four points are particularly helpful: (1) We are "baptized members of Christ's royal priesthood"[31] and as such share in His mission in the world. (2) We live out our priestly vocation in our congregations and in our homes, communities, and work places. (3) Our vocations serve as God appointed avenues for proclaiming the Gospel to those who are beyond earshot of the church and the means of grace offered there. (4) As Christ's priests, the Word we speak is His saving Word, "the same Word we regularly hear in preaching and the same Word we read for ourselves in Holy Scripture, e.g., through personal and family devotions. The content of our witness is always Christ, crucified and raised from the dead for all."[32]

Church and Missions

Most helpful in the Statement is the essential link between church and mission. "Church and mission go together;" President Harrison writes, "you do not have one without the other."[33] Referencing the work of Friedrich Willhelm Hopf,[34] he lifts up a key contribution of Lutheran missiology: Lutheran churches do Lutheran mission; Lutheran missions lead to Lutheran churches. That describes a cyclical movement of church and mission in the Missio Dei: Christ's Church is the assembly of saints born of His Spirit through the Gospel. Having His Spirit, His saints proclaim (ἐκαγγελλω) the excellencies of Him (His Gospel) who called them out of darkness into His fellowship of light. Wherever His Gospel is proclaimed He is present, calling and gathering His Church and the cycle repeats. One leads to the other and both are the personal activity of Christ (Missio Dei). Note how our Lutheran fathers confessed this dynamic.

> So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the

> sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel (AC V).

This article is entitled "The Ministry in the Church" (Latin Text), and yet the article precedes the specific article, "Concerning the Church" (AC VII). It confesses that churches and missions form an unbreakable circle, each one leading to the other. Dr. Preus points out,

> Notice the prominent place given this ministry by Melanchthon. The article on this ministry of the Word follows directly upon his presentation of the work of Christ and justification by faith, and it precedes the articles on the new obedience and the church (Art. VI-VIII), for there can be no new obedience or church without this ministry.[35]

Dr. Preus's insight is significant for the fact that neither church precedes mission, nor mission precedes church, but Christ's salvific work precedes them both. David Bosch highlights this understanding in his survey of world missionary conferences starting with Edinburgh 1910. Speaking specifically about the church/mission model fleshed out at the missionary conference convened at Willingen 1952, he writes,

> We should not subordinate mission to the church or the church to mission; both should rather be taken up into the *missio Dei*, which now became the overarching concept. The *missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*. The church changes from being the sender to being the one sent. (cf Günther 1970:105–114[36]). The new mood found expression in the opening words of the Statement received by the next assembly of the IMC, which met in Achimota, Ghana, in 1958: "The Christian world mission is Christ's not ours".[37]

In summary, the Statement drives home the fact that our Lutheran confession is essentially missiological and, therefore, essential for developing Lutheran missiology. It serves well as an apologetic for the fact that one cannot separate Lutheran mission from Lutheran confession without harming both.[38] The Statement affirms key missiological truths—drawn from the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions—that lay a firm foundation upon which to build sound missiological theory and practice, applicable to missiological contexts across time and culture. We have a doctrinally solid "statement of mission" that falls in line with Lutheran statements of mission written in previous centuries dating back to the Reformation. Indeed, "Lutheran mission is creedal and catholic."[39]

Missiological Concerns

With that in mind, it is also necessary to examine briefly where the Statement is less helpful. First, it formulates a theological statement of mission around the masthead under which the LCMS currently sails: "Witness, Mercy, and Life

Together." This triad makes a helpful "mission statement," succinctly naming important activities of the local church. However, it's a tight squeeze for the Missio Dei, and the Statement suffers from its overuse. In certain critical points its insertion is problematic. It is difficult for me to understand exactly how Witness, Mercy, and Life Together "reflect God's very being as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier" or how they "encompass His holy and gracious will for all in Christ Jesus."[40] While important to stress the essentiality of these three elements in the character of Christ's church on earth, the statement "where there is no witness, no mercy, and no life together in forgiveness and love, there is no Church, no faith in Christ"[41] comes dangerously close to ranking them among the marks of the church. We must be ever so careful not to determine the presence of Christ and His Church by what we see or don't see, but only by what we believe regarding the promise that He and His own are present where the Gospel is purely preached and sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.

Furthermore, the phrase, "Witness, Mercy, Life Together," confuses somewhat the clear focus of the Missio Dei as our Lord articulates it: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Lk 24:46-48). "Witness, Mercy, and Life Together" does not explicitly hold before the us the primary mission of Christ that He carries out unceasingly through His Church, namely the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. Dr. Preus asserts regarding Lutheran mission,

> The activity of the church is fellowship, sharing. This is the case whether the *communio sanctorunt* of our Creed is taken as the fellowship of the saints, as Luther understood the phrase (*Gemeinde*, congregation, LC II, 47ff.), or as the fellowship in the sacraments. In this community or fellowship the prime activity centers in the obtaining of the forgiveness of sins (LC II, 55) through the means of Word and Sacraments. It consists also of sanctification which in this life is never complete (LC II, 67) and is wrought also through the Word of forgiveness. Such activity is brought about and made possible by the Spirit of God—this is His work (Amt und Werk)—who works in and through the church by means of the Word of the Gospel (LC II, 59).
>
> The clear implication of what we have said is that the work of the church is the work of the Spirit; and anything which is not clearly the Spirit's work is not the work of the church. Luther likens the church to "the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God." This is the work of the church.[42]

Of deeper concern, the Statement's focus seems to be informed more by the theological and practical concerns of the LCMS as it strives to confess a clear, unadulterated Gospel than it does by the theological and practical concerns particular

to the global missionary enterprise. I am not suggesting even for a moment that striving for the true faith is not important to missions; it is in fact, essential. However, other theological and practical elements essential to sound missiology remain unaddressed in the statement. That limits its value for charting the course for LCMS missions at home and abroad.

To forge the essential link between Lutheran confession and Lutheran mission, President Harrison casts the statement in the church/mission mold of the sixteenth-century Reformation, where our fathers faithfully carried on the missional task in their "world." That world, mind you, was completely dominated by the institutional church. Their Gospel witness, therefore, took place almost entirely in the church and to the "churched." That is not to take anything away from our Confessions or the role they play in laying the foundation for all missionary activity. It simply recognizes that the Confessions were not intended to answer certain fundamental questions of missiology, particularly how the Gospel proceeds into the world beyond the boundaries of the church.

Elsewhere I have written about mission work in three contexts: (1) pre-churched, (2) churched, and (3) post-churched.[43] The term "church" in these three contexts refers to the presence and influence of the church institutionally in a given society.

> We associate Pre-Churched ministry with mission work among people groups where the Gospel has not been proclaimed and, therefore, local churches have not been established. As the Gospel prospers among these people, churches are born and their influence in the society increases. That increase effects the shift from a Pre-Churched to a Churched context. Ministry in a Churched context resides primarily within and proceeds from local congregations. Furthermore, the larger society accords the church significant prestige, position, and influence in the community, including special privileges. Just as the waxing of the church's influence signals the shift from a Pre-Churched to a Churched ministry context, its waning indicates the shift from a Churched to a Post-Churched context. As the church's position and influence diminishes our society begins to reflect the cultural characteristics of a "Pre-Churched" world. We find ourselves no longer living and serving in a churched influenced society, but rather, in a full-fledged mission field.[44]

Of the three mission contexts, the Statement speaks primarily from and to the "churched" context where the church is present and maintains significant influence in the society. That is, the church controls the arena in which it carries out its witness. Pre-churched and Post-churched contexts, however, require the church to carry out its witness in arenas which it does not control.

How, then, do we faithfully proclaim the Gospel in places where our Lutheran church is not in control of the context, or where there is no church present in a particular people group, or where the church's witness has been intentionally muted (which is a growing reality in twenty-first-century America)? The Statement does not take up these questions even though they are of great significance for Lutheran mission today.

The Statement is further shaped by the German mission leader and theologian, F. W. Hopf, mentioned earlier, whom President Harrison describes as "perhaps the most significant confessional Lutheran missiologist of the second half of the twentieth century."[45] President Harrison notes that Hopf's essay "The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions" "elaborates on the basic confessional principles of missiology, which were re-discovered in the confessional revival in Germany in the nineteenth century."[46] At stake was the proclamation of the clear Gospel—the foundation of biblical and confessional missiology—which was being challenged by the formation of the Evangelical Church in Germany, a union church made up of Lutheran, Reformed, and Union churches.

> The basic questions which have divided the Lutheran and Reformed churches since the Reformation, questions which go to the very heart of the gospel (eternal election, Baptism, Lord's Supper, Christ's divine and human natures, Law and Gospel), were deemed non-church dividing by the EKD (and the LWF soon after).[47]

These concerns are particularly significant to the LCMS as she proclaims the Gospel today, especially in the midst of the growing indifference to the truths of God's Word, even among other Lutherans. They lie at the heart of why our Synod was formed. President Harrison rightly asserts that Lutheran confession cannot be separated from Lutheran mission; therefore, Lutheran churches can only do Lutheran missions, and Lutheran missions lead to Lutheran churches. What is not addressed, however, is the dynamic relationship between Lutheran churches and Lutheran missions, that is, what they hold in common, what distinguishes them, and how they order their specific work in the Kingdom.

What do Lutheran churches and Lutheran mission hold in common?

The answer lies simply in the fact that they are each the discernible manifestations of Christ's Church on earth. How is this true? Consider for a moment Hopf and what he means by the term "Lutheran church." "Thus the Lutheran church, according to the way she understands herself, is nothing other than the one, holy church of Jesus Christ in that form of hers, in which she is clearly discernable [sic] for us on earth."[48] The form(s) to which Hopf applies this understanding are churches (congregations) and church bodies.

> "Lutheran churches" are for us congregations (*Gemeinden*) and church bodies who are ordered and are being governed in this sense, whose lives are exclusively oriented to the real marks of the true church of Jesus Christ. This we know: in, with, and under a poor earthly form of the church (*Kirchengestalt*), that is where this form is, and within its purview the one holy church is certainly to be found. For the body of Christ is to be found and grasped where the head of the body on earth lets himself be "found": "in the Supper, Baptism, and the Word."[49]

Key to this understanding is "where the head of the body on earth lets himself be 'found': 'in the Supper, Baptism, and the Word.'" The Church is not defined by location but by the presence of Christ (who fills all things), in the proclamation of the Gospel and administering the Sacraments.

Our Lord Jesus is equally present and acting in the proclamation of the Gospel through His Church, both in its local and missional forms. His ministry is not bound exclusively to the local congregation or to the pastoral office, but is bound to His Word and Sacraments. Thus, our Lord carries out His mission through His Word in which He personally gathers with His Saints and personally scatters (διασπείρω) with His Saints in the world (Acts 8:1–4). Dr. Preus considers this a key element in Lutheran mission,

> It is important to note the functional, non-institutional, nature of this ministry. Melanchthon is simply speaking here, as elsewhere, of the preaching of the Gospel Word, or of the work of the Gospel Word. This fact is illustrated clearly in the Schwabach Articles VII as they speak on this point, "To obtain this faith, or to bestow it upon us men God has instituted the ministry or the oral word [Predigtamt oder mündlich Wort], namely, the Gospel through which He causes this faith and its power and use and fruit to be proclaimed, and through it as through means He gives us faith along with the Holy Spirit, as and where He wills. Apart from this there is neither means nor way, neither mode nor manner to receive faith. There can be no doubt that this article, like AC V, describes the work of the church, or more properly, God's work through the church in causing His kingdom to come. This conforms to the Confessional notion that God is the author of baptism and of the Sacrament of the Altar. The church's mission, or ministry, is God's mission through the church.[50]

It is not always clear in the "Statement" to what the word "church" or "Church" refers. For example, in article 5, "The Saving Word of God," Church refers first to the "assembly of all believers in Christ . . . *where* the Word of God is found."[51] In the same article it refers more specifically to the "assembly of believers" gathered around pulpit and altar.

> Therefore, where the Word of God is found; where Holy Absolution is proclaimed (the specific announcement of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ); where Holy Baptism is done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; where Christ's true body and blood are given by His Word of promise, there you will find the Church, the assembly of believers in Christ, and there you will find Christ Himself.[52]

Confessionally speaking, they are inseparable. That is, "the assembly of believers" identified in AC VII under the marks of the church—Word and Sacrament—will be found in the local congregation where the called pastor proclaims the Gospel and administers the Sacraments. That connection was proper to assume in the world of the Reformers. Every village had a church; every congregation had the right to call its pastor.[53]

However, Lutheran missions carried on outside of Christendom do not enjoy the presence of congregations in every village nor the gifts of ordained pastors proclaiming the Gospel from a myriad of pulpits and altars. Mission field is defined not by presence of churches, but by their absence. Nevertheless, Jesus is personally present where and when His Gospel is read and where His saints, filled with the Holy Spirit, speak. In fact, Jesus' presence beyond the local congregation and the ministry of pastors is an essential component in the story of the expansion of the Church as St. Luke bears witness. And it still is today, especially in places where Christian assembly is forbidden or where there simply are no churches.

What distinguishes churches from missions if Christ's Kingdom comes through both?

Christ's Church on earth is both an established church (local congregation) and a "sent" church (mission). While holding in common the Gospel and the ministry of proclaiming it to the ends of the earth, established church and sent church play distinct roles, working together under Christ in building His Church. Understanding the Church in its sent or mobile form and its relationship to Church in its established form is necessary for developing a sound Lutheran missiology.

The Church established (whether a single or a group of local congregations) is God's instrument by which Jesus permanently dwells and serves in a community through His Word and Sacraments. The Church sent is God's means by which Jesus preaches the Gospel "to the other towns as well" (Lk 4:43). Permanence requires fixed locations, structures, and roles. Sent requires mobility and, therefore, traveling light. Permanence requires maintaining boundaries (humanly speaking) in order to keep the Gospel pure and the sheep safe from the evil one. Expansion requires crossing boundaries in order to bring the pure Gospel to those sheep yet outside the Church. The Lord consolidates the Ministry of the Gospel in the Church established for the sake of permanence and good order; the Lord disperses the Ministry of the

Gospel in the Church sent for the sake of all those who have not heard. The Holy Spirit, attentive to both sets of priorities, raises up "overseers," whom He tasks to care for Christ's flock (local church) by faithfully proclaiming the Gospel and guarding it from those who would do it harm (Acts 20:28–31). He also raises up "missionaries" whom He sends beyond the boundary of the Church established in order to seek and save the lost (Acts 13:1–4, Rom 10:14–15).

The Church established focuses on building and maintaining a permanent home, to which we invite the outsider, the homeless (the lost), to find shelter for their battered souls and a permanent place in the community of faith. It has often been referred to in missiological literature as the "centripetal" dynamic of Christ's Church. The Church sent focuses on leaving home, the centrifugal dynamic of Christ's Church. "As the Father sent me" meant that our Lord left the "home," where He dwelled with His Father in unapproachable light to tent among us in the shadow of death, to suffer and die in order to draw His sin-dark creation to Himself (Jn 12:32). He was sent by His Father into the world because the world was incapable of coming to Him. Likewise for us, "the sending of Jesus" implies leaving "home"— where we dwell among and enjoy the blessings of God's people—to go where there is no church, to live as strangers and exiles (Heb11).

The Lord of the Church designed churches and missions to work together, recognizing that each has an essential function to carry out in His Body on earth. However, because it is Christ's Body on earth, made up of sinful saints, it is difficult to maintain the symbiotic balance between the two so vital to Kingdom work. In the zeal to reach the lost, the Church sent may be tempted to compromise the clear witness of the Gospel (including the ministry of the Law and the Gospel) or not to teach the "all things" that Jesus commanded. Likewise, in the zeal to keep the true faith, the Church established may be tempted to add to the "all things" of Christ, things it deems "essential" by standards of its tradition and conscience but in reality are nonessentials by standards of the Gospel, and then bind new churches and Christians to them as a requirement for life together. The sent Church may go about its work, ignoring the particular concerns and priorities of the established Church, thinking that they impede the progress of the Gospel. The established Church may look suspiciously at the concerns and priorities of the sent Church believing that they will lead to compromising the true faith. These attitudes tear at rather than build up the Body of Christ. Christ's Church on earth is in daily need of repentance and the forgiveness of sins that Jesus offers. Here we rejoice in our Lord's promise, "I will build my Church."

How do we organize for the specific work of church and mission in the world?

While central to the entire understanding and work of the Missio Dei, this question seems the least developed in the Statement. That deserves explanation. As

stated above, in order to unite Lutheran missions and its Confessions, President Harrison frames the conversation within the confessional construct of sixteenth-century Christendom. As such, it organizes God's missionary activity primarily in and around the established church rather than in and around His primary arena of mission: unchurched or post-churched worlds. That can create missional "blinders" in two areas: (1) focused attention on the concerns, practices, and structures of the Western institutional church that can blind us to the concerns, practices, and structures critical to the emerging and partner churches and (2) focused attention on "local church" as God's primary instrument for Gospel proclamation that can blind us to the missional structures specifically designed by the Lord for outreach to those beyond the "sphere of influence" of the church.

The Statement tends to address theological and practical concerns raised by established Lutheran churches more than concerns particular to mission outreach. Two items in particular stand out: the practice of closed Communion and the expectation that all Lutheran congregations will follow the Western liturgical tradition as the proper form for proclaiming the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. Regarding closed Communion, President Harrison writes,

> Hence the practice of closed Communion is a necessary corollary of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. . . . Article VI of the Missouri Synod's Constitution states as a condition of membership in the Synod, 'Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description.' Article VI:b provides additional clarification by defining unionism and syncretism as 'Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession.' The practice of closed Communion then does not include receiving Communion at churches that hold heterodox positions.[54]

The question here is not over the appropriateness of closed Communion itself—it is a necessary aspect of confessing the true Gospel over against heterodox teaching regarding the Sacrament—but over its being a "necessary corollary" of the teaching of the Lord's Supper in a mission setting where the issue is often not "heterodox confessions" of the Supper, but a nascent understanding of its substance, power, and purpose.

The same question may be raised regarding the exclusive use of the Western liturgical tradition. Here, President Harrison quotes Ludwig Adolph Petri, a nineteenth-century Lutheran pastor and missions leader who insisted that mission "must abstain from establishing confessions, accepting new customs in the divine service, uniting separated confessions and the like. As soon as mission begins to do something like that, it is manifestly in the wrong, for none of those tasks is charged or relegated to mission."[55] Again, the issue is not the value of the Western liturgy or the appropriateness of connecting a young congregation with its Christian heritage. The concern is in tying the ministry of the Gospel and Sacraments to this specific

form without knowing the cultural and linguistic realities of the mission context and whether these forms communicate pure grace, legalistic ritual, or magic formulas.

Inserting these concerns into a "theological statement for mission" cannot help but nuance missionary priorities in favor of the established churches at the expense of those who have not yet heard or of young churches just emerging. How might such nuance affect our understanding of another key element in the Statement, the role of "evangelical visitation," in mission? President Harrison lifts up the apostolic practice of visiting the young churches in every city where they preached the Gospel during their first missionary journey (Acts 15:36). Likewise, he extols the Reformers for their visitation of Lutheran parishes in Germany in the early days of the Reformation. While not newly planted churches, they were new to the Gospel and, like the churches planted by the apostles, were wrestling with issues of doctrine and practice, trying to discern what was in accord with the pure Gospel and what was not. These two examples illustrate the need for and value of evangelical visitation. We do well to follow them. At the same time, a few cautions are in order. First, it's important to note a significant difference between the visitations carried out by the Apostles and the Reformers and the visitations we, the members of the LCMS, might make with our partner churches around the world. Paul and Barnabas enjoyed "visitation rights" by virtue of their office as the Apostles who planted those churches. Likewise, Luther and Melanchthon enjoyed "visitation rights" by virtue of their official appointment by the ecclesiastical authorities to conduct evangelical visits. The LCMS enjoys neither in relationship to its partner churches. Our relationship with partner churches is not authoritative, in which case evangelical visitations will be valuable only insofar as they are mutual.

A second caution, and one of greater concern, is the ever-present danger that visitations from older churches to younger may focus on the concerns of the long-standing established churches more than on the needs of the new believers. We referred to the very helpful example in the New Testament of evangelical visitations by the Apostles. We also have the example of hurtful visitations by well-meaning Christians who were compelled to require young churches to conform to ecclesiastical practices that they believed were essential components of the true faith (Gal 2; Acts 15).

Focused attention on the concerns of the established churches in the West will also nuance the helpful intention of building capacity. "Lutheran missions seeks to build capacity in the newly planted churches so that, in the unity of faith and confession, these younger churches may mature and live as true partners together with us in *Witness, Mercy, Life Together*."[56] Who determines what capacity looks like and in what areas it is lacking? What criteria are used to determine need? How do we avoid creating harmful dependencies when "capacity" seems to be measured by us in the LCMS and our partner churches with a Western yardstick? Too often the development of ecclesiastical government (the building of a national church), social

service programs, and theological education programs introduced by Western churches—with the good intention of building capacity—have proved to interfere with the God-given "capacities" of Word and Sacrament and the Holy Spirit working through them?[57] Finally, how does the building of capacity become a two-way street? Lutheran churches in the West would do well to hear the thoughtful reflection of the Reverend Randall Golter, executive director of the LCMS Office of International Mission:

> Even as we attempt to be careful, faithful, yet frugally liberal with His resources, the present reality is that we may need church partners more than they need us, not fiscally, of course, but for strength to be and act as His church in mission. They may need to pray us through these coming times even as He works His mission here and through the partner churches globally.[58]

As regards "missional structures," the Statement *seems* to orient around the premise that God's primary instrument for missionary outreach is the local church. I say that cautiously in that President Harrison recognizes in his article 12 on the Church the reality that God's mission—the proclamation of the Gospel—may precede the local congregation, "Evangelism becomes the Church's mission when its goal is gaining souls for the local community of believers and planting the church as a witnessing, merciful community of believers,"[59] and, again, "In the church created by mission, which has at its heart the preaching of the Gospel, those brought to faith 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42)."[60]

At the same time, President Harrison primarily locates Christ's missionary proclamation within the pastoral office, which assumes the local congregation.

> In order to carry on Christ's witness into the world, the Church is entrusted with training, teaching and making pastors through theological education. This witness will accompany the Church's corporate work of mercy (the mercy is Christ's) and will dominate the Church's life together. "Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one comes to Christ the Lord" (LC II, 45).[61]

He identifies a number of venues for Gospel proclamation: "proclamation by called preachers within the community of believers, the proclamation of evangelists to those outside the Church and the witness of every Christian in the context of his or her vocations in life."[62] These activities, however, occur primarily within the purview of the local congregation with the exception, perhaps, of the work of an evangelist. Even there, however, President Harrison does not consider the work of an evangelist as a distinct office in the Church, equal to the office of pastor but as an

office under, or auxiliary, to the pastoral office,[63] which the LCMS teaches is located in and by the call of a congregation.

In a companion essay—"Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations: What it Means that Lutheran Mission Plants Lutheran Churches"[64]—Dr. Albert Collver explicitly places missional proclamation in the arena of the local church. He defines the arena of Gospel proclamation with the assessment criterion, "Does the church have altars and pulpits from which the Gospel is proclaimed?"[65] He elaborates,

> The first assessment examines if a church has enough pastors to provide for the altars and pulpits in the church. The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the administration of the Sacraments are at the heart of salvation and the heart of the Church. . . . . The first dimension of this assessment is to explore whether or not the church has enough men available to preach. It evaluates if the church is using missionaries or pastors from other church bodies to serve at their pulpits and altars. It next evaluates if there are enough pastors to provide pastoral care in a responsible manner. For instance, if a congregation or preaching station only receives Communion once every six weeks because there are not enough pastors available to provide it, this would be reflected in the assessment.[66]

Setting aside for a moment the question one might raise both biblically and confessionally, whether "Altar and Pulpit" is equivalent to Word and Sacrament,[67] Dr. Collver demonstrates the point that, following the mission paradigm of Lutheran church in the sixteenth century, we tend to identify the mission of Christ with the work of the local congregation. What would a Lutheran statement look like if it was framed by a mission paradigm of a different century, say that of the New Testament?

The New Testament mission paradigm unitizes both established (altar and pulpit) and mobile structures for proclaiming the Gospel. In fact, a prominent element in Luke's account of Christ's mission is the power and mobility of the Word beyond the altars and pulpits of the church. In response to the disciples' request that the Lord restore the Kingdom to Israel (with Jerusalem as its center), Jesus turned their attention to the ends of the earth. The altar and pulpit of the Temple in Jerusalem was no longer the "go-to" place for the nations (Acts 1:8). The Lord no longer bound His mission to place (Temple) or office (Levitical priesthood) but to Himself in His Word. That's the very issue Stephen raised with the Sanhedrin of his day. The Jewish leaders virtually bound God (albeit God cannot be bound) and, therefore, His salvation to their pulpit and altar, the Temple. Stephen bound God's dwelling and "Divine Service" to Christ alone: *Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.* Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Temple of God and the arena of His Gospel proclamation. Stephen knew and confessed that our Lord ascended into Heaven and sat (stood) at the Right Hand of His Father. From that "place" He fills all things, and so He cannot be bound to any particular place. Stephen defended his confession by chronicling the great story of God's salvation plan from Abraham

through Solomon. The theme throughout his eloquent defense was that God cannot (and will not) be bound to a temple made with human hands. Note Stephen's highlights:

- God *appeared* to our father Abraham when he was in the land of the Chaldeans (note the connection with Babylon).

- God *was with* Joseph in Egypt (from where he saved the "world" and the chosen people of Israel).

- Moses *worshiped* the Lord on Holy Ground somewhere in the land of Midian. There God commissioned him to lead His people out of bondage. It's there that God commissioned Israel to be priests for the nations (Ex 19).

Following the death of St. Stephan, the Holy Spirit scattered His Word through persecution (Acts 8; 11) and eventually sent His Word through more formal mission structures (Acts 13). Through these means, God planted churches (altars and pulpits) across the Roman Empire.

The New Testament model also depended on a variety of "offices" (Eph 4) within the one "Office of Preaching" (AC V), all serving their respective function in Christ's mission. It does not appear that one "office" was auxiliary to another, but each operated symbiotically under the jurisdiction of the Holy Spirit. Prominent among these offices were "apostle" or missionary (Acts 13:1–4; Acts 14; Acts 16:7; 2 Cor 8:23) and "overseer" (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3; Ti 1). From the early church to the present, God's mission has enjoyed the benefit of these two "offices" and has ordered them to work together for the proclamation of the Gospel.[68] How might this mission paradigm inform our Lutheran mission endeavors for today? How might this paradigm inform our mission priorities, especially the present LCMS initiative of Global Seminary Education?[69]

These questions, among others, are particularly significant in this twenty-first century of Christ's mission, especially as we face the challenges of proclaiming the Gospel among pre-churched and post-churched populations. "A Theological Statement for Mission for the 21st Century" brings an important voice to the conversation by binding Lutheran mission with Lutheran confession. President Harrison concludes the "Statement" with an article entitled "Theology of the Cross," the true center of our confession and mission in the world. To paraphrase his last sentence: The theology of the cross will forever be a litmus test of the genuineness of our Lutheran understanding and statement of mission for the twenty-first century. It is this, and only this, foundation upon which we must endeavor to build.

Endnotes

[1] RESOLUTION 1-03A, Study of the "Theological Statement of Mission for the 21st Century" in Convention Proceedings 2013, 65th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, July 20–25, 2013.

[2] Matthew C. Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1, no. 1 (March 2014): 3.

[3] *Journal of Lutheran Mission* (2014) and *Missio Apostolica* (1993)

[4] Concordia Theological Seminary launched its Doctor of Missiology program, (later Ph.D. in Missiology), in the late 1980s. The Lutheran Society of Missiology began in the fall of 1991. Both endeavors were advanced by Dr. Eugene Bunkowske in order to promote missiological enquiry from a Lutheran perspective.

[5] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 60.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[9] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 60.

[10] Ibid., 61.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Robert D. Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church", *The Springfielder* 39, no. 1 (June 1975): 21.

[13] "This, then, is the article which must always remain in force. Creation is past and redemption is accomplished, but the Holy Spirit carries on his work unceasingly until the last day. For this purpose he has appointed a community on earth through which he speaks and does all his work. For he has not yet gathered together all his Christian people, nor has he completed the granting of forgiveness." (LC II, 61–62)

[14] Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church," 22.

[15] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 64.

[16] Ibid., 64.

[17] Ibid., 65.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church," 31.

[21] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 66.

[22] Ibid., 65.

[23] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 585.

[24] See Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church," 21–22.

[25] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 63.

[26] Ibid., 64.

[27] Ibid., 62.

[28] 1965 Mission Affirmations; the 1974 Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR),"THE MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE WORLD"; CTCR's 1991, "A Theological Statement of Mission"

[29] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 62.

[30] A number of references, however, are made to a Christian's "calling" in life and held up as "proper, true service of God" which include such things as true faith, prayer, vocation, and good works (see AC XXVI:10, XXVII:13, 49–50).

[31] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 66.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 64.

[34] Friedrich Willhelm Hopf. "The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions," trans by Deaconess Rachel Mumme with Matthew C. Harrison, Unpublished. 2013.

[35] Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church," 22.

[36] Wolfgang Günther, *Von Edinburgh nach Mexico City: Die ekklesiologischen Bemühungen der Weltmissionskonferenzen (1910–1963)* (Stuttgart: Evang. Missionsverlag, 1970).

[37] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 370.

[38] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 64.

[39] Ibid., 62.

[40] Ibid., 60.

[41] Ibid., 61.

[42] Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church," 21.

[43] Robert D. Newton, "Missionary Churches: Navigating in a Post-Church World," in *The Lutheran Witness*, Vol.129. No.1: 6–11; "Facing Challenges of the Post-Christian World," in *The Lutheran Layman*, November–December 2013:1–5. The term "Post-churched" or "Post-Christendom" should not be referenced as suggesting the decline or demise of Christ's Church or the gracious reign of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth (Rev 5:10). It refers rather to a profound decrease of the institutional church's influential role in society—the role upon which we Christians heavily depended in order to proclaim the Gospel.

[44] Robert D. Newton, "Facing Challenges of the Post-Christian World," 3.

[45] Matthew C. Harrison, Foreword to "The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions" by Friedrich Willhelm Hopf, trans. Deaconess Rachel Mumme with Matthew C. Harrison Unpublished (2013), 1.

[46] Ibid., 1.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Hopf, "The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions," 8.

[49] Ibid., 12.

[50] Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church," 22–23.

[51] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 61.

[52] Ibid.

[53] See "That a Christian Assembly or Congregation has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture," *Luther's Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I*, eds. Eric W. Gritsch, Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 305–314.

[54] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 66.

[55] Ibid., 67.

[56] Ibid., 64.

[57] See James A. Bergquist and P. Kambar Manickam, *The Crisis of Dependency in Third World Ministries: A Critique of Inherited Missionary Forms in India* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1974).

[58] Randall L. Golter, "What Will Happen to Missouri?" in *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, 1, no.1 (March 2014): 45.

[59] Harrison, "Why a Lutheran Journal on Mission?", 64.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 60.

[62] Ibid., 61.

[63] Ibid., 67.

[64] Albert B. Collver. "Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations: What it Means that Lutheran Mission Plants Lutheran Churches" in *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, 1, no.1 (March 2014): 20–27. The Rev. Dr. Albert B. Collver serves as the LCMS director of Regional Operations for the Office of International Mission and as such the chief mission strategist for the LCMS world mission endeavor. His essay, then, provides the blueprint for how President Harrison's "Statement" is practically applied in the various mission fields here and abroad.

[65] Ibid., 24.

[66] Ibid.

[67] There is no suggestion of "Altar and Pulpit" in the proclamation of the Gospel by the scattered saints (Acts 8:1–4; 11:19–20) or in the ministry of St. Philip (Acts 8:26–40), to give just two examples from the Scriptures. Likewise, "Altar and Pulpit" are not the focus of Melanchthon in his Article on the Ministry in the Church (AC V), but rather the work of the Spirit in Word and Sacrament (see Preus, "The Confessions and the Mission of the Church." Word and Sacrament are the means by which God communicates His salvation; "Altar and Pulpit" is one (of more than one) location where the ministry of Word and Sacrament take place.

[68] See Ralph D. Winter, *The 25 Unbelievable Years 1945–1969* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970).

[69] RESOLUTION 1-01A "To Highlight and Strengthen the Global Seminary Initiative" in Convention Proceedings 2013, 65th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, July 20–25, 2013.

Evangelism in "an Age of Normal Nihilism"

Joel P. Okamoto

Abstract: This article considers how Christians should understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its proclamation where "nihilism" is the normal condition. "Nihilism" means, as Nietzsche put it, that "the highest values devalue themselves; the aim is lacking; 'why?' has no answer." Nihilism is a normal condition for many in North America (and elsewhere), and its effects are both subtle and profound for Christian identity, life, and witness. This article will focus on the effects for the third term—Christian witness.

Among the challenges confronting contemporary followers of Jesus Christ is the *nihilism* that has become the normal condition for life in Europe, North America, and other parts of the world. For Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century, "Nihilism [stood] at the door."[1] But in the twenty-first century, nihilism has come through the door and made itself at home. We live in "an age of normal nihilism."[2]

Nihilism as a condition of life raises vital questions for Christians as they consider their lives today, including questions about the Gospel and evangelism.

What is nihilism?

The word "nihilism" is used variously, but we are following Nietzsche when he said:

> What does nihilism means? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer.[3]

For Nietzsche, the "highest values" included "God," "redemption," "eternity," "faith," and "truth."[4] He called them "values" because people held them *only* for their value to themselves and their lives. It did not used to be this way. At one time throughout the West, "God," "Christ," and "the Church" had unquestioned authoritative status. So they directed the lives of people in definite ways and with ultimate authority. It was enough to answer "Why?" with "It is the Word of God" or "the command of Christ" or "the will of the Church." But Nietzsche concluded that now they had authority only because people gave it to them, because *they valued them.* They were *highest* values, to be sure, but since there were just values, they

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could not have the status that they once enjoyed. The values devaluated themselves.

Others before Nietzsche had discerned the devaluation of the highest values. Standing on "Dover Beach," Matthew Arnold could hear and see it:

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world.
>
> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

"Faith" for Arnold was one of the "highest values," and its retreat was with a "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar." And in that loss, there was now darkness, confusion, and ignorance: "the aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer."

Similarly, Søren Kierkegaard opens *Fear and Trembling* with an explicit sense of the devaluation of the highest values: "Not only in the business world but also in the world of ideas, our age stages *ein wirklicher Ausverkauf* [a real sale]. Everything can be had at such a bargain price that it becomes a question whether there is finally anyone who will make a bid."[5] Charles Baudelaire attested both to God as "highest value" and to his devaluation when he observed how perversely people had come to regard him:

> Even though God did not exist, Religion would be none the less holy and divine. God is the sole being who has no need to exist in order to reign. That which is created by the Mind is more living than Matter.
>
> The most prostitute of all beings is the Supreme Being, God Himself, since for each man he is the friend above all others; since he is the common, inexhaustible fount of Love.
>
> *God and His profundity*. It is possible even for the intelligent man to seek in God that helper and friend whom he can never find. God is the eternal confidant in that tragedy of which each man is hero. Perhaps there are

usurers and assassins who say to God: "Lord, grant that my next enterprise may be successful!" But the prayers of these vile persons do not mar the virtue and joy of my own.[6]

Nihilism excludes neither trust in God nor belief in truth nor convictions about right and wrong, although it may come to that. Nietzsche was convinced that nearly all people were unconscious of their nihilism, that their faith and convictions were honest and sincere. For Nietzsche, nihilism *derived* from the conviction that there are no supernatural gods, no life after death, no "real world" or "sacred realm" beyond or transcending the world of experience. Nietzsche's presupposition was: "that there is no truth, that there is no absolute nature of things nor a 'thing-in-itself.'"[7] This is why he was utterly certain "the aim is lacking, 'why?' finds no answer," and, more generally, why he was thoroughly dismissive, scornful, and resentful of Christians and most philosophers. But neither being a nihilist nor dealing with nihilism requires unbelief or agnosticism or even doubt. One can be both a devout, deeply convinced believer in Jesus Christ and a nihilist.

But nihilism does give rise to a range of subjective states. The most basic is the sense of loss. This is nihilism as a *subjective condition*, or as Nietzsche said at one point, "nihilism as a psychological state."[8] He called this "the feeling of valuelessness" brought about "with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of 'aim,' the concept of 'unity,' or the concept of 'truth.'"[9] Arnold reflected this sense keenly in calling the sound of Sea of Faith's retreat "melancholy" and in picturing "a darkling plain."

"An Age of Normal Nihilism"

In our age, nihilism has become a normal condition of life. Following Nietzsche, we can explain this by saying that throughout society—in our schools, in our economy, in our civil politics, in literature, and so forth—"the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of 'aim,' the concept of 'unity,' or the concept of 'truth.'" Today's formal education aims to give students the knowledge and skills to do what they want or have to do in the economy. "Why?" has no answer further than "If you try hard in school, you might be able to get a job." The aim of business is to buy and sell. What is bought and what is sold, however, matter primarily to the bottom line. The aim of civil politics is to stay in office and serve the ones who got you into office. Meaninglessness, emptiness, confusion, sterility, and loss are standard themes not only in literature itself but also in literary criticism. For example, T. S. Eliot not only wrote "The Waste Land," a landmark in modern literature and an exemplar in displaying the contemporary world's barrenness, but also wrote of James Joyce's use of the *Odyssey* in *Ulysses*:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the

scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious.[10]

With all of these features of contemporary life, we must conclude that nihilism is normal. Accordingly, we also must conclude that we are nihilists, because our lives are spent dealing with and dealing under these values in our schools, at our workplaces, in our shopping and entertainment, and in our communities.

It is no different in our churches and other religious institutions. Here, too, nihilism is a normal condition. Following philosopher James Edwards in his book *The Plain Sense of Things*, which explored the impact of the "age of normal nihilism" on religion and religiousness, we may explain religion as "a set of values, a set of structures of interpretation employed in the hope of preserving and enhancing what we most care about."[11] Accordingly, we must consider ourselves in our religious lives to be nihilistic too. As he explains:

> What does it mean for us to be religious? It means for us to be some sort of nihilist, conscious or unconscious, joyful or sorrowful, or somewhere in between. We can no longer serve gods, nor gaze on Forms, nor encounter ourselves as the fully present ego-subject; we can only monger self-devaluated values: values that still trade under old and hallowed names "Yahweh," "Allah," "Jesus," "truth," "love," "reality," "evil," "I," and so forth; but values that are now a bit shopworn from our handling, and a bit gimcrack when seen in bright light. . . Nihilism is now the way the world comes to us, the way it sounds itself out in us; it is the way we comport ourselves to what we are given. We are all now nihilists.[12]

The idea that "Yahweh," "Jesus," and so forth are now values is evident in the way that Christians have come to regard *doctrine*. In his 1968 lecture "Religious Significance of Atheism," Alasdair MacIntyre summarized the Christian response to the threat of atheism as one that offered "atheists less and less in which to disbelieve."[13] He was referring not only to "modernist" or "liberal" Christians who openly gave up such teachings as the Virgin Birth of Jesus or His resurrection from the dead. He also meant orthodox-minded Christians:

> Despite the utmost orthodox insistence on retaining traditional creedal formulations, a process of "natural selection" seems to be occurring in which only some of the dogmas are really maintained with conviction while others, mere "vestiges," receive only the inconsequential deference of not being expunged from the articles of faith.[14]

Such treatment means that *all* doctrines are treated as mere values, and some as not very valuable ones at that.

The force of this observation intensifies when we realize what doctrines have become vestiges: those about the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the life of the world to come, and the Trinity. All are confessed week after week in churches, but in the lives of many, that rote recitation is as far as they go. Few go to sleep praying for Christ to "come again in glory, to judge both the living and the dead" or "look[ing] for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." They prefer to pray, "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." The vestigial state of the doctrine of the Trinity can be seen not only in the difficulty most Christians have of making sense of the Athanasian Creed. It is also apparent in the inability to answer basic Trinitarian questions like, "Why was it appropriate for the Second Person of the Trinity to be incarnate, and not the First or the Third?" Karl Rahner was right:

> [D]espite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere "monotheists." We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of the religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged. Nor does it help to remark that the doctrine of the *incarnation* is theologically *and* religiously so central for the Christian that, *through it*, the Trinity is always and everywhere inseparably "present" in his religious life. Nowadays when we speak of God's incarnation, the theological and religious emphasis lies only on the fact that "God" became man, that "one" of the divine persons (of the Trinity) took on the flesh, and not on the fact that this person is precisely the person of the Logos. One has the feeling that, for the catechism of head and heart (as contrasted with the printed catechism), the Christian's idea of the incarnation would not have to change at all if there were no Trinity.[15]

Once again, we must recognize that treating these doctrines as less valuable than others means that *doctrine itself* is a value. It would be one thing to observe that the situation that gave rise to a certain doctrine no longer obtains, as the first part of the Smalcald Articles did with the doctrine of the Trinity. It is another thing to be largely absent in the theology and practice of churches, which is what MacIntyre was observing. Here a selection has been made, not on theological grounds but for the sake of *survival*, that is, "in the hope of preserving and enhancing what we most care about." What is valuable stays; what is not goes. But in this even the highest values—the survivors—are devalued, and there one finds nihilism.[16]

The idea that religion itself—faith in God, praying, belonging to a church, reading the Bible, etc.—also now is evidently a value for the many who regard religion principally to be "useful," that is, an "instrument." Baudelaire saw this kind of religion in God as "the eternal confidant in that tragedy of which each man is

hero," which was why God "has no need to exist in order to reign." The instrumental notion of religion explains such things as the success of both *The Prayer of Jabez* and *The End of Faith*; *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *The God Delusion*; *Your Best Life Now* and *God Is Not Great*. On both sides, the Christian and the atheist, argue about religion's usefulness. To be sure, the Christian argues that it is helpful and the atheist that it is harmful. But for both, such things as right doctrine and right worship do not matter much; but practical outcomes in everyday life, in culture, and in civil politics do.

Practical outcomes also amount to the point of "therapeutic" religion. This term comes to us from Freud by way of Philip Rieff, who wrote of the "triumph of the therapeutic."[17] Rieff was writing at a time when much learned opinion feared the demise of supernatural religion. To the contrary he argued that there would be more religion, not less, but that it would be very different. "The wisdom of the next social order, as I imagine it, would not reside in right doctrine, administered by the right men, who must be found, but rather in doctrines amounting to permission for each man to live an experimental life."[18] The therapeutic very clearly illustrates what Edwards meant when he said that religion is "a set of structures of interpretation employed in the hope of preserving and enhancing what we most care about."

In his recent study of American youth and their religious lives, sociologist Christian Smith concluded that this kind of religion was "the de facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers"—and their parents. He called it "moralistic therapeutic deism," and about it he said, "what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to solve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."[19] It is, in a word, useful.

"Useful" is also the operative word for God in particular. The conception of God corresponds to this religion:

> This God is not demanding. He actually can't be, because his job is to solve our problems and make people feel good. In short, God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process.[20]

Evangelism in "an age of normal nihilism"

Even from this brief sketch, one can intuit that nihilism poses serious challenges for Christians in their life and witness. Here are six specific considerations for the nature and task of evangelism in an age of normal nihilism. These are sketchy and incomplete, but they do touch on the most basic and obvious matters for evangelism.

1. Evangelism must acknowledge the devaluation of God, Christ, salvation,
    Church, Bible, etc. They must recognize and respond to the fact that

    > Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have come to be seen by us as competing
    > sets of values, as alternative ways of interpreting (and thereby, one hopes,
    > mastering) the opportunities and the obstacles thrown up by one's
    > experience. Even if one might be moved—for reasons of sentiment, or of
    > political advantage—to defend one of these sets of values over the others,
    > one must at the same time realize that such a defense has now become
    > necessary: no form of life is unquestionable by us; none is proof to our
    > capacity and need for irony. Organized religion has certainly not
    > disappeared in this shadow-time of values, but it has certainly changed its
    > character in fundamental ways. There are still devout Jews and Muslims
    > and Christians around, of course, but to us they begin to look like the folks
    > who need to wear nothing but Polo head to foot, or those who spend all
    > their free time arguing the advantages of IBMs over Macs. The Christian
    > bookstore is for us just another shop in the mall.[21]

Because nihilism is normal, it will be impossible to overcome the appearance that
being Christian is a matter of personal preference or advantage. Christians cannot
help but appear as one set of structures of interpretation, that is, one way of making
sense of, giving meaning to, and dealing with life.

Not only that, but Christian witness often will present itself as a way of
interpreting life and the world. This is what C. S. Lewis did in "Is Theology
Poetry?":

> Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality, and the sub-Christian
> religions. The scientific point of view cannot fit in any of these things, not
> even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has
> risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.[22]

Lewis was not wrong for regarding the Christian faith as a worldview, but this move
does show that Christianity has indeed come to be seen, even by Christians
themselves, as a set of values. The same happens when Christians regard the Church
as "an interpretative community" or the Gospel as a "metanarrative." Such moves do
amount to a concession by Christians to their devaluation in the West. But here, as
the saying goes, "honesty is the best policy." It would be confusing at best to do
anything else.

But it is a devaluation for Christians, a *modest* form of nihilism.

2. Christians should not allow their witness to be *only* a way of interpreting life and
    the world. The Christian message must do more than offer a way to "see
    everything else," even if this way seems better or the best. In evangelism, this
    means that the Gospel has to do more than account for "heaven and earth, and

all things visible and invisible," although it should do no less. The truth of the Gospel must also come through.

For a long time Christians had been able to ignore the truth question. Now that they can't, they have often sought to make the question irrelevant or to just get by with some assertions. The "triumph of the therapeutic" amounts to giving up on the truth question, and so does a "prosperity gospel." But many retreats to rigidly following a tradition and traditional ways will do just as poorly when they beg the question concerning truth, asserting it rather than arguing for it. "God said it, I believe it, that settles it" settles nothing. Neither does "I believe what the Church teaches." And platitudes like "You can't argue anyone into believing" or "It takes the Holy Spirit" are often just convenient excuses for ignoring the truth question.

This is a *robust* form of nihilism.

Normal nihilism means that we should *expect* others to be sensitive to the truth question and also to be inclined to dismiss our claims as just another story, just another set of values, just another way to cope with life. This is likely to happen even when we pay attention to truthfulness. It is all the more likely to happen when we don't. To be sure, in our nihilistic age, we should expect to find some for whom another set of values is just what they are looking for. A different and perhaps more congenial interpretation of themselves, their lives, and the world is just what they need. But, as my earlier mention of Christian and atheist bestsellers implied, this cuts in all directions—for the Christian, but also for the atheist, and the Muslim, and the Buddhist. So the truth question remains basic.

Dealing with the question of truth is not philosophical, in the sense that the right philosophical theory of truth is necessary. It is theological. Stanley Fish was correct to point out that "whatever theory of truth you might espouse will be irrelevant to your position on the truth of a particular matter, because your position on the truth of a particular matter will flow from your sense of where the evidence lies, which will in turn flow from the authorities you respect, the archives you trust, and so on."[23] For us Christians, the truth of our message and the truthfulness of our lives are found in and through Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as proclaimed by his apostles, as handed down in the Gospel, and as attested to by his Church.

3. The question of truth matters for evangelism because this question is central to the Gospel. In each of the canonical Gospels, the truth about Jesus is central to the account. For each of the evangelists, questions like "Is He the king of the Jews?" "Is He Israel's Messiah?" "Is He the Son of God?" "Is He the one come to redeem Israel?" "Is His word God's Word?" "Are His deeds God's deeds?" are the ones that Jesus prompts, that lead to the cross, that God answers decisively in raising Him on the third day. Christian life and witness will do right by the Gospel itself only as it does right by these questions and answers.

Constructively, this is the first requirement for evangelism in an age of normal nihilism. Put concretely, evangelism must be grounded in the proclamation of the

coming of the reign of the God of Israel over all creation through Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Son of God and the one whom God appointed as ruler and judge. The truth of this message is found in the first coming of Jesus. He came to Israel proclaiming this reign of God and inaugurating it in His signs and wonders. But He was rejected and crucified for His claims and His deeds. In other words, the truth of Jesus concerning Himself, His mission, and His God were denied. However, the God who sent Him raised Him from the dead. In this act, God vindicated Jesus and His words and His works. He proved the truth about Jesus. Jesus did not immediately complete His mission—He did not at that moment "redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21) or "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). Instead, He sent His followers out to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:18). And while much of Israel continued to reject Jesus as the Son of God and as their Anointed One, the word of Christ's reign and of His call to repent, receive forgiveness, and follow Him was proclaimed and believed among the nations of the world. And so it should continue. Evangelism, to say nothing of catechesis and dogmatics, includes more than this; but evangelism, especially in an age of normal nihilism, must not include anything less.

4. Some Christians may find this message "too much": too stark, too tribal, too apocalyptic. They may be right, but simply saying so begs the question. I would acknowledge that this account could be given differently, but I also would argue that the account given is reflected in the canonical Gospels (particularly the synoptics), affirmed by the preaching in Acts, confirmed in the letters of Paul (especially Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians), acknowledged in versions of the Rule of Faith, and consistent with the ecumenical creeds.

    I am more concerned, however, that such challenges arise because *non-Christians* will have trouble with the Christian message. One should be concerned with *how* one approaches others in evangelism. But to question or challenge this as "unhelpful" or "off-putting" to others is to indulge in nihilism itself.

5. Christians should seek to live faithfully according to the Gospel. As bearers of the dominant Western religious tradition for over a thousand years, Christians have much responsibility for today's normal nihilism. Their lives have done much to foster and promote the emptiness and meaningless of contemporary life, because they would not answer many questions in rich and coherent ways. Therefore, churches in an age of normal nihilism should strive toward fostering more faithful discipleship. Christians can be faithful witnesses only to the extent that they lead faithful lives. The Lord can and does work in many and various ways and in spite of our weaknesses and errors. But this is no excuse for ignorance, indifference, or error on the part of His people.

6. Faithfulness in all matters of life matters. However, for witness in our situation, perhaps the most significant will be in *valuing one's neighbor*. This is not a contradiction. In the first place, "value" itself is not the problem of nihilism, but living only by values is. In the second place, the problem of nihilism is that one

values things *for oneself*. Valuing one's neighbor, that is, "loving your neighbor as yourself," is not just different from living by values, but quite the opposite, and it reflects something very different from nihilism. To be sure, that reflection may go completely unnoticed. In that case, nothing is lost: the neighbor will have been served. But when it is noticed, it may prompt the question "Why?" And that will be an opportunity for evangelism in an age of normal nihilism.

Endnotes

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 7. In quoting from this work, I recognize that "*The Will to Power* is a dubious text for several reasons" (Rüdiger Bittner, "Introduction" to Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003], xi). But such doubts do not matter for my purposes.

[2] James C. Edwards, *The Plain Sense of Things: The Fate of Religion in an Age of Normal Nihilism* (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997).

[3] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 9.

[4] Examples of "values" are everywhere in the late writings of Nietzsche. The ones mentioned here come from this passage in *The Anti-Christ*: "The pathos that develops out of [a wrong and dishonest attitude towards all things] is called *faith*: closing one's eyes with respect to oneself for good and all so as not to suffer from the sight of incurable falsity. Out of this erroneous perspective on all things one makes a morality, a virtue, a holiness for oneself, one unites the good conscience with seeing *falsely*—one demands no *other* kind of perspective shall be accorded any value after one has rendered one's own sacrosanct with the names 'God,' 'redemption,' 'eternity.'" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §9, in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 120. Both *Twilight* and *The Anti-Christ* bear references to the "revaluation of all values," so what Nietzsche meant by "values" is clear in those books. See also "Critique of the Highest Values" in *The Will to Power* (83–257).

[5] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 5.

[6] Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1983), 21, 74, 90.

[7] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 14.

[8] Ibid., 12.

[9] Ibid., 13.

[10] T. S. Eliot, "'Ulysses', Order, and Myth," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1975), 177.

[11] Edwards, *The Plain Sense of Things*, 196. Space does not permit and the present purpose does not require a summary of the book, but it is thoughtful and thought-provoking consideration of religion after nihilism, and I recommend it highly to all readers of this article. I also recommend the more recent book on contemporary nihilism, *All Things Shining*, by Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly (New York: Free Press, 2011).

[12] Ibid., 45–46.

[13] Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Fate of Theism," in *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 24.

[14] Ibid., 16.

[15] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1970), 10–11.

[16] More has happened here than I have space to explain, but I will identify one important factor: the loss of authority in both church and civil realms after the Reformation and seventeenth-century religious wars. Claims of truth and rightness were freed from the authority of the divinely appointed rulers. New philosophical approaches to authority were tried, and Christian teachings were subject to new questions and criteria. More than their content was challenged; their nature was too. For a relevant discussion of this loss of authority, see Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). For more on the contemporary nature of doctrine, see George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

[17] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: The Uses of Faith after Freud* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1966, 1987).

[18] Ibid., 26.

[19] Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 162, 164. Smith had also found that American youth are largely very conventional in religion and follow their parents. See esp. 120–122.

[20] Ibid., 165.

[21] Edwards, *The Plain Sense of Things*, 51.

[22] C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 92.

[23] Stanley Fish, "Truth but No Consequences: Why Philosophy Doesn't Matter," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (2003): 390.

Dreaming of Bithynia

Bob Scudieri

Abstract: In thinking about how mission has changed since I served with the Board for Mission Services, it would be easy to say that the mission has not changed but the methods have. Some today are not sure. The "mission," when I was privileged to serve, was to bring the gospel into the entire world. Today it seems we see the mission as establishing Lutheran icons. Our leaders are well meaning. They know and love the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hopefully a conversation can occur around what it is the Lord of the Church is essentially calling us to do on His behalf so that "all can be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." That is the hope of this article.

I have been asked to reflect on how mission work is different today than when the Lutheran Society for Missiology was begun in 1992. That is a tall order, one which can bring a misstep or two from a path that is still being constructed. The work of the Lord's mission must constantly change in terms of strategy while remaining the same in terms of the goal: to make disciples, in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the world. I will try not to step too far away from that path.

When St. Paul was on his second missionary journey, one of his goals was to bring the Gospel to Asia, for instance, Bithynia. However, the Spirit of Christ prevented him from going into Asia—but opened a door for him in Europe (specifically, Macedonia). It would be some time before the Gospel arrived in Bithynia, but let us not forget that Nicea is in Bithynia—the location for the first ecumenical council that produced a creed that we still confess today.

In the same way, I see the Lord working in missions in the LCMS today. We all thought we were going in one direction, but the Lord had a different plan. The following thoughts are intended to illustrate the most significant changes.

It was 1991 when I was called to be the Area Director for North America for the Board for Mission Services (later known as LCMS World Mission). Doors were opening for cross-cultural mission work all over the world. Some wise people in the LCMS had decided that a few of those doors were in the United States.

In the late 1980s, President Ralph Bohlmann and Dr. Edward Westcott con-

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After serving in the parish and as district mission executive, in 1991 Bob Scudieri was called to implement the Synod's Blueprint for the '90s, an effort to reach all ethnic groups in North America with the gospel, changing the face of the Missouri Synod, a position from which he retired from full-time ministry on July 31, 2009.

vened a group of talented and experienced missiologists to consider what mission work could look like in the decade leading up to the end of the twentieth century. The report was called "Blueprint for the '90s." One important aspect of that plan was to treat the United States as a world mission field, importing some of the lessons learned overseas about cross-cultural mission work to home missions. Part of this was because of the large and increasing number of immigrants coming to the United States. As Dr. Westcott had described mission work, the Holy Spirit of God had created a "centrifugal" mission force that sent cross-cultural missionaries overseas—and that same Spirit was controlling a "centripetal" force that was bringing many people to the United States from lands where the Gospel could not be preached, allowing them to hear the good news of life through faith in Jesus Christ, many for the first time. These leaders also were in tune to the beginning of the decline of centralized mission groups in the United States, an implosion that continues to this day.

The iron curtain across Europe and particularly the USSR was crumbling. New possibilities for Gospel seed planting were opening all over the world. With this new vision, also in the U.S., in October of 1991, I was called to implement the Blueprint for the '90s in homeland missions.

In the spring of 1992, I accepted an invitation to attend a meeting of the American Society for Missiology in Techny, Illinois. While working through a sabbatical as a post-doctoral Research Fellow at Yale Divinity School in early 1991, I had been a resident at the Overseas Ministry Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut. I was blessed to meet many mission leaders, and it was there I met scholars who invited me to attend the meeting in Techny. Little did I realize this would be the place where the seed for LSFM would be planted.

I had been told by colleagues in St. Louis that I should be on the lookout in Techny for a professor from the Ft. Wayne Seminary by the name of Gene Bunkowske. Actually, no one called him Gene. It was "Dr. Bunkowske." The first night of the Techny conference I happened to be in the dinner line behind Dr. Bunkowske! We began to talk. He was very generous and alive with his ideas about mission. After twenty or so years in Africa, he was now heading up the mission department at the Ft. Wayne seminary. He was also in the process of directing an effort to begin a Ph.D. in missions in Ft. Wayne. Near the end of the conversation, I reflected to Dr. Bunkowske that there needed to be a way for those who study mission to collaborate more with those who were in the field doing the work. The next morning at breakfast he excitedly approached me and said, "I have it—a Lutheran Society of Missiology." I added only a slight change, suggesting a "Lutheran Society for Missiology."

When I returned, I shared the concept with my colleagues in the mission department who enthusiastically endorsed it. Allan Buckman, Dan Mattson, David Birner, and especially Glen O'Shoney, then Executive Director of LCMS World

Mission, all thought it was a great idea. Dr. O'Shoney gave energetic support to the formation of such a society and provided funds and a venue for the second meeting. The first meeting of the Society was in Ft. Wayne during the 1992 Seminary Mission Congress. At that meeting, Dr. Bunkowske was elected chairman and I was vice chair. However, because of the press of his responsibilities at the seminary in Ft. Wayne, Dr. B called and asked if I could take the chairmanship. I served as chairman for the next twenty years.

So much for the background of the start of LSFM. Let's just say our organization began at a time of tremendous opportunity with people well versed in the field of extending the Gospel across cultures. It was also a time when members of the LCMS were responding generously with their time, talent, and treasure to try and keep up with the doors to "Macedonia" that the Spirit of Christ was opening. At the same time, the way they were giving their resources was about to change.

Less and less were LCMS congregations apt to simply give themselves and their funding to a faraway bureaucracy. More and more they were taking initiatives as they saw the opportunity and need. The ministry changed over the eighteen years that I was privileged to serve in the mission department. It was the same for mission departments all over North America. Our approach to mission changed from using funds and volunteers that congregations gave to a central mission department to (1) developing lines for communicating obvious opportunities for sharing Christ in the U.S. and around the world and (2) providing a way for individuals, congregations, and other organizations to respond. Bithynia became Macedonia.

There are benefits and deficiencies in this approach. Someone else will have to study how effective it has been. Asking missionaries to participate in the funding of their mission has brought international missions closer to the local congregations, but this strategy took missionaries off their fields for longer and longer periods of time. More significantly, in many cases, the congregations were already supporting international work through various independent mission agencies. Only some of these agencies were Lutheran.

All in all, I believe LCMS World Mission became very good at the new way. And then things changed again.

I retired from LCMS World Mission on July 31, 2009. God brought in a new president of the LCMS with new ideas. For the most part, this has led to a ministry of consolidation. Longtime professional missionaries have been replaced by new missionaries who have a more conservative perspective and little practical cross-cultural missionary experience. Would this be Macedonia, another advance? Or, was it an attempt to go back to Bithynia, where the door had been shut?

We should realize that there is a history for doing mission work without professional missionaries. Without vast sums of money or a professional missionary clergy, in the face of a state that sought out and killed its leaders, early Christianity

grew past its Jewish heritage in the first three centuries, sinking roots into the non-Greek peoples of Egypt and the Latin-speaking people of the West. As the church historian Phillip Schaff pointed out, there were "no missionary institutions, no organized efforts in the Ante-Nicene age; yet in less than 300 years from the death of St. John, the whole population of the Roman empire which then represented the civilized world was nominally Christian."[1] The Holy Spirit can use whatever tools are at hand to accomplish Christ's mission.

At the same time, we dare not forget that an essential characteristic that makes such growth possible is sensitivity to the cultures of those with whom we seek to share the Gospel. Anything less is simply cultural imperialism.

The sainted Paul Heerboth, in a paper presented to LCMS missionaries in Japan in the early 1960s, makes this clear. Heerboth quoted Gerhard Uhlhorn to his fellow missionaries and to the leaders of the Japan Mission of the LCMS: "A church separated from the world around it is no universal power. The church has to gain a firm footing in the world, to enter into the natural conditions of life."[2] In other words, a respect for the culture of the people you are seeking to serve is an imperative.

Heerboth also decried the fact that the universal priesthood of all believers was gradually replaced by a hierarchical priesthood of the few. And he lamented, following Cyprian, that, as the church grew in numbers, love diminished in the "multitude of nominal Christians," and distress increased. "These notions began to influence and to obscure charity in ever-increasing proportion."[3]

From Paul Heerboth's perspective, the history of Christian mission work shows clearly that large sums of money and a professional clergy are not necessary for the Word of God to come alive in a culture. Of course, we can point to many cases in the past where those tools were used by the Lord to bring many nations to Himself, but those tools are by no means indispensable.

What, then, are the challenges and promises that face the LCMS in its desire to be faithful to the Lord's mission today? I would like to share my perceptions about this, building on an article that I wrote for a festschrift for Dr. Bunkowske some years ago.[4]

What direction should mission work take in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that allows us to enter Bithynia?

For a church body that considers itself to be evangelical, I believe that we in the LCMS live in an environment of fear. Our pastors are afraid. We say we preach the pure Gospel, but in too many instances, it is the law that governs how we treat each other. To be faithful to our calling, we will have to encourage entrepreneurs to experiment with new forms and strategies to reach the lost, those dying without Christ. An atmosphere of fear inhibits that experimentation. "Synod" literally means "walking together," but it is hard to walk the same road with a watch dog.

Many LCMS pastors live in fear of breaking the rules, of making a mistake and being accused of false doctrine. It seems the worst sin a pastor can commit is to make a theological mistake. We are not as much concerned about a pastor who ministers only to his congregation and ignores those around his church who are dying in their sins—whose congregation is declining even as the population of the neighborhoods around the congregation is increasing. Is there forgiveness for making a theological mistake? Can we discuss these things collegially before casting our heresy stones? We act as if there is no forgiveness for questionable theological ideas, while we ignore the sins of no-mission. Sorry to be so blunt, but this sin has brought judgment on our church body as we see more and more LCMS congregations close their doors in communities that, especially in inner cities, are missionally target-rich. Why are we so afraid of each other?

This is a spiritual issue—a "habitus" of fear can grip us and cause us to be more concerned with our own safety than with being faithful. Or, by the power of the Word, we can joyfully step out into our neighborhoods in faith to bring life and health to our neighbors. Many LCMS churches are doing that today.

Another challenge, as you may have guessed from what I have said above, is our need to come to grips with what it means to "be faithful." Among LCMS pastors, the phrase often means staying in line with our doctrine. Of course this is true, but as the late LCMS President Alvin Barry used to say, it is only half the story. We have to get the Word right, but we also have to get the Word out. Unless we are doing both, we are not being faithful. Scripture teaches this.

Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on faith. There Paul does not talk in the abstract, but names names. Abel, by faith, offered a greater sacrifice than Cain. Noah, before the flood, built the ark. Abraham went to a land unknown to him. Trusting the Lord to lead, he went by faith. And then, Abraham offered up his own son as a sacrifice—by faith. Moses is also an example of faith; instead of choosing to be raised as a son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses chose to be badly treated with the people of God. There are many more examples of heroes of the faith who risked all to accomplish the will of the Lord.

Jesus gives a fuller explanation of faith in Matthew 25:14ff. He describes a man going away on a journey who leaves his overseers in charge. To one he gives five talents, to another two, and to a third, one talent. When he returns, he asks for an accounting. The one given the five talents returns ten talents to his lord. And the lord's response? "Well done, good and faithful servant." The same accolade is given to the servant who had been given much less, two talents, but returned four to his lord. "Well done, good and faithful servant." But the servant who had been given one talent was afraid and hid his talent in the ground so it would not be lost. To him, the lord is unforgiving: "Depart from me, you worker of iniquity, into outer darkness." Fear made the third servant unfaithful. He preserved everything to protect himself—and in the process failed to benefit His Lord's purposes.

A while back I surveyed district presidents and the presidium of our church body and district mission executives on their understanding of what it means to be "faithful." In response to my survey, a Synod exec wrote: "On the church level, faith and faithful refer to adherence to the apostles' teachings as found in the Scripture." A district president eloquently wrote to me: "A steward is one entrusted by the owner to manage what is placed into his care. He manages on behalf of the owner and in keeping with the owner's directive and will (Matthew 25). When the steward functions that way, he is faithful to the owner. In the highest sense of faithfulness, it pertains to the Gospel and all who live in accountability to God." Of course, we all want to be faithful—and one part of that is to be *fruitful*.

This will continue to be the challenge for the LCMS in the years ahead. For more than four decades, we have been declining in the numbers of communicant members and in the number of baptized members. Does this mean we have not been faithful? How does fruitfulness intersect with faithfulness?

We might consider here a fourth servant—one who had been given one talent, who went out and did her homework—buying good seed to put into good ground. But then the rains do not come and the crop is lost. What do you think the Lord would say to her? We who live in forgiveness of sins know He would say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The key question is, "Are we doing all we can to bring in a harvest?" Is a claimed commitment to a truncated set of statements about Christian faith that make no commitment to making disciples of all nations the final measure of "faithfulness"?

The third challenge I perceive, besides the need to get past a culture of fear and to better understand what it means to be faithful, is specifically tied to the United States. The third challenge is to better comprehend that we in the U.S. live on a mission field.

In my eighteen years as head of national missions for the LCMS, I saw remarkable progress in the way districts and congregations began to recognize that the United States no longer has a Christian culture. We are a mission field. The most recent executive directors of LCMS World Mission understood this: Ed Westcott, Glenn O'Shoney, Robert Roegner all were passionate about treating the United States as a country that was a mission field. We understood that there has been a rampant growth in secularism. (The fastest growing "religious group" in the United States is the non-religious, moving from 7% of the U.S. population in 1990 to 20% in 2014.[5])

We also saw that the demographics of the country were changing. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that 50.4% of the nation's population younger than age 1 on July 1, 2011 was something other than single race non-Hispanic white. The children younger than five-years, the little ones whom Jesus takes in his arms and blesses (Mark 10:13ff), were 49.7% the children of minority groups in the U.S.[6] One

wonders how many of these children have found their spiritual homes in Lutheran churches and Sunday schools. These trends will continue and the non-Hispanic white population, the population of the present Lutheran church in the U.S., will become a minority about 2050. The fertility rate must be about 2.1 for a population to maintain itself. The fertility rate for whites and Asian Americans is about 1.8 and so these two groups will decline as a percentage of the U.S. Population. Black Americans have a fertility rate of 2.1, and so they will maintain themselves at their present number. Hispanics have a fertility rate of 2.4 and will be responsible for most U.S. population growth.[7] Why are so many immigrants coming to the U.S., and why so many from non-Christian countries? Many of us believe it is because we still, at least at this time, can share the Gospel freely. The United States is "target rich" in mission opportunities. We see the new immigrants as "mission gifts" from God.

It was because of the view that the United States was a growing mission field that (after I retired) the Synod in convention reorganized the LCMS missions department into two separate entities: a foreign and a national mission organization, with two separate boards. Many LCMS mission leaders had come to the conclusion that this was necessary in order to give as much attention to winning souls in a rapidly secularizing United States as was given to reaching the lost outside our borders. In this regard, I am concerned about the direction the new LCMS administration has taken so far.

The new LCMS administration has divided its understanding of the ministry of the International Center into three areas: Witness, Mercy, and Life Together. It listed ministries at the Synod level under each of these broader areas. Under "Witness" is listed one entity, our mission work outside the United States. Mission work in the United States (church planting, evangelism, church revitalization) is placed under "Life Together." As Luther might ask, "What does this mean?" It might mean we are planting new missions mainly for Lutherans, specifically for LCMS Lutherans. While this is not in itself a bad idea, it is truly only a small part of the mission challenge we face.

I have also read that our new leaders believe that the decline in LCMS membership is due to people in the LCMS having fewer children. That is certainly short-sighted to say the least. The population of the United States is growing. It is true that white, English-speaking families are having fewer children—the same is true for African American families. But Hispanic, Asian, and African immigrant families are having large numbers of children. I suppose if our mission is only reaching white and African American people, our leadership is correct that having more children is an answer. But should we not be sharing Christ with the children and adults who speak Spanish and are from Asia and Africa? Are we so eager to go to Bithynia that we are blind to the open door to Macedonia?

In the recent past, our outreach to new immigrants in the United States looked very much as it did outside our borders. Now, it appears that working outside our borders may look more like how we formerly worked in the United States.

Ten years ago, as mission staff worked closely with both seminaries, things had begun to change. New programs were developed to bring leaders from ethnic communities into programs to prepare them for ordination into the holy ministry while taking into consideration the reality of the cultures they were from. They created programs of theological education that could be carried on locally, so that the fragile work of a new mission would not be disrupted by the departure of an ethnic leader, one who spoke the language and understood a culture that most of us do not. A local ordained pastor served as a mentor, helping prepare the ethnic leader for examinations at each stage of ministerial education designed by the seminaries. These programs of the seminaries have brought great blessings and could easily be seen as a "Matthew 25, First Servant" harvest. But will these efforts continue?

In my opinion, the time of having two residential seminaries is over. The best education can take place using the internet and local mentoring. We used to talk about "forming" pastors; that meant every pastor had not just the same theology, but the same practice. This is impractical and unworkable and not necessary in a pluralistic society like the United States.

The LCMS's changing place in American society requires the sale of both seminaries and the building of a state-of-the-art distance education seminary with a great library and rooms on campus for some students to spend some time interacting with a faculty that is internet savvy. This suggestion will not receive much (if any) support today, but twenty-five years from now will seem prophetic.

Will we understand the great number of new immigrants as people who require mission, and will we recognize the concurrent need for mission strategies used mostly outside our borders? Will we appreciate the centripetal mission opportunities God gives us? I pray it will be so. If we understand that we live on a mission field, we will give support to innovators and entrepreneurs who will take risks to bring the Word of Life to more people. If we do not recognize this change, we will be less inclined to innovate and to risk.

The fourth and last challenge I want to raise is the challenge we face working together. Specifically, I am referring to the ability of congregations to work together with districts and for districts to work together, both with other districts and with the national church body. Too many times congregations, districts, and the national administration "go it alone," making the same mistakes, not learning from one another, not helping one another, concerned only for their benefit and not for mission as a whole. I do not say this lightly. It is a matter of utmost concern, partly (and only partly) because the more we work together as local, regional, and national entities the

more effective we will be in encouraging and supporting innovative and entrepreneurial mission work.

After retiring from my call as the Associate Executive Director for the United States on July 31, 2009, I began a ministry as the Mission Equipping Pastor at Faith Lutheran in Naples, Florida. During the last three years and seven months, we have taken mission trips to Vietnam and Belize; held a fund-raising dinner for the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Palestine; and hosted a dinner for one hundred and fifty people for an Orthodox Metropolitan from the country of Georgia.

The mission trip we made to Vietnam in 2011 was in cooperation with LCMS international missions. Our church was blessed by the help we were given. We were not originally invited to go to Vietnam—it was the idea of our members to go there. Our congregation wanted to use its resources to help people in countries where the Gospel was not known. The funds we were able to generate would not have been raised to send to a faraway mission agency. We also have strengthened a program we call "Mission of the Month." Each month we highlight and raise funds for a specific mission field; six are in the U.S. and six are international. Because our members have significant resources of time, talent, and treasure, they often bring back ideas for missions for us to support. Because of this, there has been great fervor for sending the Gospel around our state, our nation, and our world. However, our people want to take advantage of the technological innovations in travel and communication to interact directly with people in these areas. We have found much joy and shared significant resources with many deserving ministries. The most help the International Center can give us is to help us make those personal and immediate connections.

At the local level, there are people who say that they do not need to go to church, that they can be Christian on their own and worship God in a beautiful sunset. We know how hard that is, and we work to include these people in the Body of Christ. There are congregations that want nothing to do with their circuit or their district. They are the less for it—not just for themselves, but the circuit and district lose out on their learning and support. There are districts of the LCMS that would rather not have anything to do with the national church body—and participate in a minimal way, or not at all, in support of a national mission effort. We are all the less for that. The districts lose because they do not get the benefit of learning from other districts. The national effort loses because there is a lack of alignment and thus less impact on mission needs in the United States and beyond. And the national Synod, at times, turns a blind eye to the needs and goals of the districts, duplicating or counteracting the work done at the regional level.

Is it possible for us to regain a sense of unity and common purpose, where we recognize how much we need one another? Could we come to a place where we recognize the real enemies are the devil, the world, and our flesh, and not our brothers and sisters in Christ?

We need to learn from one another and to encourage one another to innovate and to take risks. From the Synod president to the district presidents, the pastors and congregations, there is zeal to share the love of Christ. This is not so surprising, since wherever the Gospel is being preached the Spirit is moving the people of God to extend His Gospel farther and farther into the world.

The door to Macedonia is open. The temptation to stay in Bithynia is still with us. But the Spirit of Christ is alive. He loves Bithynia too. Centuries later, the Creed of Nicaea was written in Nicaea, a city in Bithynia. We still work under the guidance and blessing of the Spirit of Christ. Even when new directions challenge, as I am sure they challenged Paul and Silas as they considered entering Europe, we are not alone. We are the Lord's messengers, sent to bring His perfect Gospel into all the world.

Endnotes

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[4] Robert Scudieri, "Transformational Mission in the LCMS: Challenge and Promise," in *Missional Transformation: God's Spirit at Work* ed. Mark Press and Eugene Bunkowske (Bloomington, IN: Arthur Hauge, 2012), 99ff.

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Barriers to the Gospel:
Approaching Contextualization
from a Confessional Lutheran Perspective

Mike Rodewald

Abstract: The term *contextualization* has undergone a series of definitions based upon differing theological understandings of the Gospel in mission. This article explores a confessional Lutheran understanding of the Gospel message in Gospel proclamation and what this means for defining contextualization from a confessional Lutheran Christian perspective.

Introduction

In Liberia, a new Western missionary was giving an account of Noah and the Ark to members of the Bandi ethnic group. One listener asked, "Why did God also destroy the animals?" The Westerner explained through a translator, but it was apparent that the people didn't accept what he said. They talked among themselves. Finally, one local man stood up and said, "The animals were included because the groundhogs eat our rice!" Immediately all shook their heads and agreed—man is created the foremost creature and so the animals suffer with man.[1]

Contextualization seeks to encapsulate in a single word the process of proclaiming God's Word so that it may be heard in all its fullness by those within a different cultural context, often a challenge to the Church in mission. Failure to understand the implications of God's Word may occur, not because the Gospel is irrelevant, but because the messenger inadvertently misleads or is misperceived. This should not be. As the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16), the Gospel, and thus Christianity, is translatable. It is able to be "equally at home in all languages and cultures, and among all races and conditions of people."[2] In the above episode, though the Western missionary wished to explain with his words the same concept as the local man, he largely failed in his answer. Not until the answer was "translated" by one who glimpsed what the missionary was trying to explain was it given meaning in that context and accepted by all.

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In Search of a Definition

The term *contextualization* was first brought to theological prominence in the context of the World Council of Churches. A 1972 Theological Education Fund report stated, "renewal and reform in theological education appears to focus on a central concept, *contextuality* [italics mine], the capacity to respond within the framework of one's own situation."[3] The report advocated this contextuality as a response to "the widespread crisis of faith and meaning in life; the urgent issues of human development and social justice; the dialectic between a universal technological civilization and local culture and religious situations,"[4] and when authentic, "is always prophetic, arising always out of a genuine encounter between God's Word and His world, and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment."[5]

This initial coining of "contextualization" emerges from the premise of the Bible as the audible Word of God that inspires faith in man. Contextualization is realized as a meaningful response within the framework of one's own particular situation and, as summarized by David Hesselgrave, focuses on "communicating the Gospel, not so much in terms of what God in Christ has done in past history in order to procure our salvation, but more in terms of living out the implications of the 'Gospel' of whatever we determine that God is saying and doing in our moment in history."[6] Ultimately, this "prophetic" notion of contextualization finds a home in varied liberation theologies throughout the world.

This first understanding underwent meaning-shift as those with other theological suppositions began using the term and infusing it with new meaning. Early evangelical definitions reflected a need to make the Gospel meaningful through translation, expressing the task in terms of "making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation"[7] or "the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate culture and within their particular existential situation."[8] Others defined contextualization as "the process of conscientization of the whole people of God to the hermeneutical claims of the Gospel,"[9] and "properly applied [contextualization] means to discover the legitimate implications of the Gospel in a given situation. . . . Implication is demanded by a proper exegesis of the text."[10]

While these definitions arise from the supposition that the Word of God is unchanging, perhaps as a reaction to the earlier focus on implications within the receiving culture, they tend to focus on the action of the messenger. Later evangelical efforts, though more comprehensive, continue subtly in this vein. Hesselgrave and Rommen wrote of contextualization as,

> the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as it is

put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts. Contextualization is both verbal and non-verbal and has to do with theologizing; Bible translation, interpretation and application, incarnational lifestyle, evangelism, Christian instruction, church planting and growth, church organization, worship style—indeed with all of those activities involved in carrying out the Great Commission.[11]

A definition by Darrell Whiteman expresses contextualization similarly as one's "attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture."[12]

All of these definitions, when taken as a whole, capture much of what we understand contextualization to be. Yet each falls short because they focus on the action, either of messenger or hearer, as the central foci of contextualization. For a proper understanding of contextualization, we must look from a different perspective; for, as Hesselgrave rightly observes, "our theology will determine how we understand and go about the contextualization task and how we evaluate the contextualization attempts of others."[13]

A Confessional Lutheran Perspective

Though the term *contextualization* is found neither in Scripture nor in the foundational faith statements of the Lutheran Church, *The Book of Concord*, *The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, the precepts for contextualization are seen in both. The model for contextualization is Jesus, the Son of God, the Word made flesh and living among us—God's sending His Son to humankind in a way that He be made known to us in all of His glory (Jn 1:14, 18). This incarnational understanding of God and His Word is foundational for contextualization, and the early apostles proclaimed the Gospel under this understanding of their missionary task: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21). God's message is for all (Gal 3:28), and its ability to be transferred out of Jewish cultural practice is seen in Acts. In chapters 10–11, Peter is confronted with the understanding that the Gospel is for all, an idea that he twice rejects. Only on the basis of a third repeat of a vision could Peter finally accept that God accepts people of other cultures and races. In Acts 15:1–18, Paul and Barnabas confront those who teach that circumcision according to the Law of Moses was a necessary requirement for believers to gain salvation. Again, Peter bases his defense on the action of the Holy Spirit as evidence that no one is discriminated against when it comes to the call of the Gospel. God is the author and initiator of mission, and He and His Word are for all people.

The precept of God and His Word as foundational for mission has been implicitly understood throughout the history of the Lutheran Church. Luther wrote that, "God has always been accustomed to collect a church for Himself even from among the heathen."[14] And again, "Therefore God gathered a church in the world not only from the one family of patriarchs but from all nations to which the Word made its way."[15] Though the Gospel is not a human message (Gal 1:11–12), it does not act magically.[16] Rather it is the Triune God calling all to Himself through His Word. As recorded in the Lutheran Confessions, "No one has ever written or suggested that people benefit from the mere act of hearing lessons they do not understand, or that they benefit from ceremonies not because they teach or admonish but simply *ex opere operato*, that is, by the mere act of doing or observing."[17] The Gospel must be communicated to others (Rom 10:14–17), and it is in the communication of the message that we find ourselves facing a missiological dilemma.

While God's Word and action is universal, our actions are not. Cultural barriers sometimes cause a misperception to the message even to the point that the message is no longer perceived as pointing to Christ, but away from Him, as Paul and Barnabas find in an encounter with the Lystrans recorded in Acts 14. In this biblical text, an event of healing is misconstrued by those with the local worldview exhibited through their use of the Lycaonian language that Paul and Barnabas did not understand. Reactions to the event were shaped by an ancient legend—recorded by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*—relating that two gods had previously wandered around the region in human form and been rebuffed by many. An elderly couple took pity and gave from their poverty to care for them. Later, inhospitable citizens were punished and the elderly couple rewarded by the gods.[18]

It is not surprising that the Lystrans imprinted their own understanding upon the healing. They did not want to be guilty of not recognizing the gods again. For the majority of Lystrans, the event of healing did not point to Christ. Rather they deified Paul and Barnabas.[19] Though Paul and Barnabas operated as messengers faithfully communicating a pure Gospel, that message was not accurately conveyed to those who held a very different spiritual worldview. In Gospel proclamation, what is desired to be proclaimed is not always proclaimed. As Charles Kraft rightly observes, "It is the receptor who has the final say concerning what is communicated."[20]

Bible translation pioneer and anthropologist William Smalley notes that as we translate, communication is always something either more or less than what was contained in the original message.[21] Thus we must consider what happens to the Gospel message as we proclaim through cultural boundaries. As such, it is useful to look at Nida's one-, two-, and three-culture communication models[22] to see how communication distortion occurs.

In the single culture model, communication begins when the source (messenger) encodes a message for the receptor (hearer). The receptor decodes the message and

encodes feedback, thus enabling the source to know how the message is received. Both the original message and subsequent feedback are susceptible to "noise"—interference causing the message to be not fully received. Understood this way, even within a one-culture setting, communication is an imprecise process as the encoded message is frequently decoded imperfectly. Chomsky's example of a grammatically agreed surface structure with ambiguous meaning—"flying planes can be dangerous"[23]—demonstrates possible ambiguity even among members of the same culture and English mother tongue.

The communication process becomes more complex in the two-culture process that occurs when one interprets Scripture. The original message occurs within a particular biblical context. The message is "heard" by the contemporary exegete across a time and cultural boundary. In spite of his or her best efforts, it is not impossible that the exegete imperfectly decodes the ancient message. Subsequently he encodes his version to pass to another who again decodes imperfectly.

Three-culture missionary communication is even more susceptible to distortion. The exegete from one culture interprets the message encoded within historical biblical culture, encodes his understanding of the biblical message, and passes it to receptors from another culture, who decode it according to their own understanding, an understanding which is certainly shaped to some extent by their cultural worldview. The situation becomes even more complex when the members of the third culture "hear" the biblical message directly through their own study and interpretation of the biblical text and find that their conclusions differ from the Gospel version communicated to them by messengers from another cultural context.

An article in *Newsweek* magazine corroborates the difficulty of cross-cultural communication. Scientists are surprised at how deeply culture seems to shape the brain. Studies in the relatively new field of cultural neuroscience show striking differences in the active neural circuits of the brain when people from different cultures are provided the same stimuli. Information is processed in different ways. One study noted that when East Asians were shown complex, busy scenes, they perceived them with areas of the brain that process holistic context. In contrast, Americans (English-speaking Asians included) used parts of the brain that recognize individual objects. Another researcher concluded in a study comparing Asian and Western math computation, "One would think that neural processes involving basic mathematical computations are universal, [but they] seem to be culture-specific."[24] Of course, the cross-cultural missionary has always experienced the fact that culture shapes how a society's members look at the world. We cannot be surprised that science corroborates it.

Understanding the possible distortions inflicted by human boundaries within the communication of the Gospel message is paramount to understanding the importance of minimising distortions by proclaiming the Gospel in a form sensitive to context. The account of Paul in Athens (Acts 17:15–34) is an excellent example.[25] Paul used

a local point of understanding, the unknown god, as an entry point for hearers to come to a new understanding of the unknown God. Though distressed at the large number of false gods, he did not begin by publicly opposing them. Rather, first he talked with local Jews and converts from Judaism and in the marketplace with others including Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. He took the opportunity to establish relationships and find out more about the local worldview and culture before he presented the Gospel publicly. At the meeting on the Areopagus, Paul used culturally appropriate forms. He appealed to the Athenians' religiosity and philosophical disposition by telling them what they did not know. Some understand the implications of the message. The violent scenes of Lystra are not repeated. While some ridiculed his message, some wanted to hear more and some believe (vv. 32–34).

This is not to say that those who proclaim the Gospel must do so perfectly. The recognition that God is the initiator of mission precludes this. The power of the Gospel is not in what we do but in the action of the Holy Spirit in those who hear (Rom 1:16; 15:18–19). Reflecting this, the Lutheran Confessions state, "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the Gospel."[26] Additionally, "we may know that the Word and sacrament are efficacious even when they are administered by wicked people"[27]—a powerful witness to the notion that mission is God's work not ours.

In this understanding of God and His action in the world, there is implication for what our view of contextualization must be. As God's action, we acknowledge the Gospel purely retained, proclaimed, and heard within the community of believers—the true Church—as the Holy Spirit works through proclamation of the Word and the sacraments to call and sanctify.[28] Yet, scrutinising our communication of that Gospel to others, we do well to attend to statements from missiologists such as the South African David Bosch: "there is no such thing as a pure Gospel isolated from culture."[29] Our part adds nothing but distortion to the message. As its messengers and hearers, we are its corruptors. Our efforts in contextualization cannot be viewed as proactive—making the Gospel more meaningful, or even wrapping it in a different package. The Gospel is already for all. It only needs preserving from our distortion. Thus, contextualization properly approached is simply that of preserving God's pure Gospel message so that, in its proclamation, the power of the Gospel is free to work in the receptor's heart and incorrect understanding does not limit the benefits of the Gospel to the receptor.

We note that there is a danger to such a concept if misunderstood. The process and purpose of such contextualization is not to preserve static form, but rather to let the Word be free, so that, as Luther colourfully wrote of translation, the "boulders and clods" do not hinder one from the message and "the Word may have free

course."[30] As Luther says, it is a matter of "relinquishing the words," no matter what emotional attachment they have for us, and "rendering the sense."[31] It is for all within the true Church to "feel and think the same, even though we may act differently."[32]

Though preservation of the Gospel through contextualizing rightly begins with God and His unchanging Word, the process also integrally includes man and his changing world. This requires not only looking at the context of another for the purpose of passing the message, but also continuing to look at one's self and one's own context in light of the same Gospel. The messenger, and thus the Church, is challenged as God's Word calls in ways that confront one's own suppositions. Missiologist Lamin Sanneh writes, "Africans began earnestly to inquire into the Christian Scriptures, which missionaries had placed into their hands, to see where they had misunderstood the Gospel. What they learned convinced them that mission as European cultural hegemony was a catastrophic departure from the Bible. . . . they went on to claim the Gospel, as the missionaries wished them to, but in turn insisted that missionary attitudes should continue to be scrutinised in its revealing light."[33] Whether Western, Asian, Latin, or African, there is constant need to scrutinize one's own version of the Gospel. Hesselgrave cautions those operating out of the Western Christian context: "[W]e err when we (perhaps unconsciously) allow the results of centuries of contextualizing in the Western world to determine the way in which [Western missionaries] present the biblical message to our target culture audiences."[34] We err equally when we fail to consider history, since historicity is always a part of one's context. In the end, we realize that contextualization is as much for the faith of the messenger as for the faith of the hearer and, at least for confessional Lutheran Christians, can never be a realized goal but remains always an ongoing process.

Conclusion: a Confessional Lutheran Understanding of Contextualization

Thus are set the parameters for defining a confessional Lutheran Christian understanding of the contextualization process, which may be stated as follows:

The Gospel message is universal and for all. God has chosen us not only as receivers of this message, but also as its messengers. True contextualization, therefore, springs from the action of the Gospel message upon the heart of the messenger and preserves God's universal message to others through such scriptural means as the messenger has at his disposal. It is initiated and accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit through discovering and lowering the barriers to the Gospel that man erects through his sinful self and sinful world.

Contextualization is not a tool to be used in the pursuit of efficiency. If it were so, mission and Gospel proclamation would be mere method. Rather,

contextualization is God's action in the world through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit's calling and involving us in His purpose and using us as means to call others. It is God and His Word, involving both messenger and hearer, who, in faith given, preserve and express that Word throughout the world's many peoples and cultures. We proclaim and hear the Gospel imperfectly. Yet God calls us anyway and works in our hearts and minds, and so we witness to what He has done for us through His Son. As messengers, we understand ourselves as integral to the message, but also as its corruptors. Thus, we constantly seek, by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, to remove barriers and corruption and preserve that message so that the Word may have free course.

Endnotes

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[3] *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund* (Bromley, Kent England: The Theological Education Fund, 1970–77), 20.

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efficacious to one's own purpose and used to influence for good or ill in daily life (R. W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* [London: The Hambledon Press, 1987], 41, 249.).

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[26] AC. V in Kolb, *The Book of Concord*, 40.

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[29] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 297; also see Lesslie Newbiggin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1986), 40.

[30] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship" in *Vol. 53: Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. J.J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1965), 14.

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[34] Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 203.

Properly Dividing:
Distinguishing the Variables of Culture from the Constants of Theology
or
It's Not How You Look, It's How You *Think* You Look

Jack M. Schultz

Presented to the Multi-Ethnic Conference
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
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Abstract: This article is an anthropological investigation of cultural forces at play within our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and their impact on our institution. It is an examination of the complex entanglement between a theological understanding and a cultural context. The article includes observations about our current demographic profile, our stated ideas about ourselves and what we'd like to be, and discussion of what needs to be done for us to become that which we say we'd like to be.

Introduction

Thank you for the kind invitation to address a topic of critical importance for our church as we consider our future responses to changing national demographics and our proclamation and expression of the changeless Gospel of our Lord.

My vocation as an anthropologist is the investigation of cultural forces that circumscribe and permeate our human experience. These forces are usually invisible or hidden. They are hidden because they are assumed, unexamined, and therefore go unchallenged. Anthropology brings to awareness everyday practices and beliefs that may appear natural and neutral but, in effect, privilege some actions and assumptions

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while marginalizing and subordinating others. These usually invisible forces influence and shape even when they are unrecognized or denied. These very human forces are instrumental in the maintenance of culture and are at play in each aspect of a culture, including its religion. It is the consequences of these forces that I hope to expose today for your consideration as we seek ways to be more effective in our ministries.

I maintain 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. I speak with no rancor. I, like you, am striving to fulfill my calling, my vocation in the service of our Lord. I also am trying to understand how best to communicate the truths of God that we have been entrusted with. It is my purpose, as it is yours, to communicate our Lord to others, as He is. I am one of you. But I might not speak like you do.

I see my primary goal here today as giving you additional ways to think about the relationship between culture and theology as you fulfill your calling of speaking the Word of God to ethnically diverse communities. I seek to provide you *additional* ways to think, not new, or different, as if there is something wrong with your way of thinking up till now. Rather, my goal is to provide additional cognitive tools in your repertoire that you will have available as you interact with diverse peoples.

I've entitled this address, *Properly Dividing: Distinguishing the Variables of Culture from the Constants of Theology, or, It's Not How You Look, it's How You Think You Look.*

This image is a photo of a picture that hangs in our bathroom. It was a gift from another family, the Sopers, to ours. Rod Soper is a colleague of mine at Concordia University, Irvine. He and his family, like me and mine, moved from Oklahoma to California to take positions at Concordia. Our families arrived within weeks of each other, and we all went through together the process of assimilating and acculturating into our new surroundings. The adjustment from the Midwest to the "Left Coast" was gradual. (Culture shock is not only an international phenomenon.) Our Sunday afternoons were often spent together at the beach where many of the pains of adjustment were mollified by the waves,

the breeze, and that abundant sunshine. While we sat on the shore, we were regularly astounded by the beach attire and the confidence, if not brazenness, of the adults of all shapes and sizes who squeezed themselves into the smallest of swimsuits, so that more than once I remarked wryly, "remember, it's not *how* you look, it's how you *think* you look." Rod's wife, Dessa Soper, immortalized that observation in this picture that hangs in our bathroom.

This morning I'd like to frame my address around that image as a metaphor. The important feature here is that what we *are* often contrasts to what we *think* we are. There is often a disconnect between how we view ourselves and how we actually are. And embedded in that dynamic is some notion of what we'd like to be. In our attempts to better understand how theology and culture interact, I would like to consider with you these four points: What we, as LCMS Christians, think we are; what we *also* are; what we'd like to be; and what might be necessary to get us to that ideal.

What We Think We Are

When answering the question "Who Are We?," whether it be at the "About us" link on the official Web site of the Synod, in a congregation's new member packet, or in most of our personal endorsements of the church body, our usual characterizations of who we are as the LCMS are *doctrinal*. We define ourselves by our doctrine. We are quite deliberate about theology. We submit to the ultimate authority of the Word of God and insist that all our beliefs and practices conform to that Word. We are a gathering of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, committed to following faithfully. And I will not dispute such a characterization.

But what *else* are we? Even as we are believers gathering around the Word of God, we are not *only* simply and purely responding to and expressing that Word.

What We Are

What else are we? Drawing from a variety of social scientific and historical sources, here's "how we look to those sitting on the beach": We are one of more than 250 autonomous Lutheran church bodies, 21 of which are found in North America.[1] We are "the eighth largest Protestant denomination in the United States"[2]; "A branch of conservative evangelicalism or fundamentalism"[3]; "biblically literalist,"[4]; "moderate, formalistic…not given to religious innovation or demonstrativeness… [We tend] to produce sober, serious, industrious people, relatively tolerant but supportive of the political status quo."[5] We are "a Christianity…of assorted rightist tendencies."[6] We are "overwhelmingly Republican."[7] More broadly as Lutherans,[8] we are "remarkably unremarkable" and "pretty ordinary," "unobtrusive, inconspicuous."[9] We are "quite ordinarily American."[10] In other words, in virtually every demographic variable Lutherans are right in the middle, average: our income[11]

and education levels,[12] our marriage and divorce rates,[13] and our levels of home ownership. We are an "ethnic church," made up primarily of descendants of German and Scandinavian immigrants.[14] Indeed, "it is difficult to separate what is Lutheran from what is northern European ethnic."[15] We "remain a predominately [sic] white denomination; less than 2 percent of Lutherans in America are other than European descent"[16]; and even with our efforts in this direction, Lutherans are identified[17] as having the greatest proportion of white members (95%) and as the least racially diverse mainline Christian denomination in the U.S.[18]

In consideration of these descriptions, it is clear that we are not "*just* a collection of believers gathered around the Word." We are a *kind* of people. The LCMS is doing things that attract some *kinds* of people while repelling other *kinds* of people. As I observed previously,

> We…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 30 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 the "mispronunciations" of Sy'nod and Con'cordia often mark those who were raised outside our church. We have a set of shared and unexamined institutionally supported assumptions. We have our gate-keepers 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 lay in its concealed ubiquity and assumed structures. And 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. [19]

There are social forces at play in our denomination. It is not, as many of us understand, that we are "just regular" and the "others" are the ones with those accretions of culture that need to be left at the narthex door. We are heavily influenced by our ethnic history, our American experience, and our ongoing reinforcement of our ways of thinking, acting, and believing. We are so enmeshed in our way that it is sometimes difficult for us to distinguish our unique traditions from

our Lord's universal directives. Our use of pipe organs, the call process, and Overtures and Resolutions in National Convention are not "simply what the Bible says." We should not require others to accommodate us in these things.

What We'd Like to Be

What we'd like to be is aptly defined by the announcements for this conference: "multi-ethnic" and acknowledging "diverse cultural expressions." The one demographic variable that we are not "average American" is our racial and ethnic makeup. While approximately 70% of Americans are white, 95% of Lutherans are. What are we doing that attracts some *kinds* of people, while repelling other kinds? How does our LCMS "culture," that is, those hidden human forces, perpetuate an institution that produces, attracts, and reproduces a *kind* of people? Certainly, we see ourselves as part of the Church universal. Shouldn't we expect our congregations to reflect or exemplify that universality? Shouldn't we expect to have racial, ethnic, linguistic, economic, and political diversity within our congregations? Perhaps we have, like most Americans, too closely identified a Christian expression with a social and political agenda.

What Will It Take?

I have been attempting to demonstrate that our church body is heavily influenced by human, or cultural forces. These forces shape us, though they are usually unrecognized. These forces are, to a large degree, controllable, when they are recognized. But these human forces are difficult to discern and, at times, to distinguish from a theological position. "Properly dividing" the Word of God from a culture-specific understanding of that Word may be easily granted heuristically, but determining specific locations is difficult as it may be contended that there is no "cultureless" accounting or understanding of anything. However, we must attempt it and continuously critique the creeping effect of contemporary culture into our proclamation and response to the Living Word. For whose Church is it? It is our Lord's, not ours, no matter how comfortable we are with our way of "doing church." The LCMS is a group of like-minded people with a particular way of "doing church." We are not unique in this. All denominations are "cultured." They are each local and contextual iterations of the Christian faith. Our doctrinal formulations are not from nowhere, nor everywhere, but from somewhere. All understandings are situated. Our understanding of and responses to the Gospel are related to time and place; they are contextually manifested. If we hope to become multi-ethnic, we must acknowledge this reality and seek to mitigate the dominating human forces influencing our church body and make social changes that will make us more inviting and less repelling, and that will remove obstacles that prevent others from "walking with us."

Historically, people coming to the Christian faith have brought with them aspects of pre-Christian culture. Many non-essential cultured features accompany conversion. Many non-biblical elements have become "Christian," and some biblical elements have been abandoned. Christians have redeemed Christmas trees, mistletoe, Easter eggs, and even the name Easter. Voting has replaced the casting of lots for the selection of church leaders. We have replaced sackcloth and ashes with black garments for mourning. Fasting has become an optional and marginalized Christian practice. We have concluded that the admonishments for women's hats and the holy kiss are cultural and we have dispensed with them. We have embraced chivalry, democracy rather than monarchy, institutional hierarchies, flowcharts, and marketing. With great reluctance, we have acknowledged that English can be as faithful as German for doctrinal discourse. Albs, cinctures, clerical collars, pews, pipe organs, and handbells have been sanctified. Drums and guitars are still being negotiated. (That was supposed to be funny). Need we consider woman suffrage in congregational voters' meetings, or the appropriateness of life insurance?

When we bring others into our fold, we expect them to make the adjustments and accommodate us. Many of those expectations for accommodations are "ethnic," or "cultural." *We* have made use of non-biblical elements. Might not practices of, or symbols in, other ethnic communities likewise be converted for Christian use? Might not, for example, eagle feathers or sacred tobacco in a like manner undergo a conversion? Could these non-Christian symbols be reinterpreted by a faithful community to be given a place within an authentic Christian response to the Word of God?

And who gets to decide? Who gets to decide which of the practices get in and which need to stay on the other side of the sanctuary doors? I must go back to the social sciences to remind us that in any institution there is differential access to power. Status quo has its own inertia and trajectory. We who are in the LCMS institution have chosen to be there. We have self-selected for our participation. Those who have self-selected to remain in this institution have, consciously or not, conformed their behavior to belong. We have chosen to "walk together." We are like-minded people. That is one of the functions of religion, any religion. And while I am quite sure our Lord walks together with us, I am equally certain that we are not the only ones He is walking with. I don't believe He has a preference for which language we speak as we walk together, and I'm quite sure He does care about the *kinds* of people who walk with us.

Can we speak the Word, trust the Spirit to work, and recognize that there will be a variety of authentic responses? Can we discuss and disagree (although I would prefer the term "negotiate") even while we *walk together*? Can we live within the tension created by taking both our theology and culture seriously? How much discomfort might we be willing to endure to become that which we would like to be, indeed, know that we *should* be?

Some years ago, I served at the Lutheran mission on the Navajo reservation near Window Rock, Arizona. There the Navajo Lutheran converts worshiped using the old red hymnal with its archaic formal English (particularly difficult for English-as-a-second-language speakers), they gathered after services for potlucks which included casseroles and Jello salads, and they had frequent ice cream socials even while most of them were lactose intolerant. I had to ask myself, what were we converting them to?

Again, there is no such thing as a culturally neutral church or a culturally neutral theology. 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. 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.

How to Do It

It is naïve to assume that religious conversion involves only the exchange of one theology (or liturgy or system of morals) for some other. It is reductionist to see religion only, or primarily, as doctrine. For Christians particularly, we understand that the life of faith is not simply a way of thinking or believing, but it is a *life* of faith. Life involves eating and drinking, wearing and doing, earning and building. And each of these components is cultural. Conversion requires a supporting socio-cultural milieu if it is to be sustained.

I will propose two directives that can guide our "becoming that which we'd like to be." The first is that we embrace the tensions and contradictions between our theology and our cultures. We must take these both seriously. If we take *only* our theology seriously, we have the tendency to retreat into enclaves, to barricade ourselves behind bunkers (or fortresses, if you prefer), and become, in effect, an ethnic group of like-minded and behaved people and mistake that like-mindedness for faithfulness. If we take *only* culture seriously, we will so relativize and water down the Word of God that our proclamation will be little more than empty assurances that "God loves you" and admonitions to "be good to one another." But by taking both seriously we, in ongoing dialectic with our other-cultured brothers and sisters, press our theological understandings to ascertain how these eternal truths are contextually relevant and negotiate (read, e.g., "worship wars) authentic Christian responses to the Living Word of God.

Converts express and live a faith in an actual life, speak a specific language in a given location, and do particular things. A theology detached from these activities is

abstract and irrelevant. How can we as ministers of the Gospel and shepherds of God's people acknowledge or provide culturally appropriate avenues for the tasks of a living faith? The answers must be found in the tension between theology and the local culture. They require the missionary/pastor to "properly divide" and allow local culture to be expressed while preserving theological integrity.

One should expect tension between the local congregation and the institutional requirements of the Synod. The local pastor/missionary must be an advocate for the people in his congregation and their specific needs. He must engage in the tension between the local and the national.

We must also properly divide the needs of Gospel communication from the needs of the human institution (or, in our theological categories, the right- from the left-hand kingdoms). Our institution supports Gospel, it is not the Gospel. Our institution is not what needs to be preserved and shared. The institution, while necessary and indispensable, is but the vehicle for the communication of the Word of God. The Word of God is not a theological system, a liturgical foundation, or a cultural tradition. The Word of God is the person Jesus Christ—living and active among his people.

As communities change around our established, urban and suburban churches we must decide either to do as we have always done, entrench ourselves and invite others to join us if they'd like, or we must be willing to consider adapting our practices, ethos, to be more accessible to the new neighbors. Whose church is it?

How much diversity can we tolerate? Can we properly divide ethnic diversity (with its concomitant language and practice differences) from theological diversity? Can we accept the one without compromising on the other? The answers will come as a result of the ongoing dialogue between the local expressions and the national institution and the responsible negotiations in which each will allow and each will insist. These adjustments must go both ways, each responding to the admonitions and warnings of the other. It is here that we will prove the "proper division" between the constants of theology and the variables of culture.

The second directive is to speak the Word of God to individual persons, not cultures. God created individuals; He seeks individuals, not culture groups. Culture is just a context that the individual inhabits. As theologian George MacDonald elegantly observed, "by his creation, then, each man is isolated with God; each, in respect of his peculiar making, can say, 'my God;' each can come to him alone, and speak with him face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend. There is no massing of men with God."[20] "There is no saving in the lump. If a thousand be converted at once, it is every single lonely man that is converted."[21] We must move away from a mindset of ministering to "Hispanics" or to "Native Americans" and toward an orientation to the individual, who is, of course, a bearer of a culture. But look at the person first and primarily as a person, not as a representative of some ethnic or social

group. We must engage with individuals, not types. And as we get to know these individuals with their diverse backgrounds and proclaim the Word clearly to them, we'll begin getting what we need for the "proper division."

Conclusion

Please do not take my appeals here to be some sort of criticism of our theology, or some backhanded urge to change or broaden it. Rather, I have attempted to demonstrate that even our understanding of unchanging theological truths is situated. We must view from somewhere, and culture provides a framework for viewing. Culture is a context; there is no contextual-less situation or person. The context, a culture, must not be feared or denied. It is but a situation in which individuals live and work, and where the Spirit of God brings life and works faith. Suggesting that one cultural context can better embody the Gospel is much the same as suggesting that one language better speaks the Gospel. Might not any language be used to speak the pure Gospel, and might not any language be used to speak an authentic response to that Word of God? And might not non-biblical, but not anti-biblical, practices be converted for Christian expression?

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Back to my framing analogy: We may, after having taken a thorough look at ourselves, decide that we are just fine in our favorite beach attire. This is who we are, why fight it? We like who we are, we're comfortable with who we are, and we could do worse. This is tempting and has been the more common response. The habitual is easier. And if this is the course we choose, we will remain an ethnic enclave while we slowly realize the consequences.

It has been my goal this morning to provide you with some additional ways of thinking about who we are and who we'd like to be; about the complex entanglement between a theological understanding and a cultural context; about how our Gospel expressions and communications are seldom a simple rehearsing of biblical truths. But of course, I speak as an anthropologist—looking at the knowable human forces, those empirical dimensions. And I readily acknowledge that the Spirit will move as and where He will, even to the confounding of the social scientists.

You all, each, will be deciding what to do with these concepts. You all, each, must discern the differences between our Lord's Gospel and our contextual understanding of it. And by properly dividing, we will have a more realistic view of ourselves and a recognition of what changes could be made. May God grant us the resolution to do the necessary tasks to become that which we acknowledge that we could be, indeed, should be.

Endnotes

[1] Samuel Nafzger, "An Introduction to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," 1994, Messiah Lutheran Church, posted June 18, 2011, accessed June 10, 2014, http://www.messiahlutherangermantown.org/messiah-resources/lutherans/nafzger/.

[2] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks 2010), 182.

[3] Mark A. Noll, "The Lutheran Difference," *First Thing,* February 1992, accessed January 17, 2014, http://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/01/004-the-lutheran-difference-25, 8.

[4] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 182.

[5] Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market* (Ithaca, NY: Paramount Market Publishing, Inc., 2006), 130.

[6] Noll, "The Lutheran Difference," 15.

[7] Ibid., 3.

[8] Most of the researchers investigating Christian denominations do not distinguish the different Lutheran church bodies but rather treat "Lutheran" as a single entity.

[9] Noll, "The Lutheran Difference," 2, 6.

[10] Ibid., 9.

[11] Ibid., 2.

[12] Kosmin and Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market*, 192.

[13] Ibid., 193.

[14] Noll, "The Lutheran Difference," 4.

[15] Kosmin and Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market*, 130.

[16] Kathryn Galchutt, *The Career of Andrew Schulze, 1924–1968: Lutherans and Race in the Civil Rights Era* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2005), 7.

[17] Kosmin and Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market*, 236.

[18] One report distinguishes the ELCA from LCMS (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life/U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Race by Protestant Denomination, June 2008, accessed February 26, 2014, http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/table-ethnicity-by-denomination.pdf). In this report, the ELCA is identified as being 97% White, and the LCMS as 95% White. Kristen Koenig and Rick Marrs are acknowledged for locating this data.

[19] Jack M. Schultz, "Dealing with Theology Culturally," *Missio Apostolica* 20, no. 2 (November 2012): 161–62.

[20] George MacDonald, *The Complete Works of George MacDonald* (O'Connor Books, 2010), Kindle edition.

[21] Ibid.

Wilhelm Loehe and the Chippewa Outreach at Frankenmuth

James M. Kaiser

Abstract: Even though he was only the pastor of a small insignificant church in Germany, Wilhelm Loehe was an innovator in missions. This article will briefly examine Loehe's background in order to identify some of the influences that helped develop his unusual missionary motivation and that led to the founding of the Frankenmuth mission settlement as an outreach to the Chippewa Indians. It will also evaluate some of the missionary methodologies used in the outreach to the Chippewa in order to identify some of the factors that contributed to the ultimate failure of the settlement in achieving its mission.

Introduction

In 1845, thirteen German Lutherans left the small village of Neuendettelsau in Bavaria on a novel missionary enterprise. They traveled to North America to establish a settlement for the express purpose of sharing the Gospel with the Chippewa Indians in Michigan. This settlement, named Frankenmuth, was unique, since its designer envisioned that it would not only support the work of a missionary in reaching out to the Native Americans, but that the settlers themselves would be a witness to the Chippewa through the life of their Christian community.

Besides the original concept of the settlement, the venture was unusual in another way. The leadership of the Lutheran church in Germany was rationalistic at that time and not at all disposed towards missionary outreach. The initiator for both of these novelties was the pastor of a small Lutheran church in Neuendettelsau, Wilhelm Loehe.

How was it that the pastor of a small village church was able to go against the prevailing trend of the time? What was his motivation? What methods did he use, and how effective were they? This article will attempt to provide some answers to these questions.

Wilhelm Loehe's Background

Rev. Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe (known more simply as Wilhelm Loehe, or Wilhelm Löhe) was the inspiration and the driving force behind the establishment of

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the mission to the Native Americans at Frankenmuth. Loehe was a Lutheran pastor in a small village in Bavaria, but he was certainly not the typical German Lutheran pastor of his time.

Loehe was born in 1808 in Furth (near Nuremberg). Loehe had six siblings (five sisters and one brother) and his parents brought them up in a Christian home:

> His upbringing in Fürth was partly typical for a middle-class home at that time, but partly atypical. The faith and piety of the Löhe family was, in contrast to the prevailing Enlightenment faith, influenced by sixteenth-century Lutheran Orthodoxy as well as seventeenth-century pietism. Löhe's father died while he was still young, but Löhe's mother was firm in her conviction that he should have the opportunity to study theology.[1]

She sacrificed to make it possible for him to receive a good education and then to go on to theological training. After his graduation from secondary school, he began his theological study at Erlangen in 1826.

The prevailing theological movement of his day was rationalism. After the age of the Enlightenment, rationalism had spread through the Bavarian Landeskirche (territorial church). As a result, the Bible had come to be read according to the standards of human reason, so that Christianity was regarded as little more than valued moral teaching.[2]

Loehe did not embrace the prevailing rationalism. Instead, he was influenced by two of his professors to embrace an active Christian faith. Christian Krafft, a Reformed pastor, and Karl von Raumer, a natural scientist, were especially important for him. Both were members of the "revival movement," a counterpoint to rationalism.[3]

Loehe's interest in missions began "when he attended the lectures on mission history of Johann Christian Krafft (1784–1845) in 1826. In 1827, Löhe established a Mission Association to support the Basel Mission, and between November 1829 and April 1830 this circle read the book of Heinrich Loskiel on the history of the Moravians' mission to the Native Americans."[4] This exposure to mission work among Native Americans created an interest in him that did not die out and was influential in his later decision to reach out to them.

Loehe finished his theological studies in Erlangen and, in 1830, did very well on his exams. Church authorities praised his high marks with the comment, "Capable of high ecclesial offices." However, his trial sermon was not well received. It was evaluated as too "mystical" by the rationalist examiner, in spite of the fact that his exposition was based entirely upon the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Such an evaluation of his sermon meant for Loehe that from then on he would be judged as a "mystic and pietist," a serious setback for his career in the church. The church authorities never really trusted Loehe after that evaluation, and they did not want him to serve in an influential position, but rather in an obscure rural pastorate.[5]

After completing his five-year vicarage, Loehe was unable to find employment in any of the large urban churches to which he applied. Finally, in 1837, he accepted the position of pastor at Neuendettelsau. Geiger describes it as: "Neuendettelsau, located southwest of Nuremberg, was at that time an unknown and remote village."[6] Schwartz gives a more animated description: "It was so decrepit that he (Loehe) exclaimed during his first visit there, not knowing that it would be his home for 35 years until his death, 'Not dead I would want to be in that dump.'"[7]

Despite his early misgivings about the village, Loehe was an active and energetic pastor. He was a powerful preacher. He reformed the liturgy and changed other practices of the congregation in order to remove the influence of Rationalism and revive the congregation's spirit.[8]

> Alongside his congregational work in Neuendettelsau, Loehe undertook intensive theological study. The revival movement out of which he came concerned itself very little about confessional boundaries, and it now appeared to him [that] too much [was] determined by feeling[s]. Through his experience and through the study of Luther's works and the confessional writings of the Lutheran church, he arrived at the conviction that the faith must not rest solely upon feeling[s] but rather finds its strength in the "promises of God's Word," which stand "outside us." The Lutheran church and its confessions became increasingly important to [him].[9]

This was the setting for Loehe's launch into mission work and helps explain his growing interest in launching something that was distinctly Lutheran.

Loehe's Prior Involvement in Mission

Loehe's interest in mission, which had begun in seminary, continued. He

> continued to look for opportunities to be involved in mission, but was largely frustrated. In the mid-1830s, he considered traveling to the Middle East to survey mission opportunities there, but the plan fell through for financial reasons. Löhe was also prepared to support a missionary in the East Indies, but this plan was never realized because the instigator, Johann Merkel, died. During the 1830s, Löhe satisfied his desire to evangelize by being involved in at least a couple of tract societies.[10]

He supported the ecumenical Basel Mission until 1835, when the Church Missionary Society, an Anglican mission society that employed Lutheran seminary graduates, dismissed a Lutheran missionary in India over a doctrinal dispute. Loehe "became more and more interested in supporting and sending Lutheran missionaries from Bavaria."[11] As he reflected on his concept of mission, he came to the conclusion that "the commandment of Mark 16:15 ('Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation') is addressed not to a particular mission society but to the whole church."[12]

An outlet for Loehe's desire to be directly involved in missions materialized in 1840, when Friedrich Wyneken, a German pastor serving in America, wrote an appeal for workers to assist the German emigrants in America. Wyneken explained that the Lutheran church in North America was in desperate need of pastors and others willing to serve the German immigrants there.

Almost immediately, Loehe wrote an article that generated missionary enthusiasm beyond anything he had foreseen, the beginning of Loehe's missionary activity.[13] Although unintended by Loehe, the article brought in a flood of donations to help meet the need. The problem of how to use the funds was solved when two craftsmen volunteered to be trained to go and teach in America:

> Loehe housed both in Neuendettelsau and undertook their education as teachers and chaplains. Already in July 1842 they were ready to travel to North America. There arose for both the possibility of further preparation at the [Lutheran] seminary in Columbus, Ohio. The synod of Ohio was so enthused with both of these "emergency workers," as Loehe called them, that it requested fifty more students for their seminary, who would already have a similarly good preparation. Thus, Loehe built up from these beginnings a "Mission Preparation Institute." Support for this institute and many other activities was borne by the "Society for Inner Mission in the [Spirit] of the Lutheran Church" … founded by Loehe and his friends in 1849. Loehe called the work among the emigrants, who were baptized Christians, "inner mission" in contrast to "outer mission" among the "heathen."[14]

Loehe sent many more workers and these men were influential in the development of Lutheranism in America. Many of them helped to form The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the United States.

This involvement with what he called "inner mission" did not cause Loehe to forget about "outer mission." He was still concerned about Native Americans and felt a responsibility to reach out to them:

> He noted that they had been driven out from their traditional homelands and that in some places terrible atrocities had been perpetrated against them. He expressed the thought that even if Lutherans had not participated in these activities, they should still accept the responsibility for what their Protestant brethren had done. One could say, Löhe wrote, that "what Protestants had been responsible for, Protestants should correct and pay for. One could justify this sentence by saying: 'Indeed, German Protestants have not taken that responsibility upon themselves, but all the churches which emerged out of the reformation nonetheless have something in common.' One could acknowledge the responsibility of another as one's own."[15]

Loehe was motivated by compassion for the lost, but he did not see that as the ultimate reason for being involved in mission. He felt that the ultimate reason for carrying out mission was to be obedient to God's command. Ratke summarizes Loehe's views on the motivation for mission:

> It is good to have compassion for the heathen, and it is good to reach out and share the fellowship and community we experience with others. But these reasons are penultimate. The most important reason for Christians to be active in mission is because *God* commands it. God commands that we love our neighbors as ourselves. God commands that we reach out and draw into the household of God those who do not yet know about genuine community.[16]

The Frankenmuth Mission

In 1844, Loehe developed a plan that brought together his ideas of Christian community and outer mission. He proposed to send a group of Christians who would form a Christian community among or near the Native Americans. This community would support a missionary and also be a witness itself to the Native Americans through its conduct:

> In the instructions which Loehe drew up for [Georg Wilhelm Christoph] Hattstaedt (1811–1884) before the latter's departure for America (1844), it was evident that the former was thinking of the Indians and, more, that he was seeking a means of combining the activities of the Inner Mission among the Germans with those of missions among the North American aborigines. Would it not be possible, he asked, for a minister of a German Lutheran congregation to be likewise a missionary to the heathen? Could not Christian community life serve as a model to those ignorant of or unaffiliated with Christianity? Preaching and Christian practice could be made to function jointly, could they not?
>
> Ever mindful of the hazardous plight of the Lutheran church incident to the German diaspora and eager to set up a Christian community which by conduct and life would show the Indians "how beautiful and good life with Jesus was," Loehe and his friends conceived the idea of founding a mission colony in North America either among or in the neighborhood of Indian tribes.[17]

While many Germans were emigrating to North America at that time in order to escape poverty and to make a better life for themselves, the group selected to form this new colony was different. They volunteered and were accepted because of their desire to help carry the Gospel to the Native Americans. Twelve local residents from Neuendettelsau and nearby Rosstal volunteered and were accepted:

These colonists, young, vigorous, and unmarried, except for one couple, Loehe had known for years. Want and poverty did not drive them from their fatherland. In fact they clung with genuine love to their homes…. Spiritually and ecclesiastically they far surpassed the majority of emigrants. During the winter of 1844–1845 the members of this party met on Saturday evenings and Sundays at Neuendettelsau to discuss matters relative to the founding of the colony and to prepare to face the problems which were likely to confront them.[18]

Friedrich August Craemer, who had been teaching German at Oxford, heard of Loehe's plans and volunteered to be the pastor/missionary of the colony.

While working to select and train the colonists, Loehe also worked to find a suitable site for the mission colony. He corresponded with Friedrich Schmid of Ann Arbor, who led the Lutheran churches that had formed the Michigan Synod. Schmid made a trip to the Saginaw Valley and selected a site for the colony on the Cass River.

The group traveled to Michigan in 1845 and founded the town of Frankenmuth. Craemer functioned as their pastor and as the missionary. He opened a school in Frankenmuth to teach the children of the Native Americans and traveled widely in order to establish preaching stations in their villages.

In 1846, Loehe sent a second group of about ninety people to Frankenmuth. He complained about the large number in this group, since he felt that many of them were not properly motivated by the missionary cause. Later, three other colonies were also founded in the area: Frankentrost, about six miles north of Frankenmuth, in 1847; Frankenlust, twenty-two miles north of Frankenmuth, in 1848; and Frankenhilf (called Richville today), about nine miles northeast of Frankenmuth.[19]

These settlements were successful in that the German communities grew and survived. But they failed in their primary mission as an outreach to the Native Americans. Ludwig cites several reasons for their lack of success:

While the immigrant communities flourished, the mission to the Native Americans was not a success. As one may expect, there were some problems unanticipated by Löhe: The colonists knew nothing of the Native Americans' appearance, behavior, culture, or language. Moreover, the Native Americans were already leaving the settlement areas in search of better hunting grounds away from the cleared lands of Europeans. Efforts to change their nomadic habits and to "Germanize" and "Lutheranize" them were not very successful. Thus, in Frankenmuth, for instance, only about thirty-five Native Americans were taught and baptized.[20]

Evaluation of the Missionary Methods

In this section, the missionary methods used by Loehe and the Frankenmuth colony will be evaluated in an attempt to learn from what was done. Both positive and negative methods, attitudes, and actions will be listed. The following are some of the positive factors in the Frankenmuth outreach:

1. Loehe connected mission with Christian community. This could be an important factor to consider in reaching out to cultures where community is valued much more highly than individualism, and the support of a community of believers is important. The use of a community is also useful in its function of providing encouragement and support for a missionary.

2. Loehe selected people with the proper motivation to carry out the mission. He looked for those motivated by the Gospel, not just by a desire for adventure or financial gain.

3. Before sending them, Loehe provided training to the group in theology and discussed how things would operate when they were "on the field."

4. Loehe coordinated his efforts with Christians already in the area. He used them to help select a suitable site and tried to connect his work with theirs.

5. Craemer met with local chiefs in order to explain the purpose of the mission and to gain their support and cooperation:

> Among the first contacts, one occurred which inspired the colonists with some hope for the success of the mission. It was the first visit of chief Thouas, a sober and intelligent man. With him was an interpreter from his own tribe, one who had learned English in a Methodist mission school at Fort Gratiot. The two had breakfast with the colonists and discussed the proposed Indian school which the latter were about to institute. In this school, Craemer said, the Indian children were to receive instruction in English and in religion through the mediation of an interpreter. On his part the chief promised that the children of his tribe would attend this school. [21]

Greenholt, reporting on a different visit, illustrates that these visits were also necessary to clear up misconceptions that the Native Americans may have had about the mission:

> When Craemer explained his purpose in coming, the chief manifested slight interest. The reason for this, Craemer said, was that when the chief once visited Frankenmuth to interview the pastor he received the erroneous notion that if he were to become a Christian he would have to sit at home all day and study. Such a life, asserted the chief, would kill him. The wife of the chief

> inquired about the report current that her children would be dragged away into strange lands if they went to Frankenmuth.[22]

6. Craemer remained dedicated to the mission in spite of only limited success:

> Gradually, as a result of pastor Craemer's many visits to the Indians, he succeeded in setting up three main preaching stations which he endeavored to serve at least once a month. One writer says that a trip to the Pine River Indians alone required a whole week.
>
> In order to learn the Indian language and to preach the gospel to the Indians Craemer did not shun heat or cold, rain or snow, dangers [in the wilderness] nor did he decline to live in the tents and huts of the Indians or to eat with them. Yet, he learned, as did the majority of the missionaries, that, while the Indians listened quite patiently to what was said, they refused to be perceptibly influenced by it. On the other hand, the Indian parents frequently did let their children attend the school in Frankenmuth.[23]

7. Craemer translated some Scripture and other materials into the Chippewa language:

> One of the first things he aimed to do was to provide reading materials in the native tongue. For this task the German had to be translated into English and then into the Chippewa forms. With the [help of an] interpreter Craemer produced an Indian translation of the Gospel of Matthew and a small hymn book which also contained the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, several collects from the Common Prayer Book and some good songs.[24]

There were also a number of negative factors which ultimately outweighed the positives and contributed to the failure of the mission:

1. The training which the colonists received did not include anything about other cultures. They therefore held to the prevailing beliefs of that time which said that European culture was both superior to the culture of the Native Americans and that it was closely tied to the Christian message—this was how Christians should live. Greenholt gives some of Craemer's views on this:

> Under such circumstances it seemed urgent that a church should be built just as soon as possible. With a church the missionary would have more opportunity to discipline the Indians and correct the habits of which they did not approve. He believed that it would be easier to insist that the men refrain from smoking, that they dress

in the European fashion and that order be preserved, if there were a church.[25]

2. In operating the school, Craemer practiced extraction from Native American culture, instead of trying to indigenize the message:

> Craemer purposed opening a school at Frankenmuth to which the children of the tribes would be invited. He aimed to have more control over the lives of the Indian children than would have been afforded by having the children simply during the hours of instruction. He thought it would be harmful to have the children remain with their parents.[26]

3. The Native Americans were somewhat nomadic and were already leaving the area around Frankenmuth to find better hunting grounds away from the cleared land of the settlers. As a result, they did not have much contact with the mission community itself, and whole idea of using a fixed settlement as the model for outreach was not well-suited to their way of life.

4. Instead of cooperation, there was competition between the Lutheran outreach to the Native Americans and that being done by the Methodists. This often led to one side criticizing the other in the attempt to influence the Native Americans.

Since the Chippewa were leaving their area, in 1848 the Frankenmuthers helped to establish a mission station farther north, named Bethany. Here missionary Eduard Baierlein lived with his family, ministered to the Chippewa, and attempted to persuade them to settle on the mission station. This venture also failed, and Greenholt summarizes the reasons for the failure:

> The reasons why the Bethany mission failed after twelve years (1848–1860) of effort might be summarized thus: the difficult task of keeping in contact with the Indians due mainly to their roaming habits; the futility of all attempts to interest the men; the failure to make impressions by using meaningless theological concepts; the advent of the white settler; the machinations of the trader and vendor of "fire-water"; the competition of the Methodists; the desire of the Indian primarily for material benefits; the attachment to native customs; the evil influence of the white men's behavior; the Indian's feeling of the superiority of his race over all others; the almost continual need of an interpreter; and the establishment of a Chippewa Indian reservation in Isabella County.[27]

Conclusion

Wilhelm Loehe was a visionary who had a true heart for missions. His family was influential in developing his faith, which was the basis for his eventual

involvement in missions. His actual involvement was greatly influenced by the teaching and example of two of his university professors. He, in turn, motivated many others to be involved in mission and helped create ways for them to do so.

Although there were many positive aspects of Loehe's efforts and the Frankenmuth missionary settlement in their outreach to the Native Americans, it ultimately failed because of the lack of understanding of and respect for the Chippewa culture. This misunderstanding led them to use a fixed settlement to reach out to a nomadic people and to a policy of extracting the converts from that culture in order to "Christianize" them by teaching them European culture.

Endnotes

[1] David C. Ratke, "Wilhelm Löhe and his Significance for Mission and Ministry," *Word & World* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 137.

[2] Erika Geiger, "The Biography of Wilhelm Loehe: Insights Into his Life and Work," *Currents in Theology & Mission* 33, no. 2 (April 2006): 87.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Frieder Ludwig, "Mission and Migration: Reflections on the Missionary Concept of Wilhelm Löhe," *Word & World* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 158.

[5] Geiger, "Biography of Wilhelm Loehe."

[6] Ibid.

[7] Hans Schwarz, "Wilhelm Loehe in the Context of the Nineteenth Century," *Currents in Theology & Mission* 33, no. 2 (April 2006): 98.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Geiger, "Biography of Wilhelm Loehe."

[10] David C. Ratke, *Confession and Mission, Word and Sacrament: The Ecclesial Theology of Wilhelm Löhe* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 139.

[11] Ludwig, "Mission and Migration," 161.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ratke, "Wilhelm Loehe and his Significance," 138.

[14] Geiger, "Biography of Wilhelm Loehe."

[15] Ludwig, "Mission and Migration," 159–60.

[16] Ratke, *Confession and Mission*, 143.

[17] Homer Reginald Greenholt, "A Study of Wilhelm Loehe, his Colonies and the Lutheran Indian Missions in the Saginaw Valley of Michigan" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1937), 63.

[18] Ibid., 69.

[19] Ludwig, "Mission and Migration," 164.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Greenholt, "Study of Wilhelm Loehe," 163.

[22] Ibid., 171.

[23] Ibid., 173.

[24] Ibid., 178.

[25] Ibid., 207.

[26] Ibid., 103.

[27] Ibid., 204.

"A Bishop's House Church–Luther's Thoughts" Some Mission Truths Regarding Missional Communities

James D. Buckman

Abstract: The Church in the first three centuries was a House Church community. A living example is the basilica of Santa Pudenziana—the oldest church in Rome. This basilica is literally an expansion of the home owned by a Christian family who lived when Constantine made our faith the religion of his empire. This House Church was also the residence of Pope Siricius. The Church today seems to almost frantically thrash about in search of a way forward. I suggest we consider when Christianity was persecuted; and reflect on the approaches of Paul and Peter as framed by our understanding in the Confessions—after all, the Church grew explosively in spite of those harsh conditions.

What is the *Missio Apostolica* today? It is the same that it has always been: to bring the *peace* of God that is found only in His Son's atoning death and resurrection, through the *process* of God the Holy Spirit's working through Word and Sacraments, using the *people* of God, both those already known to us and those in whose hearts and minds the Holy Spirit has preceded us and prepared ahead to do good works.

The *Missio Apostolica* is about *mission*, not *management*; and there is a difference. Mission is the messy midwife of church birth, always done in fear and trembling over the awesome nature of the task entrusted. Circumcision decisions are made in part, in context (Acts 15:2; Acts 16:3).

Today's context in the United States calls for a strategic, long-term evaluation of how the church does *Missio Apostolica*: 4,000 congregations are started annually in the U.S., but 7,000 will close; we simply must look beyond a "brick and mortar" definition of Church.

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The U.S. Supreme Court, which once commented in the case of Church of The Holy Trinity vs. The United States, "this is a religious people. . . . This is a *Christian nation*,"[1] today pushes our nation in the direction of homosexual marriage, thwarts efforts to protect the unborn, and has legalized the coveting and taking of our neighbor's property if it can be proved that this is advantageous for tax revenue.

It does not take an in-depth look at the Bible to find all sorts of statements that would qualify in certain people's minds as "hate speech." One only wonders when churches will be forced to perform unbiblical marriages or face legal action. The percentage of people interested in attending Sunday morning worship declines rapidly among the youngest in our country, and the postmodern, atheistic, evolutionary mindset is indoctrinated through tax dollars among the largest percentage of school-going children.

Someone once said, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, but expecting to get different results." Jesus said, "*Every teacher of the law is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom, old treasures as well as new*" (Mt 13:52). God has the treasures sufficient for even this day—even in our context. As we look and ask, "How do we do the *Missio Apostolica*?", let us firmly and completely trust God.

I found this quote from Luther in his commentary on Philemon very interesting:

> In Colossians 4:17, Paul calls Archippus the bishop of the city: "Say to Archippus," who was the bishop of the Colossians and himself a citizen of Colossae. Use the proper title for each person… The bishop is joined by his wife, the church….
>
> *And the church* [*in your house*]. Here you have Archippus and the church. He was most likely a rich townsman. But I believe that *the house was a place for prayer and preaching*. He deserved to be called a fellow worker, since he supported an entire church. Undoubtedly there were several churches, different houses in different cities, where ten people who had someone like Archippus would gather. Philemon, as well as Archippus, is surrounded by prayers, by flaming words, and by fires.[2] (emphasis added)

If memory serves, Paul was an apostle and did engage in *Missio*. As our Commission on Theology and Church Relations wisely quoted from the Formula of Concord, "the actual intention and meaning of the Augsburg Confession should not and cannot be derived more properly and better from any other place than from Dr. Luther's doctrinal and polemical writings."[3]

Luther calls Archippus a "bishop"; he says that Bishop Archippus personally led House Church worship and that there were *many* House Churches in these cities. The *Missio Apostolica* was/is planting House Churches.

The *Missio Apostolica* of sharing the Gospel must intentionally focus on planting new worshiping communities. Today, as we witness a sea change in our culture and country, we need to get back to our first love: planting worshiping communities. Look back before Constantine, all the way back to Christ. More than one person has said that the Church experience in this century will look more like the first century than the last century. The church in the first century was a House Church community.

There are high schools in New Jersey where over sixty languages are spoken in the homes of the students; these diaspora students live within five miles of their school. Today, there are more people in our country who live in the urban and suburban areas than in the rural areas. Our population is increasingly more concentrated. (This is a good thing if you like evangelism; you can get to people more quickly.)

Luther believed that worship should be offered in the language that people prayed in. We must have a *Missio Apostolica* that facilitates the planting of Word and Sacrament communities in the prayer language of the people we are trying to reach. As I read through Luther's Works for this paper, I was very glad to see that we have some good reflection regarding this already in place—some of which I have quoted here, the rest of which you will be able to download from our website— www.HouseChurchPlanter.com.

As we look at our context for *Missio Apostolica* today, and we consider the role of missional communities in our efforts, I submit these mission truths for your review:

1. The Church must also happen beyond the walls of our church buildings.

"Greet also the church that meets at their house." (Rom 16:5)

"Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha *and the church in her house*. After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read *in the church of the Laodiceans* and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea." (Col 4:15–16) (emphasis added)

"You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house." (Acts 20:20)

"The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." (1 Cor 16:19)

"He will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household." (Acts 11:14)

"She and her household had been baptized." (Acts 16:15)

When you look at these passages, it is obvious that the Church that Jesus planted was a Church that met in homes. It is equally obvious that Jesus' instructions to the Church were to go and do likewise. The phrase "House Church" is not a church growth technique; it is Scripture. Constantine unintentionally may have put House Church out of fashion in his desire to help, but the eagle of government is flying in a different direction these days.

> Accordingly, this is what Jacob says: "This place in which I am sleeping is the house and church of God." Here God Himself has set up a pulpit, and He Himself is the first to preach about the descendants and about the uninterrupted continuance of the church.[4]

> "A disciple of the apostles of Jerusalem or Antioch came to Rome and preached faith in Christ *in a few houses*; or, as was usual at that time, some Jews living in Rome, like Aquila and Priscilla, etc., went to Jerusalem for Easter and Pentecost, learned the faith there, *and brought it home* to their relations, both Jews and Gentiles in Rome. I am led to this by Romans 16, wherein St. Paul greets many saints in Rome by name, although neither he nor St. Peter had come there yet, for Aquila and all the Jews were driven from Rome by Claudius, . . . Acts 18 [:2], and yet were greeted first.

> Now this is nothing for the Roman church to be ashamed of."[5] (emphasis added)

Good Lutheran thinking goes like this: Most of the time, the issue is not either-or but both-and. Most of the time, there is merit in both sides; one thinks of Law and Gospel for example. The two must *both* be there. Church must happen both inside *and* outside of the walls of our church buildings; even as faith must be held dearly in our hearts *and* heard decisively from our mouths.

Unfortunately, we have often looked at the texts cited above mainly as *proofs* instead of as *pictures*. Sadly, we all too often turn to these texts as proofs of how to rightly think about faith but miss the fact that these texts are pictures, moving pictures of faith coming to life and being delivered to unbelievers. To be sure, doctrine is derived from these texts; but these texts were written to communicate the dynamic process whereby the Holy Spirit brought faith into the world. Let's not miss the forest for the trees.

In our pastoral formation process, missions are historically relegated to a subset of "practical" theology, when missions are really the mountain peak—the *summit*, not a subset—which the church strives for, and everything else serves as reliable tools for this journey. Missions and management are two different things.

Look at those texts again. Do you see the *picture*? Do you see the *Missio Apostolica*? Close your eyes, and let your mind picture what is happening in these texts: Paul's coming to a stranger's house; being welcomed; meeting friends, family, neighbors and community leaders; sharing the Gospel; praying; fellowshipping;

ministering to needs; singing; baptizing; instituting the Lord's Supper; setting apart the overseers of these churches that met in homes.

Take a good look; this is the picture of Christ's bride. This is the *Missio Apostolica*.

Luther speaks clearly of this picture:

> Jacob saw this, his descendants also saw it, we too, and all who are now the church or will be the church after us see it, namely, that the church is the house of God which leads from earth into heaven. *The place of the church is in the temple, in the school, in the house, and in the bedchamber.* Wherever two or three gather in the name of Christ, there God dwells (cf. Matt. 18:20). Indeed, if anyone speaks with himself and meditates on the Word, God is present there with the angels.[6] (emphasis added)

Church needs to happen on Sunday morning, inside our church walls. There are some extremists who say that Sunday morning church is of the devil and needs to be abolished; they are of the devil and need to shut up. Sunday morning church in America meets a large number of people's needs; this needs to continue. Our model for House Church ministry teaches that House Churches should not gather when their congregation's corporate worship is happening. That is because we always want it to be possible for House Church members to worship with the larger body of believers of which they are a part. In Colossians 4:15–16, we see a good example of the *ecclesia* (church) that gathered in one home also being part of the general *ecclesia* (church) in that city.

2. When we offer something as church that is not Church; we are not being the Church.

We need to be planting Word and Sacrament communities that gather outside the walls of our church buildings. In the urban setting, dozens of cultures and languages are found within blocks of our church buildings. A practical way to offer worship in the prayer language of these people is through their homes. If a pastor will invest his time in developing House Church planters who come from the cultures found in his community, he will (like Christ) be able to multiply himself through them. These House Church planters can help with the gathering of people, fellowship, ministering to their needs, translation, social media communication, etc. The House Church planter may also be a vicar, retired pastor, deaconess, etc. In these and other cases, the ministry they assist the pastor with will vary but will always be under his supervision.

In his commentary on Genesis 28:17, Luther says,

> The place of the church is in the temple, in the school, in the house, and in the bedchamber. Wherever two or three gather in the name of Christ, there

God dwells (cf. Matt. 18:20). Indeed, if anyone speaks with himself and meditates on the Word, God is present there with the angels; and He works and speaks in such a way that the entrance into the kingdom of heaven is open.[7]

That this idea was important to Luther is illustrated in his use of child imagery in the Smalcald Articles, Luther's personal statement of faith: "God be praised, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and 'the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.' This is why children pray in this way, 'I believe in one holy Christian church.' . . . . Its holiness exists in the Word of God and true faith."[8] This striking statement was quoted again by the Lutheran confessors of the next generation in the Formula of Concord Solid Declaration.[9] In volume 41 of Luther's Works; we find the Seven Marks of the Church[10]:

1. The Bible
2. Baptism
3. Communion
4. Confession and Absolution
5. Calls Pastors and Other Church Workers
6. Prayer, Public Praise and Thanksgiving
7. The Cross

House Church may be a "small group" in terms of its numbers; but a small group is not fully the Church. Small group ministry can be a good thing, but small groups do not have the Seven Marks of the Church.

We need to plant new worshiping communities that have all Seven Marks. These other efforts can be fine; but they should not be allowed to distract us from the *Missio Apostolica* of planting the Church.

The comment here for consideration regarding missional communities is a question, "Are we trying to plant the Church?" Because the *church is the Bride of Christ.* Nothing else is.

3. We must be on guard against Absalom's spirit.

King David's son Absalom wanted to be king instead of his father. He was sneaky and crafty; he said that he had the people's best interests at heart. We need to be sure when considering mission models that they don't usurp authority from those who were properly entrusted with it. Sons of Peace have always had to be on guard against children of disobedience (Eph 2:2).

As St. Paul says in I Corinthians 14 [:40], "All things should be done decently and in order." *And no one should (as no Christian does) ignore such order without cause, out of mere pride or just to create disorder*, but

one should join in observing such order for the sake of the multitude, or at least should not disrupt or hinder it, for that would be acting contrary to love and friendliness.[11] (emphasis added)

The Apostle Paul's comments reflect the reality of Pastoral oversight: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (2 Jn 10–11).

The church has one Shepherd, one leader; it is served by His under-shepherds. To ensure that we do not have false teachers, we reserve the pastoral office for those who are regularly and properly called. We do not want a model that facilitates Absalom's spirit—the wrongful and prideful gathering of glory which is not ours.

Our church body has established multiple routes to ordination for those who want to exercise the responsibilities of the pastoral office and to prove themselves properly called for this ministry. Mission models should work harmoniously with the processes that our church body has in place to form pastors and encourage the utilization of our rich theological education system.

Absalom grieved his father and ended in destruction; this is not the path we want for the church.

4. We must look for Sons of Peace (Luke 10) in establishing the Church.

"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, '... *When you enter a house, first say, "Peace to this house." If a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you.* Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages.'" (Lk 10:1–7). (emphasis added)

"You know that *the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.* I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it" (1 Cor 16:15–17). (emphasis added)

"Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains" (2 Tim 1:16).

"Cornelius, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household" (Acts 10:2)

Here are some of the characteristics that we might see in Sons and Daughters of Peace:

1. Receptivity to the Gospel

2. Readiness to refer / endorse Gospel efforts to those they know

3. Reputations that are respected in the community

(Eric Bridges, Thom Wolf)

4. Resources shared to help the Gospel proclamation

5. Church must occur decently and in good order.

"As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" (Acts 16:4–5).

"They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach" (Ti 1:11).

> The infiltrating and clandestine preachers are apostles of the devil. St. Paul everywhere complains of those who run in and out of houses upsetting whole families, always teaching yet not knowing what they say or direct [Tit. 1:11]. Therefore the spiritual office is to be warned and admonished… Let each one who is a Christian and a subject be warned to be on guard against these interlopers and not to heed them. Whoever tolerates and listens to them should know that he is listening to the devil himself, incarnate and abominable, as he speaks out of the mouth of a possessed person.[12]

It is completely unnecessary to do away with the pastoral office in order for the Gospel to be proclaimed effectively. This is a nonsensical idea (at best). When you think of how the devil throughout the years used the Nazis, Communists, and Muslims to kill Christian pastors, why would we ourselves ever want to run off pastors from our worshiping communities?

> When Paul came there later he undoubtedly organized and improved everything, as he promised, Romans 1 [:8–15], wherein he praised their faith highly, which neither he nor St. Peter had planted. St. Peter did the same thing, though he came to Rome at another time. In Crete, too, St. Paul's disciple Titus ordained bishops and founded churches, as St. Paul commands him to do in Titus 1 [:5].[13]

In the current system, pastoral candidates basically self-identify; this is really not biblical. Using a House Church model restores the pastor as a mentor and gateway for ministry.

6. There Continues To Be Room for a Certain Degree of Freedom in Church.

As we sort through what good Church practice looks like today; we can be thankful for the scriptural vision which we confess.

Let me first make it clear that in what follows I shall not argue about whether the holy sacrament is to be administered and received in both kinds, or whether the laity have the right to take it in their hands, or whether one has the right to administer it in vessels other than chalices, or in clothes other than the sacramental vestments, or in houses other than churches. *In these and other external practices, whether they be opposed to the pope or not, may God preserve us from extended disputes. On the contrary, in such matters we Christians should and will have the right and power to adhere to the institution of Christ in any way that we may see fit,* without regard to the false and fabricated decrees of the churches, church orders, and the raging of all the tyrants, both religious and secular.[14] (emphasis added)

It will take them a good long while before they ever prove that Christ administered the sacrament in consecrated vessels, clothes, and houses, or commanded that it should be administered in that way, or that it should be placed in the mouth and not in the hands... For that would be to deny and condemn Christ who so strictly commanded us to be free. It is not at all in our power to change or surrender our liberty. . . .

They ought to be satisfied that we do not reject their ordinances and ways, and may even keep them. *However, when they try to make of them a requirement, as if it could not be done any other way, and when they bind consciences to them and insist that it is heresy to do otherwise, we refuse to tolerate it and shall resist it with life and limb.* The conscience must remain free to choose either way in this matter, and our liberty must remain unimpaired. This we must insist upon, and in this we shall have the help of Christ who gave us our liberty and commanded us to keep it.[15] (emphasis added)

7. New Worshiping Communities Collect Needed Funds.

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'" (1 Tim 5:17–18)

One of the least helpful things that has happened in LCMS urban missions was the creation of church workers and ministries that were not begun with the intentional design of being self-sufficient. It happened largely because the mission model of the LCMS was planting new worshiping communities through the work of a full-time church worker who was dedicated to no other church responsibilities. Often times, these full-time church workers were not from the area, let alone from the people group in the targeted community. Even more unfortunate are those examples of placing church workers from other church bodies into the pastoral office

of an LCMS mission effort prior to their completing any training, certification, observation or known LCMS ministry. These always ended poorly.

It is not a quick fix simply to identify men and women as potential House Church planters and to train them and use them in ministry under the supervision of their regularly called and ordained pastors. But one thing that this model does is to enable the planting of Word and Sacrament communities at almost no financial cost to the sponsoring congregation.

All of the House Churches that we have helped to plant are in the black financially. Because these ministries are financially viable, they are able to give support to the work of their sponsoring congregation. This is the biblical model. The Apostle Paul collected tithes and offerings from the House Churches that he and others had planted; these funds went to support the mother church in Jerusalem. When we plant House Churches in this way, we building up the financial resources of our established congregations; the key is to find men and women who want to help their pastor gather Word and Sacrament communities simply for the joy of helping to start new ministry. The good news is that there are a lot more of these men and women out there than most of us realize. There are a lot of baptized believers who get great joy out of helping new Word and Sacrament ministry get started. We truly *have* not, because we *ask* not.

As I listen to full-time pastors who want to focus on just starting new communities; one of the recurring laments is, "Where will I get the money?" Our church body is basically a congregationally based ministry. My suggestion to these pastors is to consider serving a congregation that will support your efforts to plant House Churches as a ministry and mission outreach of that congregation. You will bless the church and the church will bless you.

House Churches also collect funds to help their members who are in need:

> Nevertheless, Paul gives precedence to those who are of the household of faith, because we have been bound to them with a closer tie, inasmuch as they are from the same house, the church, and from the same household of Christ, and have one faith, one Baptism, one hope, one Lord, and everything the same.[16]

In conclusion: Archippus was a Bishop who, according to Luther, led a House Church (Philemon commentary). Let us pray for our church today to be blessed with similar leadership. And may this be so to God's glory. Amen.

Endnotes

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[14] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 36: Word and Sacrament II*, ed., J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1959), 239–241.

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Why Jesus Is Not an Avatar:
A Critique of the Indian Hindu and Christian Incarnation Idea of Jesus as 'Avatar' on the Basis of Nicene Affirmation for Future Missions

Subin Raj

Abstract: Christians believe and confess that God in His chosen time sent His son incarnated in human flesh for the salvation of humans and all creation. This 'incarnation' idea has been equated with the Indian Hindu religious idea of 'Avatar' by Indian Christians to inculturate the Gospel message in Indian terms. The Hindus, on the other hand, have used it to challenge Gospel proclamation. The author in this article argues that based on the Nicene Affirmation of Christian faith, the 'Avatar' concept brings along with it a religio-cultural baggage that does not adequately explain the uniqueness of Jesus' incarnation, and also misleads people from a proper understanding of God and His work of salvation in Jesus Christ. This has consequences for the teaching and mission of the Church.

Introduction

The incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God is an important—even *the* important—event in human history. We also note at the outset that Christians do not understand transcendence in a generic—or even an absolute—way, but rather in a specific modality of God's self-manifestation through the incarnation, namely in Jesus Christ who therefore comes to constitute the founding reference of Christian religious experience.[1] Thus, the incarnation is the root of all classic Christian Trinitarianism.[2] Interestingly, the Hindu religion and culture in India also point to stories of the incarnation of gods as 'avatar.' In fact, this idea of avatar is so common in the Indian language that most of the time 'incarnation' is immediately translated as 'avatar' even when translating Christian texts. For example, in my native language, Malayalam, 'incarnation' is translated as 'avatar.'[3] Also, in the Malayalam translation of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds in The Lutheran Hymnal, the word 'incarnation' is translated as avatar. In short, translations of Christian writings,

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songs, and theology in Indian languages widely use the word 'avatar' for incarnation without completely considering the other ideas that relate to the word 'avatar.' Historically, many Hindu writers, leaders, philosophers, and even missionaries used the word 'avatar' for Jesus' incarnation. Some Indian Christian theologians have borrowed the term 'avatar' to explain the theology behind the incarnation of Jesus. Therefore, in this paper I first explain the 'avatar' concept in the Hindu understanding, then compare the Nicene Christian understanding of Jesus' incarnation with attempts to see Jesus as 'avatar,' and finally explain why Jesus is not an 'avatar' on the basis of Nicene affirmation.

The Hindu Idea of Avatar (Incarnation)

The word 'avatar' means 'coming down of deity to earth.' It consists of two Sanskrit words, namely 'ava,' meaning 'downwards,' and 'tara,' meaning 'crossing or descent.' In Hinduism the word 'avatar' usually refers to 'the coming down or descent of God in some visible form.' In the latter half of the first century BC in India, the concept of avatar developed through the Bhakti movement, the Hindu tradition's 'Devotion' movement. The two epics of India, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, popularized the idea of avatars. The heroes of these epics, Rama and Krishna, were avatars. In popular Hinduism, an avatar is an incarnation of a Supreme Being or Ultimate Reality 'Brahman' manifesting in various shapes and forms.[4] This is a deliberate descent of the deity into the mortal realm with a special purpose.[5]

In Hinduism, beneath the Supreme Being, Brahman, there are three gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Most of the time, the god Vishnu comes as avatars; however, there is also talk of Shiva coming as avatars. Nevertheless, traditionally, avatars in Hinduism are usually connected with the coming of Lord Vishnu on the earth in different forms and the worship of Lord Vishnu as Supreme Brahman-Vaishnavism. The explanation given for these avatars is that they happen in the carrying out of Vishnu's work in human life. For example, whenever a great calamity overtook the sons of men, or the wickedness of demons (Asuras) proved an insuperable obstacle to their progress and happiness, Vishnu the preserver came to earth as an avatar to rescue men; when his special work was done, the avatar returned to Vishnu and merged in him.[6] Thus, in Hinduism 'Dasavatara' (Ten incarnations) are the great particular incarnations of Vishnu. The Hindu holy book, *Garuda purana*, includes the entire list of Vishnu's avatars (1.86.10–11). The number of his incarnations varies from one Hindu writing to another. The epic of India *Mahabharata* contains three lists of Vishnu avatars, the best known of which are *matsya* (fish), *varaha* (tortoise), *kurma* (boar), *narasimha* (half man–half lion), *vamana* (dwarf), *parasurama* (sage with axe), *sreerama* (hero of Ramayana), *sreekrishna* (central character of *Mahabharatha*), *balarama* (brother of Krishna), and Kalki (the destroyer who will come in *kali yuga,* the age of strife and vice when evil

will be destroyed, bringing rejuvenation of the universe). The first nine have already come, and Hindus are still expecting Kalki, the tenth avatar.[7]

Furthermore, Hindus believe that whenever there is a decline of righteousness, a god incarnates. For example, one of Vishnu's avatars, Krishna, says in the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "For the protection of the good, for destruction of evil, and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being age to age" (*Bhagavad-Gita*, 4.8). Moreover, these avatars come in each *mahayugas* (4 million years or as the need arises) and keep the balance of good and evil. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is also significant as a scriptural form in that it contains the idea of revelation occurring through avatar.[8]

The Hindu Idea of Jesus as an Avatar

Many Hindus believe that Jesus is an avatar. Like other deities, such as Krishna and Buddha, Jesus is also considered an incarnation.[9] Most Hindus consider Jesus as a Western avatar[10] and employed this idea widely in the latter nineteenth century and early twentieth century when Hindu missions propagated Hinduism in India and the Western world using 'Jesus the avatar' as a starting point. Hindus generally familiar with the events of the Christ's story understand the significance of His life through the 'avatar' concept. Also, it is common to find images of Jesus along with those of Hindu deities in homes and public places like stores, hotels, and even in Hindu vehicles. The great Hindu leader and saint, Swami Vivekananda, taught that Jesus is a 'Saktha Vesha avatar,' or an empowered incarnation.[11] Thus, according to the Hindu concept of avatar, Jesus is a deity belonging to the fourth layer of gods, beneath the Supreme Being 'Brahman'; the three gods: Brahma, Vishnu, Siva (Maheswara); and the avatars of the god Vishnu.

Furthermore, Jesus is considered as a man-god. He is a creation of God. Sometimes Hindus compare Jesus with Buddha. Swami Vivekananda argued that Buddha is Christ because Buddha said he would come after 500 years.[12] Another great Hindu leader, Kesab Chandra Sen, who was inspired by Jesus, interpreted Jesus as an avatar, the perfect realization of a god in man, achieved on the basis of union but not identity.[13] Also, in his discussion of avatars, another Indian philosopher Aurobindo places the avatar as exemplar. The avatar shows us how suffering and sorrow can become a means of redemption and how the divine soul in human nature can overcome suffering. Suffering in this view is redemptive, not because someone is suffering for us, but because it is our own suffering. He taught that Christ merely shows us how it is possible.[14] Further, the great philosopher and former Indian President, Radhakrishnan, accepts Christ as a divine incarnation or, more precisely, sees Christ as an avatar both in the sense of a descent of God and also as an example of the human realization of divinity.[15]

Similarities Between the 'Avatar' Concept and the Christian Understanding of 'Incarnation'

In an avatar, a god becomes a man. Traditionally in Hinduism, it is unanimously agreed that the avatar originates in heaven, which makes the god-man qualitatively different from man, god, and all human beings.[16] The incarnation in Christianity is also "at a certain point in human history where [sic] God (in heaven) acted in a unique way through once and for all sending his son."[17] However, for Hindus it is not necessary for the avatar to be a human being; yet, after the fourth avatar, only human beings have become avatars. Avatars also live with people. They may be kings or saints, and even a holy man like Buddha is considered as an avatar. For Christians, however, 'incarnation' is God becoming man 'for us' and living amongst us.

Furthermore, every avatar has a purpose and essentially functions to bless the devotee by destroying evil forces and establishing righteousness (*dushta nigraha sista rakshana*). Thus, for Hindus an avatar is a god who comes and establishes *dharma* (right duty and order). Similarly in Christianity, the incarnated God has a unique purpose: to redeem fallen people and creation. The Hindus pray to the avatars and believe that these prayers and praise goes to Vishnu. The popular avatars of Vishnu, namely Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, are symbols of Hindu life and are Hindu gods. The incarnate Jesus is God; He came from the Godhead, lived among us, and is the very embodiment of Christian life. When Christians pray to Jesus or in Jesus' name, they believe that the Triune God in heaven is listening and answering their prayers. Even though an avatar has both human and divine nature, which they reveal in certain incidents, they otherwise act as natural humans. Similarly, in the incarnation of God in Jesus, we see both human and godly natures, understood as a 'hypostatic union,' different from avatars. In Jesus the union of divine and human nature is permanent, but the avatars lack such permanence. The avatar's divinity is seldom revealed like that of Vishvaroopam[18] of Krishna. Some of the avatars do claim a historical basis such as Buddha, Rama and Krishna. They were born to human parents, lived among people, and died. Similarly, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is based on historical claims like the historical life of Buddha. The incarnated Jesus Christ was born two thousand years ago, had a mother, lived among people and died, only to rise from the dead.

Differences Between Avatar and Incarnation

According to Hindu understanding, an avatar is not fully god. Because only a portion of a god is coming to earth, the avatar is called '*amshavatara*' (portion).[19] After completing his duty, he dissolves into the supreme god. There are also *purna* avatars (full incarnation), but even they are seen as the portion of a god coming down to earth. Krishna, for example, is considered a '*purnavatara,*' but still considered to be an appearance of god, not the full embodiment.[20] Jesus, however,

does not have partial humanity or divinity like an avatar, but rather is understood in terms of His hypostatic union with God the Father. Also, as noted before, an avatar is a periodical, or temporary, incarnation that repeats after certain ages (*Mahayuga*). On the other hand, the incarnation of Jesus is a once-and-for-all event. It is complete; there is no need to revise it, and there is no cyclical coming of His incarnation again.

Furthermore, an avatar has nothing to do after his duty is completed. He will be killed or dies and goes back to his previous existence. An avatar does not keep a footprint after his responsibility is finished. That does not mean the people do not worship avatars, only that the avatar is not there with them. Thus, when a devotee prays to an avatar, he is actually worshiping Vishnu, and those prayers go to Vishnu. But the incarnated Jesus is always understood as being 'with us' (Immanuel) and sits at the right hand (session) of God and will come back to judge (Mt 26:64). Avatars, on the other hand, cannot come back, because they are not there; they dissolve in a god.

Also, it is not necessary for an avatar to be related with history. For example, Narasimha (man lion) avatar came from a pillar, and Vamana avatar has no parents. In a real sense, avatars have no historical background, and their lives are related to the Hindu cyclical conception of time (*yuga*). Moreover, depending upon their evaluation, Hindus change their avatars, as in the case of Buddha, who is not a real avatar of Hinduism but is brought in by replacing Krishna's brother Balarama, who was the actual avatar in this tradition. In any case, popular Hinduism considers Balarama as the avatar, but they also accept Buddha as another avatar.

Furthermore, avatars never take away sin. Taking away sin is not their way of acting and not their purpose for coming to earth. Their purpose is to kill the sinful person or change sinful events by destroying them. In Hinduism, the idea of taking away sin by a god does not exist. Rather, everyone must get rid of his own sin by various means. No god will take away one's sin. On the contrary, the purpose of Jesus' incarnation is to take away sins and lead people to salvation. He did this by sacrificing Himself, not by killing someone else to establish '*dharma*' or restore righteousness.

The Christian Use of the Word 'Avatar' and Summary of Indian Christian Theology Discussion of 'Avatar'

As already mentioned, Indian Christians have used and still use the word 'avatar' for Christ's incarnation. They translate the word incarnation into 'avatar' in songs, liturgy,[21] theology, and other writings. It is interesting that in the IELC[22] Lutheran Malayalam hymnal the word 'avatar' is used in songs only since the 1950s. Before that time, song and hymns, both translated and written (the first Lutheran song in Malayalam was written in 1911), never used the word 'avatar.' This may be due to the Lutheran theological understanding and also to show strong opposition to

Hindu ideas. (LCMS Missionaries were very particular about that; for example, they never allowed the crucifix on the altar, thinking that it may lead to a Hindu-model worship of deities and idols). The native songwriters and translators used the words *janmameduthu* (took birth here), *vannupirannu* (came and was born), *janichu* (was born), and *jathanai* (was manifested) for incarnation. But in the later period the word 'avatar' is used, and, as we examine the Christmas songs in the Malayalam[23] language Lutheran Hymnal, this change is very evident.

As we look further into Indian Christian mission history, the Jesuit missionary, Roberto De Nobili (1577–1656), used the word 'avatar' in the seventeenth century.[24] Also, Protestant Indian Christians coming from high caste Hindu backgrounds, like Sadhu Sundersingh, Bishop Appasamy, and V. Chakkarai, accepted the term 'avatar' and gave their interpretation to it. They were more attracted to the Hindu Bhakti movement and tried to introduce Jesus as avatar, which has some resemblance with the Bhakti avatar concept, so as to engage Hindu tradition with Christianity. Sadhu Sundersingh (1889–1930) was a Sikh[25] by birth but converted to Christianity. He led an ascetic life and propagated Jesus as an avatar in whom God revealed Himself. He was influenced by the devotional life and claimed to have been converted due to a revelation of Jesus as an avatar. According to his thought, Jesus as God's avatar is like a king moving incognito among people. His purpose is to carry those who want to cross the river of this world to heaven. Just as milk in a red bottle is not recognized as milk by the peasant, Jesus' divinity is hidden by His humanity until people have direct experience of Him.[26]

Another Indian Christian theologian, R. C. Das, opines,

> Jesus Christ answers the aspiration of Hindu bakti traditions which is rooted in the avatar. Whether incarnation and avatar are the same or not, the central and important fact is that the Hindu accepts the needs of incarnation and does not care for metaphysical difficulties or scientific objection raised against it. In its emotional aspects the motive of avatar is analogous to that of the Christian incarnation, which is that of god's concern for creatures. And the final choice between avatar of Hinduism and Christ is made by a sincere seeker after truth and goodness on the level of moral excellence of the incarnate one.[27]

Prominent Indian Christian leader, Bishop Appasamy (1891–1975), along with others, came to the conclusion that avatar is a concept that can be decidedly useful in Indian Christology. They believed that in its literal meaning of 'one who descends' can be justified scripturally, for example by Ephesians 4:9–10, where the word 'ascended' implies that he also descended to the lower level down to the very earth. Also, they found that the idea of 'descend' has a prominent place in the Nicene Creed, where it is said that Jesus came down from heaven.

In addition, the term 'avatar,' both in the nominal form and in the verbal form, meaning 'descends,' is often used to mean 'incarnation' in the popular language of Christian piety, especially in hymns and Christian carols. Indian Christian leader, V. Chakkarai (1880–1958), in his book, *Jesus the Avatar*, uses the avatar concept for the basis of Christology. He contends that in Jesus, the avatar, the un-manifest God becomes manifest and we can come to know Him through the way of *bhakti* (devotion). He becomes man, but, whereas all other men are dominated by illusion, Jesus is the '*sat purusa*' (pure essence man) in whom *maya* (illusion) is cast aside. An important part of Chakkarai's exposition is the theme of the continuing avatar. According to Hinduism, the avatar comes to earth for only a short time and thereafter merges once more into the godhead. Against this understanding of avatar, Chakkarai stressed the continuing manhood of Jesus. Once incarnated, He remains the God-man, even after the ascension, and for that reason can be our mediator and indweller. Therefore, Chakkarai prefers to interpret the avatar as dynamic rather than static, and he is interested not only in how the divine and human coexist in Jesus, but also in the factor of who Jesus is and what He does in the world. He is interested in the fact that, in Jesus, God has thrown Himself into the rough and tumble of human life.[28] Chakkarai takes his interpretation of kenosis in 'continuing avatar'[29] and uses it to identify the moment at which the Jesus of history passes over into the Christ of faith. That moment he believes is the cry of dereliction on the cross, when Jesus plumbs the very depth of humiliation and separation from the Father. The depth of non-being and this abyss of kenosis become the start of His glorification.[30]

Another Indian Christian, Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai (1895–1967), uses the term *prajnana* (primeval intelligence) with avatar. The Word of God (*prajnana*) took a body in the man Jesus and, as the heat of the sun's light is no different from the heat of the sun's disc itself, so this incarnate *prajnana*—the avatar, Jesus—is fully God.[31] He is the true avatar the one who descends to the place where we are in to the turmoil and pain and dirt of human existence into the ultimate bitterness of death. Thus, Jesus Christ is the incarnation, or avatar, of God; and the Holy Spirit in human experience is the incarnation of Jesus Christ.[32]

The Christian Confession of Jesus (According to Nicene Affirmation) in Comparison with Jesus as Avatar:

In Christianity, the incarnation is not mere theophany. John 1:14 explains it well: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The ideas of '*homoousios*' and 'hypostatic union' follow this scriptural understanding. For Christians, Jesus is the 'only begotten,' generated out of the Father, that is to say, out of the Father's essence (*ousia*) and is thus true God. Athanasius firmly says that He is God from God. Jesus is divine, that He is God in the flesh. On the other hand, avatars are not the real complete essence of a god; and they come into the world from time to time from a god, which means that they are not the 'only one.' Also, an avatar, in his different

manifestations, is not a god, but rather part of a god descending in a particular form for a particular reason. Also, they only 'wear' the human body, and so the pain or suffering they feel is illusion. One might note here a comparison with the heresy of Docetism, in which Christ's bodily existence is considered mere semblance with no true reality.

The Indian Christian understanding of Jesus as an avatar like an incognito king among his people or the idea of emotional catharsis of people over the avatar cannot be accepted. Jesus really is king; but when the avatar aspect is put on Him, He becomes like the avatar, Buddha, who was a king but abandoned everything and walked among people. Jesus is not an avatar like Buddha, because His self-emptying is for us upon the cross of suffering. Also, if we accept the idea of an avatar for the purpose of catharsis and allow Hindus to choose a better moral avatar, we end up decreasing the idea of Christianity. The fundamental understanding of Christianity is not catharsis but salvation, and Christ's incarnation is not for showing the people His ethical characteristics but to redeem His people from their sin. Such an act would place Jesus at the lower level of avatars, comparable with other Hindu deities and avatars, something that the Nicene fathers would have strongly fought against.

On the other hand, Christians affirm in the Nicene Creed that Jesus was generated, or begotten, not created. Therefore, according to His essence He is equal to the Father, and all things in heaven and earth have come into being through Him. To put the matter antithetically, it must not be held of the Son that He began to exist at a certain time, neither that He comes out of nothing, nor out of another being, nor that He has been created or is changeable or mutable.[33] He is unique and He is incarnated. He is not a creature and He has not been created.

The Arian controversy revolved around these very matters, and the orthodox Christians strongly rejected the position that Jesus was below the Father and insisted on the scriptural position that He is God. In some sense, Hindu beliefs about avatars support Arianism. For example, an 'avatar' is not equal to a supreme being. An avatar is not the begotten son of a god, and he is not of the same substance of a god. Also, there was a time when an avatar did not exist; and though the avatar is a created thing, he is worthy of worship. Therefore, if Jesus is an avatar, these attributes relate to Jesus too. Robyn Boyd opines on this issue of avatar that "today in India many people who are willing to accept Jesus as an avatar, like Ram Mohan Roy,[34] who was influenced by Unitarianism, perhaps even as the great avatar, but are unwilling to call him the only avatar of supreme god. This attitude is a form of Arianism."[35]

In contrast to such similarities of the Hindu avatar with Arianism, the Scriptures provide the right understanding that Jesus is not made, but is the second person in the Godhead. From the understanding of Nicene fathers, it is clear that Jesus is the Creator with God. He is not separated from Him, and there was not a time Jesus was not. In the case of avatars, they come only at a particular time and finish their

responsibilities. They have nothing to do with creation. The patristic scholar Anatolios opines that

> Athanasius' theology is focused on the unity of creation and redemption. On the *Incarnation*, Athanasius explains the necessity of beginning his discourse about the humanization of the Word by speaking of creation: "First we must speak of creation so that we may consider it fitting that its renewal was effected by the Word who created it in the beginning. For it will prove to be not the least bit contradictory if the Father worked its salvation through the same one by whom he created it."[36]

Thus, the fundamental understanding of the Trinity as seen in the Nicene Confession is not affirmed here in the concept of avatar. It is important that the Christian confession of Jesus also affirms that Jesus is not a portion of God. Athanasius says that Christ was not limited in power, knowledge, and effect in the workings of His human mind and body during the time of incarnation.[37] When He came to earth, He was fully God and fully human. The Nicene fathers were clear to distinguish the true sonship of Christ clearly from all creatureliness. They not only took care to emphasize the incomprehensibility of the eternal generation of the Son but also stressed His human nature. Gregory of Nazianzus argues about the true human nature of Christ, saying that He has both divine and human nature in Him. For example, Gregory addresses the issue of Christ's teaching and suffering, concluding that its purpose was to "measure by all comparison with his own sufferings, so that he may know our condition by his own, and how much is demanded of us."[38] As for the subjection of Son to Father, Gregory defined it as "the fulfilling of the Father's will." By taking on humanity's disobedience and rebellion, the Son overcomes it in submission to the Father. The cry of dereliction on the cross was not due to the withdrawal of either the Father or His own Godhead, but of His humanity representing us.[39]

Here we can compare Indian philosopher Aurobindo's (1872–1950) idea of the suffering of Jesus in that he understands Jesus as an example of one who shows us how we can suffer and also as teaching us a new and higher way of living. The failure of the avatar concept is clear here, because the entire discernment of suffering and pain is diminished to a lower level. That means that the pain and suffering of the avatar Jesus according to Aurobindo is only a model and not related to salvation, and the pain of this avatar is only an illusion or the bad karma of the particular avatar in his previous birth. For example, the avatar Krishna was killed by an arrow of an aboriginal because he killed king Sugreeva in Krishna's previous birth as Rama.

Significantly, the Nicene fathers sought to stress the soteriological argument according to which One and the same has created us out of nothing and redeemed us from sin. Thus, only the true God is able to redeem man. Avatars, on the other hand, cannot take away the sin of people; rather, they can only change the situation by destroying or killing people or creatures. So Christ is different from an avatar also in

this sense. Jesus is not a lesser god or a secondary position in the godhead; He is equal to God and there was no split in the Godhead when Jesus became man. More importantly, Jesus has come to 'redeem and save' fallen creation not to destroy and kill fallen creation.

It is also interesting that when we go through new Hindu writings about avatars the Hindu writers give new attributes to them. For example, Lord Rama is considered as an avatar of honesty, sincerity, and love,[40] whereas a close look finds the avatars to be mere killers of creatures or people who are considered to be evil. If they come to the world to kill people, then how are they the embodiment of love? There is no doubt that most of the interpretations are influenced by Christian ideas. Interpretations of the avatar are done with a Christian understanding, knowingly or unknowingly. The re-establishing of righteousness is based on killing of somebody, which is the Hindu understanding. No avatar sacrifices himself to bring back righteousness or for salvation of the world. Here the Hindu-Christian dialogue scholar Robinson cites Radhakrishnan and opines that for Hindus, a crucified Jesus, "a suffering god a deity with a crown of thorns cannot satisfy the religious soul."[41] If this is the case, then an avatar has nothing to do with a loving god and economy of god. Using the concept of 'avatar' to explain Jesus and His incarnation appears to be based on reversed thinking in which the avatar is the main theme and the ontology of Jesus is of secondary importance that can somehow be superficially fixed or ignored.

Further, Jesus' incarnation was historical and has historical evidences. When the synoptic Gospels tell about Pontius Pilate being the governor of Judea, they are providing historical support.[42] Such historical evidence distinguishes Him from 'avatars' and shows that Jesus is not an avatar, because avatars have no such historical claim but are rather mostly presented in Hindu myths. However, when the Nicene fathers said that Jesus is true man, they thereby also insisted upon His historicity with it, which has no loose ends. It is interesting that some Hindu advocates speak of recent avatars of Ram and Krishna as historical figures and hold festivals in locations connected with these avatars' "lives," possibly in reaction to the Christian emphasis on the historical grounding of the life of Jesus.

Also, it is very important to remember that Jesus is not an avatar like Buddha or any avatars. He is not a unique avatar. The word 'avatar' has baggage with it, and when we accept the word 'avatar,' the baggage also comes with it. Klaus Klostermaier opines that "the theological problem of Christ in India has always appeared to be that India does not wish to recognize the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the savior Jesus Christ and has always harped on the fact that there were many saviors—that Krishna and Rama and all the other avatars stood on a same level with Christ."[43] So it is clear that Christ cannot be called the "only avatar." In Jesus, the "God part" was not added to Him, for He is truly God. Also, He is not a "man-god" as some people think of it, that is, a man to whom a god's attributes were added later.

It seems clear that when Indians call Jesus an 'avatar' they just want to explain Christ from their background understanding of polytheism. Thus, when Christian theologians use the term 'avatar,' one must remember its religio-cultural importance and significance. The term 'avatar' used as an analogy to explain 'incarnation' has a fitting connection to Jesus' coming down to earth within a Hindu view of understanding. For dialogue and harmony, it may be a possible way of using this term. However, the usage of this word must be carefully limited given its cultural and theological understanding. One has to keep in mind that the person and work of Christ cannot be fully revealed in the avatar concept. Ignoring this fact will lead to syncretism or a misunderstanding of God's economy, as well as misinterpretation of God's soteriological work in Christ. As a result, the Nicene thrust of Triune God understanding might be at risk, because the avatar concept fully denies the triune concept of God. If the avatar idea denies the triune concept, then what will remain in Christian understanding? Here Nicene understanding has a big role to play. If the Nicene Creed insists upon the understanding of the Triune God, then the concept of 'avatar' will lose its identity. A proper triune understanding, that is an economical and soteriological understanding of God, is incomprehensible through the avatar concept.

Indian Christian theologians have tried to merge the Hindu aspect of avatar with Jesus Christ. For example, when Chakkarai explains Jesus as a 'continuing avatar,' he is qualifying and modifying the avatar concept with a Christian understanding. From my perspective, qualifying an idea and putting Jesus into something that is in contrast with His person and work is a wrong way of formulating theology. It must be done from the understanding of the Word of God. If we merge or qualify an idea which is alien from a scriptural understanding, that will only bring more confusion to believers. For instance, when a problem of explanation arises on certain issues of understanding, such as, 'Did Jesus the avatar kill anybody who was evil to retain righteousness?' then theologians have to find quotations from the Bible or make more re-interpretations. Here the argument of Athanasius regarding discerning the 'mind of Scripture' is very important. Athanasius, while standing firm for a Nicene understanding of faith, argues that one should learn to read properly (*kalos*) with the 'sense' (*dianoia*) right.[44] This means that when we understand and formulate theology we should keep in mind the 'mind of Scripture,' because the words from a cultural setting can mislead the whole understanding of what is being explained. Especially when we see the Hindu concept of 'avatar' for what it is, the use of this word can destroy and distort the original meaning of how we, as Christians, understand the incarnation of Jesus. Thus, with a proper understanding and mind of Scripture, we cannot express our faith through concepts and ideas that lead us to a perverted understanding of scripture and theology. Such formulations can be seen from the Hindus who wisely interpreted the verse, "I and father are one" (Jn 10:30), and argued that Jesus is the first Advaitin[45] who realized that He is Brahman. Along

with such understanding, we can also see that the Hindu understanding of pantheism (god is in everything) is explained through this interpretation of the verse.

Furthermore, when the Nicene Creed expresses Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, a Christian basic understanding about Jesus as 'Son of God' is affirmed. However, 'avatar' does not include the idea of sonship, and so an 'avatar' cannot refer to the Son of God. Rather, avatars were allowed to have sons, and Hindu gods also have sons. Moreover, for Christians, Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, whereas an avatar cannot be. Also, the pre-existence of an avatar is not found in Hindu understanding, whereas the Nicene Creed affirms Jesus as "begotten of His Father before all worlds." Here, too, Jesus does not fit into the realm of avatar, because an avatar is made for a special purpose of tackling a current situation or problem. Thus, in my opinion, many Indian Christian theologians have looked at the avatar concept of Jesus superficially. When we enter more deeply into understanding the avatar concept, such a framework of understanding Jesus is more problematic.

As we have seen, many Indian Christian theologians have begun with soteriology and then explained the ontology of God by using the concept of 'avatar.' Thus, if economy is the starting point, then Jesus' incarnation is the main theme. Still the question arises, then why accept the idea of 'avatar'? No avatar has suffered, been buried, only to rise on the third day, and ascend into heaven to sit at the right hand of Father and to come again to judge both the living and the dead, and whose kingdom will have no end.[46] If this is the Nicene Christian affirmation of the incarnated Son of God, then how can the concept of 'avatar' be used to explain Jesus Christ, beginning with the economy of God? Rather, it is important to know that the Nicene way of thinking leads us to the real economy starting point: for fallen creation's salvation He came down from heaven. Thus, the Hindu 'avatar' concept does not sufficiently explain the Christian theological idea of Jesus' incarnation.

Proposals for Future Missions

I would like to make several proposals on the basis of the above study. Using the word 'avatar' as a translation for incarnation, that is, Christ's incarnation, should cease. It seems easy to borrow a word from Hindu understanding and use it as a Christian word, but the idea of avatar is wrongly used for Jesus, both theologically and practically. Some may say the word is easy to communicate Christian understanding to Hindus, but this is not true. Following are some examples of words from the Malayalam language that we Christians use for basic theological terms: The word 'salvation' is translated as '*raksha*' (protection and redemption), while Hindus use '*moksha*' (liberation); we call God '*Daivam*' while Hindus call Him '*Iswara*'; our word for the Holy Spirit is '*parisudhadmavu,*' a concept or word that Hindus do not have; we translate resurrection as '*punarudhanam,*' and crucifixion as '*krusikaranam,*' both concepts foreign to Hinduism. For ascension we use the term '*swargarohanam.*' Hindus have that concept but rarely use the same word. For the

second coming, we use '*randam varavu*,' yet another concept that the Hindus don't have. It is evident that for most of the basic understanding of Christianity we have coined words or used special words that have no rich Hindu theological background. So we can change the word and can go back to the real understanding and re-establish the real biblical teaching about incarnation.

I also prefer catechizing Christians about the differences between the word 'incarnation' and 'avatar.' References to Christ as 'avatar' clearly lack the universal and historical dimensions found in Christianity. A proper study must include the specific beliefs about the Trinity and incarnation, because the idea of 'avatar' strikes at the root of Trinitarian belief. Such a study will help Christians to be aware of the pluralistic trap set by Hindus. Hindus have made the deities or gurus of religions like Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism 'avatars' and then swallowed those religions slowly into Hinduism. The 'avatar' concept was an instrument for this process.

Another major area of Christian theology to study carefully is Christology. Theologians still tend to use the word and concept of 'avatar' for Christ's incarnation; however, because there is not 'only one' avatar, Christ naturally becomes one among many, thus devaluing Christ and His work. Already Hindus consider Jesus in the fourth layer of their gods; continuing to use the word 'avatar' for His incarnation will only confirm and strengthen this teaching.

Another proposal is to avoid syncretism with Hindu ideas. For example, Hindus use Jesus as the avatar and thereby attract people to Hindu worship and cults, especially in Western countries in cults like Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), Sai Baba, Ramakrishna mission, Yoga, and Transcendental Meditation. Hindu cultic groups manipulate the avatar idea and explain Jesus as one among the spiritual leaders. For instance, recently I was shocked to see a book from St. Louis by a Hindu monk[47] that explains Jesus' incarnation and compares it with Buddha and Krishna, presenting Jesus as a god like them.

Conclusion

In short 'incarnation' is not equivalent to 'avatar,' and the concept of avatar does not interpret the idea of incarnation fully. Christ's incarnation is a unique incident, occurring only once in human history. It has no resemblance to any other incident, and this uniqueness is affirmed in the Nicene Creed. So we should retrieve the Nicene understanding of Christ's incarnation based on its original understanding in Christian theology and ground ourselves with a 'mind of Scripture' and formulate theology, not on 'avatar' to explain and present Jesus Christ, but upon the pure Christian Trinitarian idea that leads us to the real understanding of our Lord's incarnation.

Endnotes

[1] Anscar J. Chupungco, *Fundamental Liturgical Study* (Minnesota: Pueblo Book, 1998), 175.

[2] Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, ed., *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 9.

[3] *Malayalam Hymn book* (India Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kerala, India, 2012), 6, 21.

[4] K. M. Sen, *Hinduism* (England: Penguin Books, 1972), 73, 74.

[5] Swami Satprakashananda, *Hinduism and Christianity* (St. Louis: Vedanta Society, 1975), 32.

[6] Rev. E. Osborn Martin, *The Gods of India* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1988), 99.

[7] Martin, *The Gods of India*, 107–117.

[8] Harold Coward, ed., *Hindu Christian Dialogue* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 233.

[9] Satprakashananda, *Hinduism and Christianity*, 33.

[10] Though Jesus was born in Asia, Indians still consider him as a Western God.

[11] *Complete Works of Vivekananda*, vol. 8, "Notes of class talks and lectures"

[12] Ibid.

[13] Coward, *Hindu Christian Dialogue*, 166.

[14] Ibid., 172.

[15] Bob Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus* (UK: Regnum, 2004), 11.

[16] Daniel E. Bassuk, *Incarnation in Hinduism and Christianity* (USA: Humanities Press International, 1987), 7.

[17] Gerald O'Collins, *Incarnation* (London: Continuum, 2002), 1.

[18] In the battlefield of Mahabharatha, the warrior prince Arjuna is revealed the theophany of Krishna (or Vishnu) through a vision. Viswaroopam means full manifestation of a god. Sometimes the avatars manifest themselves fully to satisfy the devotee.

[19] Bassuk, *Incarnation in Hinduism and Christianity*, 6.

[20] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1970), 20.

[21] *Malayalam Hymn book*, 6, 240, 241.

[22] India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC) was established through the work of LCMS missionaries and their Indian native co-workers between 1895 and 1958. Before it was MELIM (Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission or popularly known as Lutheran Mission).

[23] This is the author's native language. Malayalam is spoken by around 40 million people.

[24] Michael Amaldoss, *The Asian Jesus* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 105.

[25] Sikh religion has drawn a lot of elements from both Hinduism and Islam.

[26] M. M. Thomas and P. T. Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology* (Thiruvalla: CSS, 1998), 184.

[27] Ibid., 179.

[28] R. H. S. Boyd, *Kristadvaita: A Theology for India* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1977),145–148.

[29] In Hindu bhakti understanding god is revealed and he is the good one or perfect one and can be seen. But avatars were not perfect persons, moreover they were worse than others. For instance, Lord Vishnu descends as avatar Vamana to stamp the generous and popular Asura King Mahabali into hell. Still people say the avatars are good only on the basis of tradition and seeking help for their daily problems.

[30] Boyd, *Kristadvaita*, 151.

[31] Ibid., 155.

[32] Ibid., 242.

[33] Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 104.

[34] A nineteenth-century intellectual from Bengal in India who in interaction with Christianity and Islam formed the Brahmo Samaj and saw Jesus as the greatest moral teacher.

[35] Boyd, *Kristadvaita*, 140.

[36] Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 49–50.

[37] Feenstra and Plantinga, *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement*, 120.

[38] Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers* (London: Westminster Knox Press, 2006), 181.

[39] Ibid., 179, 180.

[40] Sen, *Hinduism*, 74.

[41] Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus*, 278.

[42] Bjarne Skard, *The Incarnation: A Study of the Christology of the Ecumenical Creeds* (Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 16.

[43] Klaus Klostermaier, *Hindu and Christian in Vrindavan* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 114, 115.

[44] Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 36, 38.

Holy Spirit, Church, and the Outsiders:
A Brief Study of the Relation between Baptism and Holy Spirit in Acts 8:14–17

Alexandre Vieira

Abstract: The church of God always suffers with the difficulties of reaching out to people who are different, as well as with divisions within. The New Testament gives some examples of these problems, but also witnesses to God's actions to overcome them. In Acts 8:14–17, we see how God intervened in the long history of animosity between Jews and Samaritans, sending His Spirit to welcome outsiders and to create an undivided church.

Introduction

Two weeks ago, I was in Brazil and had a conversation with some relatives about Acts 6. As we discussed the needs of the early church, someone asked the question and made the following comment, "How is it that the church was prioritizing the Hebrew widows over the Hellenist widows? Good thing that doesn't happen today!" I replied that something very similar does happen today, in their own congregation (where I used to congregate). Some of these relatives of mine are often complaining about how only a couple of families make all the decisions in the church; whenever someone new tries to be involved in decision making, they hear: "Sorry, but we founded this church before you were even a Lutheran." Or, "It's best if we do things this way, because otherwise we will lose our identity." I told them that whenever this happens, they were experiencing the same problems described in Acts 6.

That kind of division in the church is not only present in Brazilian Lutheranism. A recent episode in the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA) also reminds us of the disunity among Christians. In 2010, the FELSISA held its first synodical convention in English instead of German. That fact was welcomed by most congregations in the church body because it allowed more people to be represented at the convention. On the other hand, the German-speaking congregations "felt threatened by a loss of (cultural) identity."[1] The ensuing controversy led to "a survey whether enough support could be gauged to form a 'German district,' possibly even leading to parallel Synods along cultural and language lines."[2] Despite all the good

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reasons for such an attempt, the question still remained: "Was the idea of forming separate synods possibly (amongst certain members at least) still rooted (on a subconscious level) on [sic] racial discrimination that could threaten the unity of the church[?]"[3]

Again, that kind of division is not peculiar to Brazilian Christians or to South African Christians; it is not even a peculiarity of recent times. The Bible tells us of similar conflicts within the early church, such as the one in Acts 6 alluded to in the first paragraph and the well-known discussion between Paul and Peter in Galatians 2:11–14 over the hypocrisy of the Jewish Christians who were withholding from table fellowship with the Gentile Christians. In this paper, I will discuss the *resolution* of a conflict like those, which is recorded in Acts 8:14–17, first focusing on some exegetical aspects of these verses that make this passage stand out in the New Testament. Next, I will offer some remarks about the flow of the narrative—how a key aspect of our passage is connected to the larger context. Then, I will discuss how God works through strange means to undo divisions in the church.

Acts 8:14–17—Are the Samaritans Really Welcomed into the Church?

Acts 8 begins with the persecution of the church. In this persecution, "they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (8:1). "Those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (8:4). Among those was one of the seven men full of the Holy Spirit chosen in chapter 6 to help "serving tables": Philip. Philip "went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ" (8:5). The text says that everyone was accepting the word he brought and were baptized. When the church in Jerusalem heard about the acceptance of the Samaritans, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. It is to their arrival, in 8:14–17, that we now turn.

> 14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

A quick and inattentive reading of this text may lead one to rushed conclusions. There are those, for instance, who affirm that verse 17 is talking about a second baptism—the baptism in the Holy Spirit, whereas verse 16 talks about the first baptism, connected to conversion, performed in the name of Jesus Christ. Another conclusion may be that the Holy Spirit was granted *because of* the imposition of hands by the apostles. [4]

Whatever verses 14–17 mean, Luke's description of the Samaritans' reaction to Philip's preaching is noteworthy. He says that they *paid attention* (8:6), there was

much joy (8:8), they *believed* and *were baptized* (8:12). By this description, the Samaritans have already been converted to Jesus. According to Paul, in Romans 8:9, the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers, and if someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. At least for those who have read Romans, it is practically impossible to imagine a church that consists of baptized believers whose members have not yet received the Holy Spirit.

Beasley-Murray[5] analyzes our passage in light of Paul's verse mentioned above and of Luke's description of the eunuch in Acts 8:39. In the latter, after having been baptized, the eunuch goes on his way *rejoicing*. The term employed to describe that recent convert is χαίρων. In our text, with the expression πολλὴ χαρὰ (*grande júbilo*), Luke means a similar *rejoicing* of the Samaritans upon their conversion. Based on this and on Romans 8:9, Beasley-Murray concludes that those Samaritans already had the Spirit but lacked the spiritual gifts that characterized the Christian communities.[6] This interpretation may be supported by the fact that in 8:18 Simon can *see* that the Spirit was bestowed. In fact, others[7] also have suggested that the bestowal of the Spirit in verse 17 was manifested in glossolalia or something similar to that in effect.

We do not dismiss the *possibility* that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans may have been manifested through χάρισμα, but let us take the text at face value for now. Luke says that the Spirit "*had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (8:16). Bruner[8] calls our attention to two aspects that help us elucidate this passage without having to qualify verse 17 as a second and distinct coming of the Spirit. He says that the words οὐδέπω (*not yet*) and μόνον (*only*) betray Luke's surprise with the situation. The *normal* would be for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit when they were baptized, but they had *only* been baptized; the Holy Spirit had *not yet* fallen on them. Because of Luke's wonder, Bruner concludes:

> With the formal "not yet" and "only" of Acts 8:16 we are led not only into the heart of the meaning of this passage but into the inner world of the writer's and the early church's conviction *vis-à-vis* baptism and the gift of the Spirit.
>
> The qualifications of Acts 8:16 indicating temporary suspension of the normal—the "only baptized" and the "not yet" given Spirit—are, we should note, singular in the Book of Acts and they *presuppose* the union of baptism and the Spirit. In no other place in the New Testament is Christian baptism given the qualifications of Acts 8:16. And promptly in Acts 8:17 we are informed that the singular disconnection was immediately bridged.[9]

Therefore, we can conclude that the delay of the Holy Spirit in Acts 8 does not teach that water baptism and bestowal of the Spirit are necessarily separated events. What happened in our passage is an exception to the rule, for it is the only time in the

NT that baptism occurs without the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.[10] That exception was immediately undone by the apostles.

You will be my witnesses

In the beginning of Acts, before His ascension, Jesus appeared to the apostles and gave them some instructions. These instructions, recorded in Acts 1:4–8, have to do with the fulfilling of the promise of the Father to send the Holy Spirit. In verse 4, Jesus tells the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the promised is fulfilled, and He reminds them of the promise in verse 5: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." In 1:8 Jesus explains the goal of their baptism with the Spirit: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Jesus says that the Spirit would give them δύναμιν so that they would become witnesses of Christ in different places and to different peoples. This is spoken to the apostles.

At Pentecost, God's promise is fulfilled, according to Acts 2. The Holy Spirit grants the apostles power to speak in other languages so that they were able to witness Christ, beginning in Jerusalem. After that, the church kept growing, but it remained in Jerusalem. It seems as if the apostles did not attend to the words of Jesus: *you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Nevertheless, God provided a way for the witnessing to come to other regions. "The first preaching to 'all Judea and Samaria' takes place after the death of Stephen, by Christians 'scattered throughout the territories of Judea and Samaria.'"[11] God wanted to take the church to others, rather than waiting for the others to come where the church was. However, something was not according to the plan: the apostles are explicitly excluded from the group who was scattered.[12] The Lord could easily have continued with His mission without using the apostles, but He decided not to. Jesus' words in 1:8 echo throughout the narrative: *you* (the apostles) *will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria.*

As we see in chapter 8, Philip, not one of the twelve, went to Samaria and gave witness to Christ. At that time, the Samaritans believed and were baptized, but God did not give them His Spirit until the apostles arrived. Again, nowhere it is said or implied that the mission depended on the twelve to be effective, but, for some reason, God was willing to keep working along the lines of 1:8.

Next, we will consider what we regard as the main reason for God's decision to withhold His Holy Spirit.

Conflict and Resolution

The Relationship between Jews and Samaritans

The relationship between Jews and Samaritans at that time is well defined in John 4:9. They did not have a friendly relation. "Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies, and had been for centuries."[13] The first cause for the divergences between the two peoples was the matter of race. In approximately 722 BC, Samaria was conquered by Assyria, and its rulers began to resettle people into it deported from Babylon, Hamat, and other places. "These foreigners brought their native customs and religions with them . . . , and, together with others brought in still later, mingled with the surviving Israelite population."[14] "From the intermingling of these captives with the Israelites left in the land came the mixed postexilic population, those to whom the name Samaritan came to apply.[15]

That past was in the way of any possibility to connect. Thus, later, by the middle of the fourth century BC, "relationships between Jews and Samaritans continued to worsen."[16] It took several years of difficult relations until they finally separated. The most probable reason for that was the "fixation of the Samaritan Scriptures (the Pentateuch) in their archaizing script, which seems to have taken place at the very end of the second century B.C."[17] At that time, "the Samaritans emerged as a distinct religious sect, completely alienated from the Jews."[18] Before that, their past had been marked by years of antagonism. "In particular, the political separation of Judah and Samaria under Nehemiah, followed by the work of Ezra, had marked a step toward religious separation that would never be reversed."[19] The following is a good brief description of the situation:

> Though the Samaritans accepted the Pentateuch as the law of Moses, strict Jews of the stamp of Nehemiah regarded them as aliens and enemies (which they often enough had been), and did not welcome them into the Temple community. And the Samaritans, being proud northern Israelites, could hardly acquiesce in the notion classically expressed by the Chronicler that the true Israel was the restored remnant of *Judah*, nor could they long concede that the only place where their God might legitimately be worshiped lay across provincial frontiers in Jerusalem. Such a situation must inevitably lead sooner or later to cultic separation. And so it did.[20]

We can see that there was hostility between Jews and Samaritans in matters related to both politics and religion. On account of such animosity, the Samaritans built their own temple, in Gerizim. That temple was destroyed by the Jews in 128 BC, which helped to solidify their enmity.[21]

The historian Flavius Josephus, a Jew, also comments on the relations between Jews and Samaritans at the time of the Assyrian Empire:

And when they see the Jews in prosperity, they pretend that they are changed, and allied to them, and call them kinsmen, as though they were derived from Joseph, and had by that means an original alliance with them: but when they see them falling into a low condition, they say they are no way related to them, and that the Jews have no right to expect any kindness or marks of kindred from them, but they declare that they are sojourners, that come from other countries.[22]

In the same work, Josephus tells us of the efforts spent by the Samaritans along with other peoples in trying to prevent the Jews from rebuilding their temple and the city of Jerusalem, which Cyrus had allowed them to do. We are told that the Samaritans succeeded at first, but when Cambysses, Cyrus's son, ascended to the throne, he was persuaded and ended up interrupting what the Jews were doing. The work stood still for nine years.[23]

Besides the matters described above, there are also reports of constant disputes between Jews and Samaritans over who was right and who was wrong: "[W]hile those of Jerusalem said that their temple was holy, and resolved to send their sacrifices thither; but the Samaritans were resolved that they should be sent to Mount Gerizzim."[24]

This history marked by deep disputes between Jews and Samaritans is not something easily forgotten. For the reasons above, the Samaritans were "people considered by most Jews to be renegade Jews at best."[25] Prejudice and feelings of superiority had truly impregnated the Jews, especially those in Jerusalem—the now home city of the first groups of Christians.

God's Resolution

If the church were at any time stuck in Jerusalem, this most certainly was not due to difficulties with transportation. It was convenient to live the "new" faith among the "old" people. Without going into details about whether all Christians—including the apostles—were being persecuted[26] or just some of them, Luke emphasizes that the apostles (πλὴν τῶν ἀποστόλων), those who would be Christ's witnesses, stayed in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, that changes in 8:14, when Peter and John are sent to Samaria by the apostles to verify the work that had been done among the Samaritans. Upon their arrival, they realize that there was something missing, something incomplete, because the Spirit had not fallen on them even though they had been baptized. Because of that, Peter and John pray for them to receive the Spirit. At this point, we can better address the questions: Why had the Spirit not fallen on the Samaritans in the first place, requiring the presence of the apostles? Why did the Samaritans have to wait? Was there something wrong with the belief of the Samaritans that impeded the Spirit, or that hindered their true conversion?[27]

A suggestion that has become popular is that the relationship between Jews and Samaritans is the key to understanding this anomaly in the relation of water baptism and Holy Spirit. In short, the Spirit was delayed so "[t]hat all could see that God received into his kingdom not only Jews but the hated and despised Samaritans too, and to reconcile these irreconcilables in Christ."[28]

In fact, centuries of enmity could only be undone by the hand of God Himself. If the Holy Spirit had "ordinarily" come as expected, together with the baptism of the Samaritans, the ancient rupture between the two peoples would not have been dealt with "and there would have been two churches, out of fellowship with each other."[29] God was showing the Samaritans that they were, despite everything that had happened up to that point, welcomed by the Jerusalem church. In addition, God wanted to show the Jerusalem church that He was behind the Samaritans' acceptance of the faith, and therefore the church had no choice but to welcome them as well. By having the apostles go to Samaria and by sending His Spirit through them, God was avoiding a potential "schism in the infant Church, a schism which could have slipped almost unnoticed into the Christian fellowship, as converts from the two sides of the 'Samaritan curtain' found Christ without finding each other."[30]

What happened in Samaria was God's way of dealing with the racial and religious separation between Jews and Samaritans. He withdrew His Spirit in Acts 8 to intervene in the history of the church (and of the world) in order to heal an open wound. Beasley-Murray, accordingly, notes that

> The Samaritans believers needed a divine revelation that in the receiving the Christ they had become integrated into the messianic people, rooted in ancient Israel and newly created through the redemptive action of the Messiah. […] It is comprehensible therefore that, in the Body wherein there is neither Jew nor Greek, it specifically a Body wherein there is neither Jew nor Samaritan. The Apostolic integration of the Samaritans into the Church of the Messiah signified an effective healing of an age-long division and it was signalized with divine approval by the Spirit coming upon the estranged people, manifesting their inclusion into the Israel of God.[31]

From this perspective, even the imposition of hands by the apostles has its place as a means by which the Samaritans are reassured of their inclusion into God's called people.[32] One way or another Jesus' purpose would be fulfilled: *you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria* . . . Persecution scattered the Christians, except the apostles, who later are compelled to send Peter and John to Samaria. With their arrival, the problem of the temporary delay of the Spirit is resolved, and their presence there also means that the Jerusalem church is on board with "this radical and unprecedented extension and new definition of the people of God, and they make it clear that new Christians of any description and in any place enter into unity and fellowship with the church at Jerusalem and do not constitute a second or subsidiary grouping."[33]

Concluding Remarks

What can we learn from Acts 8:1–17? Some Christians will answer: "We learn that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is distinct from water baptism." The Confessional Lutheran will rightly reply: "We learn that there is only one baptism, and this text teaches that in a strange way." Others will say: "Only the ministers can impart the Holy Spirit, not any Christian." This passage is the locus of many baptism debates, and this is not a bad thing. However, we should also see that "[t]he point is, rather, that Luke used these episodes to defend the extension of salvation to those groups Jews considered outside of God's promises."[34] In addition, it is significant to note that "it was not the Torah-observing disciples but the Holy Spirit who initiated the mission[,]"[35] and it was not through one of the twelve, but through Philip.

In light of this passage, when I think about my own church body and particularly about my congregation in Brazil, this passage reminds me that God's salvation can really reach all the ends of the earth. At the same time, "this unsettling passage is well suited for afflicting the comfortable in the pews—and in the pulpit[,]"[36] for there still are racial, social, and cultural barriers among our churches in Brazil.

No matter on what side of the baptism debates one is (it does matter, but not for what I am going to say next), Acts 8 may at least encourage the church to be more open to thinking out of the box, to have a heart for the mission, to seek and to understand the lost, and to interact with the culture around. It is no minor thing that the Holy Spirit empowered people to be witnesses (1:8), filled people to serve (6:5), and saved others by means of their testimony (chapter 8). In this way, although our identity as Lutherans—English, German, or Portuguese speakers—is very important, this text invites us to define our identity as in relation to the Holy Spirit, because of our baptism and because of His mission.

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[7] See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles—The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 222. Also, Robert H. Smith, *Concordia Commentary: Acts* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970), 139.

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[27] For a defense of this position, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 542. Also, James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM, 1970), 55–72.

[28] Green, *Baptism: It's Purpose, Practice & Power*, 132.

[29] Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 167.

[30] Ibid., 168.

[31] Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 117–118.

[32] Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 221.

[33] Smith, *Acts*, 142.

[34] Mark Lee "An Evangelical Dialogue on Luke, Salvation, and Spirit Baptism," *Pneuma* 26, no. 1 (September 1, 2004): 88.

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Thrive Community Church:
A Mission of the LCMS

John D. Roth

Abstract: As the planning and work of a mission planter began in Southwest Florida among a campus community and a growing suburb, reflections on God's Trinitarian nature became foundational for a reworking of the mission approach. The importance of community, relationships, and discipleship took a central role in shaping the beginnings of this ministry prior to the public worship launch in August 2014. Rather than an attractional model, this missional model finds its heartbeat in Luther's theology of the cross and is structured through discipleship groups and gatherings, community events, mission events, and in worship.

Douglas John Hall wrote in *Lighten our Darkness* that Martin Luther "wanted a gospel that drove people into the world, not away from it; that opened their eyes what was there, rather than assisting them to look past what was there."[1] As I reflected upon the call to become a church planter in the Florida-Georgia District to a unique setting in Estero, Florida, the home of Florida Gulf Coast University, I realized that I wanted to see things "the way they are," as Luther's theology of the cross emphasizes. This desire resulted in a reframing of the mission from the beginning.

The Florida-Georgia District for three years prior to my call had worked with a group of laity and pastors in Southwest Florida concerning a mission in Estero near Florida Gulf Coast University, intent on making it both a campus ministry and a community church. This "design team," as they became known as, had worked out some basic strategies and parameters for this mission. They wanted a church that would partner with other Christians to reach the community of Estero, bringing about Gospel saturation. They wanted the doctrine of the Lutheran church to be brought into a context to reach the current Millennial generation along with older generations and postmodern culture. They wanted a big vision. They wanted more of a movement than a church, affecting the lives of many people, who in turn would have an impact on others with the Gospel.

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When I arrived in Estero in February 2013, I began working through the vision and mission for the mission start. I realized that we would be doing things differently from the ground up. First of all, I had convinced the design team and district that this mission needed to start with a team rather than an individual. Just as Paul in the book of Acts went nearly everywhere with a partner or team, so we needed to add a second full-time missionary as my partner as soon as possible, especially with the dual emphasis on campus ministry and community. Yet, this decision for a team at the core is even more fundamental.

Our ecclesiology in the Lutheran Confessions is expressed as the assembly of believers gathered around Word and Sacrament. It's not the assembly of a believer, singular. It's always a community.

This understanding of community corresponds to a God who is Trinity. The Trinity is not a vestigial doctrine from the Middle Ages with no relevance today. From my reading on this subject over the past two years, I have discovered that it is a vital doctrine that has great connections with and implications for post-Christian desires for community, relationships, and purpose.

Eberhard Jüngel, in his work, *God as Mystery of the World*, states that the Trinity is about God's self-giving love. "Christian theology, however, is not primarily concerned with a God who has love but with a God who is love."[2] Though most Americans still believe in God, their conception of God is more aligned with Greek philosophy and comes across as generic monotheism. God is power. God gets what God wants. God is removed from this world. The God perceived by the Millennial generation (and others) in the Christian rights involvement with politics, in the institutional church's focusing on its survival and self-interest, in the seemingly regressive way Christians respond to modern culture—this God is being rejected, and I dare say, rightly so. The philosopher's God is not the God revealed in the narrative of Scripture and especially in the life and work of Jesus Christ.

The Trinitarian God is not that apathetic God of Aristotle, but the God of passion and involvement, of incarnation, of cross and resurrection. Love is Trinitarian. The Father begets the Son from eternity. God loves the world and sends the Son to display that love through His whole life, the exact image of God. With Jesus you see who God is and what a human being is fully. Jesus lives out this relationship with His Father throughout the Gospels. He finds His identity, purpose, and direction outside of Himself in the Father. Thus, we discover through Christ that even before God said, "Let there be light," there was love between Father, Son, and Spirit. God is love.

God created human beings (Gen 1) in His image, male and female, he created *them*. The image of God is seen in the relationships of love, trust, and service. The image of God is not something a person "images" singularly, but is shown in how one relates to others. God's three-in-oneness is to become evident in this world

through us. Tim Suttle writes, "A big part of what it means to be a human being in the world is that we are born of and into a community. It means that we are designed by the Triune God to live together in community, in a particular way. We are to relate to one another and to all of creation in such a way that when people look at us, they can see that the three-ness in one-ness stands behind all of it, sustaining it by sheer force of will."[3]

We are discovering at Thrive that Millennials are extremely attracted to a community living out God's love (God's image) in relationships. They are desperately seeking community as they struggle in their relationships. Most of the relationships they have experienced are transactional in nature. Even within the family, their relationships include conditions. It is almost as if each family member says, "So long as I'm getting something out of this family that's to my benefit, I'm involved. When it's no longer to my advantage, I'm out." As children of divorce, children of neglect, they have grown up expecting only deals. When they encounter community in which people are building covenantal relationships, they are both fascinated and puzzled. Upon seeing such relationships and hearing about a God of promise, a God who is three-in-one, and seeing church as organic rather than as organization, community rather than institutional hierarchy, they respond positively.

This understanding of God and of what church is has implications for pastoral ministry. When I received this call to plant a church and campus ministry, I knew that I needed community myself. Solo ministry is on the verge of being oxymoronic. We are not self-contained individuals. Rather, we are interdependent and relational. I needed a Barnabas or a Silas, a Priscilla and Aquilla, a John-Mark or a Timothy. We are now developing a style of leadership based upon implications of mutuality and giftedness from Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12.

This conviction even resulted in the tag line for Thrive—*Where Relationships Are Everything.*

When one distills what church is, one discovers it's not programs, structure, polity, buildings, music, or budgets. As the Confessions state, it's about relationships—a person's relationship with God (through Word and Sacrament) and with others. It's the assembly of believers around Word and Sacrament.

Evangelical Christianity in America, trying to reach new people, embraced in recent decades an attractional church model that involved the worship service as the center of gathering people in. Eddie Gibbs sees that, though by outward appearances this trend in Christianity in America seemed to be working, underneath the exterior triumph there lies a potential failure at Christendom's core. The new growth shown among mega-churches is not new growth in Christianity; rather, it is a consolidation into big box warehouses of the same churchgoing population from the smaller operations, similar to the movement in retail business. Indeed, these mega-churches

"have not made an impact" in reversing the downward trend in overall Christian church membership.[4]

Christianity has shown outward vitality through some of these operations, but having a crowd does not mean one has disciples:

> This consumer-focused approach to ministry successfully attracted crowds, but it has failed for the most part to transform lives or construct significant personal relationships that provide encouragement, spiritual growth, accountability and avenues of Christian ministry. The old adage "easy come, easy go" has proven very true in terms of many churchgoers, especially the boomer returnees.[5]

American evangelicalism has traded large numbers of worship attenders for authentic Christ followers.

My frustration is not limited to the attractional model found in mega-churches. There is a creeping consumerist mentality exhibited by members of all stripes of churches in America. Even those who don't think they are "church shopping" often actually evaluate their church by how it benefits "my family" and by "what music style (traditional or contemporary) and hymn choice that I like."

For example, we've been asked by numerous churched people, "When are you going to start worship?" It's a noble question, since the Divine Service—Word and Sacrament—is a vital aspect of a Christian's life. However, for many churched people, it is the total sum of their church involvement. They really only want an hour per week, Christianity delivered in a tidy package so that church becomes the purveyor of spiritual goods and services for the Christian consumer.

For me, this expectation raised the question: Is the typical attractional church paradigm of church planting making disciples of Jesus Christ? Has faith become no more than a list of propositions to be recited or weekly worship dates to be kept?

One may rightly ask, "Does worship need to lead to this behavior?" I would answer, no, but I've observed it happening frequently. Our theology aspires for the Divine Service to be the fullest expression of God's grace and God's people, but I've observed worship functioning at a different level. Many members now use worship as a minimum obligation. For them being Christian means knowing information about the formula for salvation. Worship just reinforces what they already know.

Thus, we are striving at Thrive to imbed a discipleship model based on Luther's theology of the cross.

That model focuses on the Gospel's accounts of Jesus' call to His disciples. Jesus said, "Follow me." As Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated at the beginning of *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Jesus calls a man, he bids him to come and die."[6] Luther's theology of the cross was his discovery that the cross is "necessary and typical of God. The cross… reveals God and his characteristic way of dealing with believers."[7]

In other words, the justification of the sinner before God involves the death and resurrection of the sinner, not simply a word about Jesus death and resurrection.

My experience in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been that most preaching in the post-World War II era became simply a word *about* the cross. Sermon after sermon in Lutheran churches teach what happened to Jesus Christ upon the cross, explaining atonement in formulaic ways, usually with these points in the message: (1) All are sinners in need of God's grace; (2) specific types of sins are spelled out that the hearers are prone to do, showing their sinful condition; (3) God sent His Son to die for the sins of the world upon a cross; (4) believing Jesus is their Savior, the hearers are forgiven so that they can live a life in praise of God; (5) thus, hearers are encouraged not to worry about sinning but simply to believe the message of the Gospel and to keep living the same way they have always lived.

No death of the sinner takes place in this preaching. The cross has only a place in history as a formula for salvation. Human beings are not confronted with the word of the cross that puts their self-centered ways to death, including their quest for self-justification for all they do.[8]

The word *of* the cross will never separate the cross of Christ from the cross of the Christian.[9] It will proclaim the death of sinful humanity and any attempt human beings initiate to justify and perfect themselves, all attempts to excuse and control, so that Paul's assertions are true. Each Christian proclaims, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Everyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old has passed away and the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). The preaching of the word of the cross will keep the death and resurrection of Christ connected to the death and resurrection of the hearer.

As a result of these trends, we have begun with a discipleship process based in homes, gatherings in various places, and one-on-one relationships rather than with a worship service that serves as the way to attract nonmembers. Our goal is to create disciples who will worship rather than worship attenders who may never get around to following Jesus. We are trying to take what Charles Cousar said seriously: "The church whose theology is shaped by the message of the cross must itself take on a cruciformed life if its theology is to carry credibility."[10]

That cruciformed life is seen in how we are trying to serve the community and how we relate to one another. Public worship then comes in line with this discipleship understanding. The service will be a time of death and resurrection for each of us as we hear the Word and receive the Lord in the Sacrament.

One year has passed since I received the call to plant this mission. We are now beginning worship, though it will be months before we publicize our worship heavily. Currently our Sunday services are for a core of members, with an emphasis on how we are creating a different culture that will be open to skeptics and questioners, sojourners and followers. The expectation from the beginning is that

those who are a part of Thrive will be involved in discipleship community, missional community, and the worship community.

A discipleship community is a place for leaders to receive support, training, mentoring, and accountability. We are striving for a discipleship community to be reproducible. We want to see more leaders begin to disciple more people. This gathering creates invitation and challenge. This group doesn't sit and talk; it takes the gospel into action. Finally, it generates high accountability. This group commits to each other to grow in relationships with one another.

Our missional community is an assembly of Christians in mission with God, empowered by the Holy Spirit to embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a specific pocket of people. A missional community is usually composed of a group of 20 to 50 people who exist, in Christian community, to reach either a particular neighborhood or network of relationships. It has an expressed intention of seeing those who are in relationship with Jesus live through this more flexible and locally incarnated expression of the church.

We explain worship as much more than "going to church." When we gather, Jesus is personally present to transform our hearts and empowering us to live Gospel lives. In worship, Jesus Christ is personally present in our midst. Worship is for imperfect and broken people who are in need of a Savior. We sing, we celebrate, we rejoice in the resurrection. We learn of God's great news for us in the Word.

We receive Jesus personally in the mystery of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

All three aspects of this mission are in process. My prayer is that, as in Jesus' parable of the mustard seed, we will see the kingdom of God expand in miraculous ways, not because of the strategy or dynamism of the mission planting team, but because of the Spirit, by the grace of God, through His Gospel Word.

Endnotes

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A Church Planting Journey
What I saw will stick with me for the rest of my life

Andy Audette

Abstract: In 2007, the North American Mission Board surveyed over 1,000 church plants and found some significant results in regards to the success of new church plants. It was found that when a church planter received leadership development training within a church plant, their odds of survivability when they plant increased by over 250%. When the church planter was mentored to have realistic expectations of what the church planting process would be like, the odds of survivability increased over 400%![1] In this paper, I tracked my training and found that the key to effective church planting is having an unyielding focus on mission and vision.

It's difficult to think of a more perfect word to describe the image of church planting than "sexy." It combines so many characteristics that surround the popular opinion: it's enticing, exciting, and glamorous. This is the place where the thinking is outside the box. Church plants are all about trying new approaches to communicating the Gospel to the world. The results are powerful testimonies, new believers baptized, and entire communities impacted with works of justice and mercy. Who wouldn't be attracted to that? Certainly I was, and it led me to Knoxville, Tennessee, on a one-year church plant internship with The Point Church.

It happened on a Saturday night while sitting in the back storage room of a movie theatre that I found myself counting hundreds of pens and becoming slightly amused. There's nothing sexy about counting pens in a back storage room. At this moment in my internship, I was faced with an incredible internal conflict that threatened to bring any future church planting interest to an immediate stop. Why am I doing this? Pastor Matt Peeples (my supervising pastor for the internship and lead pastor at The Point) has plenty of ready, willing, and eager leaders at The Point who would come to the church storage area and count pens; yet he asked me to go and do this menial task. As much as it could be an exercise in humility, there was something much deeper and much more vital that was happening here in this moment of tedious pen counting. In this moment, I had two options: The most obvious is to just get through it. Count the pens as fast as I can, try not to be bitter about it, and move on to the next thing. But what I've found looking back is that there was a second option

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that was there the entire time, working in me and building behind the scenes. This option was to have a clear focus on the mission of The Point—"Connecting the disconnected to a growing and reproducing relationship with Christ." This option looks at the pens and sees them for what they could be: a chance to connect someone who is disconnected from Jesus.

The next Sunday was a big Impact Sunday for The Point Church. Hundreds of people were going to be given a pen with a card attached during service that they would use to fill out information about going deeper in faith and service. The data that resulted from this service included pages of names and contact information from people who wanted to grow in faith by joining a Connection Group or who were interested in serving on an Impact Team. Some wanted more information about Jesus, and others desired baptism. The next week was spent making these phone calls and connecting with people for hours each day. Having in mind a clear focus on our mission made counting pens vital. Because I counted pens, people joined groups, served on teams, and connected with a pastor to learn more about Jesus and God used those conversations to bring people to Him in baptism. With that in mind, how could I not count these pens?

The difference between option one and option two is a solid and sold-out focus on mission and vision. Without a clear picture of the mission and vision, counting pens is a task that probably isn't worth my time or the money that's paying my salary. But counting pens led me to the question: "Why am I doing this?" And as that question led me to the mission and the focus on "Connecting the disconnected," counting pens became the most important thing I could be doing at that moment.

The church plant internship has been vital in that I've had the opportunity to walk through a year of what it's like to plant a church. The Point's being a portable church meant I had no office space or building to go to as a "home base." The freedom of going wherever I want to do whatever I want is one of those "sexy" aspects that actually lead more toward paranoia than any sort of glamour. I was constantly faced with internal questions: "Am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing?" "Am I making the best use of my time and money?" "Am I cut out for this?" What I've found in talks with other church planters is that they, too, have struggled with this feeling their first year. They are forced to imagine a church that doesn't yet exist and to communicate that vision to people who aren't on board yet. A strong focus on mission is what keeps those nagging questions from becoming any more than that. Keeping your mission at the forefront allows you to use it to filter your actions and your schedule. Spending the first few weeks learning the city, finding a place to "office" regularly, and exploring regular spots to play and meet people became a vital part of my job if my focus was on the mission to "connect the disconnected."

Mission informs Model

Part of my regular routine with Pastor Matt was a weekly one-on-one time where we could process experiences and questions related to the internship and church planting in general. Pastor Matt was inundated at the beginning with questions from me that related to doctrine and practice: worship practices, communion practices, baptisms…all your typical seminarian theological inquiries. What I have realized more and more looking back is that the questions weren't wrong as much as the assumptions behind the questions. I came with my assumptions that what we were doing at The Point was wrong and needed to know how Pastor Matt justifies it. This is because I was so caught up in models and their practice that I had missed a very important concept: *mission informs model.* Simon Sinek put on a TED talk about this very concept and constantly emphasized looking at "the why behind the what."

The "what" that's easy to focus on are the practices we see. We see churches being missional communities, having dynamic worship bands, or trying different methods of distributing communion, and these are the things on which we focus. In these one-on-one meetings, I was definitely focusing on models, and it was reflected in my questions. My questions were usually returned with a frustrating, albeit thought provoking, second question: "Why do you think we do this?" This caused me to put myself in the place of pastor/church planter and ask myself "why?" This type of processing was slow and repetitive, but that's exactly what one needs when it comes to capturing a mission-focused heart. It doesn't happen overnight and it can be incredibly frustrating. But what began to happen was that my eyes were opened up to the importance and single-minded focus on the mission of the church driving absolutely everything we do.

In his book *The Advantage*, Patrick Lencioni mentions the importance of mission being more than a weekend retreat that leads to a plaque we hang on the wall of the office. A mission is more than several sentences of buzzwords that nobody can remember. Mission is an orientation of the heart that drives everything we say and do, as well as everything we choose not to do. I saw this at The Point clearly. The simple mission of "Connecting the disconnected to a growing and reproducing relationship with Christ" was on the heart of anybody who spent time with this community.

Shortly after I arrived at The Point, I was approached by some regular attenders who asked for some of our promotional materials to distribute at a party they were going to at their apartment complex. Nobody had asked them to do this, and there was no plan or intention of any staff to be there. I was amazed at how excited they were to be set free to do this type of outreach on their own. This is what a strong emphasis on mission does. It sets God's people free when they can simply ask themselves: "Will this connect disconnected people?" This is the filter they are able to use to make the best use of their time, energy, and passion.

This was also a very freeing concept for me throughout my church plant internship as I really began to grasp the primacy of mission. The confusion and the stress of not knowing if I am in the place I am supposed to be or doing what I'm supposed to be doing was mitigated by this mission filter. Is this coffee shop the best place to do my office work during the week? I am meeting new people, having conversations that build relationships and lead to spiritual conversations. This environment can lead to connecting disconnected people, and so I am definitely in the right place and doing the right thing.

The idea of "mission before model" eventually led into how I process my time and activities here at The Point. If sacramental theology is a question I have, a mission before model attitude doesn't ask: "Why do we do communion this way?" Instead, it asks "If our mission is to connect disconnected people to a growing and reproducing relationship with Christ, how can we faithfully distribute the Sacrament in order to do this?" This attitude also helped greatly with the earlier story about counting pens. An attitude of mission helped me to see the potential in counting pens for a service that was designed to connect disconnected people and help connected people to grow deeper. At that moment, there's nothing else I would want to do than to be a part of preparing for an extremely important worship experience.

As I prepare to move forward as a church planter, I often get asked: "What kind of church are you going to plant? Are you going to be attractional like The Point? Are you going to do missional communities?" The question is the same I was asking a year ago, and I might have had an even better idea of a model a year ago. But now my answer is a much more ambiguous, yet confident: "I'm not quite sure yet exactly how it's going to look." This is because I want to focus in 100% on my mission and vision. This is because no matter where I end up, if I have a solid mission and vision I will be able to read my culture and ask how the mission can best be carried out in this place. The great benefit of putting the mission before the model is that if a particular model is not looking to be effective it does not mean we've failed. It just means we go back to the drawing board and look at how to better implement the mission and vision. The time spent here soaking in the attitude of mission before model has helped me to be equipped to plant a church in any context to which God sends me. I can learn or develop whatever model that seems to fit best, but what will always come first is the mission of connecting people to Christ and equipping Christians to do the same.

Mission is Constructive

The most common evaluation I have of my time thus far at seminary is that it has taught me to deconstruct absolutely everything to find the theological nuances present. This is not an inherently negative thing. It keeps us from becoming too infatuated with ideas and concepts that arise in the culture of Christian conferences and literature. We can pick out the theological traps present in models, materials, and

music. The problem is when we are simply left in an environment of deconstructing. It leaves us empty and with no answers regarding how to engage with a changing culture and context. What I've found through my church plant training and internship is that mission is constructive and has become an essential part of my formation process. Through my theological training, I am more than capable of identifying the problems with the actions, attitudes, and spiritual health of a community. I could talk about where churches are lacking and how in some ways they are flat-out wrong in what they're doing. The problem came when I would ask myself "What would you do differently?" I never felt prepared to answer that question. I knew some good stock answers that might help me out in a church planter assessment interview, but when it came to actually starting and leading a community of people as the local church, I was lacking.

The time spent at The Point, observing and soaking in the centrality of mission and vision, has helped me to see and learn how to construct. Critiquing poor theology should never be the end point, but instead I can ask what would best connect disconnected people and then look to my vision to begin creating a system to do so. At The Point, our vision is "Experience. Connect. Reflect." The system begins with disconnected people experiencing God. This happens through worship experiences, connection groups, word of mouth, and paid advertising. By intentionally focusing on the "Experience" aspect of vision, I can begin working on and creating opportunities for disconnected people to enter into the system that the Holy Spirit will use to connect them. As people experience God, the Holy Spirit will move them to faith and they will desire to "Connect" (the second part of the vision). How can I create groups, service opportunities, networking between people, etc., that will best lead to people connecting? This is a question that is constructive and it comes from an attitude of mission/vision centrality.

I've heard The Point labeled as an attractional church. If I'm honest, I've labeled it that way myself when I first came out. This comes from an attitude of deconstruction, which looks at only the worship experience (band, movie theater, message series, etc.) and radio advertising but misses the heart of the church. The Point would be much better labeled as "incarnational." We speak the language of the culture and do our best to eliminate as many barriers as possible for people to "experience" God. We do some events and some advertising that attracts, but the rest speaks to our context. Furthermore, as people experience and connect to God for the first time, they tend to catch the mission and vision better than anyone else and become the best cheerleaders for the Gospel out in the community. A radio ad and praise band might attract someone, dynamic preaching might even get them to come back, but it's a church community that's sold out to mission and vision that incarnates itself in Knoxville that defines The Point and has built it into what it is today. This is the attitude and the heart that I will carry with me moving forward. Knowing the importance and seeing the benefit of a heart completely centered on

mission and vision will lead me to prayerfully and earnestly seek out the heart of God and how He is equipping me to carry out the Great Commission by starting a new church somewhere. When I first came out to The Point, I was interested in church planting because it was popular and everyone said I should do it. After being saturated in mission and vision, I cannot imagine myself doing anything but planting a church that is sold out to the mission and vision of God in its local community context.

Seasoned church planting veterans warned me as I began this internship that I had better be careful about getting involved in church planting. They said "It will wreck you Andy." I see now how right they were. The stories I've seen and heard here of people connecting to Jesus who never would have imagined they could be welcomed in a church have wrecked me. I've seen the Holy Spirit working powerfully here to bring people to faith and back to faith. I've seen what the Holy Spirit is doing, and I've had a taste of what He's capable of accomplishing through the local church planted in a community, and I know I need to be a part of that.

Endnotes

[1] Edward Stetzer and Warren Bird, "The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities," North American Mission Board, 1 Jan. 2007, accessed 13 May 2014, http://www.namb.net/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=8590117117&libID=8590117116.

Isaiah 42: The Mission of the Servant

Celiane Vieira

Abstract: This study is intended to focus on some aspects of Isaiah 42 related to comprehending and connecting the mission and the servant, that is, how we, as the church and people of God, are to be a light to the world and to make the good news of God available to peoples outside the church, as well as to bring comfort and hope to the church herself.

In the books of Kings and Chronicles, we see Isaiah as a prophet with a long ministry of preaching to Judah. He probably began in 740 BC at age twenty-five and saw both times of peace and prosperity and times of destruction and suffering.[1]

It is possible and helpful to divide Isaiah 42:1–25 into sections:

1) 42:1–4: Presentation (description) of the servant and his ministry;

2) 42:5–9: Commission to restore Israel, reminding that the servant's ministry as covenant and light will provide more confirmation of God's incomparable power;

3) 42:10–17: Glorifying God and declaring His victory;

4) 42:18–25: Report of the blindness of Israel (especially verses 21–25), and the dispute between God and His own people.[2]

Isaiah 42:1–4 is known as the first of four Servant Songs.[3] The prophecies contained in these verses probably refer to events that occurred later, during the Babylonian exile, when Judah and Israel no longer existed as nations and when the only king was the Babylonian conqueror.[4]

In the second portion of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40–66), we read that the trust in God is expressed in

1) Giving recognition and honor to the true God over the idol-gods (40:12–26);

2) Glorifying Him for the transformation to justice, salvation, and forgiveness, all of which happens through His Servant (52:13–53:1–12);

3) Glorifying God in the Holy Mountain (40:9–11; 60:1–14);

4) Recognizing the destruction of everything that refuses to bring Him glory (41:11–12; 66:24).[5]

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When we analyze Isaiah 42:1–4, the first question that arises is, who is this servant that does the Messiah's work? The servant does not have a name. He is introduced as "*my servant*"—God's servant, chosen by God, announced by the voice of God Himself.[6] In Matthew 12:18–21, the evangelist quotes this passage of Isaiah and refers it to Jesus. In this case, we can identify this Servant of Isaiah 42 as an individual, Jesus, the Messiah, who will be the perfect Israel.[7]

In Isaiah's immediate context, the servant can also be identified with God's people, Israel, the general Israelite audience that was listening to Isaiah 40:12–41:29.[8] This way of identifying the "servant" with the people is familiar in Isaiah,[9] as we see in 41:8–9: "*You, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off'*" (ESV). The fact that this servant is the offspring of Abraham is also noteworthy, for, as we will see later, the people receive from God a similar commission given to their forefather.

Why is Israel chosen? Israel is chosen not only for her own good but also to do what a servant is meant to do, namely, *to serve*, to serve as someone who will bring justice and as the channel whereby the world may be saved through a covenant relationship with God.[10]

This connection between the world and God is how *mission* was understood to take place in the Old Testament, that is, for God's people to make the good news of God available to peoples outside of Israel,[11] as well as to bring comfort and hope to Israel herself. In the New Testament church, this Old Testament understanding of *mission* motivated and justified the young church's practice of mission.[12]

In Isaiah 42:5–9, a mission is entrusted to Israel: they are called to be "*a covenant of the people*" and "*a light to the nations.*"[13] The first part talks about being a *covenant*. The question here is, to whom is this message addressed? The scholars are divided about their identity. Some identify *the people* as Israel, since they have concluded that the Servant is identified with an individual in the previous passage. According to this interpretation, this passage would be a reminder to God's people that God Himself leads His people and sends them to serve the needs of others. The message is not immediately for the Gentiles but for those who are already a part of Israel.

Other scholars, who recognize the servant in Isaiah 42:1–4 as Israel, say that *the people* in this passage are humanity.[14] In Genesis 11, we learn that the sinfulness of the human heart that led to the confusion of all the nations required a plan of redemption. Abraham's call dealt with this human sin and this division. In Genesis 12, God blesses Abraham: "*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever dishonors you I will curse; and in you all families of the earth*

shall be blessed" (Gen 12:2–3, ESV). This is the first "Great Commission," when, through Abraham, God blessed and blesses all the nations.[15] Therefore, Abraham's covenant with God is the beginning of God's answer to the evil of humanity and "one of the key unifying threads in the whole Bible."[16] It was the Gospel, the "good news," to every person.

When God speaks to Moses in Exodus 19, He tells Moses to remind the Israelites of His grace because they had seen all the things that He had done to free them, His people, from Egypt. Being a *covenant of the people* (Is 42:6) is a reminder to them of God's grace so that they will share it with the whole world.

But what does it mean to be *light* (Is 42:6)? When Isaiah talks about darkness it is usually a reference to chaos or negation (45:7; 60:2); thus, light is the opposite of it. Through the hands and mouths of the chosen servant, God's people, the light will reach the world.[17] Thus, the people of God are to shine with a light—a visible and attractive one that will attract the nations ultimately to God Himself, and He will be glorified.[18] The word *light* is commonly related to salvation (Ps 27:1; Is 49:6); consequently, we understand that the servant is the one who will deliver the good news to other nations. Although it is difficult to understand how the faithless people of Israel could bring back the faithless Israel,[19] we have to see that it is not the people alone, but God who would guide them back, as He says in verse 6: *"I will take you by the hand and I will keep you."*

Who says that? The Lord Himself: *"I am the Lord; that is my name."* He is the one who created all things. He is the glorious one, not an idol or a made-up god. Isaiah 42:8–9 is addressed to the prophet's audience, and it is possible that some people in that audience were still confused about who God was and what He was doing. God assures them that they can be confident that everything that the servant does will be accomplished through God's direction and power,[20] under His guidance.

In verses 10–13 God is referred to in the third person, and verse 13 gives a reason why it is He whom God's people should be praising: He is *"like a man of war."* Therefore, we should praise Him for His victories.

In the next three verses, 14–17, God Himself speaks of His battle for His people. It is not just a promise that He will fight for His people; it is God's own promise,[21] which means that He will not forsake Israel.

In the last section, verses 18–25, Isaiah explains God's plans for the deaf and blind servant, Israel, who does not seem to understand God's actions. On the one hand, Israel is deaf because it refused to listen. On the other hand, the use of the word *blind* is a reference to the people's lack of insight; they were unable to perceive the repercussions and meaning of their experiences. They have seen and yet not seen; they failed to recognize what God was about and to learn their lessons.[22] As a consequence of their sinful behavior of blindly ignoring God's covenantal

instructions in the law, God allows the plunder of the people as punishment. God wants to show His people that He is the true God; they are to put their trust in Him.

One could ask, "Is Israel herself the object of the mission?" If the question is whether Israel needs to hear again the saving word of God because she fails to understand and take seriously the message, the answer is yes, but it can never stop there. Mission is never done by perfect people. Even though Israel was a weak and disobedient people, they were still the means by which God intended to reach the nations who did not know Him. As Christopher Wright puts it, our entire mission comes from the prior mission of God.[23] Indeed, even after seeing many of God's saving acts, Israel did not recognize their importance, and so she could not do God's mission by herself. She is not the power by which God accomplishes His ends; that power is the Word. The Word alone can achieve God's plan of redemption.[24]

It must never be forgotten that mission requires that the people of God put their faith in action,[25] that they be witnesses of God and carry the good news to the nations. As Israel was to be a vehicle of God's mission,[26] so also the church was made for mission.

What does this text mean for us? We can see the Servant as an example for all believers who wish to serve God. As His special vessels, filled with the Holy Spirit, we try to accomplish God's will on earth, by being the light that leads others to salvation. However, no one can fulfill this role like the special Servant, whom the New Testament (Mt 13:14–15) identifies as the Messiah. Only through that Servant will justice be established in the whole earth, and He alone will be a covenant to all the nations.[27]

In Luke 2, we read how this Messiah came to us as a child. Verse 25 says that a righteous and devout man named Simeon—who had also had a revelation from the Holy Spirit that he would see the Lord's Messiah before his death—went into the temple while Jesus was being presented as the Law required at that time. Simeon held Jesus in his arms and uttered the first poetic speech in Luke, the *Nunc Dimittis*, (Lk 2:29–32):[28] *"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel"* (ESV). In the form of a prayer of petition, the *Nunc Dimittis* demonstrates Simeon's acknowledgement, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of God's fulfillment of the promise[29] and the "universal character of God's provision of salvation,"[30] prepared in the sight of all nations.

Simeon was one of those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel, which was fulfilled in Jesus; and now this consolation was prepared for all peoples as salvation "to the Gentiles" and to Israel. His hope was the trust that God would accomplish His promise. The language used by Luke leads us to Isaiah, where Israel, after a time of humiliation, is "consoled" through the God's restoration.[31]

The Isaiah passage is very close to the passage in Luke. Some recurrent themes in Isaiah are seen in Simeon's oracle: this salvation is brought by God to us and thus it is His work and not ours; this salvation is for all peoples, universal for both Jews and Gentiles; and God delivers this salvation in Jesus, His Servant, bringing glory to Israel as God's chosen people. The role of the Servant, announced by the voice of God at the beginning of Isaiah 42, through whom God works to bring forth salvation, is fulfilled later by Jesus. In this way, the identification of Isaiah's Servant as an individual, the Messiah, is the most natural understanding.

In addition, Simeon saw the salvation that the Child would bring and also the rejection of many when he blessed Jesus: *"This child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed"* (Lk 2:34–35 ESV). Jesus Himself says in Luke 12:51–53 that He will cause division, and this division will be between the believer and the ones who will reject the truth.[32]

As Jesus is the light of the world who saves us, we are to be the light in the world to share His salvation. All Christians, like the light overcoming darkness, are to illumine society and show it a better way,[33] the only way. The light we are to shine is not just of a verbal proclamation of the Gospel, but also the light of justice and compassion for our neighbors. God's people illuminate within the church by reminding people of God's promise, and outside the church through missional light,[34] which means the work of all Christians in attracting people of the world to worship the true God.

Endnotes

[1] Andrew Steinmann, *Called to be God's People: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 491.

[2] John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998),130.

[3] Harold Henry Rowley, "The Servant Mission: The Servant Songs and Evangelism." *Interpretation 8*, no. 3 (July 1, 1954), 260.

[4] Steinmann, *Called to be God's People*, 519.

[5] Gary Smith, *New American Commentary: Isaiah 40–66.* Vol. 15b. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 76–78.

[6] Steinmann, *Called to be God's People*, 520.

[7] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 108.

[8] Smith, *New American Commentary: Isaiah 40–66*, 160.

[9] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 169.

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[11] Elmer A. Martens "Impulses to Mission in Isaiah: An Intertextual Exploration." *Bulletin For Biblical Research* 17, no. 2 (January 1, 2007), 216.

[12] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 29.

[13] Harold Henry Rowley, "The Servant Mission: The Servant Songs and Evangelism," 264.

[14] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 118.

[15] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 41.

[16] Ibid., 66, 71.

[17] Knight, *Servant Theology,* 49.

[18] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 144.

[19] Smith, *New American Commentary: Isaiah 40–66*, 154.

[20] Ibid., 169.

[21] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 125.

[22] Ibid., 131.

[23] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 24.

[24] Ibid., 55.

[25] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 39.

[26] Knight, *Servant Theology,* 53.

[27] Smith, *New American Commentary: Isaiah 40–66*, 174.

[28] Raymond Edward Brown, "Presentation of Jesus (Luke 2:22–40)," *Worship* 51, no. 1 (January 1, 1977), 06.

[29] Marion L. Soards, "Luke 2:22–40," *Interpretation* 44, no. 4 (October 1, 1990), 402.

[30] Ibid., 403.

[31] Ibid., 402.

[32] Ibid., 404.

[33] John R. W. Stott, "Salt & Light: Four ways Christians can influence the world," *Christianity Today* 55, no. 10 (October 1, 2011), 41.

[34] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 139.

The Book of Generations

Victor Raj

Abstract: This essay focuses on but a few aspects of Gospel proclamation in a changing world. Christian witnesses remain faithful to Scripture and the church's tradition as they in each generation boldly present the claim the Lord Jesus Christ has on the human race in a world lost in sin and its aftermath. An appreciation of the Church's origins in the apostolic times is an incentive for Christians of every age to better identify the world around them and the opportunities it presents for Gospel proclamation in contextually meaningful ways. The Scriptures present witnesses that took advantage of their knowledge of the first-century world as they were addressing an audience estranged from God's ways. They did so with confidence in the Holy Spirit's leading and directing that transforms people's lives to return through Jesus to their Creator. These models speak directly to the church and the world that is as competent as the church in everything except the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament witnesses the culmination of the unfolding of the Gospel of God for the whole creation (Mk 16:15), as the Lord Himself directed His first disciples to proclaim that good news for all people throughout the world (Acts 1:8). Since the fall of the first man from the grace and favor of God, the created order has been subjected to bondage and corruption and groaning for its redemption in the pains of childbirth (Rom 8:18–24). Contrary to God's intention Adam and Eve fell victim to Satan's sedition and treachery and succumbed to their inescapable distancing from the Divine Presence. Of no little consequence is the curse that human rebellion to God's ways has wrought upon the entire universe. What once took place in a garden continues to show its recurring consequences throughout the world, submitting everything that has life to pain, sorrow, and suffering. History is replete with illustrations of how one man's disobedience and trespassing of God's statutes brought the wrath of God upon God's creation. No aspect of human destiny is exempt from that tragic situation.

With the introduction of sin to God's perfect world, humanity's direct encounter with God has become forever impossible and the intention to follow His ways unviable. God's righteous indignation on human defiance severed the divine-human relationship, and human aspirations operate regrettably contrary to God's design. The already severed relationship between God and His creation has resulted in the

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inexorable deterioration and disintegration of everything that exists. In a fallen world, peaceful co-existence and justice shall forever remain an unrealizable utopia, however hard anyone tries to achieve such ideals with all honesty and integrity. Scripture puts the blame on one man's disobedience for inflicting God's vengeance on His handiwork (Rom 5:15–18).

The interplay of God's fury in the created order is evident in the futility of the daily hard work that everyone puts in with sweat on the brow and in the unending struggles that each one goes through to make ends meet. Juxtaposed to all honest and sincere intentions, the human race constantly encounters disharmony among fellow humans and within the rest of God's creation. Injustice prevails. Socio-economic inequalities generate deep divides. People plot. Nations rage. Peace talks fail. Discord and dissonance persist in every sphere of life. Death and decay spare nothing at all in all of creation.

The Gospel is the good news that God has taken the initiative to rescue His creation and the human race from this jeopardy. God has perfected in His Son, Jesus Christ, His eternal plan of salvation and redemption for the whole world. In Jesus Christ, God intercepted history and turned the world to a new and eternal direction, recreating it to fit the pattern He originally had for it. In Jesus Christ, God kept His promise of a Savior and Redeemer, discounting humanity's sin and lifting from His creation sin's recurring consequences. The Christian church of every age everywhere celebrates God's salvific intrusion into the human epoch as it boldly declares in word and deed its Savior and Lord as a testimony before all. As Christians come together to celebrate Jesus Christ and His redemptive work, they experience God's presence with them now and a foretaste of things to come.

Since the fall, God began to unfold His plan of saving the world, beginning with the Garden of Eden. The prophetic utterances echoed throughout Scripture in God's promises of a Savior from sin and its reverberations. In God's appointed time, His Messiah came to our earth to accomplish for the whole world His eternal plan of salvation (Gal 4:4). In the temple in Jerusalem and with great anticipation, Simeon was blessed to hold in his hands the long-awaited consolation of Israel in the person of Jesus (Lk 2:30). Later, in nearby Jericho, the Messiah Jesus visited with the wealthy but infamous tax collector, Zacchaeus, and declared to those who had gathered there that salvation had come to that house (Lk 19:9). At the completion of His earthly mission, during His heavenward departure from the disciples, Jesus authorized His eyewitnesses to bear witness to the ends of the earth His life, death, and resurrection (Acts 1:6–11). At His command, God's mission extends the world over through His church on earth. The Church can only be a witness to what it has received through the apostolic witness. The church engages this mission as a participant in the mission of God. We exist as a church to serve God's mission. One mission observer has stated so clearly that "It is not so much that God has a mission for his church as that God has a church for his mission."[1]

Jesus inaugurated His earthly mission by proclaiming God's rule and reign and demonstrating its presence among people through the actions He performed, beginning with Galilee His hometown (Mk 1:14, 15). It announced a call to repentance, the necessary threshold for the listeners to enter God's kingdom. In fact, the Evangelists testify that at the coming of Jesus the kingdom of God had drawn near. The resurrected Lord confirmed that in Him God's kingdom activity has been fulfilled, and that in His name repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed to all nations by way of inviting them to enter His kingdom (Mt 28:18–20; Mk 16:15, 16; Lk 24:46; Jn 20:21–23). The four Gospels therefore conclude with a call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

The Acts of the Apostles is the narrative history of how, since the Lord's heavenward ascension, the first Christians continued in His mission on earth. It begins with the early disciples, gathering in Jerusalem and awaiting the Spirit of God to descend on them, and continues through the apostolic ministry as the Gospel reaches Rome, the fount and source of power in the first-century secular world. Beginning in Jerusalem, people gathered in one place as God first drew them to Him in Christ's name and then scattered them to nearby and faraway villages and towns to proclaim to everyone God's reconciling act in Christ. Acts depicts both the centripetal and the centrifugal nature of the church and mission. In the name of Jesus both Jews and Gentiles gathered initially in the holy city of Jerusalem. From there, they scattered abroad as God's witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to terrains beyond Israel's borders to Gentile territories such as Philippi, Athens, Greece, and Rome where non-Jewish populations dominated.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the church had but one message to announce throughout the world to both Jews and non-Jews alike: Jesus was put to death on a cross for the sins of all people and God raised Him from the dead, assuring life after death for all who believe in Him as Savior and Lord (Acts 5:31). For those whose sins have been forgiven in Christ, there is life and salvation. The preachers in the book of Acts crafted their message by taking into account how best to communicate this one truth meaningfully to the hearers, whether Jews or Gentiles. They boldly encountered the religions and cultures of their hearers even as "the typical Gentile audience of the time could not resonate with the message as they were not present at the time when the events summarized in Acts 1:1–4 were taking place."[2] The platforms of the first witnesses of the Lord spread quickly from the temple precincts of Jerusalem (Acts 2) to the various towns and villages far beyond Judea. The proclaimers of the new faith addressed the households of God-fearing Gentiles (Cornelius, Acts 10) and spoke at riverside prayer meetings (Lydia, Acts 16:13). They preached the Gospel in the public square and the shrines of pagan gods (Lystra, Acts 14) and participated in the think tank of truth-seekers and philosophers of the time: the Areopagus (Acts 17). Kings and governors could not gainsay their message. Craftsmen and tentmakers, business owners and academics, idolaters and

sorcerers, men and women of means, and the rich and the poor heeded their call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The church is never stationary, limiting its life and service to one specific locale or to a particular people. God's people go with Him to wherever He leads.

Already from the beginning, God had set apart the Apostle Paul for a specific mission, that of proclaiming His salvation to the Gentiles and kings (Acts 9:15; cf. Mt 10:18). Paul joined the cadre of apostolic witnesses, having received the revelation directly from the Lord (Gal 1:12; 2:2). To his listeners and readers Paul acknowledged that he was passing on to them what he had first received from eyewitnesses before him (1 Cor 15:1–4). In other words, the apostle was confident that God was the one who entrusted him with the unique ministry of proclaiming Jesus Christ as Savior, crucified and risen. Paul did not make up a message of his own; rather he was God's vehicle for making known to both Jews and Gentiles the truth that God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin in order that those who believe might become righteous before God (2 Cor 5:14–18). Paul was interpreting the Gospel in a language with which his audience could resonate. He was intent on passing the good news of God to as many others as possible.

Reverberating in the Pauline corpus is the rhyme that the church of Jesus Christ is on a mission, the mission of God for all people, especially to the Gentiles. In Romans, his magnum opus, Paul presents the case that he and his fellow servants have the obligation to make known to all nations the mystery of salvation God revealed uniquely in Jesus Christ. That indeed, to be sure, was a mystery that lay hidden in the annals of history until the coming of Christ into the world incarnationally. Christ in His flesh and blood unfolded that mystery for all people. That this Christ lives in those who put their trust in Him is the mystery that Paul and his companions were committed to making known to both Jews and Gentiles (Col 1:27; Rom 16:25, 26), as his mission and composition make clear.

Paul began his letter to the Christians in Rome with the claim that God had endowed him and his companions with grace and apostleship for bringing about among all nations the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ (Rom 1:5). Paul concluded his Roman correspondence with the same assertion: that he by divine intention had the scriptural warrant to bring about the obedience of faith to all nations (Rom 16:26). Romans 16 is a lengthy catalogue of Paul's friends and acquaintances resident in Rome or visitors to that city, men and women and their families, his kinsmen and fellow prisoners, those who "risked their necks" for Paul, the church that met in a house, and a patron of Paul's mission and ministry. The book of Acts shows that Paul met these men and women during his missionary journeys and that they were brought to the obedience of faith through his missionary activities. In Rome, Prisca and Aquila opened their house for worship and prayer, making that into a house-church, *domus ecclesiae* (Rom 16:5). Furthermore, this chapter makes honorable mention of Paul's beloved Epaenetus (v. 5), who was "the

first convert to Christ in the province of Asia." The English translation "the first convert" reads in the Greek original as the "firstfruits" for Christ. This reading also matches the Apostle Paul's ambitious claim that he had for the Lord a harvest waiting among the Romans as well as among the rest of the Gentiles (1:13). With the conversion of the Asian Gentile Epaenetus, harvesting for the Lord in the Gentile nations typically had already begun.

Lest the Lutheran eyes see a tad of synergism in the phrase "obedience of faith," commentators suggest that in order to avoid such nuanced connotations the expression is better translated as "commitment to faith," since the relationship human beings have with God is "more a commitment to the service of God in Christ and through the Spirit."[3] The substantive "obedience" should be placed appositionally with faith, that is, when translated this way, obeying God becomes descriptive of believing in God. Further grammatical analyses make possible other rewordings, such as "faith manifesting itself as obedience" or "obedience that springs from faith." For Paul, the express purpose of his mission was that Gentiles may commit themselves to Jesus as Lord, that is, they may in faith take the step of believing in Jesus as Savior. Simply put, Paul was preaching and writing letters so that through such instruction everyone will follow Jesus to benefit fully from Him and His redemptive work. Thus, the Christian life becomes a lifetime of worshiping and praising God for what He has done and continues to do for all in Christ. As a result, Gospel proclamation becomes "a sacred liturgical act" of its own for passing the faith on to future generations (Rom 13:6; 15:16).[4]

Are the events recorded in the book of Acts essentially descriptive of the first-century Christianity, or are they also prescriptive for the church of all ages? A wise way to engage this question is to do so in a "pleonastic pluperfect sense," that is, claiming for the present the abiding results of the events of the past as they first occurred, relative to the reader and listener. To be sure, Acts is St. Luke's record of the events that took place before eyewitnesses from whom he had gathered firsthand information and also in his own hearing, as Luke himself participated in some of Paul's missionary travels as his unnamed companion (e.g. Acts 16:11). As pioneers in the field, the early Christian missionaries had no model (prescription/ roadmap) to follow but the divine mandate to makes disciples. If the church's ministry and mission is apostolic, then the apostolic model includes for each generation proclaiming the Gospel among unbelievers and making them the Lord's disciples.

In his book, the *Apostolic Church*, Robert Scudieri has argued that an apostle is one who is commissioned. A person could not simply choose to become someone else's apostle. The act of commissioning makes the one being sent the authorized representative of the sender. The commissioned one is as good as the one who commissions.[5] The apostles are authorized representatives. The authorization, Scudieri suggests, is for a specific purpose. For the apostle, there is a task to be accomplished in the name and on behalf of his sender. The apostolic authority is

extended to another only for a specific task. The apostolic church therefore by definition "is God's authorized messenger, sent with God's authority for his specific purpose: to evangelize the world."[6] God has placed in the world His community of believers for making known what He has in store for the whole world. "Apostolic" is an appropriate self-description of the followers of Jesus. The apostolic mission flows from the heart of God for the world's redemption and reconciliation to Himself. The church, therefore, is One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, and Missionary, as the title of the book claims.

If not already from the beginning when God called Abraham as the father of His covenant people (Gn 12:1–3), at least since God redeemed His people from slavery and bondage under alien powers in a foreign land, God invested in them His missionary agency. Israel had been designated a kingdom of priests and a holy nation set apart for God (Ex 19:6). They would be His special agents who will impart to the world His matchless blessing for their salvation and well-being. Israel would mediate for the whole world God's covenant blessing, while keeping intact their own identity as God's covenant people. As G. B. Caird observes, only people with a unique identity had the right to embark on a mission to the world. With that status and privilege, "They could go into a direction of religious nationalism—Israel as a nation with a king and a country or move toward syncretism at the expense of preserving the uniqueness of their religion."[7] The story of the people of Israel had been such that as a nation they were becoming syncretistic and apostate, compelled perhaps by the circumstances in which they lived. The Bible has recorded apostasy as a recurring phenomenon in the Israelite history.

In the Old Testament, the prophetic voices of God were chastising relentlessly the nation of Israel for their apostasy and calling them to repentance and trust in God alone, especially in adverse circumstances when other nations and their gods seemed to be enticing and persuasive and claiming their allegiance. Conversely, many prophetic utterances display a more generous and kind-hearted sensitivity toward the Gentiles, Israel's neighbors who were not yet God's people; nevertheless, the God of Israel controlled their destinies as well. The prophets announced that God would use Gentile nations for the working out of His sovereign and salvific purposes (Am 9:9–15; Is 10:1–4). In fact, the Rabbinic traditions of the first-century Judaism speculated that God, in making a covenant with Noah, had revealed to all nations certain basic moral obligations, as evidenced in the commonality seen even today in the ethics and civil laws of other nations and cultures. Beginning with the common ground of the natural knowledge of God (Rom 2:14–16), in due course, all nations will recognize God's matchless authority and power over them, as God alone can save people from their sin and its consequence, death (Is 2:2–4; Mt 28:18–20; Acts 28:28–31) .

Students of the first-century religious history claim that in New Testament times polytheism was the most popular and widespread belief among the common people, while "assertions of God's unity are not infrequent in pagan writers, perhaps among

some intellectuals."[8] In sharp contradistinction to the public approximation on the plurality of gods and religions, Christianity had but one specific message to convey to the world. The apostolic proclamation was exclusive in the sense that the Christian religion was founded solidly on the uncompromising monotheism of Judaism. Jesus Christ is the final and ultimate revelation of the One God of the whole world. Paul was committed to distinguishing this God from the pagan idea of many gods and many lords (1 Thes 1:9) and the "gods of this age" (2 Cor 4:4). The apostle elucidated God's ongoing operation specifically in the lives of believers as he testified that there is only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:5–6). Only through Jesus Christ is the full, complete, and comprehensive knowledge of God possible for all people, including seekers and searchers. A certain notable dialectical pattern was evident in much of Pauline discourse, as it was grounded in the affirmation that Jesus Christ was crucified and was raised from the dead as God's ultimate self-revelation for humanity's sake. Paul's missiology was grounded solidly in his Christology. As he wrote in his letter to the Corinthians, wherever he went, Paul elected to know and speak of nothing other than the crucified Christ and His resurrection (1 Cor 2:1–2). The crucified Messiah had now become a new paradigm of God's decisive action for the world.[9] Even so, the new paradigm of preaching and teaching the crucified God remains scandalous to the Jewish way of theologizing and the Gentile way of philosophizing the truth about God. Yet, it is through the crucified and risen Christ that God draws both Jews and Gentiles to Himself and builds His community on earth.

House Churches

Several generations ago, New Testament students had claimed that "There is no decisive evidence until the third century of the existence of special buildings used for churches. The references seem all to be to places in private homes, sometimes very probably houses of a large size."[10] More recently, social historians have produced credible and invaluable data confirming that at least during the first two centuries the early Christians were meeting as small groups in homes, building their faith and life together in the Lord Jesus Christ. The followers of Jesus constituted with intentionality communities that grew primarily "through the united and motivated efforts of the growing members of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives, and neighbors to share the 'good news.'"[11] Individual households served as the basic unit of the Christian religion for its maintenance and expansion, just as homes and households were foundational for the constitution and sustenance of various cultures and nations. Sociologically, villages and cities expanded to clusters, settling in specific areas organized as neighborhoods and nations.[12]

During the early centuries, Christianity achieved only minimum numerical growth.[13] Along with their intentional efforts at witnessing the faith to proselytes and

to the heathen, Christians were also marrying non-Christians (1 Cor 7:16) and raising children of mixed races, religions, and cultures. In the early days, Christians were a small minority to be sure, having little impact on the community and culture, as believers were ordinarily from the lower classes, albeit a select few representing the middle and upper classes. Not until the third century did the idea of constructing church buildings develop, and the cathedral model churches began to surface as Christian communities increased in number. Christian congregational buildings were patterned initially after the local and national governmental structures. Since the Roman emperor Constantine declared Christianity the religion of the state, a movement that began in a small town in Palestine became the dominant factor that helped shape the faith and culture of the then-known world.

Wayne Meeks has emphasized the importance for future generations of reclaiming the matrix of social patterns within which the doctrines of the church were first articulated. According to Meeks, "abstracted from that setting or placed in a different one, the stated belief is liable to mean something quite different"[14] to those who might be accepting it newly. Rodney Stark has reiterated that "*people are more willing to adopt a new religion to the extent that it retains cultural continuity with conventional religion(s) with which they are already familiar.*"[15] These observations speak volumes for Christians who are privileged to serve as witnesses of the Gospel of God in the twenty-first century in a constantly changing cultural context where religions and spiritualities are emerging forever new.

Barna's research catalogues numerous critical shifts in values and attitudes that have been occurring in the twenty-first century, especially in North America, that Christians need to take into serious account.[16] The study shows a deflation of values and value judgments*, as well as* the norms the world has set to evaluate them, a change from what people used to embrace to what they actually now embrace. According to Barna, in the American cultural and religious landscape noticeable changes have been occurring, causing the nation to become a "place where anything goes." Our generation, especially of the younger adults, is bent on moving us toward a yet-to-be-defined framework of alternative values in which personal choice is of pivotal value, says Barna. This will take the nation to a new direction that is highly individualistic in all phases of life. What was once deemed excellence is now compromised with adequacy: Common Good with Individual Advantage, Delayed Gratification with Instant Gratification, Respect with Incivility, Christian God with Amorphous God, Truth with Tolerance, Trust with Skepticism, Knowledge with Experience.[17]

Individuals, local congregations, and the institutional church in recent years have been intentional about bringing Christ across the spectrum of nations and cultures. Dedicated and committed Christian men and women, on their own or teaming up with kindred spirits, are traveling with their backpacks to faraway places hitherto unfamiliar to them with the primary goal of making the love of Christ

known to those who could otherwise have never known the Savior and experienced His love on a personal basis. Unlike during the early centuries of Christian mission, independent and entrepreneurial mission societies have been looming large globally, several of them headquartered in the historically non-Christian cultures, and commissioning fully funded Christian missionaries for service in the Western hemisphere. The centuries-old Mission Boards of institutional Churches are constantly being reconstructed and reinterpreted with a view to facing boldly the ever-increasing challenges of local and global Christian mission. The Lord's parabolic teachings on the growth of His kingdom applies both descriptively and prescriptively to the twenty-first-century mission. Some seed fall on the wayside, others on rocky ground. Some fall among thorns, and yet others fall on good soil, growing and increasing and yielding great harvest. Wherever the harvest has yielded well, the communities that are brought to faith are confessing their commitment to the One Lord in their vernacular in expressions indigenous to their language and culture.

Building Faith Communities.

Modern studies in the art and practice of communicating call for an interactive, participatory experience between the speaker and the listener/the author and the reader. Meaningful communication results in the building of an interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the listener and impels the listener to engage in a new mission pursuant on what he has newly learned. The speaker is hopeful that as he delivers the speech it will generate in the listener an exciting and suitable moment of learning and understanding of what he hears. The encounter therefore creates a conscious awareness in the listener's mind that he has now encountered something new that has value for him and his community for the present and for the future. As the mouthpieces of God, Christian witnesses are bound to be cognizant of this fact as they engage the world with Gospel proclamation. New generations need to be reached by employing new methods, benefiting liberally from the new and emerging ways and means of effective communication. Religious and theological discourse must therefore tackle this reality intelligently and wisely in order to retain the historic and conventional identity of the Christian faith while lending a listening ear to the cultural and social identity of those for whom being a Christian is a brand new experience.

Two observations from a critique of the recent reader-response theory on communication are of particular relevance here: "A book is not only a book, it is the means by which an author actually preserves his ideas, his feelings, his modes of dreaming and living."[18] And "reading is just that: a way of giving way not only to a host of alien words, images, ideas, but also to the very alien principle which utters them and shelters them."[19] These statements signify that during the process of composing a text the writer (speaker, while delivering a discourse) brings a certain

meaning to the text as he composes it, and the reader while reading it contributes his share in order to comprehend and appreciate what the author wrote and to make it his own. Readers come with their own understanding as they approach a certain text and interpret what they read in words and concepts that are familiar to them. Speakers are bound to concede that hearers are the final arbiters of what they hear in spite of the intentionality of the speaker. Gospel communicators understand the challenge of balancing the ontological meaning of the words they employ and their phenomenological implications that depend on the culture and context of their listeners. Standard dictionaries in any language define the essence of words ontologically, without in any way letting the context or the environment in which the words are used determine their lexical meaning. Phenomenological meaning, on the other hand, is dependent on the environment in which the words are used and on the contribution of the listener who participates in the conversation.

Meaningful conversation relies heavily on the mutuality created between speakers and listeners. Languages connect people and invite conversation partners. As Eugene Peterson observes, "We often assume that the problem of interpreting words is a matter of knowing what they mean and linking meanings together in some reasonable order in our minds. . . . The problem is to decide at any moment what our relation to the words should be, even when we know what they mean."[20] If the meanings of words are to be determined relationally, then words also serve to build healthy relationships between people who use them. Proclaimers of the Divine Word have the responsibility of speaking the word as well as assuring that their hearers understand what the proclaimed words actually mean to them. If the speakers are speaking "over their heads," then the hearers benefit the least from such speeches.

Theology is recognized generally as *second-order* didactic language that must be conceptually precise, as it is the exposition of doctrine within the household of faith. Theology is a systematic exposition of the self-understanding of the foundational teachings of a religion a particular people have embraced and hold corporately. Missional conversations, however, are best held in what theologians call *first-order* religious discourse that may not be conceptually precise at all, yet expressive of the human religious relationship with God.[21] Communication of Christian mission expresses the faith in the language of the heart, focusing particularly on the listener who is practically unfamiliar with the raw fact of the theological and doctrinal formulations being relayed to him. Christian mission is the interpretation of the faith for the sake of those outside the faith and do not yet belong to faith communities in order that they, too, can come to know in their heart language the heart of God who desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Genuinely missional conversations happen at the level of the first order of religious discourse. A theology of mission must discover a happy medium between the first and second order language and reflection.

Mission is the attempt at connecting the experience of the past (God's acts in the history of His people) with the realities of the present by way of communicating Christ to all people. For this purpose, systematic study of linguistics, world religions, and cultures became part of the liberal arts curriculum in colleges and universities where missionaries were trained intentionally in communication. The European model of teaching history and religions in theological colleges and seminaries was established primarily for equipping Christian missionaries for service in the non-Christian world as witnesses of Christ. Institutes for the study of religions and cultures were established wherever missionaries were trained prior to their departure to faraway lands as witnesses of the Gospel.

Numerous models have been suggested by both theologians and missiologists for accomplishing this important task, a considered appraisal of which is far beyond the limits of these present reflections. On contextualizing the Gospel, for example, Stephen Bevans has surmised that the church preserves and defends its theological tradition on the basis of God's revelation in Scripture and the church's own "experience of the past."[22] In today's context, however, when doing theology well, the experience of the present demands equally careful attention of the church's leadership in ministry and theologizing as it includes personal as well as communal experiences of the people the church has been called to serve. Whether Christians live in a religious or secular culture, in their daily living they are constantly encountering issues and challenges such as societal changes, the plurality of religions, poverty, injustice, minority status, conflict of interests, and the global move from modernity to postmodernity.[23] The Christian church must address these and related concerns for the sake of effectively communicating to the world the one message it is privileged to embrace.

Bevan's appraisal of the models of contextualization shows how theology and missiology operate largely on the horizontal lines that move from transmitting the experience of the past to engaging the present, giving various weights to the influences of the past and the present in today's church and world. The Word of God speaks directly to the conscience of people and transforms their lives in ways human calculations are rendered powerless to measure.

Nevertheless, the Christian Church has a unique privilege and responsibility to serve God and the world He has created. As Robert Kolb observes, "we are called upon to explain his unchanging truths and Scripture's unchangeable insights into the proper rules and structures for the life of his community as an institution entrusted under Scripture's direction to human design and ingenuity."[24]

Missional theologians are committed to making known to the world of all times the one truth that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Endnotes

[1] Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 148.

[2] G. B. Caird, *The Apostolic Age* (London: Duckworth, 1955), 107.

[3] Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Romans.* The Anchor Bible, Vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 238.

[4] Ibid., 711.

[5] Robert J. Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Missionary*, Lutheran Society For Missiology Book Series (Ft. Wayne, IN: Lutheran Society for Missiology, 1996).

[6] Ibid., 13.

[7] Caird, *The Apostolica Age*, 172.

[8] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 165.

[9] Ibid., 180.

[10] William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *Romans.* The International Critical Commentary. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895), 420.

[11] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, Harper Collins, 1996), 208.

[12] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 29ff.

[13] Stark has evidence to show how numbers were exaggerated in the first-century culture, in history and geography, even when they report populations in towns and cities. A similar approach is appropriate when considering the growth of Christianity today. The global South and the Far East are the two specific geographical areas where significant increase in church membership is being reported. From these regions, more people are drawn to faith in Jesus Christ from the lower levels of the socio-economic structures and fewer from the upper and higher classes of the society.

[14] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 164.

[15] Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 164. Italics are Stark's.

[16] George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trend Means for Tomorrow's World* (Carol Stream, IL: Barna, 2011), 53–79.

[17] Ibid., 79.

[18] Georges Poulet, "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority" (reprinted) in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins, 40–49. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 46.

[19] Ibid., 45.

[20] Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book: a Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 107.

[21] Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 35. Frei in the chapter on Five Types of Theology notes the distinction that Friedrich Schleiermacher made between two kinds of theology.

[22] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology.* rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 8.

[23] Ibid., 3–15.

[24] Robert Kolb, "The Sheep and the Voice of the Shepherd: The Ecclesiology of the Lutheran Confessional Writings," *Concordia Journal* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 339.

Mission Observers

Outreach to Atheists

Herbert Hoefer

We all recognize that atheists are increasing in number and aggressiveness. They are getting organized with their own "Sunday Assemblies" and slogans and advertisements and social networks and community service projects. As one lady in a community book discussion said last week with a wry smile: "I'm an atheist who has finally come out of the closet."

No doubt, there will be more and more closet atheists coming out, even in our families and churches, now that it's not so rare. It's even a bit cool among young people. When one sees these surveys of the lamentable biblical illiteracy among the general USA population, one also notes that atheists generally score higher than Protestants. Obviously, they have been part of our ministries but now have jumped ship.

One man gave me this acronym for their "new atheism" movement:

A
Thoughtful
Honest
Ethical
Intelligent
Skeptical
Thinker

Who wouldn't want to be a part of a group like that? And in the above acronym, one can discern their critique of the church, and perhaps the reason that some have left.

It has often been pointed out how, throughout history, Christianity had to address the intellectual challenges of the day. If churches only appealed to members to "simply believe," they quickly lost credibility, especially among the younger generation and the intelligentsia. And they certainly go nowhere with non-believers. Faith must be grounded in truth and fact, not simply in emotion and hope and loyalty.

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I recall an Easter sermon that I heard following the discovery of an ossuary that had the name of "Jesus" on it, along with names of some family members. The pastor asserted that there are two kinds of truth: "faith truth" and "other truth," and our truth comes from faith. But I was thinking "If those are the bones of Jesus, our faith is a sham and a lie," as St. Paul himself asserted: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1 Cor 15:17). Prior to hearing that sermon, I had thought that young man might make a good campus pastor. But not after hearing that.

Contemporary surveys have often documented how disaffected young people see the church as anti-intellectual and anti-science. Richard Dawkins, a pop icon among young atheists, has frequently called Christians "history-deniers." Of course, he is primarily concerned with fundamentalist Christians' refusing to deal responsibly with the facts of evolutionary evidence across the scientific fields, from biology to geology to paleontology to genetics to astronomy to physics and on and on.

Experts in the soft sciences, such as sociology and psychology and history, are even more likely to be atheists. They view the church and the attitudes/practices of Christians through the critical lens of wishful thinking, communal loyalty, and historical heritage. We find comfort in believing and belonging, and so we refuse to consider any disturbing questions of truth.

One thing is clear: These issues cannot be addressed by biblical scholarship or by theologians. We need lay Christian experts in these fields, in both the hard and the soft sciences. They alone will have credibility among their scientific peers and young people. The best we theologians can do is to demonstrate our honest search for truth within our own field. We need to be as ready to abandon untenable positions as experts do in other fields.

Where does this leave us with the atheists among us? I have found the best approach is to begin with non-Christian religions. Those who have dismissed Christianity often are quite willing to take a fresh look at Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. They can come to realize that belief in God is not a strange sociological peculiarity of America, but a worldwide awareness throughout history.

Often their journey from atheism begins with recognizing the credibility of experiences of the spirit world all around the world and all through history. They become aware that truth is to be found not only in what is tangible and scientifically reproducible and controllable. Then credible accounts of miracles and supernatural experiences add to the evidence they need.

It can be pointed out that the post-Enlightenment West is the bizarre phenomenon in world history, even today. People of all cultures are very aware of these supernatural phenomena and take them for what they are. They don't try to desperately explain them away. We secularists of the West, then, are the ones who are truth deniers.

Drunk in His Own Wine:
Overcoming the Obstacles
Necessary to Do Ethnic Ministry

Giacomo Cassese

The 2014 Multi-Ethnic Symposium at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis was a great opportunity to reflect upon the life and mission of the Lutheran Church in the United States.

In my book, *Conceptos esenciales : introducción al vocabulario teológico de la tradición luterana (Essential Concepts: Introduction to the Theological Vocabulary in the Lutheran Tradition)*, I use my own parable to describe the current situation of the Lutheran Church in America: the parable of the wine maker. There was a man who invested all his life in producing the most delicious type of grapes from which he could harvest the best tasting wine imaginable. After many tries, he was finally able to attain his goal. However, something terrible happened to him. The wine was so delicious that he never stopped drinking it. Every time he drank it, he would celebrate his achievement; but over time, he went from being constantly drunk to a being a complete alcoholic. The very thing that was supposed to lead him to success became his greatest obstacle.

This parable helps us to understand what is currently happening in the Lutheran Church. Our monumental heritage, our exquisite and profound theology, and our remarkable historical roots are for us what the wine was for the wine maker. The Lutheran Church seems to be so concentrated on its own past and tradition that it is blind to see anything else, even the mission field.

The greatest obstacle we have in front of us right now is this enormous myth that tells us that only those who have come from Germany or Scandinavian countries have the right to call themselves genuine Lutherans. It is like the giant pink elephant in the room. Everyone notices it, but they all avoid even broaching the subject. Most of the time, because it seems like a lost battle, people don't even bother fighting against it.

H. Richard Niebuhr, in his book *Social Sources of Denominationalism in America*, comments that Lutherans are the "least cosmopolitan" group in America.[1] This is one way of saying that Lutherans are not so willing to engage in the

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contextualization process. It is also well known that one of the major reasons for the creation of the ELCA was to try to put at an end to the ethnic European synods and to create a more integrated Lutheran body.

I wrote an article a few years ago titled, "The Illegitimate Sons of Martin Luther."[2] My intention was to raise awareness of how minority groups in the Lutheran church bodies in the United States feel about this dominant ecclesiastical culture that practically asks them to abandon their own culture in order to assimilate themselves into what is considered to be genuine. We should remember the words of Aristotle: "We are more sons of culture than we are of our mothers." What he was trying to say is that it is impossible to detach ourselves from our cultures because culture is not just an accessory. In other words, we're not merely part of our culture, we are our culture. Our culture is who we are, our identity; therefore, if I have to extract myself from my culture by taking on another in order to partake in this Christian body, it would almost be a violation of my very essence as a human.

For the minority ethnic groups in the various Lutheran church bodies in America, "cultural Lutheranism" is a strange concept grounded in an attachment to a given tradition instead of in a theological identity. The Reformation was not an end in itself. It is not a tradition; rather, reformation is a method. Therefore, to treat Lutheranism as a mere tradition is to make every Lutheran church a sixteenth-century Reformation museum.

To me, the experience of being an ethnic person within the Lutheran Church is like someone trying to connect with the goings-on in an opera house without having the required background. To enjoy the performance in an opera house, you need to wear the proper vestments to be able to enter, you need to know the language in which the opera is being performed, and you have to have an interest in opera in the first place. In other words, it won't be easy to find many people who will want to take part in this musical pastime. Something similar happens to those who are candidates to join the Lutheran Church; they feel overwhelmed by the many requirements necessary to fit into the ecclesiastical culture.

We need to remind ourselves that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is an incarnate reality. It means that just as there are no colors without tangibility, there is no Gospel without people. Secondly, we need to realize that the Church is the only organization that concentrates its efforts on outsiders, not on those already inside.

Pentecost is a powerful principle that we need to keep constantly in our minds when we do ministry among ethnic groups. Why? First, because it happened three different times as a way of God's showing us how sensitive the Holy Spirit is to each human culture. As we know, the first experience with the Holy Spirit happened among the Jews in Acts 2. The second occasion is found in Acts 8, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Samaritans. The last occasion took place in the house of Cornelius, when the Holy Spirit poured into that place (Acts 10). In the time of

Jesus, the cultural/racial world was divided into three categories: the Jews, those who were more or less Jewish, and those who had nothing to do with the Jews, that is, Gentiles. These accounts teach us that God respects everyone's culture and that He also makes the Gospel accessible to those in need of it. That is why the "Pentecost Principle" is used as a reference when we want to do ministry among ethnic groups.

Within the church that I lead in Miami, there have been a few things that have helped us to overcome cultural obstacles. First, we "remodel" the church into an extension of one's own family. As we all know, immigrants come to the United States to seek a promising future. They must usually leave their families behind, and so when the Church is presented as an extended family, it makes perfect sense for them to join it. Suddenly, it becomes the source of integration, security, and hope. These characteristics are the very meaning of being a member of the Body of Christ.

Second, we promote the spirituality of relationships, which basically means that true Christianity involves a new way of relating with others. Sin is the fragmentation of all relationships. Thus, the very essence of the Gospel is to bring us together, with God first, and then with our neighbors. Martin Luther summarized Christian ethics with the phrase "faith active in love." This means that our communion with God is always going to be translated into community.

Finally, we emphasize that in order to serve properly among ethnic groups, it is important to understand that all human beings have to satisfy basic needs beyond their own cultures and ethnicities. This means that when ministry is oriented to help others with their most profound needs, and not in first promoting a particular denominational heritage, the ministry will be more effective and more consistent with the purpose of being the Church of Christ. When people are spiritually fed, they are continually growing in their faith and are active members of the expansion of the Kingdom on Earth; and they won't so easily look elsewhere to worship. These conditions will also lead to the development of a profound commitment to those communities where the Holy Spirit has touched them. In this way, churches become healing communities, that is, places where people are restored and sent to do ministry.

Doing ministry with ethnic groups certainly requires the overcoming of obstacles. If we manage to overcome the obstacles we've been dealing with in this article, the task is going to be a lot easier to complete and will make a more integrated church possible: a place where diversity and unity reflect what the Kingdom of God essentially is.

Endnotes

[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Social Sources of Denominationalism in America* (Hamden, Connecticut, The Shoe String Press: 1954), 123.
[2] Giacomo Cassese, "The Illegitimate Sons of Martin Luther: Reaching the Latino Community" *A Manual for Congregational Leaders* (Evangelical Church in America. Division for Congregational Ministries, 2002).

Book Reviews

ON HEAVEN AND EARTH. Pope Francis on Faith, Family, and the Church in the Twenty-First Century. By Jorge Mario Bergoglio and Abraham Skorka. New York: Image, 2013. Hardcover. $22.00. (Original Spanish publication: *Sobre el cielo y la tierra*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Editorial Sudamericana S.A., 2010.)

Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected Pope in March 2013. While Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, he had promoted interreligious dialogue. This book records the conversations he had for years with a local rabbi, Abraham Skorka, on a great variety of topics: God, prayer, religious leaders, devil, death, divorce, same-sex marriage, holocaust, etc. Each of the 29 chapters in this 236-page book takes up a different topic.

The conversations reveal a church leader who is committed to social justice as a fundamental concern of the church. He says, for example, that he would not serve Communion to anyone who oppresses the poor (64) and or take donations from drug dealers (163). In outreach to atheists, he proposes that these "social concerns" are the best platform to open Christian witness (12).

On another topic of missiology, the future pope expresses an approach that involves both an expansive view of God's relationship with all people and an understanding of the proper enculturation of any faith. I quote from this section at length:

> God makes Himself felt in the heart of each person. He also respects the culture of all people. Each nation picks up that vision of God and translates it in accordance with the culture, and purifies and gives it a system. . . . He moves everyone to seek Him and to discover Him through creation. . . . Christians believe, ultimately, that He manifested Himself to us and gave Himself to us through Jesus Christ (19).

On controversial issues of church practice, the monsignor advocates that:

- Priests "get their hands dirty" and "work for the good of others" in society (23).
- Priests involved in pedophilia should be dismissed (51).
- A priest should not adopt an attitude of "only being a boss" (69).
- Chauvinism in the church has "not allowed the place that belongs to the women" (103).
- Divorced members "are not excommunicated" (110).
- Gay marriage should not be allowed but that gay people's personal freedom should not be violated (114).

- Science "has an autonomy" but it must "put limits on itself" both in its assertions and applications (125).

Of specifically mission interest is the future pope's advocacy of the "attraction principle" of evangelization. He cites Pope Benedict XVI, the pope current at the time: "The Church is a proposal that is reached by attraction, not by proselytism" (234). In recent years, I have had two other exposures to this mission policy among Roman Catholic leaders:

- About ten years ago in India, a bishop stated in a dialogue with Protestants that the Roman Catholic Church there had resolved not to evangelize at this time because of all the uproar caused. Rather, the focus had to be on social service, building up a reputation that can serve as the ground for future evangelization.
- At a panel during a seminar at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, the Roman Catholic speaker said that the church should not impose boundaries and should not guard a gate. Rather, it should "set up a flag" for people to relate to as best they can, attracting them to come closer.

Interspersed in their conversations, the two leaders bring forth fascinating inside anecdotes and references. I don't know much about the Talmud, so Rabbi Skorka's references to that literature was enlightening. For example:

- "Respect everyone, and suspect them as well" (51).
- Reduce divorce by placing huge economic hardship on a man if he wants to divorce his wife (105).
- A debate "about whether we should impose the right way of doing things or just try to convince people to follow them" (115).

Finally, a few more telling observations from the future pope:

- We need to personalize almsgiving: "Do you look them in the eyes? Do you touch their hand?" (162).
- "Shantytown priests" today are in the tradition of Don Bosco, Don Cafasso, and Don Orione, causing "a change in mentality and a change in conduct of ecclesial communities" (175).
- Pope John XXIII welcomed the first delegation of the World Jewish Congress to the Vatican with the words, "I am your brother Joseph" (186).

Through these conversations, we perceive Pope Francis speaking as a practical parish priest. We don't know how long he will be able to maintain this attitude of practical pastoral wisdom and charity. Certainly this book was well known to the College of Cardinals, and so they clearly knew whom they were electing and they want such leadership. In these first few months of Pope Francis' service, he certainly has maintained this pastoral approach to leadership. All churches will reap the rewards of such a fresh, open mentality as the public face of Christianity.

Herbert Hoefer

THE EVANGELICALS YOU DON'T KNOW: Introducing the Next Generation of Christians. By Tom Krattenmaker. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013. 221 pages. Hardcover. $34.00.

The intended audience for this book is non-evangelicals, especially anti-religious secularists. Krattenmaker states that he was briefly with Campus Crusade but is now much more liberal in his religious views. He is a feature writer on religion for *USA Today*, and he admits to being highly critical of the Christian Right.

However, in recent years, he's become aware that many evangelicals are not at all like the figures who typically speak for them publicly, particularly among the younger evangelicals. He concludes his opening chapter with the appeal to his readers: "These newly emerging evangelicals might surprise you in all sorts of ways. Meet them" (14).

Krattenmaker shares his experiences with the new evangelical leaders who eschew the public politics of "grand know-it-all narratives and ideologies" to focus instead on "heeding the practical and particular that is on the street and under our noses" (3). He goes on to describe the many ways and individuals who are engaging the culture in positive, constructive, unifying ways. He concludes his book with the appeal to recognize "how many share the dreams and commitments of progressive hearts and . . . are on your team—and how much energy, heart, and sophistication they bring" (196).

Krattenmaker cites many examples and areas where the general American public has been turned off by evangelicals—and from the Gospel. These new evangelicals, therefore, ask the probing question: "How might the church itself need to change if it is to make Jesus known?" (21) And again: "How are you going to make your faith credible and positive in post-Christian America?" (68)

In one chapter, Krattenmaker lists the areas where the young evangelicals want the church to change: playing politics, having a persecution complex, neglecting the poor, offering simplistic solutions, acting as if they only have values, and focusing only on heaven (79–92). To illustrate how these new evangelicals are stepping up on these issues, Krattenmaker gives many examples:

- Public involvement with no proselytizing (18)
- Rejecting "bait and switch" evangelism tactics (44)
- Questioning the greed inherent in the capitalist system (64)
- Publicly confessing evangelicals' own faults and failures (93)
- Moving to independent stance among political parties (96)
- Embracing environmentalism (104)
- Recognizing many evangelicals' political views as not based on the Bible (108)
- Respecting gays and gay evangelicals (116)
- Embracing all life issues, not just abortion (139)

- Encouraging adoption of unwanted children (150)
- Willingness to join liberals and secularists on social issues (155)
- Celebrating the role of science in pursuit of knowledge (169)
- Keeping conservative theology while engaging jointly in society (178)
- Redirecting "Focus on the Family" away from politics (177–90)

These new evangelicals recognize that Christians today are in a situation of struggling to gain a voice and to make the Gospel call clear in a pluralistic society. It is similar to the situation of the New Testament Christians. The early Christians got a hearing for the message by becoming known as ones who cared for the needy and created a loving community. Krattenmaker summarizes the philosophy of these new evangelicals as going "back to the source . . . to rediscover how Christianity can be vital and attractive again, now and in the future" (69).

Though he is not an active church member, Krattenmaker has done a great service to the church's mission by bringing attention to these new, creative approaches to Christian outreach. One movement I'm surprised he omitted was new monasticism, of which there are several groups in the Portland area, where he lives. He also does not discuss the involvement of evangelicals among the homeless and the runaway teens in town. The dedication and sacrifice of these young people certainly is inspiring and challenging to all of us who claim to be followers of Christ—and hopefully also to those who don't yet seek to follow Him.

Herbert Hoefer

CENTER CHURCH: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City. By Timothy Keller. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. 400 pages. Hardcover. $29.99.

Center Church is an organized and strategic attempt from the well-known pastor and author, Tim Keller, to promote missional churches that focus on church planting and church renewal. One key theme for Keller is that a missional church is always a movement and not simply an institution. Another is Keller's association of the Gospel with the circumcision of the heart from the Old Testament to show an actual change of heart and not just intellectual assent. Gospel revival then boldly declares itself to be presented for those outside of the church as well as inside, both in conversion and revitalization.

One important difference he highlights is between what he calls "religion" and the Gospel. "Religion" puts us *into* the salvation equation, but the "Gospel" takes us out. In doing this, Keller ties the Gospel back to First Commandment issues.

The Gospel commitment from Keller is fresh and applicable, but the commitment to the city is where I felt truly challenged. Being raised in a small town in rural South Dakota, I admittedly had many challenged presuppositions about city life. But Keller shows that the surroundings of the city have much value. For him,

cities are like a giant heart drawing people in and then sending them out. Cities are portals for reaching nations, just as they were used in the New Testament. A city is where we can find the most human beings, and it should be embraced as humanity intensified.

To find success, our rich theological tradition must be presented in a vision that is geared towards outreach in the surrounding culture. Contextualization is stressed as key to the city commitment, focusing on sound adaption without compromising the Gospel itself. But you cannot have contextualization without understanding the layers of culture consisting of a worldview, values, human institutions, customs, and behaviors. So contextualization comes in listening and learning from the people within the culture.

Throughout the book, I found Keller indicating that one constantly must find a middle ground or middle way between extremes. Since the Gospel can become too legalistic or just relativistic irreligion, we must navigate between those two poles. The city can be under-adapted or over-adapted. Movement can become too structured or too fluid. *Center Church*, accordingly named, seeks the balance between the poles. Keller stresses the necessity of avoiding syncretism and Gospel reductionism for the sake of adaptation. More generally, Keller states that we need to stretch as much as we can to be as inclusive as possible, and that resting on scriptural authority avoids extremes.

I know that *Center Church* will be applicable to my near future in that it addresses the "now what" that every graduating seminarian will eventually face. We amass all of this theological knowledge and doctrine, but how are we to use it for God's advantage? *Center Church* is insightful by forming its presentation around a theological vision of applying doctrine to a particular time and place. But I am confident that this book can be applied to any congregational situation that wants to build a thriving Gospel ecosystem within its surrounding culture.

Eric Hauan

I AM NOT AFRAID: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare—True Accounts from the Lutheran Church of Madagascar. By Robert H. Bennett. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013. 215 pages. Paperback. $24.99.

The purpose of Dr. Bennett's book is simple: to re-engage consideration and contemplation of spiritual warfare among Lutherans in the West. His approach is unique. Rather than laying out a system of tools for pastors and laypeople to fight the demonic, he takes a much-needed first step by exploring why we might want to develop such tools at all.

The first half of the book examines spiritual warfare as it is conducted by the Malagasy Lutheran Church and makes good use of information collated from

interviews with pastors and laity, showing with anecdotal accounts how such warfare plays out in the animistic culture which surrounds God's people in Madagascar. The second part of the book offers a survey of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and various Lutheran leaders up to the present, showing that belief in the demonic and in spiritual warfare has been a part of our Lutheran theology all along, even if we have obscured it in our Western milieu.

Dr. Bennett's book comes at a useful time. In America today, we see in the culture an emerging interest in the supernatural. Christians and non-Christians alike view the exploration of ghost-hunting, psychics, mediums, and evil spirits as fascinating and entertaining. Pentecostals and other denominations offer resources that are usually interesting, but misguided in their approaches to the subject. *I Am Not Afraid* invites the Lutheran Church into the conversation properly: by beginning its exploration with those who faithfully encounter this spiritual warfare in their work and showing us its continuity with our history and theology.

This is not a how-to book for Lutherans in the Western world faithfully to go about spiritual warfare. But it is a welcome, thought-provoking conversation starter for Western Lutherans as we go about reclaiming this aspect of our ministry and theology.

Jon C. Furgeson

THE MISSION OF GOD'S PEOPLE: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission. By Christopher Wright. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. 304 pages. Paperback. $24.99.

In his book, *The Mission of God's People,* Christopher Wright attempts to lay out, in straightforward terms, a biblically founded theological framework for understanding and carrying out the Church's mission. It is a book that seeks to serve the community of faith by setting forth a thoroughgoing biblical approach to doing mission and tries to make the connection between theology and evangelization. He asks the right questions and strives to give proper answers for a church steamrolling ahead into the twenty-first century. Moreover, Wright engages readers in a way that forces them really to think about and reassess their own positions by rooting the approach existentially and communally. He frames the entire book in light of the people of God, the church. It is addressed to and directed to the people of God, who constitute His church, because His message and Good News are not in vain and not to be stagnant. It is therefore an important piece of work that needs to be taken seriously by all people who take seriously the call to bring God's good news in Jesus Christ to the world.

To bring about this response, Wright leads with these two questions: Who are we? And why are we here? These two questions reappear throughout the book and

are the foundational questions that inform everything in the book. Simply put, Wright's central thesis is that God's plan or mission or agenda has been entirely redemptive. This focus implies that the mission that the people of God carry out on behalf of God is a holistic enterprise. It isn't simply a binary execution wherein we hand out a tract and simply become robotic in our approaches. It is instead, he argues, a complete and total approach that encompasses the whole person in bringing about and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to the world.

The first half of the book addresses issues concerning the biblical precedent and how we as God's people in the "here and now" answer the questions about our identity (who we are) and our mission (how we bring about God's mission). The second half of the book fleshes out tangible ways to spread the mission in practical and real life ways. Among the many things Wright deals with, I would focus on two: the first is the inclusive nature of God's mission, and the second consists of the ethical implications of God's mission. Wright gives a great deal of attention to the notion of the radical, free, and open-to-all inclusive nature of the Gospel. He suggests that we as the people of God are in the business of being good news people in a bad news world. I found this to be an extremely helpful way of looking at spreading the mission of God. Concerning the ethical aspect of mission, Wright argues that there needs to be a clear and distinct sanctified and holy aspect to the people of God as they spread the message. At this point, it is important to note briefly his theological background. Wright is an Anglican and certainly more Reformed in his soteriological approach, and we Lutherans would certainly disagree on some pivotal issues, question some of his vocabulary, and nuance differently some of the theological underpinnings. Regardless of the theological differences, this book proves to be an extremely helpful and engaging work that can serve both clergy and layman alike.

David Murillo

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A Note to Future 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, biblical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the apostolic mission of the church are to be explored in these pages. (See the mission statement below.) While current issues are centered around a theme, the editorial committee encourages and appreciates submissions of articles on any missiological topic.

Contributors can familiarize themselves with previous issues of *Missio Apostolica* at the Lutheran Society for Missiology's website (www.lsfmissiology.org). Click on the Publications link to view PDFs of previous issues for free.

Book reviews: LSFM also welcomes book reviews. Submit reviews of no more than 500 words. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto (okamotoj@csl.edu) if interested in writing a review.

Mission Statement

Missio Apostolica serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally.

Formatting and Style

Please utilize and consult the Turabian style, 7th edition, for citations. Feel free to use http://www.eturabian.com/turabian/index.html for help with this style. Please use endnotes rather than in-text parenthetical citations. Here are some basic examples:

[1] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 243–255.

[2] Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 184–186.

[3] Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," *Missiology, An International Review* 34 (2006): 431–450.

Direct quotations exceeding six 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.

Preparation and Submission

Length: Manuscripts should be 3,000–4,000 words. Longer pieces may be assigned by the editor. Manuscripts of less than 3,000 words will be considered for the "Mission Observers" section of the periodical.

Format: Please submit articles in single spaced Times New Roman 10-point font with 0.25" paragraph indents.

Submission: Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Professor Victor Raj, rajv@csl.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.

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Missio Apostolica Call for Papers

June 11, 2014

Greetings from the Editorial Committee of *Missio Apostolica*!

This message comes to you as invitation to write on some aspect of the theology and practice of Lutheran mission for the Missio Apostolica audience.

In his book, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (p. 25), Stuart Murray describes the Church as transitioning from Christendom to a Post-Christendom world in the following ways:

- **From the center to margins**: in Christendom the Christian story and the churches were central, but in post-Christendom these are marginal.
- **From majority to minority**: in Christendom Christians comprised the (often overwhelming) majority, but in post-Christendom we are a minority.
- **From settlers to sojourners**: in Christendom Christians felt at home in a culture shaped by their story, but in post-Christendom we are aliens, exiles and pilgrims in a culture where we no longer feel at home.
- **From privilege to plurality**: in Christendom Christians enjoyed many privileges, but in post-Christendom we are one community among many in a plural society.
- **From control to witness**: in Christendom churches could exert control over society, but in post-Christendom we exercise influence only through witnessing to our story and its implications.
- **From maintenance to mission**: in Christendom the emphasis was on maintaining a supposedly Christian status quo, but in post-Christendom it is on mission within a contested environment.
- **From institution to movement**: in Christendom churches operated mainly in institutional mode, but in post-Christendom we must become again a Christian movement.

The new subtitle of *Missio Apostolica* is "Lutheran mission matters," capturing the spirit behind the efforts of the Lutheran Society for Missiology. Lutherans bring a unique perspective to these discussions, helping pastors, missionaries, and laity to better understand and navigate the theological issues being raised in this new cultural context.

While missions and missional seem to be the new buzz word, many Lutherans are struggling with the question, "What is Lutheran Missions?" *Missio Apostolica* is seeking articles that engage that question, and the questions arising out of our

ongoing, changing cultural context. Change brings challenges and opportunities, new questions and perspectives, new approaches and apostolic entrepreneurship. The Editorial Committee is inviting you to participate and submit an article contributing to these important discussions (around 3,000 words). Both scholarly and practical articles are appreciated, as the journal seeks to be helpful to both those involved in theological education and to those involved in the practice of missions.

If you wish to submit an article, or would like to discuss the possibility, please contact Dr. Victor Raj, the editor of *Missio Apostolica* (801 Seminary Place, St. Louis MO 63105) at rajv@csl.edu. Please take this first step as early as possible. The submission date for completed manuscripts for the November issue is September 20, 2014. The committee welcomes early drafts, giving the opportunity to provide feedback in preparation for publication. *Missio Apostolica* is an international journal, available in over 40 libraries throughout the world. Articles are also made available online, to enable the widest possible audience. We are confident that many Lutherans are already thinking about many of these issues, and hope that you will share your thinking with us.

Yours in Christ,
Dr. Victor Raj
Missio Apostolica Editor
and
Rev. Jeff Thormodson
LSFM Executive Director