The Written Word Enriching Minds and Souls: a Case Study of the Function of the Religious Literature Provided by The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS)

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Abstract: This essay examines the function of the Literature Department as a provider of sound Lutheran literature on behalf of The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod. The paper notes the relevance of the written and proclaimed Word in Lutheran theology and the function of the written Word as God's means of enriching the human mind and soul. The paper then describes the service of the Literature Department of the LCHKS to its congregations and schools as well as to the Chinese audience worldwide, including a view of the historical origins of the department.

Relevance of the Written and Proclaimed Word in the Lutheran Theology

The origin of the Wittenberg Reformation, which was the inception of the Reformation as such, can be traced back to the discovery of theological category of the Word as transcending a simple aggregate of words which are said or notated. For Luther and Melanchthon, the Word was a means of divine revelation and salvation because, by virtue of the Word, God revealed His condemnation of sin (Law) and His acceptance of sinners for Christ's sake (Gospel).

According to John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1–3, prior to the Incarnation, God the Son existed as the Word (Logos) that in time by operation of the Holy Spirit became a human being. That God-man, the Savior of the universe, was, on the one hand, living to fulfill the Law in place of sinners; on the other hand, He was teaching the Law and the Gospel, bringing the disclosure of who God is towards the world to completion.

Furthermore, Christ's disciples bore testimony to His person and to His work, and that testimony was finally recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that the following generations could be exposed to the life-transforming

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proclamation of the divine benevolence founded on Christ's life and death in place of humankind.

From the Lutheran perspective, the Holy Spirit employs the Word to accomplish His twofold purpose: namely, to make all people aware of their original condition as defined by sin and to lavish on those sinners God's mercy and forgiveness, anchored in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The Word, by which the Spirit's agenda is carried out, cannot be reduced to a quote from the Scripture, but it is also an actualization of the biblical message in a written (religious literature) or oral (sermon) form.

Consequently, the Reformation theology postulated a multifaceted concept of the Word in the sense that the proclamation of the biblical truth made by every Christian in his or her own words stems from the biblical testimony to Christ as the very Word of the Father. It should be noted that the verbalization of the biblical message has a power integral to the Scripture on condition that the content of one's proclamation conforms to the biblical archetype.

Therefore, not only reading the Scripture but also all preaching and every piece of theological literature, as far as it corresponds to the biblical fountainhead, is invested by the Lord with a divine power to bring those who encounter it to faith, as well as with a divine power to sustain their faith until the very end. In the realm of salvation there is no activity or status unrelated to the Word. In addition to the written (Bible, literature) and proclaimed (sermon) Word, God has united His Word that conveys the remission of sins to the water (Baptism) and to the bread/body and wine/blood (Lord's Supper).

From the Scriptures, it is evident that God committed Himself to use His own Word to act upon His creatures and to be proactive within the world which He had created. Let us notice that according to Genesis 1:3, as interpreted in the light of John 1:3 and Hebrews 11:3, the world was called into being solely by means of the Word. Thus, both the creation of the universe and the restoration of fallen humankind to fellowship with God were mediated by the phenomenon of the Word.

Speaking of the distinctive features of Christian religion, it could be argued that the essence of Christianity is communicated as a meaningful message (propositional truth). Furthermore, the Great Commission implies that the Scripture and faithful expositions thereof must be translated into languages native to people to whom the whole counsel of God is to be preached.

The Augsburg Confession (Part I, Article V) and the section on "Comprehensive Summary, Rule and Norm" in the Formula of Concord (both Epitome and Solid Declaration) emphasize that to extend God's kingdom of grace meant, on the one hand, to preach the Gospel by means of which the Spirit changes human heart and, on the other hand, to inculcate and to fortify the knowledge and experience of the Gospel by continual preaching and teaching.

No formation or education in the Christian faith can be practiced without translating the Bible into languages native to the audience and apart from the religious literature available in people's tongues because neither the languages of the Scripture (Hebrew and Greek) nor the languages of the Reformation (Latin and German) are commonly used in far-flung Christian communities, especially in the Far East. Because Christianity is a religion of the *message*, not of magical rituals, it is obvious that not only the Bible, but also solid religious literature, ancillary to the Scripture, should be translated into the languages of the globe.

Written Word as God's Means of Enriching Human Mind and Soul

By means of the written Word, the Spirit is enriching both human understanding and the human soul and heart, since God's action upon a sinner is holistic. First, a sinner is declared innocent in God's sight on account of Christ's substitution. This act or verdict is called "justification." Second, a justified sinner is being renewed and brought into compliance with God's will. This process of transformation, which is never perfect or complete in earthly life, is termed "sanctification." Consequently, the justified human being is regarded (viewed) by God as holy with reference to Jesus' work, whereas the work of sanctification in a believer is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

In Lutheran theology, the renewal of human mind and the renewal of human soul (heart) are interrelated, because God-given faith leaves an imprint on the intellectual and volitive dimension of a human being. Although faith manifests itself in terms of will, faith should not be based on emotions or personal opinions, but rather must be embedded in Christ's person and work as revealed in the Scripture.

Therefore, the written Word conveying, explaining, analyzing, and discussing the biblical message, which could be labeled as the religious literature, is empowered to make an impact on its audience. This impact is twofold: intellectual, because human knowledge is enriched; and spiritual, given that the human heart and soul are regenerated and properly nourished.

Those two aspects of the Word's operation on human beings are truly interdependent, because the biblical message is both meaningful (the sphere of reason) and transforming (the sphere of heart). If the religious communication were not meaningful, it could not transform a recipient's heart, whereas the transforming proclamation must be meaningful because only the content of the proclamation, not the sheer act of proclaiming, can change a recipient's heart. Consequently, stark proclamation would be of no avail unless what is proclaimed is pregnant with the meaning that alters human status in God's eyes.

It could be argued that a vibrant translation activity in the Age of the Reformation arose not only from the necessity of disseminating the tenets of the Reformers, but also from the spiritual needs characteristic of every Christian irrespective of time and place. Given that faith comes from hearing the message about Christ's redemption, the task of selecting, translating, and printing the valuable religious literature, which reflects, studies, and expounds the truth of the Scripture, eventuates from the necessity of sustaining (preservation) and spreading (mission) Christian faith. Therefore, the Age of the Reformation produced so many Bible translations (Luther's German Bible, the KJV, etc.), and most theological literature peculiar to the Wittenberg Reformation was accessible in both Latin and in German.

Consequently, Luther's Catechisms, which were originally composed in German, were translated into Latin, while Melanchthon's Loci (Theological Commonplaces), which were initially written in Latin, were translated into German under the auspices of their author. Mindful of the spiritual potential inherent in a solid, comprehensive and lucid religious literature rooted in the Scripture, the Reformation literati labored through the rough seas of translation and did not hesitate to experiment in devising a theological vocabulary that previously did not exist in the vernacular languages but was unique to the ecclesiastical Greek and Latin.

Origin of LCHKS Literature Department

The history of the Literature Department is inseparable from the emergence of The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS) which originated from the mission activity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in Hong Kong. In 1913, LCMS missionaries came to China in order to preach the Gospel along Yangtze River [长江] in the provinces Hubei [湖北省] and Sichuan [四川省]. In 1949, due to the change of the political situation in Mainland China, LCMS missionaries planned to return to the United States via Hong Kong. However, when the missionaries were staying in Hong Kong, they found there many refugees from Mainland China. Most of the refugees were speaking the dialect with which the missionaries were familiar. Thus, LCMS missionaries realized that Hong Kong, too, was a mission field, and they resolved to stay there. At the very beginning, they set up shelters for worship in Tiu Keng Leng [調景嶺] called also Rennie's Mill in English. Since at that place many refugees were living, the missionaries reached people in the public areas and on the streets.

Given that the mission activity could not be separated from the religious literature, the missionaries had to write, publish, and distribute evangelism materials, such as pamphlets and posters, among the refugees who were their target group. Since the very basic evangelism resources were indispensable for conveying the saving message, the Lutheran religious literature was developing rapidly.

One year after LCMS missionaries arrived at Hong Kong, namely in 1950, they were able to reprint the Chinese edition of *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*⁴, which was based on the first Chinese translation of 1929. The latter was a memorial to the 400th anniversary of Luther's Small Catechism, which was

launched in 1529. In 1952 a revised translation was published⁵ and, in the 1950s, the Chinese version of Luther's Small Catechism had been printed at least five times.⁶ Moreover, the editions of 1954⁷, 1958⁸, 1965⁹, and 1974¹⁰ should be listed too.

Thus, the Gospel ministry by means of the Lutheran theological literature had been initiated prior to the formal establishment of the Literature Department because it would be inconceivable to build a Lutheran congregation without Lutheran theological materials translated into the native language, printed and shared with people. The solid theological literature produced by The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod, and later more specifically by the Literature Department thereof, provided a sort of standard and transparent confessional reference for the missionaries, native ministers, and new believers. This was simply a matter of identity. It is legitimate to say that without such materials a sense of Lutheran identity as distinct from the general Protestant mainstream would never have solidified in Hong Kong, where the most old and prevailing form of the Protestant Christianity was not Lutheran but rather associated, on the one hand, with the Anglo-Saxon dissenter and, on the other hand, with the Anglican Church (Sheng Kung Hui [香港聖公會]).

Luther's Small Catechism is still offered by the Literature Department, and it has been reprinted over ten times from 1949 onwards. In The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod, the Small Catechism is used primarily in the courses preparing new believers for Baptism, and it indeed enjoys considerable popularity similar to that in the European or American Lutheran church bodies, regardless of their affiliation. In practical terms, it could be argued that, among the documents belonging to the Book of Concord, Luther's Small Catechism is best known to common believers.

In 1962, Victor Hafner, LCMS missionary, moved to Hong Kong from Taiwan and commenced teaching in Concordia Theological Seminary operated by The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod. Rev. Hafner was also appointed to establish formally the Literature Department of LCHKS, which took place in 1962. He was the first Director of the Department and was also engaged in recruiting numerous part-time volunteers who helped the ministry to grow. Since 1970, the Literature Department has begun employing the full-time staff and thus became more professional.

From the historical point of view, the objective of the Literature Department was twofold. On the one hand, the Department has been established to nourish and to fortify faith and understanding of LCHKS members. On the other hand, the Department has ventured to share the Gospel in its Lutheran circumscription beyond The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod, given that the literature produced was available to everyone who was able to read Chinese characters.

The LCHKS Literature Department as a Provider of Lutheran Religious Literature for a Chinese Audience

The religious literature produced by the Literature Department is comprehensive because it embraces positions instrumental in the mission work and evangelism within the primary and secondary schools run by The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod. Consequently, this literature not only communicates Christ to adults and children within the reach of LCHKS but also engages the Christian community by means of sophisticated projects, such as Chinese edition of Luther's Works. The latter endeavor is aimed at promoting the tenets of sixteenth-century Lutheran theology in Chinese.

The Literature Department has been established as a publishing hand of The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod. Thus, the Department has been tasked with conveying and explicating the biblical truth to LCHKS ministers, teachers, and students and with instilling the core values of LCHKS (Commitment - Compassion - Community) in them.

From a pragmatic perspective, the Literature Department provides what The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod really needs, because comprehensive instruments of instruction and edification consistent with a conservative Lutheran theology are secured. Therefore, LCHKS is equipped to deliver the saving message to non-Christians, to help its members grow in spiritual terms, to train the candidates for the ministry, and to facilitate a theological development of its ministers.

In Hong Kong there are many Christian publishers, but most of them would lack a definitive denominational identity. Therefore, their offerings are diversified and are seldom focused on the one area of theological literature. It is common to see that Hong Kong publishing houses, including Christian publishers, must be marketoriented and thus often prove to be merely receptive to and respond to the interests of their anticipated audience.

For these reasons, in my opinion, Protestant churches in Hong Kong should not resign from their publishing activity precipitately. Rather, Protestant church bodies are obligated to preserve, contextualize, and promote their literary legacies, which should be precious to their members. Church publishers should be proactive, and, instead of following the preferences of their audience, they ought to stimulate the interests of their readers.

As the sole publishing house of The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod, which is one of the largest Chinese Lutheran churches, the Literature Department is dedicated to making Lutheran resources accessible to the Chinese audience of Hong Kong, Macau, Mainland China, and Taiwan, while not losing sight of overseas Chinese in the United States, in Canada, or in the Far East (in Malaysia for instance).

Nonetheless, the Literature Department is not intent on competing with other Hong Kong publishers in terms of a number of titles but rather on ensuring the Lutheran character of its publications so that LCHKS congregations and schools might be convinced of the confessional integrity of its offerings.

The groundbreaking (at least from the Chinese perspective) publication that originated from The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod, was Luther's Small Catechism, as already noted.

In 1969, the Chinese version of the Book of Concord¹¹ was completed by Erhardt Riedel, who was a second LCMS missionary to China and eighty years old at its completion. The Chinese version of the Book of Concord has been used by all Chinese Lutheran churches, not only by The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod.

In 1986 the Literature Department launched a classic textbook of the conservative Lutheran theology by John Theodore Mueller¹², which could be construed as an epitome of Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*. The Chinese version of Mueller's compendium¹³ was translated by Erhardt Riedel, and it became a standard textbook for teaching Lutheran doctrine at Concordia Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. By virtue of that single-volume course in the Lutheran systematic theology, both the candidates for the ministry and those already serving in the ministry could refine their understanding of the Lutheran tradition. In connection with Mueller's masterpiece, it is appropriate to refer another seminal work, namely to Walther's *Law and Gospel*, which was translated into Chinese¹⁴ in 1989.

At the turn from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, the Literature Department, aided by LCHKS and the LCMS, initiated the project of the Chinese edition of Luther's writings, which was defined as a Chinese adaptation of the American 54-volume edition (Luther's Works). The project of transplanting Luther's writings into Chinese is undertaken by partners in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, and in the United States. The Chinese edition of Luther's works is supposed to embrace fifteen volumes, with each volume containing approximately half a million of Chinese characters. By 2015 the Editorial Committee, which has been formed, identified which of Luther's writings might be considered to be most relevant from the Chinese perspective.

Regarding the structure of the Chinese edition of Luther's works, four categories were identified: (1) Reformation Writings, (2) Faith and Society, (3) Commentaries, and (4) Sermons. The entire edition is to be published both in the traditional Chinese characters (繁体中文), which are still commonly used in Hong Kong and in Taiwan, and in the simplified Chinese characters (简化字), which prevail in Mainland China.

Since the project of the Chinese edition of Luther's works is aimed at acquainting the Chinese audience in the Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and in the Chinese Diaspora with Luther's legacy and at inspiring Luther scholarship in the Chinese world, it is worthwhile involving major Mainland

publishers so that the aforementioned edition can be available in official bookshops and might enjoy all privileges of books published legally.

Given that Luther studies are flourishing in Mainland China, the aforementioned edition will be in demand. Such a project is certain to face challenges. First, a pool of professional translators endowed with a theological expertise is limited. Second, there are not many Chinese Luther scholars experienced in the field of translation who can serve as editors in that project. By August 2015 the first and second volumes of the Chinese edition of Luther's works have been released. The next three volumes are anticipated in the foreseeable future.

In view of its mission, the Literature Department is committed to serve The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod and the Chinese Lutheran community worldwide by providing Chinese theological materials expressive of conservative Lutheran theology. At the same time, the Literature Department explores a variety of theological fields and topics, which could be relevant to the anticipated audience. Therefore, the Department envisages diversifying its offerings in order to cover the major areas of the Protestant theology: biblical studies (OT & NT), systematic theology, practical theology and spirituality, as well as church history. Needless to say, the amount of meaningful and sound Lutheran texts circulating in English is overwhelming. Thus, the translation of them would be beneficial to the Chinese Protestant Christianity and particularly to the Chinese Lutheran communities.

Speaking of the contribution of the Literature Department to the Lutheran theology in Chinese, more publications should be mentioned. In 1992 the Department cooperated in publishing a selection of Luther's texts on faith and society¹⁷ edited by Rev. Dr. Ip Tai Cheong, the incumbent President of Concordia Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. In the sphere of Lutheran worship, the liturgical agenda by Erhardt Riedel¹⁸ and the works by Daniel W. Lee¹⁹ are to be mentioned. In addition, the Literature Department published a contemporary Lutheran catechism²⁰ and spirituality studies.²¹

The Specific Function of the Religious Literature in LCHKS Schools

In considering The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod, no one should lose sight of its schools and social services (Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service). To be precise, the congregations, schools, and social services constitute the LCHKS as it is known to us today. In this respect, it can be said that the Lutheran witness, which historically originated from LCMS mission activity in Hong Kong, was well-balanced, unifying the parish life and the schools and charity services to Hong Kong society.

In 2015 there were twenty-two kindergartens, six primary schools, six secondary schools, four night schools and two special schools operated by the LCHKS in Hong Kong. Moreover, The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod runs an international

school in Hong Kong (Concordia International School Hong Kong), administers two international schools in the Mainland China (Shenzhen and Foshan), and is developing two new international schools, one on the Mainland and the other in Macau. Thus, teachers and staff within the LCHKS school system can be estimated at one thousand persons, while the number of students exceeds twenty thousand.

Religious curriculum and spiritual activities are permissible within the Hong Kong school system, which to a large extent relies on the schools established and operated by church bodies and charitable organizations. Therefore, the schools run by the churches can keep a religious profile.

The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod fosters cooperation between its schools and its congregations that are located on the school premises. In view of the religious curriculum to which every church body operating a school is entitled, the LCHKS takes the opportunity of providing religious instruction within its schools. For this purpose, suitable religious instructors must be trained. Those who teach religious subjects must be Christians and should be trained at Concordia Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. Thus, the theological integrity of the religious instruction delivered within LCHKS schools is ensured. Neither training religious instructors nor the religious instruction in itself would be possible without proper materials.

Regarding secondary education, in Hong Kong there are approximately 150 Christian secondary schools. Accordingly, two types of religious textbooks might be identified. Some textbooks are published by denominational publishers and others by trans-denominational publishing houses. Since in the Hong Kong context a process of developing new school resources always involves significant manpower and funding, in practical terms it is debatable whether new religious materials for the schools must be prepared and released.

Nevertheless, it transpires that none of the textbooks mentioned above really conform to the doctrinal standards adhered to by the LCHKS. Thus, the question arises whether a conservative Lutheran curriculum should be advanced if the materials available at present do not serve completely a purpose delineated by The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod.

In 2012, the LCHKS formed the Committee on the Christian Moral and National Education, which is intended to work with the Literature Department on developing a complete series of the religious textbooks designed for the LCHKS secondary schools. The Committee invited senior ministers and teachers serving in the LCHKS to author and to edit that series in line with the principles of the conservative Lutheran theology, which shall be presented in a vivid way to the Hong Kong Chinese audience of the twenty-first century. The initial volumes of that series are anticipated in late 2015, while the entire project might be finished in 2017. Afterwards, the Literature Department is tasked with preparing the religious resources for LCHKS kindergartens (including songbooks) and primary schools.

However, it should be emphasized that the Literature Department has already equipped LCHKS kindergartens²², as well as primary²³ and secondary²⁴ schools, with some materials which, while distinctively Lutheran, were yet not comprehensive enough.

Conclusion

From the Lutheran perspective, God acts towards the universe and upon humankind by means of His Word. By the divine Word, the Lord continues to enrich minds and souls of those who trust His promises. God's very Word is Christ, to whom testimony was borne by His disciples as guided by the Holy Spirit. As a consequence of that testimony, the New Testament solidified and was counted among the sacred writings by the early Christians. Ultimately, the message of the Bible must be communicated to people from all walks of life in their native language, which usually happens either by sermons or through religious literature. The latter is the reason why the Literature Department exists.

Observing a genuine proliferation of Luther studies in Asia²⁵ and holding them in reverence, The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod contributes to those efforts so that Luther's heritage and the Lutheran legacy can reverberate once more, this time in the Chinese-speaking parts of Asia.

Endnotes

- ¹ The present section draws on the following positions: Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006). Edward W. A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine: A Popular Presentation of the Teachings of the Bible* ([s. l.]: [s. n.], 1952). John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics: A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers and Laymen* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934). Heinrich Schmidt, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Verified from the Original Sources*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1889).

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- ³ David G. Kohl, Lutherans on the Yangtze (Jangtzee Lutheraner): A Centenary Account of the Missouri Synod in Greater China, 1913–2013, vol. 1–2 (Portland: One Spirit Press, 2013–2014).
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⁵ (Hong Kong: 福音道路德會書報部, 1952).

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- ¹⁵ Martin Luther,《路德文集卷一-改革文獻I》[Chinese Edition of Luther's Works], vol. 1 (Reformation Writings I), ed. Andrew Ng Wai Man (Hong Kong: Literature Department LC-HKS, 2003).
- ¹⁶ Martin Luther, 《路德文集卷一-改革文獻II》 [*Chinese Edition of Luther's Works*], vol. 2 (Reformation Writings II), ed. Andrew Ng Wai Man (Hong Kong: Literature Department LCHKS, 2004).
- ¹⁷ Martin Luther,《路德文集-信仰與社會》[Luther's Works on Faith and Society], ed. Ip Tai Cheong (Hong Kong: Concordia Welfare and Education Society, 1992).
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- ²⁰《基督裡的長進》[Growing in Christ: A Catechism] (Hong Kong: Literature Department LCHKS, 1964).
- ²¹ Gene Edward Veith,《十字架的神髓—路德的靈命觀》[*The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals*], trans. Peter Kwong-sang Li and Daniel Kam-to Choi (Hong Kong: Literature Department LCHKS, 2004).
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