

# ***Lutheran Mission Matters***



Volume XXIX, No. 1 (Issue 58) May 2021

# **LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS**

## **Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology**

**Volume XXIX, No. 1 (Issue 58) May 2021**

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## Inside This Issue: Wholistic Witness

“Witness always, use words when necessary” is a popular Christian adage. From apostolic times Christians have been reaching out to the whole world with the Gospel of God, heeding the Lord’s commission to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18–20). The four Gospels conclude with the exhortation that the Gospel must be proclaimed as a testimony to the whole creation before the Lord will return to judge the world and consummate His kingdom (e.g., Mt 24:14; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:44–49; Jn 20:21–23). The Gospel calls all people to repentance, and declares forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation for all who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Book of Acts shows that the apostles continued the Lord’s mission on earth. Empowered by the Spirit, they preached and taught the message the Lord entrusted to them, accompanied by signs and wonders that manifested the Lord’s rule and reign on earth. Acts is the narrative history of the Early Church, emphasizing that the community of believers was spreading in the immediate neighborhoods, and to the farthest areas such as Rome, in one generation. More recently, however, missionary engagement has begun to build further on the platform the Lord outlined in Luke 4:18–21, giving Christian mission a wholistic outlook. Here the Lord speaks of Himself as sent by God to proclaim the good news to the poor, to recover sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim liberty to the captives. The Lord’s ministry and mission was wholistic.

Wholistic witness<sup>1</sup> is a term of recent coinage. Old Testament scholar and missiologist Christopher Wright has proposed a three-dimensional approach to the church’s mission. These include (1) cultivating the church through evangelism and teaching to bring people to repentance, faith, and maturity as disciples of Jesus Christ; (2) engaging society through compassion and justice in response to Jesus’ commands and example, to love and serve, to be salt and light, to be doers of good; and (3) caring for creation through godly use of the resources of creation in economic work along with ecological concern and action.<sup>2</sup>

Elmer Martens explicates that God’s design for humanity has four components that together illustrate how His care extends to the total person, the society, and the environment. God’s design for His creation encompasses His acts of deliverance, building up and sustaining the community, imparting the knowledge of God, and the provision for an abundant life.<sup>3</sup> If one part is missing, God’s purpose for human lives will remain incomplete, and will not be wholistic as God has intended it. In Christ, God meets the world and His people wholistically, Martens claims.

Lutherans could not agree more. Luther himself gives us sufficient cause to engage the world wholistically as God’s witnesses. In his Small Catechism, Luther explains at the basic level that God gives each person body and soul, clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all

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provisions needed to support body and life. Out of His infinite mercy and fatherly affection, God also defends His people against all danger and guards and protects them from all evil.<sup>4</sup>

We acknowledge that Lutherans have lagged in addressing wholistic mission theologically at a deeper level. Nevertheless, expatriate missionaries and overseas mission agencies strive to keep their Lutheran identity intact in non-Christian and sometimes hostile environments. Missionary chronicles bear witness that mission endeavors have been wholistic as they were involving peoples and communities that suffer socioeconomic deprivation, oppression, segregation, and persecution. In this issue, *Lutheran Mission Matters* is introducing a Lutheran exploration of wholistic mission. Further conversations are necessary to exhaust this important topic.

John Mehl argues that in today's context, it is important that sending agencies should be thinking and planning for God's mission outside the church's walls, resisting the tendency to turn inward.

Klaus Detlev Schulz posits that Christian mission is a demonstration of the Gospel in word and deed. Gospel proclamation must therefore be linked to showing compassion to the neighbor.

Michael Newman points out two examples from the early history of the LCMS to show how in the formative years the Missouri Synod was pressed into new behavior by hostile social conditions from the developing American culture.

John Juedes suggests that Lutheran theological education and pastoral formation in the majority world seminaries necessitates recognition of the contextual realities of language and culture in new ways for the sake of speaking the one Gospel meaningfully in non-Western cultures.

Samuel Fuhrmann and Werner Klän offer essays based on presentations to the International Lutheran Council, a worldwide association of Lutheran churches. The authors reiterate that the Lutheran way of confessing the faith works across cultures when missionaries and pastors relate to other cultures with respect. Fuhrmann focuses on *favelas* culture that is native to Brazil and shows that our Lord's use of the parable of the sower and the seed can speak in an agrarian context even to city dwellers. Klän asserts that confession is crucial for Lutherans and as confessors of the faith they need to appreciate and be sensitive to the context in which Christians make confession of the Gospel.

Encountering Mission inside this issue presents a medley of articles showing how the mission of God takes place wholistically in a variety of contexts, worldviews, and across cultures.

Steve Hughey explains the apostle Paul's ministry in the marketplace of the Areopagus as a strategy for serving the Gospel cross-culturally.

Tim Norton and David Sternbeck together present various challenges Christian mission has faced interacting with native American (First Nations) culture, which differs radically from a dominant Euro-American worldview. They argue that wholistic mission is biblical and speaks directly to any culture.

Herb Hoefler's essay on counterintuitive grace illustrates how world religions, especially Islam, interpret the idea of grace. It shows the importance of ongoing conversations with our neighbors as we present the unique way God has manifested His grace for all people in Christ.

Brenda Segovia reports on how the Rio Grande Mission Action Council in Texas serves in the borderlands, with missionaries caring for individuals and communities along with presenting the message of Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord.

In "A Student of the King and Teacher in the Kingdom," Miriam Carter celebrates a lifetime of missionary service offered by Deaconess Carol Halter in Hong Kong and China as she dedicates her life to serving as a student of the King and a teacher in the Kingdom. Halter is a textbook example of incarnational ministry.

Annissa Lui speaks as an insider as she narrates the wholistic missionary work of the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service. Like Paul, sharing with all people the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord is the goal God has set (Phil 3:8-9).

Miriam Carter's review of a book by a former professor of Concordia Seminary St. Louis shows that wholistic mission was not a stranger to our church body several decades ago.

*Lutheran Mission Matters* is spreading its wings across continents, to other countries and cultures without compromising its Lutheran identity. We are grateful to Professor Samuel Fuhrmann for this initiative in Brazil. The Brazil edition is known as *Missio Apostolica Brasil* reflecting LMM's original name assumed in 1992.

The forthcoming November 2021 issue focuses on mission and ministry in, through, and after a pandemic, drawing lessons for the present and for the future. An invitation to write is already available on the [lsfm.global](https://lsfm.global) website as well as on page 170 of this issue.

We recognize the decade-long service of our editorial assistant, Stacey Parker, for the production of the journal. Stacey will be sorely missed, but we wish her well as she is moving on to another career in the service of the Gospel.

This issue holds fast to the high standards the Lutheran Society for Missiology has set for the journal. These pages present for theologians, pastors, and laypeople of the church quality materials on ministry and mission for theological reflection and practical application in our everyday life and service to the church and world.

Victor Raj, editor, *Lutheran Mission Matters*

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The editor prefers the term *wholistic witness*, reflecting the comprehensive nature of Christian mission and ministry. For the sake of consistency, we have taken the liberty to change *holistic* to *wholistic* in some essays. In other instances, we have allowed *holistic* to stand as is without altering the author's intent. For a balanced approach to wholistic witness in the Early Church, see Glenn K. Fluegge, "The Dual Nature of Evangelism in the Early Church," *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 305–321.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Wright, "Participatory Mission: The Mission of God's People Revealed in the Whole Bible Story," in *Four Views of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 63–97.

<sup>3</sup> Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design*, 3rd ed. (N. Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 1998), 137.

<sup>4</sup> *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 133.

# Articles

## Mission Control

John L. Mehl

**Abstract:** The Gallup headline from March of 2021 reads: “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time.” The article goes on to state that in 2020, only 47 percent of Americans state they belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque.<sup>1</sup> How will God’s Church react to these stark statistics? The church could play it safe and only focus on worship experiences and programs for those who already know Jesus. But our Lord also loves those who don’t yet know Him, and He is sending us into the awkward places where we are not in control, to point people to Jesus.

Being out of control is not something that most people embrace—apart from enjoying a few rides at the carnival. As we look at how God’s Church is engaged in His mission (His sending) we see that our desire to control is often a prominent feature of the activities that comprise church life. We want to be engaged in God’s mission, but on our terms.

When we hear the term “mission control,” we may think of NASA or some other agency. Mission control is the team that ensures that a task is completed *precisely as planned*. For all of our language about the Church’s mission belonging to God, we want our activities to go as *we* have planned . . . we want mission control.

At a mid-1990s meeting of mission leaders working in Russia, a parachurch organization was complimented for its extensive work in the former Soviet Union. The organization’s team leader responded by saying, “We make the plan, and the Holy Spirit runs with it.” While we reel at this blatant assumption of God’s role in His mission and would never be caught saying something like this aloud, a close reflection on our ministries often reveals an effort to maintain the comfort of control.



*Rev. Dr. John L. Mehl served eight years as a parish pastor in Kansas, twenty years as a missionary for the LCMS living eleven years in Moscow, Russia, two years in Germany, and seven years in Hong Kong. He presently serves as the executive director of Mission of Christ Network and as an adjunct instructor of mission classes at Concordia University, Nebraska. He and his wife, Susan, have three children, two sons-in-law, and one grandson.*  
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Control usually takes the form of the church turning inward. We look to programs that can be accomplished on the property. Worship services are carefully scripted and often with strict limits to ensure a timely beginning of the next event. Alan Roxburgh makes a point that churches can be mechanistic and rely on Newton’s Third Law: For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. “The church, a community, and a series of programs are all treated as a set of working parts that, when arranged in the right order with the right functions, bring about success in the form of numerical growth.”<sup>2</sup> We like to see a return on investment (ROI) and pulling control levers that produce an outcome we can point to. This is done best on one’s home turf and for those who already know Jesus.

### **The World Is in Need of Jesus**

The church is about helping people have right relationships with God. This certainly happens *in* a church building, but it also needs to happen *outside* the walls. Church attendance cannot be the only goal.

Already in Genesis 3:9 we see God’s desire to rebuild the broken relationship with humanity. He comes looking for Adam and Eve who were hiding because of their sin. He calls out to them, “Where are you?” Matthew 15 points to God’s mission to reclaim the hearts of mankind for a right relationship with Him. Jesus quotes Isaiah, saying, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mt 15:8).

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God’s mission is the salvation of all.<sup>3</sup> His story of salvation includes the sending of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and now us. Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (Jn 20:21). In all of this, we see the rebuilding of a relationship between God and mankind. If salvation is for all, it is likely that we will need to go out to the highways and byways to find people (Lk 14:23).

Apart from Jonah, the Old Testament paradigm was centripetal—a drawing in to Israel.<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament we see the church being sent out.<sup>5</sup> This centrifugal movement is on display in the work of Paul. Paul’s going was not easy. He was stoned and run out of town on more than one instance. He even found himself out of control in cultures where he did not understand clearly what was going on,<sup>6</sup> but on he went into a world hostile to Christ.

Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” He had already told his disciples that we will be hated by the world (Mt 10:22–24). Former Wheaton College president, Duane Litfin, observed that “The Christian church is no longer playing for the home team. Society is no longer rooting for the church to win.”<sup>7</sup> In that case, do

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we even want to cross our church property lines where we don't control the scenarios? Yes! We do so to point people to a relationship with Christ.

This reality of the world's reaction to Christianity should *not* make us yearn for the "good old days" nor to circle the wagons around our churches. This is a time for the church to get off campus and engage as never before. The world needs a Christian people that serve it. It needs the love of God in all its forms. We live in an America where only 45 percent of the population attends church monthly or more<sup>8</sup> and 40 percent of millennials have ticked the "none" box. When Jesus "saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36). We pray for the Spirit to move us with the same compassion.

### **Engagement with the World Is Difficult**

It has been observed that in foreign, cross-cultural ministries, Christians are forced to let go of control. This isn't simply because one goes to a foreign country and cannot figure out how to get the normal morning latte or how to make the internet work. The feeling of not being able to manage situations is often the result of not knowing the rules and underlying values of the host culture.

One does not need to cross an ocean to find different value systems. They can be found in a household between different generations. Different cultures can be found all around us, based on ethnicity, age, interests, or religion, to name a few.

Filmmaker Eli Steele described the rush of clergy in Ferguson, Missouri, to Canfield Drive after the shooting of Michael Brown. These church leaders were horrified when they realized that they knew few of the young people protesting. He writes, "In the years past, their churches had turned away teen moms, drug addicts, criminals and other sinners. That's why the clergy had little to no connection with the descendants of the unwanted in the streets."<sup>9</sup>

Bob Newton has spoken often about the mission field being the place where Christ, rather than the church, is in charge.<sup>10</sup> Learning to engage where we are not in control requires us to go where only Christ is in control.

### **There Will Be Objections**

It feels like a risk to engage the world in this way. In other words, it is going to cost us and not simply in terms of money.

The world's relationships are transactional. And even in the church there will be discussions about being good stewards of God's gifts. Donors will want reports to know if their support has been used wisely. There will be efforts to have events at the church or for things to be branded so that the church gets credit.

By contrast, service to the harassed and helpless without carefully defined expectations suggests that there may be no ROI for a congregation, even if people may

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come to know Jesus. It is difficult for the old Adam living in us to give without expecting something in return. But, enlightened by the Spirit, we live free from the bonds of *quid pro quo*.

This stepping out into a culture we do not understand involves making embarrassing mistakes. We do not like that, but it is necessary. Dwight Gradin, of Mission Training International, has repeatedly made the statement that one needs to make a million mistakes before becoming fluent in a new language.<sup>11</sup> Can the same lesson be applied to our engagement with non-church culture? This engagement is not going to go according to plan, and we could well be humiliated by something wrong we say or do. But this is how we learn how to serve those who need Jesus.

Another challenge is the suffering that accompanies being the Church. In the 1950s, Georg Vicedom wrote, “Today we have a Christianity that shies away from suffering, which still goes on dreaming of a Christianized world, appeals to the rights of man and the freedom of conscience and wants to put them into operation; all this in order to escape suffering and to make that suffering impossible instead of recognizing her call to suffer.”<sup>12</sup> The world will hate the love we show as we serve in God’s mission, but this suffering can be confirmation that we are serving well.

Finally, there are also questions about what it means to be faithful to those who already have a relationship with our Lord, who need the faithful proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments (AC VII). Should churches neglect these responsibilities for the sake of the lost? Of course not. Seminary professor Elmer Matthias taught a mission class which included a theme of two-track evangelism. He emphasized that the work of evangelism is done both internally and externally to point people to right relationships with Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

## **We Have Done It Before**

The history of the LCMS shows we have allowed ourselves to be out of control and followed God’s lead when we are outside our own culture. LCMS records describe overseas mission engagement with German speakers, (known as “home mission abroad”)<sup>14</sup> and with the “foreign tongued”<sup>15</sup> before 1900. Foreign work increased heavily between the end of WWII and 1960. In those years, the Missouri Synod began work in Guatemala and Philippines in 1947, Papua New Guinea and Japan in 1948, Lebanon and Hong Kong in 1950, Taiwan and Venezuela in 1951, Portugal in 1956, South Korea in 1958, Chile, Uruguay, and Ghana in 1960.<sup>16</sup> Featured prominently in this foreign work of the LCMS was service work.

The history of the LCMS shows we have allowed ourselves to be out of control and followed God’s lead when we are outside our own culture.

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Service is one area of work in which the church does not have complete control. A usual definition of *service* is “contribution to the welfare of others.”<sup>17</sup> It assumes a relationship that is NOT transactional because nothing is expected in return. We commonly use the word *diakonia* to describe the godly service done by Christian people. It reflects God’s concern for the well-being of the whole person. Physical health is part of our Lord’s First Article creative action.

Jesus tells us, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). God sends us out to be His hands of mercy. Jesus says He will tell those who inherit eternal life, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Mt 25:35–36).

Medical and education ministries have always been a part of LCMS engagement with those who do not yet know Jesus in the foreign mission field. Lulu Ellermann, RN, is considered by many to be the first medical missionary sent by the LCMS in 1913. She served in Bargur, India, and her work was foundational in the establishment of Bethesda Hospital in Ambur. The Evangelical Lutheran Hospital at Eket, Nigeria, was established in 1952 and served by LCMS missionary doctors Lofgren, Reule, and Maier. Wheatridge helped build and equip the Children’s Hospital in Ajiro, Japan, and Haven of Hope Sanatorium in Hong Kong.<sup>18</sup> LCMS missionary doctors served at Immanuel Lutheran Hospital in Mambisanda, Papua New Guinea, from its establishment until 2010.<sup>19</sup>

Luther was a strong proponent of education,<sup>20</sup> and education has been a major part of missionary service. Lutheran missionary work in India resulted in over seventy Lutheran schools and seven schools for the handicapped.<sup>21</sup> Rooftop schools started in Hong Kong for refugees resulted in thirty-plus schools run today by The Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod. Concordia Middle School in Chiayi, Taiwan, was established by LCMS missionaries in 1967 and today educates 2,300 students.<sup>22</sup>

The unique thing about these Lutheran schools is that they are not just for Lutherans. They reflect the religious makeup of the society that they serve. Taiwan is 3.9 percent Christian<sup>23</sup> and it is assumed that the incoming students will reflect this. The result is an opportunity for service and engagement that is rarely found in Lutheran schools in the US.

These medical and educational ministries were not transactional, forcing people to become “members” to receive services. Otto Hintze once made the point that while the LCMS started nineteen schools in Papua New Guinea during the first several years of work it was not until the mission team had served nine years that they would celebrate their first baptisms.<sup>24</sup> The result of those early days of patient service is that today the Gutnius Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea counts 125,000 baptized members.<sup>25</sup>

In North America, we see that Lutherans have a good history of engaging where we are out of control. The 1930 Statistical Year-Book records “foreign tongued” work being done in America with English, Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Assyrian, Chinese, Italian, and Spanish speakers.<sup>26</sup> Lutheran hospitals in St. Louis, Ft. Wayne, Des Moines, Park Ridge (Illinois), and elsewhere are part of the service of the church, past and present.

These examples in both the foreign and domestic fields are institutional, but they set the tone for how God’s people serve. LCMS congregations and members can be equipped and encouraged to engage the community with Christ’s love in even the smallest way. Speaking at a mission conference, campus pastor Bill Steinbauer said, “Just be a virus. You only need to touch one life at a time.”<sup>27</sup> It is okay to think small. Jesus often healed people one at a time.

We are not Paul on Mars Hill. We are Dan and Ruth in our own communities. What would happen if our LCMS churches and members would shift their thinking from the Old Testament model of attracting people into the church to a New Testament model of going out to meet the “harassed and helpless”?

Lutheran doctrine of the two kinds of righteousness<sup>28</sup> helps us understand our role in God’s mission. Before our God, we stand alone, but on this earth, we are always in relationship with Christians and unbelievers. When called to faith, we are, by virtue of our baptisms, also prepared and sent into the world to give witness to God’s love for all.<sup>29</sup> We do this through words and deeds. There is no list of how we serve. God sends His Spirit to teach us love that discovers how to help our neighbor in earthly and spiritual things, and He gives us the strength and courage to love selflessly. God sends us to do this not because He needs help, and not for our own benefit, but for the good of our neighbor.

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## **It Is Time for Action**

In *Hondo*, a 1953 movie, Hondo Lane throws Johnny Lowe into a pond to teach him to swim. Johnny’s mother, Angie, is upset at what is done to her son. She turns and runs away when Hondo takes a step toward her after she reveals that she also cannot swim.

Getting thrown in is difficult because we are out of control, but it does bring results. As we think about how our congregations and members can engage where only Christ is in control, a few suggestions may help remove some of the fear before jumping in.

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- Pray and meditate on God’s Word. Be fed on Word and Sacrament at worship. We cannot neglect our spiritual well-being—our vertical relationship with God—if we are going to be godly instruments in our horizontal relationships.
- Pray to the Lord of the Harvest that He will use you in His mission. Pray “Thy kingdom come,” remembering that it is not about *our* kingdom(s). Expect no ROI for our kingdom(s). Jesus gave His all, and died for all, knowing that not all would believe. We can be extravagantly generous because His Spirit works in our lives.
- Do not throw out planning. We need to be moving forward if we are going to be surprised when God opens doors we did not plan for. We still want to be good stewards. The point is not to hold so dearly to our plans that we fail to see God’s.
- Think about how, when, and where congregations and their members can be out of control in relationships. DCE Kendra McNatt describes herself as “bracing for awkward” when she engages people in cross-cultural spiritual conversations.<sup>30</sup> The encounters often are not awkward at all, but the potential is there. Look for places with this kind of potential.
- Do not judge unbelievers because of how they live.<sup>31</sup> Sanctification comes with faith, not before. Be curious and learn their stories. Paul tells the Corinthians, “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside” (1 Cor 5:12–13a).
- Forget about trying to convert anyone. This is only the work of the Holy Spirit. Check Luther’s explanation to the Third Article on this.<sup>32</sup> We can tell what we know but cannot convince anyone.
- Have an answer to the “why” question. If you are serving, this question will come. If you are being kind and not expecting anything in return, this question will come. If you are honestly curious about someone’s life, they are going to ask you, “Why are you this way? How can you give expecting nothing in return?” Peter writes, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pt 3:15).
- Trust in God and His Word to be efficacious. “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:10–11).

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John sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Christ and Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Mt 11:4–5). God sends us to be part of His mission to make the same impact and He empowers us to serve in a way that bears witness to who our Jesus is.

If we want to make tight plans and pull control levers to fulfill tasks as planned, this is done best at home for those who already know Jesus. But God’s mission is more. He sends us into the awkward as we step over the church property line and engage the world on its terms. In the world we find God working His mission in amazing ways and we have the privilege of being His instruments to accomplish it.

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Luther says, “For whatever remains of your life, live as those sent by Christ. It is the office of everyone to instruct his neighbor, etc. And this power is given not to the clergy alone (though [here it is] spoken to the apostles) but to all believers. When you have performed this highest work, seek to become Christ’s apostle, to serve all people, so that they may come unto God as you have.”<sup>33</sup>

So, serve we shall . . . giving up control to be a part of God’s mission.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” Gallup, March 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for leading in times of transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 62.

<sup>3</sup> Rom 5:18–19; 1 Tm 2:4; 2 Pt 3:9; Gal 3:28; Rv 7:9

<sup>4</sup> Mi 4:1–2; Ez 17:22–24; 1 Kgs 8:41–43

<sup>5</sup> Mt 9:35–38; 24:14; 28:16–20; Mk 16:15–18; Lk 24:45–48; Jn 17:18; 20:21; Acts 1:8.

<sup>6</sup> In Acts 14 as Paul and Barnabas enter Lystra, it appears that they did not understand Lycaonian.

<sup>7</sup> Duane Litfin, April 23, 2016, at the CUS Council of Members Meeting at Concordia University, Nebraska.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” October 17, 2019, accessed February 26, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

<sup>9</sup> Eli Steele, “Reporter’s Notebook: Chicago pastor turns gangsters’ lives around with stunning compassion,” *Fox News*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/chicago-pastor-gangsters-compassion>.

- <sup>10</sup> Rev. Dr. Robert Newton at the Concordia Mission Institute, July 2018.
- <sup>11</sup> Dwight Gradin, Program in Language Acquisition Techniques, July 1993.
- <sup>12</sup> Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 139.
- <sup>13</sup> Concordia Seminary, St. Louis class, P-139 *Equipping People for Christian Witness*, Winter Quarter 1982–83. Dr. Matthias recognized that internal evangelism was not just equipping the saints to witness, but also to be witnessed to.
- <sup>14</sup> *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten für das Jahr 1900* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1901), 114. Mission to German speakers in Brazil, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, London, and even in Germany.
- <sup>15</sup> D. Christudas, *Tranquebar to Travancore* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 33.
- <sup>16</sup> “LCMS World Mission Report,” *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2001), 18–19. Some include El Salvador (1958) and Honduras (1961), but the report to convention does not.
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/service>, accessed February 26, 2021.
- <sup>18</sup> *Mission Digest*, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Department of Stewardship, Mission Education, and Promotion (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1959), 56–57.
- <sup>19</sup> The last LCMS missionary doctor to serve at Mambisanda was Dr. Stephen Lutz who left Papua New Guinea in the spring of 2010 and died of brain cancer in June of that year. His obituary was posted in the *Reporter* in June 2010 found here: <https://reporter.lcms.org/2010/longtime-missionary-dr-stephen-lutz-dies>.
- <sup>20</sup> Luther wrote open letters in support of education with *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520) and *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524).
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=1340>, accessed February 26, 2021.
- <sup>22</sup> <https://www.lcms.org/worldwide-regions/asia/taiwan>, accessed February 26, 2021.
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/taiwan/#people-and-society>, accessed February 25, 2021.
- <sup>24</sup> Otto Hintze in a presentation at the PNG Mission Society Bung, Timothy Lutheran Church, St. Louis, July 29, 2011.
- <sup>25</sup> <https://ilc-online.org/members/asia/papua-new-guinea/>, accessed February 26, 2021.
- <sup>26</sup> *Statistical Year-Book of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States for the Year 1930* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1931), 201–2.
- <sup>27</sup> Rev. Bill Steinbauer, Beautiful Feet Mission Conference, Concordia University, Nebraska, November 15, 2015.
- <sup>28</sup> Luther wrote: “This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused” (LW 26:7).
- <sup>29</sup> “But after we have become Christians through this Priest and His priestly office, incorporated in Him by Baptism through faith, then each one, according to his calling and position, obtains the right and the power of teaching and confessing before others this Word which we have obtained from Him. Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary” (LW 13:333).

<sup>30</sup> Kendra McNatt described “bracing for awkward” as a guest presenter in GMC 270—Mission of God class at Concordia University, Nebraska in October of 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Newman includes a great story of not judging in his book, *Gospel DNA: Five Markers of a Flourishing Church* (San Antonio: Ursa, 2016), 124ff.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000), *The Small Catechism*, 355.

<sup>33</sup> LW 69:336f.

# Mission and Christian Mercy: Pondering Their Relationship

Klaus Detlev Schulz

**Abstract:** Mission is a proclamatory, evangelistic activity that addresses the spiritual condition of a person. However, biblical data and theological anthropology inform us that such a person should be viewed wholistically, existing as an ensouled being. For that reason, mercy work and human care are complementary activities to mission proper, either preceding it, accompanying it, or following it. While mercy work is an ethical expression of the church, that is, a response of faith motivated by brotherly love for the neighbor and rooted in the parable of the Good Samaritan, it connects to Christology, to the one who Himself served in the world through both word *and* deed. His deeds and those of the apostles served as *signs* of their preaching of the kingdom that has come. The church looks at the deeds of Christ and the apostles as unique, and yet she performs her own deeds of mercy in the hope that the Lord may use them also as signs in support of her proclamation of His coming reign.

## I. A Tenuous Linkage

The activities of preaching the Gospel and showing compassion for the neighbor have been with the church since her inception. Both activities led a peaceful coexistence well into the twentieth century when their relationship became a contested issue causing their polarization.<sup>1</sup> Since then the linkage between mercy works<sup>2</sup> and mission has become one of debate. There are many reasons explaining that tenuous relationship. One is the rise of religious relativism or universalism within Christianity that not only questions the main thrust of Christian mission toward the salvation of people and the planting of churches, but undermines the purpose of all her ministries in this world. The recent debate among theologians over David Bentley Hart's *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation*<sup>3</sup> demonstrates how fragile



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the status of the church's mission is in light of universalistic or religious pluralist claims within Christianity. Fortunately, victory is not at hand for the Christian universalist cause given the strength of the arguments from those who stood up against Hart for the traditional understanding of the church's role in this world through word and deed.<sup>4</sup>

A look into the recent history of missions reveals important stations where the linkage of proclamation and works of mercy became brittle. In his seminal contribution *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom*,<sup>5</sup> James Scherer points to the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala, 1968, where the debate over the role of the church in the *missio Dei* towards the world led to the introduction of a mission paradigm that had "humanization" as its goal and that focused on relieving human tensions in the social, economic, or political realms.<sup>6</sup> Already then, many delegates thought that it compromised the central status of the church in God's mission and classical soteriology which is informed by a biblical eschatology that, in light of Christ's return, necessitates an urgent call for (missionary) proclamation.<sup>7</sup>

The late Lutheran missiologist Peter Beyerhaus (1929–2020) became a leading voice to correct this conciliar course of direction by affirming once again the proclamatory role of the church in the *missio Dei*. He did so in his tract *Missions: Which Way? Humanization or Redemption* (1971) and also, together with a group of missiologists, he formulated and signed *The Frankfurt Declaration* (1970), which was instrumental in providing the platform for the formation of the Evangelical Missionary Movement known as the *Lausanne Movement* in 1974.<sup>8</sup> Instead of tipping the scales entirely towards an evangelistic and eschatological approach—one which Evangelistic Missions such as the premillennial missions of the Puritans<sup>9</sup> and that of faith missionaries such as Karl Gützlaff and the China Inland Mission (1865) were known for pursuing—the *Frankfurt Declaration* affirmed the connection between proclamation and works of mercy: "We see therein [i.e. development aid] an important accompaniment and authentication of mission. We also affirm the humanizing results of conversion as signs of the coming messianic peace."<sup>10</sup>

A similar approach was taken a decade later at the international consultation of the Lausanne Movement in Grand Rapids (1982) on *The Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility*. The participants of the Lausanne Movement accepted both the "call to world evangelization" and the "call to social responsibility." Using the three terms "consequence, bridge, and partner" to define the relationship of evangelism and social activity,<sup>11</sup> they concluded their deliberations with the following definition:

Evangelism and social responsibility, while distinct from one another, are integrally related in our proclamation of and obedience to the Gospel. The partnership is, in reality, a marriage. In practice, as in the public ministry of Jesus, the two are inseparable, at least in open societies. Rather than

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competing with each other, they mutually support and strengthen each other in an upward spiral of increased concern for both.<sup>12</sup>

To an extent that distinction is also kept in the statement of missions, *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation and Empowerment* (2004), formulated by the Lutheran World Federation. It connects the proclamation through Word and Sacrament with diakonia while maintaining a distinction between the two:

Proclaiming and witnessing through diakonia are inseparable as participation in God's transforming, reconciling, and empowering mission in the world. Word without deed can be abstract and powerless, and deed without word can be mute and open for any interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

It also distinguishes between salvation in Jesus Christ and the healing of illnesses. Though salvation and healing are related, Christians should not equate their salvation with an automatic cure from illnesses in this life.<sup>14</sup>

Without equivocating the theological distinctions between the *Frankfurt Declaration* (including the Lausanne Movement's Statement) and the Lutheran World Federation, one sees that both have in common an interest of wanting to avoid the two extremes where one activity dismisses the other. Instead, they have chosen a middle position that affirms both activities and gives each equal validity. We take note of important phrases: Mercy works "accompany" and "authenticate" missionary proclamation; they can even serve as "signs of the coming messianic peace." We learn that the two are "inseparable," like a "marriage" and that "word without deed" remains "abstract and powerless."

However, given that both proclamation and mercy works should be treated as inseparable, equal, and legitimate activities for Christian mission around the world, the question still lingers whether church bodies should not prioritize proclamation over mercy works or at least affirm it as *the* activity to which mercy works are then connected. For if mercy works are given a standing on their own apart from proclamation, such works of mercy might as well be handed over to a secular organization that is not specifically Christian. That question of rank and prioritization will be discussed later on.

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## II. Anthropological Considerations

Next to compromising the central role of the church in the *missio Dei*, there is a second factor that potentially weakens the linkage between the two which is the failure to take a close look at one's audience to whom mission is done. Who are the persons addressed in missions and in what condition do we find them? An important underlying question is an anthropological one, what it means to be fully human, and how does this understanding of full humanity shape one's philosophy of mission and salvation (σωτηρία). According to Charles Sherlock, many Christians have equated salvation of human beings with the "soul," "spirit," or other immaterial aspects of human life.<sup>15</sup> Thereby, he concludes, "the Christian hope has often been spiritualized, and the earthy hope of the resurrection of the body replaced by an amorphous wish about an immortal soul."<sup>16</sup> Thus, a correction from Scripture is needed here since it affirms that the body will also be redeemed (Rom 8:23) and our mortal bodies will receive immortality (2 Cor 5:4). Biblical anthropology shows an interest in the bodily existence and associates the soul with a human's bodily state, both here and in the time that is to come. In that sense, then, salvation is comprehensive or wholistic, never disembodied, even if it means that the body still lies waiting for the final relief from all earthly struggles.<sup>17</sup>

This applies also to the understanding of healing. To avoid both a platonic and dualistic definition which unduly separates body and soul, or a monism that merges body and soul, theologians speak today of an ensouled body, where both soul and body are interconnected and interact with one another, which can be proven from the cases of psychosomatic illnesses. According to Ray Anderson the fact that

a human being lives and moves, experiences good and ill, is healthy and sick, and in the end dies, is not a matter of mere body. . . . The only interest biblical anthropology has in the body is that it is an ensouled body. . . . When one is a whole person, one's whole self is healthy—body, soul, and spirit. While this remains an eschatological reality, it nonetheless gives us an orientation toward seeking health for ourselves and others during this present life.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the above discussion should influence a person's outlook on life and earthly existence. Christianity, including her missionaries, has repeatedly downplayed the value of the body and a person's createdness. Within Christianity, movements abounded that denied the body its rightful place and honor. Influenced by Gnosticism and then perpetuating that attitude with asceticism, a dualism was at work that views the body as a prison of the soul. The body is finite and limited and entraps the intellectual mind or soul or spirit. Asceticism, known to exist around individuals like the father of monasticism, Anthony of Egypt (251–356) and Martin of Tours (died 397), proposed an alternative lifestyle to that of society, which they thought to progress in evil and sinful behavior. Consequently, as records show, the bishop imposed a rigorous discipline on himself and his monk followers denying themselves food, drink,

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and comfortable clothing.<sup>19</sup> In the modern age, Protestant missionaries have not shied away from chastising their bodies through extreme rigor and discipline in their service to the Lord and the unbelieving world. According to a witness account, the famous modern missionary C. T. Studd (1860–1931), part of the Cambridge seven, who went first to China, then to India and finally to the Belgian Congo, Africa, was such an example, who in spite of multiple heart attacks, continued to put himself and his fellow workers under extreme pressure and discipline that caused unnecessary tension among them.<sup>20</sup>

The Reformers looked at anthropology differently and affirmed the createdness of human life, in that they, Luther in particular, placed the first article and the bodily life around family and vocation on the same level as the second and third articles. They encouraged the consumption of food and drink, the need for marriage, the creation of a family, and pursuing one’s vocation within society. All these mandates pertaining to bodily life came from the hands of the Creator, the same God who redeems and sanctifies. Creation and earthly life received a boost, it was structured into orders, and was elevated to the same level as redemption and leading a spiritual life. Their affirmation of a human’s createdness intentionally went against a life of self-denial and withdrawal that pursued practices such as fasting, almsgiving, and sexual abstinence.<sup>21</sup>

Lutheran concerns over the neglect of the article of creation continued well into the twentieth century. As the title of his monograph, *The Flight from Creation*<sup>22</sup>, suggests, Gustav Wingren expressed concerns over Neo-orthodoxy’s denial of general revelation and natural law calling it “anthropological nihilism” that creates an “ethical vacuum.”<sup>23</sup> This resulted in the church’s mission losing ground over issues Christians have in common with non-Christians as they pertain to ordering and managing their daily, bodily life. On a sidenote, this unwarranted separation of body and soul has often influenced the Western approach to take a mechanized understanding of healing illnesses. In the latest edition of the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, a number of authors point out, that in many cases, medical missions failed to be considerate of communities around the world who connected the cause for their physical illnesses to a spiritual imbalance, and thus would first seek out traditional healing methods. As a result, “in many African countries alternative health systems exist alongside hospitals and clinics, but unfortunately they are not generally recognized by national health policies.”<sup>24</sup>

Where one side of a human being is neglected for the other, mission would fail to serve its true purpose of serving, saving, and healing humans wholistically.

We conclude that while all living life may be considered to be in possession of the breath

of life, a soul, special to humans is the fact that they have an ensouled body and a *spirited* soul. This suggests that humans, unlike the rest of creation, have an awareness for God, a capacity for response-ability, which constitutes the center of their very being.<sup>25</sup> As Luther would say, “heaven . . . was not made for geese.”<sup>26</sup> That spirited soul is what validates the preaching activity while the physical constitution calls for works of mercy. Where one side of a human being is neglected for the other, mission would fail to serve its true purpose of serving, saving, and healing humans holistically.

### III. Being Not Only Church *for* Others but Also a Church *with* Them

Those involved in missions, either in the evangelistic activity or in providing human care, actually have something in common and that is to be there *for* others and serve them. Both approaches operate with the understanding that there are those who give and those who receive. In many instances, this is still how the West looks upon the rest of the world, and as today’s short-term volunteerism shows, often persists in the notion, or even creates the image, of victims that need outsiders to come to their help.<sup>27</sup> Africa in particular is looked upon in this way. The African missiologist Tite Tiénou made this point concerning his continent two decades ago:

Misery and despair, we are led to believe, are the chief characteristics of Africa. Is it any wonder that the continent’s inhabitants are perceived as helpless children or junior members of the human race and in constant need of benevolent care? . . . One wonders is Africa only good for promoting outsiders to hero status?<sup>28</sup>

These words still deserve our attention. Perhaps one important correction to accompany the missionary endeavors of preaching and doing mercy works comes from the retired missiologist Theo Sundermeier’s concept of *convivence*.<sup>29</sup> It suggests that those involved in (foreign) missions should not regard themselves solely as givers, doers, and helpers *for* others, but primarily as living together *with* others.<sup>30</sup> As Sundermeier unfolds his approach, he critically analyses the two traditional models of mission that solely focus on being *for* others, where the teachers and missionaries either preach (which he calls the Evangelical model) or provide human care (which he calls the Geneva model) *for* others. Both have in common that they regard themselves as the haves over the have-nots: “It had to do with condescension and power and demanded from recipients’ humility and gratitude.”<sup>31</sup> Sundermeier feels that both mission movements eventually reach a dead-end street. Instead, *convivence* overcomes that barrier and it lets people who are ready to convert to Jesus know that the representatives of Jesus take them seriously, that the evangelists listen to their stories, and that the helpers are ready to help them with the intention that they may learn to help themselves.

The ecclesiology Sundermeier proposes is not a one-sided approach, a “Church *for* people,” as Dietrich Bonhoeffer is known to have written, but a “Church *with* people.”<sup>32</sup> For “the experience of convivence . . . teaches that to help is a reciprocal event in which both sides always give and receive.”<sup>33</sup> *Convivence* encourages a mutuality between the missionary and the subject. Both learn from each other as they engage in conversation and in sharing life together.

But we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. Though Western colonialism and expansionism have shaped, and to a certain level still shape Christian mission, though history shows that missions has often fostered arrogance or paternalism, a church in mission as being *for* others still matters. Being there *for* others is a fundamental Christian attitude, and a biblically mandated one, that summons Christians to live a life unselfishly for others (Mt 25:31–46) and to engage in an evangelistic activity of calling people out for a life in Christ (Acts 1:8). That is what the church has been instructed to do in the time before the Lord’s return so that a church existing without mercy work and evangelistic activity to others would cease to exist.

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To conclude this section, we note that the relationship of proclamation and works of mercy find their mandate in Scripture and a properly understood theological anthropology underscores their validity, so that seen together in their proper relationship, they provide integrity to the mission enterprise *for* and *with* the people.

#### **IV. Itshelejuba: Making a Case for Medical Mission, and for Mercy Works in General**

Itshelejuba is a rural hospital in the region of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa. It takes its Zulu name after the boulders on which it is built “Stone of the Doves” (Itshe=stone and juba=doves). Over the years it has expanded to nine clinics and one Gateway Clinic in the Pongola River catchment area. On its website we read the following statement: “Itshelejuba hospital was discovered by German Missionaries. It started as a mission station for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people. The people could not understand that the Missionaries were preaching the gospel without meeting expectations of physical wellness.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Itshelejuba was started in 1932 by the Lutheran missionary Wilhelm Weber of the Hanoverian Lutheran Free Church Mission founded in 1892 (later known as the Bleckmar Mission, and today as the Lutheran Church Mission).<sup>35</sup> On his mission station, missionary Weber converted an old farmhouse as the first health facility. At that time, medical facilities were hard to

come by in the region and the practice of traditional medicine was rampant. In fact, so much did it control the local community's beliefs towards sickness and its removal that every patient who came to be treated at the hospital would have to endure reprisals from their clans and relatives. Winning the trust of the local community was a challenge for missionary Weber.

Over the years, German medical missionaries arrived such as Sister Ruth Bauseneik in 1953, who for fifteen years began to train local staff to become general nurses and midwives. On May 16, 1969, Dr. Kurt Bergter became the Medical Superintendent of Itshelejuba hospital. Before his coming he had served as medical missionary to India. Through the tireless efforts of all involved, the hospital expanded its general care to specialize in certain areas: a maternity ward was built in 1962 and in 1965 a TB ward was added to treat the widespread problem of tuberculosis. As with many medical projects, funding for medicine, equipment, and personnel came from a number of constituents such as the Transvaal Department of Health and the German Church Charity group called *Brot für die Welt*. Also, as with many human care facilities started and run by missionaries, Itshelejuba was taken over by the local government and placed under its supervision. Yet, while the treatment of physical illnesses increasingly became the main focus at Itshelejuba, the medical operation is to this day accompanied by daily devotions and the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This became the responsibility of the pastor of the neighboring Itshelejuba parish belonging to the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA). Pastor Sibiya, who retired from parish work in 1966, was replaced by Pastor Johannes Khumalo in 1971, and currently in 2021 the hospital community is served by Pastor Ronald Lushaba.

Arguments in favor of medical missions in Lutheran mission are well-established, but at this juncture taking them up again may serve to make a sufficient case for mercy works in general, including education and agricultural mission, to use two additional examples. For such a well-formulated and biblically based Lutheran approach one should turn to the essay "*Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit*," (Reasons for starting our Hospital Ministry) by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (1910–1982), who was the mission director of the aforementioned Bleckmar Mission Society (now Lutheran Church Mission).<sup>36</sup> In his justification of medical missions at Itshelejuba, Hopf develops a number of principles that may serve as the answer to our yet unanswered question on the proper relationship between proclamation and mercy works.

As with many mission starts, medical work at Itshelejuba began without a prior planned strategy. It simply fell upon the missionaries who were left with no choice but to respond to the Zulu community's physical needs. These were so pressing and in demand of immediate attention that medical missions were simply done without further reflection and as an activity was simply placed under a broader definition of missions. However, to avoid confusion on the field, Hopf felt it necessary to develop

a reasoned approach to explain its connection to the proclamation of the Word and to the service of the missionaries who at that time were all commissioned to evangelistic missions, that is, to carry out the Lord's mandate of preaching, teaching, and baptizing.<sup>37</sup>

The first and immediate reason for medical mission lies in a Christian's love for the neighbor. Here the Christian takes Jesus Christ as his *example*.<sup>38</sup> With Christ both word and deed were inseparably connected. This can be seen in Scripture at various places. In the words of the apostle Peter to Cornelius, Jesus was "*preaching the good news of peace*" and "went about *doing good and healing* all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:36–38). And on the road to Emmaus, the two disciples shared with the Lord what they knew of Him: "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in *deed and word* before God and all people" (Lk 24:19; see also Acts 1:1).

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In the ministry of Jesus and His apostles, their deeds of healing served as *signs* that the messianic kingdom had come into the lives of the people (Mt 11:4–6; Lk 4:17–21). Deeds accompanied the preaching of His disciples (Mk 16:17) and functioned as signs that confirmed and underscored their preaching: "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs" (Mk 16:20). Although the miracles of healing which Christ and the apostles performed were unique and served as signs of the coming kingdom, Christ remains the example who wants to work His mercy and holy love through His followers to those plagued by illnesses. Thus, Christ expressly gave His *command* to His followers to give a healing and helping hand for those in need. He did so in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who showed compassion (Lk 10:25–37), and Christ concludes with the instruction to His followers: "Go and do likewise" (v. 37). In the great judgment scene (Mt 25:31–46), the Lord also gave His followers the *promise* that those on His right who did likewise will be blessed and inherit eternal life.

The question that needs to be answered is this: May the services of Christ's followers, those after the death of Christ and His apostles such as providing clothing, feeding, healing, and visitation "to one of the least of these" (v. 46), also be treated as "signs" that support the preaching of the coming of Christ's gracious reign, similar to what the deeds of Christ and that of the apostles did?<sup>39</sup> According to Hopf, that question is more difficult to answer, yet he proceeds to do so.

In the letter of James, one gets a glimpse into the continuation of the healing ministry in the life of a congregation after the ascension of Christ and the death of His

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apostles. There, the act of healing occurs through prayer for the sick and by anointing with oil in the name of the Lord (Jas 5:13–16). This means that though Christ’s ministry and that of the apostles is unique, the healing ministry continues, yet not on the same level as that of Christ and the apostles because “we live neither in the days of Christ’s earthly ministry nor in the time of his disciples who have received the power to heal immediately. We also do not live in the time of full manifestation of his kingdom.”<sup>40</sup> And yet, in spite of these distinctions and limitations, the church’s preaching and healing ministry in this interim period has to be rooted in the work of the apostles. Thus, the church sees the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments as a continuation of the apostles’ ministry by preaching their words, albeit by those who are not called to be apostles. The same can be said of the healing ministry. Though Christ and the apostles were uniquely authorized with the power to perform miracles of healing, the church continues the healing ministry of the apostles, even if she does not possess the powers of direct healing as the apostles did.<sup>41</sup>

In the end, the church pursues her healing ministry to those in need because of the mandate given in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Whether the Lord then uses the church’s deeds as “signs” confirming the preaching of the coming of Christ’s kingdom should be left to His own discretion. Since this is a time of believing and not seeing, the church may not know whether the Zulus on whom she performs her healing ministry will actually perceive her acts of mercy as a sign confirming the preaching of Christ’s kingdom. The missionaries must leave that to the decision of the Lord in the hope that like the acts of Christ, their deeds, too, might become signs or windows for people to see Christ’s love and mercy already at work here and now.<sup>42</sup> What the church is instructed to do is to confidently yet soberly conduct her medical mission. For in doing so, the church will avoid the temptation to use her works of mercy as a trap or a means to lure others into converting to Christianity. She simply does so because she has been called to serve. She achieves her goal in medical missions when she is able to help and serve, and connect that service to the proclamation of the Word. Everything else should be left to the Lord.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, in answer to the question of defining the relationship of mercy works to the preaching of the Word, the answer Hopf gives comes from his interpretation of the functions and the deeds performed by Christ and the apostles. Thus, he concludes that “connected to the establishment of diaconic service, we have the establishment of the missionary service proper.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, without merging the two activities, Hopf prioritizes preaching just as Scripture does with the signs of healing in Christ’s and the apostles’ ministry. Works of mercy, such as medical missions, are connected or aligned (*Zuordnung*) and subordinate (*Unterordnung*) to the ministry of preaching.<sup>45</sup> The linkage becomes one of both/and with medical missions specifically serving the church’s proclamation.

## **V. Corporate, Direct, and Intentional**

The above reasoning assumes that the act of proclamation and works of mercy are part of the church's ministry to the world and both are pursued intentionally and corporately by the church organizing them. In other words, as much as both the witness of God's Word and demonstrations of love for the neighbor oblige every individual Christian in his vocation, the church cannot ignore that she too has a corporate interest to play her part in God's mission. This argument was made in a CTCR statement from February 1999, entitled: "*Faith Active in Love: Human Care in the Church's Life*" by distinguishing three levels how the church pursues the works of mercy. First, every Christian responds through his vocation with works of love. This service is individual (vocational), unintentional, and indirect. "The terms 'indirect and unintended' indicate that love flows from faith in the Gospel apart from any specific or organized plan or 'intention' on the church's part, while at the same time suggesting that the church serves society 'indirectly' by helping individuals who are in need."<sup>46</sup> Second, the church also intentionally proclaims and encourages that vocational service in her sermons. This level is still indirect but now encouraged intentionally to influence the members. While the first level looks at the spontaneous response of a Christian's faith through good works, as Luther would,<sup>47</sup> the argument for affirming this level is based on the fact that good works ought to be taught and encouraged because God has commanded them.<sup>48</sup> The third level, and of value to us, is the church's interest in engaging mercy works as a community in an intentional and direct way. The reference to examples of such communal concerns in Scripture is in Acts 6:1–7, where the apostles select deacons to relieve them from the task of helping the Hellenist widows so that they could devote themselves to their main task of preaching. However, unlike the preaching activity which the church pursues and addresses specifically through the pastoral ministry, the document allows for a latitude in the church organizing and strategizing her works of mercy: "There is no prescribed manner in which the church must organize today. The structures employed for the work of human care thus differ from the office of the pastoral ministry."<sup>49</sup> The final question, how the works of mercy relate to the preaching activity of the pastoral ministry, is not further specified in the document.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Responses to human need often arise simply because that is the right thing for missionaries to do. That applies to every Christian who empathizes with the neighbor's plight and unselfishly seeks to alleviate it. To display such "brotherly love," a Christian "does not wait until he is given a command or letter from a prince or bishop," Luther observed.<sup>50</sup> As the Christian's faith is sustained and nourished by the Spirit through Word and Sacrament, its fruits become audible and visible to others through word and deed. However, both these acts are also taken up corporately and with

intentionality by the church. Since the church focuses on her mission of proclaiming the Word of God and calling people from darkness into light, she has clarified the relationship of that mission to her acts of mercy. It is a both/and with the acts of mercy supporting her proclamation. In recent decades, the relationship between mercy works and missions has become tenuous and in need of clarification. We have seen that the biblical data and theological anthropology encourage both activities without confusing one with the other. As the church locates her mandate for mercy works in the parable of the Good Samaritan, she also sees both activities rooted in the work of Christ and the apostles, albeit as a continuation that has to make concessions. To those who are on the receiving end, such acts of mercy can become “signs” of the coming kingdom. However, since the church conducts her mission in the age of believing and not seeing (Jn 20:30), she entrusts both operations to the Lord, and lets Him work through them as He sees fit.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “There was no serious polarization of spiritual and social concerns in missions until the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” Winston Crawley, *Global Missions. A Story to Tell: An Interpretation of Southern Baptist Foreign Missions* (Nashville: Broadman, 1985), 281; Jeffrey Palmer, “Human Needs Ministries,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry (Nashville: B & H, 2015), Chapter 31, 445.

<sup>2</sup> Alternative terms are manifold: human care, social responsibility, works of love or piety, even means of grace. The latter term, especially, is prone to create interdenominational confusion since Lutherans associate with the *means of grace* God’s delivery system to the world in Word and Sacraments. Instead, the Wesleyan interpretation of works of mercy follows John Wesley’s definition “of outward signs, words or actions ordained by God,” and is thus willing to call Christian works of love the “means of grace,” understanding that through their works of love they participate in God’s gracious acts of love and ensure their continuation in the world. See David Martin Whitworth, *Missio Dei and the Means of Grace. A Theology of Participation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 101.

<sup>3</sup> David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> In his blog Michael McClymond’s makes a compelling case against Hart’s universalistic thesis, “David Bentley Hart’s Lonely, Last Stand for Christian Universalism. A Review of ‘That All Shall Be Saved’” (October 2, 2019) <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/shall-saved-universal-christian-universalism-david-bentley-hart/>. The latest edition of

Lutheran Forum 54, no. 2 (Summer 2020) is in part devoted to a rebuttal of Hart's universalistic thesis.

<sup>5</sup> James Scherer, *Gospel, Church and Kingdom. Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Scherer, *Gospel, Church and Kingdom*, 119–121.

<sup>7</sup> Scherer, *Gospel, Church and Kingdom*, 114–121.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Beyerhaus, missiologist at Tübingen University, expressed his concerns in *Humanisierung—die einzige Hoffnung der Welt* (Humanization—the only hope for the world?) and together with significant missiologists at that time drafted the document called *The Frankfurt Declaration*. Peter Beyerhaus, *Missions: Which Way? Humanization or Redemption*, trans. Margaret Clarkson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 107–120.

<sup>9</sup> Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 148.

<sup>10</sup> Beyerhaus, *Missions: Which Way?*, 120.

<sup>11</sup> “First, social activity is a *consequence* of evangelism. . . . Secondly, social activity can be a *bridge* to evangelism. . . . Thirdly, social activity . . . also accompanies it as its *partner*.” Scherer, *Gospel, Church and Kingdom*, 184.

<sup>12</sup> International Consultation of the Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR) at Grand Rapids, June 19–25, 1982. *New Directions in Mission & Evangelization I. Basic Statements 1974–1991*, ed. James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 279, 280.

<sup>13</sup> *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation and Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission*. Published by The Lutheran World Federation Department for Mission and Development (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004), 38.

<sup>14</sup> “Salvation as the eschatological promise that one day God will be all in all remains in constant tension with the harsh reality of life and its longing for healing. Healing encompasses questions pertaining to health and sickness, and medical, psychiatric, emotional, and spiritual treatment and cure. For Christians of all denominations, healing is a basic theological theme, as it plays a significant role in spiritual life. The existence of disease and the fact that not every sick person among Christians receives healing raise questions about the relation of healing to salvation in Jesus Christ.” *Mission in Context*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 213.

<sup>16</sup> Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, 214.

<sup>17</sup> Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, 213.

<sup>18</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human. Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 213–214.

<sup>19</sup> Sulpicius Severus (AD 363–425), a contemporary Christian writer who helped Martin of Tours's rise to fame, observes of the bishop and his followers: “Rarely did any one of them go beyond the cell, unless when they assembled at the place of prayer. They all took their food together, after the hour of fasting was past. No one used wine, except when illness compelled them to do so. Most of them were clothed in garments of camels' hair. Any dress approaching to softness was there deemed criminal, and this must be thought the more remarkable, because many among them were such as are deemed of noble rank.” Sulpicius Severus, “On the Life of St. Martin” (Chapter 10), in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 11, Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Norman Grubb, *C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2008, reprint of original from 1933), 188–197.

<sup>21</sup> AC 20.19–22 (Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000), 55; Ap. 27.46 (Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 285); Ap. 27.54–56 (Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 286).

<sup>22</sup> “The modern negation of the belief in creation has Karl Barth as its spiritual father: all others are secondary and have grown up in his shadow.” Gustaf Wingren, *The Flight from Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), 20.

<sup>23</sup> “Quite a different matter is the Barthian thesis that man without Christ lacks knowledge of the good. By taking that view, one starts in anthropological nihilism, in an ethical vacuum.” Wingren, Gustaf Wingren, *The Flight from Creation*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, Lesego Gabaitiri et al., “Christian Medical Mission from the Perspective of Batswana Faith Healers,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 45, no. 2 (April 2021): 145–156. Therein p. 146.

<sup>25</sup> The Formula of Concord speaks of a capacity, though passive, in humans which contrasts them from other creaturely life. FC SD 2.23.60, 71 (Kolb and Wengert, 548, 555, 557). This reference is meant to highlight the uniqueness of human life over other life forms and to indicate that God does not coerce anyone to conversion as if man were a robot or a stone. See also Ray Sherman Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 38.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Luther, “The Bondage of the Will (1525),” in *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Philip S. Watson, trans. Philip S. Watson and Benjamin Drewery, Vol. 33, *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), AE 33:67.

<sup>27</sup> Michelle Staton, “7 Reasons Why Your Two Week Trip To Haiti Doesn’t Matter: Calling Bull on ‘Service Trips’ and Voluntourism,” *The Almost Doctor’s Channel*, December 15, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151218082718/http://almost.thedoctorschannel.com/14323-2/>.

<sup>28</sup> Tite Tiénou, “The Training of Missiologists for an African Context,” in *Missiological Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by J. Dudley Woodberry, Charles Van Engen, Edgar J. Elliston (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 93–100.

<sup>29</sup> Theo Sundermeier is a German missiologist, b. 1935, a former missionary teacher at the Lutheran seminary in Umpumulo, South Africa, before he became the leading missiologist in Germany at the University of Heidelberg.

<sup>30</sup> Sundermeier notes three important functions for convivence today, of sharing a life with others: to help each other, to learn from one another, and to celebrate/feast together (in German: *miteinander leben: einander helfen, voneinander lernen, miteinander feiern*). See Theo Sundermeier, “Theology of Mission,” in *Dictionary of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 429–451; Michael Kisskalt, “Mission as convivence—life sharing and mutual learning in mission: inspirations from German missiology,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 11, no. 2 (January 2011): 6–8.

<sup>31</sup> Sundermeier, “Theology of Mission,” 449.

<sup>32</sup> “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others . . . not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (NY: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1953, 1997), 282. See Theo Sundermeier, “Der Kirchenbegriff von Dietrich Bonhoeffer—Eine missiologische Perspektive. Mission und Religion in der Theologie Bonhoeffers,” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 42. Jahrgang (4/2016), 349.

<sup>33</sup> Sundermeier, “Theology of Mission,” 449.

<sup>34</sup> “History of Itshelejuba hospital,” Kwazulu-Natal Province Department of Health Republic of South Africa, <http://www.kznhealth.gov.za/itshelejuba/history.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> For further details on the beginning of the society, see Klaus Detlev Schulz, “Nineteenth Century Lutheran Missions,” *Logia* 29, no. 4 (Reformation 2020): 62–63.

<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, “Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit,” in *Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission. Festschrift zum 75 jährigen Jubiläum der Bleckmarer Mission*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Bleckmar: Mission Evangelisch=Lutherischer Freikirchen, 1967), 143–149.

<sup>37</sup> Hopf, “Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit,” 143.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Luther in “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 1519 (AE 31:297–306): “Just as he himself did all things for us, not seeking his own good but ours only—and in this he was most obedient to God the Father—so he desires that we should set the same example for our neighbors” (300). For a discussion on the connection of Christology to the moral righteousness and works of mercy in missions, see Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 126–128; 258–259.

<sup>39</sup> Hopf, “Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit,” 144.

<sup>40</sup> Hopf, “Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit,” 145.

<sup>41</sup> Hopf, “Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit,” 146: “Wie nun unsere Predigt heute einerseits apostolisches Zeugnis ist und doch andererseits nur das Wort derer ist, die nicht selbst Apostel sind, so ist unser helfendes und heilendes Handeln einerseits, wo und wann Gott will, ‘Zeichen’ der Königsherrschaft Christi zur Bekräftigung unserer Predigt und doch andererseits nur der Dienst derer, die nicht selbst die Gabe der Krankenheilung besitzen.”

<sup>42</sup> See here agreement with Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 252.

<sup>43</sup> Hopf, “Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit,” 146.

<sup>44</sup> Hopf, “Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit,” 144: “Wir können es auch so ausdrücken: neben die diakonische Begründung unseres Dienstes tritt, mit ihr unlöslich sich verbinding, die eigentlich missionarische.”

<sup>45</sup> Hopf, “Zur Begründung unserer Hospitalarbeit,” 149: “Sind . . . wir bereit zur Zuordnung und Unterordnung unserer Arbeit unter das Amt der Verkündigung.” This distinction and alignment of both works of the church finds contemporary agreement: “Evangelism is an indispensable dimension of the mission of the church; it is essential and cannot be replaced by deeds or presence of by any other aspect of the church’s mission.” Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 237–238. Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission. Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 146: “In light of scripture’s clear and repeated teaching on the eternal consequences of one’s spiritual state—forgiveness and eternal life versus judgment and eternal condemnation—we must maintain that the spiritual and the temporal needs of people cannot be placed on an equal plane.” Ott and Strauss, “The task of missions should address the most diverse of human needs, but the ministry of spiritual redemption and transformation remains uniquely central in both method and spirit,” 147.

<sup>46</sup> Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), *Faith Active in Love: Human Care in the Church’s Life* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1999), 15.

<sup>47</sup> One may see here Luther’s *Preface to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*: “O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them” (AE 35:370). “Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1 [12–

13]. It kills the Old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit” (AE 35:370). “For through faith a man becomes free from sin and comes to take pleasure in God’s commandments” (AE 35:371). *The Freedom of the Christian*: “This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is truly active through love [Gal. 5:6], that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith” (AE 31:365).

<sup>48</sup> Ap 4. 189 (Kolb and Wengert, 150): “good works are to be done because God requires them. . . . Thus good works ought to follow faith as thanksgiving toward God. . . . so that faith is exercised in them, grows, and is shown to others.” FC Ep. 4.18 (Kolb and Wengert, 499): “it is no less necessary to admonish the people to Christian discipline and good works and to remind them how necessary it is that they practice good works as a demonstration of their faith and their gratitude to God than it is to admonish them that works not be mingled with the article on justification.”

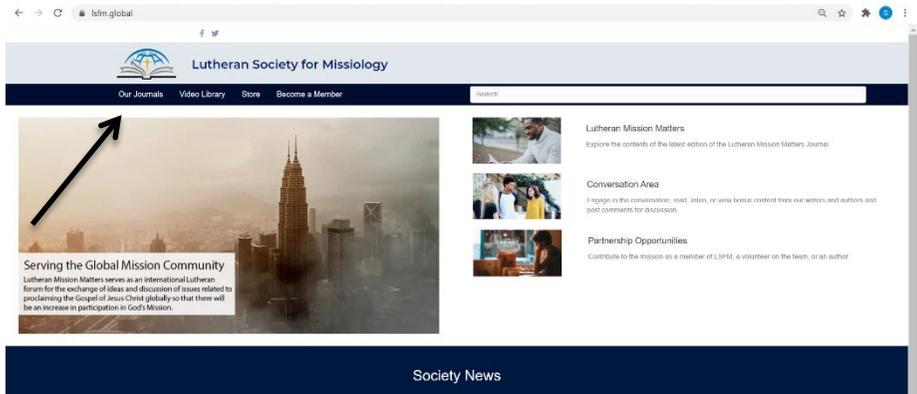
<sup>49</sup> CTCR, *Faith Active in Love*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> “In such a case a Christian looks with brotherly love at the need of the poor and perishing souls and does not wait until he is given a command or letter from a prince or bishop.” Martin Luther, “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,” (1523), AE 39:310.

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# The Surprising Result of Being Reminded That People Are the Focus of God’s Mission

Michael W. Newman

**Abstract:** After fifty years of on US soil, The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States grew in awareness that the Gospel needed to be shared beyond the audience of German-speaking immigrants. In some cases, this new understanding resulted from increasing exposure to the developing American culture. In other situations, the Synod was pressed into new behavior by hostile social conditions. But Missouri rose to the occasion. Two key figures in LCMS history, Rev. Dr. Friedrich Pfothhauer and Rev. F. W. Herzberger (both born in 1859), teach us that when processes, comfort levels, traditions, and preferences—which are always clamoring for top priority in the community of God’s people—are replaced by the ultimate goal of reaching people with the Gospel, wholistic and effective mission efforts grow and flourish.

## Neither Processes nor Comfort Levels

It started with puppies—stuffed animal puppies to be exact. A kindly woman brought forward a basket of handmade stuffed animal puppies during a worship service in Forney, Texas, so these little creatures could be blessed and consecrated for distribution among the lonely and hurting children and older adults in the community.

After the worship service, the woman presented me with a puppy and let me know how these little furry friends made such a difference as they were presented with love and care during her outreach work to the forgotten and lonely. She mentioned that she was merely following in the footsteps of her great-grandfather who had a heart for the disenfranchised. The woman’s name was Suzanne. Her great-grandfather was Rev. Frederick W. Herzberger, a pioneer of wholistic mission in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.



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Rev. F. W. Herzberger was a uniquely American pastor. Unlike many LCMS pastors during his era, Herzberger was born in the United States in 1859. He spoke both German and English fluently. After graduating from the seminary in 1882, he was sent to Arkansas where he started six new congregations in four years. As his ministry service took him to Kansas and Indiana, Herzberger was exposed to unique needs in a developing America. Crop failures in the Ozarks led him to petition railroad officials to supply seeds to families so they could grow vegetables that would keep them from starving. His uncle's position as a prison official in Kansas allowed Herzberger to observe the hardships of the imprisoned and those who oversaw prisoners. During his ministry in Indiana, Herzberger encountered the often violent struggles of laborers and labor unions. He also confronted racial marginalization and scolded complacent Lutherans for their hesitance to support the Black Lutheran School in Conover, North Carolina: "Listen! You can have so many houses and properties and farms and businesses and factories—yes, you can acquire the whole world, and yet with all that, you do not yet possess what every [African American] needs above all else. That is the precious blood of Jesus Christ, poured out also for him as well as for you who have been delivered from the anxious worry of sin."<sup>1</sup>

As Herzberger encountered newly developing cultural and societal needs, his commitment to the people for whom Christ died moved him to seize these opportunities for the sake of the Gospel. The church also awakened to this new mission realization. Urbanization was at a high point during the industrialization of America in the late 1800s. The city of St. Louis became a bustling center of production, trade, and transportation. As new residents thronged the city, urban issues began to surface. Local pastors were swamped with busy parish work and had little opportunity to extend their ministries to serve the poor, ill, and disenfranchised. But they knew they needed to reach these precious people with the gifts of God. Professor Martin Sommer of Concordia Seminary commented on a bold response to the growing human blight in urban St. Louis:

As Herzberger encountered newly developing cultural and societal needs, his commitment to the people for whom Christ died moved him to seize these opportunities for the sake of the Gospel.

It was some time before 1899 that a number of pastors of St. Louis, MO at a city conference urged the duty of the church to inaugurate the work of bringing the Word of God to the inmates of our hospitals, prisons, poor houses, and asylums. . . . After a meeting of pastors and laymen had been called, the organization of the St. Louis Mission Society was effected. This society consisted of the representatives of the different congregations in St.

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Louis. In 1899 these combined congregations called the Rev. F. W. Herzberger of Hammond, Indiana, as city missionary of their city.<sup>2</sup>

This action was the first time a pastor in the LCMS was called not by a local congregation, but by a Mission Society—a cluster of congregations deploying a pastor into an area of need for unique outreach. Robin Morgan notes in her brief biography of Herzberger that

The sense of urgency to do such mission work must have been significant among the area leaders since calling a clergyman to minister without a congregation was a big step outside the norm for the Missouri Synod community. All clergy were to be accountable to a congregation and their calls were not valid unless they came from a congregation. Even seminary professors were obliged to have a least a “paper” call to a congregation.<sup>3</sup>

Because the eternal well-being of people was at stake, the LCMS stretched its comfort level and adjusted the process of calling pastors. The result was far-reaching and wholistic ministry.

Professor L. Fuerbringer of Concordia Seminary exhibited delight in the new development. He noted that “an entirely new missionary movement had begun in their midst. The object of this mission-work was . . . to do individual soul-saving work among the hundreds, nay, thousands of poor neglected Lazaruses lying at our very doors in our large cities.”<sup>4</sup>

The scholarly and thoroughly German Lutheran Synod leader Fuerbringer saw and had a heart for the “Lazaruses,” people who might be overlooked and left without the Good News of Jesus.

This mission was messy and risky. Herzberger’s great-granddaughter recounted how he suffered the loss of sight in one eye when, as he was walking with a prisoner to the gallows, a chain broke loose and hit him in the face. But Herzberger was undeterred. Writing in the seventy-fifth anniversary book of the LCMS, Herzberger repeated the confessional refrain that Walther and many others stated boldly:

True Biblical orthodoxy is *always* full of spiritual life, full of missionary zeal, full of unfeigned helpful, compassionate love, for it is the work of God’s Holy Spirit in the hearts of His believing children. By His grace, His divine grace alone, Missouri’s faith is *no dead historical faith*, but *the faith that worketh by love*. Missouri confesses in the words of Luther with the Fourth Article of the *Formula of Concord*, treating of good works: “Faith is a divine work in us, that changes us and regenerates us of God, and puts to death the old Adam, makes us entirely different men at heart, spirit, mind, and all powers, and brings with it the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, powerful thing that we have in faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing.”<sup>5</sup>

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Herzberger went on to describe how a new cultural setting and understanding propelled the church into new pathways of behavior for the sake of God’s precious people:

The older generation of [the Synod’s] members came chiefly from Germany, where the state supported the ministry and also looked after the poor, the sick and needy in its charity institutions. Here in America these thousands of immigrants had first to learn and acquire the grace of giving for the Gospel ministry and all kinds of charities. And they did learn it under Missouri’s faithful preaching of the old, old Gospel-faith that worketh by love. Indeed, we venture to say that no other Protestant Church so stresses, on the one hand, the doctrine of salvation by pure and free grace and, on the other hand, takes such pains officially to inculcate upon its ministers and lay people the principles of true Christian charity, as does Missouri.<sup>6</sup>

Herzberger wisely connected the new mission trajectory of the Synod to its solid theological foundation by citing two of C. F. W. Walther’s seminal works:

Although a pastor has chiefly to care for the spiritual wants of his congregational members, still the care for the bodily welfare, especially for the necessities of life among the poor, the sick, the widows, the orphans, the infirm and needed and aged, also belongs to the sphere of his ministerial duties.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise the congregation shall care for the nourishment, clothing, housing, and all necessary wants of the poor, widows, orphans, aged, invalids, who are unable to support themselves or have no relatives who are in duty bound to do so. . . . Also in calamities caused by fire, famine, dearth, robbery, etc., the congregation is to help sufferers.<sup>8</sup>

Helping “sufferers” superseded systems. The Synod changed the way it called pastors. It sacrificed comfort levels as it came face-to-face with people in a new culture and context. Herzberger even noted how far the Synod had stretched when he referenced the very first patient at the newly formed St. Louis Lutheran Hospital: “It started on its career in two little rooms in the house of Mr. Ed Bertram, and its first patient was **a Mormon invalid.**”<sup>9</sup>

## **Neither Traditions nor Preferences**

Friedrich Pfotenhauer and F. W. Herzberger were born in the same year. Pfotenhauer, however, was very much a German Lutheran pastor. He was born in Hanover, Germany, and immigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen. After attending Concordia College in Fort Wayne and Concordia Seminary in St. Louis—like Herzberger, he was ordained in 1880 and called as a traveling missionary to the new and growing territory of Minnesota, called “the great northwest” at the time.<sup>10</sup>

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For the first seven years of his ministry, Pfothenhauer braved cold temperatures, blizzards, impassable rivers, and thick forests in order to locate German-speaking immigrants who needed the Good News of Jesus. Pfothenhauer understood the mission of God, “who so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son” (Jn 3:16).

Pfothenhauer described his predecessors in mission as “self-sacrificing men, their hearts throbbing with **the love of Christ and his people**.”<sup>11</sup> Pfothenhauer himself was described as “one of the pioneer missionaries of the Great Northwest.”<sup>12</sup> In addition to the elements, Pfothenhauer noted that the greatest threat during his mission experience was from “sectarian revivalists” and other denominational influences.<sup>13</sup>

The Rev. Friedrich Pfothenhauer was thoroughly German and Lutheran. He was a devoted adherent to the truth “that only God’s Word may establish articles of faith, and no one else; and that we are justified before God and are saved apart from the deeds of the Law, alone by faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> But the changing context in the United States would challenge his previous mission focus of reaching German-speaking immigrants.

After serving as the president of the Minnesota District from 1891 until 1908, Pfothenhauer was elected as the first vice-president of the Missouri Synod. Three years later, he was elected to be president, an office he held for the next twenty-four years. Just six years after his election as president of the LCMS, World War I brought shocking turbulence to the globe and to the LCMS that now numbered one million baptized members. Anti-German sentiment gripped the United States. The Missouri Synod was German to the core. Persecution erupted in communities. Legislation was passed to outlaw the teaching of German in schools. Social sentiment was overwhelmingly anti-German and, therefore, anti-German Lutheran.

For years, the debate raged in the Synod about whether or not biblical and confessional theological truth could be adequately expressed in languages other than German. For decades, English-speakers were considered church-outsiders. For its entire history, the Missouri Synod used the heart language of German for massive evangelistic outreach among German-speaking immigrants and a successful unification of people from diverse European regions and traditions who spoke the mother language. But now, the decision between a strong preference or tradition and the ability of the church to reach the people in its context with the Gospel had reached a culmination point. How did the Missouri Synod respond?

The decision between a strong preference or tradition and the ability of the church to reach the people in its context with the Gospel had reached a culmination point.

The Synod gathered in Milwaukee for its triennial convention in 1917. The year also marked the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the Reformation.

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President Friedrich Pfotenhauer noted in his opening address that “both the World War and the Church Jubilee affect us deeply, since we are both citizens of our land and members of the Church.”<sup>15</sup>

Responding as citizens of the United States, the Synod was pressed into the dramatic action of changing its constitution so that the word *German* no longer appeared in the church body’s name. At one time, the “German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States” was an inclusive and invitational name for people flooding the United States—people who spoke German, people who craved the Gospel, people who populated the heart of a growing nation and people who were pioneering new territories in the United States. But now, the word *German* counteracted mission outreach, confused families whose young men were being struck down by German soldiers in Europe, and created fear among people who no longer trusted German people. So the church set aside traditions and preferences—*beloved* traditions and preferences. Perhaps the primary motivations for this dramatic change were the Synod’s desire for self-protection as Germans in the United States and its hope to be validated as a true American church. But President Pfotenhauer, a student of C. F. W. Walther, also embraced the Synod’s resistance to exclusivity—a warning of inward thinking and behavior that C. F. W. Walther sounded loudly and clearly.<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Pfotenhauer was a missionary. His heart “throbbed with the love of Christ and His people.” Traditions and preferences were secondary to a church that was “in full possession of the treasures of the Reformation.”<sup>17</sup>

Pfotenhauer’s opening remarks at the thirtieth convention of the Missouri Synod crystallized the importance of God’s mission to reach all people with the life-giving Word:

Our Synod meets this year under very extraordinary conditions. In the world a terrible war is raging, in which nearly all the nations of the earth are engaged, so that streams of blood are flowing daily, and thousands, yea, millions, of human beings are being cut down by the sword, or by famine and pestilence.

Although we are living in such troublous times, and all happenings are pointing to the end of the world, yet **we Christians may not become slothful or discouraged, but we must lift up our heads and be active.**

Lest we think that it would be useless for us at this convention to plan for the extension of Christ’s kingdom, **the Lord tells us that even during war and rumors of war, during famine and pestilence, the Gospel is to have free course and is to be preached.** “This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for witness to all nations; and then shall the end come.” **The signs of the times should urge us to labor incessantly and with all our powers.**

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And in this work our members may not become lame for fear and expectation of things to come. We are Christians, and we know what is coming: The long-expected Last Day is coming. Our Savior is coming in heavenly glory to make an end of all earthly misery, and to take us into His eternal and blessed kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

1917 brought unrelenting pressure on the Missouri Synod. World War I caused tragic death and destruction. More than 4,000 LCMS young men lost their lives in brutal trench warfare. The Spanish Flu pandemic ended the lives of nearly 675,000 people in the US and caused the Synod to experience a 25-percent increase in funerals. Weddings declined by 30 percent. By 1919 the very first decline statistically in the LCMS was recorded since its beginning in 1847. Immigration laws changed. The birthrate dropped. Economic collapse was on the horizon.<sup>19</sup>

What did the Missouri Synod do? In humility and repentance, with trust in the Lord of the Church and in the living Word of God, it focused on God's mission and adapted. The change, however, did not happen swiftly. In his memoir, *This I Recall*, Rev. Dr. John Behnken, presidential successor to President Friedrich Pfoth, noted that for two decades after the 1917 convention "practically everything in the line of convention transactions was bilingual. There were two opening sermons, one in each language. Resolutions and minutes were read in both languages."<sup>20</sup> Finally, at the 1938 convention, a delegate made a motion to dispense with the president's report in German. Behnken noted, "That ended the use of German as the Synod's 'official' language."<sup>21</sup>

The slow and stubborn surrender of the German language hindered the outreach of the Synod. Behnken noted that many prospective church members did not join Lutheran churches because English was not being used. Others drifted away from the church because they could not understand the language.<sup>22</sup> Behnken shared,

Mr. Henry Dahlen of New Jersey, a man who had given this matter close study, once told me that according to his estimate, if all Lutherans from Germany and the Scandinavian countries and their descendants had remained with their church, Lutherans in North America would number about 25 million instead of the 9 million we have today.<sup>23</sup>

Friedrich Pfoth was, in fact, the last German-born president of the LCMS. Some speculate that the Synod was ready for an American-born leader and, at seventy-six years of age, the older, Germanic Pfoth symbolized past traditions.

But the focus on the Gospel still tugged the Synod forward. It was no social Gospel. It was the consistent action of sharing the Word of Truth. But that Word of Truth shaped the Synod's mission program to reach more and more people in the changing context of the United States. In his report to the Synod, President Pfoth noted that "Home Missions continue to prosper."<sup>24</sup> The convention

mission report described the Synod's "Pilgerhaus" (a "pilgrim home" or hostel) that was housing people from the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, and Africa as they traveled through New York City. A number of these travelers who could not make it to their destinations were provided material help and spiritual blessings. Jobs were found for three thousand travelers.<sup>25</sup> Nine congregations and forty-one preaching stations across the United

That Word of Truth shaped the Synod's mission program to reach more and more people in the changing context of the United States.

States served the deaf community. Fourteen missionaries in the United States worked among other ethno-linguistic groups: "Poles, Esthonians [sic], Finns, Letts, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Persians, and Italians." An Italian Catholic priest who converted to Lutheranism became a missionary in the Synod and was lauded for publishing an Italian translation of Luther's Small Catechism.<sup>26</sup> Missionary work to the Jewish community was proceeding with strength in New York City.<sup>27</sup> New initiatives were developed to reach people in seemingly unreachable places. President Pfothenauer formed an Army and Navy Board to tend to the spiritual welfare of those serving in the military. Unlike other Protestant churches, the Synod was given permission to provide "camp pastors" for local military bases.<sup>28</sup>

The mission of the LCMS, always centered around the Gospel, had become diverse and responsive to changing contextual needs in the United States. People were the priority—reaching people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Just two years after the convention, Rev. John H. C. Fritz, pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in St. Louis, one of the re-framers of the LCMS constitution and the chairman of the Synod's Western District Mission Board, expressed the new direction of the LCMS toward more widespread American outreach:

While for obvious reasons, our Lutheran Church in this country did its work through the medium of a foreign language, it is of late years very rapidly coming to be an English-speaking church. For thirty-five years we have had congregations which used no other language than the language of our country. There is no doubt that the future of our Lutheran Church of this country belongs to the English-speaking Lutheran Church. . . .<sup>29</sup>

A Lutheran missionary who ferrets out only the former Lutherans, or the people of a certain nationality, as those of German extraction, is not doing his mission work in accordance with his Lord's explicit directions. **Christ, who died for all, would have us bring His Gospel of Salvation to all.** The unchurched, that is, such as are not members of a Christian church, are the missionary's mission material. These the missionary will find everywhere.<sup>30</sup>

Hostile social conditions pressed the Synod into sharing the Gospel in new ways. But the Synod's mission focus was never just about being German. People's need for the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ superseded processes, comfort levels, traditions, and preferences. Friedrich Pfotenhauer presided over—and reinforced the mission purpose of—a shift that would set a new course for the Missouri Synod in America.

People's need for the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ superseded processes, comfort levels, traditions, and preferences.

### What about Today?

Two Fredericks whose lives began in 1859, one born in the United States and one born in Germany, helped to propel a wholistic American mission movement in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Herzberger and Pfotenhauer, two seasoned missionaries, advocated for and were pressed into conforming to the mission God was placing before them. Herzberger, the American cultural pioneer, embraced the whole human being with the Gospel. He cared deeply about people and responded with a wholistic pattern of service that set the stage for the Synod's twentieth-century development of a robust human care ministry. Pfotenhauer was used by God to usher in a different type of wholistic ministry—one that literally began to “speak the language” of its context. It was a slow and even unwilling transition, but people needed to hear the Good News of Jesus. The church needed to be concerned about the people in its location. Pfotenhauer triggered the change that was simmering for decades. Dr. A. L. Graebner described this needed change in the Synod's official publication, *Der Lutheraner*, in 1897. He noted that

while the use of German by our church had been a great blessing, especially to the great flood of immigrants, our church must now realize that “the years of the great immigration of Germans are past.” If our church hopes to continue to grow . . . we must think in terms of a type of mission work different from gathering scattered German Lutherans into congregations. . . . [Graebner] trumpeted the urgent need for congregations to introduce English services and to concentrate their efforts on America's vast numbers of unchurched people.<sup>31</sup>

This new direction caused the Synod to enter one of its most fruitful seasons of ministry expansion. A refreshed American evangelistic emphasis in the Synod added one million new members from 1917 to 1954, doubling in size in only half the time. Nearly 40 percent of the new members were adult converts.<sup>32</sup>

The lives of Herzberger and Pfotenhauer reflect their Savior. In Luke 7, Jesus addressed the criticism of church leaders who said, “Look at him! A glutton and a

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drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Lk 7:34) As Jesus ate at Simon the Pharisee’s house, “a woman of the city, who was a sinner” (v. 37) came to anoint Jesus’ feet. Her tears mixed with the aromatic ointment. Simon scorned the woman silently, but Jesus spoke up. He said,

“Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” (Lk 7:44–48)

Moved by God’s grace, the Missouri Synod became a friend of sinners as its context shifted. As ones who gave thanks for being “forgiven much,” the Synod reflected Christ’s love by “loving much.” Missouri brought the Word of God to the least of these even when culture caused discomfort and when processes, comfort levels, traditions, and preferences needed to be sacrificed. The Synod followed the Spirit’s lead to keep putting the Word of God to work, trusting that the Word would not return empty even when encountering new and unfamiliar conditions. Missouri even discovered that, in adverse and humbling circumstances, the Gospel proliferates. The far-reaching mission of God reaches even farther. As a result, many lives were blessed with the gifts of forgiveness and eternal hope.

F. W. Herzberger’s great-granddaughter continues his legacy as she blesses the hurting and forgotten with prayers, visits, stuffed puppies, and prayer shawls.

How are we being called to respond to the risky and messy context facing the church today? How can neither processes nor comfort levels, neither traditions nor preferences hinder the mission entrusted to us?

Will we, like those who came before us, continue to hold firmly to the truth while we also make faithful sacrifices and adaptations for the sake of people who need the Gospel? May the grace of God, His love that fills our hearts, and the pace-setting actions of our predecessors move us to steward a strong and wholistic mission for the people God has placed around us today.

How are we being called to respond to the risky and messy context facing the church today?  
How can neither processes nor comfort levels, neither traditions nor preferences hinder the mission entrusted to us?

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Robin Morgan, *F. W. Herzberger, Part 1*, 2–4, <https://crossings.org/part-one-f-w-herzberger/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Morgan, *Herzberger*, 6.
- <sup>3</sup> Morgan, *Herzberger*, 7–8.
- <sup>4</sup> Morgan, *Herzberger*, 7.
- <sup>5</sup> W. H. T. Dau, ed., *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 446–447.
- <sup>6</sup> Dau, *Ebenezer*, 447–448.
- <sup>7</sup> Walther's *Pastoral Theology*, quoted in Dau, *Ebenezer*, 448.
- <sup>8</sup> Walther's *The True Character of a Local Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, Independent of the State*, quoted in Dau, *Ebenezer*, 448.
- <sup>9</sup> Dau, *Ebenezer*, 452, emphasis added.
- <sup>10</sup> <https://concordiahistoricalinstitute.org/presidents/president-pfotenhauer/>
- <sup>11</sup> Dau, *Ebenezer*, 335, emphasis added.
- <sup>12</sup> Dau, *Ebenezer*, 334.
- <sup>13</sup> Dau, *Ebenezer*, 336.
- <sup>14</sup> “Proceedings of the Thirtieth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States Assembled as the Fifteenth Delegate Synod at Milwaukee, Wisconsin June 20–29, 1917” (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917), 5.
- <sup>15</sup> Proceedings, 3.
- <sup>16</sup> Walther held firmly to an uncompromising focus on pure doctrine, an insistent emphasis on sharing the Gospel with all people, and an ongoing quest to join with others who confessed the truth of the Gospel. He lamented his role in the Martin Stephan debacle of inward thinking and exclusivity. In an 1845 letter to Wilhelm Sihler, a missionary leader in Ohio who became the first president of the Lutheran Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Walther wrote, “We, who in unbelievable blindness formerly permitted ourselves to be led by Stephan, have special reason to seek out those of orthodox faith. . . . God knows that we ourselves under Stephan had nothing else in mind but to prove ourselves completely faithful to the true Lutheran Church. But there was nothing which caused us to fail in this very thing more than our stubborn exclusiveness.” Roy A. Suelflow, trans., ed., *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Selected Letters* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 86.
- <sup>17</sup> Proceedings, 5.
- <sup>18</sup> Proceedings, 3–4, emphasis added.
- <sup>19</sup> Statistics of the Missouri Synod 1847–1937. Compiled for the Saxon Immigration Centennial by Rev. E. Eckhardt, Part IV, note 22.
- <sup>20</sup> John Behnken, *This I Recall: Revised Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964, 2014, Kindle Edition), Chapter 4, Location 744.
- <sup>21</sup> Behnken, *This I Recall: Revised Edition*, Location 751.
- <sup>22</sup> Behnken, *This I Recall: Revised Edition*, Location 773.
- <sup>23</sup> Behnken, *This I Recall: Revised Edition*, Location 773.
- <sup>24</sup> Proceedings, 7.
- <sup>25</sup> Proceedings, 35.
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- <sup>27</sup> Proceedings, 40.
- <sup>28</sup> Behnken, *This I Recall: Revised Edition*, Location 600.

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<sup>29</sup> John H. C. Fritz, *The Practical Missionary: A Handbook of Practical Hints for the Lutheran Home Missionary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), 9.

<sup>30</sup> Fritz, *The Practical Missionary*, 12, emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> Behnken, *This I Recall: Revised Edition*, Location 751–759.

<sup>32</sup> Walter Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847–1947* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 357. Baepler notes that since 1918, 189,945 adults had confessed their new faith at the altars of Missouri Synod churches. The LCMS statistics provided to the author from the Concordia Historical Institute show the Synod reaching 2 million baptized members by the end of 1954. That included a gain of 202,497 adult confirmations from 1947 through 1954, totaling 392,442 new adult confirmands from 1918 to 1954.

# The Wholistic Missionary Works of the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod

**Annissa Lui**

**Abstract:** This article is derived from the author’s Doctor of Ministry study; it represents her sole opinion and does not represent or reference to the opinions of the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service (HKLSS) or the Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod (LC—HKS). This article offers a view of work in Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, including the development of the author’s dissertation exploring the significance of biblical/Christian elements in substance abuse counseling. She had seen some Christian faith-based organizations using Bible-based approaches which helped abusers turn to a new life, a few even becoming pastors. When she became Chief Executive of HKLSS in 2012, she endeavored to put the Christian values as the basic values of the wholistic welfare services. These values guide the agency’s range of services to abusers and to the underprivileged, including the development of a social housing project to provide short-term residence for underprivileged families.

## Introduction

In the year of 1949 when the mainland China government changed the sovereignty overnight, all the foreign missionaries, including the missionaries from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), had to leave immediately for the US. On their way home, they stopped over at Hong Kong where they were saddened by the plight of the refugees of Hong Kong people. Some of them decided to stay behind and helped out with the education, missional, and charity services. This was the beginning of most of the missional work of church-affiliated organizations in Hong Kong. The Lutheran



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Church—Hong Kong Synod (LC—HKS) was later registered as a formal organization, and other subsidiaries, such as schools, and the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service (HKLSS) was formally registered as a charity organization in 1977. In this paper, the writer illustrated the wholistic spiritual foundations of her work as a Chief Executive and how she leads the organization forward to meet the challenges ahead.

In 1979, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) formally granted subvention (subsidy) to some services run by HKLSS. These services include youth centres, elderly centres, rehabilitation centres, school social work services, and community development in rural areas. The HKLSS gradually evolved to its present size with over one thousand staff members working in more than funded forty centres with an annual subvention of about US\$38M. A number of pilot projects that are either funded by other government departments or donations or are self-financed by about US\$10M have been added over the years to serve those in unmet service gaps in the society.

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### **The Need for a Bio-psycho-social-spiritual Model of Services Delivery**

It has to be pointed out the Government subvention outlined sets of funding and service agreements to be fulfilled in disregard to the religious background of the non-government organizations (NGOs). Since the subsidized services emphasized the neutrality and value-free aspect of the helping process, and not all the staff employed are Christians, the HKLSS will provide the standardized services as the other non-faith-based NGOs.

In 2013, the HKLSS rewrote the new Vision Mission Values (VMV) statement to reflect the Christian values embedded in the services. Subsequently, the new VMV is cultivated in our services and staff training.

#### Vision

Promote care and justice as we serve God by sharing His love.

#### Mission

Provide innovative and holistic services.

Advocate a spirit of love to our neighbour and justice.

Build a professional team caring for each other and the community.

### Values

Commitment: We promise to deliver professional and client-centred services.

Compassion: We serve holistic care to people in need.

Community: We respect, accept, and love one another.

## Religion and Social Work

Historically, the concept of social welfare evolved from religious charitable activity. However, early development of the profession avoided integrating religious beliefs and practices, until recent years.<sup>1</sup> M. E. Marty attributes this trend largely to the belief that social work, as a distinct profession, is evidenced particularly by the rational scientific approach of understanding the world.<sup>2</sup> As a result, religion and social work are often deemed incompatible due to the claim that social work is concerned with basic physical and social needs, rather than spiritual. In addition, social workers stress a non-judgmental attitude to encourage clients to reach a place of self-determination—goals which are assumed to be incompatible with value-laden religious enterprises that stress dependence on a Supreme Being or a higher power. Thus, the impact of the religion, either as a protective factor in one’s development, or as a reinforcer in the treatment process is frequently ignored in the social work profession or research.<sup>3</sup>

The social work profession has always emphasized a wholistic view of the person. Thus, L. K. Holleran-Steiker, and S. A. MacMaster suggest that wholistic social work treatment for welfare services must adopt a bio-psycho-social-spiritual model of intervention; that such a view of human behavior helps bring understanding as to how biological, psychological, and socio-environmental factors contribute to a person’s behavior. At present, the element of “spirituality” must be augmented into this model so as to include all aspects of human function.<sup>4</sup> The bio-psycho-social spiritual model is an excellent guide for social work conceptualizations on the etiology of problem behavior or relationships and their resulting treatment.<sup>5</sup>

This paper will solely focus on “Christian spirituality” when considering the spiritual element in the writer’s bio-psycho-social-spiritual (BPSS) model.

Health service providers such as psychologists, counsellors, and therapists trained in the last half of the twentieth century are minimally educated on the positive role of religion or spirituality in clinical practice. M. W. Frame suggests this is due to a number of reasons: (1) psychology and religion have their own paths of development in the past; (2) the assumptions of the scientific world and those of religion are in conflict; (3) religion and spirituality are often unfairly associated with pathology; (4) religion and spirituality are considered to be the work of clergy and other spiritual leaders who are trained in non-scientific manners; (5) there is a lack of training

regarding the ways of integration of religion into clinical practices; and (6) mental health practitioners are suspicious of the effects of religious or spiritual intervention.<sup>6</sup>

The growing interest in incorporating spirituality into the social work treatment process grows out of the development of a greater psychological understanding of human nature. There is a growing trend in helping service-recipients shift from a self-centered view of self-actualization to a concern for a mutually fulfilling manner with others, the non-human world, and ultimate reality.<sup>7</sup> Current social work studies advocate the use of spirituality as legitimate.<sup>8</sup>

For clients, religion is an important element of their larger worldviews and life context.<sup>9</sup> The outcome of one's treatment is closely related to the client's conception of God. A conception of God as loving and forgiving appears to be associated with a lesser risk of substance abuse.<sup>10</sup> Incorporating a client's own spiritual perspectives in cognitive therapy will enhance the outcomes. Miller and Thoresen suggest that "spirituality" is not only a dependent variable but also an independent variable in human health.<sup>11</sup> From their panel studies on spirituality and health, Larson et al. discovered that spiritual and religious involvement was consistently and positively related to health and inversely to disorders.<sup>12</sup> In summary, involving the positive elements of spirituality may enhance hope, forgiveness, restoration of community, and a renewed sense of self-worth.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Spiritual Definition of "Addiction" as a "Relationship"**

This writer will illustrate the use of BPSS in her counselling the substance abusers in one of the services of the HKLSS, and the spiritual foundation of addiction and its implied treatment.

In Hong Kong, the Government encourages the multi-modality approaches in helping the people suffering from substance abuse. At the same time, there is also a long history of using Bible teachings to help the abusers by some Christian faith-based NGOs. In a few exemplified cases, some abusers recovered and later became Christian pastors to help the others, and the positive results are not to be neglected. This writer found that it is a good demonstration that the element of Christian spirituality in the addiction treatment warrants further research and application to other welfare services.

This writer used Auxier's definition of addiction:

An addiction is a bio-psycho-social-spiritual disorder, which can be described as: a **relationship** with a reinforcing substance or behavior marked by continued use despite negative consequences, psychological preoccupation, and failed attempts to stop using.<sup>14</sup>

## Relationship

To begin, a theological understanding of the term “relationship” should be explored. The first relationship in the Bible is between the three persons of the Trinity, as noted in Genesis 1:26, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness,”—a concept later developed into that of the triune God. The second relationship is between God and humanity (Gn 1:26; 2:7); the third relationship is between man and woman (Gn 2:21–25) who form the community in which the humans live, love, work, and play. The fourth relationship is between humanity and the rest of God’s creation. Humans are designated to love the creation, all of which God saw as “good.”

Christian doctrine claims that humans are created in the “image and likeness” of the triune God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit knit together in an eternal relationship. Humans exist as God’s creatures, not autonomously or independently,<sup>15</sup> and experience a semblance of God’s image in relationship to one another. When the relationship with God or to one another is not in harmony, humans may turn to other sources of comfort to form the attachment they are lacking, such as money, food, gambling, or psychotropic drugs. McMinn and Campbell state that “a yearning to connect is knitted into our souls,” and this yearning is rooted in the *imago Dei*.<sup>16</sup>

## *The Imago Dei*

To understand the meaning of *image* and *likeness*, this writer will focus on the exegesis of Genesis 1 where the two terms first appear in the Bible.

In Genesis 1:26, God said, “Let us make humankind (Heb. *Haadam*) in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over . . . the ground.” In verse 26, God created humankind “in our image” and “in our likeness,” and in verse 27, the term “in his own image” and “image of God” are repeated twice. The word *image* is used to denote man’s resemblance to God in a spiritual sense (e.g. self-consciousness, talents, reasoning power, etc.) or the physical quality (e.g., the upright posture) of humankind in distinction to animals.<sup>17</sup> In Genesis 1:26 these two words are employed, implying that the narrator intended to express a difficult idea or wished to avoid the danger of “*selem (image)*” being taken too concretely.<sup>18</sup> In the Old Testament (OT) context, the two words *selem (image)* and *demut (likeness)* do not singly signify either spirituality or corporeality, for a human as a complete and whole being is made in the image of God.<sup>19</sup> In the creation narrative, humankind is accorded a special, delegated status as God’s representatives on earth.<sup>20</sup> The creation of humankind is not incidental, but intended by God to establish a special relationship with God, and to carry out God’s mission.<sup>21</sup> The term “image” expresses the delegated quality, which is not effaced even after the “fall” (cf. Gn 9:6).<sup>22</sup>

In verse 27, God creates both male and female. Verse 28 marks God’s command for humans to fill the earth and subdue it. “Subdue” (Heb. *Kabas*) resembles “have

dominion,” a term frequently used in kingship, which suggests it is a part of the technical language of royal rule.<sup>23</sup> It does not refer to exploitation; rather, it represents taking full responsibility for the well-being of creation (see also Gn 2:15).<sup>24</sup> Humans are called to “rule over,” “work and care for,” and “name” the creatures, while in partnership with God and in His created world and His governance on earth.

As Stanley Grenz concludes, humans created in the image of God are called to have special standing before God, receive and reciprocate His love, and follow His commands out of love. It is in Christ that the divine image is fully revealed. Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:18 reveal God’s ultimate concern to create human beings in order that they may “enjoy community with each other, the created world and with the Creator.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, each individual is created as God’s loving child. In the ensuing chapter of Genesis, the Fall reveals the sinful condition of humankind. Thus, the humans no longer enjoy the loving and caring relationship with God and with creation. In this regard, humans are living as corrupted image bearers. Substance abusers suffer from such fallen conditions. Therefore, most addicts lack self-esteem, but Christian spirituality sees them as fallen but beloved image bearers of God, worth caring about. Unfortunately, human beings are also suffering from the effects of sin, from both their own choices and from impact of the fallen world around them.

## **The Fall of Humans and Sin in the World**

In the midst of the bliss of the garden, the first human couple chose to challenge the divine prohibition to refrain from eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God’s prohibition gives birth to human choice and desire. Erickson infers that these natural desires are, in many cases, necessary for our survival, for obtaining food, and for betterment. Erickson says that God grants humans the desire to enjoy things, to obtain things, and to do things, but these desires must be satisfied under divinely imposed limits. Failure to submit oneself to the God-constituted limit is sin. Thus, “sin is the choice of the person who commits it.”<sup>26</sup> Adam and Eve chose to make destructive choices as a result of either their inner desires (to eat appealing food) or from external inducement (the serpent’s suggestion), and they (and all humans) are ultimately responsible for their actions. But Jesus Christ, however, chose not to follow Satan’s temptations.<sup>27</sup>

The curse from God is recorded in Genesis 3:14–19. The text as an etiological narrative explains the hardships of lives: men and women disobey the commands of God. They both need to bear the responsibility and the consequences of their actions.<sup>28</sup> As a matter of fact, this narrative explains the innate wretchedness in humankind.<sup>29</sup> After Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, their relationship with God is marred. With the spread of sin, humanity is therefore alienated from God’s grace.

As humans are created in the image of God, then, sin is seen as failure to reflect the image of God. Because God is the social Trinity as discussed above, sin is ultimately defined then as the human failure to live in community with God, each other, and with the natural environment.<sup>30</sup> Sin destroys community between God, humanity, the creatures, and the environment.

Erickson concludes that there are two major aspects to the human problem of sin. First, sin is a broken relationship with God. Humans either transgress God's divine limit or fail to do what God intends, and the result is God's punishment. Second, the nature of the person is spoiled, now having a propensity for sin. The community of humans is also affected and ruptured to the point that the whole community inflicts hardships or wrongs upon one another.<sup>31</sup>

However, this narrative also sets the stage for God's grace and judgment in the "salvation history" of humankind.<sup>32</sup> Only God can use His divine way to rectify, restore, or reconcile this dreadful sinful condition. Similarly, the fallen *imago Dei* can only be rectified by God's grace. God's redemptive work comes from His love for humanity. Salvation is completed by Jesus' atoning work, and the sins of human beings are forgiven.

In theological terms, addiction is the result of an individual forming a substance attachment, which will result in a marred relationship with God and with their community. Addictive behaviour not only affects the "addicts," but their loved ones too, as well as the broader community. The helping process of the treatment reveals God's intended love for the sufferers through the hands of loving Christian counsellors or social workers. Thus, in theological terms, treatment is made possible through the love of God, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit. Thus, the Christian social workers, in the midst of helping people, see that God is actively involved in redeeming and in restoring people to a complete relationship with Him. The story of the Fall does not end there; it is followed by God's active redemption work in the history of salvation.

The helping process of the treatment reveals God's intended love for the sufferers through the hands of loving Christian counsellors or social workers.

## **Spiritual Understanding of Addiction and Treatment**

Based on the discussion of the *imago Dei* and sin, this section summarizes the theological understanding of addiction:

First, addictions exist because although human beings are made in God's image, we are fallen. The Fall affected the physical order in Christian worldview, meaning that our bodies sometimes work against our best interests. The Fall helps us understand

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that we are genetically predisposed to addiction, or that there are physical processes which “lock in” craving neurologically, reducing the role of choice in substance misuse.<sup>33</sup>

Second, a preeminent aspect of the *imago Dei* is that people are choice-makers and responsible for their actions. The fallen biological condition affects the ability to make choices. Therefore, our choices often counter what God intends for our lives. Certainly, harming our bodies or stealing to maintain a drug habit are wrong choices.

Third, the Fall has also corrupted society and family life. Hence, individuals may have been subjected through no fault of their own to evil influences (for example, child abuse, poor models of coping) which then made them susceptible to substance abuse or other problem behavior or wretched relationships.<sup>34</sup>

Fourth, the social work intervention, coupled with Christian faith, will ultimately enlarge the recipient’s worldview and life goals, to be applied as positive helping factors to re-instate their own purpose of life with God.

### **Spiritual Understanding of Christian Faith-based Welfare Services**

The above discussion laid down a solid Christian faith-based understanding of the nature of human beings and our understanding of the services delivery. The staff, as change agents of God, will help the service recipients to understand the aetiology of human suffering. The service recipients will be helped to understand that connection with God, the Creator, and the actualization of self-beings.

This writer strives to make the Christian faith enlighten our services which will stand out from the bio-psycho-social approaches adopted by other secular NGOs and will incorporate spiritual understanding grounded firmly upon Christian and Lutheran teachings.

In the coming two years, the HKLSS will be funded to build and operate social housing projects in response to the huge demand for improving the living conditions for the underprivileged families living in very disastrous living conditions in Hong Kong (Due to the high living cost in HK, some families now lived in a less than 10-square meter home, including kitchen and toilet, in the downtown area). It will be a God-given opportunity to serve the needy in a wholistic approach. The HKLSS examined the basic needs of a family with proper minimum space, environment, and healthy public space for children and parents or residents to

This writer strives to make the Christian faith enlighten our services which will stand out from the bio-psycho-social approaches adopted by other secular NGOs and will incorporate spiritual understanding grounded firmly upon Christian and Lutheran teachings.

live and grow up together. Without sufficient space and living in poverty, the children and families do suffer a lot physically and mentally. When the social housing project will be realized, this is like a blessed garden come true. In the first of Psalm, it is written that the blessed people will be able to live under the trees and enjoy the fruits and leaves (Psalm 1:3). This housing project, though it is a large-scale investment from HKLSS, is an opportunity to rethink the basic creation by God and re-build the relationship between the humans and the Creator again.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>8</sup> T. Cascio, "Incorporating Spirituality into Social Work Practice: A Review of What To Do," *Journal of Human Service* 79, no. 5 (1998): 523–32. See also T. Holland, "Values, Faith, and Professional Practice," *Social Thought* 15 (1989): 28–40.
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- <sup>16</sup> M. R. McMinn and C. D. Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 34.
- <sup>17</sup> For a full discussion, see D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53–103.
- <sup>18</sup> N. W. Porteous, “Image of God,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick, 15th ed., Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 682–685. See also J. M. Miller, “In the ‘Image’ and ‘Likeness,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 293–304. Miller suggests that *demut* is a more abstract term and can be used in reference to similarities other than the visual ones, while *selem* is a more specific and concrete term which specifies the divine similarity.
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- <sup>21</sup> C. Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, trans. D. E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 85.
- <sup>22</sup> Gibson, *Genesis*, 85.
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- <sup>24</sup> Westermann, *Genesis*, 11.
- <sup>25</sup> S. J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 230–233.
- <sup>26</sup> M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 616.
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- <sup>29</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 76.
- <sup>30</sup> Grenz, *Theology*, 242–243.
- <sup>31</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 918.
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- <sup>33</sup> J. Auxier, personal communication with this writer, March 2009.
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# St. Paul's Cross-Cultural Mission Strategy and Bunkowske's Cultural Onion Model

**B. Steve Hughey**

**Abstract:** Connecting St. Paul's mission strategy as described in his encounter with the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17 with Dr. Eugene Bunkowske's *Cultural Onion Model*, this article seeks to combine biblical mission principles and anthropological insights about the key questions and appropriate mission activities that can lead to spiritual transformation. Today's missionaries and faithful witnesses must use such principles and insights to discern what matters most to a particular unreached individual or people group. In addition, the paper explores the question of how to build potential bridges to connect a mission agent with a not-yet-reached individual or group at their deepest level so that the Holy Spirit can change their ultimate allegiance to follow Jesus and confess faith in the triune God.

## Introduction

Austin, Texas, the live music capital of the world and a growing technology Mecca, prides itself in being different as demonstrated by the city's motto: "Keep Austin Weird!" South by Southwest (SXSW), a major annual mega-event attracts



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thousands of entrepreneurs, musicians, and artists from all over the world, and the city also regularly hosts one of the world's largest tattoo conventions.

Austin is a young city, and although geographically located in the Bible belt, the city has attracted a growing number of young people who are definitely not looking to the Bible for answers. In fact, a recent Barna Group study showed the city to be among the top 35 post-Christian cities in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

My wife and I moved to Central Texas to be part of ACTS, an LCMS Texas District church-planting network, with the goal of reaching the large unchurched population with the Gospel and planting new churches throughout the metropolitan area. The network now has four churches and continues to look for effective ways to connect this growing community to Jesus and His Church. What mission principles could St. Paul teach us about reaching unique people groups like high-tech Texans, or for that matter, an unreached tribal group in South America?

To answer this question, I decided to look more closely at the story in Acts 17 of how Paul connected with the Athenian philosophers in his day. In addition, I remembered a resource my mission mentor, the late Dr. Eugene Bunkowske, shared with mission students and missionaries that he called the *Cultural Onion Model*. While Bunkowske's model is based on his anthropological studies and missionary background, I believe it also faithfully reflects biblical mission principles and complements St. Paul's missionary strategy. The missionary's outreach goal is to understand a particular culture's worldview and ultimate allegiance, in order to achieve more effective mission results, as we faithfully witness in our unique "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth" mission arenas (Acts 1:8).

The missionary's outreach goal is to understand a particular culture's worldview and ultimate allegiance, in order to achieve more effective mission results.

Examining St. Paul's missionary model, I have identified four principles: **Look, Listen, Leverage, and Link**. My chart on the following pages is an attempt to illustrate the key questions a missionary should ask in any cross-cultural situation, along with the appropriate mission actions to consider when engaging with an unreached people group.

In addition, the chart outlines the passages in Acts 17 that illustrate the key questions and mission action steps followed by St. Paul in Athens. The two columns on the far right of the graphic describe the actions, cultural questions, and onion layers in Bunkowske's model. The chart shows the relationships between the Acts 17 mission strategy and Bunkowske's model and suggests appropriate questions and actions for today's cross-cultural missionaries and faithful Christians who seek to reach their unchurched friends and neighbors.

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## Paul's Cross Cultural Mission Strategy and Bunkowske's Cultural Onion Model

Key Descriptive Words	Key Questions	Key ACTS 17 Passages	Appropriate Mission Actions	Onion Diagram Actions and Questions?	Onion Diagram Layers:
LOOK	What is the environment of the target audience? What do we need to look for?	“For as I walked around and looked carefully...” (Acts 17:23)	Prayer walking & Spiritual Mapping	Looking at the objects, artifacts, and behaviors of a particular culture in order to get some clues about what is important to them.	Artifacts Behaviors OUTERMOST LAYER
LISTEN	What matters most to the target audience? What is their key value?	“All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.” (Acts 17:21)	Asking the right questions and actively listening in order to understand at a deeper level. (Ethnographic Research)	What feelings do we observe as people in a particular culture relate to one another? What is important to the culture? What is true and false?	Feelings Values Beliefs MIDDLE LAYER
LEVERAGE	What can we do and say to get the attention of the target group and make a positive connection?	“Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious...” (Acts 17:22)	Identifying connections between where a target audience is and where God wants them to be.	What is the basic mental perspective of the target individual or group?  What is their Foundational Center?	World View Ultimate Allegiance INNERMOST LAYER

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Chart continued

Key Descriptive Words	Key Questions	Key ACTS 17 Passages	Appropriate Mission Actions	Onion Diagram Actions and Questions?	Onion Diagram Layers:
LINK	What is the ultimate goal and final result of looking, listening, and leveraging?	“God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” (Acts 17:27)	Building a bridge to connect lost and hurting people to the God who made, redeemed, and is ready to guide them into a deep relationship with Him.	How do we relate to a specific cultural/ people group or individual in order to connect with them at their deepest level and so that the Holy Spirit can change their ultimate allegiance to the Triune God?	As an individual and/or a people group embrace Jesus as their Savior and Lord, it affects and changes the other layers in their lives and they themselves become disciple-makers.

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**1. LOOK: What is the environment of the target audience? What do we need to LOOK for as we carry out God’s mission mandate?**

Paul’s “looking” in his dealings with the Athenians is evident in the phrase “For as I walked along and looked carefully...” (Acts 17:23). This phrase indicates that he was closely observing and actively seeking God’s guidance in order to take the right steps to effectively share the Good News of Jesus with that unique Greek subculture. Paul saw the numerous altars and temples the Athenians had dedicated to different gods. From this observation, Paul concluded that the Athenians were spending a lot of money and time on their religious life!

The *Cultural Onion Model* identifies artifacts and behaviors on the outside skin of the onion. As Bunkowske states, “The outer layers of the cultural onion, artifacts and behaviors, are immediately apparent and accessible.”<sup>2</sup> This is what we can easily see without cutting into the onion. But while it is only the beginning point in our attempt to understand a culture, it can reveal a great deal if we will look carefully!

In the Bunkowske model, the altars and temples on Mars Hill in Athens are the outer skin of the cultural onion. By carefully peeling away that outer layer, St. Paul

sought to ultimately identify the Athenians' beliefs, values, and worldview around which they ordered their understanding and relationship to the world.

As we seek to apply Paul's missionary approach and Bunkowske's model today, we must like St. Paul look at a target audience with God's eyes and discernment in order to understand not-yet-reached people at a deeper level and consider effective ways to connect with them. This critical missionary task requires observational skills much like those of a good detective.

One of the most appropriate tools for helping any missionary "see" with God's eyes is *prayer walking*. While widely practiced during the past twenty-five years by missionaries, the process is biblically based. For example, we see in Numbers 13:18–20, Moses' instructions to the twelve spies, a strategy to help assess the people they would encounter in battle in order to help him prepare for the battle to come. As twenty-first century missionaries prepare to enter a new unreached people group, prayer walking is one way to prepare for the "spiritual battle" they can expect as they interact with and seek to reach people of another culture with the Gospel.

We must like St. Paul look at a target audience with God's eyes and discernment in order to understand not-yet-reached people at a deeper level and consider effective ways to connect with them.

Prayer walking focuses on "looking" with prayer and helps the missionary to "see" with God's eyes. This activity responds to what one sees while walking through a neighborhood or community. For example, suppose several missionaries are prayer walking and come to a small public school. They might pray as follows: "Dear God, as we are passing this school, we see and hear children playing games in the playground. We hear teachers instructing other students, and while we don't fully understand what they are saying, we pray, Lord, that these teachers might be motivated to see each child as a unique individual made in Your image. Help the students to discover their gifts and be motivated to develop them. Help these young people to be inquisitive and to ask penetrating questions. And then, help our group to find some effective ways to come alongside of the teachers and students to help this school be a more effective instrument of your Grace. In Jesus name. Amen."

Such a prayer can help the missionary visualize and look for what God is already doing in a community or among a specific people group. And, such prayer helps a missionary to consider unanswered questions and to seek God's direction in order to formulate a mission strategy.

Another activity, *spiritual mapping*, is closely related to and often accompanies prayer walking, but ideally goes to a deeper level as it seeks to penetrate below the

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outer layer of the cultural onion. What is spiritual mapping exactly? In his insightful article, Tai M. Yip describes *spiritual mapping* this way: “By definition, proper spiritual mapping looks at the world with spiritual eyes to see spiritual realities.”<sup>3</sup>

Author F. Douglas Pennoyer, in his book, *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, adds to Yip’s definition: “Since spiritual mapping is concerned about social groups rather than individuals, the strongholds we want to study are not individual strongholds. While individuals can be under the captivity of demonic strongholds, how can we describe the demonic captivity of a society?”<sup>4</sup>

Pennoyer answers this question by explaining that

there are four levels of collective captivity: distraction, deception, dependency, and domination. Demons work on distracting people through the details of life and their desire for power and prestige. At the next level, demons work on deceiving people into accepting false beliefs. As deception advances, people become dependent on the false beliefs to cope with life. The highest form of dependence is domination when the false beliefs control people’s lives and they become demonized.<sup>5</sup>

By means of spiritual mapping, we seek to see things as they truly are and not simply as they appear to be, or as we wish them to be. And, we can begin to see at what level of collective captivity a particular people group might be operating. Following the thought of 2 Corinthians 4:3–4, we ask: How has the god of this age blindfolded the minds of the target audience so that they cannot see the Light of the Gospel? And, if spiritual strongmen must be bound in order to bring about the deliverance of their captives (Mt 12:24–30), how exactly are they to be identified and resisted?

While I directed the Central American Lutheran Mission Society (CALMS), we always began our work in economically challenged villages with prayer walking and by combining ethnographic research with spiritual mapping. We tried to answer research questions like: Which churches are active in this community, and who are their leaders? But we also tried to go beyond the answers to these more basic questions to see below the surface.

The process of spiritual mapping might be compared to a doctor examining a patient with and without equipment to determine if they have pneumonia. “Without an X-ray, the doctor can’t be 100% sure about a certain diagnosis for pneumonia. But with an X-ray, he can ‘see’ evidence of pneumonia in the lungs of his patient and then begin a proper treatment.”<sup>6</sup>

Invariably, going beneath the surface of a particular culture compares to going below the first layer of the cultural onion described in Dr. Bunkowske’s model. It is therefore not enough to describe the church buildings and to list the church leaders of a particular community. We will need to go to deeper levels of the culture if we are to

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fully understand what spiritual issues might lie beneath the surface and might affect the way people interact with one another and respond to conflicts and challenges that come their way.

Spiritual mapping seeks answers to deeper questions like: What historical and cultural realities might be influencing the way this group of people understands God and how to connect with Him? Is there evidence of this particular culture or community group combining the Christian faith with some other belief system as is often the case in Central America where indigenous people might overlay the Christian faith with traditional rituals?

For example, on numerous occasions, I witnessed indigenous people performing a traditional ritual in front of a church, and then upon completion of the ritual, going into the church to hear God's Word and even receiving the Lord's Supper. What do such rituals and the syncretism observed in such instances reveal about the religious beliefs of a certain group of people?

These are the kinds of questions St. Paul tried to answer as he related to people on his missionary journeys. In effect, I believe St. Paul was peeling away the layers of the cultural onion in order to understand what mattered to a potential target audience and in order to consider an appropriate response.

## **2. LISTEN: What matters most to the target audience? What are their key values? What are their resources and challenges? How can we ask the right questions and listen actively and intentionally in order to better understand what is important to people of a particular cultural group?**

A key value of the Athenians was seeking knowledge and new ideas. "They spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas" (Acts 17:21). Thus, they were open to hearing from Paul something new that they had not heard before. They said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" (Acts 17:19).

From the text, it is obvious that Paul didn't just look at the outer layers of the Athenians' culture. Rather he connected the dots between what he saw and the values of the target audience. That led him to realize that the Athenians were "very religious" (Acts 17:22).

In describing his model, Bunkowske says, "The outer layers of the cultural onion, artifacts and behaviors, are immediately apparent and accessible." He goes on to say, "In-depth linkages are only available as credible connections are made with the core layers of worldview and ultimate allegiance in a person's culture." He then adds this important fact, "Developing these kinds of in-depth relationships normally takes a good deal of time and effort."<sup>7</sup>

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In most cross-cultural mission situations, this search to understand a culture's values implies spending time with individuals, developing relationships, and ultimately gaining their trust.

I saw the importance of this principle of active listening in my ministry in the remote La Union area of western Guatemala where CALMS worked for many years with economically challenged villages. After several years of pursuing wholistic ministry focusing on infrastructure, educational projects, spiritual life, and health-related issues, we noticed that a growing number of families in the villages were made up of three and even four generations. So we began to consider the possibility of helping young married couples who were living in very crowded conditions with their children, parents, siblings, and grandparents under one roof to acquire a home of their own.

In most cross-cultural mission situations, this search to understand a culture's values implies spending time with individuals, developing relationships, and ultimately gaining their trust.

Instead of peeling away the layers of the cultural onion as Dr. Bunkowske might have done, we jumped to the conclusion that we could build a whole new village for young families from the area villages. We even came up with the creative idea of developing a new village from the ground up that could become a model Christian community. We also hoped that we could include a strong discipleship component that we could then use to help demonstrate what we wanted to see in all the area's villages.

However, at this point in our ministry, we had not yet "peeled away enough layers of the cultural onion" to fully understand what was really important to these couples and their extended families. Instead of seeking to understand their true values as related to their families, we eventually discovered that we had projected our own North American attitudes and values. This caused us to conclude that living so close together would not give young couples the privacy they wanted and needed.

Thankfully, as we began to actively listen to more and more of the young couples and their extended families, we discovered that almost without exception they wanted to stay living in their multigenerational families. Even though we were proposing to build a new village within a short distance of their home villages, they could not conceive of moving to a different community or living so far from their parents and grandparents. By listening to what were most important to young couples, our mission team came to see that young couples invariably valued being physically close to their extended families. By listening at a deeper level, we eventually came to understand that this value was deeply rooted in their tribal heritage.

This episode in our mission experience taught us to avoid jumping to conclusions without first peeling away more of the cultural layers. This approach of looking

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beneath the cultural layers to understand values, beliefs, and worldviews, invariably led to better decision-making as we worked with our cross-cultural partners. In the end, we responded more appropriately to the housing issue in these villages by helping families improve and expand their existing homes. This approach allowed multigenerational families to continue to live together, but with some additional space and improved hygiene.

As we engage with a new culture, we missionaries should seek to combine ethnographic research with biblical methods and principles as demonstrated by Paul at Athens. We should also seek to understand how a specific culture is organized and to understand what is truly important to that people group. In other words, as effective missionaries we will want to look beyond the artifacts and outward behaviors so easily observable, to see what is really motivating that behavior and what is really important to the people.

Bunkowske's *Cultural Onion Model* describes the middle layer as focusing on beliefs, values, and feelings. He calls this layer the evaluating level since it "provides a system for evaluating and drawing conclusions about the experiences of life in terms of true and false, good and bad, and a calibrated scale of emotions."<sup>8</sup>

As our experience with the villagers in Guatemala showed, they evaluated the suggestion to move to a new community against the backdrop of their values and beliefs. Their reaction to the suggestion of moving was strongly affected by their evaluation system of what for them was true and false—good and bad.

In the end, as a missionary develops an effective missionary strategy he or she will invariably want to ask: What is most important for this culture? In the previous mission example, we saw how important the extended family is to the culture of indigenous Guatemalans. This issue really mattered to the Guatemalan villagers, and it was essential to understand their values in order to effectively serve and minister with them.

As effective missionaries we will want to look beyond the artifacts and outward behaviors so easily observable, to see what is really motivating that behavior and what is really important to the people.

**3. LEVERAGE: What can we do to get the attention of the target audience and make the greatest positive impact? How can we create a bridge between ourselves as Christ-followers and a specific group of people or an individual we are seeking to reach with the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection and His claim on their allegiance?**

These are the questions missionaries need to ask once they have the answers to the question of a culture's ultimate allegiance.

As noted earlier, Paul correctly observed that the Athenians were highly religious. This understanding created a connection for him and his message. As he looked deeper, he saw that there was one altar to "an unknown God" (Acts 17:23). Then Paul offered to tell the Athenians about this "unknown god" they had already been worshipping. St. Paul saw the bridge he needed to cross, and he was able to cross over that bridge to share his message with an audience that was predisposed to hearing what he had to say.

Returning to Bunkowske's *Cultural Onion Model*, we note that St. Paul observed the Athenians' behavior and noted that they were worshipping many gods including an "unknown god" (Acts 17:23). Paul also observed the Athenians' feelings and beliefs. Their discussions and constant philosophical conversations revealed that they were constantly evaluating and seeking to understand and make sense of their life experiences (Acts 17:21).

How can we hope to get a positive response from a not-yet-reached individual or a specific cultural group in our missionary efforts today—whether it is an urban church-planting effort in Austin, Texas, or a Christian mass media project aimed at an indigenous population in South America? What can we do and say to get their attention? And, how can we make a positive connection that might lead to a positive response to the Gospel? These are the kinds of questions we need to ask ourselves as we seek to *leverage* where a target group is when we first encounter them and where we believe God ultimately wants them to be?

As St. Paul's example with the Athenian philosophers shows, we can be most successful in communicating the Gospel by demonstrating respect for another culture, by being sensitive to their feelings and to what is important to them, by seeking to understand their values and beliefs, and by being highly relational in our interactions.

Being culturally sensitive in our missionary practice today includes accepting that before we have ever shown up in a new mission setting, God has already been at work. We see this principle at work in St. Paul's encounter with the Athenians. God had already shown up before Paul arrived on the scene. This was demonstrated in their recognition of the reality of an "unknown god."

If we understand and accept the reality of God's presence in a community or culture, it is more likely that we will humbly look for evidence of how God has already

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been at work. And once we have recognized that before we arrived, our missionary God was already present in a particular culture, we can then build upon the foundation of His work and expect to see greater fruit. This is a critical *leveraging* principle that can help open doors for Gospel proclamation and discipleship.

I saw this principle at work often in our mission work in Central America as we began to work in villages where only indigenous leaders had ministered prior to our arrival.

Depending on the village, there were almost always spiritual leaders representing a Roman Catholic church, an Evangelical church, and a Pentecostal church. And quite often there was some tension between these various churches and their leaders. Being aware of this reality, we were committed not to add additional division in our dealings with the community. Rather we observed how these spiritual leaders interacted with one another and with the community and sought to understand their values and beliefs.

We also sought to develop a relationship with these spiritual leaders and to equip them to become more effective leaders and Christ-followers. Over time, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we regularly saw these spiritual leaders become co-workers who trusted us and one another more and worked together more effectively to help their community become a spiritually healthier village.

We knew that these spiritual leaders would remain after we eventually left their village, so our strategy involved helping them to look to God’s Word to guide their decisions and actions. We believed that with greater unity, renewed commitment to God’s Word, and dedication to His mission, they could continue building up and extending the Body of Christ long after we had completed our work and left the community.

Invariably, however, we learned over time that no amount of equipping by our mission teams could produce spiritual transformation that could significantly transform whole communities unless a majority of the people abandoned old allegiances and adopted a new “ultimate allegiance” to Jesus as Lord. As Bunkowske’s *Cultural Onion Model* description states, “Ultimate allegiance serves as the spiritual and mental dynamic for a culture’s worldview that in turn serves as the ‘internal gyro’—the managing center for everything that person thinks, is and does.”<sup>99</sup>

In keeping with the importance of helping people proclaim a new allegiance and be guided by the Holy Spirit as their managing center, in our Central American ministry we sought to equip spiritual leaders whose thoughts and actions were controlled by Jesus, “the internal gyro” of their lives.

If we understand and accept the reality of God’s presence in a community or culture, it is more likely that we will humbly look for evidence of how God has already been at work.

Helping individuals and people groups reorient their inmost cultural layers rather than focusing merely on more external issues like their artifacts and outward behaviors can lead to significant transformation in the lives of individuals and communities. Having a biblically based “managing center” in turn can lead to other changes in all the other layers of their lives—impacting their values, beliefs, worldview, and even their behaviors. Believing this principle to be true and seeking to fulfill Christ’s own command to make disciples of all people (Mt 28:18–20), God’s faithful witnesses and missionaries will seek to identify connections between where a group of people is and where God wants them to be. This leveraging process invariably involves helping others put Jesus at the center of their lives.

**4. LINK: What is the ultimate goal and final result of *looking* at a culture with God’s eyes, *listening* to discern their values, and *leveraging* our relationship to understand a not-yet-reached culture’s ultimate allegiance?**

The fourth “L” word that helps round out St. Paul’s Athenian missionary strategy is *link*. The goal is to successfully engage with a different culture in a way that leads to a change not just in behavior, but a change that goes to their cultural core—the deepest part of the cultural onion. For an individual or group to be willing to change their ultimate allegiance requires a link to an ultimate truth that they come to recognize is stronger and more significant than the one they must give up.

For an individual or group to be willing to change their ultimate allegiance requires a link to an ultimate truth that they come to recognize is stronger and more significant than the one they must give up.

Mission history, especially in Latin America where I worked for many years, is replete with examples of indigenous people groups accepting some parts of the Christian faith while hanging on to aspects of their native belief systems. Especially in times of trial such as sickness or loss of a loved one, people with strong ties to their original culture will often abandon their Christian practices and revert to non-Christian rituals as they look for answers. Such syncretistic arrangements lead to a hybrid religion that is unfaithful to both belief systems. Most concerning, such arrangements do not ultimately lead to lifestyle choices and changes that reflect the values of the Christian faith.

As we learned in our Central American mission work, it was important to help people living in economically “at-risk” communities to improve their agriculture, health care, education, and community infrastructure. But in the end, if we only focused on these things and failed to link the people to Jesus as their ultimate allegiance, they would still be spiritually poor.

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To measure whether a real link with Jesus, their Ultimate Allegiance, had really occurred, we learned to observe the leaders' behavior and how they interacted with others.

When a link with the triune God took place, we regularly saw commitments at the deepest level of the cultural onion affecting their behavior. And we observed believers acting as change agents who served as instruments of the Holy Spirit to help others embrace a new ultimate allegiance. Such commitment leading to personal involvement in God's mission is the best way to measure whether an individual has been transformed, or a cultural group has really changed its allegiance.

Frank, an unchurched 20-year-old from a small village in Guatemala, demonstrates how a person who is being transformed and grounded in a new reality through the power of the Gospel can himself become a change agent. Frank began to read the Bible our ministry team gave him. Within months he became an active participant in a new discipleship group in his community. As he grew in faith, Frank took on more leadership responsibility, eventually leading Bible study for younger youth and children. He had been living with the mother of his two small children and as a result of his growth in Christian maturity, Frank made the decision to marry his partner in a Christian ceremony. Today, he is a committed husband, father, and Christian leader in his community. Like all Christians, Frank is still a work in progress with some struggles and challenges. Yet, because his ultimate allegiance is focused on Jesus, he is now a useful servant and ambassador of Jesus in his community.

Indeed, a true Christian conversion invariably leads to changes in all aspects of a person's life. As Christian missionaries have regularly observed, a true conversion to Christ inherently produces countercultural challenges and even some new conflicts as individuals re-think their responses to decisions and human relationships. When an individual or a cultural group embrace a new ultimate allegiance to Christ, we can expect to see new behaviors, new values and beliefs—and even a new worldview. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

## **Conclusion**

As St. Paul's strategy and Bunkowske's model demonstrate, Paul ultimately wanted and needed to understand the Athenians' worldview in order to gain an audience and to share his important message of God's plan of salvation. Paul knew that the Athenians, like all cultural groups, had a unique perspective to help them organize their mental map and to help them understand what is real and to choose the god to whom they owed their allegiance. Their daily philosophical debates demonstrated that they were in effect mapping and seeking to develop meta-narratives and perspectives to better order their daily lives and society.

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In the end, our ultimate goal as Christian missionaries is to understand an individual's or a cultural group's deepest layer—their ultimate allegiance—and then link them to Christ and His mission as active participants in His mission. When we have helped this happen, we can claim to have understood and faithfully followed St. Paul's Athenian mission model and to have gotten to the core layer of the *Cultural Onion Model*.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The Barna Group, *The Most Post-Christian Cities in America: 2017*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/post-christian-cities-america-2017/>.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Bunkowske, *The Cultural Onion*, from Graduate Course in Biblical Missiology at Concordia Theological Seminary (2002), 1.

<sup>3</sup> T. M. Yip, "Spiritual Mapping: Another Approach" *Missio Nexus* (April 1995), <https://missioneus.org/spiritual-mapping-another-approach/>.

<sup>4</sup> F. Douglas Pennoyer, "In dark dungeons of collective captivity," in *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, eds. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990): 266–268.

<sup>5</sup> Pennoyer, *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 268.

<sup>6</sup> Gary Deveau and Eileen Koff, "Spiritual Mapping: Seeing Our World as God Sees It." *Transformations—Ourselves and Our Communities* (Middle Island, NY: Isaiah 54 Ministries, 2001), <http://www.isaiah54.org/Spiritual Mapping.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Bunkowske, *The Cultural Onion*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Bunkowske, *The Cultural Onion*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Bunkowske, *The Cultural Onion*, 2.

# The Ideal Model for Majority World Seminaries— Ft. Wayne 1846 or Ft. Wayne 2021?

John P. Juedes

**Abstract:** As the church grows in the Majority World (Third World),<sup>1</sup> seminaries are formed to train more pastors. What is the ideal model for these seminaries—Ft. Wayne 1846 or Ft. Wayne 2021? While the doctrine of Ft. Wayne in 1846 and 2021 is very similar, they differ considerably in the requirements for ordination, language, minimum education requirements, costs, and church culture. The 1846 seminary offered training which was tuned to the minority German culture in which the pastors served, while the 2021 seminary is tuned to the global English culture in which most of its graduates serve. Majority World seminaries today favor one model or the other, which significantly affects recruitment, development, ministry, and number of pastors.

## Ft. Wayne 1846 vs. Ft. Wayne 2021

When the Ft. Wayne seminary was established in 1846, it was not really an American seminary, but a German seminary which taught first-generation immigrants to pastor immigrant congregations. Theological training was in a dialect of Low German. Professors imported German textbooks, liturgy, hymnody, an authoritarian mode of pastoring, and a hierarchical, diocesan church government.

Most immigrants were not wealthy, so costs were kept very low. Professors were often experienced pastors rather than academics with graduate degrees. The “practical seminary” provided essential instruction for pastoral ministry, not including “academic” training which the St. Louis seminary insisted was needed (although St. Louis was also Germanic). Pastors, who did not receive academic degrees, could be trained and ordained in shorter periods of time, which reduced costs. Experience



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continued their development, and they were good pastors.

Ft. Wayne (for a long time in Springfield) produced pastors to serve the minority German culture and made little or no attempt to train pastors in and for the English culture. It took a century for the seminary to transition to English from German. Franz Pieper's classic theology text, *Christliche Dogmatik*, was published in 1924 and reprinted for use at the seminary in 1938.<sup>2</sup> It was not translated into English until 1950. Some classes were conducted in German as late as 1950.<sup>3</sup> A full century after it was established, the seminary made the case that a program with reduced admission standards and lower academic demands was needed.<sup>4</sup> Ft. Wayne (Springfield) long continued "practical" training, and pastors could be ordained with only an undergraduate bachelor's degree as late as 1972. For 126 years, there were two tracks to full-fledged ordination: one was more academic, and the other more practical with a lesser (or no) academic degree.

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Ft. Wayne eventually "upgraded" from a seminary designed to serve relatively poor, minority-language, ethnic people to a wealthy, majority-language, global culture, academically sophisticated, graduate-level academic institution. This suited most American Lutheran churches, which underwent the same cultural change. But the change produced obstacles for potential pastors who never went to college, or have learning disabilities, or have children to support, or who are immigrants.

From the American perspective, Ft. Wayne 1846 used a minority language, cross-cultural techniques, and ethnic culture to form pastors who could serve a minority people group. It was a German island in an American sea. If today's Ft. Wayne seminary was teleported into 1846 Indiana, the potential pastors could not qualify to enroll, could not afford it, and so could not be ordained.

## Which Model Should the Majority World Use?

Majority World churches make choices regarding language, requirements for ordination, minimum levels of pastoral education, types of training, cost, and culture. Some implement the 1846 model, offering training more closely tuned to the minority cultures the pastors serve. Others favor the 2021 model, with training like that in global seminaries, even though it is culturally distant from their congregations. The North American church affects Majority World choices for better or worse—both directly, in what we advocate, praise, teach, and finance; and indirectly, by example. Here are some factors to consider in fine-tuning the type of training a Majority World seminary should offer.

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## What Language?

The 1846 model uses minority languages which may have relatively few speakers, while the 2021 model uses global trade languages such as English. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

A global language, which may be a national language, provides a common language at a school which may include speakers of several minority languages. However, students vary in how fluent they are in a trade language, which may be their third or fourth language.

While more textbooks are available in global languages, they are influenced by wealthy, secular cultures which are removed in some ways from minority cultures. As a result, many do not reflect indigenous thinking or address topics important to minority peoples. For example, Western texts reflect their scientific and secular cultures. As a result, few texts address demonic oppression (possession) as a real, contemporary concern, or address animistic beliefs and practices (which they misinterpret as superstition). Most homiletics texts promote a sophisticated, literate style of preaching which may not engage minority people groups, which are commonly oral rather than literary cultures.<sup>5</sup>

When theological colleges require students to have advanced trade language comprehension, they indirectly exclude men who may be called by God as pastors but lack that ability. Learning Bible content and doctrine in global languages requires pastors to “translate” their learning into minority languages, which may result in some weak outcomes.

Some Majority World church leaders may promote trade languages because they think the socioeconomic development of their homeland depends on this. Does a global seminary experience prompt pastors to become agents of cultural and social (not just religious) change, and weaken their ability to serve their people as they are?

## What Education?

The 1846 model is low cost, while the 2021 model requires much higher costs. How much education is “enough”? This question has plenty of room for debate, and no definite answer. The practical 1846 model takes a more bare-bones approach, and gets more trained church workers into the field, more quickly. The 2021 model always favors *more training*: certificate, then BDiv, then MDiv, and certainly a STM and ThD would make “better” pastors. Both models agree that pastors learn more by experience than by academics. Is more education always better?

Who is the best teacher? Is an experienced pastor with above-average teaching ability “good enough”? Do advanced degrees make a professor more competent? An emphasis on degrees favors importing Western faculty who have more academic experience, more training in the global world, foreign traditions, less pastoral

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experience, and less cross-cultural experience. Their students often aspire to be like them, creating cultural distance between newly minted pastors and their people. Some Majority World pastors become professors after taking advanced degrees from global seminaries (after receiving pastoral training in their home countries), where they absorb global thinking, practices, and culture. Does this create distance between them and the minority people groups in their homelands?

Many church leaders push not just for more education, but for accredited degrees. This necessitates academic programs which are approved by secular governments and global seminaries. These add requirements and programs to the seminaries, thereby increasing costs and dependence on global partners. A feedback loop may develop. Global seminaries influence and fund Majority World seminary programs, which become more global in culture. Seminaries become Western islands in an African (or Asian or South American) sea.

While it is fashionable to criticize this relationship as “neocolonial,” this loaded term can be misleading. Most people understand “colonialism” as being imposed by global powers in order to control and drain the Majority World of resources. While this is partly true, many Majority World church leaders actively desire and solicit funds, institutional development, cultural change and accolades from global partners. Modern “neocolonialism” is often a symbiotic partnership.<sup>6</sup>

Many Majority World church leaders actively desire and solicit funds, institutional development, cultural change and accolades from global partners. Modern “neocolonialism” is often a symbiotic partnership.

## **What Cost?**

When more education is required for ordination, costs rise accordingly, reducing the number of those who enroll and become ordained. Potential pastors must finish high school, which often requires fees. They must be away from their farms or occupations for years, which makes them unable to provide a living for their families. Residential facilities necessitate travel costs, and higher education fees, for longer periods of time. Professors with graduate degrees may desire a higher standard of living. Academic requirements demand more equipment, such as computers, office machines, and library services. All these compel higher tuition fees.

When I preached at a service in Kenya, I watched people place offerings in the plate at the front of the church. The smallest unit of paper money was a 100-shilling note, worth about \$1.25 USD. None of the 200-some people placed any paper money in the plate. They were not stingy, but were subsistence farmers, in an area in which

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everyone grew the same two or three crops. As a result, they had very little cash, and raised money for church buildings by donating rice or chickens. It was no surprise that many seminary students were not able to pay their tuition. When the American churches fund scholarships, they increase dependency in Majority World churches. Foreign funding plagues other aspects of church life also.

Articles about seminary graduations often report small numbers of graduates. This suggests that 2021 model seminaries are not able to maintain, much less increase, the number of pastors. It may be helpful for institutions to evaluate this by tracking the numbers over ten to twenty years.<sup>7</sup> Higher seminary tuition is an obstacle to potential pastors who do not have the money to attend and cannot provide a living for their families during years of residential academics. Seminaries have little grasp of who *would have* attended if there had been fewer obstacles in terms of qualifications, costs, and time.

### **The Overlooked Majority of Unordained Shepherds**

When we hear of a dramatic shortage of pastors in the Majority World, we imagine huge numbers of churches without anyone to preach and provide pastoral care. Actually, most of the congregations are served by unordained shepherds who are called evangelists, lay preachers, or a similar title. We know little about them because we do not associate the term “evangelist” with pastoral work, and websites seldom feature them. Also, visitors to the Majority World seldom see and are unable to talk to them directly because of the language barrier.

“Evangelists,” not “pastors,” are the majority of the pastors in many countries. These statistics are representative: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK): 520 congregations, 121 pastors, and 200 evangelists. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea: 2,000 congregations, 800 pastors, and 2,000 evangelists. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sudan: 79 congregations, 26 pastors, and 80 evangelists. See note for more examples.<sup>8</sup> Evangelists are similar to licensed deacons who pastor congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS).

Church bodies rely on these unordained shepherds to preach, lead worship, and shepherd the churches every day, but in effect exclude them from ordination. In many countries, only graduates of residential seminaries may be ordained, and only they are allowed to consecrate the Lord’s Supper and baptize. Trade language fluency,

Church bodies rely on these unordained shepherds to preach, lead worship, and shepherd the churches every day, but in effect exclude them from ordination.

residential requirements, and fees, in effect, block many evangelists and laypeople from attending seminaries, and becoming ordained pastors.

As a result, congregations who are served by evangelists often go without the Lord's Supper for many months or years. For example, a church in Kenya which was served by evangelists went without communion for five years.<sup>9</sup> It is ironic that many theologians who advocate the Lord's Supper at every service also support 2021 model restrictions, which indirectly prohibit the majority of congregations from celebrating the Sacrament frequently. There may be tension between the evangelist and congregation on one hand, and the mostly absent, multi-parish pastor of record, on the other, because the evangelist shepherds the people daily, while the pastor of record is an infrequent visitor.

Training for evangelists may be available. But church bodies often emphasize and fund seminary training at the expense of evangelist training, and do not offer training which is an alternate path to ordination.

When extended residential seminary training in a global language is required, the result is that men who God calls as pastors are not allowed to be ordained, and their congregations are not allowed to have frequent communion. When churches declare an alarming shortage of pastors, it may be due to denominational restrictions that reduce the number who qualify for seminary training, rather than to a shortage of willing servants.

An alternative is to provide evangelists with training which leads to ordination and removes hindrances. This may entail the following: (1) training in minority languages (including recorded oral material), (2) little residential requirement, (3) dispersed training places rather than a central location, (4) low fees, (5) little time away from their occupations and families, and (6) resources from the global church invested here as much as in residential seminaries.

When extended residential seminary training in a global language is required, the result is that men who God calls as pastors are not allowed to be ordained, and their congregations are not allowed to have frequent communion.

## **What Church Culture?**

The 1846 model trained pastors using the church culture their minority peoples were familiar with, including language, hymnody, liturgy, pastoral practice, church government, and level of lay participation in ministry. To what degree should Majority World schools of theology teach practices suited to the minority peoples they serve?

When I taught briefly at a seminary in Africa, I visited about ten congregations. In eight of these congregations, the only musical instrument was a drum; there were no hymnals and no printed service materials. At the seminary, no one could play piano, and the guitar player was missing three of his six strings. The myriad of (wonderful!) choirs all featured choreography with their songs. It is very difficult to effectively use Western hymns, music, and liturgy, which require high levels of literacy, music education, publishing technology, and wealth which are rare in much of the Majority World.

In America, we see written words everywhere, every moment of the day. The International Orality Network estimates that 5.7 billion people (80 percent of the world's population) today are oral learners, either because they lack literacy skills or prefer orality.<sup>10</sup> They can't, won't, or don't absorb the Word of God well when it is written. Many people in the Majority World have weak literary skills, little access to literature, no religious materials available in their heart language, and little money to invest in the few books that are available.

While there is little access to written materials in many languages and areas, oral recordings in 6,400 languages from organizations like Global Recordings Network<sup>11</sup> are easily downloaded by cell phones, which are common even in remote areas. Providing more pastoral training in oral recordings rather than written form (particularly in their home languages) may be useful with trainees who are not used to reading, or who can listen during long periods of travel in rural areas. Seminary students can translate texts into minority languages and produce oral learning material more quickly and easily than print. Cell phones, travel routers, mobile hotspots, portable digital recorders, free editing software, duplicating equipment, and solar MP3 players all are relatively inexpensive and easy to use.

The drum is needed to keep the people singing in time with one another, especially in large groups. The most effective songs are like Negro Spirituals, which use call-and-response, refrains, and repetition, so people can learn and participate easily without printed materials. Songs are written by minority peoples in their native tongues and styles.

Are pastors prompted to translate Western hymns, or do they encourage their people to develop minority language songs? Do minority people groups get the message that minority language and hymnody is inferior, that to be Christian means to be global, or that only highly literate people can properly worship and learn?

Do minority people groups get the message that minority language and hymnody is inferior, that to be Christian means to be global, or that only highly literate people can properly worship and learn?

It is useful to see African and European worship modes side by side. One may view excerpts of a literacy-heavy Divine Service (based on Latin) in the video *Ibada Takatifu* (skip the introduction)<sup>12</sup>; then view songs from village churches, *Two Worship Songs from Kenya and Malawi*.<sup>13</sup> What academic level must worshipers reach to fully participate in each? How well does a scholastic style of preaching connect with villagers? Is either mode by nature more God-pleasing?

To what degree should seminaries promote hymnody, music, and liturgy in forms which are foreign to the minority people groups, hard to use when not printed, or require literacy?

European missionaries imported a hierarchical and episcopal government, and American missionaries brought congregational or presbyterian structure. All these polities find support in the New Testament. Local church government, with different views on pastoral and lay authority, also varies. Should seminaries teach church government inherited from European church bodies, or advocate models familiar to minority people groups?

### Ten Questions to Ask to Fine-tune a Church Worker Training Program

Picture a continuum with a pure 1846 model as a one on the scale, and a pure 2021 model as ten. Then consider these questions.

Where would you place your training program?

Has the net number of ordained pastors increased in recent years?

Should the program move more toward the 1846 model by reducing the qualifications to enter seminary, the number of residential years required, and costs, in order to increase the number of graduates?

Should the program move more toward the 1846 model by reducing the qualifications to enter seminary, the number of residential years required, and costs, in order to increase the number of graduates?

Would it be useful to use the 1846 model, and schedule continuing education after ordination (making training and costs less “front loaded”)?

Who has been unable to attend seminary, and why?

If current training follows an 1846 model, but is considered inadequate, would it be more useful to follow a 2021 model, or to create another model which demands less funding and time away from home? (Perhaps by using experienced pastors as deployed trainers?)

If training seems to be biased toward global culture, how could more minority culture be included (making it more “African,” etc.)?

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Does seminary encourage or discourage indigenous songs and culture in worship and ministry, and how does this affect congregations?

Would students learn more readily if more classes and materials were provided in minority languages?

What minority language oral recordings could be found or created for use in congregations and pastoral training?

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article uses the term “Majority World” because many people frown on the terms “Third” and “Developing” World. “Third” was originally used in the Cold War for nations which were not aligned with either the “First” (American allies) or “Second” (USSR), but came to imply poverty and inferiority. “Majority” and “Two-Thirds” highlight the fact that most of the world’s population is in those regions. We also use the term “minority” to refer to localized people groups, cultures, and languages which make up the “Majority World.” It is a bit confusing to read “Majority” and “minority” side by side, referring to the same people. To help overcome this, the word “minority” is always small case, used with a noun like “language,” and “Majority World” is capitalized. We do not use the other fashionable term, “Minority World,” because that would be even more baffling. We sometimes use the disfavored terms “Western” and “global,” because it is hard to find alternate terms which do not add the awkwardness that “Majority” brings. None of the terms are ideal, and all are disliked in some circles.

<sup>2</sup> Charles P. Schaum, “The Highest and Ultimate Gift of God: A Brief History of Concordia Publishing House in the German-Era LCMS,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (Jan-April 2019): 21, 24, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Arlo Janssen, *Humor from the Classroom* (WestBow Press, 2016), 87.

<sup>4</sup> Cameron MacKenzie, “The Seminary They Couldn’t Close,” *For the Life of the World* (Spring 2021): 4–6.

<sup>5</sup> Some authors from minority cultures include ethnic insights. However, some of their books are as global and removed from minority cultures as tomes by Americans.

<sup>6</sup> “Partnership” is an African euphemism for obtaining money from America and Europe.

<sup>7</sup> Matongo Lutheran Theological College graduated four men with certificates in theology in March 2019. Matongo primarily serves Kenya (520 churches) and Uganda (240 churches), so there is a large disparity between the number of graduates and number of churches. “LCMS Sponsored Students Graduate from Matongo,” Sept. 18, 2019, <https://international.lcms.org/lcms-sponsored-students-graduate-from-matongo/>. The ELCK (Kenya) reported 109 pastors in 2002 (Rune Imberg, *A Door Opened by the Lord* [Göteborg: Församlingsförlaget, 2008], 168) and 121 pastors now, showing very little net gain in twenty years of investing in a 2021 model seminary.

<sup>8</sup> Lutheran Church of Uganda: 130 congregations, 22 pastors, evangelists (unknown). Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sierra Leone: 22 congregations, 13 pastors, 22 evangelists (now 135 congregations). Lutheran Church Mission in Uganda: 110 congregations, “at least 20” pastors, “many” evangelists. Statistics were collected from websites and Facebook pages published by these church bodies, the LCMS, and the International Lutheran Council. It is hard to tell how current they are.

<sup>9</sup> <https://international.lcms.org/mission-field-update-from-kenya-june-2018/>

<sup>10</sup> International Orality Network, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://orality.net/about/who-are-oral-communicators/>.

<sup>11</sup> Global Recordings Network USA, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://www.globalrecordingsusa.org/>.

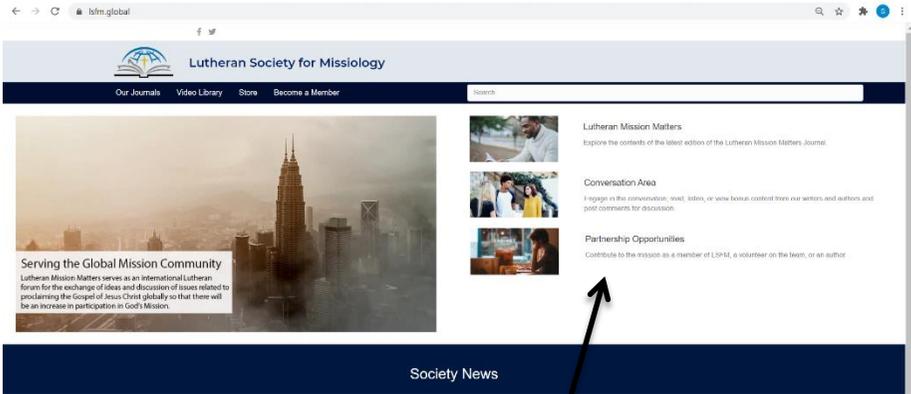
<sup>12</sup> *Ibada Takatifu*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXEZ74-cT2o&app=desktop>

<sup>13</sup> *Two Worship Songs from Kenya*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t13HYSs0Iq4>,

illustrates common characteristics: call and response, refrain, and choreography.

Choreography illustrates the lyrics. This structure enables all to join in without printed lyrics, and to sing while walking or working.

# Enter the conversation: “Why Lutheran Mission Matters.”



Be sure to check out the upcoming issue's Call for Papers (including the theme) and Submission Guidelines near the end of this edition or online (<https://lsfm.global>) under Partnership Opportunities.

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# Confession Is Crucial, and Context Counts<sup>1</sup>

Werner Klän

**Abstract:** Lutheran identity is not first and foremost a special identity; it rather lays claim to catholicity. The Lutheran Confessions are intended to be a guideline for the understanding of what Christian faith is and what Christian life is.

What is demanded of us, then, is a theological answer to the challenges we as confessional Lutheran churches, pastors, and scholars are facing in our time and day, and to our specific situations and living conditions in our various countries, continents, and climes. Translation, therefore, is inevitable for any theological endeavour: It is and remains our task. For the church and its members function as communicators of God's message to all people, not least to those who have not yet been addressed, or reached by the biblical message.

Thorough analyses of the "secular age" we live in are necessary. Of course, the different conditions, Lutheran Christians and churches are facing around the globe, have to be taken into consideration. Therefore, the Church, wherever it lives, should critically deal with contemporary issues in a given context. When it does so, this demonstrates that it is aware that it is inevitably connected with its context. If our message is to be credible, the Church will speak what we have to say to the world outside of our doors, first to ourselves.

That is to say, that the implications the global changes have for our identity as Lutherans and our confessional witness must be rethought within our own (confessional Lutheran) ranks. Moreover, the changes in the kind of Christianity that



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is emerging, especially in what is labelled the “Global South,” cannot be neglected. It may seem as though the process of secularization, as it has taken place in the “western(ized)” world, at least, was irreversible—which, on the other hand, is not yet decided.

I have been and continue to be pleading for a global fellowship between our confessional Lutheran churches through the International Lutheran Council. It would certainly be foolish to underestimate the geographical, historical, organizational, and financial problems accompanying such a project on the world level. But all these things should not be real obstacles on the way to a global confessional Lutheran Church if we want to take our heritage and our responsibilities seriously.

## **An Outline**

For Luther it is of central importance to take seriously the existence of the Church, or of “Christianity,” as he prefers to say,<sup>2</sup> and the priority of the community of the faithful over one’s own belief. This commitment to the Church precludes identifying oneself as an atomized individual with one’s own private belief and piety, and includes seeing oneself within a community of faith which is always prior to oneself and of which God the Holy Spirit makes use for the accomplishment of His work.<sup>3</sup>

This approach includes an ecumenical dimension as well—using the term “ecumenical” in the best sense: If you look at the front page of the first part in the Book of Concord, you will find the rubric “*Tria Symbola catholica sive oecumenica*” (The Three Ecumenical Creeds).<sup>4</sup> Lutherans indeed understand themselves as being at once evangelical, catholic, orthodox, and ecumenical in the best sense of the word and professing a church which shall last forever. “It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church.”<sup>5</sup>

Translation, however, is inevitable for any theological endeavour: Translation—linguistically, culturally, contextually, historically, ecumenically, not to mention our daily work as teachers and preachers—is our task. However, Christianity is and remains under an obligation to be critical of its own contemporaneity.

The Lutheran Confessions, then, can be and are intended to be a guideline for the understanding of what Christian faith is, what Christian life is, and by that is meant how we can exist and lead our lives in the sight of God.

What is demanded of us, then, is a theological answer to the challenges we as confessional Lutheran churches, pastors, and scholars are facing in our time and day, and to our specific situations and living conditions in our various countries, continents, and climes.

## On Confessional Identity

Lutheran identity is not first and foremost a special identity; it rather lays claim to catholicity. As in the Reformation, to renew the Church means to remain faithful to the one, holy, Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup> For this reason the renewal of the Church in the Reformation and after has repeatedly been accompanied by the recourse to the Scriptures, the origin and the basic document of faith. For the Gospel, whose rediscovery and preservation were the primary concerns of the Reformation is indeed the same Gospel to which witness is given in the Holy Scriptures by the apostles and the prophets and can be no other Gospel (Gal 1:7).

Lutheran identity is not first and foremost a special identity; it rather lays claim to catholicity. . . . The confessions . . . are not intended to be anything other than a rendering of the scriptural truth, concentrated on the Gospel.

The existence and the unity of the Church depend upon one and the same thing: upon the Gospel in the form of the proclamation of the Word in accordance with the Scripture, and upon the sacraments in the form of administration in conformity with their institution. Herein consists the identity of the Lutheran Church.<sup>7</sup> According to Hermann Sasse, the Lutheran Church is “the confessional church *par excellence*.” And indeed, the confessional habit is significant for the profile of Lutheran faith, theology, and church, and thus an unmistakable mark of Lutheran identity. Yet, from the very beginning, biblical faith has striven to give answer to the Word of God, by praising Him. Christian faith has always included rendering account for its contents, both to God and humanity alike. From the early days of Christianity, believers were eager to express their faith in unison.

The Lutheran Church, however, in a special manner is characterised as being “confessional.” This is due to the fact that “confession,” in the Lutheran use of the term, is meant to be a responsible reaction to God’s faith-creating action through His word, expressing not only a person’s “private” convictions on religious matters, but formulating an agreement on the obligatory feature of Christian faith, revealing the accordance of a person’s belief with the Scriptures, and thus, with doctrine of the church.

Therefore, the confessions focus on the center of the Scripture, namely the Gospel, of which Jesus Christ is the quintessence and the living reality. These documents are not intended to be anything other than a rendering of the scriptural truth, concentrated on the Gospel—hence the Gospel not understood as a collocation of correct propositions, but rather as an event in which God imparts Himself, in which God communicates Himself to man and indeed *salvifically*.

It is nonetheless true, however, that the confession of faith, not least the (Lutheran) doctrinal confession, is an introduction to the Scriptures and at the same time centers the Scripture from within the Scripture. This movement has indeed an unavoidably self-referential structure. Hence it is correct to speak of a “hermeneutic circle.”

Accordingly, the Lutheran Confessions of faith are not simply “instruction about” the Gospel, propositions and theory, nor are they merely an “introduction to” the Gospel, but rather a guideline for making practical application of the Gospel in order to cope with certain existential situations, preeminently that of the human being standing as a sinner before God.

To confess, in this understanding, is an act of (Christian) faith, which is created by the very Word of God that faith is related to.<sup>8</sup> In its essentially evangelical sense, the Word of God is His promise of salvation which calls for faith, and in doing so, conveys the faith that is able to accept God’s promise. Luther, indeed, indicates what he labels a “correlation of promise and faith” (*promissio ac fides sunt correlativa*).<sup>9</sup> As the Gospel recounts and conveys God’s action to the believer, confessing the Gospel is the “natural” reaction of faith—faith itself being a gift of God.<sup>10</sup> Faith consequently cannot but express itself in terms of confession. Conversely, this confession is “dependent on” and “initiated by . . . the Word of God.”<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, it is always contemporary and contextual.

In Luther’s confession of 1528, the contemporary and, at the same time, the eschatological dimension of Luther’s concept of confession becomes perceptible. Far beyond being just a personal act of a single individual, this type of testament was conceived by Luther as a personal testimony and, at the same time, a true expression of the faith that all Christianity shares: “This is my faith, for so all true Christians believe and so the Holy Scriptures teach us.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, a personal testimony of faith cannot be, by definition, different from what the one, holy, catholic Church has believed and confessed from the very beginning.

In the confessional documents of the Lutheran Church that observe Luther’s pattern, like the Augsburg Confession of 1530, it is therefore of great import to reach an understanding, or to establish a “consensus,” about what in fact this Gospel is: “It is enough for the true unity of the Christian Church [singular, cf. the Latin text: *ad veram unitatem ecclesiae*] that the Gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and that the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word.”<sup>13</sup>

Lutheran identity is therefore put into practice by demonstrating conformity to the fundamentals in all areas of activity. In every sermon, in church education, in the training of the upcoming church generation, it is therefore also required. Thus, the confessions of faith circumscribe and define a sphere, a framework, in which ecclesiastically legitimate proclamation is possible.

In addition, we may observe that the authors of the Lutheran Confessions always envision the pastoral dimension of Lutheran identity—particularly, whenever reference is made to the Gospel, the embodiment of which is Jesus Christ in person. The question that was always being asked was this: What is the pastoral relevance of the controversial issues and theological minutiae under discussion? What solution, in addition to its scriptural conformity, is appropriate, helpful, and comforting? What is at stake if we fail to take a careful look at this particular matter, if we neglect to formulate precisely? As a rule, the decisions then reached were rejections of extreme positions, both on the “left” and the on “right.” These extreme positions were rejected because they were viewed as posing a serious danger to the certainty of salvation.

To this extent the confessional texts constitute a guideline for pastoral care: “The doctrinal confession leads to and guides the interpretation and proclamation of Scripture—and that in a particular pastoral context.”<sup>14</sup> For us, as confessional Lutheran churches in the ILC, it is therefore both meaningful and helpful, not least in the sense of ascertaining our identity, to also revert to texts that are several hundred years old.

This means that in all dimensions of church work, the decision makers, at least those commissioned by the Church, must continue to reflect anew on, and apply to our times, the Word of God, to which the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament give fundamental, exemplary, and inviolable witness. In this manner the life and work of the Church takes place on the basis of the interpretation of, reflection upon, and application of the Scriptures and the confession of faith. For this reason it appears necessary at all levels of church work to continue to take a fresh look at the confession of faith, which is bound by the Holy Scripture as the documented Word of God and therefore obligates the Church in doctrine, liturgy, self-expression, and governance.

This means that in all dimensions of church work, the decision makers, at least those commissioned by the Church, must continue to reflect anew on, and apply to our times, the Word of God.

Since the answers found in the condensed form of the confessional documents of the sixteenth century (can) have a high degree of plausibility even for today’s contemporaries, they offer at the very least guidance for communicating faith today as well—Christian faith in its significance for our contemporaries.

## **On Context(s)**

“Everything exists in a frame of reference and is viewed and understood in a context.”<sup>15</sup> This applies also for theology and theologians: “There is a present context of a thinker/theologian, and there are circumstances surrounding readers/hearers. And

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between them . . . stands a text that comes with a context.”<sup>16</sup> None of us has direct, immediate access to facts, events, or documents of the past, or to circumstances and living conditions in a different country, even within different areas in a given country. That is why, “in order to understand, layers of culture must be peeled away, examined, and reassembled—not easy, but that is no excuse for half-hearted effort. Worse is being blind to context, as we read our assumptions, perspectives, and values back into the text, finding what we want.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, we will have to pay attention to the gap between our times and the era that we investigate. Or in missions, we will have to look very thoroughly at the differences between our culture, and the culture the gospel is addressed to.

The fathers of the Lutheran Confessions were of course deliberately conscious of the contemporary character of the confessional writings in the sixteenth century, but at the same time deeply convicted to confess the eternal truth of God’s Word. It is noteworthy, however, that nearly all of the Lutheran Confessions were subscribed to by princes and other “worldly ” authorities. They were acting on behalf of their territories in defending the

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Evangelical faith, and at the same time, justifying the ongoing reformation process over against the Pope and the German Emperor. Although, due to the political conditions of their times, the reformation movement(s) ended up in a state-church system which prevailed until the end of World War I (in Germany at least), the Lutheran churches coming out of the Reformation, particularly those adherent to the Book of Concord, may be identified as an expression of emancipation from the political and ecclesiastical powers that had fought for the domination of Europe throughout the Middle Ages.

The fathers and mothers of the confessional Lutheran churches in the nineteenth century formed, in a manner of speaking, an *avant garde* stance. They posed questions and found answers that, with their fundamental and permanent reference to Scripture, were also contemporary and appropriate. In this way they found the attention of their contemporaries; thus, a group of Bible-based, church-committed Christians came together, and became effective in society, even if only to a certain degree. In addition they were, at least in religious matters, pioneers fighting for social values of the modern era such as freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and freedom of conscience. The founders of the Lutheran confessional churches in Europe, Australia, the Americas, Asia, and southern Africa proved to be equal contemporaries of the movement for bourgeois emancipation. This remains true even if we recognize that the theological contents, for which they were prepared to give great sacrifices, were principally conservative. Nonetheless, the claim for religious, ecclesiastical, and

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theological independence in terms of confessional church bodies is an integral part of our common inheritance.

## Pertinence and Transfer

Translation is inevitable for any theological endeavour. It is and remains our task. The Trinitarian and Christological dogmas modelled from Nicea (325) to Constantinople (381) or Chalcedon (451), e.g., are lucid paradigms for such successful processes of translation. The ὁμοούσιος, although not a biblical term, nevertheless describes appropriately what Scripture tells and teaches about Jesus and His relationship to the Father (and, according to St. Basil, likewise the relationship between the Father and the Holy Spirit). Still the fathers of the ancient church held endless debates on how to understand and define the term. Thus it will be essential to transfer the biblical record into the target horizon in an appropriate, comprehensible, cogent, demonstrable manner. This implies that such a process can by no means be spared from conflicts over the plausibility and “correctness” of a given or suggested translation, even while maintaining that the spirit and the contents of the theological documents of past times apply today, particularly the Early Christian Creeds and those of the sixteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

What is necessary, is the transfer of the important heritage of the history of Christianity, and the heritage of the Lutheran Reformation in particular. Inevitably, we will have to consider the circumstances, times, contexts, people, relationships, and traditions, which have been deposited in the texts of the Lutheran reformers. An historical-contextual understanding of the texts and confessions of the sixteenth century is crucial.<sup>19</sup> That means, we will have to understand Luther’s message within the context of his own time. Neither Luther’s striving for a new formulation of the Christian life, nor the real world situation of the addressees in the sixteenth century, nor the difference between the worldview of the Reformation era and our day<sup>20</sup> may be neglected.

We will have to understand Luther’s message within the context of his own time.

Together with Robert Kolb, we claim that Luther’s *theologia crucis* is the “over-arching concept needed to understand the following: God’s revelation and the trusting in it which only first becomes truly possible with human life, the atonement against the background of Christ’s death and resurrection, and the Christian life.”<sup>21</sup> For Luther, it is only under the cross that one can know: (1) who God really is, (2) how a person should behave in relation to God, (3) what happens to people without God and what God inflicts on such a *conditio humana*, and (4) what the life of a disciple who trusts in Christ looks like in the day-to-day.”<sup>22</sup> Further, Kolb sees Luther’s concept of “two

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kinds of righteousness” as the actual prime discovery of Lutheran theology and thereby the actual theological program of the Wittenberg Reformation.<sup>23</sup>

Luther’s way of thinking includes an illuminating view of the *conditio humana* and is qualified to answer the questions of our contemporaries: “Who am I? Why am I on this earth? What makes life worth living? How do I establish appropriate boundaries to define my life? How can I truly be free?”<sup>24</sup> In a translation of Luther’s *theologia crucis*<sup>25</sup> it sounds like this: “In a time of deepest doubt on the existence and love of God, the cross shows us how God reveals himself in the midst of evil which threatens our life. In Christ, the cross shows us who God is. In a time of deepest doubt about human existence and its value, the theology of the cross defines life from the standpoint of the presence of God and his love to his creatures. In Christ, the cross reveals God’s divinity and our humanity.”<sup>26</sup>

Instead of somehow regretting the uniqueness of the Lutheran Church, in writing down its understanding of the Gospel and its own self-understanding in a *Corpus Doctrinae* with the Formula of Concord and the Book of Concord, we ought to value this approach as a contribution to the ecumenical work in our modern day. This is so since Christianity in the twenty-first century is still about proclaiming the Word of God and further speaking the message of justification in Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> “[The sixteenth century confessors] placed much, including their lives, on the line to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to his Church and their society. In this they provide a model for Christian life and witness in our time as well.”<sup>28</sup> And for exactly this reason, the “Wittenberg Way of Thinking” is fruitful for the Church in the present day.<sup>29</sup> Luther almost becomes a conversation partner for Christians in the twenty-first century, also in relation to developing critical situations.<sup>30</sup> Last but not least, such an approach is a way of translating across the historical gap of centuries and across cultural barriers.<sup>31</sup>

Instead of somehow regretting the uniqueness of the Lutheran Church, in writing down its understanding of the Gospel and its own self-understanding in a *Corpus Doctrinae* with the Formula of Concord and the Book of Concord, we ought to value this approach as a contribution to the ecumenical work in our modern day.

Two presuppositions here must be made clear: the first one posits that God formed human existence with two fundamental aspects, the second that God works through His Word in many different modes of application. The anthropological presupposition means first, that human beings are truly human, i.e., God’s creation, because of God’s goodness and favor alone, and second, that humanity demonstrates its relationship to other creatures in the form of acts of love. The theological presupposition posits that

the application of the Word of God in its oral, written, and sacramental forms<sup>32</sup> does not only inform concerning God's heavenly disposition, but much more on the basis of the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, it really effects and delivers actual new life.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible indeed, to make a bridge between Luther's (and Melancthon's) approach to questions of the meaning of humanity and of the self-revelation of God and a similar approach in our time and for our questions.<sup>34</sup> What "the good life" means and can be, is constituted even today by the readiness of Christians to enter each day with a readiness to serve within the different and overlapping stations of life, which correspond to the current calling of God to my situation and the call of God to my present circumstances.<sup>35</sup> It is all about a responsible, community-oriented, and community-serving life within a world given all together by God.

Further, Christians involve themselves intensively in society in the ways of life and cultural practices of their context on the one hand, just as on the other hand they carry their values into the life and world of society.<sup>36</sup> The manner and kind of interaction between the two is highly complex, and therefore just as complex is carrying out any kind of evaluation of their interactions.<sup>37</sup> This cannot however be played off against the observation that Luther's new way of affirming the fundamental realities of human life has worked and is still working across generations and cultures.<sup>38</sup>

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## **Culture(s)**

Talking about culture(s), we start with this definition: "The term refers to the organic and dynamic whole of human activities and relationships which define the meaning and significance of life of a specific group of people. . . . Institutions within a culture have their own cultures. . . . The church, too, has always existed as a distinct cultural unit within the peoples and lands, the societies and cultures, into which the Holy Spirit has placed it."<sup>39</sup> The Church and its members function as communicators of God's message to all people, not least to those who have not yet been addressed or reached by the biblical message. Nonetheless, they are and will remain the addressees of God's salutary will. "God's communication to those outside the faith does address these human beings as the creatures he fashioned them to be, with intelligible claims and comprehensible offers of God's goodness and mercy. . . . God's way of thinking meets human ways of thinking within the framework of his created order for communication."<sup>40</sup>

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It is God’s design to reach out for human beings who have turned away from Him, forgotten about Him, and—talking about the situation in post-Christian areas of the world—even have forgotten that they have forgotten about God: “The unchangeable truths of scripture must be proclaimed to specific human beings in their specific environments as the gospel addresses their realities and brings power to change those realities through forgiveness and the promise of new life in Christ. God’s word not only describes reality but also creates it.”<sup>41</sup>

It is God’s design to reach out for human beings who have turned away from Him, forgotten about Him, and—talking about the situation in post-Christian areas of the world—even have forgotten that they have forgotten about God.

In the course of history, particularly in the course of the spreading of Lutheran churches throughout Germany, Europe, and the world, we can see that “Lutherans have both affirmed the created goodness of their cultures, and at the same time, served as sharp critics of what their cultures do in opposition to God’s will. . . . The Lutheran mission churches . . . have often lived in conflict with traditional cultural values but have also attempted to affirm and enrich those values.”<sup>42</sup>

### Challenging Contexts

For Werner Elert in his magnum opus, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, Lutheranism is not “a once-configured and concluded variable, but rather one that finds itself living out its history.”<sup>43</sup> Interdenominationally, the “confessional dynamis” is in “independent competition with ‘extracanonical motifs’” which, “in the course of enlightenment,” is threatened by the “loss of the Evangelical approach.”<sup>44</sup> He goes on to say that it was only in the nineteenth century that a “Lutheran restoration” occurred, inducing the “Evangelical approach” to “generate entirely new forms of expression,” right up to “sociology and ideology.”<sup>45</sup> According to Elert, an “indissoluble fusion of the historical form of Lutheranism with German culture” initially occurs, but also “with other nationalities,”<sup>46</sup> as he tries to demonstrate with Hungary, the Slavic and Baltic peoples, Finland and the Scandinavian nations.<sup>47</sup> In this context, even the “development of German Enlightenment towards German Idealism via the German national literature” should be seen as “a phase in the history of Lutheranism. It is the history of its secularization.” This point of view culminates in the statement that “Germany’s intellectual history is, on the whole, a long-distance effect of Lutheranism.”<sup>48</sup>

This proposition may well be questioned. In 1934/36, and in clear contrast to his colleague in Erlangen, Hermann Sasse cautioned against these misconstructions of the Lutheran Reformation: the first that “Lutheranism itself [ . . . ] does not respond (sc. to

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the question: What is Lutheran?). It is unable to give an answer to those who inquire after its essence; it is a mute concept. It is a different matter, however, if we inquire after the Lutheran Church. The Evangelical-Lutheran Church is not an idea, it is a reality. It is not mute, it speaks.”<sup>49</sup> Sasse further states that a second heroic misconstruance culminates in hero worship and apotheosis of Luther.<sup>50</sup> The national misconstruance common in the 1930s sees Martin Luther as being the “protest of Nordic man against the piety and the ecclesiastical system of Roman Catholicism” and aims at a German national church, which had arisen during the “Third Reich.” To Sasse this is one of “the most dangerous heterodoxies.”<sup>51</sup>

Seventy years after Elert and Sasse, Charles Taylor programmatically spoke of a “secular age,”<sup>52</sup> for the northwest parts of the world in our time and day. In the course of the processes beginning around 1500, called “The Work of Reform” by Taylor, there was a progressive “disenchantment” of the world. Ultimately, the concept of the “isolation of immanence” results from this process. In Taylor’s grand narrative, however, it has to be taken into account that the process of this development can be expected to be uneven. Even so, Taylor doubts that a return to old beliefs and corresponding religious forms of organization are possible, although the question of identity formation, including collective identity formation must still be posed.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, thorough analyses of the “secular age” are necessary. What needs to be analyzed—just to list some examples from a recently published book on “Church Theory”—includes what is called the “risk society,” “individualization,” “thrill-seeking society,” “media society,” “data religion,” and theories on “world relation,” “generations,” and “metamorphosis.”<sup>54</sup> All these phenomena in the so-called developed countries, and far beyond these, can be characterized as ambivalent: increasingly welfare is endangered by technical risks, individualization bears the risk of social isolation, internet technologies threaten the subjection of human beings by algorithms.<sup>55</sup> This approach certainly includes the use of empirical, sociological tools in order to describe the reality of the church(es) [in Germany].

## **Contextual Spotlights** (without Any Claim to Be Complete)

### **Africa**

In the first ILC World Seminaries Conference taking place in Canoas, RS, Brazil, in 2001, Radikobo Ntsimane, speaking about South Africa, differentiated between the “dominant culture,” the “resistant culture,” and the “obedient culture.” This “obedient culture” includes “understanding the text,” “understanding the context,” and, finally showing “obedience to the text.”<sup>56</sup> He comes to the conclusion that “This interpretation of God’s Word that has Christ in the center serves to challenge and transform all cultures of all times to conform to the love of Christ the way, the truth and the life, in their relationship to ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’ cultures.”<sup>57</sup> In his response, Nelson Unwene highlighted the principle that Scripture has to “be understood in its native

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sense, according to grammar, context, and linguistic usage of the time.” In addition, he remarked that we

are also to interpret that inerrant Scriptures to different cultures in ways that the Scriptures be understood by the different cultures, as best as possible, in their native sense, according to grammar, context, and linguistic usage of this time (Acts 2:11b). It is faithful exegesis that introduces us to the study of the context, and consequently the culture of the society that forms the context. These exercises (analysis/exegesis of language and cultural context of both the Scriptures and the receptors) are very important to the interpreter and the interpretation of God’s Word.<sup>58</sup>

David Tswaedi, former bishop of our sister church, the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, once made the following statement:

I firmly believe that acknowledgement of the diversity of human settings calls for communicating the gospel, teaching, preaching and worshipping, in a form that would not be a photocopy of the sending church way of doing things. The failure or the denial of Africans to sing and worship God like Africans would suggest a fear of not being able to garb the message in an African culture without changing the message.<sup>59</sup> It will further evince the inability of the African church to distinguish between the northern hemisphere culture and the pith of the gospel. That failure to continue disputing the cultural incarnation of the Gospel will bolster the perennial excuse of defining the church and all it stands for as a foreign institution or in the worst as a colonial repository.

There is a general concern in some quarters that if African Lutherans would worship and sing like Africans they are in danger of syncretistic, feeling-driven, or Pentecostal tendencies.<sup>60</sup>

## **Brazil**

German language and German culture were the bond beyond the theological and denominational differences in the camp of the German immigrants to Brazil. Lutheranism and Germanness became (nearly) identical. In the twentieth century, alignments with the National Socialism ideology are to be found as well as sympathy for the “Confessing Church” in its struggle against the “German Christians.” After Brazil entered World War II, a nationalistic attitude led to prosecution and imprisonment of German pastors.

In the South American perspective, those who are poor and exploited, are able to identify with the humble Jesus of Nazareth who in the end triumphs over the evil powers. Liberation, however, is liberation that leads to serving the neighbor. The church, in the first place, exists as (local) congregation. It reminds the governmental

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authorities of the duty to fight injustice and exploitation. Thus the doctrine of the two realms becomes relevant in the Latin American context.<sup>61</sup>

## **Germany**

According to the latest statistics in Germany (for the year 2018), the two mainstream churches have lost 216,000 members (Roman Catholic) and 220,000 members (Protestant). These are greater losses compared to 2017 of approximately 30 percent (Roman Catholic) and 12 percent (Protestant). Many a reason might be named for these developments, not least the child abuse scandals in the churches. This is obviously a larger societal problem; but it is shameful that the churches, even in this regard, are not much different from our post-Christian, secular society. The church(es) as (an) institution(s) in central Europe are facing huge challenges. One of these is the so-called “social media” where it is necessary to be “relevant.” Therefore “attentiveness” has to be generated, because otherwise, communication could not be carried out successfully.<sup>62</sup> The communication of the Gospel, however, is the core of the Christian religion.<sup>63</sup>

## **Hungary**

What is special about the role of the confessions in the historic kingdom of Hungary<sup>64</sup> is not the interdependence of political circumstances and the confessions per se, but the civil and multinational background of the confessions. Three confessions from the free royal cities and royal mining towns testify to the initially outstanding role of the bourgeoisie in asserting the Reformation’s aspirations in the kingdom of Hungary. The Hungarian students who studied in Wittenberg came from a bourgeois background. Understandably, German nationality played an important role in the acceptance of the confessions. Nevertheless, in this central European context, the Augsburg Confession is a confession in which three nationalities participated simultaneously: German, Hungarian, and Slovak. The reception of the *Confessio Augustana* also showed that multinationality and multiculturalism do not constitute an obstacle to the acceptance of a confession.

## **Japan**

One way to explain why the evangelical legacy of Luther is not more prevalent in this country, is the particular Japanese context. Because the dominant religious and cultural forces are so enormously strong, and because the Christian churches are in such a minority, Christians feel a closer bond to one another, not only within various Lutheran church bodies but also across all Christian denominations. Confessional differences among the Christians are viewed as rather trivial compared to the more gigantic common enemies. Many Japanese Christians feel that a divided Christianity can only send a negative message to the non-Christians.<sup>65</sup> Obviously, this is something

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which commonly takes place in every foreign mission field.<sup>66</sup> But the unique features of Japan and, similarly, of Asia are the overwhelming diversity of religions and worldviews, the historical deep-seatedness of local cultural traditions, and the emotional character of spirituality that dismisses rationalistic thinking. After all, what the Western societies have come to know as post-modernism, with its accents of ambiguity, healing, taste, progress, and choice, has existed on Japanese soil for centuries. Lutheran churches in Japan struggle. They are a minority of the minority in society. They are surrounded by incredibly strong anti-Christian religious and cultural forces from outside, and by unLutheran doctrinal environment from within. Despite these challenges, Jesus is still the Lord of the Church, also in Japan.<sup>67</sup>

## USA

For North America, Robert Kolb has identified the following challenges for Christian witness: pluralism, secularization, especially withdrawal from religion, and individualism with clear tendencies toward narcissism.<sup>68</sup> In addition, he also lists the phenomena of estrangement and the feelings of meaninglessness and powerlessness, and last but not least, all this in the face of the reality of death.<sup>69</sup> Kolb claims however, that Luther's thought addresses North American concerns and issues today with its anthropology centered on personal trust and its teaching of the passive and active aspects of human identity or righteousness; with its understanding of the "performative," or actually creative/re-creative nature of God's Word in oral, written, and sacramental forms; with its concept of daily life in the framework of callings; and with its emphasis on the experience of the personal relationship with God in Christ.

## Tentative Approaches to Answers

The confession of a Christian is first to give answer, second to give witness; all the while, however, it is invested in the life-giving power of the Word of God itself, who desires to reach all people.<sup>70</sup> Such a confession will also be inviting, since it builds the bridge between God's Word in the Holy Scriptures and different situations and cultures in which God is awaiting our witness. In this way, the witnesses will not forget that the promise of the Lord of the Church applies to them as the "little flock" (Lk 12:32). This will not hinder anyone from proclaiming the great deeds of God to the people of the earth.<sup>71</sup>

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The transfer into our times—which is the duty of the Church through proclaiming Law and Gospel to this time and world—has already been accomplished and set down

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in an exemplary manner in the confessional documents of the Lutheran Reformation contained in the Book of Concord. But precisely in this manner, these confessional statements constitute a guideline for actual confessing, statements that articulate and make possible an understanding of Christian existence and Church life that is at the same time scriptural and contemporary—purely and simply by proclaiming the will of God and by communicating the Gospel.

Three propositions made by Armin Wenz may help us to focus on this task in the way of distinctiveness and demarcation: “Being bound to the confessions helps the church to remain different and distinguishable from the world.” “Confessional obligation helps the church avoid false concepts of ecclesial unity.”<sup>72</sup> “Confessional obligation protects the church’s integrity and the rights of the justified sinner over against any allegedly necessary improvement or deprivations of the merely biblical faith in Christ.”<sup>73</sup>

What is demanded of us, then, is a theological answer to the challenges we are facing as confessional Lutheran churches, pastors, and scholars in our time and our specific situations and living conditions in our various countries, continents, and climes. By no means are we meant to neglect the so-called “non-theological factors” in the twenty-first century, in which the world under the banner of new technologies, new economic forces, new political arrangements, and new social realities, along with the danger posed by the continuing sinfulness of humanity, creates risks that endanger life and rob us of our humanity.

Together with other colleagues and brothers, I am deeply convinced that the Lutheran message of the God-given new identity of human beings and His formation of true human life not only retains its validity but takes on new significance.<sup>74</sup>

However, Christianity is and remains under an obligation to be critical of its own contemporaneity. The Church and its members can, after all, not escape contemporaneity, neither can it be denied that its members are influenced and imperceptibly governed by “trends” and tendencies of a world and society that is not only “all around them,” but in which they live themselves and which consequently has an effect on their being. And even in the rejection of contemporary developments where the Church or its individual members, based on their Christian responsibility,

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are of the opinion that they ought to be met with disapproval, such positioning proves itself to be contemporary in nature.

Christians and the Church, claimed by their Lord, have nothing to sugarcoat, nothing to gloss over, and nothing to conceal concerning the predicament of men and our contemporary society. They will boldly carry out their task, irrespective of power, richness, or influence of men. They will not cower before the powerful, and not buckle before those in charge of the state, society, or economy—I say this because the history of the Church is also a history of failure in this responsibility. The history of alliances between throne and altar, Christianity and power, church and dictator, demonstrates these failures all too clearly. If the Church desires to do justice to her mission, it will not give in to majority-trends and “mainstream” public and popular opinion.

Therefore, it remains the task of the Church to proclaim this very “righteous, unchanging will of God”<sup>75</sup> for His world and its population, in a manner that is relevant for today. The Church is thus obligated to be critical of her contemporary setting. Contemporary life also affects the Church and her members. One cannot deny that the Church is influenced and affected by worldly societal “trends” and tendencies. These movements do not only find expression outside and around the Church but also creep into the Church. Yet the Church demonstrates that it is contemporary when she resists current developments of which she cannot approve.

One cannot deny that the Church is influenced and affected by worldly societal “trends” and tendencies. . . . The Church should critically deal with contemporary issues.

Therefore, the Church should critically deal with contemporary issues. When it does so, this demonstrates that she is aware that she is inevitably connected with her context. If our message is to be credible, the Church will speak first to ourselves what we have to say to the world outside of our doors. The Church, along with each of her members, must also admit and confess, personally and corporately, the misdeeds and failures which stand against the divine standards. This will not invalidate the credibility of the Church’s message, but strengthen it, so long as we speak out of humility which derives from a recognition of her own failures, rather than with an attitude of arrogance.

When the Church does this, she will then be able to speak to those issues in our nations and times where the divine standards of God’s will have been abandoned, despised, or wantonly rejected. We will then have to proclaim that God in His holiness will not allow such offenses and revolt to be tolerated or passed over. At the same time, though, we will speak even more clearly that God Himself, in His Son, Jesus Christ, has already overcome this evil, so that our contemporary hearers are not thrown

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into arrogance or despair.<sup>76</sup> We will proclaim—in conformity with our task and mission—that God, who is visible in Jesus Christ, took it upon Himself to repair the broken fellowship between Him and mankind, in order to free the totality of humankind and each individual human being from the injurious bonds in which we are ensnared.

## **Confessional and Ecumenical Perspectives**

The implications that global changes have for our identity as Lutherans and our confessional witness need rethinking within our ranks. In this regard, we have to remember, that “the Church recognizes the fact that her proclamation does not take place in a vacuum. Mission happens in a given context. In that context, mission engages in some form of dialogue, whatever the situation may be. The Church must learn to listen in order to respond to the cries and the crises in our times. That presents a daunting and challenging task indeed.”<sup>77</sup>

It is rather likely that, at least in Europe, Christianity—rather the Church—will take a shape similar to the one it had throughout the first three centuries, being a minority, despised, mocked, marginalized, suspected, neglected, displaced, persecuted, and even killed. I do not see the Lord promising His Church to be a culturally, politically, morally influential and even a predominant factor or institution in this world. That seductive dream belongs most intimately to the imperial ideology and ecclesiastical enthusiasm of the Constantinian era, which I agree is hard to leave behind. But I do believe the Lord who promises “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18).

Living in a post-Christian environment, it will be most necessary for the mission of the Lutheran churches in Europe to cling faithfully to its biblical and confessional roots, to remain dedicated to the task of translating and transferring the biblical-Lutheran heritage into a language understood by contemporary people, supported by authentic ways of living and working together. At least this is the historical experience of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK): God can use small circles of true Christians, witnessing deliberately and faithfully to the Gospel, as blessed bases for His mission.

All the confessional Lutheran churches in the ILC are committed to determining our decisions solely on the basis of the Word of God, and not on social, cultural, or

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practical considerations. This goal, however, is much easier said than done. The prerequisite for this task is, of course, that we continually recall the words of the Old and New Testaments, which are our foundation, set our standards, and are our steadfast aim even in these ecumenical times. Our confession as well must repeatedly be called to mind: it is bound to proclaim God’s Word and is therefore a constant and binding challenge for the church in its liturgy, teaching, government, and self-expression. In this way we become part of the twin movement of the Church towards unity: being gathered and being sent.

In preaching, teaching, adult education, mission work, social involvement, the position in the social milieu (as seen by the Church and by outsiders) there will be differences in the understanding and description of responsibilities and of the realistic possibilities in any given context. Changes in the kind of Christianity that is emerging, especially in the “Global South” cannot be neglected. It may seem as though the process of secularization, as it has taken place in the “western(ized)” world, at least, is irreversible—which, on the other hand, is not yet decided.

In any case, it has to be considered seriously that the roots and requirements of the Lutheran Church are basically ecumenical. The preface to and the Augsburg Confession in Articles I and VII, Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the creed, the first part of the Smalcald Articles, and the Binding Summary of the Formula of Concord, just to name a few of the relevant basic texts, are a fundamental witness to this. The Church Fathers at the beginning of the Lutheran confessional churches in Germany, in the first half of the nineteenth century, were aware of this truly ecumenical responsibility. In this sense it was quite logical for Wilhelm Löhe to describe the Lutheran Church as the “reconciling center of the confessions.”

Therefore—just reiterating a claim, I have been making for twenty years—we should deliberate under what conditions, in which form, with which resources, and with what consequences we could also strive for a global fellowship between confessional Lutherans through the International Lutheran Council. It would certainly be foolish to underestimate the geographical, historical, organizational, and financial problems accompanying such a project on the world level. But all these things should not be real obstacles on the way to a global confessional Lutheran Church if we want to take our heritage and our responsibilities seriously.

We should deliberate under what conditions, in which form, with which resources, and with what consequences we could also strive for a global fellowship between confessional Lutherans through the International Lutheran Council.

The ILC could then be and become more and more an appropriate counterbalance to an increasingly non-confessional Lutheranism, and could provide a well-founded, profiled corrective to theological and church-political developments and objectives that diminish, abandon, or (by trend) annihilate the theological heritage and the confessional stance of the Lutheran Church, as it is circumscribed and defined in the Lutheran Confessions.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a presentation at the 7th International Lutheran Council World Seminaries Conference in Baguio City, Philippines, in October 2019. An earlier version was published in *Igreja Lutherana, Revista de Teologia do Seminario Concordia* 81(2020). LMM thanks Concordia Seminary, São Paulo, and the editor of the journal, Rev. Dr. Anselmo Graff, for sharing the article.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. His deliberations on the translation of “*communio sanctorum*” in the Large Catechism, LC, The Creed, The Third Article, 47–50, in *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of The Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 436f.

<sup>3</sup> LC, The Creed, The Third Article, 52f., 62; Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 438f. <sup>4</sup> *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche: Vollständige Neuedition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 42.

<sup>5</sup> AC VII, 1, Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 42.

<sup>6</sup> Notably, it was Nikolaus Selnecker, who, in the first edition of the Book of Concord, labeled the early Christian creeds included in it: “*Tria Symbola Oecumenica—The Three Ecumenical Creeds*,” cf. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Werner Klän, *Einführung zum Symposium “Lutherische Identität in kirchlicher Verbindlichkeit,”* in Werner Klän (ed.), *Lutherische Identität in kirchlicher Verbindlichkeit. Erwägungen zum Weg lutherischer Kirchen in Europa nach der Milleniumswende* (Oberurseler Hefter, Ergänzungsband 4), (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2007), 15–28. See the *Thesen zur Kirchengemeinschaft. Entschließung der Teilnehmer der European Regional ILC Conference* (Antwerpen, Belgien 11–14. June 2004) *an ihre Kirchen*, 28f.; for the northern American context, cf. Samuel H. Nafzger, “The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship and its Practice with Ecclesiastical Accountability: A Missouri Synod Perspective,” 61–89; Robert Rosin, “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Europe,” 112–115.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530–1580* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 22f.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Apology IV 50, Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> Kolb, *Confessing the Faith*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Kolb, *Confessing the Faith*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper,” LW 37, 372.

<sup>13</sup> AC VII, Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Notger Slenczka, “*Die Bedeutung des Bekenntnisses für das Verständnis der Kirche und die Konstitution der Kirche in lutherischer Sicht*,” in Grünwaldt, Klaus and Hahn, Udo: *Profil—Bekenntnis—Identität. Was lutherische Kirchen prägt* (Hannover: 2003), 9–34.

- <sup>15</sup> Robert Rosin, “Seeking the Center,” in Christoph Barnbrock and Gilberto da Silva, eds, *Die einigende Mitte. Theologie in konfessioneller und ökumenischer Verantwortung, Festschrift für Werner Klän* (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2018), 229.
- <sup>16</sup> Rosin, “Seeking the Center,” 221.
- <sup>17</sup> Rosin, “Seeking the Center,” 221.
- <sup>18</sup> Werner Klän, “In praise of Prof. Dr. Robert Kolb. On the occasion of the awarding of the Hermann-Sasse-Prize,” *Concordia Journal* 41 (2015): 49–56.
- <sup>19</sup> Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen, *Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 281.
- <sup>20</sup> Arand, Kolb, and Nestingen, *Lutheran Confessions*, xiv–xix. Cf. Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 225.
- <sup>21</sup> This quote translated here is from Robert Kolb, “*Deus revelatus—Homo revelatus: Luthers theologia crucis für das 21. Jahrhundert*,” in Robert Kolb and Christian Neddens, *Gottes Wort vom Kreuz. Lutherische Theologie als kritische Theologie, mit einer Einführung von Volker Stolle und einem Ausblick von Werner Klän* (Oberurseler Hefte 40), (Oberursel, Taunus: Lutherische Theologische Hochschule, 2010), 14–15.
- <sup>22</sup> Kolb, *Deus revelatus*, 20.
- <sup>23</sup> Klän, “In praise of Prof. Dr. Robert Kolb,” 2015.
- <sup>24</sup> Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 222; Klän, “In praise of Prof. Dr. Robert Kolb,” 2015.
- <sup>25</sup> Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 220–229.
- <sup>26</sup> Kolb, *Deus Revelatus*, 34; Klän, “In praise of Prof. Dr. Robert Kolb,” 2015.
- <sup>27</sup> Klän, “In praise of Prof. Dr. Robert Kolb,” 2015.
- <sup>28</sup> Arand, Kolb, and Nestingen, *Lutheran Confessions*, viii.
- <sup>29</sup> Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 2008.
- <sup>30</sup> Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 2008.
- <sup>31</sup> Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 13; Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 19.
- <sup>32</sup> Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 131–151; Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 175–203.
- <sup>33</sup> Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 12.
- <sup>34</sup> Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 20.
- <sup>35</sup> Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 20.
- <sup>36</sup> Kolb, *The Christian Faith*, 272.
- <sup>37</sup> Robert Kolb, *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture: 1550–1675* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 6.
- <sup>38</sup> Klän, “In praise of Prof. Dr. Robert Kolb,” 2015.
- <sup>39</sup> Robert Kolb, Ed., *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 7.
- <sup>40</sup> Kolb, *The American Mind*, 7–8.
- <sup>41</sup> Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 13.
- <sup>42</sup> Kolb, *The American Mind*, 10.
- <sup>43</sup> Notger Slenczka, *Selbstkonstitution und Gotteserfahrung. W. Elerts Deutung der neuzeitlichen Subjektivität im Kontext der Erlanger Theologie. Studien zur Erlanger Theologie II* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 148.
- <sup>44</sup> Slenczka, *Selbstkonstitution und Gotteserfahrung*, 149.
- <sup>45</sup> Slenczka apud Elert, *Selbstkonstitution und Gotteserfahrung*, 150.

- <sup>46</sup> Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums* (Munich: H.Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932), 131.
- <sup>47</sup> Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, 169–250.
- <sup>48</sup> Slenczka apud Elert, *Selbstkonstitution und Gotteserfahrung*, 227.
- <sup>49</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Was heißt lutherisch?* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1934), 12.
- <sup>50</sup> Sasse, *Was heißt lutherisch?*, 31–36.
- <sup>51</sup> Sasse, *Was heißt lutherisch?*, 49.
- <sup>52</sup> Charles Taylor, German: *Ein säkulares Zeitalter* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2009), 51. English: *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007)
- <sup>53</sup> Charles Taylor, *Die Formen des Religiösen in der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 63. English: *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited (Institute for Human Sciences Vienna Lecture Series)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). At the same time Taylor notes for North Atlantic societies that people are, on the one hand, alienated from the church/churches, but, on the other hand, are taken over into a “fractionated culture” or “fragmented world,” Taylor, *Die Formen des Religiösen in der Gegenwart*, 95.
- <sup>54</sup> Christian Grethlein, *Kirchentheorie. Kommunikation des Evangeliums im Kontext*. (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2018), 210.
- <sup>55</sup> Grethlein *Kirchentheorie*, 227.
- <sup>56</sup> Radikobo Ntsimane, “Interpreting God’s Word in Different Cultures,” in Paulo Moisés Nebras, Ed., *Preparing Lutheran Pastors for Today* (Canoas: Editora da ULBRA, 2006), 52–67.
- <sup>57</sup> Ntsimane, “Interpreting God’s Word in Different Cultures,” 69.
- <sup>58</sup> Nelson Unwene, “Interpreting God’s Word in Different Cultures, Response,” in Paulo Moisés Nebras, Ed., *Preparing Lutheran Pastors for Today* (Canoas: Editora da ULBRA, 2006), 90.
- <sup>59</sup> Within this quote, Tswaedi adds a note that a narrative of the two powerful horsemen, one from the North and one from the South, Naaman and the Ethiopian Eunuch could be used as another point in this discussion. One, though hearing the message from the prophet, compared the stream he was instructed to wash in with the wide rivers back home. The other having gotten the explanation from an evangelist, was ahead of the teacher when seeing the water. He didn’t wish to be baptized in Jerusalem but in the roadside stagnant waters! David Tswaedi, “Martin Luther—One Confession, Multicultural—An African Perspective,” in Werner Klän and Gilberto Da Silva (eds.), *The Global Luther. Confessional Perspectives on Martin Luther’s Continued Influence Through 5000 Years and on Five Continents* (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2021), 20.
- <sup>60</sup> Tswaedi, “Martin Luther,” 20. Tswaedi adds note here: African musical instruments such as cow-skin drums were discouraged as linked with ancestor worship. Today the singing and swaying is characterized as unLutheran because the worship is more doing something for God and not the converse. The dancing and clapping of hands is decried as “*schwaemerisch*,” etc.
- <sup>61</sup> Roberto da Silva, “Martin Luther’s Reception in Lateinamerica und Brasilien,” in Klän and da Silva, *The Global Luther*, 40–61.
- <sup>62</sup> Grethlein, *Kirchentheorie*, 14.
- <sup>63</sup> Werner Klän, “Lutheran Identity in a Post-Christian Context. A European Case Study,” *LTR* 31 (2019), 46–67.
- <sup>64</sup> L’ubomir Batka, “Die Bedeutung der reformatorischen Bekenntnisse für die Unikonfessionalität und Multikulturalität,” in Klän and da Silva, *The Global Luther*, 95–110.

<sup>65</sup> Yoshiro Ishida, “Asia,” in *Church in Fellowship*, vol. II: *Pulpit and Altar Fellowship among Lutheran Minority and Younger Churches*, Paul E. Hoffmann and Harding Meyer, Eds., (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 40.

<sup>66</sup> E. J. Bergt, “Inter-Lutheran Seminaries,” in *All-Asia Conference on Theological Training*, Herman H. Koppelman, Ed., (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1964), 71.

<sup>67</sup> Naomichi Masaki, “The Impact of Martin Luther on Christianity in Japan,” in Klän and da Silva *The Global Luther*, 66–76.

<sup>68</sup> Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, 11, 32, 182.

<sup>69</sup> Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, 86–96.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 132.

<sup>71</sup> Kolb, *The Christian Faith*, 272, 274, 298.

<sup>72</sup> Armin Wenz, “*Quia–Quatenus*: Scripture and Confession,” in Tapani Simojoki, Ed., *Built on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets: Sola Scriptura in Context*. Westfield House International Symposium, 15–18 August 2012 (Cambridge, UK: Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, 2017), 83, 84.

<sup>73</sup> Wenz, “*Quia–Quatenus*,” 83–85.

<sup>74</sup> Klän, “In praise of Prof. Dr. Robert Kolb,” 2015.

<sup>75</sup> SD V 17, Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 584.

<sup>76</sup> SD V 18f, Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 584f.

<sup>77</sup> Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross, The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 301.

# Ecclesial Lutheran Identity and the Church's Mission in the Face of the Reality of *Favelas*<sup>1</sup>

Samuel R. Fuhrmann

**Abstract:** The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) faces many challenges in the city, given its rural origin on the one hand and the complexity of urban Brazil on the other. The isolation in the rural context, the immigrant experience, and the mission principle that gave birth to the IELB all led to a strong self-preservationist mentality. The complexity of the urban world includes the reality of *favelas*, which represents one of the biggest challenges to the church in its attempt to preach “Christ to all.” How then to reach *favela* dwellers in big Brazilian metropolises? In trying to help answer this challenge and taking all the above into consideration, this article offers an integrated view of Luther’s theology in respect to the relation between the two kinds of righteousness and the Apostles’ Creed. This approach then expands the theological reflection by putting the First Article to the service of ecclesiology and missiology. The result of all this will be an approach to missions whose starting point is justification by grace through faith and that takes cultures into consideration, facilitating the IELB’s presence in mission in the midst of the strong Brazilian cultural diversity of *favelas*, where to cross cultural boundaries is necessary for the sake of the gospel.

To speak of an ecclesial Lutheran identity and the reality of *favelas* requires a reflection about the Church’s presence in mission in an environment that is very different from the one where the Lutheran Church first emerged in Brazil. *Favela* is a housing category that refers to an urban-built environment where one encounters a rich ethnic and cultural diversity, and often the problems of violence and poverty. The Lutheran Church in Brazil, on the other hand, emerged in a rural setting marked by an environment that resulted from the immigrant experience of isolation from the larger



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society. It was in this monocultural context where a LCMS pastor started a missionary effort among Lutherans who did not have a pastor in their midst to care for them in 1900. This effort initiated a mission work which later on became the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB).

Today, the IELB is present in Brazilian metropolises and faces many challenges in this context. One of these challenges is that the church needs to cross cultural, social, and even geographic boundaries to fully account for the reality of *favelas* in its mission practices.

At the intersection between ecclesiology and missiology, Klaus Detlev Schulz writes of “mission as crossing boundaries.”<sup>2</sup> This article will not fully engage in scholarly conversation with those who reflect specifically on Lutheran identity, but offer an integrated view of Luther’s theology in a way that preserves and emphasizes the starting point of Lutheran ecclesial identity—justification by grace through faith—and affirms the Church’s presence and action in the world. Given this focus, the view needs to comprehend a theological understanding of culture and to offer criteria for assessing cultural developments.<sup>3</sup> In order to offer such an integrated view, this article first seeks to show how the relation between Luther’s view of human life as two-dimensional—vertical and horizontal—and his understanding of the Apostles’ Creed reveals a strong theology of presence and engagement in the world. This theology will be captured in terms of “cruciform engaged presence” (of the Church) in the world. Second, the article offers a brief mission history of the IELB to point out its strengths and reveal some challenges when it comes to the crossing of cultural boundaries. And finally, the article will offer an overview of *favelas* and show how Luther’s theology as cruciform engaged presence can help the IELB meet this reality more fully.

This article first seeks to show how the relation between Luther’s view of human life as two-dimensional—vertical and horizontal—and his understanding of the Apostles’ Creed reveals a strong theology of presence and engagement in the world.

## **Luther’s Theology as Captured in Terms of Cruciform Engaged Presence in the World**

Luther’s understanding of human life in terms of the two kinds of righteousness, which the reformer called “our theology” in 1535,<sup>4</sup> has already been explored and articulated by Robert Kolb and Charles Arand.<sup>5</sup> This paper assumes their articulation of this theology and explores further how Luther’s Trinitarian theology relates to it.

A concise summary of Kolb and Arand's articulation of Luther's two-dimensional theology includes these issues. Luther's framework postulates that humans are relational beings in the sense that we relate both to God and to creation. Within the vertical relationship, on the one hand, one relates to God in a passive way. Within the horizontal dimension, on the other hand, one lives in active love toward the neighbor. While in the passive interaction humans are receivers of God's gifts, both the creaturely gifts as well as the gift of salvation, in the horizontal dimension the Christian actively shares what he or she has received with others, guided by the Spirit through the Word. This two-dimensional theology is usually represented by a vertical axis and a horizontal one, forming the shape of a cross, a "cruciform" shape. Therefore, one could say that Luther's framework understands the Christian life as a "cruciform life."

This two-dimensional theology is closely related to Luther's understanding of the Creed. Luther's explanation of the Apostles' Creed in both Small and Large Catechisms stresses God's works as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Under each article, the reformer describes God as the one who does good things for and to His creatures, while the creatures passively receive God's gifts. As Luther makes that confession, however, he also affirms the presence of the church, both as individuals and as community, in the world under God's design and rule.

We first look at the passive nature of our relationship with God in the three articles. In the First Article, Luther speaks of God as the one who creates and sustains His creatures "out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in [us]."<sup>6</sup> We passively receive from God all the creaturely gifts. In the Second Article, God in the person of the Son redeems His creatures while we were still, in Luther's words, "lost and condemned creature[s]."<sup>7</sup> This point stresses the atoning death of Christ in our behalf. In other words, Luther is describing Christ's work, situating it within the passive, vertical relation of the cruciform life. And under the Third Article, Luther confesses that, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel. . ."<sup>8</sup> Here again, one can see the passive nature of our relationship with God. Luther's theology, in continuity with Scripture, considers faith as a sheer gift. This logic of all three articles, thus, reflects the passive nature of our relationship with God in the human cruciform life.

But how exactly do these articles affirm life and presence in the world? And how does the engagement for the good of the neighbor enter this picture? In the First Article, Luther also strongly affirms bodily life and offers a list of concrete gifts necessary for this life along with our horizontal interpersonal relationships of the home: "He has given me clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children."<sup>9</sup> These are all good things to be enjoyed and for which we give thanks, affirming the goodness of God's creation in spite of the reality of sin.

The Second Article also has to do with God’s presence in the world. In this article, the reformer describes Christ’s work as delivering us from our captivity “under the power of the devil.” In doing this, Christ brings us “under his dominion,” as he becomes Lord over all things. Luther understands Christ’s work not in terms of a rescue mission to take us from the world. Rather, he becomes Lord over all things. This same understanding of redemption is further explained in the Large Catechism. After stating that we first had received “all kinds of good things” from the Father at creation, “the devil came and led humans into sin, death and all misfortune.” But Christ “came down from heaven to help us. . . . Those tyrants and jailers have now been routed, and their place has been taken by Christ, the Lord of life . . . [who] assumed dominion at the right hand of the Father.”<sup>10</sup> Note that Christ’s mission, again, is not to take us from the world but to take creation back from Satan’s dominion. That is why we now “serve Christ in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, being redeemed by Christ means in no way an escape from the world. Rather, it means that now we live under the lordship of Christ, who has dominion over the entire creation.

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This understanding of redemption leads the reformer even to counter escapist theologies of his time with Second Article theology. In Luther’s commentary on Galatians, he criticizes the monastic practice of escaping the everyday places of life and activities as a means to achieve merit before God and associates this escapist view to a way of doing theology. Under such a theology, one would try “to stray into heaven with our idle speculations, there to investigate God in His incomprehensible power, wisdom, and majesty.”<sup>12</sup> Notice that Luther associates the escapist attitude of monks to what he had much earlier in his career called “theology of glory,”<sup>13</sup> a theology whose starting point is a supposed human ascent to God. But notice also how the reformer answers this problem of theological method which had led to escape from everyday life in the world:

Therefore, begin where Christ began—in the Virgin’s womb, in the manger, and at His mother’s breasts. For this purpose, He came down, was born, lived among men, suffered, was crucified, and died, so that in every possible way He might present Himself to our sight. He wanted us to fix the gaze of our hearts upon Himself and thus to prevent us from clambering into heaven and speculating about the Divine Majesty.<sup>14</sup>

Luther is rejecting monastic escapism as works righteousness and contrasting it with the incarnation of Christ. Thus, he is situating the incarnation within the vertical dimension primarily (and not merely as an example for us to follow in our horizontal relationships). Luther poses his two-dimensional theology within the broader context of his theology of the cross. The framework of the two kinds of righteousness is an expression of Luther's *Theologia Crucis*, whose starting point is God's descent to us.<sup>15</sup>

The term "cruciform," in addition to expressing the two-direction axes that represent Luther's two-dimensional theology, also evokes the theology of the cross that points to God's presence within the world to restore our relationship with Himself. This is a theology whose starting point is God's presence in the crib, on the cross, and in the tomb (which was left empty). Luther's theology, therefore, starts with God coming to us, with His presence in concrete places within created reality, in the world, and shows that the Church does not need to escape the world to serve Him.

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In the Third Article of the Creed, to be "called by the Gospel" implies a calling into a community of believers, given that the Spirit also "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church."<sup>16</sup> A Christian is present not only in the world as an individual (First Article) who believes in Christ and lives under His ruling (Second Article) but also within a gathered community that lives by the Word (proclaimed and visible). In the Large Catechism, Luther stresses that this community is ordered in such a way that "everyone may fully obtain daily forgiveness of sins."<sup>17</sup> Receiving forgiveness daily stresses the passive, vertical relationship of the cruciform life.

The horizontal dimension is brought to the fore, as the reformer reveals how to properly understand the commandments. First Luther highlights that the commandments fail to make one a Christian, while the Creed does. Second, he explains how, once one knows and believes the articles of faith of the Creed, one comes to "love and delight in all the commandments of God."<sup>18</sup> This community of faith which lives on the basis of daily forgiveness around the Word now also lives in the world with God's "gifts and power, to help us keep the Commandments."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the community which is called and gathered by the Spirit through and around the Word, now looks also to the reality beyond itself, to the reality of the neighbor, in light of the commandments.<sup>20</sup>

Luther's theology offers a framework for human life that is cruciform (related to God passively and related to others and the world actively). It stresses our relationship

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with God and thus preserves and emphasizes justification by grace through faith, the starting point to discuss Lutheran ecclesial identity. But it also gives attention to the reality of one's neighbor. As a result, this theology fosters presence in the world and in the church. This cruciform presence is understood within the narrative of salvation, opening human life to both creation and mission engagement.

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## **Engaged Presence: The Two Great Commissions and the Narrative of Salvation**

The engagement of the church in the world can be discussed according to the two Great Commissions, as proposed by Arand and Kolb. To look at these commissions in light of the theology offered above allows one to talk about a “cruciform engaged presence” of the church in the world. This kind of presence helps the church cross cultural boundaries in the city to attend creaturely needs of urban dwellers and, more important, to carry out the distinctive task of preaching the Gospel.

### **The First Great Commission in Light of the Cruciform Presence of the Church in the World**

The first Great Commission regards God's words in the creation narrative, when He created human beings in His image and said that mankind would have dominion over the creation (Gn 1:26). “As Christians re-enter creation; they find that they are now in a position to properly carry out the first Great Commission, to exercise dominion over the earth by serving it and preserving it (Gen 1.26).”<sup>21</sup> The exercise of this dominion involves service in and preservation of creation, but it is not limited to these aspects. Luther calls this dominion “the physical blessing,” which he applies to many activities we do and to things we develop or create out of God-created things, from cultivating the soil to the building of cities.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, this commission has to do both with one's service to care for other creatures and with culture, and can help congregations attempt to cross cultural boundaries in their mission efforts.

Let us first look at how culture is considered under the first Great Commission in light of the theology offered above. Kolb and Arand recall that the harsh realities encountered by Christians due to the reality of sin sometimes lead people to either desire to escape culture or to attempt to transform it into something Christian. But the affirmation of God's presence in creation in the three articles of the Creed does not allow the church to escape the surrounding cultures.

Seeing cultural activity under the first Great Commission, in light of the First Article as one of God's good gifts, frees congregations from thinking that they need

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to ignore the cultures they encounter in order to be faithful to their core identity or from the idea that mission involves by necessity a transformation of the local cultures. Under the First Article, the cultural characteristics congregations encounter in the surrounding community can be seen as God's good gifts, and God-given gifts do not need to be transformed into something "Christian." Since the reality of sin is not only a problem involving the vertical relationship but is embodied in horizontal relationships and cultures, congregations need to assess cultural developments to know when to question and reject them.

But how exactly can this assessment be carried out? There are two major aspects to be considered in assessing cultures from a

Lutheran perspective. First, from Luther's theology of creation, one learns that God has established fundamental structures for human life and activity, which comprehend the family in the home, economic activity in the workplace, political and social organization in public space, and religious communities in religious spaces. This means that in planning the course of action in a particular locality where many cultural activities already take place, congregations need to observe whether certain activities enhance or diminish these basic "vocational structures."<sup>23</sup> If any activity affects these structures negatively, congregations will need to challenge the local culture through the church's teaching and practices. The preservation of these basic structures configures one criterion to assess the local culture.

Second, in addition to paying attention to how God has structured human life, Christians are guided by the Ten Commandments in their engagement with culture. In Luther's Small Catechism, Christians are instructed not only to avoid doing evil but also to act for the benefit of the neighbor. Under the Fifth Commandment, Luther teaches the church to "prevent, protect, and save" the neighbor from any harm,<sup>24</sup> and the same emphasis can be seen in the Seventh, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments. The benefit and well-being of the neighbor is another criterion to assess whether a given cultural development can be affirmed or needs to be questioned. This may involve denouncing and opposing those normalized practices that embody the so-called structural sins, while working toward the well-being of the weakest in society.

This emphasis on the benefit and well-being of the neighbor found in Luther's understanding of the Commandments sheds light on how the first Great Commission

Seeing cultural activity under the first Great Commission, in light of the First Article as one of God's good gifts, frees congregations from thinking that they need to ignore the cultures they encounter in order to be faithful to their core identity or from the idea that mission involves by necessity a transformation of the local cultures.

speaks to one's service and care for the creation. While the exercise of dominion comprehends the care of creation in general, Luther includes under this dominion the governing of a house, for instance, which requires one to care for the neediest one in this house, like a baby who needs diapers changed. Luther extends this dominion over creation to speak not only of the care of the natural environment with its plants and animals but also of the care we provide to fellow human creatures in need.

Therefore, in attending the first Great Commission in light of Luther's emphasis on the neighbor, one is led to think also of the neediest people in society. Thus, as congregations engage their surrounding realities and need to figure out the course of their actions, they are guided by the Commandments to answer the problem of poverty in the city as well. This is of great relevance in the present context because in *favelas* one encounters not only cultural diversity but also the harsh reality of poverty, which requires an answer under the first Great Commission.

In addition to the guidance offered by the Commandments to engage the reality of the neighbor, in Luther's theology, reason plays an important role in engaging this reality. Kolb and Arand recall that, for the reformer, although in the vertical dimension "reason is blind" and "the will lies in bondage to sin;" in the horizontal dimension "reason still has some ability and freedom."<sup>25</sup> This means that when congregations engage their surrounding reality to attend to people's creaturely needs, their leaders will use common good sense to identify problems and find solutions in dialogue with the community. As will be discussed further when the reality of *favelas* is treated, the exercise of good reason can help the church avoid actions toward answering the creaturely needs of impoverished people that result in paternalistic, dependent relationships.

Therefore, when the first Great Commission is seen in light of the cruciform engaged presence, one is enabled to reflect theologically about cultures and about the importance of attending the creaturely needs of fellow urban dwellers. In doing this, the Christian lives the cruciform life in the world, actively engaged in culture for the sake of the neighbor. But this engagement is not limited to responding to sinful cultural developments and helping the needy. This engagement first and foremost involves the preaching of the Gospel, which is carried out under the second Great Commission, through which the Church's distinct, vital message is delivered to those who have not yet heard the Gospel.

## **The Second Great Commission in Light of the Cruciform Presence of the Church in the World**

The second Great Commission, also called the Gospel Commission, Jesus gave the apostles at the end of Matthew's Gospel narrative, to make disciples from every nation by baptizing and teaching (Mt 28:18–19). This commission leads the Church to always proclaim the message that tears down the most fundamental boundary, that is,

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the boundary which separates humankind from the Creator. Therefore, this commission is fundamental for considering congregational presence and action in the city.

This response to the boundary of sin in terms of the Gospel Commission follows very logically from Luther's theology captured here in terms of cruciform presence in the world. Having been called by the Gospel and made the Church by the Spirit's work, the Church (as individuals and as community) is led toward the neighbor. Arand puts it very clearly: "The church *coram deo* lives from the Word of God, and *coram mundo* it lives to deliver the Word of God to others."<sup>26</sup> Notice that the Word is central in the life of the Church. But while in the vertical dimension of the cruciform life this Word encounters us where we are, in the horizontal dimension we live and work to serve Christ so that through us the Word continues encountering the neighbor where he or she is.

A few examples from Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* can substantiate this point. These lectures reveal Luther's strong theology of creation and stress the Church's presence within creation. In Luther's thought, life under justification is lived not in escape or isolation but in the very places of everyday life. He talks about the life of the patriarchs in the midst of other people in the world:

The holy patriarchs were especially zealous in endeavoring to bring as many as possible to the knowledge of God. Therefore, Abraham not only takes care of his household, but he also builds an altar. There he teaches the true religion; there he calls upon God; there he publicly practices the outward forms of worship. The Amorite Mamre and his brothers join him, and so a large church is established.<sup>27</sup>

Luther first emphasizes the Patriarch's faith as the only means to be considered "righteous" before God. Then, after stressing justification through faith alone, Luther focuses on Abraham's life in the world, pointing out that he did not confine the faith to the limits of home and family relationships, but shared what he had received with others.

At another point, commenting on Abraham's building of an altar in Bethel, Luther affirms that there Abraham "preached the name of the Lord" (Gn 13:4) primarily to his household and then to the neighboring Canaanites. And he concludes by saying that,

Abraham is praised in this passage because he did these things, not in some corner—for fear of the threats or the violence of the heathen—but in a public place, in order that by his own example and that of his people he might lead others to the knowledge of God and to true forms of worship.<sup>28</sup>

Notice that for Luther, the understanding that God has justified human beings results in the observation that God's people are to "lead others to the knowledge of God,"

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even in the face of real danger. The Patriarchs, who for Luther represent the “true church,” lived not in escape or isolation. Rather, they lived side by side with other people groups, who worshiped false gods, and their presence among unbelieving people opened doors for witnessing. By being cruciformly present in the world and engaged with the neighbor, they tried to bear witness to their faith, bringing others to the faith in the true God.

These examples show the very point that has been affirmed at the beginning of this paper, that the starting point of Lutheran ecclesial identity—justification by grace through faith—leads to a proper understanding of the Church’s presence and action in the world. This core identity and the consequent presence and action of the church are captured by the term “cruciform engaged presence.” Ultimately, this cruciform engaged presence of the church in the world is intended to help the IELB to have a kind of presence in Brazilian metropolises that takes into account the reality of *favelas*.

The starting point of Lutheran ecclesial identity—justification by grace through faith—leads to a proper understanding of the Church’s presence and action in the world.

## **Overview of Lutheran Presence and Mission in Brazil**

The Lutheran Church first emerged in Brazil as the result of LCMS missionary effort in a setting very different from the reality of *favelas*. As we see how Lutherans have attended to both creaturely needs and faithfully preached the Gospel to people from a German background, we identify challenges this church body faces in the city. In the Brazilian urban context, one notices some limits in terms of crossing boundaries in terms of mission and service to other people groups.

Lutherans have faithfully attended the Two Commissions in its mission history. When Lutherans first arrived in Brazil, the Brazilian constitution allowed non-Catholics to immigrate to Brazil, but it did not permit these immigrants to publicly profess their faith. In addition to this limited tolerance, at that time, non-Catholics were less than fully citizens; Immigrant Protestants were inhabitants of Brazil but did not have access to the basic services that the state provided.<sup>29</sup> And since most immigrants had been placed in rural, isolated areas, they had to provide for themselves and organize life in their own way. Thus, they built their own schools, cemeteries, and later on also church buildings. This kind of built-environment served as the religious, social, and cultural centers of Protestant immigrants in Brazil.<sup>30</sup> In establishing these settlements or colonies in this way, the first Lutherans who inhabited Brazil focused their attention on both the preaching of the Gospel and on their creaturely needs. The

building of a church building on the one hand, and of the school and cemeteries, on the other, shows the two concerns Lutherans had.

This was the reality of many German Lutheran immigrants who received pastoral care from LCMS pastors starting in 1900. A few months after the arrival of the first LCMS missionary in Brazil, the Rev. Carl J. Broders, a congregation was organized in the colony of São Pedro<sup>31</sup> along with a parochial school.<sup>32</sup> Two years later, Rev. Wilhelm Mahler, first missionary to reside in Brazil after Broders's return to the US, started a school and then a congregation in the city of Porto Alegre, in a neighborhood where half of the dwellers were German immigrants. For Rev. Mahler, "the beginning [of a new congregation] needs to be with a school."<sup>33</sup> The same kind of effort was made when the church administration noticed that Germans were moving to the cities. When the secretary of missions of the LCMS Brazilian district heard that small numbers of German Lutherans had migrated to the metropolises of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte in the 1930s, the church sent pastors to start schools and congregations among them in these cities.<sup>34</sup> In Rio de Janeiro, Rev. Rodolfo Hasse would even go to the port which was the gateway for immigrants in Brazil and approach Teuto (German)-Russian Lutherans at the very occasion of their arrival—a strategy that resembles the "port city immigrant missions" in the LCMS.<sup>35</sup> On these occasions, the pastor first "performed services and [then] directed them to pastors of the Missourian synod in Brazil." The immigrants who were placed in southern Brazil, for instance, would enter the state through Porto Alegre, where another pastor would receive and help them.<sup>36</sup>

The Lutheran Church was responding to both Commissions toward the German Lutherans in Brazil. The pastors preached God's Word. The people gathered around the Word, built churches for this purpose, and built schools to answer the creaturely need for schooling and teaching the Catechism and German language and culture to the children. In addition, pastors provided a certain social assistance to just-arrived immigrants, along with pastoral care. The mission of the church was guided by the principle of LCMS mission efforts at the time, the so-called "home mission principle."<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the emerging church body was intentional in its mission toward German Lutherans and used well-thought-out strategies that would work for that purpose. In this sense, the Lutheran Church was being faithful both to its theology and to the task of crossing that most fundamental boundary, the boundary of sin, as the church kept preaching the Gospel, calling people to repentance and proclaiming the forgiveness of sins daily.

But what about the crossing of geographic and cultural boundaries to preach to those from a different background and context? How did the church attend this commission toward other, non-German urban dwellers, for which the crossing of cultural, geographic, and social boundaries is necessary?

The assessment of the Lutheran Church's mission practices made by church historians and Brazilian theologians reveals limits regarding the crossing of these boundaries due to a strong self-preservationist (immigrant) mentality. American church historian F. Dean Lueking says that in São Pedro, "There was no . . . language, cultural or theological barriers to cross. Men could move from a rural Nebraska parish post to rural Brazilian pastorate without a break in their assumptions and practices."<sup>38</sup> In this historian's assessment, the strong German ecclesial culture brought from the homeland and preserved in that isolated colony facilitated a mission work that did not require the crossing of a cultural boundary.<sup>39</sup>

Another church historian, Brazilian scholar Paulo Buss, assesses the work of the church during a period of strong urbanization in Brazil, and reports the difficulty the church had to cross cultural and geographic boundaries. In reporting on the church's mission in the 1950s, Buss lists a few challenges to the church's indigenization. One of these challenges was "Germanism." This problem regards the maintenance of the German language in a time and place where to speak German was not only unnecessary but

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also a cultural barrier for outsiders. In addition, Buss also lists what he calls the church's "rural option" and a certain "regionalism."<sup>40</sup> The historian notes how the Brazilian Missouri district had intentionally focused on rural areas. He quotes a representative of the LCMS, Rev. Harold Ott, who wrote a report after visiting Brazil, criticizing the Brazilian district: "To maintain the church ruralized is considered the ideal; to drive the work into the cities is considered a dangerous tendency."<sup>41</sup> The Brazilian district was then failing to cross geographic boundaries in its mission efforts. In the perception of Rev. Ott, the IELB seemed more concerned with its self-preservation than with reaching out to the massive population of migrants moving to metropolises.

The other problem listed by the historian—"regionalism"—regards the tendency of the church to focus its work on the southern region of Brazil, on the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, where most of the German immigrants were located, and where German was more predominantly spoken. This geographic penchant shows that concern with preserving congregational work among German Lutherans led to the problematic neglect of those unreached with the Gospel in the massive population of Brazilian metropolises.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1990s, pastors and theologians of the IELB started voicing the criticism that the IELB had moved to the city but had made little or no effort to become an urban

church. Recent efforts by the São Paulo Seminary faculty toward forming an urban missiology strongly emphasized the importance of crossing boundaries to carry out the mission of the church in Brazilian cities while recognizing that the IELB had failed to do so throughout its history.

A few examples demonstrate this point. In 1992, Leonardo Neitzel, then a professor of the seminary in São Paulo, published an article on the church's motto—"Christ for All"—and said that, "it points to the mercy of God in Christ reaching out to all people indiscriminately, crossing cultural, social and geographic boundaries." The article ends stating that the IELB should change from a "*Deutschekirche* to a *Volkskirche* on Brazilian soil." What Neitzel was then saying is that for the IELB to carry out its mission inspired by its motto, the church needed to cross boundaries. About ten years later, Neitzel assessed the IELB's major mission strategies and pointed out that, "one still can notice the necessity of a stronger commitment of the congregation, the local leadership, and support so that the strategy may go beyond the families of the church and incorporate other families of the social community in the neighborhood."<sup>43</sup> What is implicit in these words is that in the early 2000s the church was still failing to cross the geographic, social, and cultural boundaries to fully address the challenges of urban Brazil.

IELB has been faithful to its theology regarding serving as an instrument to crossing the boundary of sin among German Lutherans. But a strong concern for self-preservation limited the Church's action toward other people groups. Should the church take seriously the two Commissions when directed toward the needs of the urban neighbors of a different ethnicity, social status, and culture? Our theology, as shown above, says "yes."

But what about the reality of *favelas* in particular? As already indicated, *favelas* represent one of the most difficult challenges to the Lutheran Church in Brazil. In this recent effort toward forming an urban missiology, *favelas* are listed as one more problem that results from urbanization, but no specific attempt toward understanding and engaging this reality can be noticed. This does not mean that local congregations and their pastors have never done any mission work in *favelas*. In fact, this researcher has noticed that many faithful pastors and church leaders have tried to develop some kind of mission work in these urban living spaces.

Uninformed in respect to the complex cultural and social reality, these efforts usually ended up limited to working with those already Lutheran living close by. Cultural and social boundaries were hindrances to the Gospel, to some extent. To fully account for the reality of *favelas* in the Church's mission thinking and practice, congregations need to be aware of *favelas*' cultural and social dynamics. To this complex reality we turn now, to show how the cruciform engaged presence of the church can help cross social, cultural, and geographic boundaries.

## **An Overview of *Favelas* and the Lutheran Church's Identity and Mission**

At the turn of the nineteenth century, while the school and church buildings and cemeteries were arising in rural Brazil as the immigrants' response to their own needs, an urban built-environment for sheltering impoverished people began to emerge at the slope of hills and riverbanks in Brazil's southeastern metropolises. In 1897, the first *favela* arose in Rio de Janeiro when former soldiers of the Brazilian Army, who had been promised urban land at the occasion of their enlistment, returned from their military service to the capital to receive the promised place.

The Brazilian government failed to fulfill this promise, and the soldiers were then authorized by their commanders to build temporary shelter for themselves and their families at the slope of the *Providência* hill, located near the army headquarters. The problem, however, is that the promise was never fulfilled, and other impoverished people joined those former soldiers, increasing that kind of housing arrangement.

With time, the precarious, temporary habitations developed and became permanent.<sup>44</sup> People first aim at having a space for shelter for their families, and so start building wherever they find urban land that is not under real-estate speculation, like the slope of hills and riverbanks. In order to build something, people first use fragments of material they find. Later, once the person is able to afford adequate materials, he or she begins replacing the old fragments, enlarging and improving the "shack." As a result, a single *favela* where thousands of people live can combine very precarious shacks with brick houses, creating a strong spatial diversity that embodies their social and cultural diversity.<sup>45</sup>

These living spaces called *favelas* have increased and spread throughout the country since its first beginning. Brazil's biggest metropolises serve as an example of this. Today, the city of São Paulo has about 12 million people, including 1.2 million *favela* dwellers, and the growth rate of the *favelas* is higher than the growth of the rest of the city (2.2 percent each year in contrast to 1.9 percent, respectively).<sup>46</sup> The same phenomenon is happening in Rio de Janeiro, where there are 6.3 million people, and *favela* dwellers already make up 18 percent of the population.<sup>47</sup>

Many Brazilian scholars have already offered detailed historical accounts about the emergence, development, and increase of *favelas*.<sup>48</sup> Also the limits and strengths of different kinds of sociological lenses have been documented.<sup>49</sup> This section, while informed by this sociological scholarly conversation, looks at *favelas* in a way that reveals some of their basic characteristics and cultural dynamics which configure challenges to address or boundaries to cross.

## **Favelas' Cultural Dynamics**

In order to cross the existing cultural boundaries to enable congregations to engage the reality of *favelas* in mission, it is necessary to understand the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity present in these living spaces. In addition, while this reality is very diverse in many aspects, *favela* dwellers in general cultivate a common strong relational culture which is embodied in the built-environment. This relational way of living helps people face times of difficulties, the problem of poverty, and the fear of violence related to drugs. These are important aspects to consider when thinking about congregational presence in *favelas* to preach the Gospel and attend to the needs of people.

First of all, why are *favelas* considered spaces of high ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity? A high percentage of *favela* dwellers today is made up of migrants coming from many different regions of Brazil. One study indicates that 52 percent of *favela* dwellers in São Paulo are migrants from different regions, most of them being from Northeastern Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro, this number is 29 percent.<sup>50</sup> This fact indicates that *favelas* have a strong ethnic and cultural diversity because they represent the many cultures spread throughout Brazil, a country of continental size. The same study also shows that the *favela*-diverse demography entails ethnic and religious diversity as well. While today (2014) 67 percent of *favela* dwellers are “black [sic],” the rest consists of people from many different backgrounds, including Italian and German descendants.<sup>51</sup> In terms of religion, the majority of people in these urban spaces are Roman Catholics, charismatic Pentecostals, and Afro-Brazilian spiritists.

These data show that entering this reality as congregations differs significantly from entering the monoculture of German immigrants in Brazil, like the territory Rev. Broders entered in São Pedro. Entering *favelas* for mission purposes is different also from the situation in which pastors sought out German descendants living in Brazilian cities and where they could first build a school as a missionary strategy, or a church building, or a church hall, establishing a well-ordered space, in comparison with the surrounding reality of Brazilian cities. To enter the reality of *favelas*

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requires a theology that leads neither to escapism, be it isolationist or self-preservationist escapism, nor ideals of transforming the culture into a “Christian culture.” The cruciform engaged presence is what this paper proposes for this task. But before showing how this theology and the kind of presence that flows from it can help

to cross boundaries and engage this diverse reality, it is necessary to see another important characteristic of *favelas*.

In spite of all the diversity present in *favelas*, there is one common cultural thread among *favela* dwellers that deserves attention for the present purpose, namely, the strong relational culture cultivated in these living spaces and embodied in the built-environment.

Consider, for instance, how the characteristics of houses and the spaces between them embody and foster a relational culture. An example from a particular house of a *favela* in the city of São Paulo makes this point. This is a description made by the Brazilians Renato Meirelles and Celso Athayde, both former dwellers in these living spaces:

The ground floor is archaic, [because its style] is a thing of the 1980s, the work of the couple. There is a second floor, [with a] better workmanship, whose walls exhibit another type of brick, and a grouting very well done. [That] is the dimension [or space] of the children [of the couple]. In the turn of the century, however, the grandchildren also wanted some retreat and privacy. In the house which, like a tree, grew toward the skies, now there is a third floor. This one now has plaster on the walls; it is a manifestation of esteem and respect for the boys.<sup>52</sup>

Notice that the construction of this particular house was verticalized and enlarged to accommodate more than one generation in the same house, which is very common in *favelas*. Houses with such characteristics reveal what is usually called an extended family structure which is characteristic of a relational culture and important to be considered here.

This relational culture is reflected not only in the residences but also in the common spaces, the spaces in between the constructions. Because the pattern of building is informal and according to one's economic conditions and the size of the family, the spaces between houses form alleys where people walk and interact. These spaces serve as spaces of intense social interaction: "neighborhood relationships [are] marked by intense sociability, with a strong valorization of common spaces as place of co-living."<sup>53</sup> Notice again that the apparent precarious space for circulation is seen from the perspective of *favela* dwellers as a place for cultivation of relationships with the neighbor next door who is probably from another background.

This relational culture embodied on the built-environment also leads people to work together to overcome difficulties or accomplish projects. Consider the observations of Ruben Georg Oliven, in *Anthropology of Urban Groups*. Objecting to the view that the city necessarily fragments community life and leads to individualism by necessity, he mentions the experience of migrants to the city of São Paulo, where people built their houses in the peripheries through *mutirões* ("popular joined efforts").

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In these *mutirões*, groups of neighbors would come together to help one another, and the way to pay back for the help received would be to join the group again when another neighbor would need help.<sup>54</sup> This is another aspect to be considered in the Church's answer to the first Great Commission, which will receive attention shortly.

This relational culture used as a social strategy to answer *favelas* dwellers' needs is also of extreme importance to create a safe network to face violence related to drugs. In spite of the prejudices of the larger society, most of the people in *favelas* are normal, hardworking people who just want to raise their kids to be good citizens. But they happen to share common spaces with drug dealers who often recruit the kids for trafficking drugs. In the face of this reality, one wonders about the following question: how can these people live and feel safe in such an environment? Brazilian Sociologist Cristina Vital da Cunha wrote a book as an answer to this very question. She demonstrates that the relationships people have in *favelas* sometimes are the only ones that make them feel safe.<sup>55</sup> People create a network of relationships that helps solve internal conflicts and allows the people to be aware of when confrontations among drug dealer groups will take place. This means that, when one visits a *favela*, it is always better to be with someone from the community and walk side by side with this dweller, who will help build such a network. The experience of this researcher (who is also a pastor engaged in a *favela* in São Paulo in mission work with his congregation) is that, with time, to walk with a dweller is no longer necessary. Still, relationships are always of extreme importance.

One could say that relationships are important today in any mission field, as contemporary urban missiology has already stressed.<sup>56</sup> This is important for the IELB to consider as it intends to have an engaged presence in the city in a way that takes seriously the complexity of *favelas*. Exploration of the social, physical, and cultural reality of *favelas* reveals, advancing the urban missiology's reflection, that for the church to build this kind of relationships and engage the relational culture of *favelas*, congregations need to attend the following points: (a) they need a theological understanding of cultures that values cultural diversity while still rejects whatever opposes God's will; (b) they need pastors and leaders who spend time with people in *favelas*, who are willing to work with the people in addressing the first Commission concerns; and (c) congregations' leaders and pastors need to be willing to walk alongside a dweller for orientation and safety purposes.

One way of starting to move toward these urban missional practices, while being faithful to the core Lutheran ecclesial identity, is through the cruciform engaged presence of the church in *favelas*.

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faithful to the core Lutheran ecclesial identity, is through the cruciform engaged presence of the church in *favelas*.

### **The Cruciform Engaged Presence of the Lutheran Church in *Favelas***

The cruciform presence of the church in the world emphasizes our relationship with God in which we are passively born into a community of faith, but this emphasis does not neglect our presence in the world through which the church looks at the reality of the neighbor and acts in love. In addition, this kind of presence is not triumphalist, but cruciform. As indicated above, “cruciform” also evokes Luther’s theology of the cross, which affirms God’s presence not only within creation in general but also in particular places in the world as the Word encounters sinners, even in the midst of suffering and misery (as the cross event does not let one forget). Therefore, what drives congregations to *favelas* is not a pretentious attempt to transform the culture; nor does it attempt to impose one. Rather, congregations can be present in *favelas* to serve as God’s instruments so that the Word continues encountering sinners where they are, and so that God’s creaturely gifts can be welcomed and shared.

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### **The Cruciform Presence and the Relational Culture of *Favelas***

To look at the reality of *favelas* in light of the understanding that human life is cruciform leads congregations to recognize that human beings are relational beings—in relationship with God and with creation, vertically and horizontally. This means, first, that congregations do not neglect that their distinctive task is the preaching of the Gospel, which is the only means by which the Spirit kindles faith in people’s hearts so that their relationship with the Creator may be restored. In addition, to affirm the vertical dimension as part of what it means to be a human creature helps one understand the religious diversity in *favelas* while indicating that the church needs to continuously preach. The fact that we are relational beings vertically implies that we are essentially religious with the result that humans either believe the true God or create their own gods to fill the void left by the separation from the Creator as the result of sin. To understand the religious diversity in *favelas* within this dimension is

important because it prevents one from thinking of all religious expressions in *favelas* as mere cultural diversity which belongs to the horizontal dimension. Of course, one's belief system often is reflected in some cultural practices. The present point does not deny this fact. The point is to avoid the danger of situating idolatrous religious expressions within the ambit of human culture, with the result that the sin of idolatry is no longer called out as such. The cruciform life postulates that we are relational beings also in the horizontal dimension, and this leads congregations to cultivate good relationships wherever they are and, more importantly, to value the relational culture fostered and embodied in *favelas*. Congregations which intend to engage this reality in mission need to spend time with people to build relationships. If a congregation is working toward planting a church in a *favela*,

Congregations which intend to engage this reality in mission need to spend time with people to build relationships.

its pastor and leaders need to be present there not only during the worship service when the Word is being preached and the Sacraments administered; they need to be present there also to talk to people, to hear their stories, or merely to play soccer with the youth. The experience of pastors who have worked in *favelas* has shown that pastoral care sometimes begins on the soccer field, because it is there where the kids perceive the pastor as someone who can be trusted. Of course, good interpersonal relationships do not make one a Christian and are not the distinct criterion to determine the existence of the Church in a particular place; it is only through the Word that God does it all. But it is important to recall that through the Creed we affirm life and presence in creation. Characteristics of our humanity such as being a relational creature are of great importance for the church to better envision the scope of God's mission and the church's participation in it. By not neglecting the importance of presence and relationships and by God's power, pastors may be able to continue the pastoral care started while playing soccer, now during the sermon, having the same youth present in the church during a service. When congregations value the horizontal relationships of the cruciform life, they are enabled to make an effort to build relationships with people, establishing the church's presence in mission in *favelas*.

The importance of building relationships in this cultural setting, as just shown, is also a matter of safety. Although this is not a theological point, the presence of the church in a *favela* partially depends on understanding this point. In the sociological work of Cunha,<sup>57</sup> she notes that Charismatic Pentecostals today have a strong presence in *favelas*, while other traditions are, in general, absent. The sociologist does not intend to answer the reasons for this absence primarily, but her argument helps one understand it. She explains that many in society, including Christian groups, have assimilated a view of life that is typical of modern societies, a view that would explain the absence. In such societies, most of the citizens rely on the presence of the state

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through the police around their homes and workplaces or on security technology in order to feel safe. If they cannot rely on either of these two mechanisms in a certain place, people avoid being there. Now, since in a *favela* one cannot rely on either of the two, people avoid *favelas*. This then would explain why these two traditions (Lutherans included) in general are not present in *favelas*.

Notice, therefore, why the church's presence in these living spaces to some extent depends on building relationships to carry out its mission. Sometimes theological discussions neglect these sociological aspects because the distinctive criterion to identify the existence of the church in a particular place is the Word and the Sacraments being faithfully preached and administered according to Scripture. But this sociological aspect reveals that without interpersonal relationships there is not anyone to preach, as the church becomes absent from *favelas* because of the fear of violence. If congregations neglect the horizontal dimension of the cruciform life and the characteristics of our humanity, which Luther teaches us to be thankful for in the First Article, this neglect hinders the distinctive task of the church, the preaching of the Gospel.

This neglect may explain why the faithful response to the two commissions toward the Germans did not go beyond the cultural boundaries in the city. Lutherans of the IELB are not against reaching out to people from another background. Quite the opposite, one can see tears in the eyes of Lutherans when congregations baptize and receive someone from a different background who had not been received in God's kingdom as a child. But the fundamental emphasis on the passive nature of our relationship with God often becomes the only object of attention in theology and practice, neglecting important aspects of life in the world toward the neighbor. Through the understanding of life as cruciform, congregations can be reminded that they live by the Word before God and share the Word with others before the world.

The value of the relational culture existent in *favelas* can be welcomed and cultivated by Lutheran congregations because of the understanding of life as cruciform and the affirmation of engaged presence in the world confessed by the Creed.

The fundamental emphasis on the passive nature of our relationship with God often becomes the only object of attention in theology and practice, neglecting important aspects of life in the world toward the neighbor. Through the understanding of life as cruciform, congregations can be reminded that they live by the Word before God and share the Word with others before the world.

## **Congregational Engagement in *Favelas* and the First Great Commission**

One of the points drawn from the exploration of the relational culture in *favelas* was that this way of living helps people respond to some of their own creaturely needs, and this is of great importance in the Church's answer to the first Great Commission. As the reader may recall, many *favela* houses are built by popular joint effort of mutual help (*mutirões*). But how should this influence a congregation's actions in *favelas*? To put this concisely, congregations should learn how to work WITH people and not merely do social work TO or FOR them.

Congregations should learn how to work WITH people and not merely do social work TO or FOR them.

Answering the first Great Commission in a way that accounts for this relational way of responding to their needs help congregations avoid falling into paternalistic relationships. This is important because Christian institutional presence in *favelas* often is limited to social action that falls into these problems. One of the criticisms of Christian work raised by sociological researchers is the fact that often Christian denominations act as if *favela* dwellers were the mere object of the church's piety and charity. But as the exploration above reveals, these dwellers cultivate ways of life that counter their hardships in life. Therefore, as the church enters this reality, it would be wiser to use the same way of answering their creaturely needs. While people may use this social strategy, not always do they have the financial and human resources to solve all their problems. This means in practical terms that the leaders of congregations can try to identify areas in which the congregation can work WITH the people to answer perceived needs without local people neglecting their own responsibilities in the face of personal and community problems. This is important at all levels from an individual improving one's own house by joining the *mutirões* or raising resources for it, on the one hand, to helping in care for local schools or offering school tutoring, on the other. This is where the good use of reason becomes important in the decision process about the course of action to be taken.

Another characteristic of *favelas* is the strong ethnic and cultural diversity. Quantitative research has shown that *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are formed by migrants from all regions of Brazil, people from different ethnic backgrounds. Now, it is possible to understand the data qualitatively from a theological perspective by applying the theology offered under the first Great Commission.

The fact that people from all over Brazil came to live in *favelas* implies that they brought their particular cultures with them. This means that *favela* dwellers have many cultural tastes, sing and enjoy music through many different instruments and rhythms, and in addition organize community life in different ways. All these elements, when viewed in light of the First Article can be understood as part of God's good creaturely

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gifts. Just as Lutherans in rural Brazil organized themselves according to the culture brought from the homeland, the creaturely gifts of *favela* dwellers can be put to the service of facilitating the preaching of the Gospel in that locality, with the result that all in that emerging community of faith may “fully obtain daily forgiveness of sins.” Congregations intentionally engage this reality to serve and share the Gospel, just as the church did when the focus of their missionary effort was to establish Lutheran congregations among German Lutherans throughout Brazil.

This reflection on cultural diversity from a theological perspective affects organizing a new congregation arising in a *favela*, from how the church building can be used to answer the creaturely needs of people to how local leaders need to be chosen and trained. This reflection speaks to the how-question of ecclesiology—how to be a Lutheran Church in mission in *favelas*. The affirmation of the cultural characteristics of *favelas* can inflect those aspects that are more closely related to the distinct task of the church as congregations answer the second Great Commission.

### **Congregational Engagement in *Favelas* and the Second Great Commission**

The major cultural characteristic of *favelas* identified above—the strong relational culture—shapes strategy and sheds the light of theological reflection on aspects related to contextualization. One widespread mission strategy used in the IELB is handing out of pamphlets in the streets. To hand pamphlets was part of the mission strategy when mission work was oriented primarily toward German immigrants. In the “port city immigrant missions” mentioned above, pamphlets written in German would be handed to the just-arrived immigrants who could read and identify themselves as Lutherans.<sup>58</sup> The strategy then was very helpful. Today, handing pamphlets can still be useful for what one could call in-transit evangelistic activity, handing of material to those on the move, at train and metro stations in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in their daily (in-a-rush) commute. In this case, people do not have time to stop and talk, and usually are suspicious of strangers that engage them in conversation. To these people under this circumstance, this strategy may be helpful, if the purpose is that more people have access to God’s written Word.

But in a strong relational culture like in *favelas*, the strategy might not be as helpful. This strategy presupposes the literacy of people and that everyone likes to receive such a material for free. But this assumption should not be brought to a *favela* (maybe neither to any place in Brazilian cities), because not everyone can read in this context, and because the strategy might send the wrong message that the church wants people to believe the Gospel but is not willing to relate to them closely. This method would be problematic in any relational culture. But if congregations put their effort primarily to the building of relationships, then to give a Bible, a devotional book, or even a simple pamphlet, explaining how to use such written material might be very

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positive. In this second case, the material given would be perceived as real gift from someone with whom the receiver has a good relationship, as resulting from a relation mediated by trust.

And finally, the cultural characteristics treated above shed light on other, more crucial points. One of the appropriate concerns that faithful Christians have when they are crossing cultures to preach the Gospel is that, in the attempt to communicate the biblical message in a way that people can understand, the biblical teaching might end up being adapted to the culture in such a way that the Gospel is made captive to that culture. The same concern should be the object of the church's attention when entering the reality of *favelas*. As mentioned above, there is the danger that religious expressions which embody idolatry are viewed as horizontal, cultural aspects. This particular danger is avoided when the proper distinctions of the cruciform life are made. But still, how exactly can congregations engage *favelas* in mission in a way that the Gospel is not made captive to the culture?

Considering the elements of cultural diversity mentioned above as part of God's good creaturely gifts sheds light on how pastors can develop their work so that the Gospel is not made captive to any culture, neither to their own culture nor to another. If cultures can be understood primarily as God's good gifts, as part of the First Article and of humankind's exercise of dominion over the creation, the primary concern when IELB Lutherans enter new cultural contexts should not be to plant a congregation that will mirror congregations of southern Brazil in every way. This would create a transcultural uniformity that elevates the cultural gifts of those who preach at the expense of the gifts of the receivers of the Gospel. Because of what Lutherans confess in the Creed, they should not deny or reject the cultural gifts they encounter in their mission outreach. The what-question of ecclesiology implies that the church must be organized so that "everyone may fully obtain daily forgiveness of sins," centered in the Word (proclaimed and visible); this does not mean that the how-question of ecclesiology has to be answered in a way that the receivers of the Gospel need to overcome cultural boundaries to be part of the church. Of course, people's daily practices will probably change as the Commandments are explained, and they learn that we need to hear God's Word weekly and meditate on it daily. But their cultural gifts do not need to be replaced by cultural gifts from another culture, when such gifts do not deny or reject God's design for human life in either dimension.

Pastors can develop their work so that the Gospel is not made captive to any culture, neither to their own culture nor to another.

This means that, in the face of the reality of *favelas*, in trying to deliver a message that is faithful to Scriptures and in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions'

understanding of them, the preacher and his congregation do not need to create another challenge, namely, the challenge of making the very diverse community of *favela* cross boundaries related to music, rhythm, instruments, perceptions of beauty, or taste. This self-imposed challenge would run the risk of making the Gospel captive to another culture's external things. It is more faithful to our confession of the Creed and the understanding of human life as cruciform to use the creaturely gifts of culture already present in *favelas* regarding these external things.

Some examples below can help focus on those which are the most important things to avoid so that the church's message does not become captive to any culture (either the culture of the receivers or of the senders of the message). Pastors and congregations do not need to be concerned about how long it will take for a person in the *favela* to want to learn how to play the organ, and then to have the means to study the instrument and then, finally, to know how to play it. Rather, pastors will be able to focus their attention on how during the order of the service the new community of believers being born by the Gospel can sing led by their own musical instruments with words that give "glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," and can use their gifts and firmly believing that Christian Lutheran worship expresses God's love for all and the believers' love for God and for all people. Pastors may have to spend more time at the beginning of the mission work to prepare an order of service that is Trinitarian and Christocentric in a way that speaks to their minds and hearts. Pastors may need to spend more time teaching that it is important for everyone to be there when the service begins, even if it starts a little later than planned. And the reason for this is that the beginning of the service is when pastors, on behalf of Christ, not only inform people about how to find forgiveness in Christ but also forgives them, as if Christ were doing it Himself. To focus on this would help also to emphasize for them that the starting point of a Lutheran service is God coming to us and encountering us, sinners, where we are, in our sin and in our culture.

In other words, to reflect about an ecclesial Lutheran identity and the reality of *favelas* requires that those elements which shape the heart of biblical teaching and of Lutheran theology are properly distinguished from those elements which are part of God's good creaturely gifts. Through the cruciform engaged presence of the church in *favelas*, this can be done in a way that cultural, social, and geographic boundaries are crossed, and the starting point of Lutheran ecclesial identity—by grace through faith—from which flows "true forms of worship," is faithfully preserved.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a presentation at the 7th International Lutheran Council World Seminaries Conference in Baguio City, Philippines, in October 2019. An earlier version was published in *Igreja Lutheran, Revista de Teologia do Seminario Concordia* 81(2020). *LMM*

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thanks Concordia Seminary, São Paulo, and the editor of the journal, Rev. Dr. Anselmo Graff, for sharing the article.

<sup>2</sup> Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2009), 23.

<sup>3</sup> This paper presupposes Kevin Vanhoozer's definition of culture in terms of "works and worlds of meaning." In Vanhoozer's understanding, culture is the result of human activity and, at the same time, the framework for this activity. It means that we shape cultures and cultures shape us. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), Loc. 279, Kindle edition.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Lectures on Galatians* (1535), Vol. 26 (Philadelphia: Fortress; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1963), AE 26:7.

<sup>5</sup> According to Kolb, this distinction is rooted in Luther's sermons already in 1518 and 1519 and can be identified throughout the reformer's career mainly in his lectures on the Bible and in his sermons. The mature expression of this twofold distinction in Luther's theology can be seen in the reformer's 1535 Galatian commentary. See Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness; Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* XIII (1999): 449–66. Arand has also demonstrated the trajectory of this two-dimensional theology in Luther's thinking and the importance of this framework in the Lutheran Confessions. These scholars have co-authored a book in which these two dimensions of human life are more fully developed as a theological anthropology. Robert Kolb and Charles Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology. A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> "The Small Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 354.

<sup>7</sup> Small Catechism, 355.

<sup>8</sup> Small Catechism, 355.

<sup>9</sup> Small Catechism, 354.

<sup>10</sup> "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 433, 435.

<sup>11</sup> Small Catechism, 355.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26:28.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), Vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), AE 31:53.

<sup>14</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26:28, 29.

<sup>15</sup> See Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Theology of the Cross," *Lutheran Quarterly* XVI (2002): 443–66. See also Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross, Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Small Catechism, 355.

<sup>17</sup> Large Catechism, 438.

<sup>18</sup> Large Catechism, 438.

<sup>19</sup> Large Catechism, 440.

<sup>20</sup> For a deeper analysis of the relations between these elements in Luther's theology, see Charles Arand, *That I May Be His Own* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011), and Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther's Catechism: Creed* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 113.

- <sup>22</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Lectures on Genesis* (1535), Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958), AE 1:204, 311.
- <sup>23</sup> Robert Kolb, "Called to Milk Cows and Govern Kingdoms: Martin Luther's Teaching on the Christian's Vocations," *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 133–4.
- <sup>24</sup> Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 412.
- <sup>25</sup> Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 114.
- <sup>26</sup> Charles Arand, "A Two-Dimensional Understanding of the Church for the Twenty-First Century," *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 2 (April 2007): 163.
- <sup>27</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Lectures on Genesis* (1535), Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1960), AE 2:363.
- <sup>28</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, AE 2:332.
- <sup>29</sup> Oscar Jose Beozzo, "As Igrejas e a Imigração," in *Imigrações e História da Igreja no Brasil*, Martin N. Dreher, org. (Aparecida: Santuário, 1993), 32–33.
- <sup>30</sup> Beozzo, "As Igrejas e a Imigração," 51.
- <sup>31</sup> Mario Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda: A História da Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil*, Vol. 1 (Porto Alegre: Concórdia, 2003), 63–65.
- <sup>32</sup> Four years later, the first synodical district of the LCMS in Brazil was founded. Rehfeldt offers a detailed account of this event. He recalls that on June 25, 1904, the new district was named *Der Brasilianische District der deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten*. See Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 63–65.
- <sup>32</sup> Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 51–52.
- <sup>34</sup> Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 123–125.
- <sup>35</sup> F. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making: The Missionary Enterprise Among Missouri Synod Lutherans 1846–1963* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 59–63.
- <sup>36</sup> Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 123–125.
- <sup>37</sup> This principle was primarily intended to gather, preserve, or generate orthodox Lutheranism among German Lutheran immigrants spread throughout the world. See Lueking, *Mission in the Making*, 175. See also the concept of "Inner Missio" in August R. Swelldow, ed., *Heritage in Motion* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1998), 316–18, and Rehfeldt's description of the first fifty years of LCMS mission in Brazil. Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 7–12.
- <sup>38</sup> Lueking, *Mission in the Making*, 181.
- <sup>39</sup> Even in the formation of the first Lutheran congregation among former slaves in 1926, one can notice that the first step toward crossing cultural boundaries was taken by the receivers of the Gospel. It was in the colony of *Solidex*. This mission work started in 1919, when a member of a community of former slaves named Manuel Leal would stand by the door of a small chapel used by German Lutherans. The man would stand there to listen to the songs and the preaching. The man knew a bit of German and could understand the message because former slaves used to work for German farmers in that colony. See Ricardo Willy Rieth, "Evangélicos de 'alma Branca': os negros e o protestantismo no Brasil" in HOCK, Ingelore Starke. (Org.) *Brasil: outros 500. Protestantismo e resistência indígena, negra e popular* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal/EST, 1999), 172–200, and Dilza Porto Gonçalves, *A Memória na Construção de Identidades Étnicas: Um Estudo Sobre as Relações Entre "Alemães" e "Negros" em Canguçu* (master's thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, 2008), 62–64.
- <sup>40</sup> Paulo Buss, *Um Grão de Mostarda: A História da Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil*, Vol. 2 (Porto Alegre: Concórdia, 2000), 42.
- <sup>41</sup> Buss, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 42.
- <sup>42</sup> Buss, *Um Grão de Mostarda*, 42.
- <sup>43</sup> Leonardo Neitzel, "A Missão da IELB," *Vox Concordiana* 8, no. 2 (1992): 13–21.

<sup>44</sup> Alfredo Pereira de Queiroz Filho, "Sobre as Origens da Favela," *Mercator* 10, no. 23 (September/December 2011): 33–48.

<sup>45</sup> Paola Berenstein Jacques, "Estética das Favelas," *Vitruvius* 2, June 2001, Seção 1. <http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/02.013/883>.

<sup>46</sup> Ivanir Ferreira, "Estudo Mapeia Condições de Faveas em São Paulo." *Jornal da USP*, February 2, 2017, <http://jornal.usp.br/ciencias/ciencias-humanas/estudo-mapeia-condicoes-das-favelas-em-sao-paulo/>.

<sup>47</sup> Licia do Prado Valladares, *A Invenção da Favela: Do Mito de Origem a favela.com* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2005), 13.

<sup>48</sup> For a list of works on this topic, see Valladares's work, *A Invenção da Favela: Do mito de origem à favela.com*.

<sup>49</sup> When one uses sociological dualistic ways of understanding Brazilian society, the so-called theories of contrast in sociology, one ends up creating the binary opposition "city versus favela." Valladares, *A Invenção da Favela*, Introduction.

<sup>50</sup> Renato Meirelles and Celso Athayde, *Um País Chamado Favela* (São Paulo: Editora Gente, 2014), 33.

<sup>51</sup> Meirelles and Athayde, *Um País Chamado Favela*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> Meirelles and Athayde, *Um País Chamado Favela*, 156.

<sup>53</sup> Jailson de Souza Silva and Jorge Luiz Barbosa, eds., *O Que é a Favela, Afinal?* (Rio de Janeiro: Observatório de Favelas, 2009), 23.

<sup>54</sup> Ruben George Oliven, *A Antropologia de Grupos Urbanos* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2007), 39.

<sup>55</sup> In her ethnographic research, Vital da Cunha found that the state is usually either absent or perceived as bringing more violence to *favelas* as far as the police are concerned. Christina Vital da Cunha, *Oração de Traficante* (Rio Comprido: Editora Garamond, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> See Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014) and Gea Gort, *God in the City: A Missional Way of Life in an Urban Context* (n.p.: Harpon Digital, n.d.), Loc. 307, Kindle edition. These books exemplify this emphasis on relationships.

<sup>57</sup> Cunha, *Oração de Traficante*, Introduction, 121–123, 185.

<sup>58</sup> Lueking, *Mission in the Making*, 59–63.

# Encountering Mission

## Counterintuitive Grace

Herbert Hoefler

**Abstract:** Especially in the Lutheran tradition, we are immersed in the awareness of God's grace. However, we need to understand that for those of other religions, the governing principle of grace is highly confusing and incomprehensible. Of course, the counterintuitive nature of God's graciousness is also what can break through the other's worldview and into the freedom and relief of the gospel.

Grace is a very counterintuitive concept. Very often we who have been raised in the Christian tradition don't realize how radical it is. Grace runs directly contrary to our intuitive sense of justice and fairness: You should get what you deserve.

Yet, grace is the central theme of the entire biblical narrative. From the Garden of Eden to the fumbling patriarchs to the "stiff-necked" Hebrews to the righteous Deuteronomic laws to the prophetic promises to Incarnation and life and words of Jesus to the Pauline epistles, God's unfailing love and forgiveness is the governing theme. God doesn't give us what we deserve. He has compassion to the extent of taking upon Himself what we deserved.

How does such an understanding of God mesh with the narrative in other religions? In other religions, you get what you deserve, and it makes sense. Whether it is through karma or divine judgment or self-judgment or reincarnation or vengeful spirits, justice will be done. We find that psychologically satisfying (especially in reference to other people). The threat of repercussions keeps people under control. Our gospel message is counterintuitive. It doesn't make sense, even considered offensive and dangerous.

Grace is an assurance, a promise, a certainty. Grace is a reality that does not depend upon us. It is an undeserved gift. Even among Christians, the reality of grace



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often has a fragile hold. Most hope they are good enough to be saved. Some kind of a purgatory makes sense. We want to create and have a religion that makes sense to us rationally. It is counterintuitive that justice would be effected by God on Himself in Christ's suffering and death so that grace might prevail for us.

Of course, there are themes of grace in other religions. However, what is distinctive in Christian theology is that grace is the governing principle—in theological terms, the “crux.” For Martin Luther, grace was the heart of the whole Reformation effort. His “*sola gratia*” (“grace alone”) principle was so determinative that he eliminated seven New Testament books in the canon of his German translation because they did not present the concept of grace adequately, in his opinion.

It is counterintuitive that justice would be effected by God on Himself in Christ's suffering and death so that grace might prevail for us.

What is the governing principle in other religions? In Islam it is the awareness of God's judgment. We are called to obedience to his laws, and all our deeds are being recorded. One day we will be called to judgement before him on the basis of our deeds. Muslims will hope in God's mercy, but they don't know. They don't have the assurance of grace. Christian theology certainly has the awareness of Judgment Day, but it is not a day of uncertainty or fear. It is a day of celebration because of God's redemptive action for us in Christ.

In Hinduism, the governing principle is karma. Every action has its consequences, both good and bad, if not in this lifetime then in the next. Certainly, there are examples of grace in the Hindu scriptures and appeals to deities and rishis in popular Hinduism. But there is not the certainty as in the gospel message. Similarly, references to karmic thought are there in the biblical narrative: with the man born blind in John 9:2, “Whatever a man sows he will reap” (Gal 6:7). Even passages such as Romans 2:6, Matthew 16:27, and Revelation 14:13 might be interpreted as karmic, from that worldview. Yet, the final and governing word is one of forgiveness and grace in and through Jesus.

How, then, do we communicate a message that is so counterintuitive? I think we do it as a message of relief. So much of life depends on us. It is a heavy burden of obligations and responsibilities. When we understand God is one of ultimate compassion, we comprehend that He wants to lift those burdens from us. Even to take them upon Himself, as a loving heavenly Father, a self-sacrificing elder Brother, a guiding inner Spirit. Our attitude is one of joy and confidence and certainty, in Him.

Our message is “God is love,” with all of its radical, counterintuitive implications, His unmerited grace toward us in Christ.

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# Θεραπεία and שְׁלוֹמַי a Biblical View of Wholistic Mission

Tim Norton

**Abstract:** Two words describe Jesus' mission like no other: Θεραπεία and שְׁלוֹמַי. By deliberately focusing on these concepts from Jesus' ministry, missionaries can address the traumas that Native North Americans have experienced.

Serving among Native Americans, the first thing I noticed in my missionary life is the high degree of trauma and socially maladaptive behaviors the people I encountered have experienced. Certainly, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol addiction/overconsumption, and sexual violence are common to all human societies. Sadly, rates of these pathologies are higher among Native Americans than any other ethnic group in the US.<sup>1</sup> Much of the time the addictions are tied to trauma, a person was sexually or physically abused as a child, and self-medicates with alcohol; they then abuse their own children, and the cycle continues. Can a pastor or missionary simply talk about law/gospel without addressing these glaring realities? I hope to make the case that not only should that never be the ideal, but that the Gospel of Jesus Christ actually addresses these situations with two words that characterized His ministry: *healing* and *shalom*.

“And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people” (Mt 4:23). A key component to Jesus' ministry was healing (Θεραπεία). In its transliterated form, *therapy*, this word has been co-opted by our culture to focus almost entirely on feelings. Despite the dangers associated with a theology that veers toward Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,<sup>2</sup> healing is an area of ministry that missionaries to Native North Americans are compelled to address. To ignore the plight of people traumatized, abused, or acting as abusers, would be to become (in Harrower's words) “an antirealist.”<sup>3</sup>



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But what does “healing” mean exactly? We cannot presume to heal diseases in the same way that our Lord Jesus did. We are not granted the same divine attributes as He has. Neither can we expect a perfected, once for all healing of unhealthy patterns, (e.g., a sudden and complete cessation of substance abuse).<sup>4</sup> Our ministry of healing is much more like a beginning than an end, much more like a journey than a destination.

Our ministry of healing is much more like a beginning than an end, much more like a journey than a destination.

We invite people to “share their story” of past traumatic events. We then respond as a group in appropriate ways that speak words of healing, forgiveness, and affirmation. We do not try to fix problems, rather address them forthrightly and have other people experience the event through listening. This very basic human interaction has proved helpful for both perpetrator and victim (often they can be the selfsame person). The participants start to recognize the unhealthy patterns in their lives and are made aware of how they are perpetuating cycles of abuse.

Again, this does not mean that suddenly behaviors change, or patterns cease. Although this can be frustrating to people who want concrete results, viewing healing as a process rather than a quick (or quack) cure is more faithful to our theological expression than our human need for success and outcomes (most often tied to funding). In *The Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther’s twenty-first thesis reads: “The ‘theologian of glory’ calls the bad good and the good bad. The ‘theologian of the cross’ says what a thing is.”<sup>5</sup> It takes only a short time of observation to see “what a thing is” in the lives of human beings. Old patterns die hard, and toxic behaviors do not in a flash disappear. A biblical view of sanctification would also militate against an expectation of sudden and decisive change. “We are never without sin because we carry our flesh around our neck.”<sup>6</sup> This assertion is an accurate reflection of the Scriptures, seen clearly in Romans 7:18–20, Psalm 14:3, and Psalm 143:2.

In spite of the lack of sudden progress or even visible gains, we are promised shalom. I have chosen not to translate this word since it has an even wider semantic domain than Θεραπεύω and is probably best left in the original to convey the multi-faceted prongs of meaning. Brown, Driver, and Briggs have seven entries to define the word with shades of meaning even in a single entry.<sup>7</sup> Although the New Testament does not use this word (even in a transliterated form), it is no less a part of Jesus’ ministry as the referent of εἰρήνη (cf. Jn 14:27; 20:19) is certainly εἰρήνη.<sup>8</sup> Romans 5:1 tells that we already have peace with God, and yet perfection of this wholeness, soundness, welfare (and to add a neologism, “wellness”) awaits the return of our Lord. But shalom is what Jesus offers (Jn 14:27), and that is why I am calling the effort to address cyclical abuse patterns a healing ministry, not simply a twelve-step group or

recovery program. As Harrower writes: “shalom, the opposite of horrors, is tied to what it is to be made as persons in the image of an intrinsically personal and interpersonal Trinitarian God.”<sup>9</sup> In incorporating the concept and the promise of shalom we recognize that only Jesus can heal the deepest wounds of the heart and soul.<sup>10</sup>

Pietsch reminds us that, “for Luther theology and pastoral care are so closely intermeshed that one without the other is unthinkable.”<sup>11</sup> Hence the focus on these words as they inform and shape our practice. The forgiveness of sins is also present in these words since there can be no healing and no shalom without forgiveness.<sup>12</sup> So little of mission outreach to Native Americans has been successful.<sup>13</sup> Could one reason be that we have avoided the traumas of people’s lives and not sufficiently shown them the shalom offered through faith in Christ? Focusing on these words is not intended to produce a solution to all the issues in mission to Native Americans, but it is intended to reorient our efforts to address the most salient issues of our hearers’ lives.

In incorporating the concept and the promise of shalom we recognize that only Jesus can heal the deepest wounds of the heart and soul.

As it happens shalom is very similar to a Navajo word, *hózhó*. This word also has a wide semantic domain that includes peace, joy, and harmony.<sup>14</sup> It is also a significant word in Navajo religious practices, providing the missionary with a bridge from pre-Christian revelation, to a fuller revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The ideas of harmony, wholeness, and welfare are also included in what I like to think of as the teleological goal of a human being according to the Small Catechism: “that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”<sup>15</sup>

But all this focus on words and their meanings is *not* mental exercise for the intellectually bored. Bringing healing and shalom to bear in the lives of traumatized people is fulfilling the calling that Jesus has given us. Permit me to share a personal text I received a few weeks ago: “God has blessed me with a beautiful family including you, with prayers, song and scripture. . . . And being blessed with the Holy Spirit. . . . AND MOST OF ALL BEING SOBER. YAY!!!”<sup>16</sup> In plain words, this is what a ministry of healing and shalom looks like in the lives of our hearers, and this is why it is pertinent in mission to Native North American people.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Anecdotally: “Read almost any newspaper that serves a significant Indian population, and there is close to 100 percent chance you will find stories of tragedy.” H. Arthur and George McPeck, *The Grieving Indian: An Ojibwe elder shares his discovery of help and hope* (Indian Life Books: Winnipeg, 1991), 28. More empirically: [https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/topics/tribal\\_affairs/ai-an-data-handout.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/topics/tribal_affairs/ai-an-data-handout.pdf), accessed February 8, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> First introduced by Smith and Lindquist Denton in their 2005 book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2005). This term has become shorthand to characterize much of American theology and practice in all stripes of Christianity (including Lutheranism). Space does not permit a word study on  $\theta\epsilon\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon\upsilon\omega$ , but suffice to say, it means more than just physical healing.

<sup>3</sup> Scott Harrower, *God of All Comfort: A Trinitarian Response to the Horrors of This World* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 46. “Responses to horrors often feel inadequate: ‘What do you say in the face of horror?’ Answers must be offered because these are aspects of our existence. If we ignore these problems, we will be antirealists.”

<sup>4</sup> Here I am reminded of Luther’s words: “This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.” Martin Luther, “Defense and Explanation of All the Articles,” in *Luther’s Works: Vol. 32 Career of the Reformer II*, ed. George W. Forell and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Anchor: Garden City, NY, 1961), 503.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism” in *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 2000), 438.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament 6th ed.* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1966), 1022–23.

<sup>8</sup> “The peace of Jesus is a gift that pertains to man’s salvation. Barrett, p. 391 points out that already in many OT passages ‘peace’ had acquired more than conventional meaning, for example as a special gift of the Lord in Ps 29:11; Isa 57:19.” Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (xiii–xxi)* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 653.

<sup>9</sup> Harrower, *God of All Comfort*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> A further discussion beyond the scope of this essay relates the idea of  $\delta\lambda\psi$  to  $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omega$  (cf. Zec 6:13) only in a context of a faithful covenantal relationship can shalom (or *harmony* as the NIV has it here) exist between persons and between God and man. Also of note is that when Jesus healed the leper in Mark 1:40–44 He not only healed the disease but restored the man to the community.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Pietsch, *Of Good Comfort: Martin Luther’s Letters to the Depressed and Their Significance for Pastoral Care Today* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016), 20.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Mark 2:5–12.

<sup>13</sup> For the early LCMS attempts, see James Kaiser, “Wilhelm Loehe and the Chippewa Outreach at Frankenmuth” *Missio Apostolica* 22, no. 1 (May 2014): 73–82.

<sup>14</sup> Robert W. Young and William Morgan Sr., *The Navajo Language: A Grammar and Colloquial Dictionary* (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 1987), 462.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 16.

<sup>16</sup> Personal correspondence from congregation member of Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, Navajo, NM.

# Wholistic Mission to North America's First Nations

David Sternbeck

**Abstract:** The author provides a brief review of the misunderstanding and racism that have characterized the majority population's relationships with First Nations peoples and accompanied all too many mission attempts to reach out to these peoples. A missionary himself, he suggests that genuine commitment to the evangelization of First Nations peoples requires a commitment to wholistic mission with an emphasis on words and deeds that proclaim, disciple, and heal.

For over five hundred years, since first contact, First Nations people have been the object of mission efforts, but it is estimated that in that time, only 3 to 5 percent of First Nations people have converted to the Christian faith. The history of contact, beginning in 1492 to the present has been a troubling journey for the First Nations peoples of the Americas. In this paper, we will look at the impact of the dominant culture on the First Nations people and the need for a wholistic approach in our mission efforts.

Columbus landed on the shores of the Americas in 1492. This is what is commonly known as first contact. Between first contact and 1661 it has been estimated that 130 million First Nations people perished in the first nearly two hundred years of contact.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will refer to the first people of the Americas as First Nations as they are the first inhabitants of this land. Richard Twiss states, "I strongly embrace the concept contained in the name 'First Nations.' The terms American Indian and Native American both denote a political and colonial identity, created by others and imposed on us through conquest and treaty."<sup>2</sup>

The conquest of the Americas started on the east coast and moved rapidly westward. First Nations people were pushed from their homes and traditional territories. Diseases, for which there was no immunity, killed millions.



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In the mid-1800s, the doctrine of Manifest Destiny became a prevailing attitude regarding the westward expansion on the continent. The Oxford Dictionary describes Manifest Destiny as a nineteenth-century doctrine or belief that the expansion of the United States throughout the Americas was both justified and inevitable. It was driven by both political and religious belief. Somehow God had divinely ordained this new world to allow people to create heaven on earth, and to spread democracy across the face of the land. I do not intend to write on the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, and its complexity. Rather, this is about the spirit of Manifest Destiny and the consequences that it had for the First Nations people.

The forefathers of the United States government wrote the Declaration of Independence. They wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” So how could the spirit of Manifest Destiny justify and inevitably violate the God-given rights of the First Nations people and enable non-First Nations people to conquer this new land and make it their own?

This doctrine opened a door to a belief system that somehow First Nations people were less than human. This led to eradication policies. In 1864 Col. John Milton Chivington, who also served as a Methodist pastor, stated “Damn any man who sympathizes with Indians. . . . I have come to kill Indians, kill all, big and little; nits make lice”<sup>3</sup> (Sand Creek Massacre). Whole tribes were exterminated through eradication policies. Assimilation policies such as, residential schools, were adopted. Children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in order to assimilate and Christianize them.

This doctrine opened a door to a belief system that somehow First Nations people were less than human.

This was an effort developed in a partnership between the state and the church. First Nations children were forbidden to speak their languages or practice any of their cultural practices. Their hair was cut, and they were given European clothing to wear. Their names were taken away, and they were given Christian European names. Richard Pratt in 1879 started the Carlisle Indian school and stated, “[We must] kill the Indian and save the man.”<sup>4</sup> At last count the Canadian government has identified over six thousand graves at residential schools across Canada that hold the children of First Nations people. Many of the children were physically and sexually abused.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of the trauma caused by the oppressive nature of these policies, and the genocide of the First Nations people has left a wave of intergenerational pathologies and chronic social issues. Through removal policies, and the sudden shift of economic engines, men could no longer manage resources to care for their families.

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The male role in the communities all but disappeared. The forcible removal of the children shattered culture and family units. Children did not learn how to be mothers and fathers, husbands, and wives. O'Brien, in the introduction to her book, *Coming Full Circle*, writes

Chronic social problems that emerged as a result have indeed carried on into subsequent generations. George Guilmet and David Whited noted in 1989 that some of the highest mortality rates in contemporary American Indian communities were attributable to “accidents, suicides, substance abuse, and violence—all expressions of the emotional stress experienced by individuals who have been stripped of their cultural traditions and forced into schizophrenically bicultural existence.” . . . Statistics gathered in 1993 confirmed that alcohol-related deaths were 579 percent higher for American Indian and Alaska Natives than for the general population, while suicide rates were 70 percent higher, homicide rates 41 percent higher, and the rate of drug related deaths was 18 percent higher. . . . Poverty rates among reservation communities range from 30 to 90 percent; unemployment ranges from 13 to 40 percent; accidental death rates are typically three times the national average, alcoholism rates are 30–80 percent higher, domestic violence, teen pregnancy, child neglect, and suicide are often twice the national rate. . . . The dropout rate of Native students in public schools was as high as 60–80 percent. . . . Healthcare providers note that spiritual and mental distress associated with the impacts of colonialism, poverty, and intergenerational violence are commonly expressed somatically among Native communities.<sup>6</sup>

“How can your God love us and hate us, so much, at the same time?” Hear this statement from a First Nations woman, a residential school survivor.

Mission work to First Nations people, because of its history, requires a complex response using a wholistic approach for Gospel proclamation. At Lutheran Indian Ministries our mission is to proclaim, disciple, and heal. What was the First Nations woman understanding of the message of God’s love? How did she hear this message? For that matter, how does anyone hear?

In Acts 26:14 at Saul’s conversion, we read, “And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language (Paul’s mother tongue), ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’” Our Lord was speaking to Paul through the language he understood best, through his Hebrew culture, through his mother tongue. In contrast, the First Nations people have become orphans (trauma),

Mission work to First Nations people, because of its history, requires a complex response using a wholistic approach.

they have become strangers (loss of cultural identity), and they have become widows (death and loss of love).<sup>7</sup>

There is a resurgence within First Nations communities to recover their cultural identity, and to recover their languages. I believe the church must be present in this restoration of cultural identity for several reasons. First, the church bears a certain responsibility because of its involvement in the historic trauma of oppression and genocide that has led to these conditions. If reconciliation is to occur, both the church and the First Nations must meet at the same table. Second, only the Gospel and the presence of Christ can bring the healing that is needed. Thirdly, I have seen in the last thirty years a strong desire within First Nations communities, to know and understand who the Creator (First Article revelation) made them to be. I believe the Holy Spirit is preparing a suffering people to hear the Gospel!

As First Nations people begin to heal, they begin to see and hear differently. I am reminded of Mark 8:22, the story of the blind man whom the people begged Jesus to heal. Jesus took the man out of the village, spit on his eyes, laid His hands on the man, and asked him, “Do you see anything?” The man replied, “I see men, but that look like trees, walking.” Jesus lays His hands on him a second time and his sight was made whole. I believe, in this story, that we see healing as a process.

I think a similar process is going on among First Nations peoples. As they experience this cultural revitalization, they are beginning to see that they were created by the Creator. That they have been loved and cared for. Our God has not left Himself without a witness (Acts 14:17).

As they experience this cultural revitalization, they are beginning to see that they were created by the Creator.

An example: the Nuchahnulth people of the Northwest coast have practiced, for thousands of years a ritual called *oosimch*. They would go to the rivers at the break of dawn and bathe. As they entered the water, they chanted a prayer in their native tongue. “We bow ourselves to you Creator, true light of the morning. Have pity on us. We bow ourselves to you Creator, true light of the morning.” They would then offer their gratitude to the Creator and begin to pray for their families. Then they would offer prayers for their communities, for the children, and their elders. Then they would pray for the land and its resources.<sup>8</sup>

I found this ritual fascinating and sensed a wonderful connection to Baptism. I began to teach and preach on the Sacrament of Baptism. In the end, I told them that I thought they had been waiting in the waters for thousands of years for the words, “in the name of the Father and in the name of the Son and in the name of Holy Spirit.” Over the next eighteen months, we witnessed thirty-eight Baptisms in the river where the ritual of *oosimch* was practiced. I remember a middle-aged woman who came to

me with tears of joy and said, “Today is the first day that I know I can be fully Native and fully Christian.”

In order to journey toward wholeness, the First Nations people must wrestle with what it means to suffer. How can we make sense of suffering? How many times have we heard the question, “If God loves me, why does He allow this to happen to me?” How can there be a redemptive purpose for suffering?

Usually, out of a last-ditch effort to find relief from the pain of suffering, we ask this last question in hope. For First Nations people it becomes a series of very painful connections, to the past, the present, and the future. How can it not be a part of historic memory? O’Brien states regarding wellness in her work amongst the Coast Salish people of Puget Sound in Washington,

What begins to emerge here is a sense of wellness strongly shaped by relationships—between individuals and their ancestors, between people and place, and within and between communities. When one considers the profound connection between health and identity, healing emerges as a genuinely religious experience.<sup>9</sup>

While this interconnectedness intensifies the suffering, it can also provide a sense of resilience in the context of the healing process taking place in the community.

A Theology of the Cross is our answer to the redemptive purpose of suffering. Luther said that to truly know God, He must be seen through the cross.<sup>10</sup> Through Jesus’ life and death and resurrection by suffering came the greatest glory to God and salvation to the world. The Theology of the Cross provides a framework for a theology of suffering. Through the cross we see the clearest picture of the redemptive purposes of suffering. Paul states that, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:16–17). The greatest purpose of our lives is to allow the glory of God to be revealed in us. Eyer writes, “The theology of the cross says that God comes to us through weakness and suffering, on the cross and in our own sufferings. The theology of the cross says, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.’”<sup>11</sup>

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We see a lament theme in the Scriptures. The book of Psalms often moves from a position of orientation to dis-orientation, to re-orientation. Allender lectures on a Faith, Hope, and Love Matrix. He speaks in terms of shalom, shalom shattered, shalom sought, and shalom restored.<sup>12</sup> If we look at the biblical narrative, this is what we see. In the garden of God, we see shalom. As sin enters the garden, shalom is shattered.

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We have become orphans who have lost our name. Thrown out of the garden we become strangers groping in the darkness trying to create our own sense of shalom. We have become widows separated from God and His love. But God, in His great love and mercy, sends His Son, to give us shalom restored.

The extreme trauma and the extreme suffering of the First Nations people defies explanation. Only in the light of Christ and His Gospel can we begin to make sense of the purposes for which these things have occurred. The Theology of the Cross and a theology of suffering provide a foundation building toward the hope of shalom restored.

I am reminded of the story of Joseph. The trauma and suffering that Joseph experienced was seen by him through a theology of suffering. He says to his brothers, while weeping, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gn 50:19–21).

The Theology of the Cross and a theology of suffering provide a foundation building toward the hope of shalom restored. . . . Sacred Ground is a community-based trauma therapy program.

In addition to proclaiming and discipling, Lutheran Indian Ministries needs a third leg in its mission to serve First Nations people. It has begun to implement a program that deals with the effects of trauma, and intergenerational trauma. Sacred Ground is a community-based trauma therapy program that deals with the effects of trauma and historic trauma within indigenous communities. It centers on a peer group setting that provides common ground for everyone involved. We learn to hold space for one another, a safe space, where we can learn to share our stories. The effects of shame, betrayal, and harm cause us to see ourselves, the world and God, in unhealthy ways. It is like the blind man that Jesus laid hands on, “Can you see anything?” He responds, “I see men, but they look like trees, walking.” Jesus wasn’t finished. His promise is that He will not leave us as orphans. Trauma occurs in the context of community, and I believe healing must happen in community as well. Sacred Ground is about communities coming together and learning how to live from the heart, learning how to share from the heart, learning how to hear from the heart, and learning how to respond from the heart. We begin to see that there can be a redemptive purpose for our suffering.

Allender writes, “You are a story. You are not merely the possessor and teller of a number of stories; you are a well-written, intentional story that is authored by the greatest Writer of all time. . . . The weight of those words, if you believe them even for brief snippets of time, can change the trajectory of your life.”<sup>13</sup>

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In First Nations communities, our most valuable resources are the elders and the children. Traditions and rituals are the mechanisms used to transmit information from one generation to the next about the issues of life. Songs, dances, name-giving ceremonies, and story are just a few. In the Nuchahnulth language the word for *story* is *Ha Ho Pa*. It is story that teaches us about the Creator, about ourselves, and about community. I believe that Jesus employed this technique in some of His teachings, especially in the use of parable.

I would like to share an example of *Ha Ho Pa* from a well-known parable, the good Samaritan. We are all familiar with the story. A man is robbed, stripped naked, beaten, and left for dead. The religious elite pass by without helping him. But a good Samaritan has compassion and binds up his wounds with oil and wine. He puts him on his beast of burden and takes him to an inn. He instructs the innkeeper to care for him until he returns.

When I share this *Ha Ho Pa*, I begin to engage the hearers by asking questions. What if I were the man beaten, robbed, stripped naked, and left for dead? What if you were the man beaten, robbed, stripped naked, and left for dead? What if the man in the road is the entire sea of humanity, which has, because of sin, been robbed, beaten, stripped naked, and left for dead? What if that Samaritan took our place in the road and he was robbed, beaten, stripped naked, hung on cross, and left for dead? Wouldn't that make his beast of burden the cross that takes our wounded selves to the inn? Is the inn the church and the innkeeper the Holy Spirit? As we say in First Nations community, "It's a good story."

You wonder what is happening in the inn? We receive the care and the gifts that sustain us. The Word, the water, the body and blood, all creating faith, sustaining faith, and nurturing our faith. In our response we understand that we were all orphans, strangers, and widows. In our journey toward shalom we have been restored, given a family, given a prophetic truth to guide us, and a kingdom that will never end. We learn to love. We learn to live from the heart. Paul would say, "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thes 2:8). We learn what it means to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15).

God loves the whole person; therefore, any *Missio Dei* must be wholistic in nature. "He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps 126:6).

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Erin McKenna and Scott L Pratt, *American Philosophy: From Wounded Knee to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 375.
- <sup>2</sup> Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You* (Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2000), 22.
- <sup>3</sup> Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Bantam, 1972), 86–87.
- <sup>4</sup> “Kill the Indian and Save the Man,” Digital History, accessed March 2, 2021, [https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3505](https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3505).
- <sup>5</sup> Cindy Blackstock and Pamela Palmater, “The discovery of unmarked children’s graves in Canada has Indigenous people asking: how many more?” *The Guardian*, June 9, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/09/discovery-mass-graves-canada-indigenous-people-first-nations-residential-schools>.
- <sup>6</sup> Suzanne Crawford O’Brien, *Coming Full Circle: Spirituality and Wellness among Native Communities in the Pacific Northwest* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 2013), xxx–xxxi.
- <sup>7</sup> Dan Allender, *Orphan/Priest, Stranger/Prophet, Widow/King* (oral presentation), The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, on November 23, 2020.
- <sup>8</sup> See Denise Titian, “Quu’asa presents traditional healing information to NETP clients,” *Ha-Shilth-Sa*, Canada’s Oldest First Nation’s Newspaper, September 24, 2014, <https://hashilthsa.com/news/2014-09-24/quuasa-presents-traditional-healing-information-netp-clients>.
- <sup>9</sup> O’Brien, *Coming Full Circle*, xxii–xxiii.
- <sup>10</sup> Steven Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (NY: Bloomsbury, 2011), 143.
- <sup>11</sup> Richard C. Eyer, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross in the Midst of Suffering* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1994), 27.
- <sup>12</sup> Allender, *Orphan/Priest, Stranger/Prophet, Widow/King* (oral presentation).
- <sup>13</sup> Dan Allender, *To Be Told* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2005), 11.

# Sowing in Concrete: Congregational Effort to Join God’s Mission in Brazilian Cities

Samuel R. Fuhrmann

**Abstract:** In October of 2019, the International Center of Missionary Training (*CITM*) and the *Paulista*-district of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (*IELB*) hosted a symposium on urban missions in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. During the event, a journal of Lutheran missiology named *Missio Apostolica Brasil (MAB)* was launched in continuity with the work in Brazil of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, as a kind of partnership. This short article consists of the introductory speech delivered at the symposium, whose title was *Sowing in Concrete*, and the topic was “congregational effort in God’s mission.” The public attending the event was made up of pastors and church leaders (with little or no theological training), who required a very simple, though clear, approach to introduce the event. The article therefore explains the context out of which the topic arose and briefly explores Jesus’ use of the image of sowing the seed to talk about the disciples’ role of preaching the Gospel in the cities. In addition, the article ties the event to the effort of pastors and theologians of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, a church body that still faces many challenges in big cities (given its rural origins), and briefly talks about the importance of the new journal in the Brazilian context. The article aims to bring awareness about what is going on in Brazil in terms of mission thinking and practice to the readers of *Lutheran Mission Matters*.

## Introduction

São Paulo is known as a *selva de pedras*—“concrete jungle”—because of its many ongoing constructions: roads, bridges, and skyscrapers everywhere. And yet, as one drives through the city, one can see living gardens in the middle of the concrete. One example of this is located on the 23 of May Avenue. As one drives south on this road, one just needs to look at the left side to see beautiful flowers and other green plants



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hanging on the wall as if they had all been sown right in the concrete. It is a kind of work that probably required a lot of knowledge from someone who has studied architecture, urbanism, and landscaping. It is likely that this professional had to draw up a project and study hard to figure out the best way to do it, so that the plants are not overexposed nor hidden from the sun's light. The result of this hard work is that today, as people drive on that road, they can see beautiful plants in the middle of that dense concrete.

In southern Brazil where I grew up, I got used to seeing many plants sprouting from the earth. At my parents' house, there used to be a huge garden in the backyard. Often, I would see my parents preparing the soil and sowing seeds, and the plants easily grew. Sometimes it seemed that no further effort was needed. Flowers appeared out of nowhere; someone could even put organic material in the earth, and suddenly, from that a tomato plant would grow. It seemed to appear and grow naturally, without any effort of my parents. But the same does not happen in São Paulo, where I live today. Here, it seems, a lot of extra effort and a different kind of knowledge and skills are required. I am still trying to figure how to grow plants in my yard, and I think I will have to study different techniques to help grow plants in the middle of so much concrete. In other words, it will take a lot of effort.

This reality can be helpful to understand the challenges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil as the church participates in God's mission in the city where different strategies and skills may be required. This article does not offer suggestions in terms of strategies and skills. Rather, it introduces a theological reflection on God's mission in the city and lays the foundation for further discussions on how to sow in concrete on Brazilian soil.

### **The Sowing Work: Our Effort in a Mission That Is God's**

To introduce this theological reflection, I would like first to discuss that which is the most basic, the root—so to speak—of the metaphor *sowing in concrete*. When the *Paulista*-district pastors were planning the symposium on urban missions held in São Paulo in 2019, we started our conversation by discussing our many perceptions regarding the challenges of the Lutheran Church in this city. One of these perceptions was voiced through a question made by our colleague and friend Rev. Iderval Strelhow. His question touched the root of the matter: “Do our congregations really want to do mission work?” Our conclusion was this: “Unfortunately, our members do not seem to want to be involved in the effort required to do this work. Our members love it and rejoice when new converts are received in our congregations, especially when an adult gets baptized. Our people seem not to understand, however, that for this to happen, everyone must make an effort, since pastors cannot do all the work by themselves.”

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One could argue over these statements and disagree with them. But it is important to notice that this reflection was born, in part, out of certain uneasiness or even anxiety that we, urban pastors, experience in the city. We know our Lord is in control of His church and that the mission is God's, which brings us great comfort. And yet, it seems that the emphasis and the teaching of this God-centered biblical understanding of mission, for some reason or another, has led many to neglect how the mission work takes place in the world; neglecting work to be done today in order for more people to believe what God has already done for all in Christ. For this reason, the pastors of the *Paulista*-district came up with the following guiding question to organize the symposium: How can we emphasize the biblical teaching that the mission is God's and dependent on Him without overlooking the fact that Jesus gave a role to the church to play and, thus, that we participate in this mission as God's people?

As a first step toward answering this question, we chose the biblical image of sowing or farming to guide us. In Matthew 9, in the context of Jesus calling the twelve apostles, after showing compassion for the crowds, He says to the disciples: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (vv. 37–38). Then Matthew lists the names of the twelve, of which eleven were sent into the world to preach the Gospel (Mt 28:19–20).

Exegetical discussions about this latter text properly indicate that Jesus gave this role primarily to the apostles. An overemphasis on this point and a reading that isolates Matthew 9 and 28 from the rest of the New Testament, however, might lead to the conclusion that only the apostles have the privilege and service of sharing the Gospel. This view then results in seeing mission work as a kind of activity which only those few who have received special training can carry out. In Luke's Gospel, however, Jesus applies the farming image to the mission of seventy of His followers, whom He sends "into every town and place where he himself was about to go" (Lk 10:1–2).

In other words, the role of sowing or farming is not limited to the apostles. Neither is this role to be carried out only by pastors, but it involves many other followers of Jesus in different ways, carrying out different functions and respecting the local context. This is one reason why we have proposed the metaphor *Sowing in Concrete* to speak of the congregational effort to join God's mission.

Another reason for the use of this image in the symposium on urban missions regards the theocentric perspective of mission implicit in the use of the sowing metaphor, a perspective that also affirms the importance of our effort as we engage in mission. The people who heard Jesus talking about the action of preaching the Gospel in the cities in terms of the activity of sowing or farming knew the history of their own people, a history that had its peak or summit with the fulfillment of God's promise of a land that bore fruit because the Lord would send the rain.

This can be seen in Deuteronomy 11, when a contrast is made between Egypt and the Promised Land:

For the land that you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it, like a garden of vegetables. But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for. The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. (vv. 10–12)

That means to say that, in Egypt as slaves, the people needed to work hard to make the plants bear fruit to some extent. In the Promised Land, however, the people only needed to sow the seed, and then they could trust that God would send the rain and take care of the farmland as He had promised. In other words, the Israelites could depend on and rely on God and His providence. This is the implicit narrative or the “story behind the image,” to recall Justin Rossow’s words,<sup>1</sup> that we would like to keep in mind as we talk about *sowing in concrete*. We need to till the soil and sow the seed, which requires us to work hard. At the same time, we recognize and thank God for the fact that the plant grows and bears fruit only when He sends the rain and makes it grow and bear fruit.

We need to till the soil and sow the seed, which requires us to work hard. At the same time, we recognize and thank God for the fact that the plant grows and bears fruit only when He sends the rain and makes it grow and bear fruit.

An affirmation of both the active work of the church involved in the planting and growth of the church and the reliance on God’s power can be seen in the New Testament, as the apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth to solve a conflict within the church. Some favored him and his work, while others would prefer Apollos, and this situation was dividing that congregation. Then the apostle writes, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:6–7). Note that Paul, who at another point said he has “become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22), here says that God is the one “who gives the growth.” In other words, the very one who put a lot of effort into the mission work that is part of the church’s role did not deny that growth depends on God; the recognition that Paul worked hard did not lead him to think that the mission work depended on him. Rather, he affirmed God’s power when he talks about growth.

Paul’s use of the farming image to talk about preaching the Gospel emphasizes that the church needs to be actively engaged to make an effort to sow and, at the same

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time, this understanding still affirms the workers' reliance and dependence on God. Therefore, we can understand this biblical metaphor and Jesus' words as if He were saying, "Go! Sow in the soil, share the word, and leave all the rest to Me!" This is the distinctive role our congregations have in the cities of southeastern Brazil, and they can try to play this role trusting that the mission work depends on the Lord.

### **Trying to Join God's Mission in the Midst of the Concrete**

To hold a symposium to discuss ways by which congregations can participate in God's mission in the city and be more actively engaged is not a new thing in the *IELB*. Already in the 1970s, the church studied ways to achieve a stronger presence in the major cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro during a time of massive urbanization in Brazil.<sup>2</sup> In such circumstances, missiological study and planning were required.<sup>3</sup> Later, in the 1990s, one can see that the faculty of the Seminary in São Paulo (*ICSP*) was making an effort to form an urban missiology through the Missionary Research and Training Center and the International Center of Missionary Training (*CITM*), an effort promoted by the Rev. Dr. Leonardo Neitzel. Under his leadership, that seminary promoted a few urban mission symposia up to the early 2000s, until the closing of that seminary due to financial issues in 2003. The major problem addressed in these symposia was the fact that the church had moved to the cities, but without making much progress in terms of becoming an urban church. In other words, even in major Brazilian cities, congregations functioned as if they were still in the rural area.<sup>4</sup>

The *CITM* continued fostering theological thinking about God's mission in general under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Anselmo E. Graff, professor of the seminary in São Leopoldo in southern Brazil. Particularly regarding urban missions, some advance has been achieved from 2014 on. In this year, a missionary training center was founded in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the *Centro de Treinamento Missionário–Nestor Welzel (CTM-NW)* as the result of the efforts of local church leaders and Rev. Laerte Tardelli Voss, a former missionary to Hispanics in the USA.

This training center has since then promoted urban mission training to Brazilian pastors and church leaders. In addition, in partnership with *CITM*, it has organized regional urban mission forums and symposia oriented mainly toward the challenges still faced in the southeastern region of Brazil, where the largest Brazilian cities are located. These examples show that this reflection and the urban mission symposium held in São Paulo in 2019 reflects not only the concerns and goals of the *Paulista*-district pastors and leaders. The examples show also that the symposium continues a trajectory begun by other faithful Lutheran servants whom we join in our effort as pastors of southeastern Brazil.

"But"—one could ask—"Since the biblical image is clear about the important role the church has been given and since mission in the city has been affirmed in the *IELB* for almost fifty years, why are we still discussing some basic aspects of God's mission

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in 2019?” There is, of course, the reality of sin that hinders the preaching of the Gospel, not to mention the work of the devil, both of which hinder the action of the church. These aspects cannot be denied.

But for the present purpose, it is important to pay attention to the particular issues we are facing. On the one hand, the answer to this question has already been given: our members seem not to realize or seem not to want to do the work necessary for mission to happen. On the other hand, there has been what Graff pointed out as a “vertical reductionism” (after David Peter’s article on the two dimensions and evangelism)<sup>5</sup> in our theology. In this kind of reductionism, Graff explains, everything is attributed to God in the mission work in such a way that neglects the fact that God uses the church. In other words, it overlooks that Jesus has given a role to the church.

As a response to this problem, Graff reminds us that Luther’s theology has not only a vertical axis, but also a horizontal one, within which the church is active in love.<sup>6</sup> Of course, there are other aspects that need consideration to understand our own challenges.<sup>7</sup> For now, however, it is important to highlight that the most fundamental dimension of our theology, that God has already done all that is necessary for our salvation (which Article IV of the Augsburg Confession properly explains and highlights), has implications for our lives as Christians in the world, that is, within the horizontal dimension.

It is within this dimension, the horizontal relationships, where the congregational efforts, strategies, and planning tasks for urban missions are situated. Let us therefore look with these lenses at the “intentional effort” of congregations. It is part of the Christian life. It is necessary not for our salvation, but for the salvation of our neighbor, in the sense that God decided to use us and give us the privilege of being His instruments. He did this so that the Gospel, the message that Jesus died on the cross to save the world, may reach other people. Seeing our participation in God’s mission in this way, we will hear and interact with ideas about how to be a congregation involved in social action in the city, about being a congregation in mission in the city to preach its distinctive message, and about the mission intentionality taught in the Bible. In addition, we will hear the experience of members of a congregation planting a church in a *favela*<sup>8</sup> and of a pastor who is restructuring

Let us therefore look with these lenses at the “intentional effort” of congregations. It is part of the Christian life. It is necessary not for our salvation, but for the salvation of our neighbor, in the sense that God decided to use us and give us the privilege of being His instruments.

his congregation for a new generation, preserving the foundations of Lutheran theology.

I also would like to say a few words about another way of making an effort toward the proclamation of the Gospel in Brazil, namely, the publication of the new journal named *Missio Apostolica Brasil*. This journal can be seen as one more tool to help the church to better sow in concrete.

### ***Missio Apostolica Brasil* as a Tool to Sow the Seed of the Gospel**

This journal of Lutheran missiology results from both an initiative of the Lutheran Society for Missiology (LSFM) and from a perceived need, namely, the necessity of enriching the missiological reflection from a Lutheran standpoint in Brazil. For the past few years, Rev. Jeffrey Thormodson, Rev. Dr. Daniel Mattson, and I have been discussing the possibility of having a Portuguese version of *Lutheran Mission Matters* (previously called *Missio Apostolica*) in Brazil. During this conversation, we all agreed that this would expand the missiological reflection already fostered by LSFM through its journal worldwide, on the one hand, and fill a void in terms of missiology in Brazil, on the other. I would like to briefly talk about this second accomplishment through *Missio Apostolica Brasil*.

For the reader who might not be aware of this, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (*IELB*) had its beginning through LCMS missionary effort in 1900.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1990s, the Brazilian church body achieved full financial (and theological) independence, while maintaining the strong bond of brotherly love with the “mother church” and the common commitment to confess the faith according to Scripture and the Lutheran understanding of it expressed in the Book of Concord.<sup>10</sup> As mentioned above, the church arose in the rural environment of southern Brazil. The *IELB* faces many challenges in Brazil, and one of these challenges regards its mission work, mainly in big cities. Today, given that many of its congregations are situated in the city, part of its challenge is to learn how to function as Lutheran congregations in the midst of the “concrete,” in a way that not only safeguards their commitment to the Lutheranism, but that also fosters the spreading of the seed of the Gospel through the Lutheran voice of this church body. Some congregations may have done this job better than others, but most recognize that more needs to be done, and this requires more missiological reflection. This is where the *Missio Apostolica Brasil* journal, with the help of LSFM, enters the picture.

*Missio Apostolica Brasil* (*MAB*) will serve as a space for Brazilian pastors and theologians to participate in the international forum promoted by LSFM through *Lutheran Mission Matters*. The purpose for this journal is to reaffirm, discuss, and exchange the theological foundations, ideas, and practices of Lutheran missions around the world. In other words, the readers of *MAB* will be able now to engage in this international conversation, reading in Portuguese the articles written by

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missiologists and Lutheran theologians from the Northern Hemisphere, and to contribute to the discussion from a Southern Hemisphere perspective. This will be possible because of the commitment to translate texts from English into Portuguese and from Portuguese into English.

This new journal in Brazil focused on missiological issues fills a perceived gap in Brazilian Lutheranism. Within the *IELB*, there have been books published from the symposia promoted by International Center of Missionary Training (*CITM*) mentioned above. And still, there is a shared recognition that much more needs to be done in terms of Lutheran missiology. On the one hand, this need can be perceived in the simple fact that there is no Lutheran theological journal focused on missiology specifically in Brazil. On the other hand, the way the context changes and new challenges arise leads to the conclusion that there is always work to be done when it comes to missiology. As Graff has pointed out, the current context “demands that one reaffirms the missionary character of the church, along with the recognition that this is an unfinished task.”<sup>11</sup> The *MAB* now helps answer this perceived need.

I would like to also thank *Hora Luterana*—the Lutheran Hour Ministry agency on Brazilian soil. It is through a website provided by this missionary society that the *MAB* will be published online (the only format available as of now). *Hora Luterana* has been helping the *IELB* in its mission since before the church had become an independent church body. While it was still a district of the LCMS, *Hora Luterana* was already helping with Lutheran missions on Brazilian soil. Now, this missionary society is helping with the missiological reflection of the *IELB*.

All this effort combining the work of LSFM, *Hora Luterana*, and Brazilian pastors serves the purpose of sowing the seed in Brazilian soil, also in the midst of the concrete.

## Conclusion

One of the implications of wearing the lenses through which we look at missions as a work of sowing is that, in this way, our trust is placed in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as we participate in His mission. One of the biblical promises that uses the image of sowing to speak of God’s Word is this: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be

The readers of [*Missio Apostolica Brasil*] will be able now to engage in this international conversation, reading in Portuguese the articles written by missiologists and Lutheran theologians from the Northern Hemisphere, and to contribute to the discussion from a Southern Hemisphere perspective.

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that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:10–11). These words serve during those times when we face a certain uneasiness and even during times of anxiety. The Word that is sown accomplishes the Lord’s purposes.

Dear brothers and co-workers of southern Brazil, let us put our hands in the dirt, let us get the dirt under our nails if necessary. Let us sow in concrete, trusting in the One who sends the rain!

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Justin Rossow, *Preaching Metaphor: How to Shape Sermons that Shape People* (Brighton, MI: Next Step Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Paulo Buss, *Um Grão de Mostarda: A História da Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil* (Porto Alegre: Concórdia, 2000), 2:164–5.

<sup>3</sup> Already in 1973, seminary professor Oswaldo Schueler introduced the term “contextualization” to faculty members and students in an inaugural lecture in the opening of that year. Schueler argued that the information provided by social scientists should inform the pastors of the *IELB* in order for them to preach the Gospel in a better contextualized form. But it was only about twenty years later that a pastor picked up on Schueler’s proposal and wrote a master’s thesis on the contextualization of the Gospel for the Brazilian context. Rony Ricardo Marquardt, author of this thesis, showed the importance of Schueler’s work by noting the difficulty of the church to become an urban church in a period when the urbanization rate was rapidly increasing, and the *IELB* was in danger of losing members in Brazilian big cities. Oswaldo Schueler, “A Leitura do Tempo,” in *Lar Cristão* (Porto Alegre: Concórdia, 1974), 104–8. See also Rony Ricardo Marquardt, *A Contextualização na Ação Missionária da Igreja* (Canoas: Ulbra, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> For more on these developments, see Samuel Reduss Fuhrmann, “Mission in the Margins: An Emplaced Missional Ecclesiology for the Brazilian Church in Urban Environments” (Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2019), 61–5.

<sup>5</sup> See Anselmo Graff, “Teologia da Missão e a Teologia Luterana,” *Missio Apostolica Brasil* 1, no. 1 (Outubro 2019): 18–20. See also David Peter, “A Framework for the Practice of Evangelism and Congregational Outreach,” *Concordia Journal* 30, no. 3 (July 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Again, Graff writes informed by Peter’s article as he looks at the reality of Lutheranism in Brazil.

<sup>7</sup> In light of what we have been discussing and concerned with in our church body since our last National Convention in 2018 regarding Pastoral Ministry, it seems that we have reduced the Ministry of the Word to the pastoral, congregational task of tending the gathered sheep, neglecting the missionary office of reaching out to the lost that is part of the Ministry. Therefore, it might be helpful to look at our understanding of Ministry in light of what Detlev Schulz proposes when he addresses what he calls the “Parochial Captivity of Ministry.” This might be a good way to advance our reflection on the limits of our mission practices in order to find a way forward to overcome this particular perceived limit. See Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (Saint Louis: CPH, 2009), 263–82.

<sup>8</sup> *Favela* is a housing category that refers to an urban built environment where one encounters social, cultural, and spatial diversity, and often the problems of violence and poverty, all of which configure a challenge to the Lutheran Church.

<sup>9</sup> Mario Rehfeldt, *Um Grão de Mostarda: A História da Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil*, vol. 1 (Porto Alegre: Concórdia, 2003), 26, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Paulo Buss, *Um Grão de Mostarda: A História da Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil*, vol. 2 (Porto Alegre: Editora Concórdia, 2000), 309–17.

<sup>11</sup> Anselmo Graff, *Testemunho, Misericórdia e Vida em Comunhão* (Porto Alegre: Concórdia, 2013), 8.

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# Border Ministry with the Rio Grande Mission Action Council

Brenda Segovia

**Abstract:** Missional work and general community outreach can seem daunting for many congregations, especially those that are smaller in size and find themselves in rural communities. This article touches on how one organization created a collaborative ministry model among twelve LCMS congregations in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. The Rio Grande Mission Action Council serves mainly to raise and empower new leaders within local congregations and support outreach efforts. The model of collaboration mentioned in this article will also speak specifically to the uniqueness of ministry in a bilingual border community.

Ministry along the border is unique in that it places you face-to-face with realities that are often highly politicized and make for sensational news stories but are not always portrayed accurately or altogether truthfully. When I received my first call as a Director of Christian Education (DCE) and accepted a very non-traditional role in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, I was faced with those realities in very personal ways.

As I neared the end of my DCE internship year in southern California, I flew out to Texas to visit the area where I could potentially be serving. As I met leaders and members of the local congregations, I recall thinking that this was simply not the right place for me. I considered the vast differences between the larger urban cities I had lived in my whole life compared to this small, hot, and humid place. However, by the end of my weekend visit, as I was saying my goodbyes and heading toward security at the Brownsville airport, I looked back at the kind and friendly faces of the leaders, and I knew right then that I would be seeing them again. As I flew back to California, I reflected on the visit and realized that I already felt a pull toward the people there and a desire to join them in the exciting work they were doing. I accepted the call



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officially about a week later. I was commissioned and installed through St. Paul Lutheran Church in Harlingen, Texas, in August 2016 and deployed as the Facilitator of Missions and Discipleship with RioMAC, the Rio Grande Mission Action Council.

Accepting the call as Facilitator of Missions and Discipleship with RioMAC was much different than what I had anticipated and non-traditional in every sense. One of RioMAC's leaders later told me that upon realizing that I was Hispanic and came from a Mexican family, they did not expect me to accept the call. In my family, it is rare for young adults to move away even for college. Generally, the only other time a young woman moves away from her family is when she is getting married. I was the unusual one. I moved hours away for college and internship, then moved even further to accept RioMAC's call in Texas. There also I encountered person after person who would casually ask if I lived with family nearby, and when they heard my response, the look of disbelief never ceased to amuse me.

One thing I did not expect to feel when moving to South Texas was culture shock. I realize now that culture shock can be experienced anywhere, even within one's home country, as culture varies so much from region to region. Certain mannerisms, expressions, and names for things seemed so funny, especially some of those coming from the Latin community, which strangely differed from my own experience. Latin/Hispanic culture in South Texas was different from the Latin/Hispanic culture in the Bay Area of California where I had grown up. I was raised bilingually, whereas many of the Hispanic youth and young adults I encountered in Texas had never learned to speak Spanish. I learned that this was because their parents and grandparents had been raised to view their native tongue in a negative light. In fact, they had been discouraged from speaking Spanish in school to the point of being punished with detention or a quick slap of the ruler. I, on the other hand, was raised by a bilingual father and a mother who only spoke Spanish and sent to a bilingual elementary school. I benefited from learning to speak both "home Spanish" and "educational Spanish," and was surprised not to see that same background among those living mere miles from Mexico.

It was shocking for me to find families in the Rio Grande Valley where the mother only spoke Spanish, the older siblings were bilingual, but the youngest siblings spoke English and could hardly understand any Spanish. This left the middle siblings to act as translators between their mother and younger siblings. This lack of basic communication even within a home and family seemed unbelievable to me, yet this proved to be just one of many unique aspects of living and working by the border.

To give you a better geographic idea of the area I was called to serve, I lived in Harlingen, which is a central location of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV or Valley). From there, I would either drive 45 minutes west or east, and about 30 minutes north to get to one of the twelve LCMS churches I served through RioMAC. I was a shared resource among these twelve churches that composed Circuit 28 in the Texas District.

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These were primarily small churches, some of which shared a pastor, and one of which was led by a different visiting pastor every month of the year! This was a community where sharing resources and people was the norm.

Collaboration is one of the key strengths in the RGV. Never have I seen so many congregations, leaders, and communities willing to share ideas, finances, and resources to make Jesus known. I had witnessed competition for numbers and growth between local churches, but not here. Here were people who had put down roots and invested upwards of three decades building relationships with their neighbors. In that time, they had endured both dry seasons, as well as times of fruitfulness led by the Spirit. The local leaders had long realized that if new leaders were not raised, their congregations faced a difficult future. RioMAC was more than ready to try some innovative ideas, eager to create this collaborative ministry model and see where the Holy Spirit would lead them.

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Different ideas for learning, service, mission, and faith-forming opportunities were presented monthly at each RioMAC meeting, which were attended by pastors, lay leaders, and other community leaders. Some of these opportunities came through Kari Rogers, who represented Lutheran Social Services, or Upbring in Texas. Thanks to Kari, important community connections were made with different agencies that provided services and refuge to people that were coming across the border both legally and illegally. My first experience with one of these agencies came early on at a Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen, Texas, run by a local Catholic church. The people receiving services through that center were given a hot meal, a clean change of clothes, a small bag of toiletries, and the chance to take a shower. Afterward, each person would have time to speak to legal professionals about their next steps, before being transported to the next location.

The Humanitarian Respite Center immediately opened my eyes to the unique local service opportunities available to the youth and families that I was working with. A few months later, just before Christmas, youth and adults from three different local congregations came together for a day of service at that center. They joyfully helped clean the outdoor tent structures that were being used to house dozens of cots, sorted and organized piles of donated clothes, and they took care of children while parents showered. This was just the first of many similar experiences that were to come in my time with RioMAC, experiences that were shared among people of different gender, age, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Another major organization was Upbring (Lutheran Social Services), a temporary shelter for unaccompanied minors, where they had access to a safe place to sleep,

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nutritious meals, access to education, recreational activities, and round-the-clock supervision. For the protection of the youth in their care, as well as their privacy, Upbring is extremely strict about the people they employ and their volunteers. To become a volunteer with Upbring, one must undergo many hours of training and background tests before one can even step a foot inside the shelter. One of the training videos gave us a clear picture of the many dangers migrant youth had encountered throughout their journey. After watching the video, we processed our emotions, realizing that these youth, and the adults in their lives, had been willing to place themselves at the risk of being exploited and possibly killed. A volunteer trainer emphasized that their decision to risk their lives spoke to their desperation to escape an even more grim reality back in their home country. That statement has stuck with me ever since. I have thought about it while driving back and forth from one end of the Valley to the other, looking out toward the border wall. I have thought about it as I have witnessed the ways people have set aside their strong political views when they physically cross paths with people who have a different legal status. It is striking to hear someone say, “It’s not a political issue for me; it’s a human issue.”

There was never a shortage of outreach opportunities in the Valley, especially those that were service-project based. Certainly, there is something to be said about service along the border. People tend to take notice when they see others physically serving and lending a hand to their neighbors, asking for nothing in return. This is especially true when the church body is seen physically serving outside of the walls of their building. Often, while completing a service project and sweating buckets from the extreme humidity, we would be approached by children in that neighborhood who were curious about what we were doing and surprisingly quick to jump in and join us.

People tend to take notice when they see others physically serving and lending a hand to their neighbors, asking for nothing in return. This is especially true when the church body is seen physically serving outside of the walls of their building.

One family immediately comes to mind when I think about people jumping in to serve, when our intent was to bless *them* and share the Gospel with them through service. The Mata family consists of a mom and her three children, ranging in age from kindergarten to high school. One of our local congregations hosted a mission team from a church in Central Texas who had come to complete some light construction-based service projects. The Mata home was picked as a service location. The Mata family lived in a small trailer in a *Colonia* (an offshoot of a proper town, but more isolated). During that week of service, something beautiful happened. The Matas were not willing to sit and watch as this group of strangers worked on their trailer, instead they wanted to be part of the action! The mother cooked for the team, while her

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children helped to saw wood, hammer nails, clean, and paint. In the evenings, when it was time for the team to head back to the house of their host family, they would invite the Matas to join them and enjoy a BBQ dinner and some refreshing time in the pool. Strong bonds and relationships were formed during that mission week.

Since then, that particular mission team has returned to the Valley more than once and has stayed in contact with the Matas. Our local congregations continue to have a relationship with that family. The Matas have been interested and extremely active in all RioMAC's initiatives, especially those that revolve around youth and service. Whether as participants, serving behind the scenes, or stepping up as volunteer youth leaders for confirmation retreats, the Matas have been there. For so long, RioMAC had prayed for new leaders to be raised up in the community, and God was there answering those prayers faithfully!

The oldest of Mrs. Mata's children is now a young adult attending a local community college. He has expressed a desire multiple times to be a church worker, possibly a Youth Pastor or Director of Christian Education. However, his legal status in this country and the lack of his family's financial resources limit those options at this moment. Those same circumstances are echoed across the Valley. Because of those circumstances, I changed the way I structured my ministry efforts with youth. While during my internship in California it had been easier to plan things like confirmation retreats or fellowship outings without thinking much of cost, here in the Valley I had to shift my thinking.

There are so many factors that limit what young people in the Valley can and cannot do. The legal status of many youth in the Valley limits the places they can go, due to the border patrol checkpoint located about an hour north of the Valley. For example, there is a wonderful LCMS camp in Texas, but as it is beyond the checkpoint, many cannot benefit from that experience. Transportation is another factor, since often both parents are working to make ends meet and cannot take time off to drive their children to youth events, Bible studies, or even church on Sunday mornings. It was nearly impossible to make age-specific events for the youth, as older siblings often care for younger siblings. If we excluded someone from coming because they were too young, that meant their older siblings would not be allowed to attend either. That is where our push for family-wide programming stemmed from.

That means that as leaders, we needed to create new experiences for all the youth in the Valley to be a part of. This is where RioMAC's strength in collaborative ministry came into play. Local church leaders had access and connections to different organizations and resources that, when combined, could create impactful experiences for our families. We had leaders who consistently applied for various grants to reduce or eliminate the cost to participate in youth ministry programs and events. The success of these efforts was due largely to the system of collaboration that had been in place for decades prior to my arrival.

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There is more I could say about family dynamics, stereotypes, regional differences, and the interesting culture of border ministry. Although I no longer live or serve in South Texas, I am grateful for the experience and wisdom gained through failures and daily life there. I have never once doubted that the Lord guided that leap of faith for a reason. I am just glad I said, “Yes.” God was there in the Rio Grande Valley and He continues to work there, even when a leader is called away. One thing I have taken with me is a deep respect for those that have been there long before I got there and remain there long after I have gone. They are faithfully building relationships and doing the work that the Lord has empowered them to do, even when others come along with shiny new ideas, programs, and revised methods. That faithfulness is so steady and has laid the groundwork for others to water the seeds that have already been planted.

There is one pastor in particular that comes to mind as I reflect on some of those long-lasting relationships. This pastor has been a fixture in the Mercedes, Texas, community for decades now. I was introduced to so many Mercedes residents when I first moved to the area, and I recall being so impressed that this pastor had invested so much time into building relationships with people in his community, many of whom did not even attend the church! From local mechanics to the cashier at the local Dairy Queen, Pastor Weber knew them and their families personally. When outside mission teams began their search for a local place to serve, we knew to point them to Pastor Weber. It is that kind of day-to-day steady faithfulness that has laid the foundation for other leaders who have come and gone over the years. It is thanks to servant leaders such as this that RioMAC’s initiative in South Texas has been a place for new leaders to be fruitful.

My prayer is that faithful servant leaders do not grow weary in doing good and continuing to share the Gospel, even when they feel as though no good is coming out of their work. There is good there; it is there because the Lord is doing good through them, and His faithfulness never fails.

My prayer is that faithful servant leaders do not grow weary in doing good and continuing to share the Gospel, even when they feel as though no good is coming out of their work. There is good there; it is there because the Lord is doing good through them, and His faithfulness never fails.

# A Student of the King and a Teacher in the Kingdom: An Example of Wholistic Mission Work

Miriam Carter

**Abstract:** Two things are needed to be in the Lord's ministry. The first is to be in God's Word and the other is then to go out and work. This is an article about a woman who has done just that for more than forty years. Carol gets her strength from God's Word and then proceeds to do what is put in front of her, to share God's love. She has done this by example, by teaching, by sharing, and by caring for people who are less fortunate. Some of her stories are in these next pages.

Wholistic ministry needs both of these parts. People who want to do God's work need first of all to be students of the King, Jesus Christ. Being in the Word and learning from the Word are all important, remembering that Jesus is the Word.

The second part is also important. Wholistic ministry includes teaching in the Kingdom. Many people can teach who are not educated as teachers, even by being excellent followers. A person can teach by example, by directing conversations or giving suggestions.

The person that made me think of this title is Carol, a long-time missionary. Her life's work has been wholistic. Her goal is that everyone gets to know God and see Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and in this process she cares for all.

Carol decided that she wanted to be a missionary when she was a teenager. She says,

It all started in Florida when I was about fourteen years old. At that time, a missionary from Africa came to our church and spoke to our Sunday School about his work among the black people of Africa. I was sitting in the second



*Miriam Carter is a retired, LCMS-trained elementary teacher. She has lived in several different countries with her husband when he taught in seminaries overseas. Even when in the United States where they spent twenty-five years in St. Paul, Minnesota, Miriam would try to work with refugees or immigrants to share Jesus and to help with English. Now this work has continued in Hong Kong where she and her husband are working. Miriam is married to Richard and they have two children who have shared in cross-cultural work. [miriam.carter@gmail.com](mailto:miriam.carter@gmail.com)*

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row on the right-hand side of the church. I was curious about the array of drums and bones he had on the table in front of him. What in this world could these things be used for? When he explained that these were used in Africa to worship the gods, it came as a shock to me to realize that still so many people in this world did not know the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, there was just one thing I wanted to do—and that was to tell them. As a teenager and young person, I often said to God, “Here am I! Send me.” I didn’t know if God could really use me or not, but I always hoped so.

When she was in her first year in the university, she would stay up late and listen to the Voice of China broadcast. She felt God calling her to work for Him there. This desire never faded. When it came time to check in with the mission board of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), they suggested that she become a teacher. Later they suggested that she become a deaconess. She did that and was ready to serve but the timing didn’t work to go with the mission board.

Carol wrote letters to missionaries in Hong Kong. She decided that if someone would give her a place to live and pocket money, she would do whatever work she could do to help. She paid her own way to Hong Kong and Martha Boss gave her a place to live and shared her resources by giving her \$100 a month. Carol got to the mission field. She began learning Cantonese and stayed in this arrangement for three and a half years.

Her main role during those years was to organize and run a 24-hour daily nursery for one- to five-year-olds. There were about twenty children who had no one to care for them. She got donations from LWML women in the US to help care for those children’s needs. Leftover hotel soaps were used to wash them. She worked to have them dressed reasonably with no funds but only donations of clothes. Of course, there were also daily Christian lessons using Sunday School leaflets from the US.

Besides this main role, Carol also taught Sunday School teachers at St. John’s Lutheran Church at Rennie’s Mill (area where Lutheran missionaries first came to Hong Kong), taught English classes in their primary school, visited families, and held Bible classes for nurses, students, and others.

After some years she decided that she really should see her parents, so she did the reverse travel plan. She wrote to the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit in San Francisco. She said that if they provided a place for her to live and pocket money she would help the newly founded church by doing whatever she could. She did this for eleven years, staying with the same family for all that time.

At the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, Carol worked mostly with the youth in the area. She organized the youth group and would take them places to show them how to witness and how to lead. She would take them to a Chinese park and would have a flannel graph board around her neck. Here she seldom used Cantonese because

those youth only knew English. She helped them share stories about Jesus with the children in the park.

She also took the youth to a home for the elderly. The program grew and became popular. The youth discovered lonely Chinese people on different floors and were able to bring the residents to the gathering place. Being gathered together for a good fellowship time, they had a time to hear about Jesus and the youth would sing for them in the worship service. Women from the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit also joined in by bringing Chinese food (Dim Sum) and sharing in the fellowship. The residents received the Word but also much needed friendship.

Often Carol was also the church's driver. She would take the youth around, drive people to the doctor or hospital or even to see a lawyer or to court. She served as a translator in many of those cases. She visited non-Christian families of the Sunday School students with their teachers. Carol made sure that all of the Chinese families in the neighborhood were contacted by phone or by getting a Gospel tract.

In 1981, Carol got the go-ahead from the LCMS mission board to go to Hong Kong as a missionary. They got quite a deal. She already knew Cantonese and had so much appropriate, vital experience. By this time, she has been in Hong Kong for forty years. She is "almost Chinese" and loves these people. When she arrived back in Hong Kong as a synodical missionary, she began teaching right away in the seminary. At the same time, she was taking courses to finish her Master of Ministry degree (MM). She is well-loved today, as you can know from comments by generations of former seminary students.

Here are more of Carol's own words. "I rejoiced when God first allowed me to come to the mission field of Hong Kong, and now after over fifty years of proclaiming His Gospel to the Chinese people, I still rejoice—and even more. I thank God for letting me be one of His servants here on this mission field, and I pray to Him that He will send many more to the mission field to reap the harvest that is ripe and waiting."

I pray to Him that He will send many more to the mission field to reap the harvest that is ripe and waiting.

I think of Carol as a Student of the King and a Teacher in the Kingdom. Throughout her life she has been a student of the Bible. The Bible and prayer have been her mainstays. She has also been a teacher whether in the classroom or outside the classroom. Teaching is also done by sharing in a conversation, in person, on the phone, in letters, or by example.

Carol does the witnessing part of wholistic mission in so many ways. She wrote a Practical Evangelism book for use in Asia some years ago, and now is checking it for language and theological clarity. She spends hours with two church leaders on the

Chinese version and with me on the English version. She is working to train disciples who then can train disciples. In this book it is very clear that she is interested in wholistic witnessing. When visiting in a home, the visitors are to pay attention to everyone present and to look for needs even as they share the Good News. They are to watch for ways that they could help the person or family.

Carol also carries many tracts with her. Since her Cantonese is probably better than her English now, she can choose the most appropriate tracts and can give them with a smile.

One of her big projects each year is the annual evangelistic outreach program for street sleepers and lower income people each winter. She organizes the whole thing, gets many volunteers and donations so that these less fortunate people can come for a Christian program and hear of God's love in Jesus, enjoy a meal, be given some extra food and supplies, and get some warm clothing. It is a huge endeavor, but Carol masterfully brings in people to help from secondary school students to congregational members. All ages work together to help these needy people.

Since she has been working with the street sleepers for such a long time, she has good relationships with many of them. Lately Carol told me how much one lady enjoyed it when she took her out for lunch on her birthday. Another time she invited a man to spend the day on an outing. They visited a family and ate together and even had a Bible study in the afternoon. The man enjoyed it all so much that he wanted to stay through the evening. These street people are special to Carol. When she is talking with them, you can see her love, her concern, and her understanding.

I have seen Carol talking with a little old lady who sells a few things outside of her MTR (Mass Transit Railway) station. The familiarity was evident when they greeted. Before we walked on, Carol knew it would be special to the lady if I said something to her also. Just say, "Jesus loves you!" to her, which I did. Carol was teaching me how she builds the relationship. This lady knows that Carol cares and now knows Jesus loves and cares for her.

Carol also involves people in the US in God's ministry here. Some women there cut old Christmas cards into a cross and write John 3:16 on the back. Carol makes sure that these crosses are given out to people. The man that Carol shared an outing with asked for more of those crosses so that he could give them out. Carol's wholistic mission focuses on including others in the ministry of sharing Jesus and His love.

She is connected quite closely with a few of the schools and is often asked to speak at one school or another. She is involved with a school for disadvantaged children. She goes there to support the work in that school and loves those children. At another school she arranged for the children to put together gift bags for the people who came to the street sleepers outreach program.

Carol is also a mentor. A young lady who was deeply troubled by her rough home situation was willing to talk with Carol—and heard about Jesus’ love. Another person whom I know has been mentored by Carol for years is an artist. It is a joy to read about the woman’s art displays and the witness that she now gives of God’s love in Jesus.

Carol is personable and cares for all of these people, but she doesn’t do this on her own. Her relationship with Jesus is what her life is about, and she wants to share that with everyone. Whenever we talk she shares a special verse or two that are meaningful at the time. (We are about the same age. . . but when I grow up, I want to be like her!)

Carol lives in a large housing project with each building being twenty stories high. There are six to eight apartments on each floor. There are over one hundred buildings almost all alike in the area of about ½ mile by ½ mile. Fifty-six thousand people live in the housing project. Carol writes,

God, there are so many people out there, and so few of them know You.

What thoughts go through my mind as I look out the window at the many other twenty-story buildings that surround mine? There are two thoughts that I have again and again. Both of them take the form of a prayer.

The first one is, “God, there are so many people out there, and so few of them know You.” It breaks my heart when I look out and see so many apartments where they have incense burning to the idols which cannot help them. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. This is just what the Bible says of them in Psalm 115. How sad it is to see people offering fruit, tea, and bottles of oil to these idols which cannot help them. I just so long in my heart for all these people to know the true God who loves us so much that He gave His only Son to die on the cross for our sins, and who even gives us His Holy Spirit to help us to believe in Him. If only these people could all know the true God, then they would no longer have to live fearing the demons and trying to appease the gods. Yet only 11 percent of the people in Hong Kong know the Lord Jesus Christ. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”

What is the other thought that goes through my mind as I look out of my (apartment) window in Mei Foo Sun Chuen? My second thought is, “Thank you, Lord, that I am here and can have at least a small part in bringing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Chinese people.” Right on the doorstep of Hong Kong is China, where 1.4 billion people live. Please pray for the Chinese people that more of them will come to know the true God through

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the Lord Jesus Christ. “Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth more laborers into the harvest.”

Carol’s beginning here in Hong Kong was by the Lord using Martha Boss. They only worked together for three and a half years but God has used these two women mightily in caring for Chinese people and especially in sharing the Good News of Jesus with them. God took Martha Boss home to be with Him but is letting Carol continue in this wonderful work of sharing Him.

Wholistic ministry is still being carried on in many places and needs all kinds of workers. Carol continues to work under what is now The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Office of International Mission. If you are interested in this kind of work, there are also other organizations that have as their main focus sharing the love of Jesus while caring for the whole person. These include Mission of Christ Network, World Mission Prayer League, and Global Lutheran Outreach. You can be involved by praying or by encouraging others to pray and to consider serving. People of any age can actually work in these missions. May God bless all missionaries at home and away.

## Review

THE CHURCH SINCE PENTECOST by John W. Constable. Edited by Oscar E. Feucht. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969. 101 pages. Paperback \$26.79.

John W. Constable wrote this little book more than fifty years ago when he was a professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Reading it all these years later, I thought that the church today is in many ways still trying to do the same thing as then. Especially when I got to the last chapter, I thought even today the last chapter especially fits very well in this wholistic witnessing issue.

The book was part of a discipleship series to equip all Christians for mission. Starting with a discussion of the Acts of the Apostles, the book ends asking us to write a present-day Acts of the church. Although some historical citations may be found inaccurate, the author highlights interesting things that happened in the centuries between the first Acts and the present Acts.

In the beginning of the church, the main method of witnessing was with words, first spoken and then written. Even then, however, people were cared for by Jesus and His disciples. The words that were shared have had power ever since Pentecost. In Acts 16:20 and 17:6, we read how these early people turned the world upside down with their sharing of Jesus. This is because the first Christians believed and experienced Christ's saving work wholistically. As Constable put it: "These early Christians were on fire with the conviction that they had become, through Christ, literally sons of God; they were pioneers of a new humanity, founders of a new Kingdom" (17).

It wasn't that their lives were easy and safe. They were known to be a new sect that was not legal. Rome didn't like them because Jesus was said to be a king, and the Jews didn't like them because they were changing the old laws. Later, Christianity became a lawful religion, but was this helpful or not? The author helps us to see that it has always been complicated. For example, he suggests that it was under Emperor Constantine that a separation between the clergy and the laity advanced (44). After this more and more of the work of missions was expected to be done by the clergy.

Professor Constable makes note of Arminian churches and a social gospel emphasis on caring for the people in the urban areas in all of their troubles. Those leaders said that the "church should be concerned not only about the eternal but also the temporal welfare of men" (62). Most churches, however, didn't know what to do with those areas of life and left them alone. And here, today? "The church in America perhaps too often *adopts* the world view of the society in which it is found instead of *setting forth* a Christian world view relevant to the needs of people" (64).

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The author states then that the educational system of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is one of its most important features (77). So what are the important features now? More than fifty years ago, the Synod agreed to six Mission Affirmations. The last three were: “The Church Is Christ’s Mission to the Whole Society, The Church Is Christ’s Mission to the Whole Man, and The Whole Church Is Christ’s Mission” (78). It appears that wholistic witnessing was affirmed by our church.

The author asks us to consider how members think of others in different Christian churches and how believers work together in our communities. “Paul tells us that the church is ‘the body of Christ’” (82). Does that mean just our own Lutheran synods?

Coming to the twelfth (final) chapter, I would change the title, *New “Acts” for Renewed ~~Men~~ People*. (Yes, he does include women in this chapter.) But the key question in this chapter is about *change*: “To many the church seems no longer ‘relevant.’ But do we not have a ‘changeless Christ for a changing world?’” (96). And we are still asking that today. How do we become like the early Christians, on fire for the Lord? How and where do we “do mission”? Will Greenland’s icy mountains be in Europe or in our community?

Professor Constable concludes on a strong note when he writes that contemporary Christians can’t expect that our pastors are being paid to do this work. It is easy to think that, but this work needs every Christian. The entire priesthood of believers is needed for truly wholistic witnessing. In our new chapter of Acts,

the social situation cries out for men and women who are new apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Where there is need to speak a word of comfort, a word of admonition, a word of forgiveness, there is an opportunity for the Christian man or woman to rise to the situation with the Word from God alone. Many are the opportunities that present themselves to us and are bypassed or not seen because we lack the desire or training to be a witness to those who cry out for help. (99–100)

In this new Acts we join with the whole church of all ages and places.

When we join ourselves to Christ’s community of believers, we ally ourselves to that great body of men and women who have been the church of the past. Their history is our history. We stand with them in that great line of saints and sinners that has spread from Christ until today and will extend onward as we write New Acts until He comes again. (100–101)

Miriam Carter

## ***Lutheran Mission Matters* Call for Papers: Nov. 2021**

The editorial committee of *Lutheran Mission Matters* (LMM) invites you to submit an article for the November 2021 issue on the chosen theme, “Mission and Ministry *In, Through, and After* (?) a Pandemic: What Have We Learned?” The missions and ministries around the world have had widely divergent responses to the pandemic. The stay-at-home orders, physical distancing, and the wearing of masks had an impact on missions and ministries worldwide. Christian habits and practices were interrupted. Some congregations experienced dramatic declines in member engagement and financial support, while others remained relatively stable.

Significant questions were raised as congregations worked to balance health concerns over the need to gather for worship and to administer the Sacrament. As traditional means of outreach and evangelism were suspended, new avenues for reaching others were tried. Social media, live streaming, and online meetings were quickly implemented as alternative ways of staying connected with members, along with holding worship services outdoors and offering drive-up communion services. Many of these efforts also reached beyond the congregation into the larger community, connecting the Gospel with new hearers.

What worked during the pandemic? More important, why?—and what theological implications need discussion? How can the lessons learned through the pandemic inform the future mission and ministry activities of the local church? How did theological education fare, when universities and seminaries shifted to online courses, and what are the implications for future education strategies? We invite you to join the discussion by submitting articles and essays for the November 2021 journal. This is not the first time the church has responded to external forces beyond its control. From effective witness of the Early Church under persecution, to the oft-compared pandemic of 1918, to how Lutherans responded in 2020, we can provide a perspective on the past and the present, as we look to the future.

You are invited to submit articles, studies, or observations about the impact of the pandemic on the mission and ministry of the church. *Lutheran Mission Matters* is a peer-reviewed publication, available online at <https://www.lsfm.global> and in the Atlas (American Theological Library Association Serials) database or as printed journals. The journal is in its twenty-eighth year of publication.

LMM articles are generally up to 3,000 words in length, although longer articles will be considered. The deadline of September 1, 2021 is negotiable. Articles dealing with aspects of the theology and practice of Lutheran mission other than this issue’s theme will be considered for publication, space permitting. Send your ideas and questions to the editor of the journal, Dr. Victor Raj ([editor@lsfm.global](mailto:editor@lsfm.global)), with a copy to the Editorial Assistant at [assistanted@lsfm.global](mailto:assistanted@lsfm.global).

Please let us know soon of your willingness to be a part of this publishing effort.

In Christ’s mission to the world, and on behalf of the Editorial Committee,  
Rev. Dr. Victor Raj, Editor of *Lutheran Mission Matters*

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## *Submission Guidelines*

We welcome your participation in writing for *Lutheran Mission Matters*. Please observe the following guidelines for submission of manuscripts.

*Lutheran Mission Matters* publishes studies of missiological issues under discussion in Christian circles across the world. Exegetical, biblical, theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the apostolic mission of the church are explored in these pages. (See the mission statement below.) While issues often focus on 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* and *Lutheran Mission Matters* at the Lutheran Society for Missiology's website (<https://lsfm.global>). Click on Our Journals to view PDFs of previous issues.

**Book reviews:** LSFM also welcomes book reviews. Submit reviews of no more than 500 words. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto ([bookreviews@lsfm.global](mailto:bookreviews@lsfm.global)) if interested in writing a review.

### **Mission Statement**

*Lutheran Mission Matters* 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 consult and use *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition for endnotes. See basic examples below and/or consult the “Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide” ([http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)).

<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 243–255.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 184–186.

<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, et al., “Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement,” *Missiology, An International Review* 34 (2006): 431–450.

References to Luther's works must identify the original document and the year of its publication. Please use the following model.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, *Ninety-five Theses (1517)* in *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 31:17–34.

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Quotations of or allusions to specific texts in the Lutheran Confessional writings must be documented. The use of modern translations of the *Book of Concord* is encouraged. Please use the following model.

<sup>5</sup> Augsburg Confession V (Concerning the Office of Preaching) in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. R. Kolb, T. J. Wengert, C. P. Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 40.

Direct quotations exceeding four manuscript lines should be set off from the text in an indented paragraph, without quotation marks. Omissions in a quotation should be noted by ellipsis, with an additional period to end a sentence, as appropriate.

Spelling should follow the latest edition of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Words in languages other than English should be italicized.

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**Length:** Concise, clear articles are preferred. Manuscripts should not be more than 3,000–4,000 words although longer pieces may be arranged by the editor.

**Content:** *Lutheran Mission Matters* is committed to addressing the academic community as well as pastors and people throughout the church and involving them in the theology and practice of mission. Use of terms or phrases in languages other than the language of the article itself is discouraged. The use of complex and long sentences is discouraged. Attention should be paid to paragraphing so that the article is easy to follow and appears inviting on the page.

**Use of call-outs:** *Lutheran Mission Matters* frequently uses call-outs to break up blocks of text on a page and to emphasize important points being made in the article. The author is invited to use Word's Text Highlight Color to suggest words or phrase that may be included in a call-out. The final decision will be made by the editor.

**Format:** Please submit articles in single spaced Times New Roman 10-point font with 0.25" paragraph indents.

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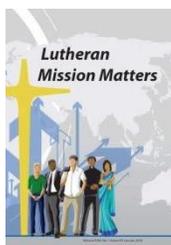
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