LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS

Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology

Volume XXVI, No. 1 (Issue 52) May 2018

https://lsfm.global

LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS
—Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc.—
ISSN 2470-1874 (print); ISSN 2470-1882 (online)

***Lutheran Mission Matters* continues the publication of *Missio Apostolica,* the journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology founded in 1993.**

Lutheran Mission Matters is published twice a year in the spring and fall by the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc. (LSFM), and special issues may be published occasionally. *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. The views expressed by the individual writers, however, are not necessarily the views of the editors, Editorial Committee, or the Board of Directors of LSFM.

The journal is an open-access publication and is available online at https://lsfm.global. Members of the society who contribute more than $30 per year may choose to receive an identical paper copy of the journal.

The journal is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database (online journal index of the American Theological Library Association) and its related online full-text component, ATLAS (American Theological Library Association Serials). ATLAS may be accessed at no charge by alumni of many seminaries upon request to the library of their alma mater.

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Inside This Issue: Confessing in Mission

It has been said, and it is biblical, that people without a vision perish. *Lutheran Mission Matters* and its publisher, the Lutheran Society for Missiology, are the result of a godly vision that its founders received a quarter century ago. The Spirit of Lord set apart three Lutherans, Eugene Bunkowske, Robert Scudieri, and Paul Mueller to become innovators in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, casting a vision for a Lutheran interpretation of Christian mission that would give birth to a society and a journal that would function as an international forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally. Soon the society would develop various chapters, and the publications would enlarge to newsletters, mission observer notes, and significant books on mission.

An extremely gifted international authority on Martin Luther and Lutheran theology, Professor Won Yong Ji, served as the journal's first editor. Dr. Paul Heerboth, an early postwar Lutheran missionary to Japan chaired the Society's publication committee. The Lord in His wisdom called these two saints to His eternal home during the past decade. This year, in March, Gene Bunkowske also departed from us to be with the Lord.

We dedicate this issue to Bunkowske, remembering the decades of missionary service that he with his family rendered to the church and world. Eugene was one of the greatest twentieth-century missiologists. He was an accomplished theological educator of the church, a linguist, a cross-cultural communicator who served particularly the Yala people in Nigeria, working with them toward translating Scripture into their mother tongue for the first time. Stateside, Eugene organized the mission congresses at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, and engaged numerous international students and theologians from across the globe.

Eugene was an exceptionally gifted churchman, missionary, and theologian for whom the status of the rich and the poor, the illiterate and the sophisticated made no difference. Everyone needed God, and everyone must hear and believe in the grace that God lavished upon all on account of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In this issue, the journal honors Bunkowske by republishing the introductory article he wrote for the journal's first issue. It is supplemented by the memories that Paul Mueller and Robert Scudieri share with us as part of the initial mission trio that formed our society and directed its publications.

The Editorial Committee had previously announced "Confessing *in* Mission" as the central theme of the journal's May 2018 issue. Our readership will notice however that this is only partly true in the pages that follow. Celebrating Bunkowske's home-going is one reason for this slight detour. Even more, the journal remains sensitive to the missional challenges of our time and seizes every

opportunity to carefully address them with the talents and gifts that God has vested in His people for the Gospel's sake. Thus, here we present a wide variety of articles and mission reflections.

The journal is committed to making the Lutheran voice heard loudly and clearly in the area of Christian mission. Dr. Luther knew that the pure Gospel will "raise the beggar, and take the poor man from his dunghill," as he stated in his letter to Charles V, June 15, 1520. We follow Luther in making the Gospel sensible to every man, woman, and child. For the Gospel's sake, we are attempting to equip our readers to meet people where they are at.

President Robert Newton in his article calls the church to recover the heart of missions to address the challenges that American Christianity is going through in the current generation. Newton argues that Lutherans need to look no further than the Book of Concord and the Confessions to perceive clearly the opportunities for mission today.

The chief articles of faith themselves are missional, emboldening the followers of Jesus to intentionally engage the culture of the time and involve the society with the Gospel's transforming power as a witness to those outside the church walls. The institutional church and its structure may have lost this vision; but the heart of the Gospel that we confess directs us to become more outgoing and outward looking. Notice that we have included a Spanish translation of the Newton essay by way of displaying our intention to bind together Lutherans across cultures and languages.

Following up President Newton, relating directly to our pronounced theme, Michael Newman has written on publicly confessing the Christ founded on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Newman sees that Lutherans are confessors of the Gospel in the church and in public places as a living testimony of God's salvific event in Christ. Lutherans have such a great treasure in earthen vessels. As mission executive in the Texas District, Newman argues for a confessional foundation for professing the faith especially among friends and neighbors. Gabe Kasper points out that confessing the faith in the (American) secular world means literally unpacking the Christian basics in language to which the average American can resonate, especially as 70% of Americans reason that they lead a morally and ethically pure and chaste life without connecting directly with the institutional church.

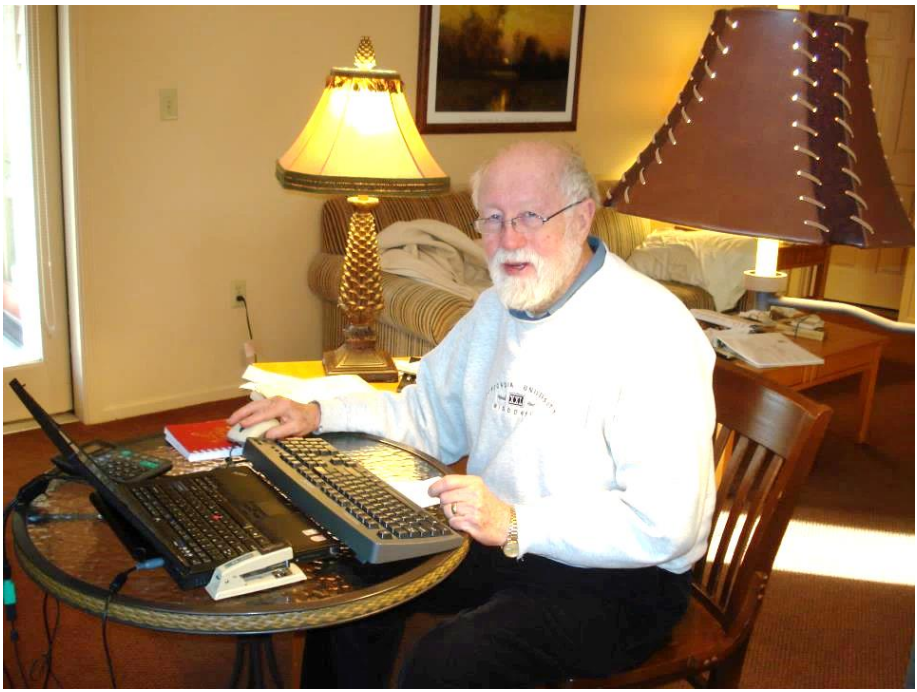
Rich Carter, however, brings an international dimension to our confession. Carter critiques the lack of confessing sins publicly, especially among Lutherans, as they bear witness to Christ in cultures outside the United States. With his hands-on experience with the Missouri Synod's Ablaze! Movement of the early 2000s, Carter readily acknowledges that confessing sins and absolving sinners is an integral part of mission wherever God deploys His people on His mission.

Director of the Lutheran Heritage of Foundation Matthew Heise reports on the necessity of translating didactic materials relative to Lutheran doctrine in many languages for the sake of instilling in as many human hearts as possible the pure love God has for all people in Christ and empowering them for effective Gospel proclamation.

We are thankful for the other writers included in this issue for their contribution to cultivating mission conversations, highlighting missionaries, and encouraging reaching our neighbors.

In this issue, in the Inbox format, we present a conversation on Christian interaction in the public square, the area of life and work where the Church's influence is in decline and the Christian faith must be shared now in the free marketplace of religious ideas. Not everyone in the editorial board agrees on everything the journal publishes. Yet we believe that this is a healthy sign of thinking and publishing in *Lutheran Mission Matters*. We strive to live up to the model the journal's founders set for its future: to serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues that serve the mission of God in our world.

Victor Raj
Editor
Lutheran Mission Matters



Rev. Dr. Eugene W. Bunkowske
1935–2018

Dr. Eugene W. Bunkowske entered God's eternal kingdom on March 27, 2018, at age 82. He began his expatriate missionary service as a Bible translator in Nigeria and ended his Africa service as United Bible Societies' translation consultant for all Africa in 1982. He was then called to Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, where he served as Professor of Missions for twenty years. This was followed by service at Concordia University, St. Paul, MN, where he was instrumental in the development of the Master of Arts in Christian Outreach (MACO) program. He served several terms as a vice president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He was a founding member of the Lutheran Society for Missiology.

Photo courtesy of Paul Mueller collection

Chief Eugene Bunkowske together with his son, Joel, and other chiefs of the Yala people.

Eugene W. Bunkowske: An Encomium

Paul Mueller

Writing a short tribute to Dr. B is an enormous task, for his influence in my life and the lives of hundreds of other missionaries simply cannot be encapsulated in a page or two of remembrances. But let me attempt the impossible.

I remember meeting Dr. B for the first time in 1985 when he had flown to Africa with a stopover in Liberia. We were celebrating the opening of an airfield upcountry in the Liberian bush. I was a brand-new missionary with my wife Joy and son Brandon. I had no idea what it meant to be an African missionary other than the basics—go tell people who didn't know Jesus about the Good News found in His life, death, and resurrection. I was beginning; I had much to learn. But Dr. B had already completed his twenty-two years of boots-on-the-ground African missionary

work and was engaged in preparing the next generation of missionaries at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Years later, at Dr. B's request, I was completing my doctoral work in missiology under his tutelage at the seminary and asked by him to serve as the first secretary of the LSFM at its charter meeting in 1991. Having served as his graduate assistant for two years, I was heading to my next role—following in the footsteps of my mentor and spiritual advisor Dr. B—to prepare the next generation of missionaries to follow after me.

That is how it was for Dr. B. He was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, intent on his missionary task who then prepared future missionaries to continue that work. And he never imagined his place, position, or vocation—no matter where he was sent or what he was assigned—as void of the missionary privilege and mandate. I remember his comment when he left Concordia Theological Seminary to come to work at Concordia University in St. Paul. He nonchalantly noted that his mission field had simply moved—from Africa to Ft. Wayne, IN, and now to St. Paul, MN. His passion was to share Christ with people, all people. He was always first a missionary of Jesus Christ.

Those are just a few of the very important influential moments Dr. B played in my life as his student, his "employee," and finally his colleague. Many others have also had similar experiences that have influenced their missionary lives. I asked several to share their heartfelt thoughts. I also listened and found others who wrote graciously and humbly about Dr. B and the impact he had on them and the world. They wrote:

"Gene kept the focus on multiplication. Great-Commission driven. That's his legacy. While Gene's voice is no longer there to encourage and teach us, his voice will continue to speak through the many of us who sat at his feet and learned from his teaching, his modeling, his inviting, and welcoming leadership."

"Gene was not only a beloved professor, but a spiritual father, mentor, disciple-maker and dear friend in Jesus. My spiritual journey was in many ways, shaped and accelerated as I followed him as he followed Jesus."

"Dr. B was one of the 'early' LCMS missionaries who came to understand that translation is not only about words. Dr. B was passionate about others having the Word, too—through their own forms."

"Dr. Bunkowske was instrumental in my mission formation at the seminary and beyond. He and Bernice reached out to students with a genuine love for them and for sharing the Gospel far and wide."

"One of the great men of God of our generation, Dr. Eugene Bunkowske influenced me and many other missionaries with his scholarship, friendship, and spiritual example. He loved God's Word, God's people, and wanted to see everyone come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord!"

"Dr. B impacted the lives of many in the classroom, in the mission field, and the congregations as God's people gathered to hear the Gospel."

"Thank you, Rabbi (teacher & mentor) Dr. Eugene W. Bunkowske (Dr. B), for making me the pastor, teacher, and mentor that I am today."

"Dr. B's impact has been felt by individuals, congregations, and entire people-groups. Dr. B's ministry approach was captivated by the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2, 'You've heard my message, and it's been confirmed by many witnesses. Entrust this message to faithful individuals who will be competent to teach others.' My life and service, like so many others, has been blessed through the touch and teaching of Eugene Bunkowske."

"Rev. Dr. Eugene Bunkowske taught me how to read the Bible and live a Christian life. He saw me growing up as a young child and guided me. He encouraged me to go to school. He drove me in his car to Maryknoll College on my first day to start secondary school with stern advice on discipline, hard work, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He did a lot for the Yala. He translated the Word of God into our mother tongue and many others. He established scholarships for young children and I am a proud beneficiary."

Dr. B realized that training the next generation of missionaries was critical. And he poured himself into that task as he not only taught future pastors at the seminary, but developed a PhD program in Missiology at the seminary, transitioned to another university to develop the newly formed Master's Degree in Christian Outreach, and was constantly sought out by conferences and venues to share his love for Jesus, his passion for telling others about Him, and the missiological insights he learned in order to do that in the most effective way possible. Dr. B's passion for academic excellence and scholarship was surpassed only by his deep and faithful love for Bernice and his family, centered in a relationship with his Savior Jesus Christ, and a desire that all people have that same personal relationship with Jesus through the disciple-making work He gave to His followers.

Rev. Dr. Eugene Walter Bunkowske was, is, and will continue to be a clear, insightful Lutheran missiological voice speaking into God's mission endeavors as God continues to work through His *ecclesia*—the Church, the priesthood of all believers. As one of the many people he influenced, I will be forever in debt to him and his willingness to take me under his tutorial wing and help shape and mold me into the person I am today. Dr. B has left behind an army of missionary soldiers well-prepared to face the changing world in which we are now entering and living. May his legacy continue to motivate us to be people of mission action and those voices of Good News proclamation as we "gossip the Gospel."

Eugene Bunkowske—In Memoriam

Robert Scudieri

To say that Eugene Bunkowske was a giant in the field of Lutheran missiology would be to say what everyone already knows. Many of us got to know Gene as a missionary to Africa, or as the Translations Coordinator for the African Continent for the United Bible Societies, or for the twenty years he spent teaching communications and outreach at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, or as the Feichter Chair Professor at Concordia University, St. Paul, where he gave innumerable students a zeal for mission work. To appreciate him as the gift from God that he was, you had to know Gene as the humble, caring, courageous servant of Christ that he was.

I first met Gene at a meeting of the American Society for Missiology in Techny, IL, in 1991. That year I had finished time at Yale Divinity School as a Research Fellow in missions. While there, I had been asked many times if I knew the great Gene Bunkowske. I did not. The late Jim Phillips at the Overseas Ministries Studies Center suggested that I attend the meeting of the ASM, where I might meet Gene and other important mission thinkers.

Sure enough, Gene was there, and also Professor Robert Newton, another leading mission thinker from the Fort Wayne Seminary. My first meeting with Gene and Bob was in a long line to a dinner buffet. Waiting in line gave us time to talk. Knowing I had recently accepted a call to head national mission work for the Synod, Gene asked me what I saw as my priorities. I do not remember everything I said, but one priority I do remembering sharing was the need for some way for missionaries in the field and those who taught missions to be able to learn from each other.

Gene became excited when someone had an idea that might advance God's mission. He invited me to his table. At our breakfast table the next day, Gene said, "I have it! A Lutheran Society for Missiology." That began a conversation that continued for the next twenty-five years, fueled by a new Lutheran mission journal, *Missio Apostolica*. Many have asked the derivation of the name of the journal. Because the journal became the main tool for promoting conversation between those in the field and those who teach, I need to explain this below.

An organizing meeting for the new society was held in the fall of 1991. I was elected chair of the new society, and an editorial committee was set in place: Missionary Paul Heerboth and I would be on the committee, as would Concordia Seminary Missions Professor Won Yong Ji, as the editor of the new journal. Professor Ji was the natural person to start up the society's periodical, having begun a Christian magazine in Korea called *NEW LIFE*, as well as serving as the editor for a Korean edition of Luther's works. Willard Burce took on the role of book editor.

Early on, the plan was to begin a mission book series. Sale of the books could be a source of income. To begin the series, I offered the book I had written during my time at Yale, *Apostolic Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Missionary*. The book traces the history of the Greek term, Αποστολική Εκκλησία, (apostolic church) in the third article of the Creed of Nicaea. The book recovers the missionary emphasis of this term, so that when, in a worship service, we confess our faith in "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church," we understand it to mean that we are confessing our faith in a "missionary church."

I tell you this because missionary Paul Heerboth suggested that the name for the new journal be *Missio Apostolica*. Paul's thinking was that using Latin and Greek in the name for the journal would signify our desire for the journal to be cross-cultural, not just a journal representing American ideas. The editorial committee would try to involve writers from cultures around the world. The journal attracted many others to the new Lutheran Society for Missiology: laity, pastors, mission professors, and mission executives, as well as missionaries serving around the world. Today we know the journal as *Lutheran Mission Matters*. It all began with an invitation to sit and talk!

Gene was hospitable. Over the years I was invited to the Bunkowske table many times. Whenever I went to the Ft. Wayne Seminary, Gene and Bernice insisted I stay with them. I would be invited for dinner, a glass of wine, and conversation that invariably opened a new door of mind and spirit.

Gene was collegial; he looked for ways to help you. He would begin our conversations after dinner with, "Tell me, Bob, about . . ." I would arrive with some issue about the society or a question about mission that seemed necessary, but difficult. Gene would listen with care and perspicuity and then say, "The Lord will show us the way." Show *us* the way. More ministries were begun by Gene and others after conversations like that.

He has now been invited to another table, where I am sure he has found others to learn from and advise. I wonder what He and his Lord are discussing at this moment. Whatever it may be, I know it would advance the mission for those of us still at work.

Trends In Missiology Today

Eugene W. Bunkowske

Abstract: Dr. Bunkowske originally presented this paper at the inaugural banquet of the Lutheran Society for Missiology in Fort Wayne on October 20, 1992. In it, he discusses twelve trends that he sees as changes in the theology and practice of missions. He explains how changes in the cultures of countries that send missionaries (The West) and in countries that receive missionaries require a new way of thinking and acting. The world is no longer so unbalanced that the Western world can think of itself as the giver of Christian faith, and the rest of the world indebted to the churches of the West for this gift. Rather, it is necessary to recognize that the young churches meet the historic churches as equals, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Together, they share the same task and search for ways to communicate the Good News of Jesus with the world.

Introduction:

Today, Tuesday, October 20, 1992, marks the inaugural banquet of the LSFM (Lutheran Society for Missiology). This banquet was scheduled to commemorate the first anniversary of the birth of the LSFM. This birthing took place at Concordia Theological Seminary on Friday, October 25, 1991, with 15 people in attendance.

Much has happened during this first year. The Society has been organized with officers in place and membership increasing day by day. Tomorrow morning, God willing, the Articles of Incorporation including the constitution and bylaws of the Lutheran Society for Missiology will be discussed and formally approved.

Soon after this meeting we look forward to receiving the first issue of the LSFM journal. Like most new babies, it will almost certainly be unpretentious at its first viewing, but that will not bother us. Rather we will be filled with joy in the knowledge that a new missiological child has been born. Once birth has taken place we can, with great delight, follow the growth and development that will quite naturally occur. Particularly as each of us is willing to make our contributions in terms of time and articles.

Hats off to the publication committee and to the editor who will have the privilege and the rare responsibility of getting our LSFM journal rolling.

Now to the task at hand, “Trends in Missiology Today” as we together move into the second year of the LSFM’s history.

Trend One:

A dawning realization that Christians should no longer be divided up into "sent ones" and "receiving ones," but rather that all Christians are "sent ones" (missionaries).

As late as 1960 when Bernice and I left St. Louis for Africa, there was a pervasive idea afloat that all cultures should be categorized on an evolutionary scale, with some at or near the top and others lower down. This led to the idea that it was the singular duty of the Christians in the "developed" cultures with a "civilized" and "technologically advanced" way of life to share the "gospel" (often interpreted primarily in terms of western lifestyle) with the "primitive pagans" in the rest of the world.

God used sickness in Africa to clear my mind very quickly of this totally biased way of thinking. It happened like this. I was down with hepatitis, covered with depressions, doubt, fear and low self-esteem. God did not send me a fellow missionary from America, but a brother African Christian. The Holy Spirit had worked faith in his heart not even a year before on the basis of God's Word spoken through me.

This man with but six years of formal schooling came into my room. I thought of him as a very young and immature Christian. Yet there he was ministering to me by turning to relevant passage after passage in all parts of the Bible. His way of prayer was straightforward, Trinitarian and in the name of Jesus Christ. It was directed to the throne of Grace as though God were right there in touching distance.

God's ministration through Lawrence Ajegi on that day did wonders for my depression, doubt, fear and feelings of worthlessness. At that moment I realized that Lawrence Ajegi was not a "primitive pagan" or even a "primitive new believer." He was the man whom God had sent to me with healing.

Then and there I realized that Lawrence had marvelously and almost miraculously come to know intimately many parts of the Scripture, in fact all of the Scripture that was needed to be a sent one, a Christian missionary. And that is what he has been ever since that day when God sent him out on one of his first missionary assignments, to a sinful and sick missionary.

I realize now as I stand before you that on that day in 1961, after only nine months of Christian faith, Lawrence Ajegi by the Grace and Spirit of God knew more of the Word of God and how to apply it meaningfully in the lives of others than many pastors here in the USA who have had a full seminary training.

Today there is no east or west, no geographic area that has exclusive rights to witness and Gospel outreach. Rather, every Christian is a "sent one" because every Christian has received God's free grace and as a functioning member of His body has been commissioned with the privilege and power to pass it on to others.

The fact of the matter is that missionaries from everywhere are crisscrossing the globe to bring the good news of God's Grace in Jesus Christ to others. These missionaries are not just people from the English-speaking or European world, but they, in many cases, are people from a variety of cultures and social classes. Many are Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America who speak four or five different languages, of which English may well be fourth or fifth or not there at all.

In fact, the increase of non-European missionaries is phenomenal. Between 1980 and 1991 the following missionary increase from so-called third world countries is as follows:

1. Asia	a 272% increase from	6,048 to 22,497
2. Africa	a 236% increase from	5,689 to 19,097
3. Latin America	a 169% increase from	1,127 to 3,026
4. Oceania	a 63% increase from	374 to 610

(Source: *International Bulletin of Mission Research,* April 1991)

By comparison, the increase in North American missionaries for the 16-year period between 1975 and 1992 (sic) is as follows:

5. North America	a 17% increase from	57,212 to 66,840

(Source: *AD 2000 Global Monitor,* September 1991)

Trend Two:

A return to the Biblical reality that all moments, places, words and actions count in mission witness.

The traditional approach in the West assumes a systematic separation between sacred and secular time and location and also between private and public time and location. This way of organizing reality has also deeply affected Christianity. In the past and, unfortunately, even often today western Christians have quite naturally left the Sunday morning worship service to kick off their "Christian shoes" and put on "private and secular sneakers" which, by definition, rule out Christian witness.

Today things are changing. Christians, particularly many "boomers," are saying that Christianity needs to be all or nothing. That, at least for Christianity, time and place cannot be divided. That Christianity is either all the time and in every place or it is hypocrisy. That whatever a Christian does or says is Christian witness. It may be good, faulty or bad, but it is witness. It does count, and it either leads people to Christ or away from Him. In fact, actions often do speak louder, or at least as loudly as words when they are naturally linked to appropriate Gospel talk.

Much of non-western Christianity heartily agrees that all moments, places and actions count in mission witness. As this trend catches on in the West we would do well to look to our non-western brothers and sisters for positive models and advice as to how this kind of mission witness is done.

Trend Three:

A growing movement toward energizing the "priesthood of all believers" for dynamic, while you live and work, mission outreach.

Two decades ago there were fewer than thirty "closed countries" in the world, that is, countries in which it was impossible to be a full-time professional missionary. Today that figure has risen to between 70 and 80 countries containing well more than 50 percent of the world's lost souls.

What are we to do?

What is needed in many places today is not more and more professional Christians (full-time missionaries), but more and more Christian professionals. Those are Christian people who know God's Word well and are committed to a natural, witness-while-you-work, approach to Christian witness and outreach. People who have made it their business to get prepared for this life in missions by equipping themselves with the professional skills that are marketable in the closed and closing countries of this world.

Sometimes we call such missionaries "Christian professionals," "tentmakers," or "bi-vocational workers." People like St. Paul or Priscilla and Aquilla and the thousands of other witnesses who, by the way, lived in a world that was for the most part totally "closed." A world in which during the first three hundred years after Christ professional Christians (full-time missionaries) had short life spans. Even bi-vocational witnesses found life very unpleasant especially as they placed their witnessing vocation well forward in their life priorities. They did, however, tend to survive especially if they were ready to move when things got too difficult.

Trend Four:

The "a-ha experience" of recognizing mission as unified and holistic Good News communication instead of defining it as a compartmentalized tug of war between "evangelism gospel" and "social gospel."

Jesus went about doing good as well as preaching and teaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He mandated the disciples to heal in His name, and He commissioned them to make more disciples, to baptize and to teach the people to obey everything that He had taught. He said that "in His name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed to all peoples of the world beginning from Jerusalem." Jesus' approach was to heal both spirit and body together by administering the forgiveness of sins and raising people from their physical infirmities.

During the segmented, compartmentalized, atomized, specialized period in the West it has been usual to choose up sides and decide to do missions either as "social

gospel" or as "evangelism gospel." It has also been fashionable to condemn those who took the other part and even to look with suspicion on those who wanted to follow Christ's example and put it all back together again.

Now, at least in some quarters, there is a move to try again to take the inspired and inerrant, revealed Word of God in the Bible absolutely seriously by doing mission holistically, to treasure the Scripture not only for right doctrine, but also for right life and mission outreach. This means rightly dividing Law and Gospel so that all people in their terrible inherited sinful condition can be found and saved.

At the same time it also means that an important part of rightly communicating Law and Gospel has to do with God touching people in all of their parts and doing that all at once by ministering to them in body, mind and spirit. Mission is God's chosen method of doing that through us, not just part of it but all of it. We are the means for bringing His full "means of grace" to human beings in all their parts for forgiveness of sins, salvation and life (now and forever).

Trend Five:

A growing understanding that parochialism and traditionalism must give way to a realistic understanding of rapid cultural change and diversity if meaningful mission communication is going to happen today.

Before World War II most people died in the same community in which they were born. That community was the lens through which they understood the entire world. Since World War II many people, especially in the western world, have come to understand themselves in global terms, including some 7,000-plus languages and some 23,000-plus people groups (cultures). A veritable explosion of facts and figures about this globalized diversity has made it impossible to "know it all" even in any one field of study.

The spooky factor is that things do not remain constant. Languages and cultures are constantly changing and at an increasing speed. Some years ago linguists spoke about dating the time when two languages separated from each other on the basis of a supposed "constant rate of change" factor. Now linguists say little about that part of language study because they know that there is no "constant rate of change" factor against which such measurements can be made. The same thing is true in culture change.

At times, like in our present century, change takes off at what seems to be an impossible rate. In such times people are faced with the hard reality of accepting almost unacceptable cultural diversity and change. For decades people have expected the rate of change to slow down or to be reversed, but that has not happened. There is no going back.

There is a trend in Biblical Christianity today to keep a sharp focus on the

Scriptural message, but at the same time to give up parochialism and traditionalism and accept the cultural change and diversity that God in His divine sovereignty has allowed. This opens the way for Good News communication to many who are ready to receive God's message as long as they are not forced to accept too much "archaic cultural baggage" with it.

Trend Six:

The realization that Spiritual and Biblical formation is basic if mission outreach is to produce productive growth.

Darwin and Huxley (1860) suggested that life could best be explained without reference to the spiritual dimension. Next, science that was originally practiced by theologians was divorced from the concept of a sovereign creator. In time the West developed a religion without the supernatural, which new religion Christianity unwittingly or wittingly (Bultmann, 1950s) adopted.

Missiologists like David Barrett have contended for a decade that Christians who hold a high view of Scripture and communicate a balanced Trinitarian message that features a Sovereign Creator God and an active Spirit of God, together with a strong emphasis on salvation in Jesus Christ, will experience growth. They also predict that Christians who view the Scripture as man's word and communicate a message that naturalizes the supernatural and glosses over the Biblical accounts that focus on the powerful activity of the Spirit of God will decline. Statistics since 1982 in *The World Christian Encyclopedia* and in the annual statistical tables of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* continue to demonstrate the truth of these predictions.

Now as Christianity has plateaued and even declined in the West, more and more Christians are recognizing that productive mission outreach and the attendant growth of the Church depend on the communication of a solid Biblical and spiritual witness.

Trend Seven:

The developing insight that the fourth self (self theologizing) is more important and basic to indigenous church planting than the well worn three-self concept that includes self support, self governance and self propagation.

In the mid-1800s Henry Venn (Church Missionary Society) and Rufus Anderson (Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) suggested that young churches should be allowed independence when they are able to govern themselves, support their own work and engage in mission outreach.

No mention was made of interacting directly with the Scriptures to work out how the Gospel related to indigenous cultural traditions. In most cases non-native missionaries insisted on handling that key theological task, doing their exegesis primarily through the filter of foreign cultural traditions. This approach almost universally excluded an informed, Spirit-of-God-guided application of Scripture to the not-before-exegeted, indigenous traditions being confronted.

The result was that the indigenous leadership of new self-supporting, self-governing, and supposedly self-propagating churches was almost universally ill prepared to bring an enlightened Law and Gospel application to bear on difficult indigenous cultural questions. By the same token these indigenous leaders, in many cases, were ill-equipped to share a full, pure and relevant Gospel communication with their own kith and kin.

The good news is that today there is a growing emphasis on Bible translation into all languages so that indigenous Christians can get directly into the Scriptures at the earliest possible moment. This intimate interaction with the Word immediately brings the Spirit of God to bear on the process. It naturally opens the way for a full, pure and relevant confrontation between the Word of God and the traditions of a given culture right from the start. It also greatly assists in the development of relevant patterns of mission witness and Biblical church planting.

Trend Eight:

A reawakening to the fact that Biblical witness and outreach is basically congregation- and people-centered rather than institution (seminary, synod, etc.) and program-centered.

The New Testament gives us the congregational models of Antioch (Acts 11:19–26 and Acts 13:1–3), Thessalonica (I Thess. 1:6–8) and Rome (Rom. 1:8). It tells us of Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26–40), Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48), Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–9), Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42), plus a multitude of other examples. There is no doubt about it, the Biblical witness models are certainly not one-for-all-times, assembly line approaches. They are not repackaged programs that can be dictated from above. Rather, the Biblical models are Bible based. They take people and each individual situation seriously. The Biblical models concentrate on bringing the never-changing Word of Law and Gospel to bear in ways that make people and their context central to the witness occasion.

The good news is that today individual Christians and the congregations to which they belong are more and more seeing the circuit, district, synod, seminary and institutional mission people as resources, as idea people and as facilitator and helpful coordinators, as those who can help with logistics and training, instead of

seeing them as those who *take over* and do the mission for the congregation or the individual Christian.

Trend Nine:

A decided movement toward short-term and volunteer mission involvement.

Career missionaries were in focus three to five decades ago. Today people are not so ready to make that kind of commitment without a close-up look at what is really involved. Things have also changed for overseas missions and partner churches. Today they are primarily interested in expatriates who can give a competent assist to get things going until such a time as there is a fully trained national to take up the work.

The dramatic nature of this trend is pointed out by the contrast in the increase of career missionaries over against short-term missionaries during the 12-year period between 1973 and 1985, a trend that continues today. In career missionaries there was an 18-percent increase, while in short-term missionaries there was an 848-percent increase.

The actual statistics are as follows:

	1973	1985
Career missionaries	33,000	38,976
Short-term missionaries	3,000	28,224

(Source: Hesselgrave, David J., *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission*, Academie Book, Zondervan, 1988, p. 40)

Trend Ten:

The dawning awareness that Christianity and particularly Christian witness and open Gospel outreach may well be moving out of the Constantinian age back into a second Apostolic age.

During most of the first three centuries after Christ it was dangerous to be a Christian. Persecution and martyrdom were commonplace. Gospel witness and worship was often done in private homes, in catacombs or on the road, and in open country places. Christian witness was continually done in a "closed country" atmosphere with no assurances or governmental protection or assistance.

In the first half of the 4th century Emperor Constantine and his successors adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and everything changed. Christian witness and Gospel outreach was in favor, and there was governmental protection and often governmental assistance. The Apostolic age had

given way to the Constantinian age. In a certain sense Christianity has, in at least some parts of the world, lived in the favored status of the Constantinian age ever since the 4th century.

In the past four centuries (AD 1500 onward) as the age of antisuper-naturalism, sacred-secular division, man-as-godism and now a new pagan supernaturalism has set in, things are radically changing. As a critical mass is reached in post-Christian thinking we may well find ourselves back in a second Apostolic age. Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in a very formal way, have already gone through such an age, and China is, for all practical purposes, still in the midst of such an age. In most parts of the West the new Apostolic age is coming in by fits and starts through a variety of legislations and legal interpretations without any sweeping formal declarations.

Trend Eleven:

The slowly growing recognition that the primary pattern of mission support today is quite different from the timeless Biblical patterns of mission support.

In the 20th century the primary pattern for supporting mission outreach has been through fully salaried missionaries. In most cases this salary has been provided by sending Christians either through mission societies or through church-sponsored mission boards. Rarely has anyone asked if this pattern (sending salaried missionaries) fits the primary Biblical patterns.

In terms of the Biblical evidence "sender-based support" does not show up as a primary pattern. Rather, three very different Biblical mission support patterns are well documented. They are the following:

1). Recipient mission support (I Tim. 5:17–18; Rom. 15:26–27; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 9:1–6, 10:1–12; I Cor. 9:7–14; etc.).

2). Self support (Acts 18:1–4, 20:32–35; I Thess. 2:6–9; II Thess. 3:6–13).

3). Unsolicited gift support (Acts 16:15; II Cor. 11:7–9; Phil. 4:10–19; III John 5–8).

People justify the present sender-based pattern with the argument that things are different today. It is suggested that there is a wider gap in the standards of living, that it is not possible for Christians with a "high standard" to sacrifice their "developed" way of life in order to evangelize. Others say, "What about Paul and the others of his time? He was most probably a well-to-do Roman citizen who found it essential to be 'all things' for the sake of communicating the Gospel to 'all people' (I Cor. 9:22–23)."

It is obvious from Scripture that Paul did not insist on a certain living standard. His approach to the living standard question was "when in Rome do as the Romans

do." To the Philippians he wrote, "I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstance, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that God gives me" (Phil. 4:12–13).

Paul often worked to support himself and others (self support). At times he received an unsolicited gift. While not soliciting gifts for himself he did solicit gifts for other needy believers (Acts 11:29–30; Rom. 15:25–28; I Cor. 16:1–4; II Cor. 8:1–4; and Gal. 2:10), especially for the needy in Jerusalem and Judea.

It appears that prayer (Acts 13:3) was the major support of his sending congregation in Antioch, plus their willingness to receive him back at the end of each tour of duty and minister to him and receive his ministration (Acts 14:27–28 and 15:35).

Now with the rapid surge of volunteers and self-supporting short-term missionaries noted above (an 848-percent increase from 3,000 to 28,224 in twelve years), the Biblical patterns of missionary support are also coming back into focus, and their relevance for today's world witness and outreach are being more fully recognized.

Trend Twelve:

A growing agreement that missiology is an important theological discipline with powerful implications for the teaching of all other theological disciplines.

Living in a specialized and compartmentalized world it is only natural that "more and more" theological disciplines will come into focus. The new kid on the block during the last 100 years with its Apostolic and Old Testament roots is Missiology. Missiology is about the Son of Man (Jesus) coming to "seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:9). It is about God using human beings as His instruments or vehicles for getting His "means of grace (oral, written and visual Word of God)" to the many "lost and dying people" of this world. It is about every "saved person" getting involved in communicating God's love and power in Christ to other people, both saved and lost ones.

At this point in time Missiology has been established as a special "set of eyes" (a theological discipline) through which we view and do theology. It is somewhat like, but not exactly like, the disciplines of pastoral theology, exegetical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, etc.

Not exactly like these disciplines, however, because Missiology is much larger and more far reaching than a single theological discipline. Missiology is, from a Biblical perspective, more like a "mother hen" under which all of the theological disciplines—including also Biblical anthropology, sociology and linguistics—live

and move and have their being. God's desire to "seek and to save the lost" (Missiology) gives all of theology a "reason for being." Thus Missiology (God's gracious desire and actions to save) can be understood as the "glue" that holds all of the theological disciplines together, as the "central essence" of all of the "knowledge about God" (theology) and its parts or disciplines.

Articles

Recovering the Heart of Mission

Robert Newton

Abstract: The article is an expanded version of Robert Newton's address at the annual banquet of the Lutheran Society for Missiology in St. Louis on January 30, 2018. In this essay, Dr. Newton argues that the Lutheran Church has been blessed to live its entire history in the era of what is now called Christendom. During this period, the Church was always close to the centers of power, and the Church's voice was regarded as important in shaping society as well as expressing its hopes for the future. Now, the Church lives and works in the world after Christendom. The Church is losing its privileged place in society and finds that it must compete with other religions in contexts that are neutral at best and perhaps even hostile to the Christian faith. In this sense, the Church is returning to a lifestyle and a way of working that are like that of the Church in the first Christian century. The Church then was a persecuted minority that carried its message with authenticity and integrity into an unbelieving world. This is the task that Lutherans today must creatively address, discovering new ways of communicating by word and deed the message of God's salvation in Jesus.

God has brought our church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), and, I dare say, the entire Christian Church in the West, to an incredible time and place in the unfolding of His global missionary enterprise. We stand at a crossroads in the history of our church body where we are faced with a choice. Do we choose to embrace the mission of God, following our Lord Jesus by faith into the world in which we have zero significance and even less control, or do we choose not only to ignore the invitation but to reject it. I've written this essay with the single desire that we capture this divinely appointed moment by faith in the living God and

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commit ourselves anew to what is in His heart and mind, that which was, is, and will always be simply this: God so loved the world. If I were to retitle this essay, it would change from "Recovering the Heart of Mission" to "Recovering the Heart of the Gospel," for I fear that the "Heart of the Gospel" is becoming lost by our Church.

Re-dawning of the Missionary Age

The Missionary Age has re-dawned in the West. Gone is the "West reaches the Rest" mission paradigm. For those of us from the West who served as missionaries overseas, we rejoice that the fruit of past missionary labors has resulted in sister churches around the world. We give thanks and praise to the Lord of the Harvest who has raised up missionary partners from peoples once considered mission fields.

We live and serve today in a global missionary enterprise, where no national church can claim the pole position of world mission or boast of its personal significance as more critical than that of other churches in participating in the mission of our Lord. It is both foolish and arrogant to suggest, as some would propose among us, that this is the LCMS's greatest moment in world missions, that is, the LCMS sits at the center of the Lutheran contribution to the global missionary enterprise.

As previous mission fields have become church bodies and resources for missionary service around the world, the U. S. is shifting from a once churched society to a post-churched or post-Christendom society. I've spoken on this matter numerous times so will not belabor the point here.

By brief reminder I divide mission work into three eras of the Church's influence in the larger world: Pre-Churched, Churched, and Post-Churched or Post-Christendom. Churches, like other social organisms, exist in relationship with a larger society defined by cultural boundaries that clearly mark those who are considered significant members (stakeholders) from those who are not (outsiders).

The Pre-Churched era finds missionaries leaving their churched world to proclaim the Gospel to unchurched people who have not yet heard it. The Holy Spirit gathers new believers around that Gospel, and the Church is born in that place. As that church expands, not only in size but also in influence, it is embraced by the culture as being a significant and positive stakeholder in the general community. That acceptance ushers in the "Churched" era of a society. Most of us in the LCMS grew up in that world. My wife and I grew up in Napa, California, and remember as children seeing signs posted a few weeks before Easter in most of the shops downtown that read, "This establishment will be closed from noon to 3 p.m. on Good Friday in commemoration of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ." It's hard to imagine such a phenomenon taking place today, which signals yet another critical shift in the Church's place in society, that of Post-Christendom.[1]

Post-Christendom must not be understood as the demise of Christ's Church in the world but rather as the loss of deference once given the organized church by the larger society. If the Church was "in charge" in Christendom, it is no longer the case. Some argue, and perhaps rightly, that the "Church" was never in charge. The issue here is not the accuracy of that fact, but rather the significance of the perception. We who are inside the Church—and even many on the outside—have long understood our position and role in society from the perspective of being in charge. We served the world from the vantage point that we mattered to it. The outside world appreciated the Church's presence and accepted its opinions as significant contributions to the welfare and progress of our society. Many Christians still depend heavily upon that social significance in order to proclaim the Gospel. Some would go so far as to suggest that we are unable or even forbidden to proclaim the Gospel in arenas in which we are not in charge of the proceedings.

The "in charge" perspective has been successfully challenged in our present secular age, and that challenge has effected the re-dawn of the missionary age among us. After 40 years of mission service and study, I have begun to define "mission work" simply as proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord Jesus in life's places and spaces where the Church is not in charge. Given this simple definition of mission, I offer two observations followed with a concomitant concern:

I have begun to define "mission work" simply as proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord Jesus in life's places and spaces where the church is not in charge.

A. While our community contexts have largely shifted toward a mission field reality (the Pre-Churched era), our methods of proclaiming the Gospel in Word and Sacrament have remained thoroughly entrenched in the ministry paradigms of Christendom.

B. The mission field challenges that we face in our communities where the Church is no longer in charge have thrown us off balance, accentuating the need and desire to maintain (even double down on) the protective boundaries and ecclesiastical order that flourished in the days of Christendom.

Taken together, these two observations give rise to the following concern: The reliance on Christendom's models of ministry coupled with the increased need to protect the Church from alien forces without (and control the Church's teaching from within) work against the Mission of God and eventually move us to abandon the pure Gospel and its call for something or someone that promises the survival of our church institutions.

A Church-Centered Gospel

The five hundred years of the Lutheran movement have been played on the larger stage of seventeen hundred years of Christendom. Key to Christendom is not simply that the Church plays a significant role in the larger society, but that it sits at the center of society. The Church not only speaks authoritatively in the realm of faith, but also in all other realms of life—family, government, education, medicine, commerce, the arts, etc. The Church, then, was society's "go to" place for organizing life in this world (First Article concerns) and preparing for the life to come. Ministry in this model was built on the assumption that the unchurched world would naturally be attracted to the Church and cross over to it via the First Article or cultural bridge shared by all people. The First Article Bridge remained strong and secure for centuries, so secure, in fact, that we Christians grew dependent on its permanence in order to reach our world for Christ.

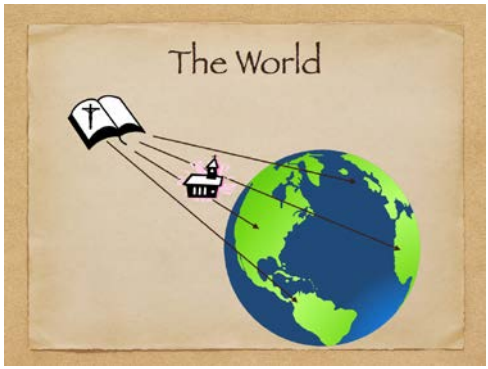
With this bridge intact, it was not altogether incorrect for the Church to locate the proclamation of the Gospel primarily within its specific jurisdiction, that is, within the gathering of God's people in worship. Thus the ministry of Word and Sacrament centered around and became synonymous with Altar, Pulpit, and Font.

We are experiencing a crisis, however. With the waning of Christendom, the cultural bridge upon which our Gospel ministry depended is collapsing. There seems to be little natural connection any more between our LCMS congregations and our communities. As a result our churches and Synod continue to grow smaller and older, and our leaders are stuck as to what to do.

The sticking point lies in the fact that we have not adjusted to our new mission field reality. We continue to depend on church-centered methods and structures to proclaim the Gospel. At this point in the conversation, we might be tempted to compare and contrast the methods and structures of church-centered ministry with those of the mission field.

However, I believe that we suffer from something more pervasive and much deeper than a glaring gap in our ministry methods and structures; our ministry suffers from a glaring gap in our fundamental perception of the Gospel. Perception in this case is akin to "worldview" or a paradigm that governs our hearts and minds as we consider God's Word and work which shapes our own work in the world. The gap in our perception is that we cannot imagine the Gospel ministry without the church at the center and the focus of God's attention.

The Lord, however, imagines Gospel ministry with His broken world in focus. Rather than the Church's seeing herself as the primary focus of His grace, He intends that she, His body, fix her attention on the "fields white onto harvest." We must ask ourselves: Are we focused primarily on Christ's ministry to and for the Church as institution or structure, or are we focused primarily on his ministry to and for the world, with the Church sharing in His missionary vocation?



As a Lutheran, I find it hard to comprehend the existence of such a gap, given our Confessional heritage. The heart and scope of Lutheran theology is summed up in "God so loved the world." The first several articles of the Augsburg Confession delineate the universal intention and dimension of God's love and the purpose for sending His Son into the world.

- AC I, "Concerning God" confesses the Triune God, the maker and preserver of all things
- AC II, "Concerning Original Sin" addresses universal sin and condemnation
- AC III, "Concerning the Son of God" asserts God's universal redemption through the death and resurrection of His Son, our Lord Jesus.
- AC IV, "Concerning Justification" continues with the doctrine that all are freely justified through faith alone in the atoning work of Jesus.

- AC V, "Concerning the Office of Preaching" articulates how this saving faith is generated in the heart of a believer—the Holy Spirit creates it as the Gospel is proclaimed in all the world.[2]

- AC VI, "Concerning New Obedience": If we do not focus simply on the Reformer's necessary polemic against works righteousness, this article teaches that good works are intrinsic to our priesthood—loving the neighbor.[3] Our priesthood was intended by God to be universal, that is, God called His people to be priests for the nations (Ex 19:5–6; 1 Pt 2:9).

- AC VII, "Concerning the Church" teaches that the Church is the gathering of God's people throughout the world by the ministry of His Gospel. The fact that the article on the Church (AC VII) is preceded by the article on the universal ministry of the Word (AC V) is significant.[4] The Church comes into being as God proclaims his salvation in the world.

A shift in our thinking, however, takes place at this point. Once the Church is established by the preaching of the Gospel in the world (AC VII), we begin to lose sight of its universal intentions. Gospel preaching for the world (AC V) blurs as we sharpen our attention on its ministry in and to the church.

Once Article VII is in place, we reread Article V through the lens of ministry for the Church and no longer the world. We build our ministry methods and structures on the platform that God primarily proclaims His saving Gospel within, to, and for the sake of the Church. This church-centered focus remains to this day the hermeneutical lens by which we read our Confessions and finally God's Word. Recent actions by the LCMS restricting the Gospel ministry of Licensed Lay Deacons bear this out. AC XIV "Concerning Church Government"—with the specific concern over who may or may not publicly teach in the Church—grinds the lens with which we interpret the Scriptures, particularly its record of the spread of the Gospel in the world.

This singular focus on ministry in and for the Church has led some missiologists to assert that Luther and his fellow reformers had little sense of or concern for Christ's mission to the world.[5] Granted, the Reformers could hardly imagine a world outside Christendom or its pervasive influence, including the rule of emperors or princes whose duty it was to bring the saving faith and pastoral care to their subjects. By narrow definition, the sixteenth-century Reformation was not a missionary movement—that is, sending people to proclaim the Gospel beyond the boundaries of the gathered Church. Nevertheless, it was a thoroughly evangelistic movement with the intentionality that the brilliant light of the Gospel shine on a world still benighted by papistic darkness.[6]

Luther, himself, understood the Gospel as intrinsically missional, that is, always in motion in and out to the world, like ripples on a pond. It can be argued that Luther

did not see the need to organize a structure for world mission because he understood the task of global proclamation as organic to the Gospel itself. Such is Werner Elert's defense of Luther's missiology against his later critics.

> Accordingly, the course of the Gospel to all nations is not in the perfect tense; it is an act in progress—an act that took place and takes place without interruption. "The Kingdom of Christ passes through the whole world," says Luther in the present tense. . . . [He] adds, "The Gospel wants to be taught and preached always and always, in order that it may always appear above the horizon." . . . "The Gospel keeps on advancing against those who do not want to hear it." . . . Here one feels all the earnestness of Luther's proclamation. Here there is no trace of a satiated resting from the Christianizing of the world. The Gospel always appears on the horizon, is always under way, is always on the attack. It must come to all nations. . . . He who speaks about the Gospel in this way also proclaims it. The thought is at the same time a realization. This would be true even if Luther had not thought at all of "heathen" in our sense. For the eager attention the Gospel pays to its proclamation is independent of the kind of people we have before us (meaning those who might receive it and those who will not). Only from the dynamic of the Gospel itself can the "idea of missions," which should be evangelical, get its obligating power, not from reflecting on this or that kind of people.[7]

Despite the Reformers' understanding that the Gospel was intrinsically for the world, and therefore missional, our church-centered model of Gospel proclamation, as inherited from Christendom, has effectively eclipsed the world-focused mission of our Lord. Word and Sacrament have become synonymous with altar, pulpit, and font and, therefore, delimited by their locale—the Church. It is indeed proper that we connect God's Word and Sacrament with our altars, pulpits, and fonts so that our people recognize and embrace the saving work of our Lord that emanates from them. God doesn't hide from us. He intends to be found and is truly present in these places. "Come to him here, all you who are weary and heavy laden; he will give rest for your souls."

God doesn't hide from us.

Unfortunately, the terms *altar*, *pulpit*, and *font* communicate more than simply the gracious presence and acts of God. They also determine the where, when, and by whom His means of grace are administered. We rightly understand worship as divine service: Jesus personally coming in His Word and Sacraments to heal and restore the world to Himself. Yet we reserve the term *Divine Service* for a specific "where, when, and by whom" Jesus comes—Sunday morning at 8:00 or 10:30 a.m., in the sanctuary, through a called and ordained pastor. By so doing, we delimit Jesus'

divine service in the world to the precincts of the gathered Church around the ministry of its called pastors.

The central role of altar, pulpit, and font in Gospel proclamation is reinforced by our choice of nomenclature "primary and auxiliary" to differentiate the ministries of the ordained and the laity—"primary" meaning the primary work of Christ and His Church, that is, proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Lk 24:47). Primary ministry directs out attention toward the called pastor serving us from altar, pulpit, and font; "auxiliary" directs our attention to all the other ministries of the Church, including those by which the Church interfaces with the world.

The pastor-centered model not only governs our understanding of Gospel ministry in our LCMS congregations, it has in recent years become the ruling principle for what has been advanced as authentically Lutheran mission. The LCMS in its 2013 Convention called for the development of a "Theological Statement for Mission for the 21st Century" with the resolve that "every district use this document for an in-depth study of the mission of Christ's church."[8] The "Statement" was drafted by President Harrison and published in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, alongside several other papers presented at "The Summit on Lutheran Mission" held in November of 2014 in San Antonio, Texas. Of significance is the emphasis President Harrison places on the pastoral office in Christ's mission to the world.

> There is one office that Christ has instituted for the proclamation of His Word and the giving out of His Sacraments. This is the Office of the Holy Ministry (see John 20:21–23; AC V, XIV, XXVII). . . . The Church may not be without this office for it is to this office that Christ has entrusted the preaching of His Word and the administration of His sacraments. No one puts himself into this office nor does the Church have the right to refashion the office into something other than what the Lord has instituted or to put men into the office without being called and ordained (see AC XIV). The Church does live in freedom to create offices that assist those who are placed in the one divinely-mandated office of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. These helping offices (auxiliary offices) would include deacons, deaconesses, evangelists, schoolteachers, catechists, cantors, parish nurses, workers of mercy and the like. These are valuable offices of service to the Body of Christ and the world, but they are not to be confused with the Office of the Holy Ministry itself. The Office of the Holy Ministry might be said to be the office of faith as Christ instituted it so that faith might be created in the hearts of those who hear the preaching of Christ crucified. Helping or auxiliary offices are the offices of love for through these callings the love of Christ is extolled in word and deed as His mercy is extended to those in need.[9]

In a companion essay, "Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations: What it Means that Lutheran Mission Plants Lutheran Churches," Dr. Albert Collver enumerates several criteria by which we may assess our global mission endeavors including the support of our many partner churches. At the time of writing, Dr. Collver served as the LCMS director of Regional Operations for the Office of International Mission and, as such, the chief mission strategist for the LCMS world mission endeavor. His essay, then, provides the blueprint for how President Harrison's "Statement" is practically applied in the various mission fields here and abroad. The first and foremost assessment asks the question, "Does the church have altars and pulpits from which the Gospel is proclaimed?" He elaborates,

> The first assessment examines if a church has enough pastors to provide for the altars and pulpits in the church. The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the administration of the Sacraments are at the heart of salvation and the heart of the Church. Some churches have a goal of one pastor for each congregation. Other churches expect for one pastor to serve two or three. Other churches use a combination of pastors and evangelists. The first dimension of this assessment is to explore whether or not the church has enough men available to preach. It evaluates if the church is using missionaries or pastors from other church bodies to serve at their pulpits and altars. It next evaluates if there are enough pastors to provide pastoral care in a responsible manner. For instance, if a congregation or preaching station only receives Communion once every six weeks because there are not enough pastors available to provide it, this would be reflected in the assessment.[10]

The Lutheran model of missions as promoted by President Harrison and Dr. Collver is built on the premise that the proclamation of the Gospel in and for the world belongs primarily to the ministry of the called pastor and reserved for him. The model further implies that unreached peoples must attend the Divine Service, led by a called and ordained pastor, in order to meet the Lord and receive His saving grace. Sadly, the flow of AC VII has been reversed from "the church gathers where the Gospel is preached" to "the Gospel is preached (only) where the church is gathered."

The pastor-centered model of ministry presents yet another problem for world mission. In our rite of pastoral ordination, we cite the texts of Matthew 28:18–20 and John 20:21–23 as instituting the office of the pastoral ministry. The contexts of these texts make clear that our Lord is commissioning His disciples for His mission to the world. However, our understanding and practical application of these texts are framed by ministry to baptized Christians in local congregations. Consider the brief list of duties listed in the Rite of Ordination, which the pastoral candidate promises to perform:

> Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine, will you forgive the sins of those who repent, and will you promise never to divulge the sins confessed to you? Will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying, and will you demonstrate to the church a constant and ready ministry centered in the Gospel? Will you admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and in holy living?[11]

Where in the rite do candidates commit to proclaiming the Gospel to the world, that is, to those outside the Church? We have profoundly altered the focus and purpose of the office of Word from what Jesus intended.

A Church-Protected Gospel

If we assume that Christ's mission—the proclamation of His saving Gospel—operates best, even primarily, where the Church is gathered and, as such, "in charge", then we are also inclined to assume that we are unable to proclaim His saving Word where the Church is not in charge. In preparation for the 2006 Synodical Convention, I led a number of delegate orientation sessions around the California-Nevada-Hawaii District. The "hot button" topic that surfaced in each of the sessions was President David Benke's participation in "A Prayer for America" at Yankee Stadium. One attendee expressed his concern as follows: "President Newton, are you prepared to charge President Benke with practicing unionism and syncretism for participating in that multi-faith worship service and also President Kieschnick for granting him permission to do so?"

I explained that it was not my practice to charge a brother with wrongdoing without personal knowledge of the matter, then briefly addressed the Yankee Stadium issue. "Friend, perhaps I, too, should be accused of syncretism and unionism. I've often preached in places and to people who did not share my faith. That's why I went overseas as an evangelistic missionary. The people I served were animists. I regularly attended their animistic celebrations and proclaimed the Good News of Jesus Christ." With tears in his eyes, the brother responded, "President Newton, we admire you missionaries who go overseas to preach the Gospel to the lost. You're our heroes. But you need to understand something. America is not a mission field."

His words may ring strange in our ears; however, we need to consider the ministry paradigm behind them. His words reflect a perspective deeply held by many in our LCMS church body. Preaching at a "Yankee Stadium" would never have been challenged overseas. It is what missionaries are called to do. However, participation in such events here in America must be challenged. Faithfulness to the Gospel message requires it. Explicit in our brother's words is the understanding that our call in America is to keep the Gospel pure and our faith, that is, our doctrine, free from

error. Thus, we are precluded from proclaiming the Gospel in any situation in which we are not in charge. Love for the broken and love for the true faith collide.

This brings us to my second observation: The mission field challenges that we face in America have thrown us off balance, accentuating the need and desire to fortify the protective boundaries and ecclesiastical order that flourished in the days of Christendom. Our relationship as Christ's Church vis a vis the world becomes one of siege with the Church on the defensive. Defending the true faith from the contaminants of the world becomes as important as proclaiming the Gospel to that world. F. Dean Lueking, in his book *Mission in the Making* noted the impact this posture makes on missionary proclamation. He writes in regard to the seventeenth century's Age of Orthodoxy:

The mission field challenges that we face in America have thrown us off balance.

> The center of the scholastic confessional concern was *Rechtgläubigkeit*, correctness of belief. This emphasis wielded great influence in the scholastic-confessional idea of the mission of the church. Error had to be corrected as well as truth proclaimed. Therefore, the missionary task could with validity be described as setting erring Christians aright. This was given equal status with the mandate to carry the Gospel to unbelievers. As the history of 19th-century Missouri Synod missions shows, it soon became evident that correcting the erring was for more appealing and immediate than meeting the demands of witness to those utterly unfamiliar with Christian truth.[12]

With that in mind we gradually shifted from being a Church primarily called by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to the world to a Church called to defend evangelical truth against the errors of other churches. The present moniker "Confessional Lutherans," with its emphasis on purity in doctrine and practice, has recast our historical identity: Evangelical Lutherans of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. By replacing "evangelical" (proclaiming the Gospel in the world) with "confessional" (purifying the Church from error), we alter our focus and purpose as Christ's Church on earth. The net result is that one can believe that he is truly evangelical—confess the doctrines of the Gospel—without engaging in the missionary enterprise and actually seeking the lost.

Dr. Donald McGavran, in his endeavor to awaken Reformed churches to the ongoing ministry of world evangelization, advocated penning new confessions for the twentieth-century Church, with particular attention given to her missionary vocation.[13] In a response to McGavran, Dr. John Kromminga, then president of Calvin Theological Seminary, wrote an article on the need and purposes of confessional writings. Though written for Reformed churches, his insights are

instructive for Lutherans. He identified three specific roles confessions play in the life of the Church.

> A confessional document as usually understood may be any or all of three things: (1) a witness to the world concerning the beliefs held by the church; (2) a teaching instrument for instruction of church members in those beliefs; and (3) a test of the orthodoxy of the members, particularly those entrusted with propagating and defending these truths.[14]

All three functions may be applied to the Lutheran Confessions. The majority of the Lutheran Confessions were written as an evangelical witness to the churches of the Holy Roman Empire. Consider what the fathers wrote regarding the Augsburg Confession.

> In these last days of this transitory world the Almighty God, out of immeasurable love, grace, and mercy for the human race, has allowed the light of his holy gospel and his Word that alone grants salvation to appear and shine forth purely, unalloyed and unadulterated out of the superstitious, papistic darkness for the German nation, our beloved fatherland. As a result, a short confession was assembled out of the divine, apostolic, and prophetic Scripture. In 1530 at the Diet of Augsburg it was presented in both German and Latin to the former Emperor of most praiseworthy memory, Charles V, by our pious and Christian predecessors; it was set forth for all estates of the Empire and was disseminated and has resounded publicly throughout all Christendom in the whole wide world.[15]

We must not miss the evangelical purpose of our fathers in presenting their confession to the Emperor at Augsburg or their intention that the Gospel resound throughout the world. That spirit sets the tone for the Confessions that follow. Understanding the evangelical purpose of the confessors is necessary for the proper application of their writings. The Confessions serve no greater purpose than to proclaim the Gospel of Christ so that all might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

We must not miss the evangelical purpose of our fathers in presenting their confession.

The second and third functions of our Confessions insured that this evangelical faith be faithfully transmitted from one generation to the next. Luther wrote the Small and Large Catechisms to provide evangelical tools for parents and pastors to disciple their children and parishioners in the true faith. They also provide a simple standard by which the doctrine and practice of our teachers might be normed. Years later, the Reformers added the Formula of Concord in order to promote Christian unity among the Evangelical churches centered in the Gospel.

Kromminga observed with some concern that, while the pedagogical and norming influences of orthodox confessions continue over the decades, the primary function—their evangelical center and purpose—tend to wane within a generation.

> The element of witness to the world usually seems to enjoy its greatest prominence when a confession is first written and adopted. This is because a confession is ordinarily produced in response to some crisis on which the church must take a stand. But as time goes by and the particular crisis fades into the past, the accent tends to fall more and more on the second and third functions of a confession.
>
> A confession, thus, is a living document whose role in the church varies with the passage of time and with changing circumstances. It may retain its full value as a teaching and testing device, but its freshness and spontaneity are in direct proportion to the imminence of the crisis to which it is addressed.[16]

Kromminga's observation should raise equal concern among us. When the evangelical purpose no longer serves as the driving force of a church's confessions, the other functions—teaching and norming—become twisted and, as Luther might say, "curved in on themselves." The priority shifts from proclaiming the true Gospel in the world to preserving the true Gospel for its own members or simply for its own sake.

The priority shifts from proclaiming the true Gospel in the world to preserving the true Gospel for its own members or simply for its own sake.

This danger of losing our first love becomes all the more real as our Lutheran churches continue to suffer from the collapse of Christendom. Confessional church leaders assume defensive positions as our contemporary cultures mount their assaults against our Christian faith and values. We err, however, when we make the protection of true doctrine the primary function of a confessing church. Feeling besieged we're compelled to retreat from the unbelieving world into our ecclesiastical strongholds. Consequently, we abandon the public square, convinced that the Gospel can only be purely proclaimed in those arenas in which the Church retains complete and unchallenged control. We delimit the proclamation of the Gospel to the safe spaces of our own sanctuaries—beyond earshot of those who have yet to hear the Good News. In order to protect and preserve the Gospel pure, we keep it from sinners for whom it was intended. True doctrine (Gospel) becomes effectively severed from the love of God intrinsic to it.

Our Lord had to confront the fact that His church leaders had similarly severed their desire to remain faithful from God's command to love their neighbor. No sooner did they hear our Lord declare His divine authority to forgive sins, then they

saw Him calling Matthew, a despised tax collector, to become His disciple. They next found Him gathered in Matthew's home with religious and social pariahs, whom Matthew had invited, and eating with them. Such action was understood in the ancient world as a statement of oneness and reconciliation. The church leaders were incensed. How dare Jesus, if he were a true teacher, hang out with people who can only contaminate that which God has made pure. "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" they asked His disciples. Jesus replied: "Go learn what this means, I would have mercy and not sacrifice" (Mt 9:11–13).

Sacrifice points toward God. We offer our sacrifices to Him. As such, we strive to keep them pure and without blemish. Jesus challenged the priority of our sacrifices toward God with God's desire that we be merciful. Mercy cannot be directed toward God. It can only be directed toward our neighbor.

In their attempt to remain pure toward God, the religious leaders walled themselves off from their neighbor. In this case, those whom they deemed the broken and contemptible. In so doing they walled off God's heart for the world. Consider the inscription chiseled into the wall separating the Temple proper from the Court of the Gentiles. Our Lord would have read those words countless times. "No foreigner is to go beyond the balustrade and the plaza of the Temple Zone. Whoever is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his death which will follow." Gentile worshipers, forbidden to enter the Temple, were forced to share their worship space with cattle, sheep, caged birds, and money changers. More than likely there was precious little space in which to worship as the number of sacrificial animals swelled during the Passover season. Convenience for the "true worshipers of God" pushed the nations out.

Hear our Lord's response: "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' [for the nations] but you make it a den of robbers" (Mt 21:13). His words referenced more than the fact that foreign pilgrims were possibly gouged by the rate charged in exchanging secular money for sacred, or by the price of animals approved by the priests for sacrifice. No, His indictment drove much deeper. Jesus charged them with making His Father's house a *den of robbers.* Robbers' dens were where thieves hoarded the treasures they had stolen from others. What was the treasure and from whom were they hoarding it? I believe Jesus was referring to His gracious and saving Word. The Jewish leaders were hoarding the treasure of salvation for themselves, refusing to share it with the nations.

Their reaction to Jesus' Words confirms the crime. The Chief Priests and Elders demanded that Jesus reveal the source behind the authority by which He cleansed the temple. So He told them a story about the owner of a vineyard and his sharecropping partners. The meaning was obvious. This temple belonged to God (and His anointed Son), not to them. The religious leaders were called to be partners with God in His divine service to the world, but they were not the owners of the house. Jesus' story

went on to uncover the evil of their self-centered hearts. They were not serving the living God by their religion. They served only themselves. And, if given an opportunity, they would take by force what only belonged to God and claim it as their own. Jesus summed up their true attitude toward God and His Messiah—the One promised by God to restore the world—with these words, "This is the heir (son). Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance" (Mt 21:38). Surely Christ's judgment against them was just, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits" (Mt 21:43).

What to do?

Sometime before this final showdown, Jesus was confronted by Scribes and Pharisees who demanded a sign to prove that He was sent from God. Jesus gave them no sign except the sign of Jonah: "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt 12:40). Jesus' sign of Jonah foretold the fact that He must be crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. His sign also intended to raise the "why" behind His death. We know that as Messiah He had to die for the sins of the world. That's clear from John's Gospel, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). At the same time there remains another "why" behind the sign.

The sign references Jonah and his three days in the belly of the great fish. Why was Jonah there? We would answer that he was swallowed by the great fish because he chose not to carry God's Word of repentance and forgiveness to a people who in his mind did not deserve to hear it. They were enemies of the people of God and needed to be treated as such. So he was buried in the belly of a great fish for three days. Why was Jesus in the heart of the earth for three days? He was obviously there for the sins of the world. Like Jonah, He was also there for the particular sin of His people, their refusal to be His priests for the nations (Ex 19:4–6). He would bear the blame for that as well. Note the prophecy from Isaiah that Matthew places in juxtaposition to the challenges of the Pharisees recorded before and after:

> Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope. (Mt 12:18–21)

"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you'" (Jon 3:1–2). What a remarkable Word of absolution that God spoke over His servant Jonah. "Go Jonah! Proclaim my Word to this foreign people who do not know their right

hand from their left." God's grace is abundantly rich; the Word of the Lord came to Jonah a *second time*. How many times would God's Word have come to Jonah before he arose to do His bidding? Three times, four times, even ten or twenty? Simply stated, as many as required. Our Lord has many nonnegotiables. Two of them stand out clearly in this text from Jonah: (1) I want the world back and will do everything in My power, even lay down My life, to make it happen; and (2) I choose not to do this great work alone. I want My children to share in My joy.

Our Lord's resurrection is God's gracious Word coming to us the second time, forgiving our sin and calling us to join Him in His ministry of world restoration. Our Lord's opening words as recorded by the evangelist are "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17). We understand those words as His call to repent from our self-righteousness and turn by faith in Him alone for the forgiveness of sins—AC IV, Concerning Justification. I am of the mind, however, that He was calling us to something far greater and more significant than my (our) personal salvation. He was calling me (all of us) to join Him in fulfilling the intentions of His Father for which He sent His Son as redeemer of the world. Jesus' call to repentance included His call once again to His people to be the missionary priests of their God.

The Lord continues to call His people to repentance. The Lord has been calling us, His Church, to repentance from the beginning of our life with Him. The Lord knows our propensity to be church-centered and continues patiently to lead us into His world. After forty days with Jesus, Peter and the other disciples asked, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The disciples could not imagine any other paradigm for the world's salvation. We should not imagine them to be either ignorant or hardheaded. They had come to know that Jesus was David's greater Son. If David's lesser son, Solomon, played an incredible role in God's global mission by hosting and bearing witness to the world leaders that came to Jerusalem from afar to "hear the wisdom that God had put into his heart," how much more would Jesus attract the nations having been raised from the dead. He could set up His divine headquarters in Jerusalem and the nations would surely come.

The disciples were good students of the Word. Yet they could not comprehend the Gospel's going out to the nations outside the boundaries of the established Jewish church. So our Lord Jesus, gently and patiently pointed them in a different direction. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). I believe that the Lord is using the Lutheran Society for Missiology collectively and you mission students and practitioners personally to assist Him in calling us back once again to His missionary heart at a time when our church body stands at the crossroads. To that we say, "Amen!"

Endnotes

[1] The Christendom era in the United States is far from over. The significance and influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America and among Latinos in this country remains strong. So, in speaking of Post-Christendom, I speak of it primarily as a phenomenon impacting North Europeans. For the purposes of this essay, that's what finally matters: The LCMS is 98% North European.
[2] AC V: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith where and when he wills in those who hear the gospel." In R. Kolb, T. J. Wengert, and C. P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 40, hereafter KW.
[3] AC VI: "It is also taught among us that such faith should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God's sake but not place trust in them as if thereby to earn grace before God." In KW, 40.
[4] See Robert D. Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church," *The Springfielder* 39, no. 1 (June 1975): 22. "Notice the prominent place given this ministry by Melanchthon. The article on this ministry of the Word follows directly upon his presentation of the work of Christ and justification by faith, and it precedes the articles on the new obedience and the church (Art. VI–VIII), for there can be no new obedience or church without this ministry."
[5] See James Scherer, *Gospel, Church & Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 54ff.
[6] See the Preface to the Book of Concord, paragraph 2 in KW, 5.
[7] Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 387–388.
[8] RESOLUTION 1-03A, Study of the "Theological Statement of Mission for the 21st Century" in Convention Proceedings 2013, 65th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, July 20–25, 2013.
[9] Matthew C. Harrison, "A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century" in *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1, no. 1 (2014): 66–67.
[10] Albert B. Collver, "Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations: What it Means that Lutheran Mission Plants Lutheran Churches" in *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1, no. 1 (2014): 24.
[11] The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 166.
[12] F. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 17.
[13] Donald McGavran, "A Missionary Confession of Faith," *Calvin Theological Journal* 7 (Nov. 1972): 135–145.
[14] John H. Kromminga, "The Shape of a New Confession," *Calvin Theological Journal* 7 (Nov. 1972): 149.
[15] Preface to the Book of Concord in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 5.
[16] Kromminga, "The Shape of a New Confession," 149–150.

Recobrando el corazón de la misión

Robert Newton

Resumen: El artículo es una versión ampliada del discurso de Robert Newton en el banquete anual de la Sociedad Luterana para Misiología en St. Louis, el 30 de enero del 2018. En este ensayo, el Dr. Newton argumenta que la Iglesia Luterana ha sido bendecida por existir toda su historia en la era de lo que ahora se llama cristiandad (¿cristianismo?). Durante este período, la Iglesia estuvo siempre cerca de los centros del poder, y la voz de la Iglesia era considerada importante al dar forma a la sociedad y expresar sus esperanzas para el futuro. Ahora, hoy en día, la Iglesia vive y trabaja en el mundo en un tiempo denominado como "después de cristianismo." La Iglesia está perdiendo su lugar privilegiado en la sociedad y encuentra que debe competir con otras religiones en contextos que son neutrales, en el mejor de los casos, y quizás incluso hostiles a la fe cristiana. En este sentido, la Iglesia está volviendo a un estilo de vida y a una forma de trabajar que son como los de la Iglesia en el primer siglo cristiano. La Iglesia era entonces una minoría perseguida que llevaba su mensaje con autenticidad e integridad a un mundo incrédulo. Esta es la tarea que los luteranos de hoy deben abordar creativamente, descubriendo nuevas formas de comunicar con palabra y obra, el mensaje de la salvación de Dios en Jesús.

Dios ha traído a nuestro cuerpo eclesiástico, la Iglesia Luterana—Sínodo de Missouri (LCMS), y, me atrevo a decir, a toda la iglesia cristiana en Occidente, a un tiempo y a un lugar increíbles en el desarrollo de su empresa misionera global. Estamos en una encrucijada en la historia de nuestra de iglesia donde nos enfrentamos a una elección. ¿Escogemos abrazar la misión de Dios, siguiendo a

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Traducido al español con permiso por Marcos Kempff y colaboradores, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 28 de abril del 2018.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 26, no. 1 (2018) at **https://lsfm.global/**.
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nuestro Señor Jesús por la fe, en el mundo en el cual tenemos cero injerencia, y mucho menos control, o elegimos no solo ignorar la invitación sino rechazarla? He escrito este ensayo con el único deseo de captar este momento divinamente designado por la fe en el Dios viviente y a que nos comprometamos nuevamente con lo que está en su corazón y mente, lo que era, es, y siempre será simplemente esto: Dios amó tanto al mundo. Si tuviera que ponerle un nuevo título a este ensayo, pasaría de "Recuperar el corazón de la misión" a "Recuperar el corazón del evangelio," porque me temo que nuestra iglesia está perdiendo el "corazón del evangelio."

La era misional vuelve a amanecer

La era misional ha vuelto a nacer en Occidente. Se acabó el paradigma de la misión "Occidente llega al descanso." Para aquellos de nosotros que servimos como misioneros en el exterior, nos alegramos de que el fruto de las labores misionales pasadas haya resultado en iglesias hermanas en todo el mundo. Damos gracias y alabamos al Señor de la cosecha que ha levantado compañeros misioneros de pueblos que alguna vez se consideraron campos misioneros.

Vivimos y servimos hoy en una empresa misionera global, donde ninguna iglesia nacional puede reclamar la posición de privilegio de la misión mundial o jactarse de su importancia personal como más crítica que la de otras iglesias al participar en la misión de nuestro Señor. Es necio y arrogante sugerir, como algunos propondrán entre nosotros, que este es el momento más importante de la LCMS en las misiones mundiales, es decir, la LCMS se encuentra en el centro de la contribución luterana a la empresa misionera global.

A medida que los anteriores campos misioneros se convirtieron en cuerpos eclesiásticos y en recursos para el servicio misionero en todo el mundo, los Estados Unidos están cambiando de una sociedad que alguna vez había sido bautizada a una sociedad post-iglesia o post-cristiana. He hablado sobre este tema en numerosas ocasiones, por lo que no aclararé el punto aquí.

Les recuerdo que divido el trabajo de la misión en tres etapas de la influencia de la iglesia en el mundo: antes de la iglesia (pre-iglesia), en la iglesia, después de la iglesia o después del cristianismo (post-iglesia o post-cristianismo). Las iglesias, al igual que otros organismos sociales, existen en relación con una sociedad más grande definida por fronteras culturales que marcan claramente a aquellos que se consideran miembros importantes (partes interesadas) de aquellos que no lo son (extraños).

La era pre-iglesia ve que los misioneros abandonan su mundo de iglesia para proclamar el evangelio a las personas sin iglesia que aún no lo han escuchado. El Espíritu Santo reúne a nuevos creyentes en torno a ese evangelio, y la iglesia nace en ese lugar. A medida que la iglesia se expande, no solo en tamaño sino también en influencia, la cultura la adopta como una parte interesada significativa y positiva en

la comunidad en general. Esa aceptación da paso a la era de una sociedad "de iglesia." La mayoría de nosotros en la LCMS creció en ese mundo. Mi esposa y yo crecimos en Napa, California, y recordamos cuando los niños veían carteles unas semanas antes de la Pascua en la mayoría de las tiendas del centro que decían: "Este establecimiento estará cerrado desde el mediodía hasta las 3 p.m. el Viernes Santo en conmemoración del sufrimiento y la muerte de Jesucristo." Es difícil imaginar que tal fenómeno tenga lugar hoy, lo que señala otro cambio crítico en el lugar de la iglesia en la sociedad, el de la era post-cristiana.[1]

El post-cristianismo no debe ser entendido como la desaparición de la iglesia de Cristo en el mundo, sino más bien como la pérdida de la sumisión que la sociedad en general le había dado a la iglesia organizada. Si la iglesia estaba "a cargo" en el cristianismo, ya no es el caso. Algunos argumentan, y quizás con razón, que la "iglesia" nunca estuvo a cargo. El problema aquí no es la precisión de ese hecho, sino más bien la importancia de la percepción. Los que estamos dentro de la iglesia, e incluso muchos en el exterior, hemos entendido desde hace tiempo nuestra posición y nuestro papel en la sociedad desde la perspectiva del estar a cargo. Servimos al mundo desde un punto de vista de que era importante para él. El mundo exterior apreció la presencia de la iglesia y aceptó sus opiniones como contribuciones significativas al bienestar y progreso de nuestra sociedad. Muchos cristianos todavía dependen en gran medida de ese significado social para proclamar el evangelio. Algunos irían tan lejos como para sugerir que no podemos o incluso tenemos prohibido proclamar el evangelio en arenas en las que no estamos a cargo de los procedimientos.

La perspectiva "a cargo" ha sido exitosamente desafiada en nuestra era secular actual, y ese desafío ha efectuado el renacimiento de la era misionera entre nosotros. Después de 40 años de servicio en la misión y al estudio de la misma, he comenzado a definir el "trabajo misionero" simplemente como la proclamación del evangelio de nuestro Señor Jesús en los lugares y espacios de la vida donde la iglesia no está a cargo. Dada esta simple definición de misión, ofrezco dos observaciones seguidas con una preocupación:

He comenzado a definir el "trabajo misionero" simplemente como la proclamación del evangelio de nuestro Señor Jesús en los lugares y espacios de la vida donde la iglesia no está a cargo.

A. Mientras que nuestros contextos comunitarios se han desplazado en gran medida hacia una realidad de campo de misión (pre-iglesia), nuestros métodos de proclamar el evangelio en Palabra y sacramentos han permanecido completamente arraigados en los paradigmas ministeriales del cristianismo.

B. Los desafíos del campo misionero que enfrentamos en nuestras comunidades donde la iglesia ya no está a cargo nos han desequilibrado, acentuando la necesidad y el deseo de mantener (incluso doblar) los límites de protección y el orden eclesiástico que florecieron en los días del cristianismo.

En conjunto, estas dos observaciones suscitan la siguiente preocupación: la confianza en los modelos de ministerio del cristianismo junto con la mayor necesidad de proteger a la iglesia de las fuerzas alienígenas sin (y controlar las enseñanzas de la iglesia desde dentro) obrar en contra de la misión de Dios y eventualmente movernos a abandonar el evangelio puro y su llamado por algo o alguien que prometa la supervivencia de nuestras instituciones eclesiásticas.

Un evangelio centrado en la Iglesia

Los quinientos años del movimiento luterano se han jugado en el escenario más amplio de los mil setecientos años de la cristiandad. La clave para el cristianismo no es simplemente que la iglesia desempeñe un papel significativo en la sociedad en general, sino que se asiente en el centro de la sociedad. La iglesia no solo habla con autoridad en el ámbito de la fe, sino también en todos los demás ámbitos de la vida: familia, gobierno, educación, medicina, comercio, artes, etc. La iglesia, entonces, era el lugar a donde la sociedad iba para organizar la vida en este mundo (asuntos del Primer Artículo) y para prepararse para la vida venidera. El ministerio en este modelo se construyó bajo la suposición de que el mundo sin iglesia se sentiría atraído naturalmente por la iglesia y cruzaría hacia ella por la vía del Primer Artículo o puente cultural compartido por todas las personas. El puente del Primer Artículo permaneció fuerte y seguro durante siglos, tan seguro, de hecho, que nosotros, los cristianos, dependimos de su permanencia para alcanzar nuestro mundo para Cristo.

Con este puente intacto, no fue del todo incorrecto que la iglesia ubicara la proclamación del evangelio principalmente dentro de su jurisdicción específica, es decir, dentro de la reunión del pueblo de Dios en adoración. Así, el ministerio de la Palabra y el Sacramento se centró y se convirtió en sinónimo de altar, púlpito y fuente.

Estamos experimentando una crisis, sin embargo. Con la disminución del cristianismo, el puente cultural del que dependía nuestro ministerio evangélico se está derrumbando. Parece que ya no hay una conexión natural entre nuestras congregaciones LCMS y nuestras comunidades. Como resultado, nuestras iglesias y el Sínodo continúan haciéndose más y más pequeños, y nuestros líderes están atascados en cuanto a qué hacer.

El punto de fricción radica en el hecho de que no nos hemos adaptado a nuestra nueva realidad de campo de misión. Continuamos dependiendo de métodos y estructuras centrados en la iglesia para proclamar el evangelio. En este punto de la

conversación, podríamos sentirnos tentados a comparar y contrastar los métodos y las estructuras del ministerio centrado en la iglesia con los del campo misionero.

Sin embargo, creo que sufrimos algo más penetrante y mucho más profundo que una brecha evidente en nuestros métodos y estructuras ministeriales; nuestro ministerio sufre de una brecha evidente en nuestra percepción fundamental del evangelio. La percepción en este caso es similar a la "cosmovisión" o un paradigma que gobierna nuestros corazones y mentes cuando consideramos la Palabra de Dios y la obra que da forma a nuestro propio trabajo en el mundo. La brecha en nuestra percepción es que no podemos imaginar el ministerio del evangelio sin la iglesia en el centro y el foco de la atención de Dios.

El Señor, sin embargo, imagina el ministerio del evangelio enfocado en su mundo quebrantado. En lugar de que la iglesia se vea a sí misma como el foco principal de su gracia, tiene la intención de que ella, su cuerpo, fije su atención en los "campos blancos para la cosecha." Debemos preguntarnos: ¿nos enfocamos principalmente en el ministerio de Cristo hacia y para la iglesia como institución o estructura, o nos enfocamos principalmente en su ministerio hacia el mundo, con la iglesia compartiendo su vocación misionera?

Como luterano, me resulta difícil comprender la existencia de tal brecha, dado nuestro legado confesional. El corazón y el alcance de la teología luterana se resumen en "Dios amó tanto al mundo." Los primeros artículos de la Confesión de Augsburgo delinean la intención y dimensión universal del amor de Dios y el propósito de enviar a su Hijo al mundo.

- CA I, "Acerca de Dios" confiesa el Dios Trino, el creador y preservador de todas las cosas
- CA II, "Acerca del pecado original" aborda el pecado universal y la condenación
- CA III, "Acerca del Hijo de Dios" afirma la redención universal de Dios a través de la muerte y la resurrección de su Hijo, nuestro Señor Jesús.
- CA IV, "Acerca de la justificación" continúa con la doctrina de que todos son libremente justificados solo por la fe en la obra expiatoria de Jesús.
- CA V, "Acerca del oficio de la predicación" articula cómo se genera esta fe salvadora en el corazón de un creyente: el Espíritu Santo la crea a medida que el evangelio se proclama en todo el mundo.[2]
- CA VI, "Concerniente a la nueva obediencia": Si no nos enfocamos simplemente en la necesaria polémica del Reformador contra la justificación por las obras, este artículo enseña que las buenas obras son intrínsecas a nuestro sacerdocio: el amor al prójimo.[3] Nuestro sacerdocio

fue pensado por Dios para ser universal, es decir, Dios llamó a su pueblo a ser sacerdotes para las naciones (Ex 19:5–6; 1 Pt 2:9).

- CA VII, "Acerca de la Iglesia!" enseña que la iglesia es la reunión del pueblo de Dios en todo el mundo por el ministerio de su evangelio. El hecho de que el artículo sobre la Iglesia (CA VII) esté precedido por el artículo sobre el ministerio universal de la Palabra (CA V) es significativo.[4] La Iglesia nace cuando Dios proclama su salvación en el mundo.

Sin embargo, un cambio en nuestro pensamiento tiene lugar en este momento. Una vez que la iglesia se establece mediante la predicación del evangelio en el mundo (CA VII), comenzamos a perder de vista sus intenciones universales. La predicación del evangelio para el mundo (CA V) se vuelve difusa a medida que enfocamos nuestra atención en su ministerio en la Iglesia y para la Iglesia.

Una vez que el Artículo VII está en su lugar, volvemos a leer el Artículo V a través de la lente del ministerio para la Iglesia y ya no para el mundo. Construimos nuestros métodos y estructuras ministeriales en la plataforma en que Dios principalmente proclama su evangelio salvador dentro, para y por el bien de la iglesia. Este enfoque centrado en la iglesia sigue siendo hasta hoy el objetivo hermenéutico por el cual leemos nuestras Confesiones y finalmente la palabra de Dios. Las acciones recientes de la LCMS que restringen el ministerio evangélico de los diáconos laicos licenciados lo confirman. CA XIV "Concerniente al gobierno de la Iglesia"—con la preocupación específica sobre quién puede o no enseñar públicamente en la iglesia—moldea la lente con la que interpretamos las Escrituras, particularmente su registro de la difusión del evangelio en el mundo.

Este enfoque singular en el ministerio en y para la iglesia ha llevado a algunos misiólogos a afirmar que Lutero y sus compañeros reformadores tenían poco sentido o preocupación por la misión de Cristo en el mundo.[5] Por supuesto, los reformadores difícilmente podían imaginar un mundo fuera de la cristiandad o su influencia dominante, incluido el gobierno de los emperadores o príncipes cuyo deber era llevar la fe salvadora y el cuidado pastoral a sus súbditos. Por definición, la Reforma del siglo XVI no fue un movimiento misionero, es decir, enviar personas a proclamar el evangelio más allá de los límites de la iglesia reunida. Sin embargo, fue un movimiento completamente evangelístico con la intencionalidad de que la luz brillante del evangelio brille en un mundo todavía ignorado por la oscuridad papista.[6]

El mismo Lutero entendió el evangelio como intrínsecamente misional, es decir, siempre en movimiento dentro y fuera del mundo, como ondas en un estanque. Se puede argumentar que Lutero no vio la necesidad de organizar una estructura para la misión mundial porque entendió la tarea de la proclamación global como orgánica para el evangelio mismo. Tal es la defensa de Werner Elert de la misiología de Lutero contra sus críticos posteriores.

> En consecuencia, la proclamación del evangelio a todas las naciones no está en tiempo perfecto; es un acto en progreso, un acto que tuvo lugar y se lleva a cabo sin interrupción. "El Reino de Cristo pasa por todo el mundo," dice Lutero en tiempo presente. . . . [Él] agrega: "El evangelio quiere ser enseñado y predicado siempre y siempre, para que siempre aparezca sobre el horizonte." . . . "El evangelio sigue avanzando contra aquellos que no quieren escucharlo." . . . Aquí uno siente toda la seriedad de la proclamación de Lutero. Aquí no hay rastro de un descanso saciado de la cristianización del mundo. El evangelio siempre aparece en el horizonte, siempre está en camino, siempre va al ataque. Debe llegar a todas las naciones.
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> . . . El que habla del evangelio de esta manera también lo proclama. La idea es al mismo tiempo una realización. Esto sería verdad incluso si Lutero no hubiera pensado en absoluto de "paganos" en nuestro sentido. Porque la ferviente atención que el evangelio presta a su proclamación es independiente del tipo de personas que tenemos ante nosotros (es decir, aquellos que podrían recibirlo y los que no). Solo desde la dinámica del evangelio puede la "idea de las misiones," que debe ser evangélica, obtener su poder de obligar, no de reflexionar sobre este o aquel tipo de personas.[7]

A pesar de la comprensión de los reformadores de que el evangelio era intrínsecamente para el mundo y, por lo tanto, misional, nuestro modelo de proclamación del evangelio centrado en la iglesia, heredado de la cristiandad, ciertamente ha eclipsado la misión de nuestro Señor centrada en el mundo. La Palabra y los sacramentos se han convertido en sinónimo de altar, púlpito, y fuente y, por lo tanto, delimitados por su lugar: la iglesia. De hecho, es correcto que conectemos la palabra de Dios y los sacramentos con nuestros altares, púlpitos, y fuentes para que nuestra gente reconozca y abrace la obra salvadora de nuestro Señor que emana de ellos. Dios no se esconde de nosotros. Él tiene la intención de ser encontrado y está realmente presente en estos lugares. "Vengan a él aquí, todos ustedes que están cansados y cargados; él dará descanso para sus almas."

Dios no se esconde de nosotros.

Desgraciadamente, los términos altar, púlpito, y fuente comunican más que simplemente la presencia y los actos divinos de la gracia. También determinan dónde, cuándo, y por quién se administran sus medios de gracia. Entendemos correctamente la adoración como un servicio divino: Jesús viene personalmente en su Palabra y los sacramentos para sanar y restaurar el mundo para sí mismo. Sin embargo, reservamos el término Servicio Divino para un "dónde, cuándo y por quién" viene Jesús específicamente, el domingo por la mañana a las 8:00 o 10:30, en el santuario, a través de un pastor llamado y ordenado. Al hacerlo, delimitamos el

servicio divino de Jesús en el mundo a los recintos de la iglesia reunida alrededor del ministerio de sus pastores llamados. El papel central del altar, el púlpito y la fuente en la proclamación del evangelio se ve reforzado por nuestra elección de nomenclatura "primaria y auxiliar" para diferenciar los ministerios de los ordenados y los laicos: "Primaria," que es la obra principal de Cristo y su iglesia, es, proclamar el arrepentimiento para el perdón de los pecados (Lucas 24:47). El ministerio primario dirige la atención hacia el pastor llamado que nos sirve desde el altar, el púlpito y la fuente; "Auxiliar" dirige nuestra atención a todos los demás ministerios de la iglesia, incluidos aquellos con los que la iglesia interactúa con el mundo. El modelo centrado en el pastor no solo gobierna nuestra comprensión del ministerio del evangelio en nuestras congregaciones LCMS, sino que en los últimos años se ha convertido en el principio rector de lo que se ha avanzado como misión auténticamente luterana. La LCMS en su Convención de 2013 pidió el desarrollo de una "Declaración Teológica para la Misión para el Siglo 21" con la resolución de que "cada distrito use este documento para un estudio en profundidad de la misión de la iglesia de Cristo."[8] La "Declaración" fue redactada por el presidente Harrison y publicada en el número inaugural de la revista *Journal of Lutheran Mission,* junto con varios otros documentos presentados en "*The Summit on Lutheran Mission*," celebrada en noviembre de 2014 en San Antonio, Texas. Es significativo el énfasis que el presidente Harrison pone en el oficio pastoral en la misión de Cristo al mundo.

> Hay un oficio que Cristo instituyó para la proclamación de su Palabra y la entrega de sus sacramentos. Este es el Oficio del Santo Ministerio (ver Juan 20:21–23, CA V, XIV, XXVII). . . . La Iglesia puede no estar sin este oficio porque es a este oficio que Cristo ha confiado la predicación de su Palabra y la administración de sus sacramentos. Nadie se pone en este oficio ni la iglesia tiene el derecho de remodelar el oficio en algo que no sea lo que el Señor ha instituido o de poner hombres en el oficio sin ser llamados y ordenados (ver CA XIV). La iglesia vive en libertad para crear oficios que ayuden a aquellos que son colocados en único oficio del ministerio de la Palabra y los sacramentos ordenado por la divinidad. Estos oficios de ayuda (oficios auxiliares) incluirían diáconos, diaconisas, evangelistas, maestros de escuela, catequistas, cantores, enfermeras parroquiales, trabajadores de misericordia y similares. Estos son valiosos oficios de servicio al cuerpo de Cristo y al mundo, pero no deben confundirse con el Oficio del Santo Ministerio mismo. Podría decirse que el Oficio del Santo Ministerio es el oficio de la fe tal como Cristo la instituyó para que la fe pueda ser creada en los corazones de aquellos que escuchan la predicación de Cristo crucificado. Los oficios de ayuda u auxiliares son los oficios de amor a través de estos llamamientos, el amor de Cristo se exalta en palabra y acción a medida que su misericordia se extiende a los necesitados.[9]

En un ensayo complementario—"Eclesiología, misión y relaciones con los socios: lo que significa que la misión luterana planta iglesias luteranas"—el Dr. Albert Collver enumera varios criterios mediante los cuales podemos evaluar nuestros esfuerzos de misión global, incluyendo el apoyo de nuestras muchas iglesias con quienes nos asociamos. En el momento de escribir este artículo, el Dr. Collver se desempeñaba como Director de Operaciones Regionales de LCMS para la Oficina de Misión Internacional y, como tal, fue el principal estratega de misión para el esfuerzo misional mundial de LCMS. Su ensayo, entonces, proporciona el anteproyecto de cómo la "Declaración" del presidente Harrison se aplica en forma práctica en los diversos campos misioneros aquí y en el extranjero. La primera y más importante evaluación hace la pregunta: "¿Tiene la iglesia altares y púlpitos desde donde se proclama el evangelio?" Él explica:

> La primera evaluación examina si una iglesia tiene suficientes pastores para atender los altares y púlpitos en la iglesia. La proclamación del evangelio de Jesucristo y la administración de los sacramentos son el corazón de la salvación y el corazón de la Iglesia. Algunas iglesias tienen el objetivo de proveer un pastor para cada congregación. Otras iglesias esperan que un pastor sirva dos o tres. Otras iglesias usan una combinación de pastores y evangelistas. La primera dimensión de esta evaluación es explorar si la iglesia tiene o no suficientes hombres disponibles para predicar. Evalúa si la iglesia está utilizando misioneros o pastores de otras iglesias para servir en sus púlpitos y altares. Luego, evalúa si hay suficientes pastores para brindar atención pastoral de manera responsable. Por ejemplo, si una congregación o lugar de predicación solo recibe la Comunión una vez cada seis semanas porque no hay suficientes pastores disponibles para administrarla, esto se reflejaría en la evaluación.[10]

El modelo luterano de misiones promovido por el presidente Harrison y el Dr. Collver se basa en la premisa de que la proclamación del evangelio en y para el mundo pertenece principalmente al ministerio del pastor llamado, y está reservado para él. El modelo implica además que los pueblos no alcanzados deben asistir al Servicio Divino, dirigidos por un pastor llamado y ordenado, para encontrarse con el Señor y recibir su gracia salvadora. Lamentablemente, el fluir de la CA VII se ha invertido de "la Iglesia se reúne donde se predica el evangelio" a "el evangelio se predica (solo) donde se congrega la Iglesia".

El modelo de ministerio centrado en el pastor presenta otro problema más para la misión mundial. En nuestro rito de ordenación pastoral, citamos los textos de Mateo 28:18–20 y Juan 20:21–23 como instituyendo el oficio del ministerio pastoral. El contexto de estos textos deja en claro que nuestro Señor está comisionando a sus discípulos para su misión en el mundo. Sin embargo, nuestra comprensión y aplicación práctica de estos textos están enmarcadas por el ministerio a los cristianos

bautizados en las congregaciones locales. Considere la breve lista de deberes enumerados en el Rito de la Ordenación, que el candidato pastoral promete realizar:

> ¿Enseñarás fielmente tanto a los jóvenes como a los mayores en los artículos principales de la doctrina cristiana, perdonarás los pecados de aquellos que se arrepienten y prometes que nunca divulgarás los pecados de quienes te los confiesan? ¿Ministrarás fielmente a los enfermos y moribundos, y demostrarás a la Iglesia un ministerio constante y dispuesto centrado en el evangelio? ¿Amonestarás y animarás a la gente a una viva confianza en Cristo y a la vida santa? [11]

¿En qué parte del rito se comprometen los candidatos a proclamar el evangelio al mundo, es decir, a los que están fuera de la Iglesia? Hemos modificado profundamente el enfoque y el propósito del oficio de la Palabra, de lo que Jesús quiso.

Un evangelio protegido por la Iglesia

Si suponemos que la misión de Cristo—la proclamación de su evangelio salvador—opera mejor, incluso opera principalmente donde la iglesia está reunida y, como tal, "a cargo," entonces también estamos dispuestos a suponer que no podemos proclamar su Palabra salvadora donde la iglesia no está a cargo (al frente). En preparación para la Convención Sinodal de 2006, dirigí una serie de sesiones de orientación para los delegados dentro del Distrito de California-Nevada-Hawaii. El tema "caliente" que surgió en cada una de las sesiones fue la participación del presidente David Benke en "A Prayer for America" en el Yankee Stadium. Uno de los asistentes expresó su preocupación de la siguiente manera: "Presidente Newton, ¿está preparado para acusar al presidente Benke de practicar unionismo y sincretismo por participar en ese servicio de adoración multiconfesional y también al presidente Kieschnick por otorgarle permiso para hacerlo?"

Le expliqué que no era mi práctica acusar a un hermano de un acto indebido sin el conocimiento personal del asunto, y luego abordé brevemente el tema del Yankee Stadium. "Amigo, tal vez yo también debería ser acusado de sincretismo y unionismo. A menudo he predicado en lugares y ante personas que no compartían mi fe. Es por eso que fui al extranjero como misionero evangelista. Las personas a las que servía eran animistas. Asistí regularmente a sus celebraciones animistas y proclamé las buenas nuevas de Jesucristo." Con lágrimas en los ojos, el hermano respondió: "Presidente Newton, admiramos a ustedes, los misioneros que van al extranjero a predicar el evangelio a los perdidos. Ustedes son nuestros héroes. Pero Ud. necesita entender algo. Los Estados Unidos no es un campo de misión."

Sus palabras pueden sonar extrañas en nuestros oídos; sin embargo, debemos considerar el paradigma ministerial detrás de ellos. Sus palabras reflejan una perspectiva profundamente arraigada por muchos en nuestro cuerpo eclesial de la

LCMS. Predicar en un "Yankee Stadium" nunca hubiera sido desafiado en el extranjero. Es lo que los misioneros están llamados a hacer. Sin embargo, la participación en tales eventos aquí en los Estados Unidos debe ser cuestionada. La fidelidad al mensaje del evangelio lo requiere. Explícito en las palabras de nuestro hermano es la comprensión de que nuestro llamado en los Estados Unidos es mantener el evangelio puro y nuestra fe, es decir, nuestra doctrina, libre de error. Por lo tanto, no podemos proclamar el evangelio en ninguna situación en la que no estemos a cargo. Amor por los quebrantados y amor por la verdadera fe, colisionan (chocan).

Esto nos lleva a mi segunda observación: los desafíos del campo misional que enfrentamos en los Estados Unidos nos han desequilibrado, acentuando la necesidad y el deseo de fortalecer los límites protectores y el orden eclesiástico que florecieron en los días del cristianismo. Nuestra relación como Iglesia de Cristo con respecto al mundo se convierte en un cerco que ha colocado a la iglesia a la defensiva. Defender la fe verdadera de los contaminantes del mundo llega a ser tan importante como proclamar el evangelio a ese mundo. F. Dean Lueking, en su libro *Mission in the Making* (Misión en construcción), hizo notar el impacto que esta postura tiene en la proclamación misionera. Él escribe con respecto a la era de la ortodoxia del siglo diecisiete:

Los desafíos del campo misional que enfrentamos en los Estados Unidos nos han desequilibrado.

> El centro de la preocupación confesional escolástica era *Rechtgläubigkeit*, la exactitud de la creencia. Este énfasis ejerció una gran influencia en la idea escolástica-confesional de la misión de la iglesia. El error tenía que ser corregido, así como la verdad proclamada. Por lo tanto, se podía describir con validez la tarea misionera como corregir a los cristianos equivocados. A esto se le dio el mismo estatus que al mandato de llevar el evangelio a los incrédulos.[12]

Como muestra la historia de las misiones del Sínodo de Missouri en el siglo XIX, pronto se hizo evidente que corregir el error era más atractivo e inmediato que cumplir con las exigencias del testimonio a aquellos que definitivamente no estaban familiarizados con la verdad cristiana.

Ante esta realidad, gradualmente pasamos de ser una iglesia principalmente llamada por Cristo para proclamar el evangelio al mundo a una iglesia llamada a defender la verdad evangélica contra los errores de otras iglesias. El actual apodo de "luteranos confesionales", con su énfasis en la pureza en la doctrina y la práctica, ha reformulado nuestra identidad histórica: los luteranos evangélicos de la Confesión inalterable de Augsburgo. Al reemplazar "evangélico" (proclamando el evangelio en el mundo) por "confesional" (purificando a la iglesia del error), alteramos nuestro

enfoque y propósito como la Iglesia de Cristo en la tierra. El resultado neto es que uno puede creer que es verdaderamente evangélico—confesar las doctrinas del evangelio—sin involucrarse en el desempeño misionero y buscar realmente a los perdidos.

El Dr. Donald McGavran, en su esfuerzo por despertar a las iglesias reformadas al ministerio actual de la evangelización mundial, abogó por escribir nuevas confesiones para la iglesia del siglo XX, prestando especial atención a su vocación misionera.[13] En una respuesta a McGavran, el Dr. John Kromminga, el entonces presidente del Calvin Theological Seminary, escribió un artículo sobre la necesidad y los propósitos de los escritos confesionales. Aunque escrito para las iglesias reformadas, sus observaciones son instructivas para los luteranos. Él identificó tres roles específicos que las confesiones desempeñan en la vida de la Iglesia.

> Un documento confesional, como generalmente se entiende, puede ser sola una o la combinación de tres cosas: (1) un testimonio al mundo con respecto a las creencias sostenidas por la iglesia; (2) un instrumento de enseñanza para la instrucción de los miembros de la iglesia en esas creencias; y (3) una prueba de la ortodoxia de los miembros, particularmente los encargados con propagar y defender estas verdades.[14]

Las tres funciones se pueden aplicar a las Confesiones Luteranas. La mayoría de las Confesiones Luteranas fueron escritas como un testimonio evangélico de las iglesias del Sacro Imperio Romano. Consideremos lo que los padres escribieron con respecto a la Confesión de Augsburgo.

> En estos últimos días de este mundo transitorio, el Dios Todopoderoso, por amor inconmensurable, gracia y misericordia por la raza humana, ha permitido la luz de su santo evangelio y su Palabra, las únicas que otorgan la salvación apareciera y brillara puramente, sin ser alterada ni adulterada por la supersticiosa oscuridad papista de la nación alemana, nuestra querida patria. Como resultado, se elaboró una breve confesión de la Escritura divina, apostólica y profética. En el año 1530, en la Dieta de Augsburgo, se presentó en alemán y en latín al anterior emperador digno del más alto elogio, Carlos V, por nuestros predecesores piadosos y cristianos; fue establecido para todos los confines del Imperio y fue diseminado; y resonó públicamente a través de toda la cristiandad en todo el mundo.[15]

No debemos perder el propósito evangélico de nuestros padres al presentar su confesión al Emperador en Augsburgo o su intención de que el evangelio resuene en todo el mundo. Ese espíritu establece el tono para las Confesiones que siguen. Comprender el propósito evangélico de los confesores es

No debemos perder el propósito evangélico de nuestros padres al presentar su confesión.

necesario para la correcta aplicación de sus escritos. Las Confesiones no tienen mayor propósito que proclamar el evangelio de Cristo para que todos puedan ser salvos y llegar al conocimiento de la verdad.

La segunda y tercera función de nuestras Confesiones aseguraron que esta fe evangélica se transmitiera fielmente de una generación a otra. Lutero escribió los Catecismos Menor y Mayor para proporcionar herramientas evangélicas para padres y pastores para discipular a sus hijos y feligreses en la verdadera fe. También proporcionan un estándar sencillo por el cual la doctrina y la práctica de nuestros maestros pueden ser normadas. Años más tarde, los reformadores agregaron la Fórmula de Concordia para promover la unidad de los cristianos entre las iglesias evangélicas centradas en el evangelio.

Kromminga observó con cierta preocupación que, si bien las influencias pedagógicas y normativas de las confesiones ortodoxas continúan a lo largo de décadas, la función principal—su centro y propósito evangélicos—tiende a menguar dentro de una misma generación.

> El elemento de testimonio al mundo generalmente parece brillar con mayor prominencia cuando una confesión se escribe y se adopta por primera vez. Esto se debe a que normalmente se produce una confesión en respuesta a alguna crisis en la cual la iglesia debe tomar una posición. Pero a medida que pasa el tiempo y la crisis particular se desvanece en el pasado, el acento tiende a caer cada vez más en la segunda y tercera funciones de una confesión.
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> Una confesión, por lo tanto, es un documento vivo cuyo papel en la iglesia varía con el paso del tiempo y con las circunstancias cambiantes. Puede conservar todo su valor como un dispositivo de enseñanza y prueba, pero su frescura y espontaneidad guardan una relación directa con la inminencia de la crisis a la que se responde.[16]

La observación de Kromminga debería plantear la misma preocupación entre nosotros. Cuando el propósito evangélico ya no sirve como la fuerza motriz de las confesiones de una iglesia, las otras funciones—la enseñanza y la norma—se tuercen y, como podría decir Lutero, "se curvaron sobre sí mismas." La prioridad pasa de proclamar el verdadero evangelio en el mundo por preservar el verdadero evangelio para sus propios miembros o simplemente para su propio bienestar.

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Este peligro de perder nuestro primer amor se vuelve aún más real a medida que nuestras iglesias luteranas continúan sufriendo el colapso del cristianismo. Los líderes

confesionales de la iglesia asumen posiciones defensivas a medida que nuestras culturas contemporáneas aumentan sus ataques contra nuestra fe y nuestros valores cristianos. Sin embargo, erramos cuando hacemos de la protección de la verdadera doctrina, la función principal de una iglesia confesante. Sintiéndonos sitiados, nos vemos obligados a retirarnos del mundo incrédulo hacia nuestras propias fortalezas eclesiásticas. En consecuencia, abandonamos la plaza pública, convencidos de que el evangelio solo puede proclamarse puramente en aquellos ámbitos en los que la iglesia conserva el control completo e indiscutido. Delimitamos la proclamación del evangelio a los espacios seguros de nuestros propios santuarios, más allá del alcance de quienes aún no han escuchado las buenas nuevas. Con el fin de proteger y preservar el evangelio puro, lo guardamos de los pecadores para los que fue destinado. La verdadera doctrina (el evangelio) queda efectivamente separada del amor de Dios intrínseco a ella.

Nuestro Señor tuvo que enfrentar el hecho de que los líderes de su iglesia también habían roto su deseo de permanecer fieles al mandato de Dios de amar a su prójimo. Apenas oyeron a nuestro Señor declarar su autoridad divina para perdonar pecados, vieron llamar a Mateo, un odiado y despreciado recaudador de impuestos, convertirse en su discípulo. Luego encontraron a Jesús reunido en la casa de Mateo con parias religiosos y sociales, a quienes Mateo había invitado, y comiendo con ellos. Tal acción fue entendida en el mundo antiguo como una declaración de unidad y reconciliación. Los líderes de la iglesia estaban indignados. ¿Cómo se atrevió Jesús, si era un verdadero maestro, pasar el rato con personas que solo pueden contaminar lo que Dios ha hecho puro? "¿Por qué come su Maestro con cobradores de impuestos y con pecadores?" Al oír esto, Jesús les dijo: "No son los sanos los que necesitan de un médico, sino los enfermos. Vayan y aprendan lo que significa 'Misericordia quiero, y no sacrificio'. Porque no he venido a llamar a los justos al arrepentimiento, sino a los pecadores" (Mateo 9:11–13).

El sacrificio apunta a Dios. Le ofrecemos nuestros sacrificios a él. Como tal, nos esforzamos por mantenerlos puros y sin mancha. Jesús desafió la prioridad que colocamos a nuestros sacrificios a Dios con el deseo de que Dios quiere que seamos misericordiosos. La misericordia no puede dirigirse a Dios. Solo puede ser dirigida hacia nuestro prójimo.

En su intento de permanecer puro hacia Dios, los líderes religiosos se aislaron del prójimo. En este caso, se aislaron de aquellos a quienes consideraban quebrantados por el pecado y despreciables. Al hacerlo, tapiaron el corazón de Dios para el mundo. Consideremos la inscripción cincelada en la pared que separa el Templo propiamente dicho del Patio de los Gentiles. Nuestro Señor habría leído esas palabras innumerables veces. "Ningún extranjero debe ir más allá de la balaustrada y la plaza de la zona del Templo. Quien sea sorprendido al hacerlo, por su propia culpa, le sobrevendrá la muerte." Los adoradores gentiles, que tenían prohibido

ingresar al Templo, fueron forzados a compartir su espacio de adoración con ganado, ovejas, pájaros enjaulados y cambiadores de dinero. Es más que probable que había muy poco espacio para adorar a medida que aumentaba la cantidad de animales para ser sacrificados durante la temporada de la Pascua. La conveniencia para los "verdaderos adoradores de Dios" excluyó a las naciones.

Escuchemos la respuesta de nuestro Señor: Está escrito: "Mi casa será llamada casa de oración", pero ustedes han hecho de ella una cueva de ladrones" (Mateo 21:13). Sus palabras van más allá del hecho de que los peregrinos extranjeros posiblemente eran extorsionados por la tasa que se cobraba al cambiar dinero secular por uno sagrado, o por el precio de los animales aprobados por los sacerdotes para el sacrificio. No, su acusación fue mucho más profunda. Jesús los acusó de hacer de la casa de su Padre una cueva de ladrones. Las guaridas de los ladrones eran donde los ladrones acumulaban los tesoros que les habían robado a otros. ¿Cuál y de quién era el tesoro que estaban acumulando? Creo que Jesús se estaba refiriendo a su Palabra misericordiosa y salvadora. Los líderes judíos estaban acumulando el tesoro de la salvación para ellos, negándose a compartirlo con las naciones.

La reacción de los líderes religiosos a las palabras de Jesús confirma el crimen. Los jefes de los sacerdotes y los ancianos exigieron que Jesús revelara la fuente detrás de la autoridad por la cual él limpió el templo. Por eso les contó una historia sobre el dueño de un viñedo y los encargados de aquel viñedo. El significado era obvio. Este templo pertenecía a Dios (y a su Hijo ungido), no a ellos. Los líderes religiosos fueron llamados a ser colaboradores de Dios en su divino servicio al mundo, pero no eran los dueños de casa. La historia de Jesús pasó a descubrir el mal de sus corazones egocéntricos. No estaban sirviendo al Dios viviente con su religión. Solo se servían a sí mismos. Y, si se les hubiera dado la oportunidad, hubieran tomado por la fuerza lo que solo le pertenecía a Dios y lo hubieran reclamado como propio. Jesús resumió su verdadera actitud hacia Dios y su Mesías, el prometido por Dios para restaurar el mundo, con estas palabras: "Éste es el heredero (hijo). Vamos a matarlo, y así nos quedaremos con su herencia" (Mateo 21:38). Ciertamente, el juicio de Cristo contra ellos fue justo: "Por tanto les digo, que el reino de Dios les será quitado a ustedes, para dárselo a gente que produzca los frutos que debe dar" (Mateo 21:43).

¿Qué hacer?

En algún momento antes de este enfrentamiento final, Jesús fue confrontado por los escribas y los fariseos que exigieron una señal para demostrar que él era enviado por Dios. Jesús no les dio ninguna señal excepto la señal de Jonás: "Porque, así como Jonás estuvo tres días y tres noches en el vientre del gran pez, así también el Hijo del Hombre estará tres días y tres noches en el corazón de la tierra" (Mateo 12:40). La señal que Jesús usó sobre Jonás, predijo el hecho de que él iba ser crucificado,

sepultado, y que resucitaría de entre los muertos. Su señal también tenía la intención de establecer el "por qué" de su muerte. Sabemos que, como Mesías, tuvo que morir por los pecados del mundo. Eso es claro en el Evangelio de Juan, "Éste es el Cordero de Dios, que quita el pecado del mundo" (Juan 1:29). Al mismo tiempo, sigue habiendo otro "por qué" detrás de la señal.

La señal hace referencia a Jonás y sus tres días en el vientre del gran pez. ¿Por qué estaba Jonás allí? Responderíamos que fue tragado por el gran pez porque escogió no llevar la palabra de Dios de arrepentimiento y perdón a un pueblo, que, en su mente, no merecía recibirlo y escucharlo. Eran enemigos del pueblo de Dios y necesitaban ser tratados como tales. Así que fue "enterrado" en el vientre de un gran pez durante tres días. ¿Por qué estuvo Jesús en el corazón de la tierra por tres días? Él obviamente estaba allí debido a los pecados del mundo. Como Jonás, él también estuvo allí por el pecado particular de su pueblo, su rechazo a ser sus sacerdotes para las naciones (Éxodo 19:4–6). Él también sufriría la culpa de eso. Tengamos en cuenta la profecía de Isaías que Mateo coloca en yuxtaposición a los desafíos de los fariseos registrados antes y después:

> Éste es mi siervo, a quien he escogido; mi Amado, en quien se complace mi alma. Pondré mi Espíritu sobre él, y a las naciones anunciará juicio. No disputará, ni gritará, ni nadie oirá su voz en las calles. No quebrará la caña cascada, ni apagará la mecha humeante, hasta que haga triunfar la justicia. En su nombre esperarán las naciones (Mateo 12:18–21).

"La palabra del Señor vino a Jonás por segunda vez, y le dijo: 'Levántate y ve a la gran ciudad de Nínive, y proclama allí el mensaje que yo te daré'" (Jonás 3:1–2). ¡Qué extraordinaria palabra de absolución que Dios habló sobre su siervo Jonás! "¡Anda, Jonás! Proclame mi Palabra a este pueblo extranjero que no conoce su mano derecha de la izquierda." La gracia de Dios es abundantemente rica; la palabra del Señor vino a Jonás por segunda vez. ¿Cuántas veces habría llegado la palabra de Dios a Jonás antes de que él se levantara para cumplir las órdenes de Dios? ¿Tres veces, cuatro veces, incluso diez o veinte? En pocas palabras, tantas como sea necesario. Nuestro Señor tiene muchas órdenes que no son negociables. Dos de ellas se destacan claramente en este texto de Jonás: (1) Quiero recuperar el mundo y haré todo lo que esté en mi poder, incluso sacrificaré mi propia vida para que suceda; y (2) elijo no hacer este gran trabajo solo. Quiero que mis hijos compartan mi alegría.

La resurrección de nuestro Señor Jesús es la Palabra de gracia de Dios que viene a nosotros por segunda vez, perdonando nuestro pecado y llamándonos a unirnos a él en su ministerio de restauración mundial. Las palabras iniciales de nuestro Señor tal como las registró el evangelista son: "Arrepiéntanse, porque el reino de los cielos se ha acercado" (Mateo 4:17). Entendemos esas palabras como su llamado a arrepentirnos de nuestra auto-justificación y nos volvemos por fe solo en él, para el perdón de los pecados (ver CA IV, Acerca de la justificación).

Estoy convencido, sin embargo, que él nos estaba llamando a algo mucho más grande y significativo que mi (nuestra) salvación personal. Él me está llamando (a todos nosotros) a unirnos a él para cumplir las intenciones de su Padre, por las cuales envió a su único Hijo como redentor del mundo. El llamado de Jesús al arrepentimiento incluyó su llamado una vez más a su pueblo a ser los sacerdotes misioneros de su Dios.

El Señor continúa llamando a su pueblo al arrepentimiento. El Señor nos ha estado llamando, a su Iglesia, al arrepentimiento desde el comienzo de nuestra vida con él. El Señor conoce nuestra propensión a centrarnos solo en la iglesia, pero él continúa pacientemente guiándonos a su mundo. Después de cuarenta días con Jesús, Pedro y los otros discípulos le preguntaron: "Señor, ¿vas a devolverle a Israel el reino en este tiempo?" (Hechos 1:6). Los discípulos no podían imaginar ningún otro paradigma para la salvación del mundo. No debemos imaginarnos que eran ignorantes o testarudos. Habían llegado a conocer que Jesús era el Hijo mayor de David. Si el hijo menor de David, Salomón, jugó un papel increíble en la misión global de Dios al hospedar y dar testimonio de los líderes mundiales que llegaban a Jerusalén desde lejos para "escuchar la sabiduría que Dios puso en su corazón," ¡cuánto más atraería Jesús a las naciones después de haber resucitado de los muertos! Él podría haber establecido su cuartel general divino en Jerusalén, y las naciones seguramente vendrían.

Los discípulos fueron buenos estudiantes de la Palabra. Sin embargo, no pudieron comprender que el evangelio era para ir a las naciones fuera de los límites de la iglesia judía establecida. Por eso, nuestro Señor Jesús, gentil y pacientemente los dirigió en una dirección diferente. "Pero cuando venga sobre ustedes el Espíritu Santo recibirán poder, y serán mis testigos en Jerusalén, en Judea, en Samaria, y hasta lo último de la tierra" (Hechos 1:8).

Creo que el Señor está usando colectivamente a la Sociedad Luterana para la Misiología (Lutheran Society for Missiology) y a ustedes, personalmente a estudiantes y partícipes en la misión, a acompañarle en la tarea de llamarnos a todos, una vez más, a su corazón misionero en un momento en que el cuerpo de nuestra iglesia se encuentra en una encrucijada. A eso decimos: "¡Amén!"

Notas

[1] La era del cristianismo en los EEUU está lejos de haber terminado. La importancia e influencia de la Iglesia Católica Romana en Latinoamérica y entre latinos en este país todavía es fuerte, Así que, al hablar de post-cristianismo, hablo primariamente como un fenómeno que impacta a los europeos del norte. Para el propósito de este ensayo, esto es lo que finalmente importa: La LCMS es 98% europea nórdica.

[2] CA V: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith where and when he wills in those who hear the gospel." In R. Kolb, T. J. Wengert, and C. P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 40, hereafter KW.
[3] CA VI: "It is also taught among us that such faith should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God's sake but not place trust in them as if thereby to earn grace before God." In KW, 40.
[4] See Robert D. Preus, "The Confessions and Mission of the Church", *The Springfielder* 39, no. 1 (June 1975): 22. "Notice the prominent place given this ministry by Melanchthon. The article on this ministry of the Word follows directly upon his presentation of the work of Christ and justification by faith, and it precedes the articles on the new obedience and the church (Art. VI–VIII), for there can be no new obedience or church without this ministry."
[5] See James Scherer, *Gospel, Church & Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 54ff.
[6] See the Preface to the Book of Concord, paragraph 2 in KW, 5
[7] [7] Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 387–388
[8] RESOLUTION 1-03A, Study of the "Theological Statement of Mission for the 21st Century" in Convention Proceedings 2013, 65th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, July 20–25, 2013.
[9] Matthew C. Harrison, "A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century" in *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, 1, no.1 (2014): 66–67.
[10] Albert B. Collver, "Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations: What it Means that Lutheran Mission Plants Lutheran Churches" in *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, 1, no.1 (2014): 24.
[11] The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran church—Missouri Synod. *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 166.
[12] F. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 17
[13] Donald McGavran, "A Missionary Confession of Faith," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 7 (Nov. 1972): 135–145.
[14] John H. Kromminga, "The Shape of a New Confession," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 7 (Nov. 1972): 149.
[15] Preface to the Book of Concord in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 5.
[16] Kromminga, "The Shape of a New Confession," 149–150.

The Confessing Church:
An Act of Excluding or the Art of Gathering?

Michael W. Newman

Abstract: Confessing. Ask a person on the street about confessing, and you'll very likely hear accounts of criminals admitting their guilt as detectives press them with evidence. Ask church adherents what it means, and they may describe humbling moments of acknowledging their sin in prayerful tones during worship or voicing one of the ecumenical creeds in the company of a Christian congregation.

The word means "to declare together." It is derived from the Latin prefix *com* (together) and the verb *fateri* (to admit, declare).[1]

The Greek equivalent is *homologeo*. Its classical meaning is "to say the same thing, to agree in statement, or to admit a charge."[2] The New Testament deepens its significance, as the admission and speaking involves testifying to the truth of Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus used the word in Matthew 10:32, "So everyone who acknowledges [*homologeisei*] me before men, I also will acknowledge [*homologeiso*] before my Father who is in heaven." The apostle Paul proclaimed in Romans 10:9, "If you confess [*homologeiseis*] with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

God's children speak the same saving message they've been given. This saving message is vocalized as disciples follow Jesus' mandates to make disciples (teaching and baptizing, Mt 28:18–20) and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation (Mk 16:15). As followers of Jesus go into all the world, they are confessing people.

This paper will unfold the biblical paradigm of confessing as an integral component of God's mission effort to reach His beloved yet straying people. We will see the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the actions of God's faithful servants in history reinforce the truth that the confessing church is a church engaged in the art of gathering. While confessing sets boundaries and creates differentiation, the Word confessed always reaches, invites, calls, and gathers as it is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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Exclusion?

Quoting Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–1700*, Dr. Mary Morrissey, a Reformation literature scholar from the University of Reading, commented on the character of the age of confessionalization: "By the 1570s, 'ordinary people were beginning to own the religious labels that the officially agreed confessions and the decisions of Councils were creating: they found that they were Protestant, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed. They were proud of these identities, and they often grew to hate people of different religious opinions.'"[3]

"Confessing," a term meant to communicate oneness with Jesus Christ by grace through faith in Him, began to morph into exclusivity and division.

"Confessing," a term meant to communicate oneness with Jesus Christ by grace through faith in Him, began to morph into exclusivity and division. That which was freighted with speaking the same message God first gave and voicing aloud the saving news of the Gospel began to acquire the baggage of division, a focus on finding inferior confessions and "thinning the herd." Confessionalization mutated the disciple-making mission purpose of confessing into a fault-finding quest.

In his book, *Accidental Pharisees*, Dr. Larry Osborne discussed how exclusivity can be harmful to God's Kingdom purpose. Speaking into the evangelical context of measuring up to specific outward marks of faith, Osborne said,

> If you continue farther down the path of contempt for those who fail to keep up, you'll end up in a place of arrogance. Fewer and fewer people will measure up to your definition of a genuine disciple. Inevitably, being right will become more important than being kind, gracious, or loving. Thinning the herd will become more important than expanding the kingdom. Unity will take a back seat to uniformity.[4]

Osborne's analysis applies to an exploration of the confessing church. If what is confessed goes beyond what God has given or if the confession becomes narrower than the biblical witness, arrogance and judgmentalism inevitably take hold. Confessing mutates from that which gathers to an act of excluding.

Consider the Pharisees. Once scholarly teachers of God's Word and navigators for people who desired to follow Him, the Pharisees devolved into a Jewish sect known for its complex legal constructs and a sharp-eyed search for transgressors of the law. They gave birth not to an ever-expanding confessing community, but to a selective and exclusive enclave of arrogant confessionalism. A similar stumbling block exists today. Setting forth the truths of God's Word in an orderly way is beneficial to God's people and advantageous for the proclamation of the Gospel. But

history shows how sinful pride can easily take hold. Osborne noted about today's church,

> Now, I'm not saying that anyone is intentionally trying to produce a brood of Pharisees. In most cases, people who prescribe a more radicalized and activist faith have the best of intentions. They want our churches and people to reach their full spiritual potential. They don't want to settle for mediocrity. But there is something worse than settling for mediocrity. It's exclusivity. It's the temptation to up the ante and to raise the bar of discipleship so high that it disqualifies all but the most committed, and thus thins the herd that Jesus came to expand.[5]

The confessing church is always in danger of becoming an excluding church because those who confess are fallen and sinful people. What is the answer? It is the very Word confessed. God's Word creates a confessing church that gathers. Not only is the biblical witness invitational, welcoming, and reaching, but the Word made flesh, Jesus the Son of God, became the friend of sinners and the seeker of the lost. He embodied confessing as the art of gathering. Jesus demonstrated that the very confession of the truth presses the church outward to share that truth.

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Scripture, The Gathering Word

How is the confessing church portrayed in the Scriptures?

The confessing church may be seen at its best during times of persecution, marginalization, and exile. Consider the biblical book of Daniel. Ripped away from his childhood home of Jerusalem by the conquering Babylonians, young Daniel and his comrades faced the dilemma of either silent capitulation to Babylonian indoctrination or a posture of confessing that could result in persecution and death. Demonstrating faith in the God of heaven, the young captives chose the latter. But their confessing did not alienate or exclude. It called and gathered—as God's Word, by His grace, always does. Remember how Daniel's confession drew his captors in: "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs" (Dan 1:8–9 ESV).

After Daniel spoke respectfully to the Babylonian steward and proposed a test-run for ten days, "At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables" (Dan 1:15–16 ESV).

The chief of the eunuchs joined in the act of confessing. He was gathered in—not particularly into a full confession of all the nuances of faith in Yahweh, but definitely into a dramatic departure from Babylonian diet practices. Suddenly this Babylonian official was a participant in facilitating meals that gave glory to the God of heaven. But this was just the beginning.

In Daniel 2, a frustrated King Nebuchadnezzar resolved to kill all the wise men in the land—Daniel and his friends included. After spending the night in prayer and receiving God's revelation of the pagan king's dream, Daniel went to King Nebuchadnezzar with the answer he was seeking. But Daniel didn't scold King Nebuchadnezzar. The young prophet didn't point out the king's inadequacies and theological shortcomings. Daniel became a confessing servant of God. He declared to the king, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Dan 2:27–28 ESV).

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What was the result of this confessing? After hearing Daniel detail the king's dream and its meaning, the astonished monarch of the Babylonian Empire "fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. The king answered and said to Daniel, 'Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery'" (Dan 2:46–47 ESV).

Daniel confessed the true God, and it led the king to speak back what he had seen and heard. Nebuchadnezzar declared with Daniel the truth about the God of heaven.

As you may very well know, the book of Daniel continues to display bold confessing that calls and gathers. In the face of belligerent rejection, the confessing of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego elicited another acknowledgment of the God of heaven from Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3). In Daniel 4, the prophet challenges the king to a life of godly virtue: "Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to

you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity" (Dan 4:27 ESV). Daniel's overt but respectful confessing called Nebuchadnezzar to walk with God. Once again, after an odyssey of rejection, the king praised the God of heaven (4:3, 34–35).

The missionary Daniel (one sent to the foreign land of Babylon) continued confessing as he interacted with succeeding kings. Darius' remarkable declaration shows the calling and gathering nature of the Word confessed: "I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions" (Dan 6:26–27 ESV). The ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire was gathered into voicing the Good News of the God who saves.

The ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire was gathered into voicing the Good News of the God who saves. . . . Jesus' confessing was all about gathering.

Even the written language of these accounts displays the gathering quality of the confessed Word. While the book of Daniel opens and closes using the Hebrew language, the core of the book is written in the language of the world, Aramaic. The confession cried out to the world and sought to gather all who heard in order that they would receive life and salvation by faith in the God of heaven.

And that's just the book of Daniel. Think about Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon as he called them to settle in the land, plant gardens, build houses, marry, multiply, and seek the welfare of their strange surroundings. They were sent. This was God's Kingdom mission. They were not to evade or exclude. They were there to gather (Jer 29).

Fast-forward to Jesus, the embodiment in word and deed of the gifts of God received and confessed. Jesus, the Way and the Truth and the Life, sought the broken, the outcast, and the sinner. He was rejected by the arrogant and egotistical, even though He yearned to gather them. In tears He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Mt 23:37 ESV).

Jesus' confessing was all about gathering. In John 10 He admitted that there were many more outsiders to gather: "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10:16 ESV).

Consider Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well in the Gospel of John (chapter 4). Jesus immediately declared the gift of God to the Samaritan woman. He persisted in His confessing by unfolding the blessing of eternal life. He dug into the woman's personal life and led her into a conversation about true worship and the source of eternal salvation. Then He revealed Himself as the Messiah.

Remember, this was an interaction with a Samaritan woman. Jesus had every right NOT to communicate with this person who was—according to the legal and cultural viewpoint of the day—sinful, inferior, unworthy, and unclean. If anyone deserved to be excluded, it was she. She not only passively didn't fit into the category of a righteous person; she actively opposed God's standards. But Jesus' act of confessing didn't alienate her; it called her to the living water that wells up to eternal life (Jn 4:14).

Jesus' life and ministry embodied—incarnated—confessing as the art of gathering.

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Larry Osborne captured this gracious fact:

> Jesus didn't come to thin the herd. He didn't come to recruit "special ops" Christians. His goal was to expand the kingdom, to bring salvation to people who previously were excluded. He came to seek and find the lost, including a large group of folks no one else wanted to invite to the party. Everything about Jesus' ministry was designed to make salvation and the knowledge of God more accessible.[6]

The scriptural witness to a confessing that gathers fills the New Testament. The apostle Paul took a stand against the well-established apostolic leaders when they backed away from eating with Gentiles. He said, "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy" (Gal 2:11–13 ESV).

For Paul, there was no "Benedict Option" for the confessing church.[7] No matter how "unclean" or "offensive" the constituency, confessing meant gathering, not excluding. Paul went on to make sure everyone understood why such radical table fellowship was appropriate. He said, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one

will be justified" (Gal 2:15–16 ESV). The heart of the Gospel—justification by faith in Jesus Christ, being gathered by the God of grace because of what He has done through Christ, not because of our merits—propels the confessing church to call and gather all people into this saving faith.

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Even the final chapter of the Bible puts an exclamation point on the gathering nature of the confessing church: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev 22:17 ESV).

You may be thinking, "But the very act of confessing does indeed exclude. Heresies are out there. People live as enemies of the cross of Christ. The church is not to be flimsy in its doctrine or weak in the message it declares."

And you're right. Confessing will always encounter rejection. The confessing church confronts error, admonishes the straying, and holds one another accountable. And people will back away. They will exclude themselves from the Gospel confession. But the primary task of the confessing church—the people of God entrusted with the Gospel—is to gather people into the saving gift of life in Jesus Christ. Even when the apostle Paul commanded that certain individuals be "handed over to Satan" (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20), the purpose of that command was that they "may be saved 'in the day of the Lord'" and that "they may learn not to blaspheme." The intent was to gather.

The Confessing Church in History, The Art of Gathering

Our forefathers grasped this truth about the confessing church. Confessing was about gathering, not excluding. Klaus Detlev Schulz remarked in his book, *Mission from the Cross*, "Luther's efforts at making the Christian Church doctrinally sound were designed to strengthen Christians for their witness and confession to the world. His emphasis on the Word of God, the Sacraments, faith and obedience, catechesis, worship and liturgy, and translation makes most sense in view of the Church's primary mission of preaching the Gospel and bringing in the lost."[8]

This focus is evident in the preface to the Book of Concord. The reformers emphasized that the Confessions were to have Gospel-enfolding repercussions throughout the world. The Book of Concord was "set forth for all estates of the

Empire and was disseminated and has resounded publicly throughout all Christendom in the whole wide world."[9]

This worldwide declaration had as its intent to train people for service in the church and for the holy ministry so that "among our descendants the pure teaching and confession of the faith may be kept and spread through the help and assistance of the Holy Spirit until the glorious return of our only redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ." The confessors were compelled to gather all people possible into this saving truth: "Then too, we acknowledge, on the basis of the divine injunction . . . to continue to do all that may be useful and necessary for the increase and expansion of God's praise and glory, for the spread of that Word of his that alone bring salvation."[10]

Exclusivity never crossed their minds. It was never their intention "to keep this salutary and highly necessary work of concord hidden in the dark and secret from everyone or to place the light of divine truth under a bushel or a table."[11]

The forefathers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) followed in those steps. As the new frontier of Lutheran mission began to unfold in the mid-1800s, Rev. Friedrich Wyneken sent an appeal to the Lutheran Church in Germany. With so many new residents of the growing United States still disconnected from the church, Wyneken connected the sound confession of the church to the gathering action of the church. He pleaded, "Ought not the church, as a good mother, to have set out long ago through her servants and gone after these languishing children, dying in wretchedness, in order to help them?"[12]

After the formation of the LCMS, the newly organized effort stood firmly as a biblical and confessional church body. But a recognition of the central focus of a confessing church remained clear. As the church agreed to send out traveling preachers, missionaries at large called "*Reiseprediger*," theses were formulated to outline the rationale of such missionary action. Thesis 11 described the kind of emergency that allowed setting aside traditional pastoral formation. It also showed the heart of a confessing church: "An emergency occurs then when, through a legalistic retention of the order, souls, instead of being saved, are lost, and thus love is thereby violated."[13] The confessing church, the staunchly confessing Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, knew its confession was focused on mission. The church was a steward of the Gospel that gathered people in.

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How easy it is to drift from this delicate balance. Instead of striving to embrace, understand, and open a dialogue with people who do not know Jesus or walk with Him, the church can lose confidence in the transformational power of the living Word and shun the very people who need its confession. Under the premise of refusing to compromise the confession, the church can fall into the trap of quenching the work of the Holy Spirit by excluding people who do not appear to fit the confession of faith. Larry Osborne commented, "I'm concerned that the new boundary markers and litmus tests of today are not leading us back to New Testament Christianity; they're leading us back to New Testament Phariseeism. They're simply the newest iteration of old-school legalism."[14]

Gospel Movements Today, The Confessing Church Gathers

But, you may say, aren't today's mission movements experiencing success only because, in an effort to attract people, they throw away or dilute the biblical confession? Doesn't the art of gathering imply a theology that has to capitulate to the whims of pluralistic spiritualism? In order to bring the central message of Christ to the world, aren't we seeing solid doctrine tossed aside?

To be sure, there will always be people and movements that compromise God's Word. But a Gospel tragedy would occur if, in our fear of compromising God's Word, we put it under the proverbial bushel in order to protect it. That act, perceived to be faithfully guarding the truth, deviates from orthodoxy, falsely teaching that the confession of the Gospel is limited to a select few. God may have loved the world, but His Word of truth cannot be entrusted to the world.

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The fear about mission movements, however, is ill-founded. Dr. David Garrison, the Southern Baptist International Mission Board's Global Strategist for Evangelical Advance, noted in his seminal work, *Church Planting Movements*, that today's mission movements are not diluting the message. In fact, it is faithful confessing that empowers the rapid multiplication of the church around the world. Garrison said,

> Those who have successfully navigated a Church Planting Movement are unanimous in their conviction that "it must be God's word that is authoritative for the new believers and the emerging church not the wisdom of the missionary nor some foreign creed nor even the local church authorities." By continually pointing back to the source of one's own authority, the church planter is modeling the proper pattern for the new believers who will soon become the new conveyers of the movement.[15]

A Call to Action for the Confessing Church Today

Today's cultural context calls for the confessing church to reengage in the art of gathering. Eschewing fear, complacency, distraction, and arrogance, the confessing church must face the brutal facts of a post-church and emerging pre-Christian society with a willingness and readiness to let God's Word do its gathering work. What are some next steps for the confessing church?

First, the confessing church must resist the temptation to exclusivity. Two years before the LCMS was founded, Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther recognized the need to gather rather than exclude. As he engaged in seeking partnerships with those of the orthodox faith, he emphasized the hard lesson he learned during the emigration to the United States under Rev. Martin Stephan. He said, "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."[16] A narrow, critical, arrogant, hateful, judgmental, or mean spirit has no place in Christ's church. Taking on a primary mission to "thin the herd" or exclude those who are "inferior" is neither biblical nor confessional. The confessing church never has an excuse to be mean. No, the confessing church rejoices, loves, bears witness, and shares good news. It lets God's confession of love and grace override ego and unkind speaking. It reaches all with the good news of the One who died for all (2 Cor 5:15).

Today's cultural context calls for the confessing church to reengage in the art of gathering. . . . The confessing church never has an excuse to be mean. No, the confessing church rejoices, loves, bears witness, and shares good news.

Second, the confessing church must persist in its Christ-mandated activity. The confessing church walks in the footsteps of Jesus, the friend of sinners and tax collectors. The confessing church is invitational. It engages, welcomes, calls, and gathers. The confessing church is an agent of the Holy Spirit who "calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth."[17] The confessing church ventures into new territory, takes risks, and is not afraid that the Word of God will crumble or return empty. The confessing church is sent by Christ Himself and, as it goes, it makes disciples of all nations. It hones the art of gathering, empowered by God's living Word of grace and truth. The confessing church is the church in mission.

Consider the apostles Peter and John. They were told to stop, to keep quiet, and to give their confessing a rest. What was their response? Were they satisfied that they reached enough people with the Good News of the risen Savior? Was it time to take

a breather? Should they coast for a bit to see what time would bring or let people start coming to them for spiritual information and guidance? No. They were sent to gather. That's what confessing meant. To the opposing church leaders they exclaimed, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19–20 NIV).

May we do likewise. May we be the confessing church.

Endnotes

[1] https://www.etymonline.com/word/confess, accessed February 4, 2018.
[2] Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 200.
[3] Mary Morrissey, "Confessionalism and Conversion in the Reformation," Oct. 2015, accessed Feb. 4 2018 at http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935338-e-73
[4] Larry Osborne, *Accidental Pharisees: Avoiding Pride, Exclusivity, and the Other Dangers of Overzealous Faith* (Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Edition, Locations 116–119.
[5] Ibid., Kindle Locations 742–747.
[6] Ibid., Kindle Locations 807–810.
[7] In his book, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, Rod Dreher advocates that Christians may have to "build strong arks" to safeguard Christian faith and values in a world that is hostile to them. He suggests that Christians may need to take the same strategy St. Benedict of Nursia took in the sixth century: retreating into isolated places in order to build protected and stable Christian communities.
[8] Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross* (Lay Reader's Edition) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 53.
[9] Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 5.
[10] Kolb-Wengert, 14.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Carl Meyer, *Moving Frontiers* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 95.
[13] Ibid., 206–207.
[14] Osborne, *Accidental Pharisees*, Kindle Locations 1017–1019.
[15] David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (WIGTake Resources, LLC, 2012), Kindle Edition, Locations 2803–2807.
[16] Roy A. Suelflow, trans., ed., *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Selected Letters* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 86.
[17] Kolb-Wengert, 355.

Confessing Sin in Mission

Richard Carter

Abstract: In personal stories and professional studies, the author proposes attention to sin—its confession and absolution—as vital to confessing in mission. As suggested by the *Ablaze!* movement in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and its global partners, there is an important place for appropriate leadership, planning, and administration in mission; but there needs to be space between evaluation/assessment and making new plans, space for recognition of sin in the assessment, and space for absolution to set free for mission. The David Kolb four-stage cycle for learning is adapted for engaging in mission, with the addition of that space for confession and absolution. The author invites the reader to reflect on places in her/his life where sin has impeded mission and to hear absolution for such sin. The last word, the first word in mission, is God's: You are forgiven.

The insight came at a district outreach training event. I remain grateful for it. The facilitator opened the session something like this: "Here is significant, appropriate data about how we have not followed through in mission, in our Lord's Great Commission. With this new program we have the opportunity to correct that. What choices can we make, what programs and plans in our congregation and district, to get going in mission?"

The event was part of *Ablaze!*, a multi-year outreach program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and its partner churches around the globe. The intention

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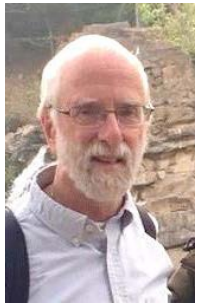

Rev. Dr. Richard Carter is rounding out fifty years in ministry by serving a third year as a volunteer theological educator at Concordia Theological Seminary, Hong Kong. He frequently introduces himself in classes this way: He climbs up on a desk and notes, "Three master's degrees and one and two-thirds doctorates. Who has all the answers?!" And then climbs down, sits on the floor, looks up, and says with a line borrowed from Robert Kolb, "Unless, of course, I am witnessing from my vulnerability" (in Speaking the Gospel Today*, p. 16). He served in two congregations as a DCE before entering seminary. After Yale he taught for six years at Lutheran Seminary for the Lutheran Church of Nigeria. Following doctoral studies, he taught at Concordia University, St. Paul, until his retirement in 2013. His professional interests include Christian education and the integration of faith and life, supported by Luther's Catechisms.* carter@csp.edu

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was 100 million distinct faith-sharing events over the years leading up to 2017, the five hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. "Did not our hearts burn within us?!" such that 100,000,000 people would be on the receiving end of some sharing of the Good News of Jesus.

At that particular presentation, however, my heart burned within me for a different reason. I thought and felt, "If we haven't been faithful and obedient in mission, our first choice is to confess our sin and hear absolution." A decade later, my interest and concern remains: one element of "confessing in mission" is confessing our sin in mission.

The colleague who had made the presentation seemed to miss what we (I) so often miss, that the power of mission, the power in Christian living to do what we haven't done, is the power of the Good News, not first the power of our program decisions. As Christians, we may do well with Law, speaking to ourselves and others about God's will and the ways we are not "in" God's will.[1]

If we haven't been faithful and obedient in mission, our first choice is to confess our sin and hear absolution.

It may be that in formal speeches—in sermons—we make clear the Good News proclamation as the sequel to Law. In traditional communion liturgies, absolution follows confession, before we move on to sanctification, to other activities of worship in prayer and praise.[2] But in common Christian thinking and, I would wager, in common parish and denominational practice, we move from confession to sanctification without the "pause" for absolution—the pause that truly refreshes—for Good News. We move from assessment to strategies. That may be good administrative practice, but we miss out on accessing the Good-News freedom to make that move.

Some may rush in to read this article eagerly in terms of "never did like Ablaze." That may be its own sin to confess. An intention and effort to proclaim Jesus to 100 million?—Praise God, even if you don't like the particular organizational structure. The sense of celebration was evident almost a decade ago in lines from a *Lutheran* (LCMS) *Witness Reporter* article:

> **"Ablaze!" faith-sharing counter exceeds 10 million**
>
> The Web-based "counter" that tracks the number of times LCMS Lutherans have shared their faith with others as part of the *Ablaze!* movement hit 10,006,997 as this *Reporter* was going to press April 29 [2009]. That figure includes some 310,000 additions from the Synod's Southeastern District, which has been recording Gospel-sharing events for three years and last month added them to the *Ablaze!* Web site.[3]

A photo caption with the article noted, "Sharing one's faith with others—even across a backyard fence—is what the Synod's *Ablaze!* initiative is all about."

Lutherans teach all three articles of the Creed. There were significant gifts in the *Ablaze!* proposal besides that Spirit-working, Third Article "backyard fence" sharing of the Good News of Jesus. The First Article of the Creed invites Christians, including church leaders, to work with goals and objectives, appropriate leadership, planning, and managing of tasks, as *Ablaze!* demonstrated with articulated and engaged planning for many people globally for activities by which to be in mission. Too often in the life of the Church there is a lack of attention to planning and administration, to the development in the church (as an institution) of the knowledge, attitude, and skills by which well-organized business and community groups go about their tasks. How will we face our Lord and explain that Servant Leadership or Management by Objectives or Policy-Based Governance was fine for the world, but we are people of the Word and wouldn't touch such things. (Erasmus in the 1500s in his "In Praise of Folly" noted that a bishop was so pure that he would never touch a gold coin. Erasmus' point, however, was different. The bishop would never touch a gold coin, except with gloved hands.)

A story about a pastor's reflective and planning work in his congregation gives a sample of how the church can use such "public" skills and methods:

> In short, the gut check, brought on by an honest look at the parochial report and faith-filled prayer [and absolution?] led to the realization that he had been leading the congregation as if they were in the "church business," when in reality they were supposed to be in the "reconciliation business"—in mission!

This pastor used a professional planning skill, distinguishing between "adaptive challenges" and "technical solutions," as part of his reflective process. The world's "work" may well work in the church, the administrative and leadership attitude, skills and knowledge it develops being useful also in church "work."[4]

Perhaps such use of public, professional skills is a matter of "Two Kingdoms" theology. The Kingdom of the Left teaches us to manage well the Kingdom of the Right, insofar as it is a human organization. When the Kingdom of the Right loses—missionaries brought back, schools closed—how much might it have been our sins in the Kingdom of the Left that set up such losses? There may be a time and a place rightfully to close a congregation, school, or other agency. But how often is it wrong, the consequence of months or years of failure to lead, to plan, to administer well? How often is it our sin that needs confessing, not just pressures such as a downturn in the economy or a change in the demographics?

To be clear, this article proposes absolution, not administration, as the first step on the way forward to confessing the faith in mission. Doing a better job of

"running" the church is not our salvation. Using effective administration—or any other method of "remaking itself in the image of whatever is happening lately"—to restore the church to some glorious status, would be sin, pursuing an illusion. "The church is to be about the things of salvation: forgiving sins, pointing and guiding people to the way of life outlined in the Scriptures."[5] Absolution, then effective administration in mission.

This article proposes absolution, not administration, as the first step on the way forward to confessing the faith in mission.

This article commends the *Ablaze!* effort, and all those who worked in it (globally!) across the years—as it commends schools, pastors, and other church leaders who have recognized the need for skillful administration, for assessing need and setting goals, objectives, and plans to respond to those needs. The critique here is of the much wider and deeper issue, the need to make space in or after assessment to identify or clarify our sin, and to hear Good-News absolution applied to it. Who knows where and how we might serve in witness and mission when we have made such confession and heard such absolution as God is eager to speak?!

Two examples come to mind, one congregational and one personal. The congregation had bumped along for a number of years with their pastor, unhappily. Some were displeased with the pastor's work and some were displeased with those who were displeased, etc. The pastor accepted a call to serve elsewhere. Everyone could breathe a sigh of relief and get on with the business of calling the next pastor. Yes? Or maybe, "No." In this case in a Sunday morning service before the call meeting, the opening Confession and Absolution was adjusted to use Corporate Confession and Absolution. A parish leader spoke briefly, inviting members to consider their sins in general and their sins in particular, whatever sin might have been theirs during the last pastor's years of service. The vacancy pastor followed with time for silence for reflection and confession. Then, with the general absolution to all worshipers he gave the invitation to come forward to receive absolution individually, as the order provides. The absolution could be for any and all sins; it was clearly a way for the congregation to acknowledge its sins—confessing—and be freed for mission—confessing—with whomever would be the next pastor. Confessing sin in mission cleared the air, brought the light and life of the Gospel to bear on congregational life and allowing freedom to move forward, confessing the faith in mission.

A particular example of Confession and Absolution opening my life for mission turned up when I had not sinned yet. But for the event coming up in two months with some mission options, any time I thought of it, all I could think of was sins. Imagine it was a family reunion: All I could think of was that I would punch out Grandma

and kick Grandpa in the shins. I was stuck. Stuck? "In bondage to sin and cannot free myself" came to mind. I made an appointment, and in his office I asked: "Pastor, would you please hear my confession?[6] I haven't sinned yet, but I do find myself in bondage to sin. I cannot change my thinking about Grandma and Grandpa." I confessed this, my sinfulness in mission. "As a called and ordained servant of the Word" he proclaimed to me forgiveness in Christ. Before I had straightened up from receiving the absolution, I noticed something new in my mind and heart: the equivalent of "I could shake hands with Grandpa and hug Grandma." The absolution set me free for mission.

This personal example brings to mind the "double work" of absolution. We are freed from the guilt of sins and from our bondage as sinners; the Good News of Jesus deals both with actual sins and with original sin. How easy it is to think that my ideas, my plans, my preferences are the right ones; and yours are sins. How easy to think that you should repent and realize that my way is the right way. How hard is to think that even with my right ideas I am a sinner—that, in addition, my idea might not be the best one. How easy it is in the determination to be right that we lose the New Testament command to love! How powerfully absolution can set us free for loving.

So, then, the facilitator and that presentation helped me to recognize the need for confessing and absolution in the midst of programming. Our opportunity (our mission?) is the integration of the Good News of Jesus with planning, the unity of faith and organizational life. I wonder how this might be applied to confessing "in mission."

Imagine this conversation between a newbie and a seasoned cross-cultural, overseas missionary. The seasoned one says, "We brought them the Gospel, but we never taught them to lead." "But there has been a seminary there for years." "Yes, we taught them to be pastors, but we never taught them to lead." That may have been simply an educational or administrative mistake. Or it might have been, coming from pride or laziness, a choice that was also sin. If appropriate, might the seasoned missionary even now make individual or corporate confession of the failure, and hear absolution applied? And what events or programs or conversations might follow—reconciliation and leadership development for a church body where leadership had not been introduced? Might a partnership begin to grow where there had been something more "colonial"?

Might I or we or you need to confess our sin, our holding on to particular doctrinal terms or worship practices in a way that is sinful and impedes mission? Am I ready to confess my fear, that if we don't "do" Gospel in this way that I know how to, that these people (congregation, culture) won't hear Good News?"—as if God cannot speak any language other than mine? This is not a proposal to get new doctrine; the witness of the Scriptures and the Confessions is enough, *satis est*. This

is a proposal to reflect on and confess our sin—in domestic and congregational mission and in cross-cultural and overseas mission—our sins of being set in our ways, not God's. Let the Good News we intend to proclaim be the power of the Gospel that liberates us to confess the faith in mission.

Consider Luther's Small Catechism. Do we hold on sinfully to language that doesn't "do" mission? I affirm, practice, and teach memorizing and rememorizing the Small Catechism. But might we, freed in absolution, think carefully about the particular words we use? For example, many have learned the words, "What does this mean?" There is a Latin ancestor for that English translation—a word about thinking—but that so easily leaves Luther's excellent teaching in the mind, the intellect. By contrast, if we note the German ancestor of this traditional question, it sounds more like a two-year-old exploring her world: "What's this?" "What's this?" "What's this?" The words of the Small Catechism might more easily move from mind to heart and hand, a part of exploring the life God gives. Might we have a sin to confess in mission, in teaching the faith, that we are so used to one set of words that we fear, or are too lazy, to consider other sets of words?—even when they are in an original language?

Lutheran Pastor gives up "Gospel"!

Consider our use of the word "Gospel." Imagine this headline in some (Lutheran) tabloid: "Lutheran Pastor gives up 'Gospel'!" It is the habit of the tabloids to find the outlandish headlines that will get our attention, before we read the lines and in between the lines. Would that Lutheran headline get your attention? Would you be ready to go to the next convention and press charges? You might, until you listened and recognized the sin of rushing to judgment in mission. The pastor's point, whether the tabloid caught it or not, was that the word *Gospel* is pretty much useless for most of the world. Without a long explanation, it hardly conveys the wonder of what God is doing in Christ. As twenty-first century religious language, *Gospel* hardly conveys the nuance that (pagan and believing) people heard in the first century, some announcement of victory and/or joy.[7] The words *good news* might communicate more quickly. Then, instead of delaying mission by having to explain Old English and Greek terms, we can move directly to discussing why this Jesus would be "good" and why this Jesus would be "news."[8]

In that Small Catechism Luther asks—invites us to ask, "What sins should we confess?"[9] Which are the sins, mine and yours, that might prevent or impede mission? Well, all of them! The "gross sins" come to mind easily: adultery and other sexual wrongs, and theft and embezzlement, especially by any in the Christian community and even more so especially by its ordained leaders. While I wish none of those is yours, as this list continues and I find my place in it, you may find your own: lack of personal and professional growth, whether from laziness or fear;

disconnection from family and community because of a focus on work (again, especially hard when it is the pastor focused on "ministry"); arrogance or willful ignorance in congregational life; refusal to consider my role in whatever trouble is brewing in family, community, or congregation. What would you add to this list?

Which are the sins, mine and yours, that might prevent or impede mission? Well, all of them!

1

2

3

How many corporate and personal sins frustrate God's mission? Missing the mission comes easily even when the setting seems so "mission." Three days into teaching theology cross-culturally in a setting outside the U.S., I found myself angry. These students don't speak my language! They don't eat my kind of food! They don't eat my way! A colleague/pastor who was there heard my confession, my sin of cultural and personal arrogance—that God should run the world my way; and in the absolution he spoke, I was freed to love and serve. My lesson plans didn't change, but I was changed. Relationships could settle down, the learning curve could go up, because of absolution.

What sins should we confess? For most American Christians, the tensions surrounding food offered to idols (1 Cor 8) are perhaps not an issue, though they may be for Christian sisters and brothers with a heritage in other parts of the world. Might the question for many in worship in the U.S. not be food offered to idols but instruments used in worship? Paul's counsel to practice love for each other may go out the window in our arguments on that subject, as our fear or pride rules. Mission to the world is lost in loveless argument "at home." Can we acknowledge our sins and sin on such parish and denominational questions—and then by absolution restored in our relationship with God and each other, we could go on to celebrate together in mission?

An implication of the doctrine of original sin is that we never have a purely good motive. Absolution is the invitation to a secure relationship in which motives can be examined, feelings noted and considered, sin recognized—and forgiven. Indeed, absolution opens the possibility to sin boldly, and believe more boldly still that God chooses to work in and with us. Hard choices to make in challenging cultural contexts? Perhaps the freedom to choose, more than a particular choice, will demonstrate the Good News of Jesus.

Another implication of the doctrine of original sin is that we sit alongside our neighbors, not over and above them, in daily life. That "we"—Christians—have the

right answers does not make us righteous and the others "wrongeous." We are free to be in mission alongside our neighbors not because we have the truth, but because Jesus is the Truth. The lectionary readings for Palm Sunday this year, e.g., Phil 2:5–8, invite us to a serious practice of humility in mission. The glory is God's, not ours. If we sit next to our neighbors, rather than standing over them to preach (actually or metaphorically), we might better listen to their experience of Law and help them better hear the Good News that we beggars have heard.

It might be easy in this article, with so much attention to sin, to disparage "the things of the world." However, believing that "God has made me and all that exists" suggests that one can learn much from the world to apply to ministry in the Church, much from the Kingdom of the Left that can be used in the Kingdom of the Right, in mission. One such learning is the David Kolb Learning Cycle, a model for classroom and lifelong education/learning, which can be adapted also for administrative tasks. It allows and fosters the opportunity to recognize strengths and weaknesses, creative gifts and sin.

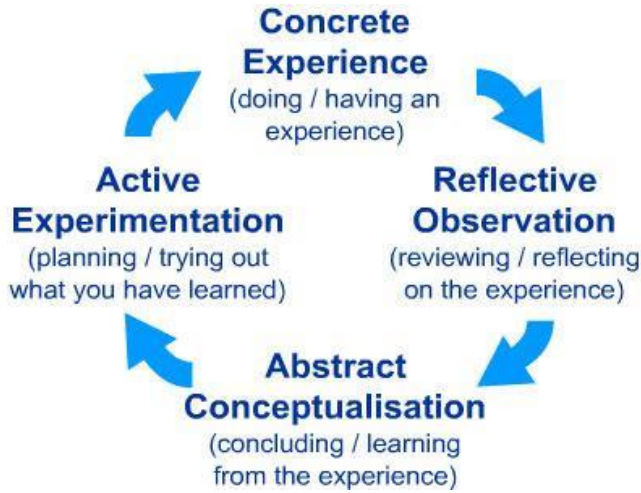

Figure 1. David Kolb's Learning Cycle[10]

For convenience in this cycle, start at the top with experience, in the classroom, in life, in mission. Then comes reflection: What did I notice, think, feel? The abstracting work fits such observations into one's current personal and professional paradigms, while risking the change of paradigms to fit the "reality" of the experience and reflection. And that leads to experimentation and new experience, to a "Plan B," and the cycle continues.

Where in the cycle would you locate absolution? It can be seen as part of abstract conceptualization, after the reflection (indeed, the quiet for reflection that

comes often with confession of sin). One "track" of the reflection, alongside "What went well?" and "What missed?" could be "What might be my sin?" There may be no actual sin involved. (Mistakes, of themselves, may be simply mistakes, with no sins directly involved.) A disease theory of sin, that is, a dis-ease theory of sin, may help. In reflection, where I notice my discomfort, one question to ask is, "What sin might be hiding behind my dis-ease, my not-at-ease, my discomfort?"

It might not be appropriate to call absolution "abstract." It is audible, even tangible, when in private or corporate absolution the sign of the cross touches the forehead. Still, in "learning from the experience," one can learn of his sin and his Savior's freedom. Conceptualization, and then experimentation, are free to operate, moving us on in mission.

Consider this model applied to mission:

1. Concrete (Mission) Experience: personal, congregational, judicatory, and denominational activity
2. Reflective Observation (Assessment): what strengths and weaknesses become evident in professional review, in personal/emotional reflection, and in spiritual examination?
3. Abstract Conceptualization: personal and professional reading and conversation, and also Christian Conversation (absolution where appropriate, pastoral, mutual conversation and consolation,[11] Bible study, and worship). These allow, with the freedom of absolution where appropriate, for celebrations and corrections.
4. Active Experimentation: personal, congregational, judicatory and denominational pilot projects, etc., which can lead to . . .
5. New (mission) Experience

This mission-minded adaptation of the David Kolb model invites recognition of First Article gifts—professional and personal/emotional activities—as well as Second-Third Article gifts that set us free to use them. In community conversations, in business and society, with "neighbors," perhaps we can move directly from strengths to celebrate, etc. In Christian conversation, as also for oneself as participant in community and church conversations, repentance and absolution are unique resources for moving ahead, for mission; indeed, the Good News of Jesus is unique! It is "news." It is new.[12]

Another article in this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* makes a parallel proposal for mission.

> Today's cultural context calls for the confessing church to reengage in the art of gathering. Eschewing fear, complacency, distraction, and arrogance, the confessing church must face the brutal facts of a post-church and

> emerging pre-Christian society with a willingness and readiness to let God's Word do its gathering work. What are some next steps for the confessing church?
>
> First, the confessing church must resist the temptation to exclusivity.[13]

This article disagrees with that article only slightly. The first step is confessing our/my sins of fear, complacency, distraction, etc. Then the facing and resisting can be more viable, more powerful.

Consider again the place of confession of sin in the 1,000 Gifts "movement." This effort, visible online,[14] proposes that a person look back at his day, recognize particular (positive) elements, and write words of thanks or praise, naming those elements. That is Experience-Reflection-Conceptualization before moving on. Excellent!

Then consider the risk when the reflection and conceptualization occur apart from consideration of sin and absolution (whether for a believer or one who does not believe). The focus may easily descend to my life, my good experience. Easily I miss "God gives daily bread."[15] Also for the believer in this process, Christian life risks becoming my effort, my experience of success, my good things—and my trouble if I don't have a long enough list. There is something parallel here to congregations with a "praise band" supplying music for worship. Likely well meant, such a title may subtly tell a lie, that worship is all about praise, about my good experience. Judging by the Psalms, a congregation that has a praise band should also organize a "lament band," or rename its group as a "worship band." No, this paragraph is not asserting that praise bands are sinful. It is noting how easily we can lose mission—confessing the whole of God's truth—even in the "good" things we do.

The intention of this article is our telling the truth about our sin, but not stopping there. From absolution we intentionally practice mission grounded in God's grace. This grounding may be recognized in the Lord's Prayer. "Hallowed Be Thy Name" and the other petitions invite the believer to a life that sees in our experience God's speaking first, God's giving the words we pray, our turning to God, who is holy, rather than attempting to "holify" our lives. Every act of our turning to God in Christ is a witness to our world, a testimony to God's mission working through us.[16]

Making space and time in mission for reflection, for seeing sin and hearing its absolution, frees space and time for moving ahead in experimentation. Leaders and followers can join in risk-taking, partnership, and messy successes. Consider this parallel, or parable: The professional counselor seeks first of all to develop with a client a secure attachment. In that attachment, particular troubles can be faced and healthier choices made.[17] God offers the attachment in Christ, and we can practice offering the same in the Body of Christ. Secure in the relationship with God, we can practice restored relationships with each other. Our mistakes and our sins then have

time and space to be named, the mistakes corrected, the sins forgiven. Growth in mission can follow—not that we will have a divine answer for every choice, but that we can rest ourselves and our risk-taking in God's absolving, freeing care.

Growth in mission can follow—not that we will have a divine answer for every choice, but that we can rest ourselves and our risk-taking in God's absolving, freeing care.

Confessing our sin, my sin, in mission. God grant us the personal and professional and spiritual clarity to do reflection/assessment well, including the recognition of our sins and sin. Then for experimentation, God grant us courage, energy, wisdom, and skill for mission. And in between those two, "your sins are forgiven, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Endnotes

[1] Epitome VI:2 in the Formula of Concord distinguishes between life under the Law and life in the Law; the latter, because of the Good News of Jesus, is an option for believers.
[2] It is always the Good News that frees, but it has not always been that Confession and Absolution came early—or at all—in the order. Communion liturgy did not include corporate confession until the Medieval period (Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947], 257.). Might it be one of our sins that we think of an "historic liturgy" when in reality "the" liturgy has been adjusted throughout history, rightly and wrongly, for cultural concerns?
[3] Paula Schlueter Ross, "'Ablaze!' faith-sharing counter exceeds 10 million," *Reporter* (May 5, 2009), retrieved March 12, 2018, https://blogs.lcms.org/2009/ablaze-faith-sharing-counter-exceeds-10-million.
[4] Robert E. Kasper, Assistant to the President—Congregation Mission and Ministries, in "No more 'Business as Usual,'" in *Michigan* [District of the LCMS] *in Touch* (February 2018): 14.
[5] Gregory Alms, "The Fat Elvis Conundrum," in *Forum Letter* 47, no. 2 (February 2018): 4–5.
[6] I am so grateful for the pastor, decades ago, who at a young adult retreat introduced me and all of us there to the option, the choice, of individual confession.
[7] *Euangelion* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 269–272.
[8] Consider also the word *sin*, part of the theme for this article. As I understand it, to preach in Chinese the Good News of Jesus as Savior from sin is to preach that Jesus saves from criminal behavior. Not so many people in Chinese contexts need a savior?
[9] SC V 17
[10] Saul A. McLeod, "Kolb - Learning Styles," Simply Psychology, 2017, www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html.
[11] Smalcald Articles III iv.
[12] Please note that it would not be your fault, as a part of your (own, congregation, other Christian "unit") participation in the public conversation, if people ask about the freedom and

love that you demonstrate. It would be a gift of God and another opportunity to be in mission explicitly.

[13] See Michael W. Newman, "The Confessing Church: An Act of Excluding or the Art of Gathering?" in this issue: 67.

[14] http://onethousandgifts.com/

[15] SC III 13.

[16] Helmut Thielicke, *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on The Lord's Prayer*, trans. with an introduction by John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 43–54 and *passim.*

[17] Cora Lau Mei Kuen, presentation on February 15, 2018 to a visiting team from Pearl Health Clinic (Idaho Falls, Idaho; Mr. Zak Warren, Clinical Director) at Rainbow Lutheran Centre of Lutheran Social Service, #6 Chi Shin Street, Tseung Kwan O, New Territories, Hong Kong.

Confession as Mission in a Secular Age

Gabe Kasper

Abstract: In his 2007 tome, *A Secular Age*, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor asks the question, "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?"[1] With this question, Taylor taps into a mood of many in the Western world, in a time when unbelief is seen as the default position, even for believers.

How does the Church respond? As a confessing church body, the simple answer is to "be faithful to our confession." At face value this appears to be a fine answer. However, if the confession of the Church is misplaced, she can lose her mission. Consequently, the focus of this paper is to show that the truest confession of the Church demands a response of mission in our secular age. It will do this through understanding the secular age, refocusing the Church's confession, and articulating a way forward in mission in line with the truest confession of Christ's Church: Jesus Christ is Lord.

The World Is Flat

In *Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard presents "The Occasion," the moment when the individual encounters the risen Christ. In that moment, confronted by the risen Jesus, the individual must respond either in faith or offense. Kierkegaard explains:

> The possibility of offense is the crossroad, or it is like standing at the crossroad. From the possibility of offense, one turns either to offense or to faith, but one never comes to faith except from the possibility of offense. The possibility of offense, as we have tried to show, is present at every moment, confirming at every moment the chasmic abyss between the single individual and Jesus over which faith and faith alone reaches. . . . The possibility of offense is the stumbling block for all, whether they choose to believe or they are offended.[2]

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This dichotomy of faith or offense at the presence of Jesus is an argument employed by Christian apologists again and again throughout the ages. Recent examples include C. S. Lewis's "liar, lunatic, or Lord" proposition in *Mere Christianity*, Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, and the popular podcast *Hinge*, which pairs an atheist and an evangelical pastor in a deep dive into the historical reliability of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of these arguments are predicated on this idea of "The Occasion," that once one encounters the resurrected Jesus the response is either faith or offense.

But, what if there's a third option? What if, upon encountering the resurrected Jesus, the response is neither faith nor offense, but apathy? It seems that, regardless of well-crafted arguments, persuasive presentations, and seemingly irrefutable evidence for the resurrected Jesus, the response in today's West is often, "So what?"

What if, upon encountering the resurrected Jesus, the response is neither faith nor offense, but apathy?

Why is that? The world is flat. The Augustinian notion that we all have a "God-shaped hole" that we're looking to fill, seems to have almost evaporated from our modern imagination. Or, as one billboard put it, "Jesus is the Answer" underneath was spray painted, "What was the question?" Referencing the mood of many in the postmodern West, philosopher James K. A. Smith puts it this way: "They don't have any sense that the 'secular' lives they've constructed are missing a second floor. In many ways, they have constructed webs of meaning that provide almost all the significance they need in their lives (though a lot hinges on that '*almost*')."[3]

The lack of even an attempt to find meaning beyond our material existence points to the reality that we live in what philosopher Charles Taylor calls "a secular age." When Taylor speaks of "a secular age," he doesn't mean a "secular society" in which there is a separation of religion and state. No, a secular age is one in which all the emphasis is on the *saeculum*, the here and now, without any concept of the eternal. Meaning, wisdom, and happiness are sought in this life, simply as we see it—with no appeal to outside forces. Succinctly put, we've constructed a way of being in the world that offers significance without transcendence.

To be clear, the mood of "a secular age" is not limited to the avowed secularist or the unbeliever. On the contrary, many in the postmodern West believe in something beyond us, but generally live as if that doesn't really matter. We've constructed what Charles Taylor calls an "immanent frame," *a constructed social space that frames our lives entirely within a natural (rather than supernatural) order*.[4] Georgetown Professor Paul Elie comments on this in his 2004 book, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*:

> We are all skeptics now, believer and unbeliever alike. There is no one true faith, evident at all time and places. Every religion is one among many. The clear lines of any orthodoxy are made crooked by our experience, are complicated by our lives. Believer and unbeliever are in the same predicament, thrown back onto themselves in complex circumstances, looking for a sign. As ever, religious belief makes its claim somewhere between revelation and projection, between holiness and human frailty; but the burden of proof, indeed the burden of belief, for so long held up by society, is now back on the believer, where it belongs.[5]

Perhaps the believer reading this might identify best with James K. A. Smith's succinct summary of this idea: "We don't believe instead of doubting; we believe while doubting. We're all Thomas now."[6] It's not that faith doesn't exist in "a secular age," it's that deeply held religious belief does not come easy, even for those who want it to! The experience of belief in a secular age can be likened to Abraham's great test of faith to sacrifice his own son. Sometimes to hold on to the historic Christian faith in this secular age feels like being asked to hold knives over one's son on Mt. Moriah.

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In their book *Good Faith*, authors David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons lay out the numbers behind the reality that many feel. In their research Kinnaman and Lyons distinguish between those who see faith as background noise from those who are actively engaged. They call the latter group "practicing Christians," people who "say their faith is very important to them and attend church at least once a month." According to their study, 3 out of 10 Americans are "practicing Christians."[7]

Of course, many millions more have some sort of faith connection, but exercise little of it today—folks who may have been raised in the church but now see the practices and tenets of the faith as just landscape. This is the largest faith group in America today. Three out of four U. S. adults have some Christian background, but 3 in 5 American Christians are mostly inactive in their faith.

Why is that? Kinnaman and Lyons lay out a few perceptions that help explore why faith is irrelevant to many. First of all, leadership, or lack of it. Only 25% of adults say ministers are very reliable in helping people live out their convictions privately and in public.

Secondly, the perception is that religious people aren't very charitable. Half of Americans believe that a majority of charity work would still happen if there were no religious organizations or people to do the work. This is far from reality, but perceptions matter.

Thirdly, Christianity is irrelevant to life and culture. Large proportions of the culture believe our faith has had little or no impact on art, culture, personal well-being, politics, community cohesion, or community services. Again, not an accurate perspective, but still perceptions matter.

Fourth, people can live a good life without Christianity. Seventy-five percent of U. S. adults agree that people can live a good and decent life without being a Christian. This raises the question, if I can be a good person without all the hoops of Christianity, what do I need it for?

And finally, many of Christianity's good ideas are taken for granted. In the centuries preceding our time, many Christians profoundly and positively shaped the institutions we enjoy today. Schools and universities, hospitals, labor unions, public libraries, voting rights for women and ethnic minorities, endowments for the arts and sciences, etc., all have connections to people of deep faith, but many have since been divorced from their founders.

So, if companies offer mission trips to do humanitarian good, nonreligious nonprofits feed the hungry, celebrities talk about the Sabbath, fasting, and meditation, politicians shepherd their flocks towards transcendent goals, and life coaches help people find purpose and calling, then, do we really need this ancient faith any more when life is just fine without it? The confession of the Church is a resounding, yes, of course! But the path forward requires a reexamination of what it means to be a truly "confessional" church.

The Iceberg Is Deeper

The belief that the conflicts in our church body are about "wine, women, and song" is a myth. Those are tip of the iceberg issues. The real issue lies much deeper under the water. The real issue centers on faithfulness to our confession. And confession simply means to speak what is true. Our confession is what one believes is true about the world.

So, when there is a division in the practices of the Church, it's not "merely" a matter of pragmatics. It's a matter of confession. This is because practice flows out of confession.

If the Church gets her confession right, then what it looks like to be faithful to that confession should naturally flow. So, when there is a division in the practices of the Church, it's not "merely" a matter of pragmatics. It's a matter of confession. This is because practice flows out of confession.

For example, when a pastor insists that the prescribed Divine Service is the only way in which people can receive the Means of Grace, what is he actually confessing?

He's confessing that the Divine Service is what we must be faithful to. And when another pastor insists that the Church always be "culturally relevant," what is he actually confessing? He's confessing that adapting the Church to the culture is what it means to be faithful.

The problem with both of these confessions and consequent practices is that they have forgotten what they confess. And so, what does the Church confess? In Matthew 16, Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And the disciples say, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, others Jeremiah, or just another prophet." And Jesus says, "But who do you say I am?" Peter answers:

> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (vv.16–18, ESV)

Jesus says, Peter, you got it right. And it is on the rock of that confession that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God that I will build My Church. The rock of the Church is the confession that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God. More simply put, the confession of Christ's Church on earth, and therefore the confession of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is "that all tongues shall confess Jesus is Lord." This is what Paul writes in Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

It's important to note that when the Church confesses, "Jesus is Lord," she is making a political statement, that is, a statement about whose kingdom she belongs to. As theologian Kurt Marquardt points out, "The Church is not a democracy but a Christocracy: Christ alone is Lord."[8] Similarly, we find this same confession and kingdom allegiance in the Lutheran Confessions. In his explanation of the second article of the creed in the Small Catechism, Luther writes, "I believe that Jesus Christ . . . is my Lord. He has redeemed me . . . in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."[9]

The Church is defined and identified by her confession that Jesus is Lord. In this confession, the Church declares that she is faithful to nothing else, but to her Lord and consequently to His kingdom.

It is understood that boiling the Church's confession down to "Jesus is Lord" seems overly simplistic. But it is to this confession that the focus must return. Because, in a secular age, when everything else is stripped away, it is to this confession that the Church must remain faithful. Any debate or discussion about church practice or doctrine must submit itself to this question, "Are we being faithful

to our confession of Jesus as Lord?" Actually wrestling with this base question puts everything in perspective. Now, of course, what exactly it means for Jesus to be Lord needs to be defined, taught, and agreed upon by the Church. And indeed this is exactly what the Lutheran Confessions aim to do!

Any debate or discussion about church practice or doctrine must submit itself to this question, "Are we being faithful to our confession of Jesus as Lord?"

To subscribe to the Confessions is to confess Jesus as Lord. This should inspire the Church to actually wrestle with her Confessions, instead of using them as a club to beat one another over the head with. When the Confessions are understood as the confession that Jesus is Lord, it drives the Church back to this basic confession and calls her to align all of her doctrine and practice with the simple truth of Christ's Lordship.

The confession that Jesus is Lord means something. It means that the Church believes that Jesus is actually in charge, that He really inaugurated God's kingdom during His earthly ministry, that the Father gave Him His "stamp of approval" by raising Him from the dead, and that Jesus ascended into heaven and reigns from now unto all eternity. If Jesus really is Lord, if He really is King over all the earth, then living for Him and His kingdom becomes a powerful antidote to the flattening effect of "a secular age."

Article III of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession emphasizes this thought: "This same Christ suffered and died in order to reconcile the Father to us and rose from the dead in order to rule over, justify, and sanctify believers."[10] It's clear that Scripture and the Confessions confirm that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus happens not only so that the Church would have life in the age to come, but also that she might live in Jesus' kingdom and under His Lordship right now as His church on earth. David Yeago summarizes this thought well: "The Good News is not that 'we don't have to do anything'; the Good News is that we get to have Jesus for our Lord instead of the devil."[11]

Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God. Through Baptism and faith in Him, people are moved from the kingdom of darkness to God's kingdom. Walter Rauschenbusch writes, "His (Jesus) task was not to impart correct concepts about the kingdom but to make it possible for men to respond to it; as a parable of the kingly God, he invited men to look through him into the kingdom, with the result that his hearers could not respond to the kingdom without responding to him."[12] In other words, the kingdom is where the king is. But, what does this confession mean for the mission of the Church in a secular age?

The Mission Is Enchantment

One of the greatest North American writers in the last twenty years is the late David Foster Wallace. For anyone who has read his work, he has this uncanny way of tapping into the flattening experience of postmodern life. Following the release of his most notable work, *Infinite Jest*, David Foster Wallace was interviewed by *Salon* and asked what the book was about. He said "it was about what it is to be a human being in America at the turn of the Millennium." When asked what exactly that was like, he said this:

> There's something particularly sad about it, something that doesn't have to do with physical circumstances, or the economy, or any of the stuff that gets talked about in the news. It's more like a stomach-level sadness. I see it in myself and my friends in different ways. It manifests itself as a kind of lostness. The sadness that the book is about, and that I was going through, was a real American type of sadness. I was white, upper-middle-class, obscenely well-educated, had had way more career success than I could have legitimately hoped for and was sort of adrift. A lot of my friends were the same way. Some of them were deeply into drugs, others were unbelievable workaholics. Some were going to singles bars every night. You could see it played out in 20 different ways, but it's the same thing.[13]

So, Wallace says, in this secular age, there is this pervasive sadness. When asked why that was, he suggested that it came from the inability of our culture to confront the deepest questions about who we are. This is what philosophers Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelley call "normal nihilism,"[14] in which the question why has no answer. Thus, Wallace concludes the *Salon* interview with the words, "I get the feeling that a lot of us, privileged Americans, as we enter our early 30s, have to find a way to put away childish things and confront stuff about spirituality and values."[15]

It's in that last line from David Foster Wallace that a crack in the seeming impenetrable "immanent frame" of "a secular age" begins to show. And it's in that crack that the Church's confession-fueled mission can begin to take root and grow. Theologian Arthur Glasser explains, "What this means is that Christians in the world have a role to fill that non-Christians cannot possibly fill. They have to break the fatality that hangs over the world through reflecting in every way the victory that Christ gained over the powers. They are to be a sign of the new covenant, a demonstration that the new order has entered the world, giving meaning, direction, and hope to history."[16]

It's understood that a call to a realignment of the Church's core confession of "Jesus is Lord" may appear to be simplistic or reductionist response to our secular age to some readers, but in keeping with the theme of this journal, it seems an appropriate place to start. When the Church takes seriously her confession of Jesus

as Lord, she suggests to "a secular age" that another way is possible, that perhaps this world is enchanted after all. One of the first ways this is expressed is in corporate worship. Missiologist Lesslie Newbigin explains, "A community of people that, in the midst of all the pain and sorrow and wickedness of the world, is continually praising God is the first obvious result of living by another story than the one our world lives by."[17]

Of course, worship alone is hardly the full embodiment of mission fueled by the confession of the Lordship of Christ. But, a community of people who see the transcendence of God not only in the religious experience of a worship gathering but in deep communion with their fellow citizens of a kingdom that is "not of this world" provides another opportunity for the re-enchantment of the Western world. Author Mark Sayers explains, "The small commitment of regular attendance grows in to the commitment of loving brothers and sisters in Christ, which blossoms into the service of those outside the church, love of neighbor in sharing good news and seeking of mercy and justice."[18]

The confession of Jesus as Lord propels His church into a mission of enchanting the Western world through her worship, her community, and finally her friendship. As any professional ministry practitioner will tell you, one of the most challenging aspects of evangelizing his or her community is the lack of relationships Christians have with non-Christians. But those who confess Jesus as Lord are part of a kingdom that transgresses boundaries and prioritizes friendships with those who do not believe as they do. This transgression of social boundaries, though seemingly small, opens up the possibility of enchantment. Lesslie Newbigin writes, "Such a community is the primary hermeneutic for the gospel, all the statistical evidence goes to show that those within our secularized societies who are being drawn out of unbelief to faith in Christ say that they were drawn through the friendship of a local congregation."[19]

The confession of Jesus as Lord propels His church into a mission of enchanting the Western world through her worship, her community, and finally her friendship.

Worship, community, and friendship may hardly seem a large enough antidote to the complexities of the secular age, but in so many ways the Lord tells His people that His kingdom is built through such seemingly small acts; tiny mustard seeds make trees, yeast causes bread to rise, and confessing the Lordship of Christ can enchant "a secular age" with the good news that we are not doomed to fatalism, but that there is hope for history.

Endnotes

[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2007), 25.
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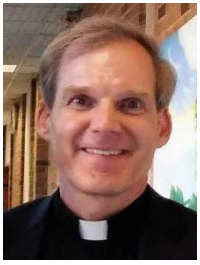
A Lutheran Perspective on the Influence of *Life of Brainerd* on the Church's Understanding of and Approach to Missions since Its Publication in the mid-Eighteenth Century

Vernon E. Wendt Jr.

Abstract: The popularity of David Brainerd's personal journal, published by Jonathan Edwards in the mid-eighteenth century, greatly influenced the revivalistic understanding of and approach to Christian missions. We can only imagine how the history of missions for the past several centuries might have been different had a journal as influential as Life of Brainerd been published at the same time, portraying a missionary faithfully proclaiming the Gospel message in all its truth and purity and rightfully administrating the sacraments, instead of adhering to the principles of Jonathan Edwards' theology.

An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd, Minister of the Gospel, Missionary to the Indians, from the honourable Society in Scotland, for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and Pastor of a Church of Christian Indians in New Jersey. Who died at Northampton in New England, Octob. 9th 1747, in the 30th Year of his Age: Chiefly taken from his own Diary, and other private Writings, written for his own Use; and now published, by Jonathan Edwards, A.M. Minister of the Gospel at Northampton in 1749[1] significantly influenced others in their missionary endeavors. This paper offers a Lutheran perspective on the impact Brainerd's journal has had on the church's understanding of and approach to missions since its publication.



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[1] Hereafter referred to as *Life of Brainerd*

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Influence on Missions

Ultimately published in at least 54 editions, *Life of Brainerd* became a source of inspiration for countless missionary careers. As William Warrant Sweet once remarked, "David Brainerd dead was a more potent influence for Indian missions and the missionary cause in general than was David Brainerd alive."[1]

John Wesley was among the first to recommend *Life of Brainerd* as a source of inspiration for evangelicals, observing in 1767, "Find preachers of David Brainerd's spirit and nothing can stand before them."[2] Between 1768 and 1835, Wesley went on to produce several abridged versions of *Life of Brainerd*, advising that the diary be used to revive evangelical commitment.[3] "Let every preacher read carefully over the life of 'David Brainerd,'" encouraged Wesley. "Let us be followers of him, as he was of Christ, in absolute self-devotion, in total deadness to the world, and in fervent love to God and man."[4]

Brainerd's popularity accelerated with the advent of the first half of the nineteenth century. Protestant leaders held up Brainerd as a model of self-denying piety, as well as a rare example of a successful (if only momentarily so) American Indian missionary.[5] *Life of Brainerd* became the first biography written in America that was well received both abroad and at home. It was published in Dutch in 1756, in French in 1838, and in German in 1851.[6] Published materials by and about Brainerd helped him to attain a prominent place among evangelical circles. Ministers would recount his life from the pulpit, and parents would describe his self-denying exploits during devotions with their children.[7]

The diaries and memoirs of evangelicals are replete with references to Brainerd's life as an aid to their piety.[8] Brainerd was so respected and idealized that in 1822 Sereno Dwight remarked that "the veneration felt for his (Brainerd's) memory, by the church approaches that with which they regard the early Evangelists and Apostles."[9]

As impactful as Brainerd's journal was on Christian piety, Brainerd's influence on missions is even more remarkable. Even though his missionary career spanned less than five years, *Life of Brainerd* inspired many to choose missionary careers as a means of manifesting a similar spirit.[10]

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Among the more prominent missionaries influenced by Brainerd's life were William Carey and Henry Martyn. To Carey, one of the first Baptist missionaries in India, *Life of Brainerd* was almost a second Bible.[11] Carey, William Ward, and Joshua Marshman, colleagues in the Serampore Mission in India, affirmed a covenant three times a year that

included the following statement:

> Let us often look at Brainerd . . . in the woods of America pouring out his very soul before God for the people. Prayer, secret, fervent, expectancy, is at the root of all personal godliness.[12]

Henry Martyn claimed that he was drawn into missionary work through reading *Life of Brainerd*.[13] His missionary motto: "Let me burn out for God" was paraphrased from a line in Brainerd's diary.[14] He once wrote, "I long to be like him" and like Brainerd, he ended up dying of tuberculosis, while serving in India with Carey.[15]

Brainerd also inspired Samuel J. Mills, considered the founder of American foreign missions. Mills reflected that he was first attracted to his religious vocation by the stories of David Brainerd and John Elliot that his mother told him in his youth.[16] Francis Asbury, the first missionary of Methodism to America, referred to Brainerd as "that model of meekness, moderation, temptation, and labor, and self-denial."[17] Thomas Coke, another Methodist and founder of missions throughout the world, wrote of Brainerd on coming to America in 1749: "his humility, his self-denial, his perseverance and his flaming zeal for God, are exemplary in deed."[18] Robert McCheye, who organized missions for the Church of Scotland, wrote of Brainerd in 1832:

> Most wonderful man! What conflicts, what depressions, desertions, strength, advancements, victories, within thy torn bosom! I cannot express what I feel when I think of thee. Tonight, more set upon missionary enterprise than ever.[19]

Also, included in the long list of missionaries who were inspired by Brainerd are David Livingston, missionary to Africa; Samuel Marsden, missionary to Australia and New Zealand; Robert Morrison, Scottish missionary to China; John Wilson, missionary to Western India; Andrew Murry, missionary to South Africa; Sheldon Jackson, missionary to Alaska; and Christian Frederick Schwartz, a German Lutheran missionary to India.[20]

Missionaries regularly took the work into the field, where it became part of their devotional exercises. Gideon Hawley, a missionary protégée of Edwards, carried in his saddlebag a copy of *Life of Brainerd* to which he referred to whenever under duress. In 1753, he wrote, "I greatly need something more than humane to support me. I read my Bible and Mr. Brainerd's life, the only books I brought with me, and from them have a little support."[21] Pliny Fisk, a missionary in Egypt, also drew comfort from Brainerd's diary while in the field.

In 1822, Fisk noted in his diary that one Sabbath, while reading *Life of Brainerd*, he was led to contrast Brainerd's character and accomplishment with that of the pharaohs. He concluded that "All their cities, mausoleums, temples and pyramids,

seemed insignificant compared with the crown of glory which Brainerd won."[22] Also, when he was seriously ill, Fisk wrote in his diary, "What must not Brainerd have suffered, when sick among the Indians?"[23]

Memoirs of the graduates of Andover Seminary, the institutional center of the missionary movement in nineteenth-century America, contain direct testimony of *Life of Brainerd*'s influence. Before sailing from Andover to Bombay, missionary Gordon Hall wrote to his parents: "It will be trying to your parental tenderness to see your son leaving you to live and die in a foreign land. But have you not given me away in covenant to God?"[24] Hall went on to remind his parents "that death will separate us whether we consent or not."[25] Levi Parsons, the first American missionary to Palestine, declared in his farewell address, after citing Brainerd's example, "Better, my brethren, wear out and die within three years than live forty in slothfulness."[26]

Life of Brainerd's influence on twentieth-century missionaries can be found in Jim Elliot's writings. Inspired by Brainerd, Elliot flew with four companions to share the Gospel with the Auca Indians in South America. Shortly before he was martyred in 1956, Elliot wrote, "Confession of pride—suggested by David Brainerd's Diary yesterday—must become an hourly thing with me."[27]

Life of Brainerd's continued influence on the twenty-first century can be seen in the 2009 publication of *David Brainerd: A Flame for God* (2009),[28] the 2009 publication of *The Lives of David Brainerd*,[29] and the 2011 children's book *David Brainerd: A Love for the Lost.*[30] In addition, a documentary on David Brainerd,[31] along with a companion devotional book,[32] are being marketed both to foster Christian piety and to spur others on to mission work.

Criticisms of Brainerd as Missionary

Given *Life of Brainerd*'s impact on missions, one might surmise that Brainerd's missionary career would be unanimously lauded. However, Brainerd's image as a model missionary has not gone without criticism. Although evangelicals throughout the years have tried to mold Brainerd into the foremost missionary of his time, he made relatively few converts while in the field.[33]

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Norman Pettit questions Brainerd's "calling" to the mission field, evidenced by his lack of joy in his work among the Indians, along with the fact that his diary contains no

indication that he considered mission work while in college.[34] It wasn't until he was expelled from college that Brainerd was compelled to preach to the Indians.[35]

In addition, there are hints throughout Brainerd's diary that he had taken upon himself (for the wrong reasons) a job for which he was not properly fit.[36] Brainerd disliked the wild and hated the discomforts that went with living in the woods.[37] Protestant missionary leaders sometimes feared that the influence of Brainerd's self-sacrificing zeal could drive young recruits to an early grave.[38] Brainerd's melancholy attitude expressed in his diary led Andrew Croswell to describe Edward's *Life of Brainerd* as that "long and tedious account we have of his wading through the fogs and mists of vapours and melancholy," which he felt had "a direct tendency . . . to frighten others away from the joyful religion of Jesus Christ."[39]

Croswell argued that the praising of "such dark and gloomy lives of Christians of the first magnitude, must be doing the Jews and deists a pleasure, whose hearts are gladdened by seeing Christianity represented in such an hideous manner, as if they who knew most of it, were the greatest strangers to peace and comfort."[40] Worse yet, Brainerd's doubt was possible evidence that he questioned Christ's all-sufficiency and free forgiveness, making Jesus "a little Savior." For, in effect, Brainerd was despising the blood of Christ and had "a mean opinion" of His free grace.[41]

Others have criticized Brainerd's demeaning attitude towards the Indians. As one of his journal entries entry reveals:

> They are in general unspeakably indolent and slothful. They have been bred up in idleness and know little about cultivating the land, or indeed of engaging vigorously in any other business. . . . They have little or no ambition or resolution. Not one in a thousand of them has the spirit of a man. And it is next to impossible to make them sensible of the duty and importance of their being active, diligent, and industrious. . . . It is to be hoped, that time will make a yet greater alteration upon them for the better.[42]

Thus, Henry Warner Bowden writes, "Holding such convictions about Indians and beset by misgivings concerning himself, it is remarkable that Brainerd contributed anything at all beneficial to missions."[43]

Paul Harris criticizes that Brainerd's diary is concerned with Brainerd himself, and little is said about his dealings with the Indians. Even when he describes his Delaware converts, Brainerd's emphasis is placed upon God's grace communicated through his preaching, while the Indians appear as mere stock figures.[44] Hence, Brainerd gives the impression that missionaries shouldn't concern themselves too much with how they relate to their prospects. What they really needed to worry about was their relationship with God. For if a missionary tried hard enough and demonstrated enough faith, the Holy Spirit would take care of the rest.[45]

Brainerd is also criticized for shying away from confrontation over Indian land rights. According to Harris, "In the end Brainerd did nothing more than turn his back on the efforts of his converts to construct a viable way of life."[46] His example encouraged later missionaries to overlook the ways in which the process of conversion affected the social structure of the people. "Missionaries were given no incentive to develop more than a superficial understanding of the social context in which they labored."[47]

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A Critique of the Critics

While there may be some validity in the analysis of Brainerd's critics, they also omit some important points. For example, while it is true that Brainerd had relatively few converts, it is difficult to determine one's "success" as a missionary based on numbers. This is especially true in the case of the American Indians in Brainerd's day, who proved to be a difficult target to reach for numerous reasons. Therefore, it is not surprising that Brainerd had relatively few converts, nor did his contemporaries who also worked among the Indians.

When Pettit questions Brainerd's "call" to the Indians due to his joyless determination to persevere, one wonders if Pettit would have questioned Jeremiah's calling or that of Jonah's! It is unfortunate that Brainerd's melancholy spirit seems to overshadow any joy he may have had in his missionary endeavors, but one cannot judge whether someone is "called" or not based upon their lack of joy in the field. Many missionaries have gone through periods of doubt and despair. Also, one cannot discount that is appears that Brainerd was already predisposed to a melancholy spirit due to his background, temperament, and sickly body. In answer to Pettit's allegation that Brainerd only chose to work in the mission field due to his expulsion from college, both Edwards and the SSPCK (The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge) credit Brainerd with turning down several assignments in comfortable parish churches among the English.[48] Also, in response to Pettit's questioning Brainerd's call to mission work based on his failure to mention his interest in missions in his diary at college, how many other missionaries did not receive a "call" until later in their lives?

In defense of Brainerd's alleged lack of sensitivity to the Indians, it should be acknowledged that Brainerd was a product of his environment. Neither Brainerd nor Edwards appear "intent on belaboring parodies of the conventional images of satanic savagery."[49] In fact, there are relatively fewer such images in *Life of Brainerd* than in

much of the missionary propaganda before and after.[50] For example, John Elliot, the "great apostle" to the Indians had looked upon his charges as "doleful creatures"—the very ruin of mankind.[51]

In answer to Harris's criticism of Brainerd's self-centeredness, given the fact that *Life of Brainerd* was intended to be a personal diary depicting his struggles for holiness, it is little wonder that so much of it is consumed with his personal struggles and feelings towards God rather than focusing on the Indians he worked with.

Finally, Brainerd may have failed to take a stand for Indian land rights, but how many others took such a stand, not to mention a sickly missionary with a melancholy spirit? In fairness to Brainerd, he spent as much time educating his people as he did catechizing them, in hopes that the Indians would improve their status in life.[52] Also, his preaching and teaching tended to focus on Christ crucified as the "man of sorrows" who came to suffer and die that others might be saved, realizing that the Indians who had been cheated out of their land and decimated by the white man did not need to be also told that the white man's God was angry and vengeful.[53] In addition, Brainerd was careful not to proclaim the superiority of his civilization but sought above all to communicate the essence of the Christian faith.[54]

Brainerd as Model Missionary?

In his four years as a missionary to the Indians, Brainerd experienced only a moderate amount of visible success for all his world-renouncing efforts. He was most effective in his preaching tour to the Delaware Indian village at Crossweeksung, New Jersey, which began on June 19, 1745. Within a year, there were 130 persons in his growing assembly of believers.[55] The whole Christian community moved from Crossweeksung to Cranberry in May 1746 to have their own land and village, but by November, Brainerd was too sick to continue his work.[56] Nonetheless, from the right perspective, Brainerd can be looked upon as a model missionary in the following ways: (1) his love for the people, (2) his Christ-centered preaching and teaching, (3) his emphasis on education, (4) his intercessory prayer, and (5) his sacrificial service.

1. Love for the People

The passages in Brainerd's diary resonate with his concern for the conversion of the Indians. An example can be found in one of his letters addressed to a "dear friend," dated July 31, 1744: "But I think I could be content never to see you or any friends again in this world, if God would bless my labours here to the conversion of the pour [sic] Indians."[57]

Still another example of Brainerd's passion for the Indians can be seen in the change in his interpreter, as described in his diary. At first, Brainerd describes how

his interpreter, an Indian by the name of Moses Tatamy, hindered his work, because he "addressed the Indians in a lifeless indifferent manner."[58] Later, however, a great change took place in the interpreter. Not only was he baptized by Brainerd, he is described as greatly assisting Brainerd's work.[59] This change in Brainerd's interpreter is evidence that Brainerd's love and concern for the Indians was contagious.

On another occasion, a convert of Brainerd reportedly told her granddaughter that Brainerd "was the first white man she could ever love, having suffered so much from them . . . but now God sent this man to pay her for all the wrongs which she had suffered."[60] Brainerd was so moved by her testimony that he "was willing to endure hardships . . . that he might do her people good."[61] When Brainerd visited his congregation of Indians for the last time on March 18, 1747, he described that the degree of affection among them was more than merely natural.[62] Also, Edwards describes Brainerd's final prayers as dwelling "much on the prosperity of Zion, the advancement of Christ's Kingdom in the world, and the propagation of religion among the Indians."[63]

Finally, Brainerd's love for the Indians can be seen in his brother John's appointment as his successor in the mission at Cranberry. Brainerd described his love for John as being more than any creature living.[64] We can infer that he passed his love for the Indians on to his much-loved brother. For if he didn't love them, he certainly would have dissuaded his brother from working among them.

2. Christ-centered Preaching

Brainerd, as a disciple of Edwards, tended to promote what can be described "a more law/gospel/law" message than that of a "law/gospel/gratitude" message,[65] thereby failing to properly distinguish between law and gospel. However, his goal of making Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins as the central theme of all his discourses to the Indians is admirable.[66] His normal path of exposition was as follows:

a. God's perfections.
b. Man's fallenness.
c. Self-justification's utter insufficiency.
d. Christ's utter sufficiency to save.
e. The urgency to respond to Christ by faith without hesitation.[67]

In addition, Brainerd was convinced that morality was best promoted by preaching Christ crucified. As he wrote in his journal:

> I never got away from Jesus, and Him crucified, and I found that when my people were gripped by this great evangelical doctrine of Christ and Him

> crucified, I had no need to give them instructions about morality. I found that one followed as the sure and inevitable fruit of the other.[68]

3. Emphasis on Education

Brainerd spent as much time educating his people as he did catechizing them, with the hope to improve their status in life.[69] He not only helped inspire others to found schools for Indians, he also was a source of inspiration for the founding of Dartmouth and Princeton.[70]

4. Prayer and Fasting

While we should be careful not to make prayer a work to earn God's favor or a tool of manipulation, Brainerd can serve as an example for us in his praying for the unsaved. In his journal, we read of him spending whole days in prayer, sometimes setting aside six times in the day to pray, and seeking out others to pray with him.[71] He prayed for not only his own sanctification, but for the conversion and purity of the Indians and, above all, for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ around the world, especially in America.[72] In addition, his willingness to withhold from eating, in his longing for holiness, guidance, and greater usefulness by God among the Indians is also something we can emulate.

5. Sacrificial Service

Like prayer and fasting, acts of service should not be seen as a way to earn God's acceptance and favor. Instead, any sacrifice we make for the Kingdom of God is to be compelled by our love for Him in response to the love He has shown to us in Christ, as the Holy Spirit works in us the will and power to do God's will (Phil 2:13). From this perspective, Brainerd's example of devotion to God and man, despite his physical ailments and hardships, can serve as inspiration for our missionary endeavors.

Possible Reasons for the Popularity of Brainerd's Journal

Given Brainerd's moderate success as a missionary, why then was his journal so influential? I contend that there are two main reasons for his journal's success: (1) Readers can easily relate the sufferings and weaknesses of Brainerd with their own, and (2) the influence of Jonathan Edwards as the editor and promoter of *Life of Brainerd*.

1. Brainerd's Sufferings and Weaknesses

The fact that Brainerd struggled so much as a person and as a missionary makes him even more relatable, than if he would have portrayed himself as a glowing success in his memoir. Instead, *Life of Brainerd* invites the reader to join him, as a fellow cross-bearer this side of heaven, where the glory of God's Kingdom is often hidden. As John Piper describes, Brainerd's life is "a vivid, powerful testimony to the truth that God can and does use sick, discouraged, beat-down, lonely struggling saints, who cry to him day and night, to accomplish amazing things for his glory."[73]

Those who struggle with sickness and disease can identify with Brainerd's struggle with almost constant sickness; those who experience dark times of depression can identify with Brainerd's recurring bouts of melancholy; those who find themselves separated from loved ones and friends can identify with Brainerd's struggle with loneliness; and those who have had to endured external hardships can identify with Brainerd's many challenges in his missionary endeavors.

Above all, readers can identify with Brainerd's spiritual struggles, such as his struggle at times to love the Indians, his struggle to stay true to his calling when the opportunity for an easier life as a pastor came along, and his many struggles in his pursuit of holiness. Yet, despite all his struggles, Brainerd's diary portrays him as never giving up until his dying breath. The implication for readers of *Life of Brainerd* is that neither should they give up in their dedication to their vocations and to their God, until they join Brainerd in breathing their last and hear the words, "Well, done good and faithful servant."

Since its initial publication in 1749, *Life of Brainerd* has never gone out of print. Because of its honest portrayal of a man's struggles with his own sinful nature, as well as in fulfilling his vocation as a missionary in a challenging field, it remains just as relevant as when it was first published.

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2. The Influence of Jonathan Edwards

We cannot underestimate the influence Jonathan Edwards has had on Christianity in America, as well as throughout the world. While George Whitefield is considered the foremost revivalistic preacher, Jonathan Edwards is considered by many to be the foremost theologian of revivalism in America, and there is hardly any

doubt that Edwards' sole motivation for editing and publishing *Life of Brainerd* was to propagate his theology of revivalism. Thus, we are left to speculate on what Edwards chose to leave out of Brainerd's journal, as well as possibly what he may have added or reworded to fit his theological framework. Rather than being an impersonal theological work, *Life of Brainerd* is the equivalent of Edwards' theology taking on flesh in the form of a sickly missionary, prone to a melancholy spirit. In fact, Brainerd's diary led to an important sub-genre of religious biography in America: the missionary memoir meant to inspire others to Christian ideals.[74] Unlike other missionary reports that focused on the missionary endeavor itself, Brainerd's diary primarily focused on the missionary and his personal struggles. This compelled others, who weren't even missionaries, to read and follow Brainerd's example within their own context of life.

As a theologian, Edwards identified with Calvinism, as opposed to Arminianism. These two different theological strands may appear to be markedly different. Calvinism emphasizes God's sovereignty and man's predestination, whereas Arminianism emphasizes man's decision for or rejection of Christ. However, the results of both approaches tend to be a focus on human good works rather than on Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. For through good works, one must either demonstrate his right to acceptance (Calvinism) or earn his acceptance (Arminianism). This can be seen in Edwards' emphasis on signs or "distinguishing marks" of regeneration to be assured of one's salvation.[75] As John Gerstner states,

> The difficulty is in detecting such signs [of spiritual conversion]. Edwards, having taught its possibility, urged the saints to get assurance. However, he raised so many problems that it became a byword that very few of his closest, followers, if any, ever got it.[76]

Hence, *Life of Brainerd* resonates not only with those who hold to such a works-centered understanding of the Christian life, it also has served to reaffirm such a position.

Finally, because Edwards, as "America's theologian" put his "imprimatur" on *Life of Brainerd* as an example of Christian piety, others, who admired Edwards, were persuaded to do the same. This has resulted in a domino effect, as prominent Christian leaders in successive generations have continued to persuade others to read *Life of Brainerd* as an inspiring example of Christian devotion.

Conclusion

Although *Life of Brainerd* was never intended to be a guide for missionary methodology, its content promoted the Jonathan Edwards' idea that if one had a vibrant vertical relationship with God, then their horizontal relationship with others

would take care of itself. Consequently, sociological and cultural considerations were deemed unimportant. All that was needed was a pure heart for God.[77] Thus, *Life of Brainerd* significantly contributed to the "revivalistic" understanding of missions that emphasizes that the success of one's mission endeavors is dependent on the purity or accomplishment of the missionary who can persuade sinners to believe and be saved, rather than on the mighty act of God who turns and transforms people.[78]

Brainerd's love for the Indians, Christ-centered preaching, emphasis on education, prayer and fasting, and willingness to give up all for Jesus are commendable. However, by implying that "success" in missionary endeavors is solely dependent upon the piety of the missionary, rather than on the faithful proclamation of God's Word and rightful administration of the Sacraments, the influence of *Life of Brainerd* may have inadvertently distorted the Church's understanding of and approach to missions.

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We can only imagine how the history of missions for the past several centuries might have been different had a journal as influential as *Life of Brainerd* been published at the time, but rather portraying a missionary faithfully proclaiming the Gospel message in all its truth and purity and rightfully administrating the Sacraments, instead of adhering to the principles of "Edwardsianism." As Dan Saunders asserts,

> Edwards' doctrine of assurance is like the naughty child climbing up the slide rather than taking the stairs. He confuses the locus of assurance and bases his doctrine in union with God and Christian practice which can only lead to the subjective errors of unhealthy introspection and legalism. Rather, assurance should ultimately be based in objective sources, coming from God. The promises of God in Scripture, the finished work of Christ, the indwelling of His Spirit from these spring the fountain of assurance, the certainty of regeneration producing faith, the certainty of a God transformed life, the certainty and hope of glory.[79]

While journals, letters, and biographies of Lutheran missionaries have certainly been published throughout the years, e.g., *The Autobiography and Chronological Life of Reverend Paul Henkel (1754–1825)*,[80] "The Life and Labors of Friederick Schmid,"[81] *Nau! Mission Inspired: The Story of Henry Nau*,[82] none has had such an influence as *Life of Brainerd* in motivating its readers to sacrificial living. This may

be due to the simple fact that these works have tended to focus more on the mission work itself rather than the piety of the individual missionary. Still another possible reason is that an influential figure like Edwards has yet to endorse such a Lutheran writing as "a remarkable instance of true and eminent Christian piety in heart and practice, tending greatly to confirm the reality of vital religion, and the power of godliness."[83]

This lacuna certainly doesn't preclude the possibility of publishing a portrayal of a life of sacrifice that is more in keeping with our understanding of theology and ministry. In contrast to Jonathan Edwards' version of piety portrayed in *Life of Brainerd* that emphasizes God's sovereignty and the sanctification of one's will, such a work would emphasize the cross of Jesus and a complete dependence on God for one's faith and holiness. Hence, such a work would offer readers an affirmation of their identity in Christ rather than a subjective proof of their possible election. Ideally, such a portrayal of Lutheran piety would prove to be as influential to others in sacrificial living and missionary zeal as *Life of Brainerd* has, in addition to being a leavening influence of orthodoxy.

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Cultivating a New Perspective on Unity in Worship Practices

Laura M. Pulliam

Abstract: Confessions are crafted over time. Time itself can serve as a sieve through which poor theology is purified. Therefore our confessions of faith, crafted over time and carefully laid out in the *Book of Concord*, are the highest quality tools for mission available to us. As with most tools, however, utility is dependent on the user, not the object itself. How do we practically utilize confessions in such a way that we do not have to first convert someone to our *culture*[1] before they are converted to *Christ?* In recent years, the confessions of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) have more often been used as a hammer for proving a point than as a spoon for delivering the Gospel. What the LCMS desperately needs, possibly more than ever, is some discussion on the practical use of this tool, particularly in worship practices. The Early Church provides a helpful framework for how we might handle these discussions.

Now is the perfect time to have these conversations, as new LCMS churches are being planted across America, crafting their budding congregational cultures and practices from the ground up. Fortunately, these dialogues are beginning. In 2017, the synod published a guidebook, *Mission Field: USA—A Resource for Church Planting*. This publication was followed by an online training resource in early 2018. As our synod begins a renewed effort to plant congregations in the United States, we must ask ourselves some hard questions. How do we utilize the "sieve" of our

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View Lutheran Mission Matters 26, no. 1 (2018) at **https://lsfm.global/**.
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confessions as we fulfill the Great Commission? How do we confess the Good News in all its richness and purity to the people who need to hear it most—those *outside* the flock? What does it look like to "develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith"?[2]

I would like this article to serve as a useful resource for church planting teams as they consider, specifically, how to curate their worship practices as they confess in mission. I use that phrase "to curate worship" intentionally. Curation requires a working knowledge of the history of one's subject matter as well as the audience to which that matter will be delivered. Too often, we find individuals who specialize in one *or* the other, to the detriment of both parties as well as to those in our congregations. Truth be told, among my fellow Lutherans I sometimes feel like the "weirdo" in the room. I've led worship with a guitar, and so I've been labeled as someone who loves contemporary worship. I've been known to add liturgy or chanting to youth retreats, and so I've been marked as someone who loves traditional worship. Which is true or is it possible to be both?[3] I suppose I don't know what I am. What I do know is that we need a middle ground. And pragmatically speaking, we have never needed a middle ground more desperately than right now, as the church planting movement in America is picking up speed.

My husband, Mark, and I *are* kind of weirdos. We've been known, on more than one occasion, to uncork a bottle of wine, sit on the front porch, and talk worship theology and its application in church planting. I note especially "more than one occasion" because, despite the theology degrees and bookshelves full of resources at our disposal, we have never once found the definitive answer to our questions about what historically-grounded, biblically-faithful worship looks like in a gymnasium full of new believers. I've intentionally transitioned to a more conversational tone, but that's because I think this is exactly how this conversation needs to happen—sitting on the front porches of our homes, looking at the mission fields of our neighborhoods, as we consider the practical applications of our Lutheran confessions in worship. Specifically, what does this application look like for those called to plant churches, reaching our de-churched and unchurched neighbors? My Master's thesis took me into the worship practices of the Early Church, specifically how the people balanced culture and history in their corporate worship practices. Since my husband and I are inclined toward church planting, we have wrestled extensively

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with how to apply the behaviors and practices of these earliest Christians to twenty-first century Christians.

In order to address this topic, a working definition of liturgy is in order. In its simplest form, liturgy is the pattern of responses utilized in corporate worship. While this word is almost overly-saturated with meaning today, Luther's perspective was comparatively uncomplicated. He suggested all that is required is that the church "come together to hear God's Word and to respond to him by calling upon him together, praying for every kind of need, and thanking him for the benefits received."[4] In biblical times, *liturgy* simply meant "public service."[5] Before AD 500, this word was used to describe the Christian's entire response to God, that is, the work of the people both inside and outside the church.[6] Since that time, "the liturgy" has in some cases been made so specific as to denote only certain calls and responses in a particular hymnal.

This raises the question if there is any value to using liturgy at all. In an age in which a phone becomes obsolete in a matter of months, is there benefit to retaining anything old? I propose that there is something deep inside of us that resonates with tradition or, more specifically, with the *unchanging*. A friend recently shared with me that her children and grandchildren often remark that her house feels like home "because it never changes." Personally, I know that Thanksgiving just wouldn't be Thanksgiving without the standard spread; I've never desired tetrazzini on this turkey holiday. I believe every one of us has that *one* radio hit from our high school years that, in an instant, takes us back. There are scents that awaken memories we thought were far gone. When we respond to the greeting "The Lord be with you" with the familiar words "And also with you," we are participating in a greeting shared by our Old Testament brothers and sisters in the faith and even, if we grew up in the faith, our younger selves, our parents, or our grandparents. This deep resonance with familiar sights, sounds, and even smells is one benefit to utilizing familiar patterns in worship.

Other benefits to following a pattern (liturgy) in worship include memorization and participation. For the Early Church, structure in worship came about as a means of enabling more participation in worship. Newcomers could learn elements of worship that were repeated week to week—a very important feature before the advent of the printing press—and, since most of these elements were direct quotations from Scripture, not only were they able to participate, they were internalizing Scripture simultaneously.[7] These repeated elements in the first few centuries included the recitation of the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer.[8] Today we could ask, *What elements of our worship encourage participation? What elements help participants memorize passages of Scripture?* I believe we consider these opportunities too narrowly when we repeat only one passage, such as the *Nunc Dimittis*, without ever challenging ourselves and our congregations to learn more.

This is not to discount the *Lutheran Service Book* as a confessional teaching tool in the least. I wish simply to suggest that the Divine Service settings which it contains are not the *only* teaching tools at our disposal. For example, for several years in a row my congregation read portions of the Passion narrative aloud on Good Friday. Having done this several years, it suddenly dawned on me that I had memorized substantial portions of Matthew 26–27. As another example, when my San Antonio DCE cluster holds a four-day youth event, we write a call-and-response liturgy based on the theme Scripture passage(s) for the event. By the end of the long weekend, many students are able to repeat these passages back to their parents. Pattern creates "an understanding among the participants," allowing worship to be a "corporate expression and not just the response of the individual."[9] If spontaneity, either on the part of the participants or the pastor/worship leader, is given free reign, only the most dominant voices would ever be heard in worship.

The patterns of worship established by the church throughout the ages are worth studying *because* they bear the brushstrokes of so many fellow believers. Each stroke adds a layer of color and texture to this beautifully elaborate painting of worship today. However, it is not in keeping with the example of the ages to act as though we twenty-first century Christians must carbon-copy that painting, failing to add our own mark, *nor* to completely toss out that painting and start completely from scratch. Like us, the earliest Christians wrestled with this tension between the old and new. They found value in retaining some elements of the old; this fact alone should make us consider whether there is some benefit in those elements for us today. It can be a beautiful thing that the church has retained "words which for the most part have become exclusively its own."[10] It is important to note "can be" because, on the one hand, practices shared with others are a mark of intimacy. On the other hand, practices left untranslated serve only as a barrier to new believers. New church starts (and old ones, for that matter) must consider whether they will translate their unique words and practices or treat them like a secret handshake that the visitor must earn the right to learn. If we make the choice to retain practices or words that belong solely to the church, we must also be diligent in translating them for newcomers, lest we mistake exclusivity for intimacy. Familiarity and innovation are not mutually exclusive. To return to the Thanksgiving analogy, I had no complaints when marriage introduced me to a whole host of new holiday side dishes. The turkey was still there, but it was surrounded by San Antonio culturally-appropriate jalapeno

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cranberry sauce. In worship, let's keep the meat and stop arguing about the side dishes.

One of the greatest detriments, I believe, to the current discussion on worship is that *style* is the foundation upon which unity is built. *Style*, by definition, is a manner of doing something. Much time is spent on discussing the *manner* instead of the *substance*, which is our confessions. The earliest Christians faced a similar potential for distraction. Two types of congregations developed in Early Church—the Jerusalem Type and the Gentile Type.[11] The doctrinal debates settled by the Jerusalem Council (AD 49) did not suddenly translate into practical similarities among all worshiping bodies, which retained culturally-specific, geographically influenced nuances throughout much of the first three centuries. In fact, many Gentile-type congregations were completely isolated from other believers and, therefore, lacked many of the forms adopted from Judaism.[12] Despite these differences in the manner, they were united in the message—Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). It is actually in the marriage of these two types that our rhythm of worship today finds its source. From the Jerusalem Type, we find the roots for such elements as sacramental rites, prayers, sermons, prescribed readings, psalmody, hymns of praise, and festivals. From the Gentile Type, we received such practices as weekly gatherings, home devotional life, and (more humorously) the potluck. Consistency in liturgy and hymnody among the churches simply did not exist until much later. Yet, for the Early Church, variety of style did not mar unity of message. Nor did it for Luther. We find in the Augsburg Confession the following:

One of the greatest detriments, I believe, to the current discussion on worship is that style is the foundation upon which unity is built. . . . For the Early Church, variety of style did not mar unity of message.

> For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. As Paul says in Ephesians 4[:4–5]: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."[13]

This point is emphasized again in the Apology with an additional note as to the useful retention of words or traditions that have been passed down through the ages:

> [The church] consists rather of people scattered throughout the entire world who agree on the gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit,

> and the same sacraments, whether or not they have the same human traditions. . . . But just as the different lengths of day and night do not undermine the unity of the church, so we maintain that different rites instituted by human beings do not undermine the true unity of the church, although it pleases us when universal rites are kept for the sake of tranquility. . . . With a grateful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances, especially when they contain a discipline by which it is profitable to educate and teach common folk and the ignorant.[14]

So what are the essentials? Consider the elements which have stood the test of time through the last two millennia of Christians: prayers, songs, readings from Scripture, sermons, and the Lord's Supper. As Luther indicated, the ceremonies surrounding these elements is not the foundation upon which our unity is built.

This is a good place to include a note of caution. Satan uses tricks to infiltrate the truth. As early as the second century, one of the tricks he has used involves something as innocent as song. Gnostic teacher Bardesanes spread false doctrine through "charming hymns and melodies."[15] This practice was then repeated by several other heretical teachers. In our desire for variety, good theology should never be sacrificed. I once had a conversation with an intelligent professor and theologian who asked me, "Is the church supposed to be a white tower upholding the pure doctrine of the church or a soup kitchen for sinners?" In my naive enthusiasm, I quickly answered the latter. "Wrong," he corrected, "It is a spurious alternative." What he meant is that soup is no good for the sinner if it has been poisoned. To carry this analogy into the statements made at the beginning of this article, our carefully-crafted and time-tested confessions are the way we check the soup for poison. In crafting our corporate worship, we must always remain diligent in checking each element against Scripture and our confessions.

In our desire for variety, good theology should never be sacrificed.

Some would argue that worship must look almost identical in every LCMS congregation in order for unity to be maintained. In the 1700s, German pastor Henry Melchior Muhlenberg founded the first Lutheran synod in America and voiced a desire to see "[o]ne church, one book"; this initiative sprung from a desire to create a shared culture among the churches, rather than to correct any divergent theology.[16] However, in the larger history of the church, this is a relatively *new* idea. In the Early Church, it was not uncommon for the expression of liturgy to vary based on location and audience while the essential elements and their understanding remained the same. For example, two distinct descriptions of the Lord's Supper appeared early on: "The one, in the *Didache*, was intended primarily for Christians [while the] other, in one of the apologies of Justin Martyr, was designed to be read by non-Christians."[17]

The liturgies of the early Christians differed depending on their intended audience. They shared a common confession concerning the Lord's Supper even if they used different words to describe it. I echo Muhlenberg's desire for a shared culture among the congregations in our synod; however, I disagree with his method for attaining such unity. I believe we can have that shared culture if we focus on the essentials—our confessions—while respecting the necessity of some diversity in practice. Rather than focusing on the neighboring congregation's wallpaper, let us focus on the foundation, because we will find that they are, in fact, built upon the same thing.

All this brings us to the question of how to cultivate a new perspective on worship, particularly, one that is useful for church planters and their teams and answers the question, "What are the essentials?" As we have seen in the example of the two "types" that emerged in the first century, the Early Church had "more than one liturgy, or form of worship . . . individual areas had their own liturgies, and the liturgy in any given area changed from one period to the next."[18] New church starts *will not* look like congregations that were established one hundred years ago. Gentile Christians who gathered for worship did so differently than their Jerusalem counterparts, who were steeped in Jewish culture. They remained unified because of their message. Can we not model this in our congregations today? Can we rally around our shared confession even as we share that confession with the mission field in which God has placed us, whether that be rural or urban, old or new, domestic or foreign? As I mentioned at the beginning of the article, my husband and I are personally wrestling with this. We have found the framework of the Early Church to be a useful tool, and I hope that you have found it similarly helpful. In our church plant plan, here is what the initial workings of this wrestling look like for us: We would love for the worship gatherings to resemble the uncomplicated beauty of a campfire praise service with minimal media, instruments, and lead vocals. The liturgical elements and songs (both old and new) could be printed in songbooks, allowing us the ability to worship in any space (including outdoors). We believe that the liturgy is living, and one of its best uses is to help us memorize God's Word. Thus, we would seek to cultivate a renewed contextual use of liturgy that brings the richness of worship throughout the history of the church into contemporary context in order to be accessible to the new and renewed believer.

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Ultimately, my prayer for the LCMS is that we could unite around that which is confessed rather than the manner in which it is confessed. A successful example of what this unity in confession can look like is seen in my friend Rev. Ted Doering's church plant. The congregation recites the Apostles' Creed every single week as a teaching tool because many have never memorized it before. When Pastor Ted preaches, he does so in a conversational tone from the floor of the cafeteria where his church is currently worshiping. He has no robe nor pulpit, and at the end of the service, everything from the sound system to the baby changing station will be packed into a small trailer, but the content of his sermon is Law and Gospel in all its purity. The manner is unique to his flock, which is made up of more new believers than cradle-Lutherans, but the content is consistent with any other LCMS church.

I have often witnessed my brothers and sisters in the faith getting bogged down in the "preservation of tradition," failing to realize that *preservation* is an action we take to keep something from dying. *Cultivation*, on the other hand, is something we do to encourage the growth of that which is living. In our new church starts, let's cultivate a love for the living liturgy of the church, adding our fingerprints to this beautifully elaborate painting rather than starting from scratch Let's utilize our confessions as a sieve through which we strain new ideas, refining those ideas down to the very best methods for conveying the pure Gospel to those who so desperately need to hear it. Let us utilize the Early Church, not just the (relatively young) Lutheran church, as a framework for learning to graft contemporary converts into our rich Christian tradition. And finally, let us cultivate a new perspective on unity in our corporate worship practices by focusing *first* on our common confession in Christ.

In our new church starts, let's cultivate a love for the living liturgy of the church, adding our fingerprints to this beautifully elaborate painting rather than starting from scratch.

Endnotes

[1] When I speak of culture, I am referring *specifically* to the standard practices, characteristic features, and social practices that have become common to the LCMS tribe (apart from our theology). For example, most of us have an unspoken set of social expectations of those who would enter our doors as well as a set of assumed "standard practices" of other LCMS congregations.

[2] LCMS 2016 Handbook, Constitution Article 3.7, p. 11. https://www.lcms.org/about/leadership/commission-on-constitutional-matters.

[3] As recent data from Barna indicates, I may be in good company among my fellow millennials. A 2015 report on "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church" included a surprising lack of emphasis on classifications of "traditional" or "contemporary" worship.

Rather, a greater emphasis was placed on the content of worship—"when [millennials] show up at church for a worship or learning opportunity, they do so hoping there is Someone present to worship or learn about." https://www.barna.com/research/what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church/

[4] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Sermons I*, Vol. 51 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 33.

[5] James Leonard Brauer and Fred L. Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 59.

[6] Edgar S. Brown, *Living the Liturgy: A Guide to Lutheran Worship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 7.

[7] Timothy Maschke, *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 85–86.

[8] Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Service of the Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 32.

[9] Brown, *Living the Liturgy*, 7.

[10] Ibid.

[11] As their names reveal, the Jerusalem and Gentile "types" comprised primarily Jewish or Gentile converts, respectively. Each type had its own unique characteristics. The Jerusalem type was influenced more heavily by the customs and practices of Judaism. The Gentile type finds its origin a little later—around AD 50—in Corinth and Asia Minor and developed its practices without these same influences.

[12] Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 25.

[13] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, "The Augsburg Confession—German Text," *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 42.

[14] Kolb and Wengert, "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession," *The Book of Concord*, 175, 180.

[15] Ernest Edwin Ryden, *The Story of Christian Hymnody* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1959), 11–12.

[16] Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, vii.

[17] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1953), 199.

[18] Robert G. Clouse and Edward Engelbrecht, *The Church from Age to Age: A History from Galilee to Global Christianity* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 16.

Inbox

Confessing the One True God in the Context of Public Interreligious Events

Editor's Note: This article is revised and adapted from *Concordia Journal*, 30, no. 3 (July 2004): 118–121.

In the polytheistic arena of an increasingly "small world," for a Christian invited to participate with representatives of non-Christian religions in public religious events, the issues are primarily scriptural and secondarily practical. The hazards, far outweighing any expectations of effective Christian confession or proclamation of the Gospel, justify—even demand—an explained absence.

Scriptural "lenses"

Scriptural "lenses" through which to observe and evaluate civic religious events are at least threefold: (1) the First (foremost) Commandment (Ex 20:3 and Mt 22:37–40); (2) paradigmatic events (1 Kgs 18 and Acts 17); and (3) clear apostolic directives for the Christian life (1 Cor 10:14ff. and 2 Cor 6:14ff.).

The First Commandment

In Exodus 20, God speaks clearly: His people are to have no other gods before Him. In Matthew 22:37–40, Jesus explicates the First Commandment for the Pharisees. Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is the "first and greatest commandment." Note that the First Commandment takes precedence over the Second. Love for neighbor follows and is based upon love for God. In a multireligious event, the stakes are high—overwhelmingly high. A Christian who risks participating obligates himself to give clear, unambiguous witness to the triune God as the one true God, of whom all other "gods" are but false, demonic imitations. Absent that, he has violated the First Commandment, for we are to have no other gods before Him, i.e., in addition to or in His presence. And what of the Second Commandment in such circumstances? Love your neighbor as yourself. To that we respond: What greater love for a neighbor can be shown than to witness to him of the one true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and of the one and only hope of his salvation? It is the very antithesis of love to imply the religious validity of a collection of clerics on a public platform, regardless of their professed beliefs. Christians are to let charity prevail in their dealings with others, but it is God who defines love.

Elijah and the prophets of Baal

In 1 Kings, Elijah is acting in the midst of national crisis and suffering—in this case, drought and famine. The analog in our civic culture is a disaster or crisis, when

high emotions tempt people to blur religious distinctions on a public platform to emphasize unity. To be sure, Elijah shares a platform (Mt. Carmel) with the priests of Baal. Observe, however, how Elijah relates to his Baalite peers. Does he respectfully listen to their prayers and then offer his own as one of several equally valid petitions? Hardly. Read Elijah's plea to the people (v. 21). Read his prayer (vv. 36–37). Read the whole account. We may be uncomfortable with Elijah's (God's) method, but we dare not ignore the clear message that God does not tolerate other gods in His presence. Only He is the God of Israel. If, under the New Testament, we do not slaughter the priests of false gods, we surely avoid even the implication or appearance that they are representatives of equal and valid religions.

Paul and the Areopagus

For a positive example of Christian presence in a public polytheistic context, we refer to Paul's Athenian experience (Acts 17). In Athens, where idols were common, Paul is preaching the "good news about Jesus and the resurrection." When asked to meet at the Areopagus, he doesn't flinch. Risking sneers (there were some) and ridicule, he again preaches the resurrection, upon the hearing of which some say, "We want to hear you again on this subject." As a result, "a few men became followers of Paul and believed." No mocking or slaughter of false prophets this time, just clear proclamation of the Truth. Paul meets the followers of other "gods" on their own turf and leads them to the Gospel. Note, however, that the context is neither a prayer service nor a formal religious event of any kind. Can one even imagine Paul's engaging in serial prayer or a rite of worship with or among unbelievers? Why not? He explains clearly in quite another context.

Paul again—God's Word for the "Corinthians" of the twenty-first century

In his Epistles to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul provides clear, practical "thou shalt not" applications of both commandments, even (especially) for today. In 1 Corinthians 10:20 he warns: "the sacrifices [and surely the prayers] of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons." What Christian would choose or dare to participate with demons? In 2 Corinthians 6:14ff., Paul charges believers not to be yoked—especially, and obviously, in a religious context—with idolaters or unbelievers. That is, they should not put their spiritual welfare and the spiritual welfare of others, fellow believers as well as unbelievers, at such risk. "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? . . . between the temple of God and idols?" Rhetorical questions, to be sure. To put it bluntly: Avoid illicit religious relations. Could any scriptural warnings be more relevant to contemporary multireligious events? There is no ambiguity here. The ambiguity resides in our culturally conditioned minds, which, by the way, may also tempt us to regard references to "demons" and "Belial" as archaic. Yet we know that God's Word applies to us and our time, that our world is spiritually no different from the world of Paul. God's faithful people have always had to live and interact

with unbelievers and anti-believers. Our twenty-first century world offers nothing new under the sun in that respect. These clear words of Scripture are no rigid or out-of-context proof-texting. They are at the heart of the matter, for the Corinthians and for us.

Note that Paul does not limit prohibition against such yoking to prayers or worship with vested clergy. The proscription is general: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. . . . What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?" Lest we misunderstand his meaning, Paul defines and clarifies: "For we are the temple of the living God." It is not only in a temple ("built with hands") or a church or a mosque that a Christian avoids participating in prayer or worship with unbelievers. Rather, we Christians, who are the very "temple of God" (cf. 1 Cor 6:19), avoid any yoking—in actions or contacts—that would cause us or our neighbor to offend God or to confuse false gods with the one true God. Could Paul have put it any more directly? Call such events what one will—"civic event with religious content," "prayer service," etc.—it matters not. Do not be yoked!

What of the claim that a Muslim cleric or Jewish rabbi in some sense believes in "the one true God"? While the claim may provide a basis for theological discussion and, in an appropriate context, even an opportunity for evangelism, it has no relevance to a public interreligious worship context, where important distinctions can't be made.

Practical matters—important, but secondary to the scriptural

Even aside from these clear scriptural prohibitions, given all the hazards of such events, we must conclude that opportunities for Christians to witness in a multireligious civic event that includes any aspect of worship, e.g., prayer, are essentially nonexistent. The most common public perceptions at such events—despite any good intentions of the Christian or his well-meant words—are that

a. all participants have an equally valid "prayer path" to God.

b. tolerance of each other's religious beliefs is more important than the Truth.

In America, for example, it is only good civic manners when religious representatives gather on the same platform not to assert religious claims too seriously (certainly not exclusively) or to promote one religion at the expense of another. Ultimately, public prayer in a context of polytheistic civil religion is neither a proper means nor a setting for clear proclamation. Once one agrees to play by the rules of pluralistic public etiquette, it is all but impossible to proclaim that the Triune God is not one choice among others, but that He is the one true God and that Jesus is "*the* Way." Such a claim is seen as fractious, a violation of a tacit gentleman's agreement and rejection of the contemporary religion of diversity. Exclusivity is a most unwelcome interloper in the public religious context. A participant who makes exclusive claims at a multireligious civic event is far more likely to alienate ("Who does he think *he* is?") or to confuse ("Why is he here?") than to provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to open hearts to the Gospel.

The matter of perceptions

If we are to let love for the neighbor prevail, charity toward the weak in faith and those who lack faith in Christ means—at the very least—avoiding any act that confuses or alienates. Despite his best intentions, the Christian who participates in prayer or other religious activity on a platform with representatives of other religions must understand that he exercises little or no control over the perceptions that accompany his presence. Indeed, a presence that suggests to the spiritually weak or unenlightened that there are many paths to God is loveless in the extreme. For example, in regard to participation in an interreligious service some years ago following a national crisis, an editorial in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* opined: "Shouldn't everyone recognize that there are many different ideas about spirituality, all of them to be respected? Shouldn't the members of one faith [i.e., religion] feel comfortable worshipping [sic] their God, even in the company of people worshipping another? *Aren't we spiritually more alike than different*?" [emphasis mine] (December 3, 2001:B6) That anyone refuses on scriptural grounds to participate in interreligious prayer or worship—period—is all but impossible to comprehend in a culture that venerates pluralism and diversity.

Why (not) participate?

Finally, however, we must ask: What is the point of participation? Is it to provide "visibility in the marketplace of religions"? That is not a scriptural concept. Is it to signify civic unity in a time of crisis, that we Christians are one with representatives of other religions in decrying the evil that surrounds us? That is, good intentions justify the act? The spiritual hazards are simply far too many and too great. We do well to remember that pressure to participate is usually social or cultural—anything but evangelistic: "The mayor, the governor, the President, et al. issued the invitation. The priest, the rabbi, the imam will be there. How can I refuse? What would people think?" And it is pride that prompts illusory self-assurance: "*My* contribution will be distinctive. *My* message will be clear. *My* prayer will stand out from the other three or five (serial, but equal) prayers addressed to a sequence of 'deities.'" Another verse from 1 Corinthians 10 may well apply in the context: "Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (v. 12).

Rather, at interreligious worship or prayer events, civic or otherwise, let our clearly explained absence *be* our public witness. There are far better and more appropriate—and less hazardous and less ambiguous—opportunities and occasions for proclaiming the Good News of salvation through Christ alone and for living that faith in public contexts. For interreligious events, a pastoral decision based on clear scriptural guidelines, including proscription, is always in order. Practical matters of *fellowship*, that is, activities involving other Christians, offer adequate opportunities for casuistry. The Scriptures, Old and New Testaments alike, are unambiguous regarding *interreligious* relationships. Sophisticated judgment is seldom required.

The bottom line for Christians: KIS (Keep It Scriptural)

Exodus 20 and Matthew 22 (First Commandment); 1 Corinthians 10; 2 Corinthians 6.

David O. Berger

Response

Witness in the Marketplace of Religions: An Opportunity to Be Seized

David Berger's article, "Confessing the One True God in the Context of Public Interreligious Events" raises important issues about opportunities for witness to the One True God in the context of "public interreligious events." Since my own ideas are somewhat different and we are both members of the *Lutheran Mission Matters* editorial committee, I want to thank him for giving me the opportunity to share my views.

My concern takes seriously the last phrase of the article title, "public interreligious events," and that phrase sets the tone for this article. The time is very likely coming when Christian faith will have no privilege in American society, and all our public witnessing will be done in a context where all religions and spiritualities are regarded as equally valid. Christians will need to bear witness in a truly free-marketplace of religions.

To put this issue in perspective, I think we must recognize that this is not an issue about the answer to the famous Lutheran question: "What does this mean?" but about that second Lutheran question: "How is this done?" In my more than thirty years of service with LCMS World Mission, I met and worked with many people who were already working in the free-marketplace of ideas and also in areas where the marketplace was not very free because Christians were a small minority in a vast sea of people outside the Christian faith. In all those situations, I never heard a suggestion that the Christian faith was something that could be compromised or watered down to make it more compatible with the non-Christian religion. In my experience, people who have sufficient courage to share the Gospel in the marketplace are among those who are most seriously concerned about a pure Christian message and how it can be faithfully communicated in a non-Christian and perhaps even anti-Christian context.

This does not mean that they do not have continuing discussions in the family, in the Christian congregation, in the Christian community, about how this message is to be shared. What should be said? How should it be said? Where should it be said? Can we say more than we are already saying? Are we saying so much that we

turn people off? Are we pulling our punches, saying less than we can and must say to faithfully communicate the message of God's saving work?

These are important questions, and I think that if we pay attention to the Bible as the Berger article has done, we will gain some insight into the task God has given us along with some guidance about how to do it. My view is that God wants Christians to be crossing cultural boundaries, not with the expectation that Christians can only do their work inside safe boundaries where Christians are in control, but God prepares His people to work in situations that He has prepared them to handle. For some, this may be a conversation across a backyard fence. For some, this may involve speaking to a crowd in a public place, standing next to a non-Christian person who has just expressed his non-Christian or even anti-Christian faith in a way intended to influence and win over a crowd—surely a stressful and high-risk situation—but also a situation that God says His people will know how to handle because He guides them through His Spirit (Mt 10:18–20), and His word accomplishes its saving task (Is 55:11).

Questions about when and how the Gospel can be shared go back to the very beginning of Christian history as we can see from events like the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). For one Christian party, witness to the Christian faith was not complete without inclusion of the signs of Jewish piety that had preserved the identity of the believing community for centuries; but for Peter, who identified himself as the apostle to the new community, the Gentiles, they were "a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (Acts 15:10 ESV). As Paul makes clear in Galatians 2, questions about the importance of Jewish dietary regulations and other customs continued as live issues deep into Peter's ministry, a ministry that Paul evaluates as "the gospel to the circumcised" (Gal 2:7–8 ESV). It is a sign of health, I think, when Christians are discussing and learning from one another how they can share the Gospel fully and accurately in a new context.

At the same time, there can be no doubt that Paul expected the Christian community to live in constant contact with the non-Christian community and that he considered these contacts as an important way in which the Christian faith was brought to the unbelieving community. Even in the most intimate human relationships, Paul expected that Christians married to unbelieving spouses, would remain in their marriages. "For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?" (1 Cor 7:16 ESV). Indeed, how do you know? This was the most important consideration for Paul: God puts opportunities for sharing the Gospel in our lives that we need to be grasping, for God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4 ESV).

That is why it is difficult to directly apply Elijah's action on Mt. Carmel to the American situation today. Elijah lived in a theocracy where the ruling class had become admirers of all things Sidonian including Baal, the god of the Sidonians. They were engaged in a clearly-defined program to eliminate worship of the God of

Israel, and this included the use of a state-sponsored prophetic band to intimidate God-fearing people and impose a foreign, pagan religion on the Israelite people. In such circumstances, Elijah had no choice but to strike a revolutionary blow against ruling class oppression led by Ahab and his Sidonian wife, Jezebel.

Americans, however, do not live in a theocracy, but in a country where freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed, and government attempts to give preference to one religion over another are forbidden. It is required of Christians in our context that they carefully examine every situation where the Christian religion loses a privilege or when a privilege formerly reserved to Christians is now extended to other religions or ideologies and to carefully formulate an appropriate response. There can be no doubt that American culture is changing, and as never before, the changes require an authentic and compelling response. The task of the church is not to defend self-servingly its traditional privilege, but in a world where it is regarded as just another set of religious ideas, to bear clear and compelling witness in a winsome way to the God who saves for Jesus' sake.

At the same time, what God is willing to tolerate is illustrated by an event in the life of Elisha, Elijah's successor. Naaman, the Syrian army officer suffering from leprosy, fought obedience to God every step of the way, but finally his healing led to his confession, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (2 Kgs 5:15 ESV). Yet, he needed one more special arrangement: "In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master (the king of Syria) goes into the house of (the Syrian god) Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter" (2 Kgs 5:18 ESV). To which Elisha laconically replied: "Go in peace" (2 Kgs 5:19 ESV). There are different answers in different situations.

The article suggests that those who are thinking about participation in events in the public square—especially in events where spokesmen of other religions will be present should consider the consequences and conclude that the rewards are too few and the risks too great.

There may be situations where this is true, but it is equally true that such situations may offer invaluable opportunities to speak Law and Gospel. In their public lives, Americans are generally a confident people, confident about their understanding of the world and their place in it, confident that their financial and intellectual resources can solve any problem. In normal American public life, there is limited opportunity to gain a meaningful hearing in the public square.

The situation is different after a time of tragedy or disaster. The fact that local news media may call it a "service" does not mean very much aside from the fact that American English does not have widely-recognized terms for religious gatherings other than "service." Christians and the public may well have the opportunity in the future to discover whether they like "public interreligious event" better than the description "prayer service."

When the secular community experiences disaster, when it is clear that Americans do not have all the answers, that mistakes have been made on a national and even personal level, then the community is ready to hear the word of God, a word of judgment that requires repentance and confession even as the assembly longs for a word of hope, a longing that the Christian message can fulfill.

The situation is similar to that encountered by St. Paul in Athens as he worked in the free marketplace of ideas of his day. Americans read the story as if Paul were addressing an afternoon book club, where any kind of casual conversation can take place. In fact, the Areopagus, powerful already in classical Greek times and in Roman times still the most important civic council in Athens, had total control of the civic life of the Athenian people. Paul could not invite himself to a meeting of the Areopagus. His invitation came from the Athenian religious and civic establishment, which probably included not a single Christian. Paul was invited by non-Christians to address a non-Christian assembly composed of high ranking officials of the Athenian state who expected to be addressed by an unsophisticated fool. Their invitation is officious, the words of men accustomed to being in control, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean" (Acts 17:19–20 ESV).

As it turned out, Paul was no fool, and his sophisticated address to the Athenian officials, often described as a sermon, resulted in the willingness of some to hear him again, and, indeed, a number of people walked out from the council and joined Paul and believed, including "Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34 ESV). If Paul had concluded that the setting and the people involved were firmly embedded in Greco-Roman religion and that to respond to their summons would compromise his Christian witness, that he could only witness to people in small settings where he was in control, there would have been no such result, and very likely Christian witness in the European world would have had a different shape.

In our world, silence might have worked in an era when the church was close to the center of the life of the community and had influence in shaping the values of the community. When it was important to hear the voice of the church, then the silence of the church was deafening. In the free marketplace of ideas of today, especially when others are prepared to offer what they have, the silence of the church is taken to mean that Christians either do not care about the suffering of the community or that they have no message in response to the disaster. In the free marketplace of ideas, we have no message unless we speak or act out our ideas. It is a serious mistake if, as a result of our silence, we allow others to define us and our God as unloving and uncaring.

The proposal that the refusal to participate sends a clear message that the participation of others makes it impossible for Christians to participate needs to be recognized, not as some kind of mission outreach strategy, but as a purely defensive strategy to try to hold on to people who are already church members.

The concern is not that non-Christian people will think about Christians more positively and be more open to the Christian message, but rather that Christian people will be tempted to believe that there is no difference between their God and non-Christian deities. Of course, this could happen, but it is more likely to happen when Christians have not been equipped to hear the beliefs of others and respond with an authentic witness of their own to the Gospel as they live and work in the free marketplace of ideas, in the spaces where the church is not in control. What the church is lacking in the modern and postmodern world is not people who keep silent on the sidelines (the church has lots of those), but people who are "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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" (1 Pt 3:15–16 ESV).

Bearing witness to Jesus in non-Christian society is never easy, and there will always be discussion about how this is to be done. What should be said? How should it be said? When should it be said? These are all questions worthy of discussion. What is indispensable, however, is that something must be said. The Lord of the Church says, "When you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Lk 17:10 ESV). May God open our eyes to see the opportunities to serve that He puts before us.

Daniel L. Mattson

Encountering Mission

Applying the Great Commission

Derrick Miliner

Abstract: Applying the Great Commission has always been a challenge for some churches. In my twenty-nine years of working in the Church, I have seen the Church struggle with applying the words of Christ "go into all nations." I think we are selective in the nations we go into. In this article, I discuss a simple way to apply the Great Commission. From my perspective in this article, Jesus said to make it as simple as He initially sent the disciples with nothing in their hands; just faith in Him. I, too, think we should have faith and go, close to our churches. Stop passing our close neighbors to reach the perfect neighbor.

During my past twenty years of being a member of a congregation in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I have seen us develop several strategies on how to implement the Great Commission of Jesus Christ found in Matthew 28:18–20. I have listened to several reasons why we do not intentionally go into our neighborhoods and invite our neighbors to church.

Several theologians have described the Great Commission "as you go on your way" you should disciple, baptize, and teach. My goal in this article is to present another approach to carrying out the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. My primary objective is to present this simple way for us to consider: We should walk into our neighborhoods a half a mile east, north, south, and west around our churches with our strong Lutheran confessional faith without fear of how people will respond, and I believe this will provide us a real application of Matthew 28:18–20. We are witnessing in other countries, but I think we should stop passing by our neighbors close to our church and invite them.

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I don't think any special training is needed if one pays attention to the words of Matthew 28: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'" (NIV).

The first question I have is whether we can we approach this task of making disciples, baptizing, and teaching Christ in a simpler way. We have tried several training programs to carry out the Great Commission. All these training programs have positive attributes and ways that help us share the Gospel. I still ask the question, are we hesitant to invite the neighbors that don't look like the majority of us sitting in the pews? When we are going on our way to and from the church, are we intentionally passing by our neighbors for a better neighbor to invite?

I still ask the question, are we hesitant to invite the neighbors that don't look like the majority of us sitting in the pews? When we are going on our way to and from the church, are we intentionally passing by our neighbors for a better neighbor to invite?

Reverend Ben Haupt said it best for me in his sermon titled "Paul's Alls, Luther, and the Discovery of America": "When the neighborhood begins to change around the church, it's easier just to drive into the sanctuary parking lot, past the changing neighborhood and pretend that we're back in the 1950s when the neighborhood was as white as Andy Griffith and Beaver Cleaver."[1]

I'm making some assumptions here; we sometimes are afraid to invite all people surrounding us. I have noticed in the urban and suburban churches, as the demographics of the traditional Lutheran people have changed, that we don't go out and welcome the neighbors in. We are selective in the target areas of ministry. I find some fear in some of the churched people when asked to walk into the neighborhoods that they are not accustomed to. I go back to the question of whether we are looking for a specific type of person—Christian or non-Christian—who we want to be in our church. I conclude my assumptions with a question: Why are we making the task of the Great Commission so difficult?

As I ponder the existence and continuance of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I ask all of you, how important is the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to us? Have we looked at all the models of reaching out to our neighbors, intentional evangelism, and walking into our neighborhoods around us to see what is working? What would we have to do to settle this question? I think the question can be

answered simply: Follow Jesus' instruction to the fullest extent that we can. He made it very simple by saying, "Go."

So, again, my reasoning for writing is to tell you what Jesus said, and that was simply to go. Jesus gave the disciples a model to follow for going in Luke 9:1–6:

> And [Jesus] called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. And He said to them, 'Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.' And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. (ESV)

Jesus explains it so plainly how to go and implement the Great Commission. Why do we confuse it? Why do we have training programs to teach what to say, where to go, which demographic reports to read, which group of people we desire in our church, and all the other targeted aspects of the neighborhood? I think it goes back to what I stated earlier: We sometimes are afraid to invite all people surrounding us.

The evidence I have seen of sharing the Great Commission says we are mediocre at best. Author Michael Parrot gives us these statistics:

- 95% of all Christians have never won a soul to Christ.
- 80% of all Christians do not consistently witness for Christ.
- Less than 2% are involved in the ministry of evangelism.
- 71% do not give toward the financing of the Great Commission.

One particular denomination did a survey on its leadership ministries. The results are as follows:

- 63% of the leadership in this denomination, including deacons and elders, have not led one stranger to Jesus in the last two years through the method of "Go Ye" evangelism.
- 49% of the leadership ministries spend zero time in an average week ministering outside of the church.
- 89% of the leadership ministries have zero time reserved on their list of weekly priorities for going out to evangelize.
- 99% of the leadership ministries believe that every Christian, including leadership, has been commanded to preach the gospel to a lost world.

- 97% believe that if the leadership had a greater conviction and involvement in evangelism, that it would be an example for the church to follow.
- 96% of the leadership believe their churches would have grown faster if they would have been more involved in evangelism.

Because of this, our results in evangelism have been mediocre at best.[2]

As we all know, there are different models of sharing the Gospel, failed models of sharing the Gospel, and there are some churches that are lukewarm, hot, and then cold again. I think we need to become very hot with the key concepts of Matthew 28:18–20. Jesus tells the disciples to go into all nations, which was different than the first mission when He said only go to the lost sheep of Israel. This Great Commission included everyone; now contrast this against what we do today. We selectively study our area before we go. Is this what Jesus said? Study the demographics, look at the income, and look at who they are before we go? No, He said "all nations."

His instructions were not a set of alternatives, not a set of new concepts, terms that we should say when we get out into our neighborhoods. He simply said, "Go," and as Luke's Gospel said, He gave them power and authority. We, too, have the same power and authority to proclaim the kingdom of God.

The evidence to me in the Scriptures implies that we should go and continually go with the love, grace, and faith of Jesus Christ into our nations and the neighborhoods around us. My thoughts on the implications and consequences are that, if we don't apply the Great Commission to our neighborhoods around us, we will shrink in size. We must get out of the pews, chairs, and recliners and invite all in. Our synod has responded with ways we can continue the Great Commission through evangelism and outreach. I wholeheartedly agree with this approach of reaching out as we always have. I conclude simply with the word of Jesus: "Go." Use the model Jesus instructed the disciples to use, which I think applies to us today.

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Endnotes

[1] Ben Haupt, "Paul's Alls, Luther, and the Discovery of America," *Lutheran Mission Matters*, 25, no. 2 (November 2017): 209–210.
[2] Michael Parrott, *Street Level Evangelism, Where is the Space for the Local Evangelist* (Spokane, WA: Acts Evangelism, 1993), 9–11, https://bible.org/illustration/evangelism-statistics.

Confessing the Faith in Print: From Mongolia to the Muslim Diaspora and Beyond

Matthew Heise

Abstract: Lutheran missions have a great deal to offer seekers in this smaller, global world, where borders have shrunk, and formerly exotic lands like Mongolia are more readily accessible to the Gospel. Whether followers of shamanism, Islam, or tribal religions, more and more non-Christians are coming to the faith through the spoken and read Gospel. I offer some thoughts on encounters I have had with these seekers from my service with LCMS World Mission and now as executive director of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation.

The great behemoth had fallen, and it wasn't going to get up again. So it was as the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991 and the doors to churches, long closed began to open again. Many of those church buildings had been reconstructed as theaters, film depositories, even swimming pools. Some older parishioners who had kept the faith during the spiritual drought of the communist years began to filter back into the pews. But for most Russians, the language of Christianity had become foreign. Accustomed to a school curriculum of scientific materialism with Marx, Engels, and Lenin as the textbooks, they were eager to become reacquainted with the historic faith that had been brutally purged from the country in the intervening years.

In 1993, the Lutheran Heritage Foundation (hereafter LHF) founder, Robert Rahn, along with a Russian professor, Konstantin Komarov, took advantage of the new freedom to distribute Russian-English New Testaments on Red Square. Hope

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and a new air of fresh possibilities filled the land as if the Russians were awakening from a long, spiritual slumber. They were not alone, as other Westerners distributed Bibles too, while yet others slyly added their own books and pamphlets to the distribution mix: the Book of Mormon, Watchtower tracts. Had LHF not been there, such cults were prevalent and more than eager to "explain" the Bible and add their own delusive theology to the equation. It was an important lesson that if we Lutherans do not teach our theology, there will be others who will fill the spiritual void.

In the Russian context of the early 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union, children's Bible story books, Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* and C. F. W. Walther's *Law and Gospel* were essential translations at first. Citizens of the former communist state needed to return to the basics of the faith, and LHF had the unique opportunity to reach ethnic Russians, which in the past had been out of bounds since the Lutheran church had been allowed to embrace only certain specific ethnic groups within the country: Germans, Finns, Latvians, Estonians, and Swedes. These were individuals who were considered ethnically "Lutheran."

But quite often I noticed ethnic Russians, who may have possessed perhaps a few drops of Finnish or German blood, flocking to the Lutheran churches. It seemed apparent that some simply wanted to emigrate to the West, while others desired to reconnect to a language of their youth, often German or Finnish, that had been forbidden by Joseph Stalin as the language of "Fascists."

I especially remember the elderly parishioner, Alexander Konstantinovich, a member of the Lutheran congregation in Tver. Alexander was ethnically Ukrainian and German, but he wanted to learn German, and so he came to the rented room where the fledgling congregation was meeting. Alexander soon gave up hope of learning the language at his age but was nevertheless baptized and confirmed. In the new and fast-paced Russia, he clung to the promises of the Gospel, finding comfort in the Word after the death of his wife and the murder of his only son. Alexander remained a staunch parishioner until his death at the age of 84.

Stories like Alexander's were not uncommon, as beginnings were made towards openly confessing Christ again within the context of a nation that had possessed a vibrant, influential Lutheran church since the mid-sixteenth century. In the early 1990s, Russians were generally open to Protestantism, but the window would soon close.

Therefore, as Russian Lutherans trained up a new generation of pastors and servants of the church, it was important for LHF to translate Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, as well as the Lutheran Confessional writings in the *Book of Concord*. Even before I started working for LHF (2014), I found these resources quite valuable, and I was grateful that I could utilize them while teaching at the Theological Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (2003–

2013). They were put to good use, as students mined the Word of God in their native tongue, even as they learned Greek to dig directly into the New Testament. The Lutheran church was held in high esteem by Christians of all denominations because it was seen as the church which "taught" the faith.

That window of opportunity to have an impact on society has closed to some extent, as the Russian Orthodox Church has reminded Russians that they were historically, ethnically Orthodox, and that they should not forget this if they wanted to remain Russian. And yet, in the burned-out interior of the historic St. Anne's Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg, visitors to the church undergoing reconstruction are greeted by tables laden with books from LHF. The work most requested today?—Bengt Hägglund's *History of Theology*, which gives readers a broad scope of theological history, especially from the viewpoint of the West, which is something Russians often lack.

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During my own years of missionary service for LCMS World Mission in the former USSR (1994–1996, 2001–2014), I found that the *Small Catechism* resonated with many seekers. I was often greeted with the response, "I like it because that's what the Bible teaches."

At the same time, LHF was also receiving requests from nations in the 10/40 window that had little to no Christian tradition. They needed to begin at the very beginning, so to speak. In Southeast Asia, for instance, nations like Cambodia had long-standing Buddhist traditions and had more recently been traumatized by Pol Pot's vicious Khmer Rouge. Now they were open to hearing the sweet chords of the Gospel. In other Asian countries, there were other spiritual seekers who found no hope or solace in Buddhism or traditional local religions.

In Mongolia's capital, Ulanbaatar, a 15-story building in the downtown area stands abandoned—prime real estate, never occupied. A rumor began to circulate that it was haunted by evil spirits, and so it remains desolate. In lands where the spirit world is real and frightening, how comforting it is to hear from Luther's *Small Catechism* in the "Explanation to the First Article of the Creed" that "He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil." In the Western world, these words are often passed over with knowing nods of the head, but to those trapped within the context of Buddhism or shamanism, these words are life-changing because they assert that believers are never alone. God protects His people.

Mongolian Lutherans now possess copies of *A Child's Garden of Bible Stories* from Concordia Publishing House in their native language, and Pastor Purevdorj Jamsran is currently working on the *Small Catechism* so that each person will have

access to its biblical teachings. This is how we Lutherans can expel the ghosts of spiritual bondage that hold so many Asian nations in their clutches.

However, Asian nations are not alone in their search for Truth. In lands that have been traditionally Muslim, a spiritual ferment is growing. We no longer have to "imagine" what is occurring within the Islamic Republic of Iran, because many Iranians have emigrated to Europe, Canada, and even the United States. From their witness, we know that there is a budding underground church within Iran. I have met many of those who risked their lives to follow Christ in Iran and have now landed in asylum centers, especially in northern Europe, where they are eagerly studying God's Word.

Last fall I had the opportunity to visit several Iranian Bible study groups in Denmark's Lutheran churches. Traveling through barren, depopulated Danish towns, we arrived at one such refugee center. Gathering up several carloads of refugees, we drove to the Lutheran church in Bording, where a Bible study was to take place with about 40 Iranian refugees. We have distributed LHF books there and, in tandem with the Danish Balkan Mission, have helped support translations of devotional materials to comfort and help Iranians grow as they read about God's love and care in their own language, Farsi. Addressing a packed room of about 60 in Holstebro, I heard simultaneous translations into Arabic and Farsi, while my own translator, an Iranian fluent in Danish and English, translated for me. This partnership, which includes LHF work, makes clear confession in mission today in northern Europe.

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In Germany, missionary Pastor Hugo Gevers of the LCMS's partner church, SELK (Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church), holds Bible studies in Borna and services in Leipzig and Chemnitz. The irony is that these formerly Lutheran cities have seen an exodus of native Germans from Christianity, only to see their churches increasingly filled with Iranians and Afghans.

In the village square in Borna, one can find a statue of Luther portrayed as Junker Jörg, since he preached there a few times incognito. That historic town has undergone many changes recently as German "alt-right" organizations like PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West) have actually paraded around the apartment building where Pastor Hugo holds Bible studies with a predominantly Afghan group of seekers and believers.

One of the devotional books that LHF is preparing in Farsi will be of great benefit to seekers and believers, as it provides comfort via daily devotions focused upon God's Word. In the dangerous neighborhoods where former Muslims live, not

only do they have to worry about locals, but primarily about radical Muslims who tell them they cannot leave Islam without consequences, often violent.

In southwest Berlin, Dr. Gottfried Martens' congregation in Steglitz has ballooned over the past four years from 80 parishioners to over 1,500, predominantly Iranians and Afghans. I almost always spy a member/seeker looking at LHF's Farsi translation of the *Small Catechism* during a worship service. The organist has even begun to incorporate Farsi hymns into the service.

Not surprisingly, most former Muslims wrestle with understanding the complexity of God. In Islam, Allah is distant and, in practice, not as merciful as some may attest. That is why it is a revelation for them to read Luther's explanations to the Commandments that begin with "We should fear and love God." Fear of God or spirits, as in shamanism, is something Muslims can readily comprehend. But a God of love? That is a foreign word to many Muslims today. One Muslim from Iran, when told by Lutheran missionaries that "God so loved the world…," responded by saying: "I have never heard this before. Please, tell me more!"

As they adjust to a new society in Europe, many former Muslims have emphasized to me that they see Christianity and freedom as synonymous. While they may often understand this concept in a political sense, they are very much intrigued by the spiritual freedom that Christ brings, as opposed to the bondage that is all too apparent in Islam. They know the Law very well. But it's the Gospel—God's unconditional love expressed through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus, and grasped by them through faith irrespective of their good deeds—that has been a revelation to them.

I would submit that this is a unique moment in Iranian history, as well as that of Muslims in general. They have suffered under the prescriptions of the Law for so long—in some cases, even Sharia law. But they are ripe and ready for the Gospel.

My cousin reminded me of the road traveled by former Muslims, as she related her experiences in 1970s Iran. She and her husband befriended an Iranian at Michigan State University in the mid-1970s; and, as they were students in the film department, he invited them to join him on a journey across Iran to explore his homeland and its culture. She noted, even then, increasing numbers of women beginning to veil themselves. Bibles were available, but few people were interested. By the end of the decade, Ayatollah Khomenei led a fundamentalist Islamic revolution, and the Shah's country disappeared.

In the early years of this century, I lived in Eastern Europe. Once when I invited several Iranians to my apartment, I was surprised that they wanted to show me a video of the 2500th

Confessing within all of these contexts encourages us to know whom we are addressing.

celebration of King Cyrus' Persian Empire back in 1971. "That was when we had a real leader!" one of the Iranians exclaimed. I was surprised, knowing the shortcomings of the Shah in the department of human rights. But in their 20s and 30s, these Iranians had known only Sharia law and the brutal rule of the ayatollahs. Since my colleagues and I were trying to evangelize them, we recognized that if they were representative of the younger generation, then the time was right for the Gospel of Christ to penetrate that land and its people.

Confessing within all of these contexts encourages us to know whom we are addressing. Paul gives us a marvelous lesson in Athens. He comes prepared, knowing the Greek poets, making connections between them and a knowledge of God all the while leading them to the Savior.

We need to be equally prepared, as we look to books that will speak to spiritual seekers with the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For example, when preparing the *Book of Concord* in Korean, it is best to call it a *Summary of Christian Doctrine*. The original phrase doesn't mean as much to them, so we adapt to the society without changing the content of the message.

In the Asian world, humility is highly valued as a virtue so that even a catechism that has Martin Luther's name attached can seem like "worship" or excessive praise to an individual. So, once again, on certain occasions we will leave his name off the book and refer to it as a statement of Christian faith. I have no doubt that Luther, echoing Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 and 3, would gladly refrain from using his name—he, a "poor stinking bag of worms"—if it would serve the cause of the Gospel. It is the substance of the confession, not the labels, that brings life in mission.

In conclusion, it seems that some ethnic groups make the connections to the Christian message more readily than others, given recent persecutions for their faith and their past history, as in Russia. But the greatest growth of Christianity today is coming from those lands where the Gospel and Christian literature has rarely been heard or read but is now greedily devoured. It fits sociologist Philip Jenkins' thesis in *The Next Christendom* that the Christian world is once again returning to the southern hemisphere (although not exclusively). As Christians of the Western tradition, we need to be mindful of their specific congregational and pastoral needs as we provide them with good, sound Lutheran doctrine so that they too may be in mission and confess the Christian faith in all of its beauty and truth.

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Reviews

Biblical Languages and the Mission of the Church

The need for at least a basic facility in both primary biblical languages as a prerequisite for seminary studies is most obviously tied to the need to be able to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the sacred Scriptures by means of the primary sources. But the learning of even an ancient language serves also the "cross-cultural" mission awareness of seminary formation in several important ways. It begins with recognizing the difficulty of access to and understanding of those "not like us" without entering into another—and another's—linguistic and cultural world. It shows the need for language learning and how language not only reflects but also shapes both the expression and even conception of reality. It also provides entry into the historical background of another culture and the distances that exist both in space and time and in culture and community, even as it reinforces the constants of the human story under God's judgment and grace. In short, it demonstrates the difficulties of cross-cultural communication in any context, including those less removed in space and time than the cultural world of the Old and New Testaments, but across various barriers nevertheless.

The ways in which biblical language skills have been acquired have changed significantly over the past generation, even as the goals and instructional methods have remained fairly constant. The pattern of multiple years of both Greek and Hebrew studies in advance of matriculation at our seminaries is now generally limited to those in pre-sem programs in our CUS schools, though students can and do enter seminary with similar backgrounds in languages from other undergrad programs.

Various causes lie behind the current situation, including the mixing of the former "two tracks" (Springfield and St. Louis) in the late 1960s and 1970s, first due to the issues that led to the "Seminex" divide and, following that, to the growing, if never quite exact, similarities of both seminaries' offerings (including the requirement of Hebrew at now Fort Wayne, though within the MDiv curriculum itself). The need had been created to service both "pre-sem" undergrads (with language pre-reqs met) and a growing number of students who were admitted "subject to" completing the language requirements. This could most efficiently be done at and by the seminary itself; and our St. Louis seminary, historically the "track" for pre-sem undergrads, developed prerequisite courses in both languages.

This approach created a tension between the need to gain language proficiencies as a prerequisite and the small window of time that students had in which to learn them, often the summer before formal matriculation or in the early terms of the Sem I year. Intensive summer courses became the "boot camp," for better or worse, for

language learning—and generally a very efficient way, under energetic and exceptional engagement by both instructors and students! This instruction was then to be augmented by the use and reinforcement of basic skills throughout the curriculum, especially in the exegetical courses that followed.

Over the years, this new "track" has become more the norm than the exception, in spite of a continuing number of pre-sem grads who entered with the more traditional longer-term approach to fundamental Greek and Hebrew. With the comprehensive curriculum review conducted by the St. Louis seminary over the past years, the opportunity presented itself to rethink how best to provide both immediate and longer-range language instruction with even stronger reinforcement throughout the four years of seminary formation. The other key opportunity was a growing recognition of the use—and usefulness, if properly engaged—of electronic resources already becoming commonplace on students' and pastors' computers.

St. Louis Professor David Adams became somewhat of our in-house expert on these resources, having been an early adopter himself and even involved in behind-the-scenes research, development, and testing of various software programs. In the following article, he reviews and rehearses the decision to engage the Logos Bible Software as part of our ongoing commitment to the biblical languages among the ministerium of a church body deeply committed to *sola scriptura* and the proper use and interpretation of those Scriptures, written for our learning but also written in ancient languages that engage us in cross-cultural hermeneutics in the service of the mission of our Lord. In a time when deep study of the Scriptures and its theological truths is often pitted against the more immediate need for mission and evangelism, though never at shallow or superficial levels, or the importance of learning also modern languages that reflect the mission field, readers of LMM will appreciate this report on the continuing efforts by our seminaries in effective engagement of the biblical texts.

Andrew H. Bartelt

On the Adoption of Bible Software as a Tool for Seminary Study: A Reflection

We began to teach Hebrew and Greek at Concordia Seminary in 1843. Since that time the focus of our study and teaching of the word of God has been the Scriptures as they are written in those original languages. While theological emphases and hermeneutical presuppositions may have changed over the intervening century-and-a-half, the basic skills required for studying the biblical texts in their original languages have changed very little. The introduction of Bible software in the 1980s began to change that, so that after more than thirty years of maturation, this technology provides today's student of the Bible—whether clergy or lay, student,

pastor, or professor—with tools that enable him to engage the Hebrew and Greek text of the Bible in a way that was simply not possible before.

As a result of our recently completed curriculum review process, the exegetical faculty of the seminary has decided to adopt the use of these tools for seminary instruction and to encourage and promote their use by our students and graduates. It was not an easy decision. It was arrived at only after considerable debate and with a clear recognition that it creates as many challenges as it resolves. In the end, we made the decision because we recognized that one of the most important things that we could do to promote the study of the Scriptures in their original languages is to teach what we might call "sustainable skills."

We have long recognized that many pastors have found it difficult to maintain their Hebrew and Greek language skills while serving in the ministry, whether in the mission field or in a congregation. This, in turn, limits their ability to study the Word of God in the original languages in which God inspired the Holy Scriptures to be written. Widespread anecdotal evidence from serving pastors and missionaries indicates that the greatest barrier they encounter to maintaining and using biblical languages for the study of the Scriptures arises from the many and various demands upon their time and energy. The pressures of ministry in the modern world make it difficult for missionaries and pastors alike to devote to the task of biblical study the time and effort sufficient to maintain their knowledge of Hebrew and Greek at a functional level.

Bible software can help overcome the barrier of limited time and the resulting reduced facility with the biblical languages. Used properly, it can facilitate competent reading by helping readers identify difficult forms. It can help overcome the barrier of limited time by speeding up the process of looking up unknown words and locating pertinent discussions in grammars, commentaries, and other resources. In addition to facilitating reading, Bible software can also be a valuable and useful tool for gathering information about the Bible used for sermon preparation, teaching Bible classes, and related tasks.

We recognize that providing our students and pastors with a tool does not, by itself, solve any of the problems that they may encounter any more than simply owning a book gives its owner knowledge. To benefit from such a tool, one must learn to use it properly. The faculty is dedicated to helping our students use all the tools at their disposal to be faithful and effective stewards of the Word of God. And it is to attain that goal that we have decided to adopt a standard Bible software package and help students learn to use it properly.

This does not mean that we are going to stop teaching Hebrew and Greek, or that our students will have any less need to learn those languages. In fact, other changes that we have made to the curriculum will increase the overall time students spend using those languages to read the Bible. More to the point, we see the use of

Bible software as a tool to support and encourage students and pastors to engage the Word of God in its original languages, not to discourage or eliminate it. We have long believed that the study of the God's Word in its original languages is important for both the theological development of the pastor and the long-term theological health of the Church. The value of the study of the Bible in its original languages for the theological development of the pastor was well-articulated by the Synod's commission that produced the last major revision of our curriculum almost two generations ago. They wrote:

> It is possible for a man to be a Christian without knowing the original languages of the Scriptures. He who has the skill of drawing upon the sacred writings for their revelation of God in Christ can be a very good Christian. A variety of helps is at his disposal, including translations, annotations, and commentaries.
>
> This situation can create the impression that a man can be a very good biblical teacher and pastor for the same reasons, through the same skills, and with the same helps. It is possible that he can function in that way up to a certain level.
>
> It is unlikely, however, that the minister of the Gospel can function to the peak excellence suggested in 2 Timothy 2 and 3 without a more basic understanding and use of the original biblical languages. The New Testament writings were themselves in the idiom of their time. Furthermore, the idioms of biblical Hebrew were familiar also to Greek-speaking Christians in the New Testament, because of the Aramaic background of the Gospels, the Septuagint version quoted in the Epistles, and the climate of thought and conceptual apparatus of the Old Testament revelation immediately comprehensible to the first Christians, as contrasted with many centuries of Greek or of Romanizing western thought intervening in the concepts of the twentieth century.[1]

We agree with that assessment. Not only are the words, the grammar, and the syntax of the text best understood by engaging it in its original language, but also the text in its original language provides the best entrée into the thought-world of the biblical writers, in which they were inspired to record God's Word. For all of these reasons, we will continue to teach and study God's Word as it was written in its original languages. Indeed, it is to promote, support, and encourage such study that we have decided to adopt the use of Bible software.

There is a great deal more to studying the Bible in its original languages than just knowing the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words or being able to parse verb forms. The interpretation of the Bible is a complex task that involves a wide range of knowledge and skills. In addition to linguistic skill, literary awareness, and theological understanding, sound exegesis requires some knowledge of ancient

cultures, especially ancient religions, as well as some awareness of the peoples of the biblical world, together with their histories, at least insofar as they interacted with Israel and the Church through the apostolic period.

To this diverse foundation of knowledge, skills, and understanding, the interpretation of specific texts sometimes requires a healthy dose of knowledge about geography, archaeology, and ancient extra-biblical literature. Finally, to all of this must be added at least a general familiarity with the ways in which biblical texts have been interpreted in the past, of how they have been used in theological formulation across the history of the Church, and past and present theories of literary interpretation.

It hardly requires stating that no one is an expert in all of these fields. We all draw upon the works of specialists in these various disciplines to fill in the lacunae in our own knowledge base. Bible software can assist and support the student of God's word by helping to research, organize, and present all of this material in an efficient manner to facilitate study and increase understanding.

But there are also limitations to what Bible software can do. Learning to do exegesis requires three distinct levels of interaction with the text. At the foundational level one must become a competent reader of the text. Becoming a competent reader requires significant experience reading biblical texts sustained over time. Bible software cannot make a student a competent reader, but it can contribute to becoming a competent reader by supporting and encouraging sustained engagement with the biblical texts.

Second, one must learn to ask appropriate exegetical questions of the text and understand how to find the answers to those questions. Bible software does not teach one what questions to ask, but it can help in finding the answers to those questions once we have learned to ask them.

Finally, the exegete must possess the judgment necessary to evaluate both the information that he possesses and the way in which others have interpreted the text. This judgment comes only with experience interacting with the biblical texts and their interpreters. Again, Bible software is not and cannot ever be a substitute for this exegetical and theological judgment. It can, however, facilitate the growth of this judgment by supporting and assisting the sustained study through which such judgment is developed.

Once we concluded that it was time to adopt a standard Bible software tool, the faculty had to answer another question: which one? Students of the Bible in our day are blessed to have a variety of computer-based tools available to them. Each of these tools has its individual strengths and weaknesses, and any of them can be beneficial. Most members of the exegetical faculty already had experience with one or the other of these packages. There is a natural human tendency to favor that which

we already know over something new and different. In our discussions about this we came to recognize that the decision about which Bible software package to adopt could not be about "what I like" or "what I use." Rather, the decision had to be based on what would best serve the needs of the most of our students, now and in the future.

In evaluating our options with a view to adopting a standard, we were especially concerned with long-term value. We wanted to adopt a tool that will not only benefit a student during his academic studies at the seminary, but will also be flexible and extensible enough to support and encourage his continued study of the Word of God throughout a lifetime of service to the Church in whatever capacity God may call him.

With that in mind, we ultimately chose Logos Bible Software as a standard. Among the reasons for that choice were the following: (1) Logos provides a wider array of tools than other biblical language software so that it can help answer a wider variety of exegetical questions; (2) the extensive library of resources available provide a strong and flexible growth-path from academic work in the seminary classroom to whatever kind of pastoral work God may call a student in the future; (3) as a company, Logos has a well-established track record of stability, during which it has demonstrated its commitment and ability to support the widest possible variety of hardware and operating system platforms; (4) Logos is designed with the needs of the parish pastor and missionary, not just the academic, in mind; and (5) Logos has the largest number of specifically Lutheran resources available to our students and pastors, including the Kolb-Wengert *Book of Concord* and all of the volumes of the Luther's Works American Edition and numerous volumes on Lutheran history and theology..

It was a difficult decision. We recognize that no biblical software is the "best" for every person or for every task. If all that we wanted was something that could help parse difficult verb forms and quickly look up words in a lexicon, any of the major Bible software tools would do. They all do those basic tasks well. Where Logos stands out is in its ability to integrate a wide range of information: linguistic, historical, literary, dogmatic, geographical, archaeological, and practical, and present it to the user in a way that helps the user access it quickly and easily. Our job as seminary professors is to help our students, many of whom will serve in mission fields and congregations far removed from theological libraries, understand how to bring that information to bear on the study of, and proclamation of, the Word of God.

Despite the benefits that using software tools offers to students of the Bible, there remain some who are concerned that promoting the use of Bible software will undermine the learning of Hebrew and Greek. We understand that Bible software can be misused. It is not a panacea, but a tool. We take seriously the potential misuse of the tool. But this is nothing new. There have always been some students who take

short-cuts in their studies, usually to their own detriment and that of the congregations they serve. Likewise, there have always been students who devote themselves diligently to their work and who succeed at a high level. Neither of those tendencies will change. But we are confident that most of our students sincerely want to do well. Our task is to help them achieve the highest level of accomplishment that their individual skills, interests, and circumstances will allow. And that means equipping them with the best tools and teaching them how to use them appropriately. As with any tool, the craftsman must learn to use it in a proper and effective way. By incorporating the use of Bible software into our curriculum and instruction, we intend to help students learn to use this tool properly. Using Bible software properly means learning to use it to support the competent reading of the Bible in its original languages, not as a substitute for it.

We recognize that it is our responsibility, as faculty, to help students learn to use this tool in a positive way, and not to misuse it. We also recognize—and this is a humbling thing to have to say—that we do not yet know how to do this well. As a result, we are working with others to help us learn how to use this tool effectively ourselves, and to teach our students how to do so as well. This will take some time and effort on our part. It will also take some experimentation.

The best way to use the software in class will depend on the goals of the class and the judgment of the individual instructor about the best ways to accomplish those goals. But that, too, is true of any educational technology. The history of education shows that it takes time to discover the best way to employ new technologies in teaching and learning. One cannot wait until one has all the answers before beginning the process, since the answers are often discovered only as a part of the process.

So we have begun. While we are encouraging faculty to implement its use, we recognize that because our individual gifts and skills vary we do not all teach in the same way. We do not require every instructor to write on the blackboard or use presentation technology, and no member of the faculty will be forced to use Bible software in class. Only one thing is certain: the use of the software in class and for assignments will evolve over the next few years as we develop our expertise in using it for exegetical instruction.

It is a truism that there is only one possible direction in life, forward. As we move forward, new tools and technologies present new opportunities and new challenges. This is true in every field of human endeavor, including the study of the Bible. Our recent decision to adopt Logos Bible Software as a standard tool for our students is both an opportunity and a challenge. Our task is to seize the opportunity and meet the challenge. May God grant us success, and to the Church the benefits of our effort.

David L. Adams

Endnote

[1] Excerpted from Appendix C of the 1958 report of the Curriculum Commission of the LCMS Board for Higher Education, published as *Able Ministers of the New Testament* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1958). A slightly revised version, mostly filling in some gaps in the earlier draft, was released in 1964.

REALITY IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS: The Journey to Quantum Gravity. By Carlo Rovelli. Translated by Simon Carnell and Erica Segre. New York: Riverhead Books, 2017. 288 pp. Hardcover, $26.00. Paperback, $16.00.

ONLY A THEORY: Evolution and the Battle for America's Soul. By Kenneth R. Miller. London: Penguin, 2008. 244 pp. Hardcover, $25.95. Paperback, $17.00.

The hard sciences, such as physics and astronomy, deal with incomprehensible mystery, just as theology does. Hard scientists are accustomed to dealing with realities that are impossible to put into ordinary language. They reach the frontiers of human knowledge where God actually becomes a plausible answer.

This is what we find in Carlo Rovelli's latest book, *Reality is Not What It Seems.* He traces the pursuit of physical truth, particularly from Democritus, through the medieval philosophers, and into our age of modern physicists, particularly Einstein. The title of his concluding chapter is "Mystery." Throughout the ages, people have sought to understand the mysteries of our physical world, where it all came from and where it is headed and how does it function. "This acute awareness of our ignorance is the heart of scientific thinking" (259).

Rovelli traces this ongoing pursuit of truth, graphically illustrating the humble willingness—even eagerness—to be proved wrong. He traces how insights on the functioning of the physical world have portrayed a reality that is far removed from our ordinary experience. In quantum mechanics we are confronted with a description of the world that seems "a little absurd" and does not "make much sense" (137).

But if this is where the best evidence leads us, we must courageously move with it: Do electrons actually exist? Is time real? Is infinity impossible? Is space granular? What is gravity? Is the universe curved upon itself? Reality is not what it seems. What we normally experience and see is not what really exists on the fundamental and cosmic levels. We are confronted by a mystery that is both daunting and enticing.

That is a mentality with which theology is comfortable. We, too, know the pursuit of knowledge, the limits of language, the partiality of truth, the reality of Mystery. We are comfortable conversing with those who are pursuing the mysteries of the physical world, with openness and camaraderie and anticipation. Like the

scientists and philosophers, we know what it is like to deal with questions for which we have no definitive answers and realize we may never have them.

> This means not giving credence to those who say they are in possession of the truth. For this reason, science and religion frequently find themselves on a collision course. Not because science pretends to know ultimate answers, but . . . distrusts whoever claims to be having ultimate answers and privileged access to Truth (261).

Works such as this book are ones theologians of the church must absorb and integrate with theological insights. To have credibility with the wider community and with the youth, parish pastors must have some familiarity with these great pursuits of knowledge. Congregation members must be able to discuss knowledgeably with friends and colleagues. We do so with respect and openness for these historic human quests for truth.

Quoting Richard Feynman: "I think I can state that nobody really understands quantum mechanics" (140). The world it portrays is all too far removed from our ordinary experience. To this end, Rovelli introduces the work by stating that he has tried to explain things for the common reader as "a magic journey out of our commonsense view of things, far from complete" (3). Mathematics is the language of physics, and that is particularly incomprehensible for the common reader.

Nonetheless, we come away with a profound respect for the pursuit that has gone on through the ages. We admire those physicists and astronomers who are so dedicated to pursuing truth now, wherever it may lead. On that basis, we have a lot to discuss together, sharing the insights into the Mystery that we have.

This approach of openhearted partnership contrasts sharply with the experience Kenneth Miller describes in *Only a Theory*. Miller has been a prime figure in the efforts of major scientists to debunk the Intelligent Design (or "ID") movement, participating in several court cases, debates, and talk shows. He relates and refutes the several different ways that people of religious persuasion have attempted to infuse the supernatural/divine into the evolutionary process: irreducible complexity (53–73), the anthropic principle (121–22), creationism (79–95), intelligent design (114–17), "specified complexity" (39–43). He sees this attack on evolution as an effort of fundamentalist Christians to protect and promote their faith, using Intelligent Design as a scientific "wedge" (174–83).

ID advocates reluctantly admit that scientifically they have struggled. They have no empirical data or comprehensive theory to demonstrate their position (112, 178–79). However, through the use of mass media, they have been highly successful politically and socially in the USA. In a 2005 survey of 33 industrialized countries, on the acceptance of human evolution "from earlier species of animals," the USA was next to last, at 40% (214).

Miller concludes his book with a dire warning that the successful public relations tack of the ID movement will seriously undermine and stultify the entire scientific enterprise in this country. The ID movement has linked up with the philosophical relativism movement to argue that "objective truth is a myth" (181) and "evolution occupied its privileged position in science education only by virtue of the fact that it was in keeping with the materialist ideologies of the ruling elites" (182). Thus, the title of the book, "Only a Theory."

Miller wishes that American Christianity would return to the view of St. Augustine on "the dynamic nature of the universe," quoting him: "The universe was brought into being in a less than fully formed state, but was gifted with the capacity to transform itself from unformed matter into a truly marvelous array of structure and life forms" (160–61).

For most of us, evangelism among scientists is a cross-cultural experience. As every missionary knows, we cannot relate to this new, foreign culture unless we humbly respect them, learn their culture, and gain their trust. These books are a primer for us to begin to understand and speak knowledgeably. Scientists have the same spiritual needs and desires as everyone else. In this sphere, we have a great Truth to share. And we should do so "with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet 3:15).

Herbert Hoefer

THE MINISTRY OF EXPANSION: THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE LAITY. By Roland Allen. Edited by J. D. Payne. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017. 176 pp. Kindle, $9.99. Paperback, $12.99.

Cover to cover, the book brings to life the author's unswerving commitment to sharing the Good News of Jesus. Allen's best-known books are *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes which Hinder It*. In this book one can turn to almost any of the 150 pages to gain an understanding of Allen's emphasis that beyond the habit and relatively recent traditions of the established church lie freedom with promise and expectation that where "two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

The practicality of carrying out God's mission in places outside the "settled" communion of the church recognizes the place for lay ministers. In the introduction to the manuscript, Hubert Allen, his grandson, reports that Roland Allen came to the realization that

> the New Testament requires two very different forms of Christian leadership. On the one hand, there was need for evangelists and preachers to spread the Word. In order to guard against error these people needed to be thoroughly instructed in the faith either by persons trained by the apostles,

> or subsequently by persons trained by them and their direct successors (e.g., as Paul taught Timothy and Titus). But alongside these learned evangelists there was a need in every locality for competent persons to provide the sacraments, which Jesus commanded for all his followers to observe. Such people needed to be elders, respected by the whole community. They did not need detailed understanding of abstruse theological doctrines but rather were required by Paul simply to have the qualities set out in his letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9). (27–28)

The book is divided into two parts. Part One is Background. In it, Reverend Payne wisely provides the reader with additional introductory comments from three contemporary devotees who are "among the best Roland Allen scholars in the world": Robert Schmidt, Steven Rutt, and Robert Banks. The focus of Schmidt will be of particular interest for many readers of this journal. He was a missionary in Nigeria for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the 1960s. In a scant 14 pages, he takes the reader into the wider blessings of lay ministry. He focuses on four present-day crises that could benefit from Allen's emphasis on lay ministry: the cultural crisis, the financial crisis, the generational crisis, and the ecclesiastical crisis. Steven Rutt comments on each chapter of Allen's manuscript, "The Ministry of Expansion, The Priesthood of The Laity." In doing so Rutt includes historical markers of Allen's personal growth and understanding of spirit led outreach.

The review of the leaders of his lifetime, who expressed the settled position of the Anglican Church in contrast to Allen's, brings out a contextual background not unlike today's hesitancy on the part of some within the church to embrace the concept but stop short of its practical application. He refers to Allen as a missionary analyst who, "interpreted his context as similar to the early stages of the younger churches of Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, Galatia, and Rome" (52).

Part 2 contains Allen's manuscript. It leaves no doubt as to his purpose for writing. His opening words are clear:

> This little book is not a theoretical treatise on the Ministry; it is an attempt to show a way of release to men and women who are bound in a cruel bondage, and hindered by it for stretching out their hands to receive what Christ Himself offers to them. . . . As I look out over the world I see Christians scattered as sheep having no shepherd, where I might see small Churches springing up and increasing in number, filling the whole world with joy and gladness. (71)

In the seven chapters that follow, we read of the debate that existed between Allen and the Anglican scholars of his day. In chapter one, Allen lays the groundwork for the reader's attention. He expects the reader to be in agreement with three fundamental principles,

1) Christ ordained two sacraments for all his children,

2) Christ explicitly directed us to observe His Last Supper,

3) Obedience to Christ and observance of His sacraments has been a means of grace to us.

In chapter two, Allen answers the reluctance to celebrate Holy Communion in the absence of ordained clergy by clarifying how habit and custom were the drivers behind the statement, "We've always done it this way."

In chapter three, Allen finds validity in the ministry of one who is "spirit led" to tell others of the blessings received. He uses the term *charismatic ministry* inclusively of individuals who are "exercising their ministry, undirected, uncommissioned, unordained by any ecclesiastical authority," a ministry familiar to the Church of the apostolic age. In chapter four, Allen asserts that evidence exists in the New Testament, which is further supported by the Early Church Fathers, that celebrating the Lord's Supper in the absence of an ecclesiastical authority was the normal practice. In chapter five, Allen responds to "the objection that we are no longer living in the days of the early Christians and that consequently we cannot act now as they did then" (111).

Allen's answer to this is that we very much do live in like conditions and illustrates his point. Chapter six answers the challenge of defining the priesthood of the laity, not in general but specifically as it applies to being God's mouthpiece in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Without taking away any validity of ordained ministers, Allen cautions limiting the definition of ministry to ordination alone.

Allen titles the seventh chapter with the word *presumption*. Here Allen questions the widely held opinion that any exercise of the universal priesthood except through the ordained clergy is a presumptive invasion of the functions of the ordained clergy. He answers this opinion partly by turning the argument around. He suggests that dwelling on the fact of ordination as the only qualification for ministry may lead to a very false notion that in fact limits the grace of God. It is in the "Postscript" that the reader meets Robert Banks. Banks advances Allen's deep concern for making available the Lord's Supper to Christians who are outside of the geographical boundaries of a bishop or priest. Banks offers another unpublished manuscript by Allen, titled "The Family Rite." As one might gather from the title, it is here where Allen links his conclusions regarding the celebration of the Sacrament with the additional aspect of the place where this rite originally took place was in the houses of believers (Acts 2, Acts 20, 1 Corinthians 11).

My observations include the opinion that the person who enjoys forensics (formal debating) will appreciate the manner in which Allen refutes the established pronouncements of two of his contemporary Anglican scholars. His style is like the use of a lariat that is thrown to encircle the target and slowly draw it tight. For any

who favor the ministry of deacons serving Christians in the absence of an ordained pastor, Allen provides plenty of support. Given the contemporary challenges to the ministry of care and outreach, it is not difficult to see how the crises mentioned by Robert Schmidt find aspects of hope in Allen's manuscript.

Charles A. Brehmer

Lutheran Mission Matters Call for Papers: Nov. 2018

Greetings in the name of Jesus,

We invite you to submit an article on the theology and/or practice of missions to the November issue of the journal, *Lutheran Mission Matters*.

Lutheran Mission Matters is published twice a year and has been in existence for twenty-six consecutive years, formerly under the title, *Missio Apostolica.* It is published by the Lutheran Society for Missiology, an organization focused on the role in the mission of God that the Lutheran Church has played, plays now, and will continue to play into the future. Further information about the society and its journal can be found on its website: https://lsfm.global.

Articles in *Lutheran Mission Matters* are indexed and are available online in the American Theological Library Association Serial (ATLAS) collection. Articles in the journal are peer reviewed.

As the theme for its November issue, the editors of *LMM* have selected the "setting apart" of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1–4, including examining the role of the Antioch congregation in laying on of hands and "releasing" them, the guidance and sending of the Holy Spirit, and the world into which they headed. As the Lutheran Church appears to be at a point where it needs to consider God's mission afresh, what are the messages that communicate with a twenty-first century world, a world of "Nones," resurgent world religions, and a world of growing Islam? Who carries these messages? How? How are such messengers chosen, released, sent, and by whom?

We know that there are many people in the Lutheran Church who are convinced that the Lutheran understanding of the Christian faith is a gift of God to be shared with the world. If you have ideas that you are willing to share, we invite you to become a part of the discussion. I am the editor of the journal, and I welcome enquiries, and I am overjoyed to receive articles. I can be reached at:

Dr. Victor Raj
Concordia Seminary
801 Seminary Place
St. Louis, MO 63105
Phone: (314) 505-7116
Email: rajv@csl.edu

In behalf of Christ's mission to the whole world,
Rev. Dr. Victor Raj

P.S. If you know of someone with whom this message should be shared, please feel free to pass it along.

A Note to Contributors

We welcome your participation in contributing to *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 the Publications link 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 (okamotoj@csl.edu) 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*, 16th edition for endnotes. See basic examples below and/or consult the "Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide" (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

[1] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 243–255.

[2] Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 184–186.

[3] Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," *Missiology, An International Review* 34 (2006): 431–450.

References to Luther's works must identify the original document and the year of its publication. Please use the following model.

[4] Martin Luther, Ninety-five Theses (1517) in *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 31:17–34.

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.

[5] 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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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.

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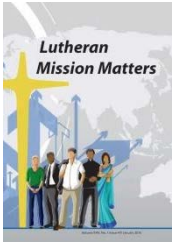

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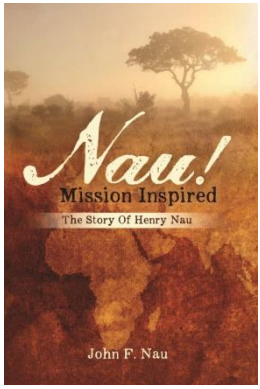

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