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CONTENTS

Inside This Issue ... 159

ARTICLES

An Examination of Strategic Mission Plans Before and After 2010
Richard Gahl ... 161

International Partnerships: A Reflective Assessment
Paul Mueller ... 181

Keeping Our Balance in Our Own Context: Keeping the Cross in Cross-cultural and Taking the Con Out of Contextualization
Andrew Bartelt ... 195

Celebrating the Ministry of Licensed Lay Deacons: A Theological Review of the Task Force Report on 2013 LCMS Convention Resolution 4-06a
Michael T. Von Behren ... 211

"Here Is the Church, Here Are the People . . .": Ecclesiology Is the Servant of Soteriology
Robert Scudieri ... 229

Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities: Congregations and Race in America
Theodore J. Hopkins and Mark A. Koschmann ... 247

Martyria and Mission: The Witness of Creative Disruption
John Nunes ... 264

Confessing the "Real Present Jesus": the Power to Overcome Cultural Barriers with the Good News of the Gospel
Gregory P. Seltz ... 272

Signs of Transformation: Communicating the Gospel in an Age of Nones and Dones
Scott Yakimow ... 281

The Biblical Nature of Mission: God's Mission in Action
Eugene Bunkowske ... 298

ENCOUNTERING MISSION

Scattering for Gathering
Victor Raj ... 305

BOOK REVIEWS ... 310

SERMON

I Will Build My Church
William Utech ... 320

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Inside This Issue: Missiology

Why are we devoting an issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* to something called "missiology"? Most Christians and, I am bold to say, most Lutherans have no idea what that word means. The term is not in the Bible. It doesn't matter. An understanding of "missiology" is crucial for the church today. In this issue some of the most expert missiologists will show you why.

According to Dictionary.com, missiology is "the area of practical theology that investigates the mandate, message, and mission of the Christian church, especially the nature of missionary work." Maybe it would just be easier to say that *missiology is the study of the theory and the practice of mission*, important for Christians involved in international mission work and, increasingly, for work in North America.

The articles in this issue cover a wide range, from Dr. Gene Bunkowske's article on the biblical basis of mission to Victor Raj's observations on the missiology of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church; from Andy Bartelt's correcting crucial misunderstandings about contextualization to Richard Gahl's overview of the change in missiology in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

Gahl's article is timely because it looks at a substantive change in the mission theory and practice of a major Lutheran denomination. Following the administrative restructuring of the LCMS, mandated by the 2010 convention, thirty of the top leaders of the Church's mission department were let go. They were told by the new administration, "We intend to go in a different direction." What is that direction? How is it different from the previous one?

My article advocates that "ecclesiology," the study of church, has to remain the servant of "soteriology," the study of salvation. When church becomes an end in itself, it diverges from its mission, which is to bring the eternal love of God shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This happens as the church participates in "witness, mercy, and life together."

Rev. Gregory P. Seltz, the Speaker for the Lutheran Hour, shares his thinking about urban missiology; Mark Koschmann and Theodore Hopkins describe how an urban congregation understood systemic issues facing their city as a crucial element of urban mission work; and Rev. Dr. John Nunes, the newly elected president of Concordia College New York, shares his ideas about the relationship between *martyria* and mission work. Michael Von Behren addresses the role of laity in missions and the thinking behind the need for licensed deacons.

Then there are the general challenges to mission work in North America. Professor Scott Yakimow's concern is how we approach the "nones" and the "dones," those who have made conscious decisions to stay away from Christianity and religion in general. How can we approach them with the love of God? They probably are not going to walk into a church looking to become members. It has

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been said that if a community was starving to death and a warehouse filled with bread was nearby, but nobody let the word out, that would be loveless. Yet so many churches have something much better than physical bread but do not believe it is their business to go outside the walls of their church to share it. The unspoken message is, "This church is for the members." Wouldn't you say that was loveless?

The authors of these articles have made it a point not to focus on any particular individuals, but rather to assess mission thinking and practice in North America at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We invite your comments and your prayers.

Robert Scudieri
Editor for the Missiology issue
Lutheran Mission Matters

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Articles

An Examination of Strategic Mission Plans Before and After 2010

Richard Gahl

Abstract: Given that it has been five and a half years since the restructuring of the LCMS it is appropriate to ask: How goes God's mission in the LCMS? Rather than gathering opinions for a variety of interested participants and observers, this article has chosen to narrow its focus to the comparison of two strategic mission plans. The first is the Balanced Focus Plan of the Board for Mission Services dated 2007. The second is the first strategic plan for the new Board for International Mission dated 2014, Consolidate, Focus, Renew and Establish Partnerships. There are a number of significant differences in the two strategic plans: governance models, questions about who does the mission (Is it all baptized Christians or just pastors?), and worship practice in the mission field. A primary concern, however, is the state of relationships between the LCMS and partner churches across the globe. In a word, there is much work to be done before relationships deteriorate even more.

2010 was a watershed year for LCMS mission and governance. First, the 2010 Convention adopted a new structure for the national office. Instead of one Board for Mission Services (BFMS) for worldwide and national mission, two separate boards

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Following pastorates in Indiana and Pennsylvania, Richard Gahl was called as Executive Director for the Ohio District LCMS. He served in that role from 1981 until retirement in 2005. Primary focus was in the areas of missions and stewardship. During these years he co-edited the two print editions of the Congregational Stewardship Workbook and was a collaborator/writer for the first LCEF demographic tool for congregations, Linking Congregations and Communities. Dick was one of ten selected by the LCMS for training in Search Institute's strategic planning process, Vision to Action. When the Faithful Christians Faithful Congregations version of this process was made available to all LCMS congregations, he was one of the trainers of the planning facilitators. In retirement Dick and his wife Judy continue to live in the Cleveland area. He continues to do consulting with congregations in mission, strategic planning and stewardship. rgahl@aol.com

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were brought into existence. The Board for International Mission (BIM) also incorporated the worldwide component of the former Board for Human Care. A new Board for National Mission (BNM) created one place for various North American mission components, including Human Care and what used to be termed Congregational Services. The second matter of significance was the election of the Rev. Matthew Harrison to the presidency of the Synod and the normal changes in the staffing of the President's office that occur in the midst of the staffing changes for the newly adopted mission structure.

The purpose of this article is to examine how the new BIM/BNM structure is working when compared with the previous BFMS activities. Two documents will be foundational for this examination: *2007–2010 Balanced Focus Plan* of the BFMS and the *Consolidate, Focus, Renew and Establish Partnership*: *Strategic Plan for the Office of International Mission*, dated May 15, 2014. It is recognized that these two documents are not "apples to apples" comparisons since the United States was previously considered as one part of the world mission field.

There are different assumptions and strategies evident when the two strategic plans are compared. The *2007–2010 Balanced Focus Plan* centers on Ablaze, the collaborative effort of LCMS congregations and worldwide partner churches to intensify personal witnessing in preparation for the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation of 1517. This was the second stage of a three- or four- stage strategy to connect with 100 million unchurched or unconnected people across the world.

There are different assumptions and strategies evident when the two strategic plans are compared.

Consolidate, Focus, Renew and Establish Partnership is the plan of May 2014. It might be described as a starting-from-scratch plan, especially as a whole new administrative staff was being gathered in St. Louis, together with many new missionaries in the field replacing long serving staff. The lack of continuity of the old with the new has complicated the normal difficulties of continuing to grow relationships with partner churches.

Balanced Focus Plan 2007–2010

The plan begins with a Theological Preface, adopted by the BFMS in October 2000.[1] The Preface begins with two paragraphs setting forth the premises that God loves the world, His will is that all should be saved, and mission belongs to God. The next two paragraphs set forth the principles that, in the broadest sense, all Christians are missionaries and that, in the narrower sense, the Spirit, using the church as the means for identifying and sending people, sends specific people to accomplish specific tasks in missionary service. This sending includes men as missionary

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pastors; men and women, including teachers, to share the Gospel through words and deeds of loving service; and support staff, for example, to fulfill record-keeping or accounting standards of the United States or foreign governments.

Referencing the Augsburg Confession, Article V, the Preface speaks of the office of ministry that is given to all pastors to provide the Gospel and Sacraments. It further defines "missionaries" as those who are called to carry the Gospel to people who would not hear it unless someone crosses a barrier of language and/or culture to reach them. In view of its US responsibilities, the Preface states that a missionary is not necessarily called into foreign service; for mission work is done wherever boundaries must be crossed to proclaim the Gospel. It may require learning another language but especially learning how to communicate clearly in unfamiliar cultural forms.

> In the broadest sense, all Christians are missionaries.

In a Preface subheading, "Baptism, the Church and the Lord's Supper," the Augsburg Confession's Article VII is referenced to define the church as "the assembly of all believers among who the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel." The Preface further observes "in this sense it can be said that Lutheran mission work leads to Lutheran Churches."

In the section on "Worship," the Theological Preface again references Augsburg Confession Article VII: "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be uniformly observed in all places." This is further explained with the statement: "The Lutheran church does not maintain that there is one form of worship that must be used throughout the world, but it has always been concerned that its total worship life confesses the faith of the creeds in accord with the universal church, that that the worship-liturgical life of the church is done decently and in order." The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article X: 5,9 is also referenced: "We further believe, teach and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way."

"Church and Ministry" is the final subheading of the Theological Preface. Two matters are to be noted. First is the statement: "Scripture makes clear that all believers are priests before God (1 Peter 2:9)." This is explained as follows: "All Christians have the joyful privilege and responsibility of showing their thankfulness to God for his salvation by sharing the Gospel with those around them." It is further noted: "One of the missionary's primary responsibilities as a pastor [is] to prepare all the members of the congregation for their works of service, each according to the

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calling God has given (Ephesians 4:11–13), and to prepare some men, selected by the church, for entrance into the public ministry."

After the Preface, the *2007–2010 Balanced Focus Plan* identifies six areas of focus (mission, mission responders, partnership, people, leadership and board). Each of the six areas has a listing of goals, strategies, and measures. Basically, the *Balanced Focus Plan* describes the BHAG (big, hairy, audacious goal) of sharing the Good News of Jesus with 100 million unchurched or uncommitted people by the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. This sharing has also been known as Ablaze!, the organizing mission principle for 2007–2010. Measures for the Mission Focus for June 30 were established as three thousand congregations and their districts engaged in Ablaze! initiatives, together with one thousand congregations participating in international and national mission events. Measures also had a board focus. Every board member of the BFMS was expected to have traveled on a board-designated trip, to have been involved in at least one short-term mission experience. Board members were also expected to be active financial contributors to LCMS World Mission and to have made at least two development visits with a principal gift officer, usually within his/her district.

One asterisk (*) in the plan gives clarity to the definition of new missions. "A 'new mission' in the United States is a group that meets regularly around the Word and intends to become a separate congregation at some point. Internationally, a new mission may be defined as a new community of believers gathered around the Word that may become part of a Word and Sacrament community." Seven hundred fifty new missions were to be started in the United States by LCMS World Mission and its partners. Internationally, with five partners in each region, one thousand new Lutheran communities would be initiated. Both were to be accomplished by June 30, 2010.

It is important to remember that Ablaze! was officially adopted at the Synod's 2004 convention and reaffirmed in 2007 and 2010. The 2004 convention agreed to "the urgency of the national goal to reach 50 million unchurched and/or uncommitted people with the Gospel." The convention further encouraged each congregational member "to share the Good News of Jesus when the Spirit provides opportunity." The 2007 Convention further resolved "that the LCMS through its districts, congregations, Lutheran Hour Ministries, LWML, and LCMS World Mission through its national team support the mission revitalization efforts as a major component of Ablaze!"[2] Several Conventions commended "the Board for Mission Services for its loving efforts to lead the church in God's mission and the Ablaze! movement."[3] By 2013, mention of Ablaze! had shrunk to a parenthesis in a "Whereas" "(including the goals and priorities of Ablaze!)" with reference to the new Office for National Mission's being encouraged to continue church revitalization efforts.[4]

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It is true that when a new mission field is entered by any church body a long process begins that eventually results in a new church body—a church body that becomes a partner church. A former German missionary to Papua New Guinea, Georg F. Vicedom, later became an eminent professor of missions in Germany. Concordia Publishing House has translated and published two of his books, *The Mission of God* (1965) and *A Prayer for the World* (1967). The second work examines mission from the perspective on the Lord's Prayer. Vicedom addresses partnership in mission in the final chapter.

> In mission everything appears as God's act. Conversion, faith and life are worked by God alone. . . . God works among men the same way He worked on the apostles. . . . They all stand under the same effective action and under assignment of the one Word since all have received the same gift from God. Solidarity under the Word and in reception of salvation incorporates believers into one unity.[5]
>
> It should be the same way with the relationship between mission leadership and the young church, missionary, and congregation, the missionizing church at home and the Christians abroad. There are no opposites, no superior and inferior, no givers and receivers. Both are a unity before God even if they have different tasks and obligations. . . . How many tensions between the mission and the young churches would have been eliminated if this common basis had been the point of departure![6]

Fast-forward to four Regional Directors for LCMS World Mission meeting together with the Associate Executive Director for International Mission on August 29, 2006. The issue discussed was the different results gained from partnership and paternalism approaches. A speech on this topic by then Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, inspired the conversation. At the end of two days, the five international mission leaders put into writing their understanding of transformational mission in a thoughtful and thought-provoking paraphrase of Secretary Rice.

> We would define the objective of transformational mission work in this way: To work with our many Lutheran friends around the world in a posture of partnership, in order to build and sustain missional, well-developed, and well-managed national churches, (including our own LCMS, for the conversation goes both ways), that will respond to the needs of people (spiritual and physical), while being held accountable for efforts in the international Lutheran mission movement. . . . Transformational mission work is rooted in partnership, not paternalism, in doing things with other people, not for them, often being directed rather than directing.[7]

Partnerships, no superiors or inferiors, unity in Christ, working with and accountable to one another. These are rich words for partnership in the Mission of

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God, for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ across the world. What a wonderful common basis for working together.

Partnerships, no superiors or inferiors, unity in Christ, working with and accountable to one another. These are rich words for partnership in the Mission of God, for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ across the world.

Consolidate, Focus, Renew and Establish Partnerships

Strategic Plan for the Office of International Mission v.1.1a (May 15, 2014)[8]

The 2014 strategic plan for the Office of International Mission is a document of some fifty-six pages compared to twenty pages for the previously reviewed Balanced Focus Plan. Following an Executive Summary the plan is presented in nine sections: (1) Historical Background; (2) Lutheran Mission at the beginning of the 20th and 21st Centuries; (3) Structure: Board/Staff; (4) Organizational Tenets; (5) SWOT analysis for 2014; (6) Regional Plans; (7) Appendix A—Toward a Responsible Lutheran Church; (8) Appendix B—LCMS Partner Churches Responsible Lutheran Metric; and (9) Appendix C—Regional Organizational Charts. To compare the two mission plans, it is important to add to this strategic plan the twelve–page "Theological Statement for Mission" authored by President Harrison that serves both the Board for International Missions and the Board for National Missions. The Theological Statement has twenty-three sections.

God is the subject of the first section. One readily identifies what has become the signature phrase of President Harrison's administration: WITNESS, MERCY, LIFE TOGETHER.

> **God.** Where the Holy Trinity is present via the Gospel and received in faith, there cannot but be WITNESS (*martyria*), MERCY (*diakonia*), and Life Together (*koinonia*).
>
> His holy will for all in Jesus Christ—namely that all come to believe in and bear witness to Christ, reflect divine compassion, and live together in forgiveness, love, and joy in the Church.[9]

The signature phrase is lifted up throughout the "Theological Statement for Mission." It even summarizes the statement in the final sentence: "The theology of the cross will forever be a litmus test of the genuineness of our WITNESS (*martyria*), MERCY (*diakonia*), and LIFE TOGETHER, (*koinonia*) in our midst." Generally the English and the New Testament Greek equivalents are printed together. There is a problem with connecting MERCY with διακονια. The entry for *diakonia* from the Third Edition of the Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament in 2000 makes a significant change from the second edition published in 1979.[10] In

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> "The theology of the cross will forever be a litmus test."

the third edition, the first meaning is "to function as an intermediary, act as a go-between/agent." The fifth use is identified as the "special problem" of Acts 6:2 "looking after tables." The second edition placed "to wait someone at table" in first position. "Care for, take care" of were in third position. Make no mistake, the concept of mercy, care, compassion for those in need is a critical aspect of the Church's Gospel. Luke 4 and Matthew 25, among many possible citations, make that very clear. However it cannot be based on the understanding of "mercy" as the normal translation of the New Testament word *diakonia*.

It is evident that the work of Friedrick Wilhelm Hopf (1910–1982) has had a significant influence on President Harrison. He referenced Hopf's signature phrase "the Lutheran Church can only do Lutheran missions" in an earlier essay written in 1993 published in a 1998 issue of *Logia*.[11] President Harrison was also involved in the translation of Hopf's 1967 essay for a Special Issue (April 2015) of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* published by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. One section of that essay is noted here under the heading of Confessional Subscription.

> The Confessional status of a congregation—the catechism in the instruction of the youth, the Order of the Divine service, of the liturgy and of the worship of the church according to the Agenda, the hymnal, the ordination vow and the promise of the pastor at his installation—all that receives its Spiritual power through God's efficacious Word of salvation at work in it.[12]

What is included? The BFMS recognized a variety of worship ceremonies and practice. Divine Service, Agenda, and Hymnal appear to have a more limiting perspective. Is Hopf requiring that the same Divine Service, hymnal, Agenda, etc., be translated in every mission/language setting? Missing is any reference to choir music.

Hopf's work may have application for understanding the Policies for the Board for International Mission, dated January 16, 2011. Under the category of Witness Outcomes, paragraph 1.3.1.3 states "Lutheran Missions will include thorough catechesis of Lutheran doctrine, hymnody and worship to all." Policy 1.3.1.6 reads

> The Church will also seek to establish Lutheran congregations that imitate the early believers who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread (i.e. regular and faithful use of the Lord's Supper) and the prayers (historic liturgical forms of worship)" Acts 2:42.

1.3.1.7 states: Lutheran "missions will be done by Lutheran clergy who will preach, teach, and administer the sacraments." No reference was identified for other church workers in other sections regarding Mercy Outcomes and Life Together Outcomes.

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Now for a look at the Strategic plan itself.

The Executive Summary notes, "changes due to restructuring made it impossible to continue to use the Balanced Focus Plan of the previous BFMS." A new plan was needed and the current document is described as "a work in progress that represents the focusing of strategic ideas." The "work in progress" includes no sign of Ablaze! in the entire document.

Section 4, Organizational Tenets, is an exceptionally useful one-page description of the work intended! It would make an excellent color tri-fold handout to be distributed throughout the church. The Synod Mission Statement flows smoothly into the Office of International Mission's mission statement with the appropriate sending and supporting language. Note how the Vision Statement casts an important direction for the work of the Synod across the world.

> The LCMS is the premier catalyst of a seamlessly connected global network of confessional Lutheran partners united in mission to Witness to the Gospel, manifest Mercy, and enhance Life Together.

Of special interest is the listing of five values. One could only wish to learn more about each of them. The listing of "sustainability" and the continual references to stewardship in both the Theological Statement and Appendix A of the 2014 strategic plan call for more attention to this subject later in the this article.

1. Fidelity—Be Lutheran
2. Quality—The pursuit of excellence
3. Credibility—Inspires belief in project
4. Sustainability—Financial capacity to last
5. Stability—Strength to stand and endure.

The last categories are a listing of six Mission Priorities.

1. Plant, sustain, revitalize Lutheran churches
2. Support and expand theological education
3. Perform Human Care in close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministries
4. Collaborate with the Synod's members and partners to enhance mission effectiveness
5. Nurture pastors, missionaries, and professional workers to promote spiritual, emotional and physical well-being
6. Enhance elementary and secondary education and youth ministry.

Section 5 is a two-page analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. From the experience of this writer in working with congregations in strategic

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planning over the last twenty years, strengths or assets are an especially critical foundation of any way forward in mission. Eight items are listed as strengths. As might be expected, the declining membership of the Synod is anticipated to have a negative impact on the capacity of the church to engage in mission at home and abroad. It is a bit of a surprise to see the recognition of the effect of the departure of many missionaries in recent years included in the "weakness" category. The needed learning curve of the completely new and inexperienced mission team was also acknowledged. The opportunities for providing theological education with our mission partners most certainly prompted the second of the six Mission Priorities. The need for better coordination of mission societies, districts, congregations, and Recognized Service Organizations with the Board for International Missions was noted in both the Weaknesses and Threats categories.

Regional mission plans for Africa, Asia, Eurasia, and Latin America take up pages 12–27 in the plan. Latin America has the most developed plans in the document. The rest are sketchy, still in process.[13]

Appendix A—Toward a Responsible Lutheran Church is dated September 2013 and makes an assessment of partner churches, giving a metric or percentage grade for how fields are performing in six categories: Proclamation, Theologizing, Theological Education, Leadership, Operational Ability, and Stewardship. The assessment material without the percentage grading scores was also published in Synod's electronic *Journal of Lutheran Mission,* Vol. 1, No. 1 in 2014 under the title: "Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations: What it Means that Lutheran Mission Plants Lutheran Churches." (p. 20–27)[14]

It needs to be clearly stated that very important matters are being addressed with the concept of responsibility. Please note, page numbers from Appendix A are included to provide accurate reference. "How to measure the success of the church" (29). There is a continual need for "evaluation of partner churches" (29). A question in the evaluation of a particular partner church is: "Is it responsible for stewardship to support its workers, operation, and mission work?" (29).

Please note that the following quotations are all from Appendix A, with page numbers also noted:

> Work is done to help each church grow in the six areas. . . . The relationship and partnership is dynamic and based on mutual respect and love for the other as the Body of Christ. (32)
>
> The assessment evaluates a particular church as a responsible Lutheran church as observed by the partner church and informed by the particular local church (usually identified in the form of a request for assistance). (32)
>
> The Responsible Lutheran church metric provides a snapshot of the current state of the mission partner/partner church. It shows in broad categories

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> where the Missouri Synod can partner with the [specific partner church]. Over time, the nature of the work done by the Missouri Synod will change. The snapshot also helps planning by demonstrating what type of worker might need to be recruited to help in a given area (33).

For the purposes of this article, the focus on metrics will be narrowed to the area of stewardship. The listing of questions for evaluation of this part of the life of the church is as follows:

> Does the church teach stewardship?
>
> How much of the church's budget is funded externally?
>
> Are the core and essential operations self-funded?
>
> Would vital components of the church's life diminish if external funding was no longer provided?
>
> Stewardship would further be subdivided into the capacity to work outside the geographical borders of the church [i.e. help other partner churches]. (31–32)

Earlier in this article, reference was made to the five values under the heading of Organizational Tenets. The fourth value listed was Sustainability, defined as the "Financial capacity to last." What appears to be happening is that "sustainability" is being equated with "stewardship." While the two may be connected, they are definitely not describing the same thing. In fact, the strategic plan has fallen into the common fallacy of equating offerings with stewardship. Often does one hear congregational leaders state that "if the church budget is fully funded we congratulate ourselves because we are good stewards." This is formulated in the 2014 strategic plan with the assumption that the more the partner church becomes self-funding for its core and central functions the more the partner church is demonstrating good stewardship.

In 1998 the LCMS Convention adopted eight biblical stewardship principles to clarify some common perceptions that stewardship was all about money. The first two of those principles are:

> God's stewards are stewards by virtue of their creation and their recreation in Holy Baptism; therefore, they belong to the Lord.
>
> God's stewards have been entrusted with life and life's resources and given the joyful responsibility of managing them for him.[15]

It would be wise to bring these principles back into the discussion of sustainability and stewardship.

The matter of financial support with each partner in mission requires prayerful, mutual conversation. In district mission grants, allocations usually find their place in a mutually agreed schedule for self-support that is regularly revisited and adapted to

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need. Issues of entitlement or even greed are ever lurking in the shadows of such conversations. This requires a mutual, transparent, not top-down, process.

A significant danger in a metric process is turning the Gospel into Law—we are saved by what we do as stewards. Romans 12 describes the steward as a person who presents the entire or whole self as a response to God's call. The child of God is always a 100 percent steward. Any other metric undermines Holy Baptism. A partner church may be providing 50 percent of the resources to fund its core functions, but it is never a 50 percent steward. Anything less than a 100 percent steward is divisive for relationships with partner churches. For the record, every mission field/partner church is assigned a measurement for the six Mission Priorities mentioned above. There is no measurement or self-assessment for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, let alone an evaluation of the LCMS by partner churches.

A significant danger in a metric process is turning the Gospel into Law.

Concluding Observations and a Look Ahead

	2007–2010 Balanced Focus Plan	2014 Consolidate Focus, Renew, and Establish Partnerships
SIGNATURE PHRASE	Ablaze!	Witness, Mercy, Life Together
VISION	First place the church looks for quality mission involvement	Premier catalyst of a seamlessly connected global network of confessional Lutheran partners.
MISSIONARIES	In the broadest sense, all Christians are missionaries	Lutheran missions will be done by Lutheran clergy
RELATIONSHIP MODEL	"with" reciprocal—give and receive	"above" one directional
GOVERNANCE MODEL	testing policy-based governance checks and balances	fully policy-based accountability to Synod President

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	2007–2010 Balanced Focus Plan	2014 Consolidate Focus, Renew, and Establish Partnerships
WORSHIP	Total worship life confesses the faith of the Creeds . . . and that the worship-liturgical life of the church is done decently and in order (Augsburg Confession VII) The community of God in every place and in every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances (Formula of Concord, Article X)	Establish Lutheran congregations that imitate the early believers, who devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship.
FUNDING BASE	shrinking cutbacks as needed when funding declines	shrinking even more Sustainability plan
NEW FUNDING MODEL	Pilot test of five positions for network-supported missionary model	All missionaries in Network Supported self-funding model. Must raise 70% before leaving for mission field. National staff team to assist
STAFFING	Experienced team with minimal/normal changes in both administrative and field staff	All new key staff in administrative positions. 45 field positions changes from September 2010 to December 2014

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1. Comparison and Contrast

The chart above has attempted to summarize some of the key elements of the two strategic plans. Vision, Missionaries, Worship, and Relationship Models are the locations of the most significant differences. Those differences should be a cause for some concern. In the 2014 vision, the picture designed to draw one into the preferred future is not one of reaching people who do not know Christ so that the Spirit will work faith in the promises of God. The "all nations" of Matthew 28 and the "large crowd from every, nation, tribe, people and language" of Revelation 7 represent a vision for mission. "Bringing together confessional Lutheran partners" refers to people already reached in God's mission. At best it is about Life Together but certainly not about Witness to the Savior of us all. It is a reversal of Gospel priorities.

The significance of the diminished vision of 2014 is evidenced in a letter of August 13, 2013 sent to all LCMS military chaplains serving with the Office of National Mission. This letter was in response to the US Supreme Court's reversal of Don't Ask Don't Tell legislation that had the effect of legitimatizing same sex marriages. At issue is the role of LCMS chaplains in conducting marriage retreats.

> Our LCMS chaplains cannot lead marriage retreats where SSDPs [Same Sex Domestic Partners] have signed up. To do so would give the appearance of "normalizing" a behavior that is not in conformance with the Christian, Biblical and Lutheran definition of marriage.

The mission concern is the requirement that a chaplain recuse himself from a situation where a Gospel-motivated witness is needed. The example of Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well in Samaria comes to mind. While even walking through Samaria was risky behavior for a God-fearing Jew in that time, speaking with an individual whose moral behavior did not meet biblical standards was a risk our Lord was willing to take—for the sake of her relationship with God's Messiah. Determining that our chaplains should not associate with SSDP individuals in marriage retreats is to cut off the opportunity for faithful witness whatever the "appearance" may be to others.

2. Restructuring

The restructuring of the LCMS adopted in 2010 appears to have deep roots in a policy-based governance model for the Offices of International and National Mission. Both are now directly accountable to the Office of the President of the church body. Previously the Board for Mission Services established its own plans and called workers into the mission field. The BFMS was linked to the President's office through the Board of Directors' budgeting process. This made for a system of checks and balances. In the restructuring, the President has personally authored a Theological Statement for Mission that is thorough and comprehensive. While this

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article has had some quibbles with the signature phrase, WITNESS, MERCY, LIFE TOGETHER, the rest seems to work. The focus on "Lutheran churches plant Lutheran churches" appears in the Balanced Focus Plan of 2007–2010, and so it is nothing new. The phrase's prominence is. Twenty-five years of personal experience facilitating church plants in the Ohio District assumed nothing else was appropriate. The unanswered question is: Why the fuss now?

3. Ablaze!

The transformation of Ablaze! from a worldwide effort giving direction to the efforts of LCMS mission stations (congregations), districts, and international partners in a Gospel, grace-based effort to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in anticipation of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation to a parenthesis in a 2013 convention "Whereas" is troubling. To read in the 2014 Strategic Plan that "restructuring made it impossible to continue the Balanced Focus Plan" is confusing. Yes, International and National Mission are two separate entities. But continuing a convention resolution from 2004, of which the *2007–2010 Balanced Focus Plan* was one installment of a seventeen-year emphasis, is impossible? In the light of the 2010 convention's commending of the work of Ablaze!, a new plan now cancels it. Creative minds are able to find ways to do things. "Impossible" does not seem to be the right word; "choose not to" seems closer to the mark. Choosing not to carry out commended convention-adopted emphases sets a precedent of great concern.

The SWOT analysis of the 2014 Strategic Plan includes the following: "The Synod-wide restructuring of 2010 . . . also resulted in a feeling of constant change, confusion, and lack of vision and plan for the future in the area of mission." What else might be expected? Long established missionaries relating to partner churches are no longer on the scene for whatever reason. Leaders of partner churches had attended both the 2004 and 2007 conventions in a demonstration of support for Ablaze! In 2005, five international case studies of progress in Ablaze!-related efforts were published in a small book, *Reaching 100 Million, International Lutheran Leaders Speak Out.*[16] The copyright is listed as the Lutheran Society of Missiology via Concordia Publishing House. Is it possible that the abandonment of Ablaze! has played a role in the perception of partner churches of constant change and confusion mentioned in the 2014 SWOT analysis above? Faithful efforts are now deemed "impossible" to continue?

4. Who Does Mission?

One subject that continually surfaced in the research for this article might be characterized as: To whom does the mission belong? Was it given just to pastors? Matthew 28 and Mark 16 are sometimes adduced as giving the mission to the apostles, now interpreted as pastors. Or is mission given to the whole church?

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Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 2 are cited. In 2007, the Convention adopted Resolution 1-03, "To Prepare New Study and Increase Emphasis on the Priesthood of All Believers" and assigned the task to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. This article cannot quickly solve the issue, but it can point to a sermon that might make a good place to initiate conversations.

> To whom does the mission belong? Was it given just to pastors?

First, a word about sermons in general. While doctrine may be evident in preaching, the primary focus is to proclaim Jesus as Savior in the face of the sinfulness of humankind. It is a call for the baptized to live out the faith granted by their God. A sermon is always set into a particular time and place. We might even say it is "customized" for a particular group of worshipers by a faithful pastor.

This sermon of C. F. W. Walther is for the 12th Sunday after Trinity in 1842. The text, Mark 7:31–37, depicts Jesus in His ministry passing through the area of the Decapolis, ten small communities near the Sea of Galilee settled by Roman immigrants. Friends brought to Jesus an individual who was deaf and unable to speak clearly. After touching the man's ears and his tongue, Jesus said: *ephphatha,* translated "be opened."[17] The man was healed. The event concludes with Jesus' ordering the man and his friends not to tell anyone what happened. But the more Jesus discouraged them, the more they told the story. It is this act of bringing a friend to Jesus and the subsequent sharing of the Good News of Jesus that is the "hook" for Walther's sermon.

The opening paragraph sets forth a "perfect equality" for all the baptized.

> The church which Christ has established on earth ought to be marked by perfect equality. It should never be set up as an earthly government. In the church, no one should be on top, no one the superior, no one first, no one lord and master. This is one of the fundamental doctrines of all Christendom: whoever is a real member of the true church is equal to all the others. Each has the same baptism, the same faith, the same Christ, the same righteousness, the same hope of eternal life, the same eternal blessing of salvation in Christ Jesus.[18]

In the next paragraph, Walther points out the practice of the world to make much of what he calls external differences: rich, poor, high status, simple, clever, etc. But he insists that it must be different in the church.

> But in the kingdom of God, these things make no difference. Although gifts, office, and accomplishments may differ, yet all members remain the same before God; all have the same power; no one is subjugated to another.

He concludes the introduction with a reminder of his duty as their pastor.

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> It is therefore my duty, dear friends, to teach the right and duty of the spiritual priesthood diligently and often. Allow me to speak now of one aspect in particular—the duty of all Christians to lead other souls to Christ.

The following are some paragraphs that describe the gift of faith that kindles a holy desire to share the news of the Gospel with others, Walther speaks of sharing the Good News as a "sacred duty."

> Dear friends, through faith a Christian receives not only the holy desire to bring souls to Christ, he receives this task as a sacred duty. No one should say, "I am not a pastor, a teacher, or a preacher; let them teach, instruct, comfort, and lead souls to Christ. I wish to remain in my own vocation." No Christian, you are baptized, and through holy baptism you have already been called and anointed to be a priest of God.
>
> Through holy baptism, every Christian has been consecrated, ordained, and installed into the ministry to teach, admonish, and comfort his neighbor. Through holy baptism each Christian has obtained not only the authority, power, and right, but also the high, holy obligation—under the pain of losing the divine grace—of rousing himself to care and to help so that others may be brought to Christ.[19]

By now a listener in 1842 and the reader of this article will be asking about the relationship of the Office of Public Ministry and this sacred duty priesthood of the baptized. Walther puts it in terms of a both/and. The work of the church needed to be accomplished by both pastors and the people of the congregation.

> It is certainly true that not everyone is a pastor or bishop in the Christian congregation. God is a God of order. For order's sake, the congregation calls only one (or a few) to administer publicly—in the name of all—the rites of the spiritual priesthood. But just as in the construction of a church building many workers are needed, not only the foreman who organizes and supervises the whole job, so also in the construction of the invisible church, not only the called ministers of Christ do the work, but rather all Christians must lend a hand.
>
> The Christian church is a great mission-house. Each Christian in it is a missionary, sent out by God into his own circle to convert others to Christ, invite them to the heavenly wedding, call them into the kingdom of God, and enlist soldiers everywhere to the eternal treasure and the army of Christ. God does not give his spiritual gifts only to pastors and teachers. Lay people who do not stand in the public office often have very glorious gifts. . . . Does God give these gifts to the church for nothing? Does not our God clearly show by these gifts that every Christian is a fellow laborer in the vineyard?[20]

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In this sermon we are able to discern the high honor Walther gave to the faithful in the congregation. Every church is a mission house and each Christian is a missionary. Clearly Walther knew pastors as entrusted with the mysteries of God, but he also saw each of the baptized as agents of God bringing Good News "in their place of life, in their vocation." The question, "Who does Mission?," requires similar clarity in these days in the life of the LCMS.

> Every church is a mission house and each Christian is a missionary.

Yes, pastors are called to the Office of Public Ministry to lead mission. But Walther indicates that there is a role for members of congregations who are called by Baptism to do mission. It is not an either/or but a both/and. We are all, together, called into God's mission.

Isn't it time for thorough conversations about this matter to begin in earnest?

The Initiating Question

The question initiating this review was: How well is the new LCMS mission structure working? After five years, it appears that there has been limited progress, perhaps even a step back. Much work is still to be accomplished. Be assured that the initiating question does not assume there was no need for continuous improvement in the old BFMS structure. However, three specific items in the new structure do call for attention.

The first is best described with the mantra of a few years back: Make the main thing the main thing! Is the main thing the reaching out with the Good News of Jesus Christ, or is it building a worldwide Lutheran confessional movement? The first part of that question is not exclusive of the second part. But an exclusive focus on a confessional movement has the effect of working on a secondary, not the main, thing.

Second, relationships matter. Worldwide cross-cultural relationships can be a quagmire. One wrong step can set back working relationships for a generation. The report of the 2014 strategic plan states that some of the mission fields are considering leaving the fold. That has to be a major concern! It is not a sign of healthy cross-cultural relationships.

Finally, one never starts from scratch. The complete overhaul of mission staff (forty-five position changes in four years) is a significant loss of corporate memory and impairs critical relationships across the world. Out with the old, in with the new may appear to be a worthy idea. But the church may have lost more than it gained over the past five years.

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Afterword

If a reader has gotten this far with analysis of God's mission in the LCMS, the questions of "so what?" and "now what?" are hopefully close to the surface. It has long been a core conviction of this writer that each and every congregation is an outpost of God's mission, with the corollary that each of the baptized is called into that mission.

Since the 1980s, a citation, long lost in the details, has captured this conviction: "*The church is the only organization in the world that exists for the sake of the non-member.*" This thought made it into a sermon at the dedication of a congregation's new educational wing, congratulating the mission outpost for preparing such wonderful space for the children of the community. The "deer in the headlights" response revealed that the members thought the addition was just for the children of the congregation. It is significant that one recent Bible version translates the word "repentance" with the phrase "a new way to think and act." So it must be with God's mission.

As I read the new strategy for international work, I would hope that the Synod would make every effort to emphasize that the Synod, its districts, congregations, and every man, woman, and child in the LCMS exists not only to take care of themselves, but to carry the love of Jesus to all, in and outside the United States. It is not only ordained clergy who can "speak the good news." The church in Antioch grew without the knowledge of the Apostles in Jerusalem.

> The LCMS exists not only to take care of themselves, but to carry the love of Jesus to all, in and outside the United States.

Furthermore, seven times in the book of Revelation some working into the text of the four words—tribe, language, people, and nation—call the church and the baptized into the vision of the mission of God. That this combination of words is repeated seven times must have been significant for John's first readers and therefore for each of us as we are called to God's mission in the twenty-first century. To perhaps overstate a point, this is not LCMS mission or even Lutheran mission. It is God's mission entrusted to His Church.

On the one hand, we understand our mission as bringing the Lord's Gospel to people outside of the United States. But the mission leadership of the LCMS should be constantly reminding us that the United States is a "mission field." The large numbers of immigrants and refugees in our culture could be seen as a gift from God. One of our leaders has repeatedly said that, "The only way for the LCMS to increase in membership is for LCMS women to have more babies." Yes, white English-speaking people in our country are not replacing those who have gone to be with the Lord. At the same time, for Hispanic, Asian, and African immigrants, births are

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exceeding deaths. What is the Lord trying to tell us? As someone said, "Heaven is not going to be a room filled with only white English speaking people."

In one of the weeks following Easter this year, pictures taken over fifty years ago were shown to our congregation of a Baptism service in Papua New Guinea. Over five hundred people in white robes processed to the place for Baptisms. The line of people to be baptized walking four abreast, stretching back beyond camera range. Tribe, language, people, nations—it was amazing. It was energizing. Then sadness overwhelmed me as I remembered how many LCMS mission outposts do not report one adult Baptism or adult confirmation in a year; the number was upward of twenty percent in the Ohio District during my years of service.

Yes, this article is about world or international mission. But it also must be about God's mission in every Christian congregation. God's mission cannot be reduced to institutional structures. God's mission must be fueled by Spirit-directed study of the Word of God. God's mission will be filled with prayer for reciprocal, collegial relationships with people near and far with the view that we will be joining others across the world in praise and thanksgiving to the Lamb that was slain, whose life and death has brought us hope.

Endnotes

[1] The full text of the preface is available at Daniel Mattson, "A Preface to Lutheran Missiology," *Missio Apostolica* 15, no.1 (May 2007), 45–52.
[2] Documentation is found in the published Proceedings of the conventions: 2004 p. 120; 2007 p., 57, 111; 2010 p.103; 2013 p. 120.
[3] 2010 Resolution 1-02 first resolved. Adopted first in 2004 1-05A
[4] Proceedings 2013 Convention Resolution 3-08A, p.120.
[5] Georg F. Vicedom, *A Prayer for the World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 147.
[6] Ibid., 148.
[7] Paul Mueller, "International Partnerships: A Reflective Assessment," in this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters*, no. 2 (May 2016), 182–183.
[8] Although this document has not been made available to the public, it has been referenced and sections have been distributed at LCMS meetings. Specific reference to the 2014 plan is given in the February 13–14, 2015 meeting of the Board of Directors. Unofficially the document has been distributed on the web.
[9] Matthew Harrison, "A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century—Draft," September 2013.
[10] *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Third Edition*, revised and edited by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2000), 229–231.
[11] Matthew Harrison, "Lutheran Missions Must Lead to Lutheran Churches," *Logia,* (1998): 29–33.

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[12] Friedrich William Hopf, trans. Rachel Mumme with Matthew C. Harrison, "The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions," *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, (Special Issue April 2015): 6–38.
[13] It was surprising to find Puerto Rico in the list of countries where the LCMS works in mission efforts. Puerto Rico is a US territory with approximately three million US citizens.
[14] Albert B. Collver is the author of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* article without reference that it is a portion of Appendix A of the 2014 strategic plan. From this I believe that Dr. Collver is the author of Appendix A, if not the whole strategic plan.
[15] These principles were embedded in the Handbook of the LCMS as Bylaw 9.01. They do not appear in the 2013 edition of the Handbook, having been overlooked in the reworking of structural matters resulting in separate boards for international and national mission.
[16] Allan R. Buckman, ed., Eugene W. Bunkowske, Series Editor, *Reaching 100 Million* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Society for Missiology & Concordia Publishing House, 2005).
[17] It is worth noting that the annual conference of LCMS churches in ministry with the deaf is called the Ephphatha Conference.
[18] C. F. W. Walther, "Bringing Souls to Christ: Every Christian's Desire and Duty," trans. Bruce Cameron, *Missio Apostolica* 6, no.1 (May 1998) 6–15.
[19] C. F. W. Walther's Sermon for the 12th Sunday after Trinity,1842 in C. F. W. Walther, *Year of Grace*, Donald E. Heck, trans. (La Valle, WI: Donald H. Heck, 1964), 267–274.
[20] Ibid.

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International Partnerships: A Reflective Assessment[1 2]

Paul Mueller

Abstract: Navigating collaborative relationships involved in effective and successful international church partnerships requires knowledge learned through study, as well as experience gained through years of practice. This article attempts to define an appropriate approach to international partnerships and then identify some of the difficulties encountered as those partnerships are developed and maintained.

On August 29, 2006, in Wichita, Kansas, the International Management Team (IMT)[3] met to discuss vision and mission for each of the four regions in which they were working around the world: Africa, Asia, Eurasia, and Latin America. Members were responsible for managing the partnerships and relationships that the LCMS held, was maintaining, or was developing with other national Lutheran church bodies around the globe. Though there were many other items to discuss and work through in those few short days, understanding and developing appropriate partnerships was key to robust and sustainable relationships that supported not only the partners, but also allowed and expected formation of those appropriate partnerships by and with the LCMS.

A speech given by Condoleezza Rice, at that time the sixty-sixth United States Secretary of State, formed the basis for a discussion at that meeting. In working with international partners around the globe, she had found that there were certain postures, expectations, methods, and strategies that she wanted to develop with those partners. In that speech given at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, on January 18, 2006, addressing transformational diplomacy, she said,

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> I would define the objective of transformational diplomacy this way: to work with our many partners around the world, to build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that will respond to the needs of their people and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system. Let me be clear, transformational diplomacy is rooted in partnership, not in paternalism. In doing things with people, not for them, we seek to use America's diplomatic power to help foreign citizens better their own lives and to build their own nations and to transform their own futures. . . .
>
> Now, today, to advance transformational diplomacy all around the world, we in the State Department must again answer a new calling of our time. We must begin to lay the diplomatic foundations to secure a future of freedom for all people. Like the great changes of the past, the new efforts we undertake today will not be completed quickly. Transforming our diplomacy and transforming the State Department is the work of a generation, but it is urgent work that must begin.[4]

Though it might be argued the United States ultimately is a self-serving and self-seeking nation interested in its own welfare and will always determine whether the welfare of another will benefit itself, the words spoken by the Secretary of State sparked a conversation that led the IMT to rethink its posture and approach to LCMS partnerships around the globe. The conversation was dynamic and robust. The IMT was intently interested in understanding how partnerships were not only understood by us, but how they were interpreted by the other partners around the globe.

And so, with prayer and determination, the IMT took on the task of rewriting Condoleezza Rice's statement. It took significant word-smithing and a substantially different starting point and end goal than of those of the United States State Department.

It required from the very beginning that meaning for any partnership begins and ends with the grace shared by God the Creator through Jesus Christ and moved into the world through the sending of His Holy Spirit, and today continues to be sent through the church, His *ecclesia*. It develops so that not only Christians, but all people hear the Good News found in the Savior of the world. It means that partnerships are about God's mission and not a foreign power interested in its own welfare.

What developed was a paragraph that tried to succinctly describe a partnership built on Christian respect and mutual admiration in Christ. At the end of the two days, the IMT expressed its understanding of transformational mission as follows:

> We would define the objective of transformational mission work this way: To work with our many Lutheran friends around the world in a posture of partnership, in order to build and sustain missional, well-developed, and well-managed national churches[5] (including our own LCMS, for the

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> conversation goes both ways) that will respond to the needs of people (spiritual and physical), while being held accountable for efforts in the international Lutheran movement. Succinctly said, 'Shared Risk + Shared Responsibility = Shared Rewards.' Transformational mission work is rooted in partnership, not paternalism, in doing things with other people, not for them, and often being directed rather than directing. For that goal, we offer, when requested, LCMS resources and power to help our national partner churches around the world increase their own capacity and transform their own future and anxiously and humbly covet the same for ourselves from our partners. To advance transformational mission work all around the world, we in the LCMS must rise to answer a new historic calling and be transformed as well. We must begin to lay new foundations to secure a strong and viable and vital future for world-wide Lutheranism. Like the great changes made to accomplish LCMS efforts in the past, new efforts we undertake today will not be completed tomorrow. Transforming the LCMS is a work of a generation. But it is urgent work that cannot be deferred. (Paraphrased from Condoleezza Rice, January 18, 2006).

Though the definition developed may not capture all that is needed or required, it does establish a solid foundation to begin the conversation and practice of partnership. Based on this definition, the IMT then considered the partnerships that had developed and were being developed around the globe. Though numerous items related to partnerships were identified, the following more significant issues emerged that influence excellent and robust partnerships.

"Passing the Baton" Phenomenon

Many have used the phrase, "passing the baton,"[6] to describe next steps in the partnership process with national churches. In the case of the historic missionary activity of the LCMS, missionaries worked long and hard to help establish a national church. They served in positions of authority and power. They planted local congregations and trained the local leaders. They helped build hospitals, clinics, schools, church buildings, and leadership training centers. They wrote grants to fund projects to reach the local community. They supplied funds for micro-enterprises, for erecting latrines, for purchasing school books and materials, to send leaders to schools, Bible colleges, and seminaries. LCMS missionaries have given their hearts and lives to help build the capacities of the emerging national churches.

LCMS missionaries have given their hearts and lives to help build the capacities of the emerging national churches.

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As a national church body grew in numbers and leadership capacity, the hope and prayer was that someday, the national church and its leadership would assume the responsibility of managing their own church. Missionaries would eventually fade into the woodwork, leaving behind a solid foundation on which the national church would continue to build and grow. There would be some overlap, e.g., leaving behind some missionaries to serve as consultants or supporters, continuing conversations how each might continue to work together to advance God's mission in that place. The intent was never to abandon the partners. But the goal was to pass the baton of leadership and ownership to the national church and its own leadership.

What has in fact happened in many places returned a different outcome: a dependent national church unable to carry that baton. Passing the baton to the national church is less easy when the baton built developed Western models and structures with assumed definitions and expectations. Unintentionally, a Western church model was developed, and often the baton passed to the national church was a rather different baton than that imagined by the national church.

Passing the baton to the national church is less easy when the baton built developed Western models and structures with assumed definitions and expectations.

The resources needed to support essentially Western rather than indigenous models were often not available. Seminaries needing significant amounts of income for the daily running and management of the plant and the support of staff and professors no longer had that full support; or, if they did at the beginning, support was diminished on a sliding scale over a set number of years. Buildings that required repair and upkeep simply outpaced the capacity of the national church's resources. Equipment repair and management skills that were the responsibility of the missionaries now fell to the national leaders.

Those leaders who were trained in Western colleges and seminaries with a worldview very different from the local context and who were now considered the obvious recipients of the roles missionaries held brought back Western ideas of leadership and authority that often clashed with the local understanding of leadership. Seminarians who had learned a Western, systematic approach to the Scriptures now began to apply that approach in ways that made sense to the missionary or seminary professor and student, but missed the mark when local people tried to connect the Scriptural insight with local questions and life styles.

The baton, which once looked so right and effective and successful, became a burden placed on the national leadership.

This is not to say that the baton of the past has been unsuccessful. Many national churches are now carrying the baton and moving forward with the capacity to carry

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on a robust ministry. But there are also those struggling to run with the baton handed them.

If a church continues to insist on a colonialist approach in which outsiders make decisions *for* national churches about priorities, it is imperative they understand the difficult situation they are creating when the responsibility for managing and running the work is turned over to the national church. Continuing a flow of resources from the West to the rest is simply not possible. Resources are not endless. Church professionals trained in and by the West may return to their home churches as marginalized leaders. Transplanted institutions and governance structures are at odds with local contextual structures. Buildings and land acquisition may hinder the original purpose of the missionaries.

Though unintended, a colonial posture that demands and commands a Western defined level of capacity from the national church in order to carry the baton forward actually creates less than equal partners and keeps the national church body in a lap dog posture at the mercy of the original owner.

The "Money Police" Problem

Finances have and will continue to raise significant issues when appropriate partnerships are being developed. In the past, support for the partner church came in various ways. Initially, dollars flowed into a country and often into the hands of a local Christian who had made contact in some way with generous and caring people in the West. An honest relationship developed between a person of God in a country who deeply desired people to meet Jesus Christ in his village, town, community, or country.

Individuals, a local congregation, or a church group in the West raised funds, shared those funds with the local individual and/or ministry, and intended and tried to visit the ministry on site. At times, this relationship developed into an opportunity for the Western church to send missionaries—short term and long term as well as career people—who served as church planters, teachers, builders, medical staff, and support staff. Goods were then purchased by the missionaries—plank, tin roofs, cement, books, school supplies, brick and mortar. And, to be sure, money followed for projects or tuition or rent or salaries.

There are still individuals in various parts of the world who connect directly with a congregation, a group, or even an individual, and who then receive support. Of course, missionaries are still being sent. That has not changed. Most national churches around the globe, if asked, would readily receive people to support the ministry of the national church; and missionaries continue to support projects they consider valuable and helpful.

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Noticing a need in a particular ministry, missionaries on the ground (either on their own or in consultation with national congregations or the national church) developed these projects, sent the request to the church, and received the funds to move the project forward. The dollars generally flowed to the missionary, who would manage the project while using local skilled people and resources.

As the national church matured, however, more and more responsibility was handed over to them. They were expected to imagine projects, develop the proposals, and, if funded, find local people and resources to complete the project. As the project moved forward, the missionary or church would release supporting funds. The release of funds was always tied to good project reports or receipts that had been accumulated and submitted. Very infrequently would funds in total be released to the local congregations or the national church before the project began or before receipts or invoices were submitted.

As a result, missionaries maintained their control over the funds, even though the project was approved by the church, the project was part of the national church's ministry vision, and the local church was more than capable of managing the project and funds. Often, national church leadership was not trusted, or its ability to manage a project and its funding was questioned. Missionaries began to be seen as the money police.

This practice continues today and fuels the perception by national churches that their leadership is not trusted or lacks capacity.

Funds, Power, and Partnerships

Though the practice has been disparaged and criticized for decades, the model still continues: tying resources and decision-making power to partnerships. The old model looks something like this: A conversation begins between an established national church and another partner church. There is a request for support—either funds or people—for the local ministry to move forward. Once the request is clearly understood, the church develops a proposal for implementation. It might look something like this:

> The Mission Board of the American Church prayerfully wishes to establish a formal strategic partnership with the Seminary of the African Church in order mutually to share the responsibility to strengthen the mission identity of the African Church.
>
> In order to accomplish this partnership, the following goals have been drafted:
>
> 1) To facilitate close cooperation between the partner seminaries to strengthen the mission of the Church in Africa with a sound Scriptural identity.

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2) To strengthen the theological voice mutually between the partner seminaries.
3) To strengthen the academic educational standard making the African Seminary a premier seminary in Africa.
4) To develop a more efficient and accountable system for managing and reporting on all American Church support and the handling of American visitors to Africa.
5) To support the African Seminary's operational budget to the extent feasible until it becomes self-sufficient.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

American Church Responsibilities:

1) To facilitate a closer partnership between the seminaries of the two churches.
2) To help support theological educators as visiting faculty to the African Seminary.
3) To build the capacity of the African Seminary faculty through ongoing theological education.
4) To provide an operational subsidy of $60,000 US or above as needed and available per fiscal year for the African seminary until it becomes self-sufficient.

African Church Responsibilities:

1) To provide satisfactory and timely reports to the American Church's Mission Board and accept directions for improvement.
2) To consult the American Church's Mission Director on matters concerning any visiting faculty, lecturers, teachers, presenters, or professors coming from the American Church.
3) To develop courses pertaining to the Scriptural teaching related to worship and doctrine in consultation with the American Church's theological scholars under the guidance of the Mission Board.

PARTNERSHIP RELATIONS

1) The African Seminary President shall share with the Mission Board Director issues regarding non-theological matters.
2) The African Seminary President shall share with the Mission Board Director of Theological Education issues regarding theological matters.
3) The aforementioned Directors shall consult with and report to the African Church President and the American Church's Director of Church Relations as appropriate.

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4) Regarding visiting instructors, the African Seminary President shall consult either of the aforementioned Directors before allowing an instructor to visit.

DURATION AND IMPLEMENTATION: This agreement covers a period of three years, after which it may be extended by written agreement.

As one reads this partnership agreement with a set of lenses formed by the IMT's definition of partnership, glaring contradictions are evident. The most obvious contradiction is tying significant funds to the activity of the national church. In addition, it is also evident that the partnership with the seminary is tied to an American expectation of proper and appropriate reports and authority channels, appropriate oversight of the development of courses, and appropriate individuals approved by the American Church regarding who would be allowed to teach at the seminary.

Regarding the IMT's definition of partnership and the approach taken to develop those partnerships, it is noticeable that the IMT's definition of partnership does not try to define a prospective national church's capacity by a list of metrics developed by the Western church. In addition, the definition does not intend to assess a national church's capacity with a SWOT analysis, subsequently assigning a number from one to a hundred, indicating their ability to partner appropriately with the Western church.

Appropriate partnerships do not require adherence to rules and regulations developed by another partner. That is not a partnership. It is a contractual relationship built on cultural expectations and power by one party over another.

And though this example may seem to be "over the top," it is shared in this article from a real-life example taken from a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) sent to a national church in the last three years. Appropriate partnerships do not require adherence to rules and regulations developed by another partner. That is not a partnership. It is a contractual relationship built on cultural expectations and power by one party over another.

Asking for Support without Fear

Let one more issue suffice. National churches often don't voice their real needs or vision in partnership conversations because they are afraid that if they voice their vision other partners around the table may have another vision and would therefore not support the partner's vision with resources and funds.

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Though this may not be a worldwide phenomenon, when wealthy partners—partners with resources, people, money—come to the table with other less wealthy partners, the collaborative conversation is already weighted toward the wealthy partners. This is often experienced in the following way:

1) A visiting mission team interested in investing significant time and energy in a partnership with a national church visits and meets with the leadership of the national church.
2) The visiting mission team asks the right questions: How can we help? What do you need? What do you desire? They are searching for answers that will move forward the vision of the national church.
3) The response from the national church is often couched in the following language: What gifts (people, resources, money, skills, ideas, expertise) do you bring to bear on this place? What are you able to do?
4) The visiting mission team then lists a number of skills, resources, ideas, suggestions, and ministries that they could support or provide.
5) The national church suggests and points out that one or two of the many things on the list is exactly what would move their mission vision forward.
6) The visiting mission team is excited that they will be able to support that important vision of the national church.

A quick read of this process does not seem to raise any red flags. The visiting team asked for suggestions. The national church responded with answers that matched the resources available. But a closer reading reveals that the national church did not indicate its vision. They simply defined their vision by identifying items on the resource list of the visiting mission team that they would appreciate. The items may, of course, be exactly what are needed by the national church. But rather than the national church sharing its vision and finding the visiting mission team unable or unwilling to fulfill its request, it would rather receive whatever help a visiting mission team might offer and take advantage of any investment into its ministry in whatever fashion that the visiting mission team is able to supply.

It seems to the visiting mission team as if the conversation between the two partners is real and collaborative, both sharing their vision and passion and finding a way to connect to one another. But in reality, it is the weaker partner simply trying to find a way to keep the visiting mission team interested in supporting the local ministry. Many national churches are afraid that their real vision may not connect with the resources standing right in front of them, or that the visiting mission team finds the national church vision uninspiring and does not feel compelled to invest in that vision.

Some national churches would rather have visiting mission teams invest in whatever manner they choose rather than lose the investment opportunity. This has sometimes resulted in buildings erected but never used, ministries started but never completed, land purchased but the vision for that land never accomplished.

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This scenario is not just related to visiting mission teams from congregations or judicatories. While I served as Regional Director—Africa, LCMS WM, project proposals from national churches and emerging partner churches arrived on my desk each year. Often, a national church would send in six or more proposals requesting project funding from $500 to hundreds of thousands of dollars. And then, by virtue of past experience and protocol, those multiple requests forced us to decide not only which projects from among all the national churches LCMS WM might support (after all, resources are limited), but also forced LCMS WM to determine which projects were priorities for each individual national church as evaluated by LCMS WM.

In further conversations with each of them, LCMS WM clearly indicated that the funds available were limited and subsequently asked for project proposals ranging between certain dollar amounts (depending upon the funds available any given fiscal year). Secondly, LCMS WM communicated to the national churches that, although LCMS WM funded a variety of ministry projects, there were certain projects it could not consider. Finally, and probably most importantly, it communicated that the national churches were each to prioritize their project proposals. LCMS WM would begin its deliberations with the highest prioritized proposal submitted from each national church. It was clearly explained that, regardless of the perspective of LCMS WM on any proposal, it would still fund a national church's vision and priorities as it was able.

Very few national churches believed that LCMS WM would approach the assessment of project proposals with that posture. On the basis of past experience with a host of mission funders, they felt that unless their vision matched LCMS WM's vision for them, they would receive no project funding. As a result, the partners would work hard to determine which projects would find better reception in LCMS WM deliberations and submit those particular types of projects. It took several budget years before national churches believed the rhetoric: LCMS WM funds the priorities of national churches. It began to break down dependency postures and system manipulation.

Partnerships need to be built on trust and mutual admiration for one another, with each partner bringing to the table the resources, gifts, skills, and wisdom that they are honestly able to supply; and whatever those assets are, they are enough. When partnership conversations begin, both sides need to be willing to share their vision—the visiting mission team, judicatories, or even, as with

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LCMS WM, large national churches, and the national church with its skills and resources, its genuine vision and hopes and desires.

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this paper, the insights shared come from being in the mix, with "boots on the ground," and instigating those courageous conversations so necessary to develop the important partnerships churches need to move God's kingdom forward. Please allow me to end with one more actual story which highlights the learning curve still evident as partnerships begin to grow and mature.

As I began my work as Regional Director—Africa LCMS WM in 2005, one of the items laid on my desk was a partnership agreement being developed titled, "Guiding Principles for the Working Agreement between the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) World Mission and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)." Less than three pages long and in process since 1996, the goal was to complete the agreement as soon as possible.

One of my first African meetings was with the President of the EECMY in March 2006 to discuss the document. We spent several hours working through the document, revising, changing phrases, trying to develop appropriate language that was satisfactory to both sides. At the end of the day, we still had work to do and we both indicated that we would plan another meeting to address the formal partnership. Over the next two years, we met a number of times, with little if any progress.

One day, I received an e-mail inviting LCMS WM to the EECMY's annual partnership gathering, scheduled for January 2008. I returned to Ethiopia for the 29th annual partners meeting, the "Committee of Mutual Christian Responsibility." The partners were from all over the globe, mostly Europe and North America. They included LWF, PCUSA, RCA, NLM, and many others—a total of 40–45 partners with whom the EECMY had a formal relationship/partnership. And each of them had signed a partnership agreement Memorandum of Understanding, written by the EECMY.

It was a new discovery. The EECMY had developed their own agreements. I took copies and asked LCMS WM in St. Louis to look at them and determine if they could serve as the platform for partnership with the EECMY rather than have LCMS WM and the EECMY try to draft and write a separate document. Except for a few items, LCMS WM responded that the documents could be the platform for a signed, official partnership.

Another partnership meeting took place in April 2008, four months after the annual meeting. I indicated that I had discovered and read the EECMY partnership agreements already developed. The president informed me that the "Standard

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Partnership Agreement" was for all partners and the EECMY even allowed room for discussion if there was any article that was not clear or needed some modification.

With that as the backdrop to the meeting, and with the president at the table with both the LCMS WM MOU that had been in draft form for years and the EECMY's own partnership documents in front of him, he asked me, "which one should we use—the MOU being drafted between WM and the EECMY or the EECMY's own document?" I told him to rip up the LCMS WM MOU and to work with the EECMY's document.

Within one hour, the agreement was signed. After another two hours, a more concise partnership agreement the EECMY used, the "Specific Agreement," was being discussed. Once LCMS WM agreed to allow the EECMY to determine what agreements were appropriate to use for official partnership with their church, the meeting moved along quickly. After ten-plus years of conversation and at least four–five years of working with a three-page draft document that LCMS WM initiated with a posture clearly indicating to the EECMY who was in authority, it took only four months (from the discovery of the EECMY documents in January until the April meeting) to agree to move forward to sign a working agreement between the EECMY and LCMS WM. The simple equation shared earlier in the IMT's partnership definition captures this well: Shared Risk + Shared Responsibility = Shared Rewards. And each partner that shares brings the capacity it has and the wisdom it can offer, and it is enough. Partnerships.Are.Not.One.Way.

Shared Risk +
Shared Responsibility =
Shared Rewards.

Some Personal Reflections as a Postscript

Though it has been several years since I have served in an international position, I have not been absent from the conversation nor from observing the present practices as international partnerships move forward. Though it is only my humble opinion, I believe that the present direction being forged in partnership development and management has been to return to older practices, models, approaches, and postures rather than moving in the direction as described in the definition shared in this paper.

I have observed a dependency model being used as an approach to strengthening partnerships or beginning them. In some instances, money has been closely tied to partnerships agreements. Explicit and implicit control has been connected to instructors and professors who teach in institutions and seminaries. National churches have been instructed to consult the LCMS on matters concerning any visiting faculty, lecturers, teachers, presenters, or professors coming from the West. Outside influence has been applied to national churches as they choose their own

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leaders to instruct at their own institutions. Partners are rated according to their abilities and capacities to be effective partners based on criteria defined and delineated by the Western church. The three-self formula that allows for many and varied ways for national churches to define their own capacity as sustainable, governing, and propagating bodies has been replaced with Western-defined criteria with little input from the national churches themselves.

I have noticed that rather than partnering and advocating for and coming alongside of our international friends, involvement in litigation and court cases has become more common. The present trend seems to be directive rather than partnership, and that done even with litigation. That partnerships include support, advice, conversation, and dialogue, even when it needs to be courageous, should be expected. But outside partners should not choose which side to support in a national church's struggles and conversations. An organization may choose not to partner with another organization, but litigation brought or supported by an outside voice intending to influence the decisions of a national church should never be used. In my opinion, those decisions are strictly and only the responsibility of the national church in that place.

I have also observed people being removed from mission leadership roles. Since 2010, nearly fifty international missionaries and twenty individuals from the home office with proven abilities, cross-cultural competencies, and hundreds of years of service have resigned, been removed, or been repositioned. Though the reasons for these remarkable changes are not all known, the reality is that these changes have occurred in the recent past and a significant number of years of experience in mission have been lost in the international missionary movement.

Since WWII, LCMS missionary efforts have intentionally built upon the work of previous generations to establish indigenous churches that themselves produce missionaries, resulting in a powerful global network of Lutheran church bodies and new mission efforts. That continuity of mission, a distinguishing hallmark of LCMS missionary efforts for nearly seven decades, is now being severed, and the chain of cumulative mission knowledge and experience broken.

In addition, in numerous instances these missionaries have been replaced with others who do not always bring those same gifts and experiences. In my opinion, individuals have been placed into significant leadership positions in international contexts or in roles explicitly connected to international partnerships who bring little significant mission theory or practice or proven ability to competently navigate the difficult waters of cross-cultural ministry. Mission theory accompanied by extended experience is important, for without them, one is doomed to repeat what appears to be a good idea, when, in reality, experience indicates that it is not. Without good theory coupled with extended experience, one is reduced to one's own wisdom and worldview yet untested by reality.

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Finally, limitations have been placed upon those who are sent into international contexts where church planting or theological education is the main focus, namely, ordination and the M.Div. degree, effectively eliminating many who could serve faithfully and successfully. These changes affect the capacity of the Western church to partner appropriately and, finally, successfully.

> Without good theory coupled with extended experience, one is reduced to one's own wisdom and worldview yet untested by reality.

These are simply my thoughts, reflections, and perspectives. Though some might agree, others will disagree, which makes for a wonderful, robust, and transparent conversation as the church, the people of God, moves together into the world to reach those who still live without Him and the gift of grace so freely offered. May that always be the goal. To His glory alone.

Endnotes

[1] A previous version of this article appeared as "Transformational Mission Work—A Definition" in *Missio Apostolica* 22, no. 2 (Nov. 2014). Paul Mueller revised and expanded the article.

[2] Though this paper is interested in sharing an appropriate approach to developing partnerships with national churches throughout the world, it does so from an experiential perspective. The issues raised in this paper have been seen throughout the world. They are not centered in one place or with any particular type of national church. And though the few issues noted in this paper are important, it is surely not an exhaustive list. The intent is to raise awareness of what might begin to constitute an appropriate approach to developing those partnerships and, subsequently, what to watch for as those partnerships move forward. Finally, though this paper reports the issues from a "boots on the ground" perspective, the issues have not been processed in a vacuum. Years of study and research have helped to shape this response.

[3] The makeup of the IMT included the four Regional Directors for Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod World Mission (LCMS WM) along with the Associate Executive Director for International Mission.

[4] From a speech given by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, on January 18, 2006. The entire speech may be found at http://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/59306.htm.

[5] In this document, the word "church" refers to a sending church, a church normally from the West. The words "national church" refer to the local church in a different place, in another country, often referred to as a receiving church.

[6] This phrase used in mission circles was popularized in a book entitled, *Passing the Baton*, by Tom A. Steffen (Ingram Publishing, 1997).

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Keeping Our Balance in Our Own Context: Keeping the Cross in Cross-cultural and Taking the Con Out of Contextualization

Andrew Bartelt

Abstract: The dialectic between theology and culture and its subtopic "contextualization" provide a case study that shows how Lutheran theology properly holds theses in a "both/and" tension, as well as identifies antitheses that need to be called out as aberrant theology and practice.

Orthodox theology is about making distinctions, and mission is about contextualization. As we turn the corner toward our next convention of the Synod, the need for clear distinctions and honest discussion about matters that both unite and divide us is urgent. Having recently participated in now the fifth Multiethnic Symposium at Concordia Seminary,[1] we have again engaged the important issues of theology and culture as they both complement one another—and stand in dialectic tension.

Lutheran theology can handle tension; it is one of our hallmarks. We also make distinctions. Both are needed on a daily basis and as we do our best—and sometimes our worst—to "walk together" through another convention season. The first part of this essay speaks to our own LCMS context into which our Lord's confession and mission is contextualized and inculturated. Then we turn attention to some basic issues of contextualization as a critical issue in the mission of our Lord that moves us outside of our more parochial contexts.

As Confessional Lutherans, we understand both thesis and antithesis. Our Confessions are clear to point out not only what we believe, teach, and confess but also what we reject and condemn. But we have to be careful that this duality and polarity does not, in fact, further divide what we actually do believe, teach, and confess. On the other hand, what we claim to believe should not, in fact, be itself tainted or confused with what we should also reject.

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The "Both/And" of Lutheran Theology

There are many issues about which we must maintain an "either/or" between thesis and antithesis, where we are "for" this but "against" that. But there are also many issues about which the proper Lutheran distinction is not an "either/or" but a "both/and." Inherent in our theology is the ability to distinguish and yet hold key motifs as necessary but complementary. The tension between doctrine and mission is an example: we are "for" both of these. These should present agreement among us all, and a list would touch on key *loci* within our Confessional agreement.

A basic list might include the following:

Law / Gospel
bread and wine / body and blood
why some? / why not others?
Jesus as true God / Jesus as true man
simul justus / *simul peccator*
Office of the Public Ministry / Priesthood of the Baptized
righteousness as vertical (*coram deo*) / righteousness as horizontal (*coram hominibus*)
already / not yet
formal principle / material principle
faith / reason
corporate / personal
"catholic" and ecumenical / confessional and doctrinal

What can happen is that our sense of thesis and antithesis that is appropriate for the "either/or" distinctions can carry over into our discussions over the "both/and." In fact, I would suggest that a lot of our internal tension and even disunity occurs because of a confusion of these two categories, often based on misunderstandings and characterizations, fostered by an inability or even unwillingness seriously to engage the "other side." Let us try out a few more pairs, about which we would all agree, but about which we might sense some tendencies toward "leaning" toward one side and creating an imbalance:

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doctrine / mission
clarity and purity of doctrine / ambiguity and messiness of mission contexts
theology ("from above") / social sciences ("from below")
attention to contextualization and culture / God's Word as the only universal truth

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Here are areas where we might privilege one or the other, and thus where we need to work harder to keep our balance, engaging both sides of the proverbial aisle. But this can get tricky and easily out of balance, like the dryer spinning with a lumpy load. A system of checks and balances is a good thing.

In physics, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, but in the LCMS, for every action there is all too often an equal and *slightly greater* reaction, adding a "plus one" that creates an imbalance.[2] Thus, for example, some experimentation in worship styles causes a fearful reaction that we are losing our theology of grace-oriented, sacramental worship, grounded in God's divine service *pro nobis*. And instead of discussing these tensions, we begin a process of overreactions on both sides that can lead to non-Lutheran worship styles on the one hand, and to a reduction and restriction to a tightly controlled and limited set of rigidly prescribed forms on the other.[3] As another example, we sense a growing functionalist view of the Office of the Public Ministry, even a sense of "lay ministry" as "laity serving in the Pastoral Office" (not as the "ministry of the laity"), and we overreact into a loss of the Waltherian "both/and," extolling the views of Loehe and even flirting with the views of Grabau.[4]

Or we rightly resist subsuming theology to sociology, properly prioritizing our biblical and doctrinal "text" to any cultural context, but then we resist and problematize *any ministerial use* of the social sciences.[5] Or instead of engaging the complexities of culture and contextualization, we might oversimplify these realities and retreat into what might seem quite obviously to be "the one culture of God's church" and forget that it, too, is inculturated and contextualized into forms that can divide as well as unite. While working to keep the "cross in cross-cultural," we can easily fall prey to the "con" in contextualization, as though we need to be "against" any suggestion that the pure truth of God's Word that transcends any and all culture can be—and will be—contextualized by human culture and history.

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Keeping the Proper Tensions

In fact, Lutheran theology is not simply bipolar. It is better characterized by balance between polar tensions, like the clothesline held taught. Release the tension, and the line goes limp. Overextend the tension, and the line breaks. Our theological

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distinctions are not simply "thesis::antithesis," but rather begin with those "both/and" tensions that are really "thesis::thesis." But there are also antitheses, the "either/or" distinctions, and these exist on *both* sides. And it is usually in these extremes where the true mischief can be found. The better model is thus—*antithesis*::**thesis::thesis**::*antithesis.*

Might this form something of a grid or map for our church, including "Synod in convention"? If the "center aisle" divides the two sides of the house, we need to remember that there is a "thesis" position on each side that needs to be respected by the other. But there is also an "antithesis" position on each side. Far too often it is the issues on the margins that tend to define that which divides us—and frankly should divide us, as there are aberrant issues of substance and practice on both sides of the aisle that need to be identified and rejected. Better than offering fuel for those on the other side who would critique such extreme attitudes and actions, these "side aisles" are better policed from those on their own respective sides of the center aisle.

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Here are some more polarities, but with a bit of that "overreaction" and "plus one" problem that might benefit from some tempering:

> We must retain our tradition and restore historic worship practices as the only way that Lutherans should worship. / We must be innovative in connecting to everyday people, even re-writing the Creeds so people can understand them better.
>
> The pastor is a leader, motivator, using social and anthropological skills to lead (manipulate?) his congregation to agree to his pastoral "vision." / The pastor must be as objective as possible, even downright boring, to assure that faith is worked solely by Holy Spirit and that God's people do not engage in sociologically driven church growth.
>
> The Word of God is transcultural and universal within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church that transcends space and time; thus, issues of culture must be superseded by what we claim to be the pure "divine culture" of liturgy. / The Word of God is always "inculturated" and can make no claim to universal truth; culture will always cause theology to be adjusted and relativized.
>
> We must be loving and tolerant, even if anything goes, and the Eighth Commandment can be trumped by concern for mission. / We must be

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> suspicious and intolerant, and the Eighth Commandment can be trumped by concern for pure doctrine.
>
> We will live and die by the need for the Means of Grace, even by laity in pastoral roles. / We will live and die by AC XIV because no Word and Sacrament ministry can happen unless one is *rite vocatus*.
>
> We lie awake at night, concerned that people are going to hell. / We lie awake at night concerned that impurities in doctrine and practice will destroy faith and threaten salvation. (And for those of us who care deeply about both, well, we just don't get much sleep!)
>
> We think the "other side" is too far to the edge and should not be tolerated in the church of God, or at least as "Confessional Lutherans." / We think the "other side" is too far to the edge and should not be tolerated in the church of God, or at least as "Confessional Lutherans."

While intentionally pushing toward hyperbole here, the point is that we can easily slip from the "both/and" of thesis::thesis, into the "either/or" of our antithetical boundaries. Lutheran theology is especially equipped to deal with such tensions. We need to be in honest dialog with one another as we address both long-standing and new tensions, lest they divide us. The problem with a "coalition of the willing" is that it often fails to hear (or even to listen to) those who may actually be raising legitimate concerns. Matters of the Word of God are not simply decided by a majority vote, but by consensus around the study of the Word itself, seeking unity in that text despite our differing contexts.

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And so, in the Synod, we have election results by the slimmest of margins, with those elected by one side not very interested in serious engagement with the other and often publicly opposed by them. The two-party system is now firmly in place, and the ideological polarization mimics a similar gridlock on the national political scene. Whoever is in power is in correction mode from the abuses or neglect of the previous decade or so, losing continuity as though nothing good happened in the recent past.[6]

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Moving specifically into the area of missions, the following pairs of assertions might be considered, all of which nearly quote or paraphrase various voices within the LCMS.

> Mission is accomplished only by the Means of Grace. The role of the church is the administration of the Means of Grace. Like a light on a hill, we gather the people of God around the presence of God, in His holy and historic liturgy, universal in space and in time as God's inerrant "text." Let those who are seekers come in here.
>
> Mission is accomplished only by the Means of Grace. The role of the church is the administration of the Means of Grace. As Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, so we must enter into the messiness of lives, identifying with people where they are in all their felt needs and in ways that will connect and communicate to their contextual expressions of faith.
>
> __________
>
> Salvation is accomplished only by the Means of Grace. The role of the church is the administration of the Means of Grace. The church does mission. The first thing we need to do as a mission planting strategy is to establish proper Lutheran worship through the office of pastoral ministry among a community of Lutherans, gathered around Word and Sacrament. Visitors are welcome but must be instructed in our worship, familiar to us if not to them. They must be fully catechized in all points of doctrine to make a confession of faith in order to join our communion fellowship.
>
> Salvation is accomplished only by the Means of Grace. The role of the church is the administration of the Means of Grace. But mission creates the church. So don't have your first worship service too soon or be dependent on a called and ordained pastor. Worship is for the insiders, and we need to reach out to outsiders. A small worshiping community will not attract outsiders. Develop a strategy to build community and relationships. Do not hold a worship service until 9–12 months after establishing a beachhead presence in the community.
>
> __________
>
> Mission strategy must be driven by meeting people in their context, identifying their manifestations of spiritual need. We need to connect people to Jesus. So we must understand American culture. The missional impact of much of American Evangelicalism is that it identifies spiritual expressions from within the context of American culture. We need to learn something here. Worship must enter into American culture.

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> Mission strategy must be driven by a proper and pure understanding of the Triune God, whose salvation for all nations was accomplished in Jesus the Christ. Humanity must be drawn into the truth of God, expressed by the orthodox faith throughout history. So we need to subsume any contemporary context into the larger story of God's holy history, manifest in that "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" and holy liturgy that transcends space and time. Worship must take us out of American culture.

So how do we restore and keep our balance, affirming that which should not divide us, even within the proper tensions of our "both/and" and, at the same time, dealing with what should properly distinguish us from aberrant theology and practice?[7] I do not have a long list of answers, but some obvious practical solutions would start with respecting others and actually listening to their concerns, beyond what are often surface or "presenting" issues.[8] A second is a greater intentionality for dealing with the problems on the margins *from those on the same side of the aisle.* Too often we are far more interested in dealing with the aberrant issues on the other side of the aisle and ignore the "beam" that is in our own margin. Our political process doesn't help, since such a critique and even correction may well need to be applied to those who are the basis of support for election and re-election. But until we can honestly address both the "'pros" of the other side and the "cons" of our own side, we will continue to swing back and forth, with the direction of Synod set by ideological agendas. And so a third obvious way forward is the cross, and its drawing us into the humility before God and one another in our own "cross-cultural" ways of being Synod together. As much as we need to cross cultures outside our church, we also need to cross our own cultures within it. And always, in every way, the unity is found in keeping the cross central in our "cross-cultural" awareness!

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Mission and Contextualization: Keeping the Cross Central as the Mission Goes Out

Meanwhile, the mission of our Lord is exploding before us, with all the challenges and joy and messiness and reorientation that comes with engaging on the edges *outside* the church; and it offers extraordinary opportunities for cross-cultural, multicultural, and inter-cultural encounters, not just internationally but also in our own neighborhoods all over America, declared a mission field already in 1992. And

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so we have renewed debate—and one might hope healthy dialog—regarding "contextualization." This is a subset of a much greater mission conversation, engaging now an additional Lutheran journal.[9] Many of the missionaries who have left the mission field in recent years have brought a wealth of experience from global contexts into our own North American contexts and thus into our domestic conversations as well. How will we address the current issues with dialog, not diatribe, and from both sides of the aisle, with their differing but valuable and helpful perspectives and with their own sets of "pros and cons" that need to be heard and understood?

So let us steer back to the actual goal: not just keeping our balance, but doing so for the sake of the mission of Christ. We began with a reference to the Multiethnic Symposium this past January. Its theme sought to address the related tension of unity and diversity, between the unity of faith and confession as one Body in Christ and the diversity that represents the gifts of God—given into the real lives of real people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue. Drawing on the motifs of community and hope that have framed every previous Multiethnic Symposium, we listened to the various "communities of hope" that find unity in the "one community in Christ." The plural "communities" is intentional and raises the question of how biblical and Confessional Lutheran theology is inculturated and expressed within different communities, each in—and from—its own cultural context.

In a church body that is 95 percent Anglo, the question of "contextualization" is easily complicated and even confused by the simple fact that the "context" of being Lutheran, more specifically an LCMS Lutheran, can become that of the dominant culture into which other cultures need to be contextualized.[10] In fact, we, too, have our own context that must be recognized, lest the mission of our Lord across cultural boundaries be hindered by the assumption that contextualization is really an invitation for others to enter into our context. A key factor to "unity in diversity" is, in fact, a respect for appropriate diversity. This can too easily become a "con," both in the sense of being fearful and thus "against" any understanding of contextualizing the Word of God into *other* contexts not our own, but also in the sense of deceiving ourselves that our own context is self-evidently normative.

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Of course, this cuts both ways. We are all both "cultural" and "cross-cultural" in virtually every dimension of socialization. Anglos are not the only ones who have to cross cultural boundaries; but, as the dominant culture of our church body, Anglos need to take extra effort and care that what we are communicating as the truth and

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message of God's Word is, in fact, God's Word and not our own culturally appropriate way of articulating and confessing and practicing it. To be sure, we have come to know and articulate God's truth and to put it into practice in ways that are "contextualized" into our historical and cultural context. But that context is not the content, and Christ's mission to all nations assumes that the same Word of God can and will be contextualized in different ways in different cultural contexts. This is not to relativize the Word of God but actually to understand that it will be expressed in culturally appropriate ways, just as it is in our culture, however we might describe it (German, "western," American, English).

On the other hand, we need to work to insure that the culture does not alter the truth of God's Word. There are ways of receiving and expressing that truth differently, but it is the same truth. There is the danger of running headlong into the culture without maintaining our theological foundations, but there is also the danger of being so wary of losing our theological moorings that we never leave the safety of the harbor to engage the culture. We are in a very complex and changed social context, and those who head out into uncharted waters need a compass (or, in today's world, a GPS) that works very well indeed. But engage the culture we must, as the Word of the Lord goes forth from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

To be sure, the "direction of fit" must always be to receive God's Word and His ways as normative. The strong and self-serving sinful tendency in all of fallen creation and in every culture, particularly our self-indulgent American culture, is to try to fit God into my life and my worldview. Rather, the "text" of the Word of God must bring us into God's worldview.[11] Yet God has come to us and entered into our world, which is, in fact, His. He has "contextualized" Himself as the incarnate Word Made Flesh, a man within a Jewish family. This "scandal of particularity" by which God chose the Jewish culture of the first century is a case of cultural specificity. Yet His Galilean exhortation to make disciples of all nations implies that those of every nation, tribe, and culture are to be included. But they are not simply included or incorporated into this or that one culture but into the unity of the Body of Christ that includes many and various cultural contexts. Whatever we do, we need to keep the cross (and all that it conveys) in "cross-cultural mission!"

The Context of Contemporary Mission, without the "Con"

Frankly, I suspect that there would be general agreement with the caution that we can easily "mash up" or mix up our clear Gospel proclamation as we seek to communicate it across cultural boundaries. In their article, Woodford and Senkbeil are rightly concerned for a "unifying way forward that combines both biblically faithful foundations and culturally sensitive approaches," including what is called "common sense contextualization." Likewise, the call for "textualization" is important, if what is meant deals with that "direction of fit" of our lives (and cultures) into the life of God, and not the other way round, as most folks want and

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are wont to do. Much religious activity is focused on finding ways for God to fit into my life than for my life to fit into God's life, given as gift and then lived under Him in His kingdom.

So again, there is needed emphasis and legitimate concern on both sides of this issue as well. Some well-meaning mission endeavors in our church have, in fact, sometimes "mashed things up." On the other hand, those who are deeply engaged in contextualization are, in fact, very concerned about "textualizing" people into God's story, through Word and Sacrament and embodied in the Word Made Flesh: this is God's text indeed!

Perhaps all this is obvious, but issues are far more complicated, and we need to maintain the healthy both/and, while also be well aware of the aberrations on both extremes. How does "textualization" actually work within the various contexts into which it inevitably must be contextualized? Here is some fertile ground, not for "cons," but for further conversation, especially in a culture that is not only increasingly "unchurched" but also neo-pagan.[12] In calling for "open and fraternal discussion of the challenges before us,"[13] the article closes with the exhortation that "rather than contextualizing the Gospel by reshaping it to make it more culturally acceptable, we're called to welcome exiles from our collapsing world and textualize them into God's transcendent kingdom that never fades."

Indeed. But how is that "transcendent kingdom" actualized and incarnated into a world of cultures? Into which culture will it be incarnated and contextualized? Is it represented by the culture of first century Palestine? by the kingdom of David and the temple of Solomon, with lyres and lutes and no hint of a cathedral pipe organ? by the Early Church gathering in homes and later catacombs, finding a new way to be Israel without temple or one specific land? Shall we privilege "the Western liturgical tradition filtered through the sieve of justification by faith alone and honor it as our heritage (AC XXIV)" [14] or explore what a non-Western liturgical *ordo* might look and sound like?

How do we "be who we are" as a Lutheran church culture with our heritage and historical shaping and yet not let that become the norm and form by which others enter into the Body of Christ as confessed by those who hold to our biblical and confessional theology? Form and content go together and influence each other, as the wise dictum of *lex credendi lex orandi* states so well. But the "forms" of our theology are not the theology itself. How might our rich Lutheran theology find expression in other cultural contexts? How might our own inculturated forms and language be horribly misunderstood in other cultural contexts? And perhaps most importantly, how are we to be Lutherans who are strong in both confession and mission when the context of being church in a churched society has so radically changed?

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One of the deceptive "cons" within a fear of contextualization is to assume that "our" culture is the same as God's culture, and other cultures need to adapt to our ways of being church. Another lesson learned from our Multiethnic Symposium and now years of engaging inter-cultural work is that the dominant culture has to humble itself as a servant even to begin to enter into other cultural worldviews and practices so that communication of God's "text" can be shared and understood. This may well lead to "culturally sensitive yet pointed catechesis," in Woodford and Senkbeil's words, but it will take some serious attention to the problems of translation.

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Dr. Jack Schultz of Concordia–Irvine, one of a few within our fellowship that is trained in cultural anthropology,[15] notes the following, "Mission is essentially praxis, and that entails involvement and communication. Whatever the criteria for the essence of the message, the specific and the concrete foundations for mission emanate from cultural and historical specificity."[16] He continues, "At this point we are brought face to face with the presuppositions of Christian engagement. There are two basic ways to proceed. Lamin Sanneh usefully contrasts a diffusion approach to a translation approach to missions as follows:"

> One way is to make the missionary culture the inseparable carrier of the message. This we might call mission by *diffusion.* By it religion expands from its initial cultural base and is implanted in other societies primarily as a matter of cultural identity. Islam, with which Christianity shares a strong missionary tradition, exemplifies this mode of mission. It carries with it certain inalienable cultural assumptions, such as the indispensability of its Arabic heritage in Scripture, law, and religion.
>
> The other way is to make the recipient culture the true and final locus of the proclamation, so that the religion arrives without the presumption of cultural rejection. This we might call mission by *translation.* It carries with it a deep theological vocation, which arises as an inevitable stage in the process of reception and adaptation. Conversion that takes place in mission as diffusion is not primarily a theological inquiry. It is, rather, assimilation into a predetermined positivist environment. On the other hand, conversion that takes place in mission as translation rests on the conviction that might be produced in people after conscious critical reflection. What is distinctive about this critical reflection is that it assumes, either implicitly or explicitly, a relativized status for the culture of the message-bearer. Christian

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> missionaries, from Peter and Paul down to our own day, have spent a good deal of their time denouncing false conversions, and urging believers to adopt a code of critical self-examination lest they presume too much on the worth of any person, whether as transmitter or as recipient.[17]

Translation is serious business, but we should know something about this enterprise. We see ourselves as the recipient culture of the biblical text, but in our mission we become the source and need to attend to the "locus" of the recipient, even as God took on the form of a servant, becoming like us. Perhaps the basic communication triad is helpful also in this context, noting the relationship of *signifiers* (signs, words, marks on a page, actions, forms) and the concepts that are so signified (*conceptual signifieds*), applied to a *referent*.[18] Whether words or signs or offices and functions, signifiers evoke "meaning" as conceptual signifieds, which have referents in time and space. Finding common signifiers, not to mention clarity in what they actually signify, is very tricky across cultural boundaries, as anyone who has tried to function in a second language quickly realizes.

Even more difficult are abstract theological terms, such as justification and sanctification. Further, what are the signifieds for actions, rituals, and musical forms? We dare not abandon what is theologically correct doctrine and practice, but how do we translate the meaning of actions, rituals, and even worship forms, a problem most of us know even from the shift from German to English. At the time, that was of serious concern; yet today we seem to function fairly well in English. Of course, common signifiers can be clarified through conversation and even teaching (catechesis), but too easily even these practices assume the need for a "target culture" to learn vocabulary and forms from the "source culture" rather than seeking to engage the conceptual signifieds expressed through other culture-specific signs.[19]

The Symposium had as its underlying narrative the question of how a denomination can move from "doing ethnic ministry," which implies a source and a target receptor, to what might be a truly "multi-ethnic church," in a foretaste of the glorious vision of Rev. 7:9. Very few of us are trained in cultural anthropology; yet we actually do have such resources within our Confessional Lutheran fellowship. After many years, we are finally arriving at places where honest and open conversation can happen, respecting and celebrating both the diversities amongst us as well as our common life together as "one community in Christ."[20]

Moving forward with Courageous Confessionalism, with the Cross and without the Con

This essay does not pretend to have profound answers. I am neither a missiologist nor a social scientist. Nor am I a practicing pastoral theologian or directly engaged in inter-cultural mission. But I have learned how much I need to listen, maybe even going into "anthropology mode," and to engage those who have helpful insights from all sides of an issue. But I approached this task simply as a

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member of a church body that seems increasingly divided and virtually divorced from, and increasingly disinterested in, those on the "other side of the aisle" with whom we share fellowship within and around the Body of Christ, where lives of repentance humbly receive our Lord's forgiveness given and shed for us. We are all under the cross.

In the end, the fact is that here on earth there is no one "God-culture," other than our common creatureliness within a fallen creation still under God's care. God's "text" comes to us in ancient languages and contexts into which we need to be contextualized in order even to begin to be "textualized." And then into what cultural "set of signs" shall that text be translated? What is the language, culture, and *context* of "the church" from which such translation must occur? What are the "heart languages" and cultures into which such translation must occur? What are the social, economic, political, historical, and even congregational contexts[21] in which the text of God's Word is contextualized? Ancient? Modern? Post-modern? First century? Sixteenth century? Nineteenth century? (Thank God for historians who understand historical *context*!) Hebrew? Greek? Latin? German? Spanish? Swahili? Korean? Chinese? Hmong? How do we move from simple translation to appropriation of the common conceptual signifieds and referents that allow us to confess the Creeds with the same understanding?

In the end, the fact is that here on earth there is no one "God-culture," other than our common creatureliness within a fallen creation still under God's care. God's "text" comes to us in ancient languages and contexts into which we need to be contextualized in order even to begin to be "textualized."

How can we realize and recognize that neither side of the aisle has the whole, pure understanding of doctrine and mission and that our "pros and cons" all need to be heard across the aisle? How can we avoid allowing unnecessary polarization into simplified "either/or" positions, rather than find and maintain the proper tension of a Lutheran "both/and"? Can we find a way to live together within a proper tension of actually having disagreements? How can we deal with aberrations and extremes within our church body that go beyond the tensions and are actually antithetical to what we believe, teach, and confess and how we live together, humbly kneeling at the Lord's table as one body in Christ?

Our Lutheran theology gives us the tools and categories to address the changing cultural landscape, itself a new context into which the church needs to be incarnate and thus be "contextualized," like it or not. But we need not lose our bearings, either. There is more that unites us than divides us. Indeed, energized by the power of the Holy Spirit through the evangelical Gospel, Lutheran theology has been extremely creative and generative in a proper sense, applying unchanging truths to the changing

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needs of Christ's mission. We are not about simple repristination of another time and place and context. We do want our grandfather's church to be also our grandchildren's church. Sadly, the latter are increasingly absent, living in a cultural context different from that in which we learned to be part of God's church and mission.[22] And unlike all those theological systems that have to resolve every tension, and in so doing fall into errors on one side or the other, we know how to manage polarities and deal with diversity. If anyone can do this, we can.

> There is more that unites us than divides us. Indeed, energized by the power of the Holy Spirit through the evangelical Gospel, Lutheran theology has been extremely creative and generative in a proper sense, applying unchanging truths to the changing needs of Christ's mission.

This, I would say again, is "courageous confessionalism": so clear and confident in what we believe, teach, and confess, so anchored in our biblical and confessional commitment, so humble in our confession of our own sinfulness, so dependent on the grace and mercy of God in Christ our Savior, so interdependent on one another as the Body of Christ, confessing His Name to one another and all the world, that we can move forward, together, rejoicing in our unity of faith and of purpose to face the challenges and opportunities of Christ's mission, strengthening the found to be the people of God, and actively seeking the lost, of every nation and tribe and people and tongue, and yes of every cultural context, that all nations might be saved, come to the knowledge of the truth, and be disciples of Jesus, who lives and reigns to all eternity.

Endnotes

[1] The fifth biannual Multiethnic Symposium at Concordia Seminary, Jan 26–27, 2016, under the theme, "Communities of Hope: One Community in Christ."

[2] The fourteenth annual Theological Symposium at Concordia Seminary, September, 2003, addressed this issue under its overall theme, "Identifying Authorities: The Limits of Theological Diversity and Confessional Unity." See also Andrew H. Bartelt, "Keeping Our Balance: Maintaining Unity in a World (and Church!) of Diversity," *Concordia Journal* 30:3 (July 2004).

[3]Actually, *LSB* offers a wider variety of forms than any previous hymnal in my memory, but even at that, it is not to be so restricted as to disallow any deviations or augmentation properly reviewed under the "doctrinal supervision" of the *pastor loci.*

[4] I learned well from William Schmelder that there is a reason for the order of Walther's treatise as *Kirche und Amt,* another "both/and" tension. It is a gross oversimplication, to be sure, but one could generalize Loehe's view as "*Amt und Kirche*" and Grabau's almost Romanizing position as simply "*Amt.*"

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[5] The broadsides against "church growth" are a good example. We cannot and will not "build the church" by sociological means and methods (and many church planting methods show that it can be done, without attending to much theology!). But why would we not engage sociological insights in a ministerial (not "magisterial") way as a "first article gift" of our Creator that may assist our understanding of the human and social world into which our Creator came as Redeemer to form the Body of Christ among us?
[6] The almost wholesale replacement of our international mission personnel since 2010 is one painful example. Domestically, we now have the "first" national missionaries sent out under the "Mission Field USA" emphasis, perhaps reconnecting with the declaration in 1992 of "North America as a mission field," which then included the sending of numerous national missionaries in the decade from 2000–2010. The current emphasis is on church planting and revitalization, two of the three "Ablaze! goals," but without any connection to the previous collaborative work and study.
[7] If I may insert a "political" observation, it is interesting to note that former President Kieschnick highlighted the *unity of our synod* in holding to the proper tensions within Lutheran theology in such matters as the divinity of Christ, or a high view of Scripture, or solid "grace alone" and sacramental theology, focusing on the vast midsection of the entire Synod and in contrast to those *outside* our Synod. Current President Harrison ran on a platform that highlighted the *disunity our synod* in tolerating aberrant practices, focusing on specific areas in the margins of our church, in contrast to others *inside* our synod.
[8] President Kieschnick's Theological Convocations and now President Harrison's *koinonia* project are attempts in this direction.
[9] *Journal of Lutheran Mission,* 1:1 (March 2014).
[10] Rev. Tom Park of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in St. Paul, MN, offered a sectional presentation entitled, "Kim Chi, Sauerkraut, Lutefisk, and Papaya Salad: Quintessential Ingredients for Multi-Ethnic Ministry," noting (1) that even these fairly obvious diverse foods begin to demonstrate issues that can divide us (especially in the control of the parish kitchen!) and (2) that respect for this diversity can bring everyone together "to taste and see that the Lord is good."
[11] This tension between contextualization and "textualization," has been raised in a recent *LW* article, Lucas Woodford and Harold Senkbeil, "Mission and Ministry Mash Up" in *Lutheran Witness*, May 2015.
[12] The *LW* article was intended as a point of entry into a larger conversation and a larger project addressing also the underlying issues of our increasingly "sub-human" Western culture, engaging fundamental issues of theology and anthropology (Harold Senkbeil, personal communication).
[13] In fact, this project began as an attempt to listen to issues that have been raised as a result of the *Lutheran Witness* article from both sides, noting both the common themes and agreement (the both/and) as well as those points where each side might refine the either/or. My goal was to engage the authors of that article in some follow-up conversation and clarification and even to mediate and moderate a dialog between these pastoral theologians, on the one hand, and someone engaged in the social sciences from a cultural anthropological perspective, on the other. For the latter role, I turned to Dr. Jack Schultz of our Concordia University–Irvine, who has served as a presenter and dialog partner on issues of theology and culture at several of the Multiethnic Symposia at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

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As it has turned out, various factors, primarily those of overcrowded schedules and commitments, have so far prevented that interaction; but the principle of actually dialoging about a critical topic such as contextualization in the mission of our Lord is something to which all involved in this project remain committed.

[14] Matthew Harrison, "A Theological Statement for Mission in the 21st Century," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1:1 (March 2014), http://blogs.lcms.org/2014/mission-in-the-21st-century, §18.

[15] Many who receive sound orientation to the mission field will have had at least some "basic training" in cultural anthropology, as will those engaged in Bible translation. I have learned only a small insight into what might be called "anthropology mode" as observation of a different cultural community's activities, communication, language, relationships, rituals as a place to begin to understand connections between signifiers and conceptual signifieds.

[16] Jack Schultz, personal communication.

[17] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 29.

[18] See James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean: Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: CPH, 2013), 89–99, particularly the graphics on 95–96.

[19] One of the presentations at the aforementioned Multiethnic Symposium featured a "case study" in cultural readings of texts, led by Dr. James Voelz and engaging readings of Mark 9:14–29 (the demoniac son) from a Native American, Hmong, and West African cultural context to show what different "meaning producing factors" are in play from different cultural contexts.

[20] This was thematic at the recent Multiethnic Symposium already mentioned.

[21] It is interesting to observe that a related debate among us concerns the "contexts" of pastoral formation and education, including the strengths and weaknesses of contextualized education. In fact, all education is contextualized. The issue is defining and determining the most appropriate contexts.

[22] See, as one example among many, David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

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Celebrating the Ministry of Licensed Lay Deacons: A Theological Review of the Task Force Report on 2013 LCMS Convention Resolution 4-06a

Michael T. Von Behren

Abstract: This article provides a theological review of the Task Force Report on 2013 LCMS Convention Resolution 4-06a from the perspective of those who seek to support the ongoing ministry of Licensed Lay Deacons in the LCMS and to encourage fuller appreciation of the complementary nature of the role of both pastors and laity in service of the Gospel. It affirms aspects of The Report, while responding to The Report's critiques of Licensed Lay Deacons used in Word and Sacrament ministry by relying on the same fundamental theological sources as the Task Force Report, namely scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and C. F. W. Walther's *Church and Ministry*.

Introduction, Purpose, and Rationale

The thrust of the Task Force Report, which convened in response to 2013 Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Convention Resolution 4-06a to study the use of Licensed Lay Deacons in the LCMS, was not affirming but rather raised critical contention with the practice of using Licensed Lay Deacons in Word and Sacrament ministry. In support of Licensed Lay Deacon ministry, it identified the twenty-six years of history that our Synod has had since the 1989 Synod Resolution 3-05b and listed briefly the following insights from its recent interviews with the districts who most utilize Licensed Lay Deacons.

> Visitations of six districts with the largest number of active deacons and/or graduates of district training programs provided helpful insights. The rationale for the programs emphasized during the visits generally included three points:

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> • First, most frequently mentioned was the number of *small congregations*—particularly those in rural and urban areas—that are *unable to support a pastor* financially and have difficulty finding supply or vacancy pastors to serve them.
>
> • Second in importance was the shortage of ordained pastors available to serve LCMS congregations in certain *isolated geographic locales*, both in terms of their availability for calls and also their ability to serve with minimal remuneration.
>
> • Third, few LCMS pastors are equipped for ministry, church planting, and mission *outreach in urban settings and elsewhere among racial and ethnic minorities*. Moreover, such missions tend to have minimal financial resources and frequently cannot support the costs of a full-time minister.
>
> Proponents of the districts' programs frequently mentioned the need for and value of specially trained laymen who work under pastoral supervision to supply these needs. They often suggested that such programs have developed a neglected aspect of pastoral responsibility because the pastors who serve as mentors to deacons exercise *episcope*—pastoral supervision—of the deacons and also, thereby, expand their pastoral scope beyond what they can do by themselves.[1]

The Report also explained that the theological position used to assess Licensed Lay Deacon ministry was discussed with the Council of Presidents of the LCMS and there were "no reservations" regarding it. The report states:

> While various district presidents have expressed reservations about how to address various practical aspects of the proposals offered below, no one on the Council has expressed any theological objections to the understanding of *rite vocatus* provided in the preceding sections. It is our prayer, then, that the Synod can move forward in its practice on the basis of a common theological understanding of the need to rightly train, examine, call, and affirm the ministerial validity of those who will preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments in our congregations and missions.[2]

The critiques of using Licensed Lay Deacons for Word and Sacrament ministry raised in The Report all stem from this theological position, which The Report indicates is rooted in the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the historical witness of the Church. The Report assumes then that the use of Licensed Lay Deacons in Word and Sacrament ministry finds no support in our common theology. Instead it states:

> Walther's 'Church and Ministry' lays forth quite clearly a scriptural and confessional case for distinguishing the Office of the Ministry from the priesthood of all believers, emphasizing that the ministry is a particular office established by God which the church is bound to uphold by divine

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> command and not on an arbitrary or optional basis. Church and Ministry anchors this teaching in a multitude of scriptural witnesses, and AC (Augsburg Confession) V, AC XIV, AC XXVIII, AAC (Apology of the Augsburg Confession) XIII, the Treatise (on the Power and Primacy of the Pope) and FC (Formula of Concord) SD (Solid Declaration) XII among other confessional sources. In addition, Walther cites Luther and many Lutheran fathers to make his case. Such an array of biblical, confessional, and historical witnesses to the necessity of a rightly called Office of the Ministry has led many in the LCMS to voice significant discomfort and objections to the practice of lay preaching and administration of the sacraments which is present in some LCMS congregations.[3]

Therefore an adequate response to this Task Force Report must first state the theological basis upon which the utilization of Licensed Lay Deacons for Word and Sacrament ministry is founded and demonstrate that this theology is in line with the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and our common theology of ministry found in the theses and various sources cited in Walther's landmark compendium *Church and Ministry*.[4]

Theological Statement on Laymen in Word and Sacrament Ministry

Celebrating the use of laymen in Word and Sacrament ministry supports and affirms the Office of the Ministry across our synodical fellowship as we rejoice in the partnership in the Gospel that God has bestowed on His Church between the priesthood of all believers and those called into the Office of the Ministry.[5]

The urgency of Christ's call for workers into the harvest fields where "the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Lk 10:2, Mt 9:37) necessitates our willingness to place people into Christ's service in a variety of ways. The first Lutheran reformers shared an excitement over the freedom of the Gospel, not only in that it is "the power of salvation to all who believe" (Rom 1:16) but that, in this glorious freedom, "the Word of God is not bound" (2 Tim 2:9). It is not bound by chains, as Paul reminded the young pastor Timothy, nor is it bound by human institution or the traditions of men as the Lutheran reformers sought to express even in the very words with which they chose to frame the Confessions of our church in order to free the Gospel message from the tyranny of Roman ecclesiology.

So together with the Early Church evidenced in the pages of the New Testament, the witness of the Church Fathers, and the support of the Lutheran reformers, it behooves us to strive for multiplication of leaders in the church, both lay and ordained, who will respond to God's grace as Isaiah did in saying, "Here am I. Send me" (Is 6:8) and provide response to Paul's cry of faith from Romans 10, "And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they

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are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!'" (10:14–15).

It is a beautiful thing when the ministry of the Gospel is carried out as God intends. The gift of the Office of the Ministry is one facet of this beauty. The Office of the Ministry is a divine gift to the church as scripture witnesses that it was Christ who "gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11). Yet this divine office was not given to procure ministry unto itself, but as follows in Ephesians 4, it exists to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:12–13). Johann Gerhard is quoted by our father in faith C. F. W. Walther in *Church and Ministry*, speaking of Jesus, saying "After His session at the right hand of God, He still grants to His church pastors and teachers in order that His saints may be perfected for the work of the ministry, by which His mystical body [the church] is edified (Ephesians 4:11–12)."[6]

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The Office of the Ministry is that divinely established office that God has given His Church to equip and lead through Word and Sacrament the great and glorious mission Christ has given to us until the day He returns, namely, the proclamation of the Gospel, so that the Spirit may turn hearts to faith "where and when" it pleases Him.[7]

Within the doctrine of vocation, namely, that God calls His people into vocational service for Him, the Office of the Ministry is a particular vocation and divine calling not common to every believer. In every vocation, the responsibility and duty of each believer is to proclaim the Gospel as a function of the priesthood of all believers in an individualized (as opposed to public) sense. Thus the Apostle Peter who affirms our priesthood reminds us that we "proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness" (1 Pt 2:9) and that we ought to be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for the hope that is in [us]" (1 Pt 3:15).

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While not every believer is called to the Office of the Ministry, the public exercise of the Means of Grace is a right God has bestowed upon the priesthood of all believers. This is the foundational truth expressed by the Lutheran Confessions in *The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, which states, "the keys do not belong to any one particular person but to the church . . . . For having spoken of the keys in Matthew 18, Christ goes on to say, 'where two or three agree on earth . . .' [Matt. 18:19–20]. Thus he grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the church."[8] *The Treatise* is objecting to the claim that the power of the keys was given to Peter alone and subsequently to those who have succeeded him as Pope. The term "power of the keys" is used here by *The Treatise* in the broad sense to refer to the power to "proclaim the gospel, forgive sins, and administer the sacraments."[9]

That these keys are not only given to the Church as a whole to use, but that the right and ability to use them is given to each individual believer is seen in writings of Luther quoted by Walther in *Church and Ministry*. Thus Luther, speaking of the Pope, says, "A [baptized] child in the cradle has a greater claim to the keys than he, together with all those who have the Holy Spirit,"[10] and again, "Christ gives to every Christian the power and use of the keys,"[11] and again, "He not only grants [to every Christian] the right and power of the keys, but he orders and commands their use and administration,"[12] and again, "The keys belong to the whole communion of Christians and to everyone who is a member of that communion, and this pertains not only to their possession but also their use and whatever else there may be."[13]

It is this right and ability within the priesthood of all believers to use the Word and Sacraments that allows an individual believer publicly to proclaim the Word of God in an assembly of unbelievers. Some are fond of Luther's phrase, "Necessity knows no laws." This is true, not because it allows one to step outside of our God-given theology that defines the distinction between the priesthood of all believers and the Office of the Ministry, but because God has fundamentally given the ministry of Word and Sacraments to the priesthood of all believers. This is our common theology. Thus, in the presence of unbelievers a believer needs no call other than that of necessity as Walther quotes Luther on this saying,

> "If he has not been called to do so, as you yourself have often taught, he dare not preach." To this I reply: Here you must place a Christian in two places. First, if he is where there are no Christians, he needs no other call than that he is a Christian, inwardly called by God and anointed. There he owes it to the erring heathen or non-Christian to preach and teach them the gospel, moved by Christian love, even though no Christian has called him to do so. . . . In such cases . . . necessity ignores all laws . . . . In the second place, if he [the Christian] is where there are other Christians who have the same power and right as he, he should not put himself forward but let others

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> call and put him forth so that he might preach and teach in the place at the command of others.[14]

Indeed there is a God-given distinction between the Office of the Ministry and the priesthood of all believers. While every Christian has the right and ability to publicly use the Word and Sacraments, to do so among others who likewise have that same right amounts to one Christian esteeming himself above others instead of using the gifts to edify the church. So Luther says regarding this, "it does not behoove anyone of his own accord to appropriate to himself that which belongs to all."[15] Thus among believers propriety and humility prevail. So when a Christian is in the presence of other believers, even when as few as "two or three" are gathered, he should not arrogate such a calling to himself, but in Christian love, he should wait until he has been called by others to do so.

While in apostolic times this call occasionally came immediately, that is, directly from God to the person, the New Testament also clearly witnesses that God calls people to this public exercise of the Word and Sacraments mediately, that is, through other believers, as well. Such mediate calls came in a variety of ways in the pages of the New Testament, as has also been acknowledged by the 2003 LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) document, *The Theology and Practice of the Divine Call*. In summary of the biblical data it states, "the biblical writers give us several pictures of how the church actually went about selecting pastors in 'normal,' settled situations. . . . In any case, however, they do not provide any explicit directives regarding the practice of the call. Any guidance drawn from these examples, therefore, will have to be inferential."[16]

Even in the absence of "explicit directives," we find in the New Testament that the call sets apart some from the priesthood of all believers to exercise publicly Word and Sacrament ministry on behalf of others. Also discernible in the New Testament witness, the writings of the ancient Church Fathers, and the writings of the Lutheran church fathers are different types of calls into the public use of Word and Sacrament.

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First and foremost, among these types of calls publicly to exercise Word and Sacrament ministry is the formal call into the Office of the Ministry. Not all are qualified to hold this office, and those qualifications are outlined by the scriptures in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The priesthood of all believers confers the authority of the keys upon a man when it chooses (examines or certifies), calls, and places him into this highest office, which is referred to in various ways in the scriptures, such as, the office of pastor/shepherd, overseer/bishop, or presbyter/elder.

Ordination is a means of placing one into this office, and yet it is not a necessary means, as is clearly noted in *Church and Ministry*, where Walther's Thesis IV on the Ministry states that it "is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call."[17] Likewise, Gerhard is quoted in *Church and Ministry* to affirm the conclusion that ordination is an "adiaphoron."[18]

Ordination is a means of placing one into this office, and yet it is not a necessary means.

Even so Walther, the historic church, and the fellowship of the LCMS through the years have each affirmed the value of ordination as apostolic custom. As a Synod, the LCMS has agreed that it should be retained, utilized, and reserved for the placement of pastors into the Office of the Ministry.[19] This rite, seen in practice already in the New Testament, is useful for publicly confirming the call which confers the office.

This practice of examination (or certification), call, and ordination was the primary means for placing men into Word and Sacrament ministry among the confessors, as is enumerated by the CTCR's 2003 report *Theology and Practice of "the Divine Call."* It recounts carefully the precedents found in the sixteenth century.[20]

There is however another type of mediate call from God, which places some from the priesthood of all believers into what Walther in *Church and Ministry* called "subordinate" or "auxiliary" offices that take part in the functions of the Office of the Ministry. Walther writes, "Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry . . . . For they take over a part of the ministry of the Word and support the pastoral office."[21] Again, Walther writes, "Therefore, in scripture the incumbents of the ministerial office are called elders, bishops, rulers [*Vorsteher*], stewards, and the like, and the incumbents of subordinate offices are called deacons, that is, servants, not only of God but of the congregation and the bishop."[22]

In support of such offices Walther quotes Chemnitz: "Paul himself sometimes attended to the ministry of the Word in such a way that he entrusted the

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administering of the sacraments to others: 'For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel' (1 Corinthians 1:17)."[23]

Such offices carry out their ministry under the "oversight" of one in the Office of the Ministry. This is acknowledged in Walther's *Church and Ministry* by citing Luther, who said of bishops (pastors), "They are the ones who are placed over every office. . . . That should be the business of the bishops; for this reason they are called overseers or *antistites* (as St. Paul here designates them), that is, presiders and rulers."[24]

The use of subordinate or auxiliary offices is evidenced in the Scriptures as well. Phillip, Stephen, and five others were the first to be chosen by the church and then placed into such offices in Acts (Acts 6:1–6). In other scriptures, such as 1 Timothy 3:1–12 and Philippians 1:1, the subordinate office of deacon is clearly differentiated from that of overseer, which we now call pastor. While the scriptures do not enumerate lists of such offices, our Lutheran church fathers have understood from the Scriptures and the witness of the church through the centuries that the church is free to establish them according to need and context for the sake of the Gospel. Again Chemnitz is quoted in *Church and Ministry* saying of the New Testament witness,

> Because many offices pertain to the ministry in the church that in a large assembly of believers cannot be well attended to in whole and in part by one person or a few, the church, as it began to increase, began to distribute these ministerial offices among certain grades of servants in order that all things might be done orderly, decently, and in an edifying way . . . when the number of disciples increased, they entrusted the part of their ministry dealing with alms to others, whom they called deacons or servants. . . . This origin of ministerial grades and orders in the apostolic church shows the cause, reason, purpose and use of these grades and orders. According to the size of the congregation, the various ministerial functions thereby were to be performed more readily, more rightly, more diligently, and with greater order and becoming dignity to the edification of the church.[25]

Again from Chemnitz, *Church and Ministry* cites, "Those grades and orders of which we have spoken above were not above and outside of the ministry of Word and sacraments; the very functions of the ministry itself were divided into these grades."[26]

These offices are not inherently bound in what particular functions of the Office of the Ministry that they authorize men to take part in and utilize; nor are they mandated to a length of time.[27] The particular functions of the Office of the Ministry in which they participate and the tenure of such a call is established instead by the call of the congregation and the delegation of the one who has "oversight" of such offices through his calling to the Office of the Ministry in that place.

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As an example of such in the witness of the New Testament, Stephen and Phillip began with appointment to service at the table distributing food to widows, yet after being found faithful in their calling, they were entrusted with ministry of Word and Sacrament. This practice also is included in *Church and Ministry* under the thesis that deals with subordinate and auxiliary offices by quoting Chemnitz who writes, “Since the apostles themselves appointed some of the deacons who had proved themselves, such as Stephen and Phillip, to the ministry of the Word we conclude that these grades or orders were also to serve the purpose of preparing and testing some in the minor offices in order that they might be entrusted with more important functions of the ministry with greater security and profit.”[28] There is no indication in the Scriptures that Stephen and Phillip were made pastors, elders, or overseers but rather that they were entrusted with the public use of “more important functions of the ministry,” here, namely, the Word of God. In addition, Philip’s ministry was clearly more than that of Word alone but also of Baptism as is evidenced in Acts 8:12, 38.

The ministry of Licensed Lay Deacons is not identical to that scriptural office of deacon but may likewise be understood as such a subordinate or auxiliary office in the church, which exercises both Word and Sacrament.

As Walther states clearly in Part II Thesis VI of *Church and Ministry*, “since the congregation or church of Christ, that is the communion of believers, has the power of the keys and priesthood immediately (Matthew 28:15–20; 1 Peter 2:5–10; cf. also what has been said under Part I, Thesis IV), it also and it alone can entrust the office of the ministry, which publicly administers the Office of the Keys and all ministerial [priesterliche] functions in the congregation by electing, calling, and commissioning.”[29] Thus, even the smallest gathering of believers has this right which cannot be taken from them, as the Lutheran Confessions also state saying,

> For wherever the church exists, there is also the right to administer the gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the church to retain the right to call, choose, and ordain ministers. This right is a gift bestowed exclusively on the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church. . . . Pertinent here are the words of Christ which assert that the keys were given to the church, not just to particular persons: “For where two or three are gathered in my name . . .” [Matt. 18:20].[30]

The local congregation, even in a synodical fellowship, retains this right and privilege of the Gospel. As the congregations of the LCMS have agreed to together train and certify men for the Office of the Ministry, we can celebrate all the various routes that our seminaries have established to prepare and certify men for that office: M.Div, Alternate Route, SMP, CHS, EIIT, the Cross-Cultural Institute at Concordia, Irvine, etc. We can also celebrate the joint work our Synod has established for the training of commissioned ministers to function in auxiliary offices.

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At the same time, congregations and districts can be encouraged to partner together in local areas to create avenues for laity to engage in additional subordinate or auxiliary offices, which may not be synod-wide and may be utilized only in particular contexts and regions. District leadership and regional Concordia Universities are a tremendous blessing in equipping the church in these ways with leaders for ministry.

Yet we should also recognize that, in addition to these formal calls (the call into the Office of the Ministry and the call into subordinate or auxiliary offices), there is a legitimate, right, and proper call that is made informally in which a believer may be asked to publicly exercise Word and Sacrament ministry. This is a call that does not place one into an office of the church but is a call that comes from a fellow Christian in a time of need for temporary public exercise of the functions of the Office of the Keys. Here temporary means not "one time," but "as long as the need persists."

Such a call need only be the simple request of a fellow believer. This is the case that is often referred to as an emergency situation. Thus our Confessions quote Augustine's story of the two men in the boat, where one baptizes the other and then the latter absolves the former. The Confessions say that by this simple request and act "one becomes the minister or pastor of another."[31] This does not mean that such an act placed these two men into the Office of the Ministry with tenured calls that needed to be confirmed by the church at large with ordination should they be rescued. No, the point *The Treatise* is driving at is laid out before the story, "wherever the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel."[32]

At times, Luther speaks of such emergency situations by saying that a Christian might use his right to publicly exercise the Means of Grace, even without a mediate call. As Walther quotes him in *Church and Ministry*, "There is a difference between administering a common right by the command of the congregation and using that right in an emergency. In a congregation, in which everyone has the right, none should use that right without the will and appointment of the congregation. But in an emergency anyone may use it who so desires."[33] At other times, Luther still speaks of the propriety of an informal call in such circumstances; thus, Walther also quotes Luther: "he should not put himself forward but let others call and put him forth so that he might preach and teach in the place at the command of others."[34]

So also Walther quotes Johann Gallus, professor of the Augsburg Confession and pastor at Erfurt during the days of the Reformation, who said, "Therefore, not only ministers but, in most urgent and extreme emergency (that is, when no pastor can be obtained and a Christian is asked by a fellow believer), laymen are also permitted to administer Holy Communion, to baptize, and to pronounce absolution."[35] Likewise Tilemann Hershusius, Professor of Theology at Rostock and Heidelberg in the time of the Reformation, is quoted by Walther saying, "In such emergencies a Christian should not be troubled about being a busybody in another's

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business, but he should know that he is performing a true and due call of God and that his ministry is as efficacious as if it were ratified by the laying on of hands for the office of the ministry in the whole church."[36] Thus there is a "true and due" call that is informal and is simply the request of a fellow Christian, yet it too is at the same time divine in nature.

It was not only because the Roman bishops would not carry out their responsibility to ordain that the reformers arrived at this theology concerning the priesthood of all believers and the Office of the Ministry. Nor was it simply response to enthusiasts who saw no need for a mediate call or the Office of the Ministry. Rather, these influences precipitated the reformers' study, discovery, and articulation of the doctrine of the call and of the office. This doctrine, in a freeing fashion, affirms this God-given right of the local church.

In other words, just because our Synod is not in the same context of having an oppressive ecclesiology that refuses to ordain men as pastors does not mean that this theology, which centers this right to choose and call men into a service of Word and Sacrament in the local congregation, is inapplicable. The theology itself is scriptural, true, and timeless.

Of these different types of calls listed above, the formal call to the Office of the Ministry was the most common practice among the Lutheran confessors. Yet all of the understandings of the word "call" that validate a person's public use of Word and Sacraments—whether in the Office of the Ministry, in a subordinate or auxiliary office, or in situations of necessity—are in view in the confessor's choice of words in Augsburg XIV, "*rite vocatus*."[37]

Even if never placed into regular practice, the call to subordinate or auxiliary offices and the call of necessity were in the experience of the confessors. That is to say, the reformers saw situations that they needed to respond to outside of the norm of ordaining men to be pastors; and, in their theological reflections on this matter, they recognized other valid understandings of a proper call, namely, the informal call in necessity and the use of subordinate offices. Some of these same reformers had input in framing, and others were among the first confessors of *The Augsburg Confession*. While the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* following The Confutation's rebuttal concerning canonical ordination narrows the discussion at that point specifically to call and ordination to the Office of the Ministry, as also does the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* when it addresses the Roman bishops who withhold ordination of pastors, the *Augsburg Confession* is written more broadly. In a beautiful stroke of Gospel-inspired wording, it does not limit itself to discussion of the Office of the Ministry but picks up the whole of the preceding theology when it says, "concerning church order . . . no one should publicly preach, teach, or administer the sacraments unless properly called (*rite vocatus*)."[38]

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This is the theology captured in the sources cited in Walther's *Church and Ministry* and upon which Walther builds his theses. This theology was hotly debated in the early days of the LCMS, and since then Walther's compendium, *Church and Ministry*, has become the statement of our Synod on these matters. Yet this ongoing struggle over the free course of Gospel proclamation has continued. It was found in the discussions over the *Reiseprediger*,[39] the traveling lay preachers utilized in the Western District of our Synod in its early years, and this struggle continues in our discussions today. These timeless truths become clouded in the life of the church by our polity and practical arrangements and need again and again to find expression in our ecclesiology so that the Gospel may have its free course among us.

These timeless truths become clouded in the life of the church by our polity and practical arrangements and need again and again to find expression in our ecclesiology so that the Gospel may have its free course among us.

This is of course not all that is to be said regarding the theology of church and ministry. Even Walther acknowledges that concerning his monumental work. Instead, he stated, "it was, of course, not our intention to present the doctrines of church and ministry in their completeness. . . . It was our purpose to stress only those points concerning which there prevails a difference and to embody only so much uncontested material as is demanded by the context."[40] This also was the task in the preceding theological statement. The remainder of this report will address specifically the words of the Task Force Report, both affirming aspects and addressing criticisms.

Review of Task Force Report on 2013 LCMS Convention Resolution 4-06a

In keeping with this theology of church and ministry as enumerated above, the first step in responding to the Task Force Report on 2013 LCMS Convention Resolution 4-06a is to affirm and celebrate these shared beliefs and common theology as they are expressed in the report.

Shared Theology that is Affirmed:

The mission of Christ given by Jesus to the apostles extends to the whole church, both lay and clergy.

> The Lord's promised presence and His command to preach the saving Gospel to the nations establish both the daily witness of the entire church [laity] and the office of preaching in the church. . . . The office of preaching

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> in the church and the proclamation of ordinary believers in daily life do not compete, but correlate with and complement one another.[41]
>
> The first president of the LCMS, Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther preached a sermon in 1842, in which he proclaimed,
>
>> Thus, my dear ones, you see: the office of Preacher or Caretaker of souls has not been instituted so that no one else is responsible for teaching or the care of souls. No, the whole congregation is to be a holy people, a royal priesthood. . . . Oh, how differently things would look; how much greater and more wonderful would be the blessing of the Word of God, if each Christian recognized his holy calling and administered his royal priesthood. With that in mind the Apostle cries to the Corinthians, *"Strive to love. Be zealous for the spiritual gifts, but primarily for the gift of prophesying Christ's message of salvation." [The German imperative is plural, denoting all of the people.]"*[42]

The Office of the Ministry is not optional for the Church, nor is it a humanly created institution of the church.

> Originally published in 1852 as *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, Walther's *Church and Ministry* lays forth quite clearly a scriptural and confessional case for distinguishing the office of the ministry from the priesthood of all believers, emphasizing that the ministry is a particular office established by God which the church is bound to uphold by divine command and not on an arbitrary or optional basis. *Church and Ministry* anchors this teaching in a multitude of scriptural witnesses, and AC V, AC XIV, AC XXVIII, AAC XIII, the Treatise, and FC SD XII among other confessional sources. In addition, Walther cites Luther and many Lutheran fathers to make his case.[43]

Indeed, here the conclusion of the report even asks if those who support Licensed Lay Deacon ministry can agree to this. As the theological statement above affirms, the answer is "yes."

> Can we not agree that our Confessions remind us that the Office of the Ministry and the Royal Priesthood stand together in a complementary relationship, but also not one without distinction? The Lord of the church has given ministers to His church so that the church may be served faithfully and competently.[44]

Those who serve in Word and Sacrament ministry should not be imposed upon congregations nor should they carry out this ministry without a proper call.

> Those who preach and administer Christ's gifts must be examined in their personal life and in their ability to teach rightly. They are not to be imposed

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> on congregations, but freely chosen by the flock that will be served by them.[45]
>
> The Pastoral Epistles summarize the qualities the church must look for in her pastoral servants. Above all, they must be "above reproach" so as not to put obstacles in the way of the Gospel and must be "able to teach" so that they proclaim Law and Gospel clearly. Self chosen good works quickly become idolatry. Therefore, no one is able to certify himself or declare himself qualified for ministry, but the Church as the Bride of Christ is to put in place the structures necessary to assure herself that her ministers are qualified. No one should set himself up as pastor, so churches develop procedures by which pastors are called.[46]
>
> It is the Word which restricts those who should preach, even though the Word also affirms that every Christian is a priest (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10).[47]

The rite of ordination is by apostolic custom the manner in which the church publicly confirms the call of a congregation and places pastors into the Office of the Ministry.

> The rite of ordination does not confer a special character or power on the person. It is also, as Walther emphasized, an apostolic custom and not a divine mandate. . . . Ordination, as a rite, is not mandated by the Lord.[48]
>
> Luther was just as emphatic. Referring to the public ministers by the term "priest" as was still current at his time, Luther writes: ". . . whoever does not preach the Word, though he was called by the church to do this very thing, is no priest at all, and that the sacrament of ordination can be nothing else than a certain rite by which the church chooses its preachers." Walther is therefore following this understanding of ordination when he says of it: "The ordination of those who are called with the laying on of hands is not a divine institution but an apostolic, churchly order and only a solemn public confirmation of the call.[49]

When no believers are present, a Christian needs no formal call but sheer duty to the Gospel is such a call in itself.

> The Word also affirms that every Christian is a priest (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10), that all Christians are "taught by God" (John 5:45), and that, as Luther explained, when any Christian is with those who do not know Christ "it is his duty to preach and to teach the gospel." "In such a case a Christian looks with brotherly love at the need of the poor and perishing souls and does not wait until he is given a command or letter from a prince or bishop. For need breaks all laws and has none." There is no biblical restriction on sharing the faith in one's daily vocation in the world.[50]

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All these statements are common in our theology, and our whole Synod can rejoice together in them.

Now this paper will turn its attention to and respond to the critiques of Licensed Lay Deacons in the ministry of Word and Sacrament as enumerated in the report.

Concluding Remarks

The recommendations of the Task Force Report to end Licensed Lay Deacon ministry and instead utilize only ordained pastors for Word and Sacrament ministry results from an unfortunate narrowing of the definition of call. Indeed this is true not only in terms of the way Augsburg XIV is interpreted but it's also seen in our synodical documents like *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature*, published by the CTCR in September 1981, which states, "In order to clarify what is meant by call we define it as follows: A person is 'called' when he or she is summoned by the church to the office of Word and Sacrament or to an office auxiliary to it on a full-time permanent basis and by education, by certification, and by solemn and public act (e.g., ordination or commissioning)."[51]

Increasingly congregations are in need of servants in Word and Sacrament who are not "full-time" and for whom ministry is not their primary livelihood. This is true in small congregations that cannot afford a full-time pastor, in congregations where the pastor serving simply needs assistance in carrying out the functions of the office, in places where ethnic ministry is growing and expanding, and in new starts where the Holy Spirit is moving powerfully and effectively.

It is not reasonable to expect that every congregation can afford all the full-time pastors it might need, nor that there are enough retired pastors in a local region who have the ability and desire to serve those ministries. Licensed Lay Deacon ministry meets these needs in a responsible way within our theology of church and ministry. Rather than further restricting the guidelines for who may participate in Word and Sacrament ministry, it would be a blessing to our Synod if we were to explore more avenues for equipping and engaging laity for ministry of all kinds responsibly under the oversight of those called to the Office of the Ministry.

(Follow this link or go to lsfm.global to read the author's analysis of the specific issues raised in Task Force Report on 2013 LCMS Convention Resolution 4-06a.)

Endnotes

[1] *2013 Resolution 4-06a Task Force Report to the Synod*, July 2015, 6.
[2] Ibid., 13.
[3] Ibid., 3.

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[4] Ken Schurb warns against creating caricatures of Walther in "Was Walther Waltherian?" *Concordia Journal*, 37:3 (Summer, 2011): 189–200.The first of such caricatures that he points out comes from those who claim, based on Walther's high esteem for the priesthood of all believers, that he would have supported occasional lay preachers. Schurb demonstrates this to be a false caricature of Walther's view. The theological statement above, as well as the rest of this document, will heed that due caution and will not posit of what Walther would have or would not have approved. Rather, it will simply quote the sources cited by Walther in *Church and Ministry* and quote Walther himself at times as he draws theological understandings from these sources. The purpose is not to be "Waltherian" but rather to let the Lutheran Fathers, the Scriptures, and the Early Church speak through these sources collected in a work, *Church and Ministry*, that the LCMS has since its early days affirmed.
[5] The term Office of the Ministry is used in this document to refer to that same highest office in the church otherwise known as the "Predigtamt," "The Pastoral Office," "Office of the Public Ministry," or "Office of the Holy Ministry."
[6] C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: CPH, 1987), 185.
[7] The full expression of that quote is familiar from our Confessions, *Augsburg Confession* Article V: "So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the word and sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 41.
[8] Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 334.
[9] *The Treatise* in this section on "The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops" explicitly references the *Augsburg Confession* and *Apology* to define what it means by this power. See Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 340. Often in the *Augsburg Confession*, the term "power of the keys" narrowly refers to absolution or retention of sin in the context of confession and absolution. *Augsburg Confession* Article XXVIII, however, which corresponds to this particular topic, defines the term more broadly as the public use of the means of grace (God's Word and Sacraments): "Our people teach as follows. According to the gospel the power of the keys or of the bishops is a power and command of God to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sin, and to administer and distribute the sacraments." Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 92.
[10] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 56.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 57.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 163–164.
[15] Ibid., 161.
[16] CTCR, *Theology and Practice of "The Divine Call"* (St. Louis: LCMS, 2003), 10.
[17] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 219.
[18] Ibid., 262.
[19] CTCR, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* (St. Louis: LCMS, 1981), 22 states "As a matter of uniform nomenclature and in accordance with common understanding, the term 'ordination' should be reserved for a man's entry into the office of the public ministry. The initial acceptance by the church of the gift also of those who are to serve in the vital auxiliary offices should be carried out with solemnity befitting the office. Tradition,

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common expectations, and the uniqueness of the pastoral office speak against using the term 'ordination' for other than the office of the public ministry."

[20] CTCR, *Theology and Practice of the Divine Call*, 13–17.

[21] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289–290.

[22] Ibid., 289.

[23] Ibid., 298.

[24] Ibid., 293.

[25] Ibid., 296–297.

[26] Ibid., 299.

[27] The tenure of "subordinate" or "auxiliary" calls is not addressed specifically in C. F. W. Walther's *Church and Ministry*, nor is the extent of the functions of the ministry which these offices may exercise. The CTCR document *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* (p. 35) states without further supporting citation: "Functions that are essential exercises of the ministry of word and sacrament should be performed by those who hold the office of the public ministry," not by those in auxiliary offices. However, the sources cited by C. F. W. Walther in *Church and Ministry* and quoted in this document will show that statement to be inadequate. The CTCR document, *Theology and Practice of the Divine Call* (pp. 19–20), cites additional writings of Walther, outside of *Church and Ministry*, to explain Walther's view that rejects the idea of a temporary call, which was prevalent in American Lutheranism in the mid-nineteenth century. He writes, "Unfortunately it has become customary in our country to hire ministers for one year, even as we hire our servants and cattle herders. . . . Even in emergencies these calls with a time limit cannot be justified." The basis for this explained in the CTCR document is "The very idea that a divine call could be issued for a set number of years was a contradiction in terms. Since God is the one who issues the call." While the issue of the tenure of divine calls is beyond the scope of this document, let it simply be said that the divine nature of a call need not contradict the possibility of its being short term. If God calls a person to the ministry mediately, through the church, then what scriptural reason would prevent God, through the church, from mediately determining the tenure of that call based upon its need for ministry? The CTCR document also cites Franz Pieper who reasoned for the possibility of "calls of temporary assistance," while still maintaining Walther's rejection of "temporary calls." These discussions themselves reveal an underdeveloped area of our theology and the want for some understanding of the "temporary" needs for assistance in the public use of Word and administration of the Sacraments in the church.

[28] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 297.

[29] Ibid., 219.

[30] Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 340–341.

[31] Ibid., 341.

[32] Ibid., 340–341.

[33] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 162.

[34] Ibid.,164.

[35] Ibid., 280–281.

[36] Ibid., 281.

[37] This is contrary to the opinion of the CTCR, *Theology and Practice of the Divine Call* (St. Louis: LCMS, 2003), which recognizes only the formal call to the Office of the Ministry as fitting within the meaning of "rite vocatus." For a more detailed defense of the understanding

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of *"rite vocatus"* presented above, see Michael T. Von Behren, "Rehabilitating the Doctrine of the Call: Building Strength and Agility for Mission," *Lutheran Mission Matters*, 24:1 (January 2016): 96–117.

[38] Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 47.

[39] C. F. W. Walther participated in producing twenty-eight additional theses to address the *Reiseprediger*, traveling lay preachers, who were subsequently adopted by the Western District. They can be found in LCMS, 1863 Proceedings, pp. 56–58. Karl Wyneken, "Missouri Molds a Ministry for Mission," CHIQ45 (May 1972): 69–88, among which include these:

> "9. Love is the queen of all laws, more so than all regulations, i.e., in cases of necessity it knows no commandment.
> 10. There are cases of necessity in which also the regulation of the public Office of the Ministry cannot and should not be observed. Exodus 4:24–26.
> 11. A case of necessity occurs when, by legalistic observance of the regulation, souls would be lost instead of saved and love would thereby be violated."

Yet even with this concession for emergency use of Word and Sacrament by lay preachers, it was determined that these laymen should not administer the Lord's Supper. However, this was not because of lack of right or ability, but rather because "the traveling preacher does not possess the required knowledge of those who come to the Lord's Supper, and since on account of the press of time he cannot prepare them for the Holy Supper." This is cited by William C. Weinrich in "Should a Laymen Discharge the Duties of the Holy Ministry?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Volume 68:3/4 (July/October 2004): 207–229. Weinrich cites this to support the conclusion that "The exegetical, dogmatic, and pastoral tradition of the Lutheran heritage admits no circumstance that justifies the use of unordained laymen for the purposes of preaching, baptizing, and administration of the holy supper." While these theses do indicate that the debate was ongoing in the early LCMS and even now, and that Walther himself wrestled with these issues, it does not seem to indicate that the issue is as clear or resolved as Weinrich suggests. Do the *Reiseprediger Theses* provide circumstances where laymen may carry out these functions or not? So then, as also today, it is beneficial for us to listen to Walther's fundamental thesis contained in *Church and Ministry* and beyond Walther, to listen carefully to the sources he collects and cites for us in that work, which do offer broader understandings of the call to publicly use Word and Sacrament, beyond simply the call to the Office of the Ministry.

[40] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 9.

[41] *2013 Resolution 4-06a Task Force Report to the Synod*, 1–2.

[42] Ibid., 27.

[43] Ibid., 3.

[44] Ibid., 29.

[45] Ibid., 29.

[46] Ibid., 11.

[47] Ibid., 8.

[48] Ibid., 11.

[49] Ibid., 10.

[50] Ibid., 8.

[51] CTCR, *The Ministry Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature*, 29.

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"Here Is the Church, Here Are the People . . .": Ecclesiology Is the Servant of Soteriology[1]

Robert Scudieri

Abstract: The point of this paper is *"Ecclesiology must always be the servant of soteriology."* When this becomes altered, or confused, or worse, reversed, there are severe consequences. The Reformation came about because by the sixteenth century this had become reversed. In this article, I trace the history of one denomination's struggle to keep ecclesiology in the service of the sharing of the saving gospel. It is a history of triumphs and failures, as it would be with any earthly institution.

Introduction

I have been asked to submit an article on missiology. Professional theologians are friends with many "ology" words, missiology being just one. To do justice to missiology it is necessary to visit the neighborhoods of ecclesiology and soteriology. You will understand why after spending a little time visiting with them.

There is an old children's rhyme: "Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the door and see all the people." But this rhyme equates "church" with a building more than with people. We all know this is not the case. Equating "church" with a building is foreign to the Bible and therefore to the Lutheran Confessions.

In the "Prayer for the Church," we pray,

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> Grant we beseech Thee Almighty God unto Thy Church Thy Holy Spirit and the wisdom that cometh down from above, that Thy Word, as becometh it, may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve Thee and, in the confession of Thy name, abide unto the end, through Jesus Christ our Lord.[2] (Forgive me, I prefer this older version of the prayer).

It is a beautiful prayer—but why did we pray for this Word to be preached only to "Christ's holy people?" While this is absolutely appropriate—I wonder if we should place such limits in a prayer for the Church. Shouldn't we be praying that the Word be preached to all the world?

After the blessing of having worked at the congregation, district, and national levels in forty-five years of public ministry, I have heard numerous presentations on ecclesiology and how the body of Christ is organized to carry out its work. I would like to share some of what I have learned.

To begin, ecclesiology is the study of the Church. How do we define "church"? How is it organized? What is its function? Soteriology is the study of salvation. How does one come into a right relationship with God; how do we receive eternal life? How do we become connected to the living Savior, Jesus, the only One who can give us life in its fullest sense?

The point of this paper is that *ecclesiology must always be the servant of soteriology.* When this principle is altered or confused, or worse, reversed, there are severe consequences. The Reformation came about because by the sixteenth century the principle had become reversed.

A study of ecclesiology helps us address questions that confront churches today, questions such as, Is there one correct church body? Who can start a new church? Why do graduates have to be called by a congregation before they can be ordained? Why do Lutherans call their leaders pastors, but Roman Catholics call them priests? What is distinct about the call of a pastor? Why can only the pastor say, "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins?" Can a layperson commune the pastor? absolve someone? preach from the pulpit? consecrate the bread and wine at communion? read the Gospel lesson? teach? baptize? celebrate communion?

A study of ecclesiology helps us address these questions.

We might also ask, "*Why do these questions continue to come up?"* One reason is because while Scripture is very clear about soteriology, there is much less to guide us in ecclesiology.

The Bible is clear about soteriology; Jesus tells us in John 3:16, "God loved the world so much He gave His one and only Son—that whoever believes in Him will not die but have eternal life." And Paul, in Ephesians 2:8–9, writes, "For it is by

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grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—so that no human can boast"; and in Romans 3:20 ff., "God's way of putting people right with Himself has been revealed—and it has nothing to do with the law. The law and the prophets gave their witness to it—but God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ."

But Scripture gives us less direction for ecclesiology. *Coram Deo*, before God, we are given a few basics: the Church is the "bride of Christ" (Mt 9:15; Mk 2:19; and Lk 5:34). The Church is the living Body of Christ (1 Cor 12). The Church is "the assembly of all believers and saints" (AC VIII). Simply put, the Church is "those who hear the voice of the shepherd and follow."

But, in terms of church organization, (*coram humano*—from a human perspective), we are not given very much about the formal principle for the organization of a church. Much of what we know as the organized church today is inferred from comments in Scripture, and much is according to human rules—set up to follow civil law. But what is the "material" principle, the foundational principle that gives meaning and direction to how the church is established? I suggest it is the Gospel, and thus, soteriological.

I repeat, my main point is that *ecclesiology is and must remain the servant of soteriology.*

To address this matter, I would like to look at five factors that gave the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod the ecclesiology we have today. There are certainly more than just these five, but these seem to me to have had the most influence.

> Ecclesiology is
> and must remain
> the servant of soteriology.

After considering how we arrived at our understanding of church, I will suggest seven propositions that could keep ecclesiology as the servant of soteriology.

Five formative sources in the creation of our LCMS ecclesiology

1. Scripture: The Bible has given us direction for how we should come together to live out our calling as the body of Christ. These basic principles do not only inform but also determine our ecclesiology. This article is not an exhaustive study of all the Bible has to say about the church, but I will offer some of the most important of the principles set down by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, speaking to Peter, says in Matthew 16:18, 19,

> I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have

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> been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

Here the "you" is singular, although as Lutherans we have traditionally understood this as giving power to all who make the confession that Peter makes in Matthew 16. The Church as a whole, all who confess Jesus is Savior, the Church on earth has the authority to bind or loose sin. In The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, we teach that there is no one "correct" organized church body; rather, all who confess Christ as Savior are part of "the one true Church."

The power of the whole Church to forgive sin can be seen more clearly in John 20:23. Speaking to the disciples this time, Jesus says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven." The authority is not given to one individual, but to the disciples. We understand this to mean it was given to the Church.

The Church has the authority no other institution on earth has: the authority, as the body of Christ, to forgive sins.

And Jesus expands on this idea of the authority of the Church in Luke 22:24–27, spoken to the apostles. The authority they have is not power over others, but power *on behalf of* others. Jesus tells them that they are to be servants:

> A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

Scripture tells us the disciples of Jesus will live their lives as servants, living lives of forgiveness, sharing the love and forgiveness of God wherever they go, in word and in deed. "This is the *sine qua non*" for churches and, in fact, individual Christians to demonstrate their service to God.

2. Influences on present LCMS ecclesiology from Early Church history: From the very first, all the saints were expected to share the love of Jesus: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pt 2:9). This was spoken to the disciples in general, not just to the apostles.

But there were also specific roles for ministers, as in Ephesians 4:11–13:

> And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the

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> saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

It is clear that these roles were "ministries," meant to "equip" the Christians to live out their lives as servants of Christ in the world. One of these roles has not been understood in its fullest vocation—the role of the apostle, other than the original Twelve.

"Apostle" was a Jewish legal term. The apostle was authorized for a particular mission, to legally represent, with authority, the one who had sent him. In the Church, we have one authority: to forgive sins. In the New Testament and in the Early Church, the term "apostle," while most often used to refer to The Twelve Apostles, is used for ministers beyond the Twelve: for instance, Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and James brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19) are called (in Greek) "*apostolos*." When these designations are translated into English, most Bibles call them "messengers" or "representatives" to keep us from confusing them with The Twelve. I do think we lose something, though, by not recognizing the connotation the term "apostle" brings with it.

Apostles continued, among other ministries, into the second century. The Didache instructs how churches are to treat "apostles," small "a": "When an apostle comes into your town treat him as if he were the Lord!" The Didache says the local church is to feed such an apostle and give him a place to sleep. If the "apostle" stays stay one night, he is a true apostle. If two nights, beware. If three nights, this is a false apostle."[3]

At this time the apostle apparently was a wandering missionary. Local church leaders were first called "presbyters" (elders) and "poimen" (shepherds). Gradually, as local churches grew in size and became more complicated in their administration, the local church leader was called "overseer" of life and doctrine; from the Greek term for "overseer," we get the English word "bishop." Presbyters and elders were "settled" ministries; they were part of the local church organization. As the church grew, bishops oversaw the life and doctrine of larger groupings of Christians. And the Early Church grew rapidly and grew large.

By 300 AD, ten percent of the Roman Empire was Christian and the church was expanding, even though Christianity was still not "legal." The church could not own land, although a layperson might purchase a house where the Christians would gather. A Christian might be known because he or she was missing an eye, or a hand—because of persecutions. This began to change in 311 AD when Constantine became the emperor of Rome. His support for Christians provided fertile ground for the church to expand. And expand it did. Dioceses were the form of the Roman

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Empire's administration. The church took over the term for its regional administration. We in the LCMS go by geography as well, but we say "districts."

"Bishops" were becoming heads of a "college" of local pastors and gained more oversight and authority. At the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, it was also decided that "bishops" should be elected by their own churches in the presence of one or more neighboring bishops. These bishops provided theological oversight, consultation, and were instigators of mission to go to new areas to establish new churches. In these days the meaning of "apostolic" was weighted towards a focus on maintaining correct teaching, but the term never lost its missionary connotation.

St. Augustine of Canterbury became known and is still known as the "Apostle to the English." Saint Bonaventure is called the "Apostle to the Germans." Saint Columba is the apostle to the Scots. And so on. These were all missionaries.

Thank God that we have district presidents today who continue to exert that kind of original apostolic-missional leadership.

3. A third influence on our ecclesiology was the Reformation of the Church. Gradually, certainly by the sixteenth century, soteriology had taken a back seat to ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic Church. Soteriology had become horribly distorted in the church prior to the Reformation. With the sale of indulgences, certificates sold for the forgiveness of sins, the distortion became apparent to almost everyone—so much so that it became a focus for the division of the Western Church.

The Lutheran Reformers' position was that the Roman Catholic Church had lost sight of the doctrine of grace, the free forgiveness of sins; therefore, it had lost its claim to be considered the authentic Christian Church.

Maintenance of the institution was put ahead of soteriology, that is, the building of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome caused great monetary needs, one response of which was to sell more and more indulgences. The need for funding for ecclesiastical needs superseded grace; and it was the sale of indulgences, payment for the forgiveness of sins, that pushed Luther over the edge.

Another thorn in the side of the "protestors" was the teaching that apostolic succession was necessary for the presence of the true Church.

The Reformation addressed these issues in the Augsburg Confession in Articles 4, 5, 7, and 14. It was the Lutheran theologians' position that the Roman Catholic accretions obscured Christian soteriology. In the Roman Church, forgiveness could only be obtained through a priest through the sacrifice of the Mass. The Lutherans reacted to this by emphasizing the role of the pastor as a shepherd who would emphasize grace, the free forgiveness of sins for the sake of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.

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The Lutheran position was that it is not having a priest who stands in apostolic succession that makes a "valid" Christian church, as the Roman Catholic theologians taught. The true Church exists where the Word of Christ is being preached in accord with the Gospel and where the Sacraments are being administered rightly (ACC VIII).

4. Later Lutheranism: The Roman Catholic leaders accused the breakaway Lutherans of not being a part of the "true" church. Two of the reasons they gave were that the Lutherans were not "catholic" (everywhere in the world) and not "apostolic" (sending missionaries out into areas where the gospel had not been heard).

This accusation caused an overreaction by the Lutherans. Justinian Von Welz was a Lutheran layman who had a passion for the Gospel to reach the whole world. However, this idea was attacked by the seventeenth-century Wittenberg (Luther's) faculty. Their position was that the Great Commission had ended. It was only meant for the time of the original Twelve Apostles.

This seems curious to me in that Luther's Large Catechism, in the explanation of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, states the following:

> Therefore we pray here in the first place that this may become effective with us, and that His name be so praised through the holy Word of God and a Christian life that both we who have accepted it may abide and daily grow therein, *and that it may gain approbation and adherence among other people and proceed with power throughout the world,* that many may find entrance into the Kingdom of Grace, be made partakers of redemption, being led thereto by the Holy Ghost, in order that thus we may all together remain forever in the one kingdom now begun. (emphasis added)

In the most deplorable instances, the Means of Grace became ends in themselves! It is like the carpenter who idolizes his hammer and saw, keeps his hammer and saw in good shape, but then never builds anything. Word and Sacrament are given to the Church to be means for equipping the saints of God to live out their faith in the world—for their own good, but also for bringing others to faith. Later Lutheran leaders in America would forcefully make this same point—particularly the leaders of the early the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

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5. C. F. W. Walther, an early leader of the Missouri Synod, was a participant in one of the great theological controversies of the nineteenth century in America: A Lutheran church in Milwaukee had lost its pastor. The congregation wanted to authorize the principal of the church's elementary school to preach and to celebrate the Sacraments until a new pastor could be found.

The congregation contacted Walther in Missouri and Rev. Johannes Grabau in Buffalo to ask their advice. They wanted to know if they could authorize their called elementary school principal to preach and preside at the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The question was really deeper than that: What they were asking was, "where is the efficacy of the Means of Grace—in the pastor, or the congregation?"

Bishop Grabau of the Buffalo Synod taught there was one visible church on earth and it was the Buffalo Synod. Congregations were legitimized by having an ordained clergyman in the Buffalo Synod. For Pr. Grabau, the pastor was supreme in all church matters, including administration. Walther and the Missouri Synod disagreed.

Walther and the LCMS said no, the Church is "invisible," composed of true believers from every Christian denomination. The authority to forgive sins was given to the whole Church, and was transmitted by God through the Church to one whom the congregation calls to use them in public: the ordained pastor.

Walther and the early LCMS pioneers had come to their convictions through a fiery trial. As you may know, after the immigrants landed on the shores of the Mississippi, they accused their leader, a man they called bishop—Martin Stephan—of immorality and embezzlement. This created a crisis in the colony. If their bishop, the man who had led them, was found to be corrupt, could they be considered a true church?

It was with much soul searching and study of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions that they said, yes, we are a church, not because our leaders have been perfect, but because the Word is being preached in the purity of the Gospel and the Sacraments are being administered rightly among us. This event moved Missouri away from calling our spiritual leaders bishops; today we call them district presidents instead. Our forbearers were especially sensitive if they felt a leader was out for his own gain, or was overbearing, or accruing power to himself. And so they had a natural fear of leaders like Bishop Grabau.

In the theology of the Missouri Lutherans, laity normally serve the Lord in *their* "call"—their vocation. As the "royal priests of God" (1 Pt 2:9), they intervene on behalf of their family, their co-workers, their neighbors. They bring the love of Christ by word and deed into their workplaces, into their families, and into their communities. As such, they play a most vital role in the Church's mission force.

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The difference is that laypeople do not represent the church in a public way, but serve under the supervision (*episcope*) of an ordained pastor, as members of the Lord's "holy nation" (1 Pt 2:9). Furthermore, as a statement that laity are the "royal priesthood" and do not give away their rights as priests, in LCMS churches laity may read the appointed texts in public worship—even the Gospel lesson, if asked to do so—and assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper and administration of Baptism. While the pastor oversees teaching, Sunday School teachers and Bible study leaders may, under supervision of the pastor, also teach. In fact, they extend the ministry of the pastor; otherwise, either the pastor will not be able to teach all who need instruction, or he will suffer in body and in spirit trying to meet the needs of too many responsibilities.

Laity may, under the supervision of their pastor, even preach from the pulpit from time to time when needed; they can absolve someone of sin—not in public, but in their private spaces; in an emergency, a layperson can perform a Baptism.

Laity may not, from a Lutheran perspective, consecrate the elements for Communion—except in an emergency, where there is no ordained pastor available—because Holy Communion is not necessary for salvation.

One of the clearest statements that "ecclesiology is the servant of soteriology" is an 1842 sermon preached by Walther. When you read it, you can feel the heartfelt desire of Pr. Walther as he bares his soul to his congregation. In the sermon, Walther gives direction for organizing ministries of the called pastor and the laity and implores both to give their efforts to bringing the love of Christ to those who are dying in their sins. The sermon makes clear that the Church as a whole is, as he says, a "mission house"—a mission society—in service of bringing the Gospel out into the world.

Then he continues: "Each Christian is a missionary, sent out by God into his own circle to convert others to Christ. . . . Women as well as men, young as well as old—All Christians are spiritual priests and teachers of the word. . . . The whole congregation shall be a holy people, a royal priesthood."[4]

To say that the whole congregation has been commissioned to bring the saving love of Christ into a dying world is only to affirm with the founders of the LCMS that ecclesiology is the servant of soteriology.

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In the first part, I have shared highlights that have influenced the LCMS to have the ecclesiology it has today. I know this is an overview; whole books could and

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have been written about this. The purpose of this article is to remind us of the past and to continue the discussion in the present.

Next we will consider some ways that churches can live up to this sacred heritage the Church on earth has received—and celebrate this way of "being church" that has been entrusted to us. The experiences of those who have gone before us are wonderful and marvelous gifts. They have kept ecclesiology as the servant of soteriology for over one hundred and fifty years.

Seven propositions to keep ecclesiology as the servant of soteriology.

Curvatus in se "(curved in upon self) is the Latin phrase for what we call sin. But you probably know that, because we see it often in ourselves, in our families, and, yes, in our churches. The temptation to turn away from others and from the world to satisfy my/our needs dogs us, haunts us. For me, the sure sign of church-sin is when a community of Christians puts its needs above that of the people around them.

I served on the committee to call a new pastor to our church only one time. At the first meeting, the representative from the denomination told us, "Your work is to find the best pastor for the people of this congregation." I had promised myself I would not say anything at the first meeting, but upon hearing that I couldn't not raise my hand and ask, "Yes, but, aren't we to find the best pastor for the neighborhood around us?" It was the mission question—and it assumed the church was a mission base and that the pastor we called would be a missionary. It also assumed that the pastor, like the best missionaries, would be among us to equip those in his care to be in ministry in their respective spheres of influence: their families, their neighborhoods, their places of work. How to do that—how to keep "ecclesiology as the *servant* of soteriology"—is the subject of the following propositions:

1. The primary mission of the Church is to make disciples of every nation,[5] both more mature disciples and more disciples, using the Word as it is preached in its purity and the Sacraments as they are administered rightly.

It is probably not necessary to say it, but we must be careful to maintain the pure teaching of the Scripture. If we lose that, we have nothing worth saying.

But we human beings add accretions—more than is required. Some Christians add, "If your church is not growing, if it is not prosperous, then it is less than Christian—or at least not faithful." Others will tell us that unless the church is poor and suffering, it is not being faithful. Why is that wrong? Because it bases the presence of the church on something other than the right preaching of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments.

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It is becoming trendy today to say we will plant "distinctly" Lutheran churches. Of course, but that raises the question of what is "distinctly Lutheran." Originally, "Lutheran" was a term to designate a Gospel reform movement within the Church catholic. Today we would hope this could be a Gospel reform movement within the world!—but more on this later. If by "distinctly Lutheran" all that is meant is that a church conforms to specific ceremonies or the look of a building or the way the church is titled or the pastor dresses, we have lost something important. We have lost a principled theology. We may even have lost the spirit of sacrifice and love that are basic ways we communicate to the world who we are.

If by "distinctly Lutheran" all that is meant is that a church conforms to specific ceremonies or the look of a building or the way the church is titled or the pastor dresses, we have lost something important.

2. A second proposition for keeping ecclesiology as the servant of soteriology is to reaffirm that the chief work of the office of public ministry is to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:1–12).

The pastor has a role as an overseer of faith and life. In 1 Peter 5, Peter addresses "elders" and "shepherds," whom he calls "overseers." (The Greek word is "*episcopoi*." These "oversee" the correct teaching of Law and Gospel and urge the Christians in their care to live lives that bring the love of Christ into their own spheres of influence. The office is not optional, but essential to "being the church." The pastor, using the authority transmitted to him by the congregation, stands in the place of Jesus in public ministry (Jn 17:18; 20:21).

But the pastor does more than just mentor and maintain doctrine for a group already organized; there is the apostolic responsibility to order the church in such a way as to spread the Good News outside the congregation he serves.

In this respect, a congregation has the authority to add other ministers of the Gospel who are not "ordained" to Word and Sacrament ministry, but who nevertheless hold a public office in the church. Congregations are free to call a teacher, or DCE, or DCO, or parish nurse, or church council officers, or a team to begin a new mission. When they do, they are publicly recognizing specific people for a specific, well-defined ministry (as the "apostle" in the Jewish Talmud—Beracoth 5—was authorized for a specific task and for that task only). We are saying publicly, "You can trust these ministers. They have been 'rightly called' for the task to which they are assigned. They are under supervision of the one we called to preach and to teach the Gospel among us."

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Since the "keys" are given to the Church, the church must "rightly call" the pastor—*rite vocatus* (AC XIV). Without the call, there is no pastor. The service of ordination, on the other hand—for both Luther and Walther—is a tradition, an important tradition to be continued. When a pastor retires, he is still a "Reverend," but unless he has a call from a congregation, he ceases to be a pastor.

> But the pastor does more than just mentor and maintain doctrine for a group already organized; there is the apostolic responsibility to order the church in such a way as to spread the Good News outside the congregation he serves.

The Lutherans saw the Anabaptists in Saxony as raising up anyone to be their pastor. Lutherans wanted to separate themselves from this practice. They wanted pastors who would be "rightly called"—*rite vocatus*. The term is not defined in the Lutheran Confessions, but has come to mean generally the *proper selection*, *preparation*, *affirmation by the broader church* and the *public call of a congregation*. How the call is carried out may change. At various times, it has been a somewhat informal process. When the blessing of a formal seminary education was not available, candidates could be tutored by someone authorized for this purpose and later tested to see if they had mastered the requirements for public ministry of the Word. It is critical to have this training and this testing, but how it is done can vary and has varied.

The pastor stands in public in the place of Jesus to exercise the church's authority (the apostolic authority) to forgive sins. This right is given to the pastor as the steward of the gifts God has given to the congregation, through the call of a congregation. This authority is not "transferred to" or "given over to" the pastor. The church retains this authority. That is why in the LCMS a seminary graduate cannot be ordained until he has a call from a congregation. The congregation calls the pastor to, on their behalf, "oversee" the ministries and ministers of a congregation—assuring that the Word is being preached in its purity, that the Sacraments are being administered rightly, and that this Word "has free course." The final "oversight" belongs to the congregation—who calls the bishop-pastor to do this on their behalf.

Again, as "bishop," with the support of the congregation, the pastor can recruit others to help him carry out his ministry. Installation of Sunday School teachers, church council members, readers in church, communion assistants, a missionary to Muslims, a Mission Equipping Pastor, a team to begin work in a new area for a new congregation—all are appropriate.

Tenure for the pastor is not an essential part of a call. Congregations can choose to give a tenured call to a pastor, a teacher, DCE, DCO, or others they deem

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important for the continuation of ministry. Recently it has been wise to say that only the called minister should have tenure. But this is a human decision.

Since the “keys” are given to the Church, Christians do not give up their Gospel rights, at any age. Luther gives an example of preparing confirmation age children to share the Gospel; in case they were abducted in wars with the Muslims, they could confess the faith to them.

Something that is rarely discussed among us is that, even though we have strict rules for calling a tenured minister, we are not as privy to guidelines to “un-call” a called worker who has tenure. In some instances, these workers must be accused of false doctrine or immorality to be relieved of their position. I must say that this stance causes all kinds of mischief. But, if the congregation has the right to call, why can’t it decide that its pastor no longer should stand in the place of Christ to minister to them? This decision, of course, should not be made lightly; but I can see no biblical reason that it could not happen—and might very well result, in many instances, in the Gospel’s having a greater chance to be released into the world.

3. To keep ecclesiology as the servant of soteriology, each Christian congregation needs to seek the support of the wider church.

In interpretation of doctrine and in practice and in the calling of public ministers of the Word, it is wise to seek the counsel and endorsement of the wider church. Christian people and congregations (*deo humano*) are sinful. They can turn inward—as I said earlier, one definition of “sin” is *curvatus in se* (St. Augustine’s phrase, by the way), that is, “turning in on self.”[6] It is a temptation for churches as well as individuals.

There are exceptions to the benefit of receiving support from the broader church, for instance, in times of emergency: Deacon-Evangelist Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, and baptized him without consulting with St. Louis, I mean Jerusalem. Peter in Acts 10 baptized the gentiles in Cornelius’ house without getting permission, but his preaching received the blessing of the Holy Spirit and resulted in the Gentile Pentecost.

The church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22) did send a representative to Antioch to understand what the Lord had been doing in raising up a church there, one that had been started without the oversight of the Twelve. The work among gentiles in Antioch began as a result of the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen. The representative sent by Jerusalem, Barnabas, encouraged the growth of the church and, on the face of it, on his own brought in a former outcast, Paul, to oversee the further proclaiming of the Gospel.

St. Cyprian of Carthage in the third century said, “He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the church for his mother.”[7] But at times individuals want

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to "have church" alone watching a sunset; some congregations may not take the ministry of their district seriously and keep themselves away and be non-supportive. Some districts would like to ignore the national synod. At times our synod may have trouble relating to other Christians, although the purpose of the synod, and districts, is to "strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world."[8] There may be good reasons for this—or—it may be simply sin, "Incurvatus in se."

4. A fourth principle for keeping ecclesiology as the servant of soteriology: Every Christian has not only the right, but the duty to share his or her faith.

Martin Luther saw all the tasks of one's life as providing opportunities to express our faith. According to Luther, "The great flaw of the medieval monastic system was that it limited service to God to 'religious acts.'"[9] The monastic tendency was to "denigrate (the structures of society) as inherently evil—and to withdraw from them into a supposedly holier way of life."[10]

But God calls us to express our baptismal identity through everything we do, including work. God opens doors at work to demonstrate the love of Jesus through honesty, through mercy, sometimes through sharing the Word of God. All this means that the everyday work of a Christian is a holy calling, a calling to live in gratitude to God and to serve others.[11]

Our synod's emphasis on "martyria" (witness), "koinonia" (fellowship) and "diakonia" (service) is right on.

The church will make every effort to equip laity to bring the love of God into their vocations.

Now, this is done primarily out of love. Love is the final guide. If you have a starving community and you have a warehouse filled with food but don't tell anyone—let them come to us but not go to them—this is not love. Out of love, the Lord came to us: "God loved the world so much" (Jn 3:16). "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:35).

Rev. Khurram Khan reaches out to Muslims in the United States, but the Lord grabbed hold of Khurram in a Bible study in Saudi Arabia. Khurram (a civil engineer from Pakistan) was working with the Arab American Oil Company when he and his family were invited by Mr. Howard Russell to learn more about Jesus. It is against the law to study the Bible in a group in Saudi Arabia. The people in the group took a grave risk meeting as they did.

But in that class, Khurram for the first time heard the Gospel (Howard Russell is a committed LCMS member in Southern Illinois—and Lutherans know their Gospel). The Spirit of Christ moved Khurram to want to dedicate the rest of his life

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to sharing this love with Muslims. Today he is a graduate of the Fort Wayne Seminary's EIIT program and as the head of People of the Book Lutheran Outreach oversees more than twenty missions reaching Muslims in the United States and six in Pakistan and India.

People of the Book Lutheran Outreach has reached out to Muslims with the love of Christ, but there are some involved in outreach to Muslims who demonstrate a mean spirit. That will not change hearts.

The Church Father, Tertullian, in the third century described how *outsiders* see the Christians: "'Look,' they say, 'how they love one another' (for they themselves hate one another); 'and how they are ready to die for each other' (for they themselves are readier to kill each other)."[12]

They'll know we are Lutherans by our hymnal, yes . . . ; by our church architecture, ok . . . ; by use of the Means of Grace, yes . . . ; but, in the end, the most biblical characteristic of Lutherans is that they will know we are Lutherans by our love.

5. The Church is not an end in itself; it is the servant of Christ, and therefore of all.

As Jesus left His Father's house to engage the world, His people do the same.

In St. Louis, Lynn and I belonged to Historic Trinity in Soulard, Walther's church and the place where early formative meetings of the Lutheran Hours Ministries were held. Trinity had been a thriving congregation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—serving the needs of new immigrants, helping them find housing and jobs.

By the middle of the twentieth century, German immigrants were no longer coming to St. Louis in large numbers, and Trinity had declined to the point where, in anticipation of the closing of the church, the trustees started a foundation to preserve the church building as a museum.

However, a new pastor with a new vision was installed. The neighborhood around Trinity had declined, and there was a need for food distribution to homeless men. The church also joined in partnership with a Roman Catholic Church a block away to support their homeless shelter. This brought a different kind of person into the church—we called them angels. They were on medication or off their medication. In the middle of the service, one of the angels might get up and begin to sing, or preach. The congregation was gracious and patient.

The strange thing was this became attractive to people from the suburbs who were looking for a church that was making a difference in its community. Some of you know the Ted Drewes ice cream store in St. Louis. Ted and his wife, Dottie, joined Trinity. People from the International Center and CPH came to join. After a

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few years, the congregation voted to rehab the parsonage into a soup kitchen and meeting rooms and offices for community groups. In other words, Trinity reengaged its community with the love of Jesus. Today the congregation is strong and growing.

The Church in one sense does not have a mission. Instead, the mission of God creates the Church. The invisible Church will continue forever. The visible church is governed by bishops, tax laws, and Concordia Benefit Plans. The visible church has a cycle of life—comes into existence, matures, declines, and dies. In the LCMS, in studies we did in the late 1990s, we saw that the typical LCMS congregation grew from 0–30 years of age. From 30 to 60 years, there was a plateau in worship attendance. From 60 to 80 years of age, congregations generally declined. Many congregations did not last past eighty years. They may still have their doors open, but their ecclesiology no longer served soteriology in any significant way. Church councils and voters meetings become more concerned with paying the bills and keeping the roof in good repair and pay less attention to saving souls.

The question that begs to be asked is—are we planting enough new churches to replace those whose life cycle is ending?

6. A sixth presupposition: While doctrine remains unchanged, the church can change its polity and practice.

Changes may occur in ecclesiology to better serve soteriology. By that, I mean in the things that can be changed *coram humano*, things not required by Scripture as understood by us through the lens of the Lutheran Confessions. Such things include forms of worship.

At times we will emphasize the needs of a “settled” church—a church existing in an obviously Christian culture, but change is required when the culture turns away from Christian values and ideals. The way a church lives on a mission field is and has to be different from the church in a Christian country. The way the church worships will be different. When many have not grown up within the culture of the church, there has to be more effort to form new converts. Preaching will reflect more on the contrast between the culture and the church.

There is no one form revealed in Scripture for music, or for order—although a while back the chairman of the LCMS Commission on Worship did suggest elements that should be included in a Christian worship service. The earliest Christians worshiped in Hebrew; does that mean we must do the same? They met in private homes for worship. Is this more authentic than in a public space like a church building? They used musical instruments to lift their joy and thanksgivings to the Lord, but none of these were an organ. At first, the worship leaders were Jews; must that be the case now?

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The last word about worship forms in my opinion is Augsburg Confession, Article 24, "The chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ." I would say this also applies to all forms of church administration; essentially, this is the point of my presentation.

7. We should not add to what the Holy Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions say about ecclesiology.

If it is not in the Bible and the Confessions, we are free to change. Roman Catholics have another criterion; they add "tradition." So their pope and bishops and priests are the bearers of the tradition.

There has been talk suggesting we should add "tradition" and have four *solas*, "*Sola gratia, Sola fide, Sola scriptura, Sola tradition.*" I am not for this, because it elevates human rules and guidelines to a par with gifts given to us by the Lord Himself. I think this is very dangerous.

The Bible says little beyond some very basic principles of ecclesiology (see Part I of this paper); the Lutheran Confessions are the same. When we begin to add more "essentials" to the basics we have received, we need to be very careful. Soon the simple truths can become unrecognizable.

Conclusion

This has been a short paper on a very large topic. I apologize if I have not said everything clearly or fully enough. I have tried to be faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Ecclesiology is the servant of soteriology because the Church is the body of Christ and Jesus, our Savior, said "I came to serve, not be served."

I have tried to be faithful to the genius of the founders of our synod and to the servant heart they displayed.

That servant heart, which always accompanied the heartfelt beliefs of the founders of the Missouri Synod, continues to reverberate down the centuries. It has been made real in the tens of thousands of times pastors and laity have gone outside of the four walls to share their faith.

That servant heart, which always accompanied the heartfelt beliefs of the founders of the Missouri Synod, continues to reverberate down the centuries. It has been made real in the tens of thousands of times pastors and laity have gone outside of the four walls to share their faith.

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By the grace of God it will continue to be real among us—even more than it is today. And so maybe we can change that old children's rhyme—maybe from now on we should say, "Here is the church, here is the steeple. Open the doors, and send out the people."

Endnotes

[1] This article is based on a presentation made first at a convention of the Texas District in June 2012 and later revised for presentation at the New Jersey District Pastoral Conference in October 2013.
[2] *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 305.
[3] Didache, Part III, 11.3
[4] Published in *Festklange* (CPH, 1892), trans. by Bruce Cameron (July 1993).
[5] J. A. O. Preus, "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles," p. 2, (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1973). Adopted as resolution 3-01 at the 1973 Convention of the LCMS, 127–128.
[6] It was Augustine of Hippo who first coined the phrase *Incurvatus in se.* Martin Luther expanded on this in his Lectures on Romans and described this state as: "Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, [being] so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them (as is plain in the works-righteous and hypocrites), or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake."
[5] Cyprian, *Treatise on the Unity of the Church*, 6.
[8] 2010 Handbook of the LCMS, p. 13, Article III, Objectives, #2.
[9] D. Michael Bennethum, *Listen! God calling!* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 49.
[10] Ibid., 60.
[11] Ibid., 44.
[12] Tertullian's "Apology," Chapter 39.7 (circa 200 AD)

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Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities: Congregations and Race in America

Theodore J. Hopkins and Mark A. Koschmann

Abstract: Race and racism are urgent matters for the church to address, particularly in the urban centers of the United States. In the last couple of years, a gaping wound has been opened in the middle of American cities. These wounds are evident in New York, Minneapolis, Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, Saint Louis, and many other cities across the country. In these places, it is becoming ever clearer that race and racism cannot be ignored. If this is true on a pragmatic, political level, how much truer is it theologically? After all, Christ has called His church to consist of people of all colors and ethnicities, and Christ has called His church to mission in the urban centers of North America. In view of this reality, this paper argues that faithful mission and ministry in urban settings requires congregations to contextualize the gospel, by addressing race in their public ministry, and we describe such faithful ministry with an historical example of First Immanuel Lutheran Church in Chicago.

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It might be a surprise to some, but how to do effective urban ministry is well-established.[1] Actually setting out and doing ministry in the city is more difficult, but there is a general consensus on how to minister effectively in the city. The keys are twofold: love the people and build trusting relationships. Of course, we agree that such things are valid and important in any ministry, but the contention of our paper is that these concerns neglect a basic issue of the urban setting: social sin generally and racism in particular. Our paper will proceed by examining briefly the problem of racism, then showing how the failure to address racism is an ecclesiological problem, the privatization of the church. Next, we will look at the congregation of First Immanuel Lutheran in Chicago as an example of a congregation that publicly embodies the witness of Jesus Christ to urban Chicago. Finally, we will argue for three congregational practices that exemplify Christian witness in the face of social sins like racism.

The 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, highlights just how important the issue of race is, and why the white church especially has ignored it. In the middle of August 2014, the Pew Research Center conducted a national survey that asked whether the shooting of Michael Brown "raises important issues about race that need to be discussed." Eighty percent of black Americans agreed that the Ferguson situation is about race and that the shooting raises racial issues that need to be talked about. White Americans, however, had a different interpretation of the events. Only 37 percent of whites believed that racial issues were important to the Michael Brown shooting, and 47 percent of whites thought that race was receiving far too much press.[2] This survey is a microcosm of the situation in the city more broadly; other surveys from the Pew Research Center show the same phenomenon.[3] In general, most African Americans believe that racial issues are a central concern of urban life, whereas many white Anglo- or Euro-Americans think that racial issues are a thing of the past. Simply on the level of pragmatics—we will get to the theology soon enough—how can the church effectively minister in an urban setting when it disregards a fundamental concern of so many people?

> We believe, however, that Christ calls His church communities to tackle systemic issues within their neighborhoods, including structural failures that implicate society as a whole in sin, such as racism.

The surveys of the Pew Research Center show that African Americans believe racial issues are still of the utmost importance; yet congregations, even urban ones, largely fail to attend to such systemic social issues. To be clear, Christians often address social, structural issues as individual Christians, but Christian congregations are hardly the center of Christian social action. We believe, however, that Christ calls His church communities to tackle systemic issues within their neighborhoods, including

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structural failures that implicate society as a whole in sin, such as racism. What do we mean by "structural failure?" Structural failures are systemic problems that exist on a social or institutional level, resulting in harm to human beings or more broadly to God's creation. As such, structural failures must be understood not only ethically in terms of harm to God's creatures but also theologically as implicating whole communities in sin. Harm to God's creatures is not merely an ethical problem but is deeply religious. Sin against one's sister or brother is sin against God. Just as personal sin against one's neighbor is a theological problem, so too are harmful structures theologically problematic. Institutions are fallen, and social structures sometimes promote sin. Thus, structural failure results in personal sin and personal guilt.[4] At the same time, this personal sin is not mine alone, but it is social sin, belonging to a community of people who, whether in sins of commission or omission, are complicit in doing harm to their neighbors. Hence, structural failure results in social sin, for which the church, as the community called to attend to God's command and admit its guilt before God, is also guilty.

Not only do harmful structures result in sin, but social sins like racism often give rise to the harmful structures in the first place.[5] Thus, the relationship between social sin and structural failure is complex. Social sins like racism cause and perpetuate harmful structures. At the same time, harmful structures also create and maintain the social sins. Furthermore, identifying a harmful structure is no easy task. Identifying structural failure is a challenge because *from the outside* these structures may not appear to be harmful at all. Structural failure often appears to be just the way things are, and no one is to blame. In fact, with structural failure, it is common to blame the weak for their own situation. Poverty may be blamed on the poor, immigration blamed on the immigrants, and racism blamed on people of color. For example, when racism is not understood as a social, systematic problem, then it is too often conceived merely as a personal problem. As such, racism exists solely when an individual hates or looks down on another because of skin color. As a result, racism may be denied as an enduring problem, since few people hate others *solely* because of skin color. In this view, racism is primarily a problem of perception. Of course, in calling racism a problem of perception on the part of people of color, one places the blame squarely on them.

In our view, however, racism is not only personal; racism is a social sin that that pervades the nation and especially the city. Racism is embedded within the city's deepest structures, including the structures of commerce, such as access to food and medicine, the structures of education, the structures of transportation, and the structures of security.[6] In Saint Louis, many have identified racism as the underlying problem contributing to the structural failure that occurred in the shooting of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson.[7] The response to the shooting has been so intense because it is an instance of the broader problem of racism as a social sin. Despite the prevailing problem of social sin, conservative churches tend to focus on "hearts and

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minds," that is, interpersonal relationships and individual lives. Liberal churches may highlight structural failure, but they often address the problem only ethically, trying to solve structural failure through partisan politics. Neither attends to the congregation as a concrete community in which Christian political activity takes place. Why have congregations received such little attention in how Christians affect society?

In the recent monograph, *To Change the World*, James Davison Hunter argues that all of American society has succumbed to an ethos of political power. In other words, partisan politics forms the matrix for how Americans understand public, social issues. The church has also been caught up in the overwhelming aura of partisan politics. Hunter observes, "Politics is the way in which social life and its problems are imagined and it provides the framework for how Christians envision solutions to those problems."[8] Hence, both the Christian Right and the Christian Left have focused on effecting social change through partisan politics. The political positions are polar opposites, but the fundamental strategy is the same. From the now defunct Moral Majority of Jerry Falwell to Jim Wallis's Sojourners, conservative and liberal Christians alike work to change their communities through voting and public policy rather than through the public life of congregations. Sojourners may fight against poverty, while the Christian Right fights against gay marriage, but the strategies are the same.[9] Partisan politics is the way for Christians to change the world.

What is the problem with this "witness" of partisan politics? At the level of politics, the church becomes caught up in a battle involving political parties, and no matter which side Christians choose, they lose.[10] Political parties embody power that is anything but Christian. Most importantly for the church, this focus on partisan politics largely neglects Christian congregations as communities through which Christians embody the Gospel in the face of social sin and publicly witness to Christ in their neighborhoods. In other words, this primary witness of partisan politics ignores congregations as public, visible actors in their locales.[11]

Most importantly for the church, this focus on partisan politics largely neglects Christian congregations as communities through which Christians embody the Gospel in the face of social sin and publicly witness to Christ in their neighborhoods. In other words, this primary witness of partisan politics ignores congregations as public, visible actors in their locales.

One may argue that the political witness of the Left and Right is indeed the problem, and the solution is to focus on interpersonal relationships: loving individuals, building trust, and shaping the individual for public life. In this view, the

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church must stress the proclamation of the Gospel to individuals and build relationships in order to make individuals good public actors. The problem is that such a view makes the congregation alien to the public realm except through individual Christians. The congregation has little role to play as a community that embodies the Gospel, confesses social sin, and works to reform structural failure issues through the church's common life. Ironically, a solely interpersonal approach to the church is the other side of the coin of partisan politics. Both the interpersonal and the partisan position share the same fault: the privatization of the church. In both of these views, the task of the congregation is to form the *individual* in his or her Christian life. For those politically minded, the pastor's job is to address political issues and help show how individuals should vote. Or, for those focused more interpersonally, the pastor's job is to preach the Gospel and build trusting relationships between people so that people are converted and live as Christians outside of the congregation. In both cases, the congregation as a community is treated as private, and the focus is on the individual.

Certainly we affirm that the church *must* proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to individuals, but the church's mission is also a public witness of the visible community. A privatized understanding of the church, however, practically removes the congregation from the public realm; and this privatization distorts the church's witness, especially in matters of structural failure and social sin. Structural failure and social sin are easily neglected in a privatized church life because they do not fit in the private sphere. Both are public and systemic, without a single guilty party. Whole communities and societies are complicit in this sin. As such, a privatized understanding of the church has trouble addressing such problems of the public sphere, which are dismissed as "too political." The church is supposed to stress individual conversion and individual Christian life, not the political matters of the public sphere. The result is exactly what Hunter observes: social issues like racism, poverty, and immigration become exclusively matters of partisan politics to be solved by the state, since the church deals only in the private sphere. To return to the urban context, a privatized understanding of the congregation easily neglects the fundamental structural issues of urban ministry, especially the matter of race and the pernicious effect of racism on people of color.

Certainly we affirm that the church *must* proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to individuals, but the church's mission is also a public witness of the visible community.

To sum up our argument thus far, we contend that urban ministry is not only about loving people and building trusting relationships on an interpersonal level, but congregations also need to address systemic issues in their communities, especially social sins such as racism and the corresponding structural failure. Some may argue

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that our position sounds like liberal politics. To be clear, though, we are *not* advocating for liberal politics against a conservative politics, nor are we suggesting that churches should stop preaching the Gospel in favor of social justice. Instead, Christ calls the church to live from the Gospel in its public, visible life, which includes speaking truthfully about social sin and working to heal broken structures. In other words, the Gospel entails a particular kind of life, and the church fails to live out this calling of Christ in the city when it does not address the fundamental structural issues that affect the city. With regard to the matter of race, Christ calls His church to speak truthfully, to confess and repent, about the ways that we are complicit in racism, even in its less apparent structural forms.

Other Lutheran pastors have called for this same honest, public witness of the Christian church. One notable example within the LCMS was Rev. Andrew Schulze (1896–1982), who served black mission churches in Springfield, Illinois (1924–1928); St. Louis, Missouri (1928–1947); and Chicago, Illinois (1947–1954).[12] He was an early advocate for integration, especially to get black students admitted to Lutheran schools, and wrote several treatises on race relations in the church. His 1968 *Fire from the Throne: Race Relations and the Church* is dated but still relevant in that Schulze confirms the importance of the church's public witness and its relationship to the Gospel. He writes,

> At any given time there is no aspect of human existence that can be bypassed by the church if it is to fulfill its God-intended purpose in the world. . . . When theology speaks of man's relation to God and God's relation to man, there are always implications of man's relation to man.[13]

We agree with Schulze that the relationship between God and humanity takes shape in church communities that Christ has called to witness to Him in their common, public lives.

This paper is not the place to develop a comprehensive, theoretical account of the necessary ecclesiology, but a few comments are in order. Our basic ecclesiological thesis is that ecclesiology needs to understand the church as a concrete, visible community called to witness to Christ in its common life together.[14] This witness to Christ must address social sin and structural failure of the public sphere, as well as personal sin, so that a congregation embodies a Christian public witness, which is an alien politics compared to the power games of political parties. Congregations embody this alien politics both in their worship and in their work of service. The difficult question for us today is: What does this look like? What does

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it look like for a church-community to live out its public calling to Christ in view of social sin? This is a particularly difficult question because our imaginations have been captured by the framework of partisan politics. Hence, the example of First Immanuel in Chicago can be helpful as a first step to reimagining church politics in North America today. We first look at First Immanuel during the 1950s and 1960s when the congregation was engaged heavily in the civil rights movement. Although First Immanuel is hardly unique in this regard, it is a helpful example for reimagining public witness today, particularly in addressing racism as a social sin. Although times have changed in the past fifty or sixty years, First Immanuel is an illustrative example in part because of this historical distance. This distance gives us an opportunity to evaluate more clearly First Immanuel's witness and see how it has affected the congregation to this day. After this historical sketch, we will draw out three specifics for how congregations can witness to Jesus Christ in the face of social sin and the accompanying structural failure.

First Immanuel: Learning to Embrace the City

First Immanuel Lutheran Church was established in 1854 on the west side of Chicago. During its first hundred years, First Immanuel reflected its neighborhood of predominantly German immigrants and Americans of German heritage. But by the mid-twentieth century, the neighborhood around First Immanuel changed significantly as increasing numbers of African Americans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans entered the community. When the neighborhood first changed, First Immanuel was paralyzed. Racist attitudes, clashes along class lines, and a Lutheran parochialism hindered the congregation's engagement with its surrounding community. As a result of urban residents' migrating to the suburbs, First Immanuel experienced a significant loss in membership. In 1890, First Immanuel had peaked with three thousand baptized members; but by the 1940s, membership had dropped to a two hundred, with much lower Sunday worship attendance.[15]

Consequently, First Immanuel took a hard look at whom God had called them to be. Two plausible options were relocating to the suburbs or closing the doors for good. Instead, the congregation decided to refocus its efforts on its own neighborhood. To do this, the congregation had to take seriously its identity and mission as a church. To be sure, contentious questions emerged about race and religious identity related to the mission and purpose of the congregation. Sometimes these debates were complicated by language that too

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easily pushed aside concerns about race, ethnicity, and class. But, in the end, the congregation rediscovered God's call to the local neighborhood. Furthermore, they committed themselves by word and action to all the residents of the neighborhood—old and new, rich and poor, German American, African American, Mexican American, and all other ethnicities.

We first look at how the congregation's pastors raised the support and took the risks to re-purpose First Immanuel as an urban Lutheran congregation. But these pastors did it with the commitment and courage of its lay men and women. In fact, a more complete account of First Immanuel's history would emphasize the tremendous work of the congregation's Sunday School, the involvement of students from Concordia College in River Forest, and the neighborhood networking of First Immanuel members with African American mothers living in the nearby public housing units. Yet, for the sake of space, we will focus on the work of the congregation's pastors who, together with lay men and women, grew to realize that Christ was calling them to serve the city where they were. They were convinced that the message of Christ meant that the people of their neighborhood needed a church where Christ's reconciliation actually takes place, especially between people of different races, ethnicities, and cultures. The pastors didn't have all the answers—an important admission for pastors to make—but they did work faithfully to understand the issues in their community and to share the Gospel in their neighborhood.

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The pertinent history of First Immanuel begins in 1952, under the direction of a new pastor, the Rev. Ralph Moellering. With Moellering's arrival, First Immanuel began to make more intentional efforts to connect with the area's African American and Mexican American residents. Moellering wrote this in his memoirs about his ministry at First Immanuel:

> Lutherans, as well as most other organized denominations, preferred to "keep their hands clean" and not "become involved." By retreating into our citadels of "spirituality" we could pretend to be about "the Father's business." In our self-righteousness we could even denounce the do-gooders who seemed to be striving for salvation by "good works." . . . A

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> misapplication of Reformation doctrine . . . tended to make Lutherans impotent and irrelevant in the changing city.[16]

Moellering thus describes what might be called the "standard story" of Lutheran congregations in the city. For its first hundred years, First Immanuel easily fit the above description. But when Moellering was called to be pastor at First Immanuel, he made his acceptance of the position contingent on the congregation's acceptance of African Americans in worship and as fully vested members of the church. In 1953, First Immanuel took a bold step by becoming the first LCMS congregation in Chicago to voluntarily integrate with African Americans and other people of color. The congregational resolution stated: "We will certainly not refuse anyone of any race or color who would apply for membership." Thus, one year before the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in *Brown v. Board of Education*, members of First Immanuel demonstrated a willingness to break down the racial divide at a time when many in the church and across the nation opposed integration. The African Americans living in the neighborhood took notice of such a decision by a white Lutheran congregation. Furthermore, First Immanuel's effort was based on three articles of faith emphasized by the congregation in a published statement:

> The first is that a congregation should serve its immediate neighborhood with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The second is that a congregation should celebrate racial inclusiveness as the most complete expression of the church of Jesus Christ. The third is that the larger church body should assist such ministry with resources of people and money.[17]

Delegates at the 1956 LCMS national convention adopted this mandate and demanded further support for urban congregations regardless of race.

Following these congregational statements, efforts to integrate at First Immanuel proceeded at a steady pace. While Moellering waged a principled fight against the endemic racism in the Lutheran church and especially against the mission board of the Northern Illinois District for the LCMS, members of the congregation simply attended to the needs of those in their community. In May 1954, First Immanuel opened its new member instruction classes to African Americans. Many families in the community also brought their children to First Immanuel's Sunday School. In 1955, Samuel Hoard, an African American student from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, served as vicar at First Immanuel. As a result, integration was not only allowed but actually began to take place in this congregation. In fact, Hoard spent the majority of his ministry serving the older, white, and mostly German American members of the congregation, while Moellering led the congregation in doing ministry among African Americans. Other ministries and efforts began to include the Mexican Americans in the congregation, including the calling of a Spanish-speaking pastor, Rev. William Puder, in 1956. In the mid-1960s, First Immanuel would further

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its connection with the neighborhood by direct participation in the Chicago civil rights movement.

While many Americans were engaging in civil rights activism during the 1950s and 1960s, the impetus for the change among this Lutheran congregation was deeply theological. Moellering summarizes, “Lutherans would say they must invoke both Law and Gospel . . . the all-inclusive love of Jesus Christ, whose sacrificial death atones for the totality of human guilt, must be proclaimed at every level with full understanding of the people to whom it is directed.”[18] Moellering’s point about the *totality* of human guilt includes what we have called social sin. Additionally, Moellering, like Andrew Schulze, stresses the need to proclaim salvation at every level and for all people.

In 1958 Moellering left the congregation to pursue a doctoral fellowship at Harvard and was replaced by Rev. Don Becker. Becker continued the efforts of his predecessor by advocating for civil rights and ardently pursuing social justice in Chicago. The insufficient urban housing, especially among African Americans living in the city, was a central rallying point of the civil rights and religious leaders in Chicago. First Immanuel was no exception. Insufficient urban housing was another structural failure that Becker and his congregation addressed. This was not direct racism, yet there was a clear connection between racism and unequal housing in Chicago, making this another structural failure that largely affected people of color. As a result, Becker became involved in addressing the deplorable conditions of neighborhoods, in which city aldermen had neglected the basic needs of neighborhood infrastructure. Together with other members from the church, Becker worked closely with the West Side Organization (WSO), an organization that was committed to fair and equitable housing in Chicago and helped orchestrate local rallies and protests. One way the WSO advocated for equality was by sending black couples and then white couples to the same real estate agents on the same day to see which houses and neighborhoods were shown to prospective buyers based on race. Six years later, in a Chicago rally against housing inequality, Martin Luther King described what these activists experienced. He said:

> We sent Negroes in large numbers to the real estate offices in Gage Park. Every time Negroes went in, the real estate agent said, “Oh, I'm sorry, we don’t have anything listed.” Now, you can find something somewhere, but it was always back in the ghetto, but they didn’t have anything. And then soon after that, we sent some of our fine white staff members into those same real estate offices, and the minute the white persons got in, they opened the books, “Oh yes, we have several things. Now what exactly do you want?”[19]

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Becker, his wife, and other couples from the congregation, both black and white, were involved in this type of activism in an effort to draw much needed attention to the racial inequalities in Chicago urban housing.

Then, in 1966, First Immanuel continued its civil rights activism through direct participation in the Chicago Freedom Movement when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., came to Chicago to lead the city in a series of demonstrations to highlight the housing crisis for the people of Chicago and the watching nation. King sought to expose the hypocrisy of the northern United States, including politicians such as Mayor Daley, who supported civil rights in the south but did nothing for equality in the north. King's visit to Chicago was controversial for First Immanuel, in particular, because King was planning to speak at a rally hosted at the church. Prior to King's visit, Becker had promised the use of the church building to the West Side Organization as needed. But the specific request for King to speak at the church was a bit more controversial. Instead of deciding the issue behind closed doors, Becker had the issue taken to the entire congregation for a vote.

The issue was complicated because some members believed that King always stirred up trouble. In fact, many of the area African American churches were themselves reluctant to host King because they did not want to oppose Mayor Daley and city hall. Many members at First Immanuel were also concerned about getting involved in such a controversial political issue because they thought it might bring bad press for the church. In addition, the fact that King was a Baptist preacher caused concern among some members. But for Becker and several African American members, hosting King to make a public stand against the inadequate city housing was an opportunity not to be missed. In fact, the inequalities over city housing directly involved some of the African American members at First Immanuel who lived in the public housing units in question.

To resolve the congregational debate about hosting King for a rally, the issue first went to the church council. For the first time, the church council was split along racial lines. White council members spoke of the possibility of violence, while black council members saw the rally as an unprecedented opportunity. The black vote narrowly won, five to four. Having been approved by the church council, the issue then went before the congregation to vote on this recommendation. Again, the vote painfully fell along racial lines with just a few whites advocating for King. Becker did not have a vote in either setting, but his support for hosting King for the rally was readily apparent. The decision to host King narrowly passed, again by one vote. For a short time, the congregation was split and members were embittered toward one other. Many of the white members opposing the decision blamed Becker. But despite the backlash of some angry members, including threats from a member to blockade the doors on the day of the event, the narrow majority of the congregation maintained its support for hosting King. By the time of the actual event, most

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members of the church had been convinced that hosting King was an important event for supporting the people of color in their neighborhood and across Chicago.

On the day of the rally, King arrived late, exhausted and worn-down after visiting five churches in one day. Nevertheless, the public rally, speech, and unity of black and white members, together with people from the surrounding neighborhood, spoke highly of the congregation's commitment to address the darkest realities of urban Chicago. It was also a telling example of Christian solidarity in the face of suffering and oppression. Before King arrived, members from First Immanuel and residents from the neighborhood sang Gospel songs and had several local leaders speak. Becker also shared some words on behalf of First Immanuel, explaining that the congregation "is speaking about this issue [civil rights] because it relates to our identity as Christians. It is not just about civic duty . . . we are supporting it because this is where we belong."[20] In short, Becker was arguing that the reason for Lutheran involvement was a direct result of the Christian faith in recognizing the inclusive message of the Gospel to all people regardless of race and the Christian view of the church as the body of Christ for all people.

Embodying a Public Witness to Jesus Christ

How did the members of First Immanuel embody the Gospel in their city? To be sure, the Gospel was paramount for both the members and the pastors of First Immanuel. They were enacting what Andrew Schulze called for when he stressed: "God's relation to man and man's relation to God—while emphasizing man's relation to man."[21] The work of First Immanuel was not primarily about the Social Gospel or civil rights; First Immanuel's first concern was God and the good news of the Gospel. The Gospel is not for white or black people alone; it is for all people, regardless of ethnicity or color. Since the Gospel is for all, members of First Immanuel recognized that their congregation too must be for all people. This inclusiveness could not be just lip-service; but rather their public life had to embody this reality. Thus, First Immanuel worked to bring reconciliation between whites and blacks within their congregation and to bring justice to the broader neighborhood. This was life in the Gospel.

How did First Immanuel go about its urban ministry? Three factors stand out. First, the congregation was attuned to the urban realities facing the neighborhood. This meant that First Immanuel drew no hard lines between church and world or between public and private. Instead, the public problems of their neighborhood were the problems of the church, and God's reconciliation between all people regardless of color was enacted in the church's public life and mission in the community. It was essential that First Immanuel first recognized the problems within their congregation and the problems in their neighborhood.[22] As part of Chicago's West Side, First Immanuel heard God's call to address the social sins of racism and unequal housing

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that were afflicting their people. By hosting King, First Immanuel recognized that the structural failures facing Chicago were not merely ethical, but they were also deeply theological. God had placed First Immanuel in this location to love and serve these neighbors, which required that First Immanuel step outside of the norm and work with King to bring about racial reconciliation and housing equality. As a result of First Immanuel's public witness, the local community recognized the importance of First Immanuel as a crucial part of the neighborhood and the city.

Second, the pastors at First Immanuel were leaders committed to their neighborhood and working for change in their congregation, their church at-large, and their city. Moellering was outspoken, Becker mild-mannered, but both shared a commitment to the neighborhood and the people of Chicago's west side. They went everywhere the people went, lived, worked, or played. They also went with their members on civil rights marches and public housing visits. They lived out what Walt Wangerin describes in his book, *Ragman*. In a commencement address to seminarians, "Time in The City," Wangerin gives graduates two assignments by which they are to earn their "higher degrees" in the urban environment. He says:

> Pastors [Christians] must . . .
>
> 1. Learn The City. Learn the language of its people, its secular means of communication, the flicker of eyes, the gesture of hands, the postures of contempt, servility, pride, protection, love. Learn The City. Learn the laws that shape it, both hidden in society and open in the books of government. . . . Learn its hierarchy, the levels of its power. Learn to read what hurts are real and what their symptoms are. Discover first the human dramas already being enacted in The City before your arrival—for the Holy Spirit is ahead of you, already establishing his work, already directing his purposes. Learning The City, you begin to learn of him.
>
> 2. Earn your right to be heard by The City. This is not bequeathed you with your graduation nor even with an ordination. It comes of a very specific labor. It comes when you—to your own sacrifice—commit your ways to the people of The City; and they shall believe that commitment only over a period of time. Stand with them in the courtroom, if that's where their lives take them; sit with them in hospitals, in jails, in the streets, in their places of business, in their bitter and brighter moments. It's a hard thing to do . . . but it shall earn you the right to speak when the Spirit gives you the power to speak.[23]

Lastly, members of First Immanuel were not afraid to speak the truth about their congregation and their neighborhood, even when it exposed them as caught in the web of sin. The pastors and leaders of the congregation were engaged with the contentious social issues of the day, both outside and inside First Immanuel, e.g.

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racism, segregation, and unequal housing. They did not try to bypass or ignore public, structural failures, or their complicity in them. They addressed such social sin head on. More than that, by being truthful about their sin, personal and social, they were also truthful about Jesus' justifying work for sinners. Trusting Christ, they could admit their own faults, biases, and complicity with inequality, injustice, and sin.

This last point about truthful speech in confession and forgiveness opens up divine worship as a space and time of public witness. In worship, the Spirit opens our hearts and minds to our sin, Christ's forgiveness, and to God's will for our lives, shaping our imaginations and our attitudes toward the world. In the booklet *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about confession:

> We cannot find the Cross of Jesus if we shrink from going to the place where it is to be found, namely, the public death of the sinner. And we refuse to bear the Cross when we are ashamed to take upon ourselves the shameful death of the sinner in confession. In confession we break through to the true fellowship of the Cross of Jesus Christ, in confession we affirm and accept our cross.[24]

Following Bonhoeffer, we see how Christ calls His church to confess our deepest guilt and complicity in all sin, including social sins, and follow Christ in accepting our own crosses by bearing the burden of guilt and sin in confession.[25] In so doing, the Spirit forgives our sins and opens our eyes to see injustice and to begin to work for more just structures in our cities.

> Collaboration in combatting social sin is not an academic exercise; it is something the church is called to do.

Collaboration in combatting social sin is not an academic exercise; it is something the church is called to do. As such, we wish to point out an existing liturgy that does what we are talking about. The Litany of Reconciliation comes from England's Coventry Cathedral, which was bombed in 1940 during World War II.[26] After the bombing, Provost Howard had the words "Father Forgive" inscribed on the wall behind the altar of the ruined cathedral. The words "Father Forgive" are the response of the congregation in the Litany of Reconciliation, which is prayed every weekday at noon by the Coventry congregation and is used throughout the world by the Community of the Cross of Nails. Praying this prayer of confession is a practice that leads to repentance for all sins, personal and social, and places the church at the mercy of God for forgiveness. After confessing in such a way, Christ's word of full absolution works peace, hope, and joy in His people, opening the eyes of the church to see structural failure and social sin for what it is and calling the church to faithful witness in the face of such sin. The Litany confesses:

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All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,

Father Forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,

Father Forgive.

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,

Father Forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,

Father Forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,

Father Forgive.

The lust which dishonors the bodies of men, women and children,

Father Forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,

Father Forgive.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Endnotes

[1] For example, see Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); Rev. Steve Schave, LCMS Director of Urban Ministry, "Urban & Inner-City Mission White Paper: Community Development and Caring for the Marginalized," accessed September 30, 2014, http://www.lcms.org/citymission; John Nunes, *Voices from the City: Issues and Images of Urban Preaching* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999); and Clifford J. Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States, 1945–1985* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

[2] Pew Research Center, "Stark Racial Divisions in Reactions to Ferguson Police Shooting," August 18, 2014, http://www.people-press.org/2014/08/18/stark-racial-divisions-in-reactions-to-ferguson-police-shooting/.

[3] For example, see Pew Research Center, "Views of Law Enforcement, Racial Progress and News Coverage of Race," March 30, 2012, http://www.people-press.org/2012/03/30/blacks-view-of-law-enforcement-racial-progress-and-news-coverage-of-race/.

[4] For an excellent discussion of social sin which appropriates social sin critically, see Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London: T&T Clark, 2009). Although Nelson's subtitle names only "liberal" theologians, Nelson makes it clear that social sin is a theological reality that the whole church must address: "I intend to show that the issue of unjust and sinful social

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arrangements is a matter of universal human concern. It is neither a 'liberal' hobbyhorse nor a 'conservative patsy.'" Ibid., 8.
[5] For an insightful analysis of the enduring consequences of slavery, Jim Crow, and racist housing policy on African Americans, see Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 21, 2014.
[6] For evidence of the impact of racism specifically in St. Louis, see Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). For two seminal scholarly works on race and the American city, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2005); and Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2005). For a historical analysis of religion, race, and the city, see John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[7] Several news articles and editorials have covered the events related to the Michael Brown shooting as a symptom of a much larger, systemic problem of racism. See especially Julie Bosmanoct, "Bruised and Weary, Ferguson Struggles to Heal," *New York Times*, October 6, 2014; Travis Scholl, "Trying to see clearly in #Ferguson's haze," *St. Louis-Post Dispatch*, August 19, 2014; and Kimberly Norwood, "Why I fear for my sons," CNN, August 25, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/25/opinion/norwood-ferguson-sons-brown-police/index.html.
[8] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 168. We do not use the word "politics" in the same way as Hunter. Hunter defines "politics" in relationship to the nation-state (*To Change the World*, 102), whereas we use "politics" to refer to the public, common activity and goods of various communities and not any particular overarching one, like the state.
[9] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 111–149.
[10] Ibid., 148–149. According to Hunter, both the Republican and Democratic parties seek to *use* Christians for the sake of political power.
[11] Even a good Lutheran ethicist like Robert Benne, who understands the complexity of the relationship between religion and politics, neglects the congregation in this sense. For Benne, the two options are direct influence from a congregation on society in partisan politics or indirect influence in forming individual Christians for the political sphere. This misses a third option where the congregation avoids *partisan* politics and instead acts as a community to publicly witness to Jesus Christ in its neighborhood. This is a kind of politics focused on common, public activities and the common good, but not as defined by the state. See Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), especially 81–113.
[12] See the excellent biography: Kathryn Galchutt, *The Career of Andrew Schulze* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).
[13] Andrew Schulze, *Fire from the Throne: Race Relations in the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 11.
[14] For a comprehensive account of the church that develops along a similar trajectory, see Jennifer M. McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (Oxford: University Press, 2012). For a specifically Lutheran account, see Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

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Peterson's ecclesiology does not go far enough in describing the church's mission as the *public* work of the Spirit in service and proclamation, but her ecclesiology is a helpful development in the direction of this paper.

[15] For written accounts of First Immanuel Lutheran, see congregational histories: "A Brief History of First Immanuel Lutheran Church of Chicago," "First Immanuel Lutheran Church of Chicago: 125 Years (1854–1979)," "Here is Immanuel: Isaiah 8:10 (1854–Centennial–1954)," Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO. Mark Koschmann also interviewed and corresponded with Rev. Don Becker, Rev. Harry Therwanger, and George Manning from 2011–2014. See also T. H. Hartman, "Men on a Mission: Lutherans Who Come to Grips with the Problems of the Inner-City Church," *AAL Correspondent* 58, no. 427 (Winter 1960): 2–6, 13.

[16] Ralph L. Moellering, "The Beginnings of Racial Integration at First Immanuel Lutheran Church:1954–1958." First Immanuel Lutheran Church, Chicago, IL, 1964. File on First Immanuel at Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

[17] Donald Becker, "A Brief History of First Immanuel Lutheran Church of Chicago."

[18] Ralph Moellering, "The Beginnings of Racial Integration at First Immanuel," 16.

[19] *Eyes on the Prize*, "Two Societies," Blackside, Inc., 1987. Transcript for *Eyes on the Prize* made available through www.pbs.org. This excellent documentary aired on PBS and is also available on DVD (2010).

[20] Donald Becker, Interview by Mark Koschmann, Chicago, IL, November 23, 2011.

[21] Andrew Schulze, *Fire From the Throne*, 11.

[22] This points toward ecclesiology as a contextual discipline, which should guide specific congregations in witnessing to God in Christ through proclamation of the gospel, service in the community, and forming faithful disciples. For references and a more thorough discussion of ecclesiology understood in this way, see Theodore J. Hopkins and Robert Kolb, *Inviting Community* (Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013), 9–17.

[23] Walter Wangerin Jr., *Ragman: And Other Cries of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 69–70.

[24] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1954), 114.

[25] For an account of confession and repentance as Christian public witness, which employs Bonhoeffer effectively, see McBride, *The Church for the World*, 119–146.

[26] The history of the Litany and the text of the Litany come from the website of the Coventry Cathedral. See "Coventry Litany of Reconciliation," accessed October 7, 2014, http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/about-us/our-reconciliation-ministry/coventry-litany-of-reconciliation.php.

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Martyria and Mission: The Witness of Creative Disruption

John Nunes

Editor's Note: At its root, *martyria* means "witness." Martyrdom throughout Christian history has sometimes been the fate of those who, in the face of opposition, have chosen to give witness to their faith.

Abstract: God's mission, introducing a realm of holiness and forgiveness, cannot enter the unholy realms of this earth without some interruption to business as usual. There will be some scraping of structures, some reordering of priorities, turning some systems upside down. This article defines this missional activity as creative disruption. It suggests that creative disruption functions best when it is creative, with respect to tradition and disruptive with respect to traditionalism. While leaders committed to stirring up the status quo are often unpopular and inheres sacrificial witness (*martyria*), this article addresses some of the constructive benefits of disruptive work to God's mission.

Ambassadors for Christ are those through whom God is appealing to people to be reconciled by the Gospel's message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20). On occasion, they must engage others wisely in creative disruption that often appears to be non-reconciliatory. This essay will propose (1) a definition of creative disruption, (2) the conditions and manner in which it is to occur, and (3) the constructive benefits to God's kingdom of disruptive work.

To evoke Jaroslav Pelikan, creative disruption functions best when it is *creative* with respect to tradition (furthering the living faith of deceased believers) and *disruptive* with respect to traditionalism (challenging the dead faith of those who are alive).[1]

Theological support for this idea will be interwoven throughout the article as

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will historical considerations and general practical descriptions. This mission-related consideration of creative disruption is predicated on a theological underpinning that, as Robert Kolb summarizes, joins with those who have "striven to demonstrate that Luther's proclamation of the God who justifies is not trapped inside sixteenth-century thought forms but is relevant and applicable to the dilemmas and distresses of the twenty-first century."[2] In this sense, creative disruption is not an *avant-garde* breakthrough for missional leaders, but rather a reiteration of ancient truth revealed in the living tradition of Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) in a manner that constructively confronts the wounding captivity of traditionalism. Against this, the Spirit persists in witness with the ever vivifying, ever innovating doing of God's promises to God's people, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (Is 43:19). As such, living traditions in which the Spirit's enkindling presence abounds are robust as they anchor community, inform liturgical practices, and prompt spiritual and numerical growth.

> Creative disruption is . . . a reiteration of ancient truth revealed in the living tradition of Scripture alone.

Such acts of creative disruption that are attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit should be distinguished from what the Lutheran Confessions describe as *Schwärmer*. The Reformers' concerns for *enthusiasm*—those raving verifications of salvation apart from the operative means of the Spirit, God's Word and Sacraments—do not negate, however, the fact that God through the Word is dynamically alive in the church (Heb 4:12). As a corollary, however, that liturgical assembly constitutes a proper arena through which these means are communicated does not imply that the worship forms themselves cannot be creatively disrupted if they deteriorate into lip service (Mt 15:9).

A Historical Witness and Martyred Disrupter

Gudina Tumsa, of the Oromo ethnic group, was born into extreme economic poverty in western Ethiopia in 1929, the same year as Martin Luther King. Tumsa was martyred on July 28, 1979, at the hands of a brutalizing Marxist revolutionary government. Candid rhetoric, cheerful fearlessness, and courageous witness in the name of Jesus were his traits despite his hardship, suffering, and persecution. Educated at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota in the 1960s, Tumsa was also a student of the civil rights movement in the United States. Tumsa opted for a Martin Luther King-like strategy of identifying structural sin, mobilizing people of faith, and then working non-violently (which is not passively) within human institutions, not to overthrow them, but to improve them gradually from within.

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Upon his return to his homeland and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), Tumsa rose quickly in leadership. This dynamically burgeoning Lutheran church body, headquartered in Addis Ababa, embodies its name "Mekane Yesus," which means in the Amharic language, "place of Jesus." Its membership grew from 65,000 members in 1959 to 2.5 million by 1999 (larger than the LCMS) and then to more than 5 million in 2009 (larger than the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Since 2009 alone, the EECMY has grown by more than a million people. Lutheranism is vibrant with a bright future on the African continent.[3] The EECMY is now, in 2016, upwards of 7 million members. Joy in the power and promises of the Gospel, the integration of service and witness, the proximity of the practice of these marks of the church, and willingness to suffer for the faith have historically characterized the members of this church body and offered an example for the reimagining of Reformation traditions in the global north. Another early African church leader, Tertullian, was right: "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."[4]

In the 1970s, Tumsa served as the General Secretary of the EECMY. Refusing to bow down to the draconian political demands of the revolutionary government that sought to silence the church, he was arrested. Refusing to submit or recant, he was tortured. Refusing to flee from Ethiopia while he had a chance (like Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany), he was re-arrested and viciously murdered. Each refusal was predicated on his doctrinal conviction: that God's justice in the world and God's justifying act in Christ are inextricably linked. He wrote:

> The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's power to save everyone who believes it. It is the power that saves from eternal damnation, from economic exploitation, and from political oppression. . . . It is the only voice telling about a loving Father who gave his Son as a ransom for many. It tells about the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body. It is the Good News to sinful humanity. . . . It is too powerful to be compromised by any social or political system.[5]

Generational Dynamic

There is a generational aspect to tolerance for and expectation of creative disruption that may also be a global phenomenon similar to what motivated Tumsa. I have observed a considerable elasticity in the ecclesiology of those who are "digital natives"—as contrasted with "digital immigrants." Perhaps this phenomenon is related to the developing world's nimble witness, missional creativity, and embrace of the poetics of disruption. Those with fewer material investments have smaller portfolios—by portfolios I am referring not only to financial assets, but the entire range of the goods to which one is attached, which one carries (*portare*) through life—those goods that become "bads" when used to violate the First Commandment.

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Once while lecturing on this in a classroom of twenty-somethings, I was struck by the extent to which their awareness of creative disruption was textured by the frequency of technological innovation in their lives—the rapid cycles of interruption by its introduction. Their lives—with respect to Diagram A (below)—were rarely lived in the realm of complacency, except when associating with those unfamiliar with new technology and frequent innovation. This acknowledgment seems to suggest that creative disruption is not a concept posited on the axis of liberal or conservative[6]; rather it is posited demographically, namely generationally and geographically.

Institutional Wisdom

One of the most difficult aspects in the calling to lead a Christian organization is the negative consequences of being creatively disruptive in a destructive manner.

Christians are often conditioned, not wrongly, to be peacemakers and bridge-builders who value highly doing things decently and in good order. The normal human aversion to conflict seems amplified in Christ-followers. That one might actively nurture disruption seems contradictory to middle-class Western notions of what it means to be "nice" Christian leaders. The example of Gudina Tumsa and Bonhoeffer[7]—as martyrs, witnesses to a way of the cross in sacrificial service—provides biographical material in support of this observation.

Think of the prayers that liturgical churches pray in Advent: "Stir up your power and come," and "Stir up your might and come." These echo the Psalmist, who pleads, "Stir up your might and come to save us. Restore us, O God" (Ps 80:2b/3a). Ponder on what is actually being prayed for here—matters being stirred up.

Consider the prayer Jesus taught His followers and their spiritual descendants to pray, especially the petition, "Your kingdom come." God's realm of holiness cannot enter the unholy realms of this earth without some interruption to business as usual, without some scraping, some reordering, turning things upside down. G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) once described the way that the coming of Christianity did not, by any means, do away with the traditional patriarchal family, but merely turned it upside down. Instead of moving from father to mother to child, the Holy Family moved from child (Jesus) to Mother Mary to Father God. He then concludes with a quote that's become epigrammatic and applied to many other scenarios: "many things are made holy by being turned upside down."[8] Those words are worth framing as a reminder above one's desk.

God's realm of holiness cannot enter the unholy realms of this earth without some interruption to business as usual.

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True Christian leaders . . . are called to call individuals, organizations, staffs, the community, and the world to turn around—for Christ's sake.

Repentance—which typifies daily the Christian life—is itself sometimes seismic and painful and always includes, humanly speaking, some element of loss, some facing of hard truth: "There can be no redemption unless the truth about the world is told and justice is done. To treat sin as if it were not there, when in fact it is there, amounts to living as if the world were redeemed when in fact it is not."[9] In our devastatingly broken world, Christian leaders must dare to be creatively disruptive of the patterns, lifestyles, cultural habits, excesses, oppression, that are not God-pleasing. True Christian leaders cannot avoid this prophetic dimension. They are called to call individuals, organizations, staffs, the community, and the world to turn around—for Christ's sake.

This is not an advocating for being disruptive for its own sake, stirring up dissension for the sake of one's personal agenda or emotional needs, or to get even; Proverbs 15:18 warns: "Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife." Rather, we who are in pursuit of excellence, of best practices—of missions that transform hearts, change minds, and renew relationships with forgiveness—must ourselves be transformed by rekindling "the gift of God that is within you" (2 Tim 1:6). The verb "rekindle" in biblical Greek comprises three words: *ana* (again), *zōe* (life), *pureo* (to burn). To "rekindle" is to burn back to life, to restore the fire (Ps 80:3), to relight or reignite the fire, to resurrect, ***ana***-*stasis*, to light the fire that helps others to see their way forward. That is a responsibility of the leader.

Creative disruption:

- surgical, not random
- scalpel, not sledgehammer
- managed, not unintentional
- careful, not reckless
- prayerful, not self-sufficient
- missional, not self-indulgent
- systemic, not atomistic
- complex, not simplistic
- pruning, not cutting
- generative, not destructive
- oxygenizing, not suffocating
- life-giving, not death-dealing

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Tips in Truth Speaking and Creative Disruption from John the Baptizer

(Luke 3:1–20)

What can truth speakers learn from the ministry of this grasshopper-eating, camel-hair wearing, full-throttled eschaton-preparing, Isaiah-echoing, fire-repentance, field-preaching prophet who comes to stir things up?

1. Speaking God's truth is often unpopular, a solitary activity; don't be surprised when you feel like a voice crying the wilderness.
2. Truth speakers must avoid both the temptation toward self-righteousness and the traumatizing victimhood of self-pity.
3. Truth speakers often convey their message in metaphors, i.e., the in-filling of valleys, leveling of mountains, straightening of crooked ways, smoothing over of rough places.
4. Truth speakers stir up the established in-circle with diversity so that all flesh sees the salvation of God.

Speaking God's truth is often unpopular, a solitary activity; don't be surprised when you feel like a voice crying the wilderness.

Rooted in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus

The paramount event of creative disruption is startling and counterintuitive. Even to consider the sequence of events in Holy Week is to contemplate the most epochal, brain-bending, meaning-making moment in world history. While the creative act in Genesis disrupted the primordial chaos of pre-history, this redemptive interruption constitutes an even greater work, according to Martin Chemnitz: "The work of re-creation and rebuilding is greater than the work of creation and building."[10]

God's intervention for human salvation happens ironically, even amidst the injustice of Roman colonial violence. There are numerous disruptive implications of Jesus' death, myriad ways that it disturbs the status quo. The crucifixion shatters human fixations with worldly fascinations—like obtaining material possessions, maintaining political power, or maximizing physical pleasure. The death of the very icon of God, the One whose coming restores fully the divine image in human identity, disrupts our fabrications that attempt to remake God in our own image. The resurrection of Jesus represents an unpredictable intrusion into complacent religiosity. It resists being printed in the bulletin. It is actuarially ridiculous.

Those who believe it are carried away in an unspeakable sway; they shout "Hallelujah." They are transported by faith, their sanctified imaginations now

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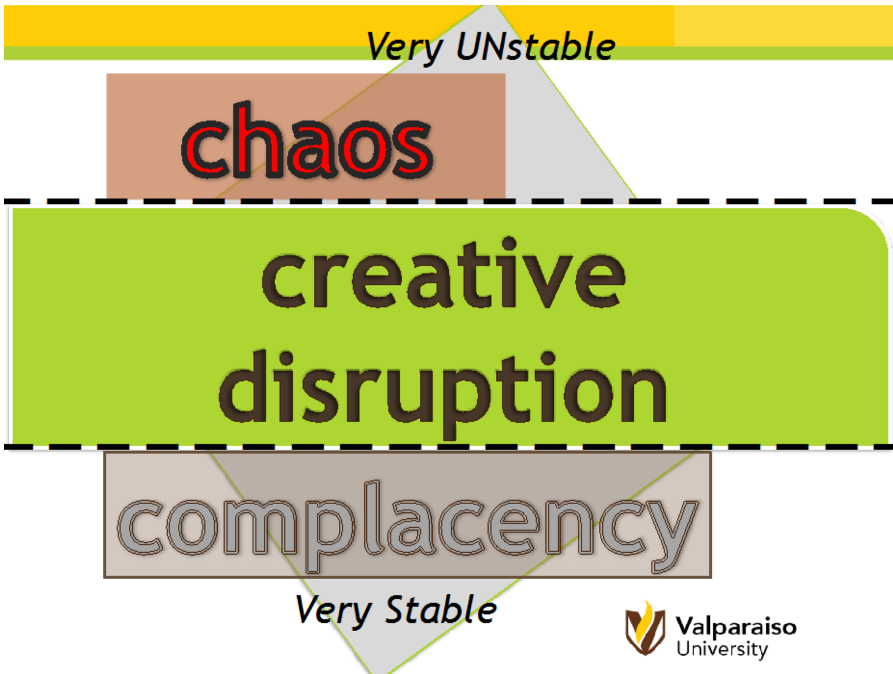
redefining reality, incorporating people previously sworn off as off limits. Old boundaries fall away. Lepers or the leper-like are healed by God's love. Outsiders gain access. The joyless leap in ecstasy. Powerbrokers are broken in repentance. The intimidating territories of the brave and strong no longer terrorize the weak and fearful. Lion and lamb share terrain. Categories no longer exclude. Tax collectors are not only challenged, but by God's incalculable grace volunteer to change. Privileges are not only upended but willingly surrendered. Idolatrous priorities are forsaken—the energy once committed to selfishness is now redirected for the good of others. Sinners are welcomed home and transformed by an unanticipated hospitality. Fragmented communities discover new forgiveness-fueled friendships. Dying people are loved to a life that goes beyond their last breath. Human dignity is respected at every age and stage of biology, from every mother's womb to the moment of entrance into Mother Earth's tomb.

All of this incurs disruption, but it is creative disruption because it ennobles us, calling us to our highest selves and fashioning before our very eyes a portrait of eternity.

DIAGRAM



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Endnotes

[1] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
[2] Robert Kolb, "Contemporary Lutheran Understandings of the Doctrine of Justification," *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004): 159.
[3] There are twice as many Lutherans in Africa as there are on the continent of North America and more Lutherans in two east African nations, Ethiopia and Tanzania, than in Germany. Two summarizing demographic facts add perspective to the typical Western view of Lutheranism: (1) There are more Lutherans alive now than ever in the history of the world, and (2) the average global Lutheran now looks like an Ethiopian.
[4] Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, Chapter 50. For easy access to the work of Tertullian, see Tertullian and Robert D. Sider, *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).
[5] Gudina Tumsa, "The Role of a Christian in a Given Society" in Oeyvind Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974–85* (Oxford: J. Currey, 2000), 200–204. See also Tumsa's "Memorandum to Ato Emmanuel Abraham, President, ECMY; from Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary, ECMY Re: Some Issues Requiring Discussions and Decisions," 271–279 in the same volume.
[6] If, however, we are speaking of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I have long maintained that the range of the axis is from ultra-conservative to moderate. There are very few in the LCMS who are theologically liberal.
[7] "There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace must be dared, it is itself the great venture and can never be safe. Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to mistrust, and this mistrust in turn brings forth war. To look for guarantees is to want to protect oneself. Peace means giving oneself completely to God's commandment, wanting no security but, in faith and obedience, laying down the destiny of the nations in the hand of Almighty God, not trying to direct it for selfish purposes. Battles are won, not with weapons, but with God. They are won when the way leads to the cross." Renate Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Brief Life*, trans. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 34–35.
[8] G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (Rockville, MD: Serenity, 2009), 92.
[9] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 294.
[10] Chemnitz is quoting St. Bernard in *Loci Theologici*, tr. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1989), 154.

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Confessing the "Real Present Jesus": The Power to Overcome Cultural Barriers with the Good News of the Gospel

Gregory P. Seltz

Abstract: When the church confesses the incarnate nature of the Gospel message, what are its implications for mission work? What are the implications for the proclaimer as well as the hearer? If the Gospel message is not merely a "teaching of religious dogma" but an encounter with the one who saved and redeemed you, what does this say about the nature of our "confession of the faith?" This article will explore the sacramental gospel and its implications for mission by examining the sociological implications derived from incarnational, sacramental theology and by critiquing such sociological implications in light of the nature of the sacramental word.

The Sacramental Gospel and its Implications for Mission

When the Church confesses the incarnate nature of the Gospel message, what are its implications for mission work? What are the implications for the proclaimer as well as the hearer? If the Gospel message is not merely a "teaching of religious dogma" but an encounter with the one who saved and redeemed you, what does this say about the nature of our "confession of the faith"? First, we will examine the

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sociological implications derived from incarnational theology. Secondly, we will critique such sociological implications in light of the nature of the sacramental word.

The Sociological Implications of the Incarnational Message—A Mission Methodology

The incarnation of Jesus has become a paradigm for modern, cross-cultural "mission methodology." The very birth of the Son of God in a manger to a peasant family from Nazareth demonstrates the lengths that God is willing to go in order to communicate the message of the Gospel to a sinful, disobedient, even deaf world. The pericopes of Jesus' washing the disciple's feet (John 13) and the narratives of His death on the cross (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19) proclaim both the message of salvation and the servant nature of its communication. As the incarnate servant, Jesus Himself communicates, even translates, the "good news of the cross" into the language of the people to whom He was sent. This Gospel message of God, embodied in the form of a servant, fulfilled in the death of Christ on the cross and translatable to the common man, is what makes the Christian message unique. In his work, *Translating the Message,* Lamin Sanneh describes this uniqueness, this translatability of the Christian message:

> Conversion that takes place rests on the conviction that might be produced in people after conscious critical reflection. What is distinctive about this critical reflection is that it assumes, either implicitly or explicitly, a relativized status for the culture of the message-bearer.[1]

The message of the Gospel honors the "receptivity" needs of the receiving culture. All "incarnational" mission methodologies stress this obligation for communication on the "proclaimer" by emphasizing the primacy of the receptor cultural forms. The proclaimer needs to be vulnerable to that culture so as to become an authentic voice from within. Lingenfelter calls this becoming a 150 percent person, one who has begun to shed "sheddable" aspects of his home culture while earning the right of being an authentic member of the new culture in which one serves. In his words,

> Missionaries and others who accept the challenge of cross-cultural ministries must by the nature of their task, become personally immersed with peoples who are very different. To follow the example of Christ, that of incarnation, means undergoing drastic personal and social reorientation. . . . Cross-cultural workers must be socialized all over again into a new cultural context.[2]

The sacramental Gospel is a translatable one because God is making use of the earthly form. Whether it was God coming to Adam in the garden in ways that he could understand, or locating His promise of salvation in a people group born of Abraham, or assuring His people of their forgiveness through Old Testament temple

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sacrifices and the presence among them in the temple (1 Kings 8), God "condescends" to the level of the people He wishes to save so that they might receive the grace He wishes them to have.

In this sense, the message is receptor-oriented. It is not that the message is determined by the culture, but that the proclaimer of the message is the one who is accountable for its delivery. It is the work of the "incarnate" one to strive continually to find the right metaphor, the comparable analogy that might unlock the meaning of the Gospel to the culture in which one serves.

It is the work of the "incarnate" one to strive continually to find the right metaphor, the comparable analogy that might unlock the meaning of the Gospel to the culture in which one serves.

In my work in New York City, in Los Angeles, and now as Lutheran Hour Speaker, I am constantly reminded never to take for granted the fact that each neighborhood and circumstances brought unique challenges and opportunities to proclaiming the Gospel. While the Bible speaks about the reality of sin, the ravages of sin from which our Lord has redeemed us may manifest in very different ways among the culture groups that we serve. Often in my work in urban communities, such things might appear as alienation and disenfranchisement from society. People are literally "kept out" from the broader community by virtue of their powerlessness and isolation. Within that alienation is also the personal failure and sin that plagues all people, but together builds a hopelessness that seems insurmountable. To be an incarnational bearer of the Gospel is to enter into that alienation and participate in the hopes and fears of the community. Yet, even as one seeks to earn the right to share the Gospel, one is already speaking a "sacramental" word from within that alienation that builds the hope, joy, power, and peace that only Christ can build in both the sharer and the receiver.

The reality of sin among the urban elite, on the other hand, would manifest itself in other, often very different ways. Often, the corporate hopefulness and unbounding temporal opportunities mask a real emptiness and despair. Jesus' challenge to the rich man with full barns (Lk 12:16–20) is the classic message. But in this case, too, one must enter into the plastic world that keeps real meaning at bay. One must endure its shallowness and learn its language so as to speak boldly of living life "abundantly" in Christ, free from the shackles of wealth and position.[3]

The incarnation methodology of mission invites the sharer of the Gospel to know the arena in which one serves. Very concrete indigenous metaphors[4] that bridge the biblical message of the Gospel into the culture in which one serves are not only needed, they are demanded.

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This methodology not only makes one aware of the culture in which one serves, it also makes the messenger aware of his or her own cultural limitations.[5] The incarnational Gospel is more than a method. It is more than a sociological paradigm. This message convicts and saves both proclaimer and hearer. Biblically, "incarnation/sacrament" is still the action of the God who saves, who communicates with the world He created and redeemed. The Bible uses a vast array of metaphors and analogies as well as didactic teaching to convey God's message of salvation. Jack Preus observes that "The Gospel is alive simply because it is words. It is alive with words and metaphors that are themselves living. These words (used by God) actually make things happen."[6]

As we communicate the Gospel, we are also communicated to. Rarely is the Word of God "over-translated." The richness of the sacramental word invites the growth of both proclaimer and hearer. God always transforms the one sent and the one to whom he is sent.

Bridging cultures through "clay-vessel" proclaimers to culture-bound hearers is still possible. Universals do still exist among human beings. Kraft, speaking of human commonality in terms of universal needs and desires, says:

> The number and nature of such universals are impressive. For they demonstrate that human beings, though participants in radically different cultural systems, have a great deal in common. And it is this great similarity among human beings that provides the basis on which cross-cultural human understanding and the potential for intercultural communication rest.[7]

While such sociological observations are encouraging and helpful, more must be said. The principal reason that the Gospel is translatable, able to bridge cultures, remains the sacramental character of the message of the cross. The Apostle Paul says:

> But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23–24); and
>
> I am not ashamed of the *gospel*, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Rom 1:16) (emphasis added).

Paul demonstrates the limitations of all cultures and their equivalent value before God, while also demonstrating the uniqueness of the ministry and message of Jesus Christ, who was the fulfillment of the promise through the line of Abraham, born from the Jews, sent to the Jew first and then to the Gentile so that all might be saved. No one culture over another "deserves" to be the vessel through which God communicates the message of the Gospel. Therefore, no culture is to be absolutized. But, the fact remains that God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He redeemed the

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Israelites and established them as bearers of His message of salvation by grace alone and birthed that promise in the family of the line of David at the time when “Quirinius was governor of Syria” (Lk 2:2). As one bears the message of the Gospel, every modern witness to Christ finds himself in the dual position of learning the sacramental message “once delivered” and the challenges of “delivering it anew” to the culture that stands before us. Alberto Garcia states it well: “This is the ‘vulnerability of the cross’ and the fragile existence that the missionary appropriates as he/she witnesses to Christ cross-culturally.”[8]

Many of the sociological works that stress the incarnational methodology of mission are very helpful in preparing missionaries for the kinds of sacrifices that will be necessary to engage other cultures as credible witnesses to the Gospel. Assessing culture, both our own and the community to which we are sent, is the beginning of being useful to Christ and community. Allowing the process of incarnational critique allows the missionary to become “ambassador” to a culture different from one’s own. While the sociological ramifications are helpful in preparation for such realities, the sacramental nature of the “word shared” still remains the only confidence for the strength to stay the course of cross-cultural mission work.

The message of the Gospel is not “religious teaching” emanating from neutral cultural constructs, but rather an encounter with the living God who has spoken in history.

Sacramental Gospel: Its Missional Character and Blessing

To take the incarnation seriously, one must be committed to the sacramental nature of the Gospel and its transcultural nature. The unique, sacramental character of the Christian message is its revelatory nature. The message of the Gospel is not “religious teaching” emanating from neutral cultural constructs, but rather an encounter with the living God who has spoken in history. Leslie Newbigin says,

> At this point the only relevant questions are: Is there anyone present? Has he spoken? Natural theology ends here: another kind of enterprise begins, and another kind of language has to be used—the language of testimony.
>
> The Christian church testifies that in the actual event of this finite, contingent, and yet rational world of warped space-time there are words and gestures through which the Creator and Sustainer of the world has spoken and acted.[9]

Here Newbigin proclaims a God who has spoken. The Lutheran teaching goes even further when it says that God has spoken, and He has still located Himself a place where He can be found. He is not merely here or there, He is located in words, water, bread and wine, so that you might receive him. Thus, Sasse:

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> He, the *Deus incarnates*, who for our sake took flesh and blood, stoops down to us so low that He not only lives among us but in us, and we can do nothing else than speak the words of the centurion with the old liturgies of the Lord's Supper: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."[10]

The implications of God incarnate become obvious. An incarnate Lord is knowable and receivable. The Lutheran Confessions teach, therefore, the "certainty" of salvation, not as a human achievement but as a sacramental reality, a pure gift given and received. Certainty of one's forgiveness of sins is essential to the Gospel. The Apology states,

> "How do we become sure that our sins are forgiven?" . . . This cannot be answered, nor can our consciences find rest, unless they know it is God's command and the gospel itself that they should be certain that their sins are forgiven. . . . We teach that this certainty of faith is required in the gospel; the opponents leave consciences uncertain and wavering.[11]

But such certainty is not merely for one people group alone. Even in the choosing of Abram in Genesis 12, God instructs us that it is for the blessing of all the nations. God always speaks particularly so that we can see the uniqueness of His Word, but He also speaks universally for the sake of all. In this regard, the Gospel is a supra-cultural word:

> There are many ways to communicate the Gospel. In its diversity, the Gospel overcomes cultural and linguistic barriers. There is a universality about the Gospel not only in the sense that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), but also in the fact that the very language of the Gospel is universal.[12]

Sacramental Word Empowers Incarnational Sacrifice

What Lutheran theology offers, as noted in the previous section, it has often failed to use to explicate the benefits of the sacramental Gospel and the power of the confession of the faith in response to the critiques of the sociological "incarnational mission methodologies." Various authors writing from a sociological perspective (Kraft, Sanneh, etc.) are curiously suspicious of "conservative, dogmatic theology" as culturally ethnocentric.[13] It is true that communication theory from a sociological perspective is a messy business, one that tends to defy absolutes. Genesis 11, the tower of Babel, tells us why. However, no sociological theory of communication can fully account for the fact of "each one hearing the Gospel in his/her own tongue" as recorded in Acts 2. It is not enough merely to state that God wants all people to hear the Gospel in their own language, one must also testify that God has chosen certain means and modes of communication. There are qualitative differences between our speech and the words of the Scripture. Lutherans have the opportunity to offer both

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the incarnational and the sacramental message and method of the Gospel for mission. To practice one, sharing the incarnational message with an incarnational sociological methodology, without confessing the reality and power of the sacramentality of the Word and Sacraments, is to risk missing the blessings of both.

There are various ways to express the sacramental, "both/and" essence of the Gospel and its method of proclamation. While sociologists tend to speak of the culture forming the message of the Gospel, one could argue from the biblical data that God and the promise "formed Old Testament Israel." So much of the Gospel is foreign to any human culture that denying the sacramental power of the Word to form us would be reading the Bible selectively at best.[14] It is clearly not biblical to "relativize" all manner of speech as if the Bible were nothing more than the viewpoints of primitive Christians from a very different era. The sacramental character of the Word that we proclaim resists such under-interpretation. The scope of this article is not adequate to examine all such arguments. Rather, it will finally focus on the two distinct ramifications flowing from the sacramental reality of the words of the Bible being Christ's life-giving, faith-sustaining Word and their positive implications for cross-cultural mission.

Of first importance is the issue of certainty before God Himself. Sacramental certainty, the "requirement of the gospel,"[15] has implications for mission work. One's certainty before God is foundational to one's ability, even "willingness to risk," in relational ministry. The objective, certainty-giving character of this word can hardly be understated. As the Formula of Concord states,

> We believe, teach, and confess that in spite of the fact that until death a great deal of weakness and frailty still cling to those who believe in Christ . . . they should not doubt their righteousness, which is reckoned to them through faith . . . , but they should regard it as certain that they have a gracious God for Christ's sake on the basis of the promise and the Word of the holy Gospel.[16]

The sacramental nature of the word must be part of our testimony. It is not spiritless dogma, but a life-giving, Christ-filled word that we speak. As Jesus institutes the Means of Grace, through words, water, bread and wine, He builds missionary confidence where it belongs, namely amidst our mutual struggles. As one seeks to divest oneself of certain cultural garb and appropriate another, personal vulnerability is overcome in the assurance of Word and sacraments. Such certainty then calls one to empty oneself as servant-sharer

> If we take sacramental theology seriously, then we have confidence in God's working for us and in us, as we work to share His Word in words that the recipients of the message can know and understand.

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for the sake of the recipient. If we take sacramental theology seriously, then we have confidence in God's working for us and in us, as we work to share His Word in words that the recipients of the message can know and understand.

Secondly, in sharing the sacramental Word of Christ, such certainty then empowers the willingness of any bearer of the Good News of Jesus to risk the securities of comfortable culture, etc., to communicate the Gospel effectively. In urban ministry, one cannot live thirty miles away from a community and drive in for ministry. If you are unwilling to "live with your people," you will not be able to serve your people. John 13 and Ephesians 5:21 speak about a servant submission that is aspired to from strength, not weakness. Such servanthood opens lines of communication. Such servanthood can only happen if one understands one's certainty before God in Christ through Word and Sacrament which empowers one to take a servile position for the delivery of God's good news in Jesus. The call to sacrifice is not to lose one's identity (for that comes from the certain Word of Christ for/to you), but to become vulnerable to another so that Gospel communication might overcome human barriers.

The call to sacrifice is not to lose one's identity (for that comes from the certain Word of Christ for/to you), but to become vulnerable to another so that Gospel communication might overcome human barriers.

This certainty breeds confidence and perseverance in Christ even as it makes one vulnerable to others. Aware of one's limitations as a human, sinful being, one takes comfort in knowing that God has spoken. He can be found. He has instituted the Means of Grace that will not return void unto Him, and He has called us to such ministry. To risk all, namely the comforts of our tradition, our culture, our language—even life itself—and to watch anew as the Christ incarnates the Gospel in words, water, bread and wine for another is to be emboldened anew in urban, secular contexts that challenge the Church in twenty-first-century America.

Conclusion

Incarnation, sacrament, "in flesh," this is the nature and missional way of the Gospel. This is the message of the church for itself and for others. This is the confidence of one in cross-cultural mission. Sacramental Gospel breeds both confidence in one's relationship to Jesus and perseverance to enter the place of mission where the uncertainties and antagonisms of non-Christian people can become bridges not barriers. Finding the vocables that proclaim this biblical message anew in new communities is more than mere sociological method, it is also confidence in the Holy Spirit to transcend our cultural limitations and bridge the

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communication gap with the words, water, bread and wine that He has given us to offer. Is the Gospel translatable? Yes, even through people like us, because of its Spirit-filled, sacramental character and because of the method of communication (servant-natured, culture-affirming) it calls its bearers to bear.

Endnotes

[1] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 29.
[2] Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Guide for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 119.
[3] George Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 44–54. Hunter lists characteristics of "secular" people. In many ways, the people of Harlem and Wall Street are the same. They have bought the lie of secularization and materialism. One lives deprived of the false hope and fights to have what it has not. The other has the "goods" and is driven into the despair of having no restraint for sinful, self-centeredness. Multiple alienations exist for which that Gospel is both the cure and the challenge for purposeful living.
[4] Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 209: "There are many ways to say the Gospel. In its diversity (metaphors), the Gospel overcomes cultural and linguistic barriers."
[5] 2 Corinthians 4—the idea of being an earthen vessel, yet delivering the good news of God is both terrifying and exciting.
[6] Preus, *Just Words*, 35.
[7] Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (MaryKnoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 87.
[8] Alberto L. Garcia and A. R. Victor Raj eds, *The Theology of the Cross for the 21st Century* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 19.
[9] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 88.
[10] Herman Sasse, *We Confess Anthology*, Vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 96.
[11] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 202 (Apology XII:88).
[12] Preus, *Just Words*, 210.
[13] For Kraft, creeds, modes and meanings of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the sacredness of monological preaching, various forms of church government, refraining from smoking and drinking and the like are "forms of belief" that need to be constantly re-evaluated to proclaim the meaning "behind the form." (118). Sanneh makes comparison of dogma and experience as being the same as cultural absolutism versus healthy pluralism (69). Here, the sacramental, life-giving character of the "given" word is totally missed.
[14] Such issues as the character of "apostle," the meaning of "sacred tradition" in 1 Cor. 11, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc., could all be shown to be community-forming rather than culturally formed.
[15] Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 202 (Apology XII:88).
[16] Ibid., 496 (Formula of Concord, III:6).

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Signs of Transformation: Communicating the Gospel in an Age of Nones and Dones

Scott Yakimow

Abstract: The Church is confronting an emergent phenomenon in populations described as the "nones" and the "dones," that is, those who have never been religiously affiliated and those who became disenchanted with their church home or with "organized religion" and left. Both display new epistemological challenges to the Church because of the lack of a shared cultural common ground. Some argue that what is needed is a better apologetics to arrive at a shared ground to demonstrate the unreasonableness of unbelief. Others eschew apologetics for a purely proclamatory approach, believing that presenting the faith directly carries with it its own power. The first is an objectivist approach and the second, a subjectivist. In this article, I argue that both approaches have valid concerns but that both also fail epistemologically. Instead, I propose a semiotic epistemological model via an understanding of triadic signs that both shows the futility of such an objectivist/subjectivist dichotomy, while taking into account their valid concerns, and opens new avenues for restructuring our understanding of outreach with the Gospel, particularly to the nones and the dones.

In the first half of 2012, I was faced with a decision: Should I return to Kenya to continue my service as a missionary with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), teaching at the seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK), or should I accept the recently proffered call to teach theology at Concordia

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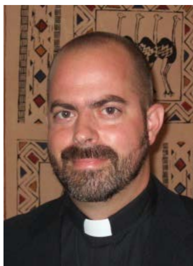

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University in Portland (CUP) in the heart of the great Pacific Northwest. Frankly, my heart was back in Kenya, where I had served from 2002–2005 and had first visited in 1994. It felt as much like "home" as anywhere to me. Portland, on the other hand, felt strange, foreign—even hostile to a large degree, based on everything I had heard about it, which entailed political views far to the left of my own, an odd hipster subculture, the annual naked bicycle ride, and an overall general weirdness proudly proclaimed by the sign downtown which says: "Keep Portland Weird." When I eventually did make my decision to accept the call to teach at CUP, I announced it to my family using a quotation from Homer's *Odyssey* in which Ulysses, washed up on an unknown shore, laments that even the trees are strange.

More than anything else, what made Portland strange to me—and was the cause of my decision to teach here rather than to return to Kenya—was the high prevalence of what are now called the "nones" and the "dones." These are two distinct groups who either are not religiously affiliated and never have been (nones) or those who were previously affiliated with a religion, usually Christianity, but are no longer (dones). While many people have a tendency to lump these two groups together, they are actually quite distinct and take quite divergent attitudes toward religion in general. The nones typically do not have strong feelings toward "organized religion" one way or another and simply have little experience with the phenomenon. This attitude leaves some open to the idea of religion and curious to learn more and others simply seeing no need for organized religion in general. The dones, on the other hand, are those who have extensive experience with religion and, in the words of Neil Carter, a self-proclaimed "done": "We're not unchurched, we're 'done churched.'"[1] Perhaps what is most characteristic of this group is a deep familiarity with Christianity, having lived and absorbed it for some time. This experience leaves many of the dones with a respect for some Christians who are able, in the dones' understanding, to live the faith authentically. This respect is coupled with a lack of patience for those who know their own faith only formulaically, repeating well-known teachings without having absorbed them into their lives deeply. Perhaps most important is that both groups tend to hold in common an openness to absorbing new data, to gathering more information in order to be better informed. To be more accurate, a *self-perception* of openness is characteristic of both the nones and the dones. Thus, such openness to new information tends to be more aspirational than actual.[2]

My concern in this brief essay is the same that ultimately drew me to teach at Portland—to reach out with the Gospel of Christ to a new generation of people who are disconnected with the Church and to whom the Gospel message is nearly incomprehensible or simply offensive, and not for the right reasons.[3] Constructing a brief outline of how such outreach might be conducted among the nones and the dones who register both intellectual objections to Christianity, as well as attitudinal and spiritual hesitancies to it, is the burden of this investigation. Many of these

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objections relate to the role of science and demonstrative, observational truth that has currency beyond any particular community and those more local, faith-based truth claims that might make sense to a particular group of people but do not extend beyond them. In short, these objections are formulated according to the well-worn debate between understanding truth claims as referring to something objective or subjective, something that can clearly be seen to be "as it is" out there in the world and something that has resonance only with an individual. This debate is sometimes described as one between dogmatism or scientism and fideism or relativism. When weighed in the scales, Christians are seen to fail in their connection to the "real" world and are frequently dismissed as irrational or unwilling to confront hard truths. The attitudinal and spiritual hesitancies of the nones and the dones are connected to the intellectual objections in that they are rooted in observations of Christians being inflexible, (naively) dogmatic, abusive, aggressive, and satisfied with platitudes. This is to say that negative experiences weigh heavily among the dones, and the nones are left with only what the popular culture tells them about Christianity. What is required here are eyes to see and ears to hear.

When weighed in the scales, Christians are seen to fail in their connection to the "real" world and are frequently dismissed as irrational or unwilling to confront hard truths.

In this article, I argue that we need to refigure our understanding of the relationship between evidence and faith beyond the objectivist-subjectivist dichotomy in order to arrive at a different way of conceptualizing the epistemological task altogether. The way I propose is the way of semiotics, the way of signs. By understanding communication—and indeed, thinking in general—as being nothing more (and nothing less) than the interplay of signs, the need to make a hard distinction between the objective and the subjective is obviated. What is left is a way of understanding communication that allows for the role of both mind-dependent (subjective) beliefs and how they correlate with mind-independent (objective) data. This approach provides the nones and the dones with an intellectually satisfying model of how Christians arrive at knowledge, and it allows for a demonstration of a Christian spiritual *habitus* that they might find ultimately attractive.[4]

While speaking of semiotics as mitigating the objective-subjective divide may come across as being a purely theoretical exercise, there is great practical benefit in doing so in at least two ways. First, it serves to alleviate the angst that arises due to a debate within the church itself that serves to fracture our outreach to those who champion a largely apologetic approach and those who largely eschew apologetics in general in favor of a proclamatory model of outreach.[5] This debate promotes schisms

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within the LCMS, and such schisms hinder our Gospel proclamation and serve to drive people away from the church for all the wrong reasons. A second practical benefit of achieving a new way to conceptualize the relationship between evidence and the interpretation of that evidence (the objective and the subjective) is that it allows the nones and dones to see Christianity in a new light as something that has a surprising amount of intellectual substance and integrity—something that many nones and dones dispute heartily. It also shows how new data might be absorbed within a Christian worldview such that Christians can at the same time *both* remain faithful to the language of Scripture and the way it has been interpreted in the tradition *and* creatively apply that understanding in surprising ways to a new situation given new data. This is to say that a semiotic approach enables one's habits of interpretation to be refigured, thereby creating the space for a new appropriation of the Christian proclamation that may go beyond the intellect to the heart, resulting in a new understanding, a new mind.

A second practical benefit of achieving a new way to conceptualize the relationship between evidence and the interpretation of that evidence (the objective and the subjective) is that it allows the nones and dones to see Christianity in a new light.

This article will proceed in the following manner. The first section is dedicated to introducing the concept of the sign itself in triadic terms, along with some missteps that have been made in modern times in describing it. This is the most technical section of the essay. The second section applies this understanding of the sign and its epistemological consequences to the debate over the role of apologetics in outreach. The third and final section of the paper examines the implications of a triadic understanding of the sign for fruitful engagement with the nones and the dones and how it opens up the space for the beauty of the Gospel to be perceived.

The Way of Signs

The concept of the sign has a long history in Christianity, from the Gospels and especially the Book of John to Augustine until the time of Descartes, when John Poinsot wrote his magisterial summary of the study of signs, *Tractatus de Signis* (1632). Semiotics, or the study of signs, which had been a fruitful area of study, lay dormant for most of the modern period as philosophy pursued what John Deely has termed "The Way of Ideas," following Descartes' lead, which, in Deely's opinion, has largely been a failed project.[6] It is only with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century philosopher and polymath Charles S. Peirce that semiotics has reemerged into the intellectual life of the West, and it is only even more recently that

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numerous thinkers are realizing that it is crucial not only to epistemology but to logic as well.[7]

Within this tradition, the earliest definition of a sign comes from Augustine in his *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*): "a sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses."[8] This admittedly quite vague account of a sign was revised over the course of the tradition, but it was Charles Peirce who gave a more precise formulation of what is involved. In his understanding, a sign has three distinct aspects: the representamen (or sign-vehicle), the object, and the interpretant. The *representamen* or sign-vehicle is what is usually thought to be the sign itself; it is the stop sign along the side of the road, the smoke from a fire, the word on the page. The object is the thing that the sign-vehicle represents, for example: eliminating the kinetic energy of a vehicle in the case of the stop sign, the oxidation of wood for the smoke, and the idea connected to the word. The interpretant is the mental habit that associates the representamen and the object; it is how one "instinctively" knows to bring the car to a stop, to look for fire when one sees smoke, and to search for meaning for the word. It is only by the interrelation of all three that a sign actually functions as such; that is, it is not just the relationship between the representamen and its object that constitutes the sign, nor is the relationship between the interpretant and the representamen sufficient to be an accurate description of the semiotic process. Rather, it is all three at once, and any discussion of the functioning of a sign must keep this in view.

Even as Peirce developed his triadic conception of the sign in the nineteenth century, it was Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic sign that he described in his *Course on General Linguistics* (published posthumously by one of his students in 1916)[9] that took pride of place in linguistics and philosophical reflection for much of the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries. Saussure was not so concerned with the theoretical implications of the sign but rather was interested in training linguists how to understand foreign languages. To this end, he came up with his idea of the sign comprising two aspects: the signifier and the signified. A word refers to its meaning in a structured way with that structure being the natural language itself. This is encapsulated in his distinction between *parole* (what is said; the utterance) and *langue* (the structured natural language that gives an utterance meaning). The signifier is itself arbitrary for Saussure; it acquires its meaning only in relation to its structure. Meaning arises only by the relationship of a sign to other signs; it is differences between signs that are crucial for understanding. For example, when one hears the word "di:r," one differentiates between something that eats corn and that one hunts from someone whom one loves or feels affection toward only by looking at what else is in the sentence. What gives the utterance "di:r" its meaning are the words that surround it, such as "Please pass the pepper, dear," or "I hit another deer with my truck last week." To repeat, it is not the habit of interpretation that connects

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the utterance “di:r” with its meaning but purely the objective words also uttered that do so.

Far beyond his original intention, Saussure’s dyadic sign became the theoretical background for much philosophical speculation in the twentieth century. It underwrote the Structuralist movement, which held that one could understand a given utterance or instance of language use by relating it to the linguistic structure within which it was constructed. A corollary of this approach is the belief that the interpreter can, in principle, arrive at *the* proper understanding of a sign if one sufficiently understands the sign’s relationship to other signs within the structure. There is *a* correct interpretation that one can fully and completely understand within the relevant structure, and views that differ from that understanding are simply wrong. The situation or character of the interpreter is irrelevant; what is relevant is the sign itself and the system used to decipher that sign.

While it would be reductionistic to posit that a dyadic understanding of a sign was the only factor contributing to an objectivist approach to the interpretation of signs, it is hard to dispute that Saussure’s understanding was a primary contributing factor in establishing the intellectual *bona fides* of such an approach. This is the case because if one could, in principle, arrive at *the* understanding of a sign, and the only relevant element to the sign’s proper interpretation is a structure that is independent of the interpreter, then one could, in principle, give *the* objective meaning of the sign. There is no room for subjective interpretation because the situatedness or formation of the interpreter is simply irrelevant.

Ironically, Saussure’s dyadic understanding of the sign, which was intended to yield *the* meaning of an utterance, was its own undoing. The well-known Deconstructionist, Jacque Derrida,[10] gleefully took Saussure’s dyadic sign and ran with it—away from objectivism to a subjectivist relativism. It was precisely the gap between the signifier and the signified that became crucial in Derrida’s understanding, and he labeled this gap variously, calling it *la trace* or, more famously, *la différance*. What Derrida essentially did was to constantly move between various interpretive structures, each of which was a plausible fit for the context at hand. By doing so, he could take the same word, phrase, or sentence and make it mean, not just one thing, but to take on nearly infinite meanings, the scope of which is determined only by the creativity of the interpreter. *La différance*, itself nothing more than a gap or a lack, becomes a type of generative anti-matter that produces interpretation on top of interpretation, the endless play of the interpreter who glories in the game. The movement that he and others spawned is commonly known as “Post-Modernism,” but that term is a misnomer in that obscures the reality of what occurred. Rather than being “post” or “after” modernism, Derridean deconstructionism is simply the inevitable endpoint of a modernism characterized by Saussure’s dyadic sign. In an ironic twist, the quest for objective certainty yielded

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the free play of the subjective mind, and the debate between the two modernist trajectories continues to this day.[11]

To return to the more ancient understanding of the sign that Peirce described in explicitly triadic terms, its very triadicity prevents it from a critique like Derrida's. Unlike Saussure, where there is an explicit gap between signifier and signified, which Derrida relabels *la différance*, no such gap exists in Peirce's sign. In fact, the sign takes explicit account of the subjectivity of the interpreter within itself in the interpretant. The history, situation, character, and habit of the interpreter is part and parcel of how the sign is to be understood. One does not approach interpretation antiseptically, as if one can just clear away all of one's biases and arrive at *the* meaning of the sign. Rather, Peirce's triadic sign takes note of the interpreter and how his life experiences have formed him in describing how that person goes about interpreting signs. The triadic sign enables one to explain why, for example, the idea of voter ID laws have very different valences among different populations in the United States. Among some communities, showing an I.D. to vote is simple common sense; one must be a citizen to vote, and proving citizenship can only be done expeditiously by showing a government-approved I.D. On the other hand, some communities perceive such laws in relation to their experience of obstacles being raised to prevent them from voting. Far from seeing this as a common-sense regulation, they perceive it based upon their experience as yet another attempt to keep their voices out of the voting process. In Peirce's terms, they interpret the same representamen differently because their interpretants differ; Saussurean Structuralists would claim that one is right and the other is wrong and base their understanding on the structure they believe to be relevant; finally, the Deconstructionist would joyfully point out the arbitrariness of the Structuralist in choosing which structure is relevant even as they deny doing so. This is to say, Peirce can easily account for such a difference in sign interpretation in his triadic semiotic; Saussure's dyadic approach cannot.

To be clear, the interpretant does not refer to the interpreter *per se*; it refers instead to the habitual manner in which the interpreter understands signs. The habit of interpretation does not even have to be cognitive. For example, when approaching a "stop" sign, rarely does one who has experienced driving on American roads for any length of time go through a mental checklist of identifying the sign, mapping that onto a linguistic structure, and only then deciding to press the brake pedal. Rather, once a driver notices the stop sign, she simply by force of habit presses the brakes (assuming that she is a good, conscientious driver), and it is the actual pressing of the pedal that is the interpretant.[12] Similarly, one skilled in idiomatic expressions realizes that when one "dials" a phone in this day and age, no dial is involved. It is the force of habit that causes one to interpret the archaic idea of "dialing" in this instance as connecting one phone to another in order to have a conversation. Yet even here, there is no cognition that arises to the level of

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consciousness when understanding the expression “to dial a phone,” and such a habit is the interpretant of the sign.

There are many implications of a triadic understanding of the sign, but for our purposes the most relevant one is that the sign serves as a bridge between the subjective and the objective, the mind-dependent and the mind-independent. In this understanding, what is objective or mind-independent corresponds to reality, where reality is defined as that which is what it is, independent of what anyone thinks about it. What is subjective or mind-dependent is the understanding or stance that one takes or finds oneself in toward reality. These two domains are joined by the sign. This is the case whether it be visual observations that are nothing other than light reflecting off an object onto the eye’s optic nerve and transmitted via electric impulses to the brain, which then interprets those impulses into conventional signs that also are transmitted ultimately via some type of sensory input (typically touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing). Thus, the information that is accessible to us is not the real thing itself experienced purely (objectivism, i.e., there is one, “absolute” truth that we know), nor is it all a product of whatever we think or want it to be (subjectivism, i.e., we all have “our” truths). Rather, we know the real world, but we know reality mediately via the operation of the sign.

Ears to Hear

With this understanding of the sign in hand, I turn to the implications for the debate between those who believe that apologetics is crucial to the conduct of outreach with the Gospel and those who believe that apologetics is ultimately a fruitless endeavor and should be largely abandoned in favor of pure proclamation. In this section, I argue that such a dichotomy is intimately connected to a worldview that polarizes knowledge between objectivist and subjectivist poles, between knowing the world simply “as it is” and the inability to know such a world in favor of holding on to whatever one finds personally meaningful. Further, as we have seen, a triadic understanding of the sign dissolves this strict dichotomy by placing each pole within a larger, unitive framework. Christian claims, such as the existence of God, can be seen to indeed be the product of a particular, formed understanding; they are the product of a worldview that holds Christ to be crucified for our sins and raised for our redemption.

Yet understanding the world according to a belief system is not itself strange. Everyone has a set of beliefs and a personal history that greatly influences how he understands any sign or event. Even so, such beliefs also have a connection to something outside of one, to objects, events, concepts, etc., that can be discussed and debated, precisely because they are not purely subjective but exist in reality. They are public, not private, even as their interpretation involves a particular stance that

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the interpreter takes toward them. The triadic sign makes this a comprehensible and thus a defensible stance to take.

The apologist's chief concern is for the ability to reach outside of private understandings to evidence that exists independently of what anyone thinks about it in order to show the rationality of Christian belief. The influential LCMS apologist John Warwick Montgomery evidences such a concern frequently, such as in his essay "Lutheran Theology and the Defense of Biblical Faith," when he expresses his concern about a Christian arbitrariness that rejects apologetics, saying: "Only a genuine apologetic based on external, objective fact as presented in general and special revelation preserves religious decision from arbitrariness, keeps the gospel truly *gospel*, and . . . 'lets God be God.'"[13] Given a disagreement, the only way to discuss anything productively is not to focus on the disagreement *per se* but rather to bring in external data, something that *is as it is* independent of what anyone might think of it, to discuss. That is, there must be a publicly available subject matter or else all that is left is the will-to-power of the participants who arbitrarily decide what to believe. Peirce's triadic sign addresses this concern by emphasizing that signs do have objects, and these objects exist in reality just as they are. It does not eliminate the need to interpret those objects, but it insists that disagreement needs to be about something real in order to proceed fruitfully toward possible agreement (or at least better understanding) and not just spin wheels. Having ears to hear entails the ability to hear *something*, something that is not restricted to what is in one's own head.

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On the other hand, those who speak against the ability of one to "prove" the existence of God or to otherwise argue people "into the kingdom" via apologetics also have a valid concern. There is a basic epistemological problem with the idea that one can "prove" such things as the existence of God in that human arguments are too weak a vehicle to accomplish such a thing. Theodore Mueller, whom Montgomery quotes in the essay above, makes this point when he writes:

> Christian theology is the ability to exhibit, or preach, the Gospel, but not to prove it true by human arguments of reason or philosophy. . . . Let the Gospel be made known, and it will of itself prove its divine character. Christian apologetics has therefore only one function: it is to show the unreasonableness of unbelief. Never can it demonstrate the truth with "enticing words of man's wisdom."[14]

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Proof, which involves something that is irrefutable, is unachievable because there is always a way to refute a statement.[15] Rather, what is the chief concern of the anti-apologists is the transformative character of the Gospel. It conveys a special power, a "divine character" that will demonstrate its own veracity and convey its own, non-rational proof directly. Here again, the idea of a triadic sign dissolves the epistemic problem. The formation of the interpreter is crucial to how the sign is understood, and this formation is a product of many experiences that occurred prior to any discussion being held in the present. The root problem is unbelief, and unbelief goes to the heart of the interpretive stance that a none or a done might take to Christianity. What becomes crucial is the attractiveness of the Gospel message, those of a proclamatory, anti-apologetic bent would emphasize; and simply demonstrating this attractiveness in what one says and does is itself a form of persuasion and can be used by the Spirit to change hearts and minds. To hear a sound one must have ears. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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In a triadic understanding of the sign, in Gospel outreach one is left with the realization that legitimate, factual concerns a non-believer might have need to be addressed; yet addressing such concerns is not yet sufficient for the proclamation of the Gospel. This quite pragmatic understanding refuses to take a hard line for or against apologetics because ultimately the point is that one must become all things to all people in order by all means to save some. Much of the internal debate surrounding apologetics within the LCMS and elsewhere is intractable because of a failure of philosophical categories or the ability to conceive the world differently. In a worldview governed by the modernist divide between objective truth and subjective truths, interminable debate is the norm because the one set of claims empowers the other. The more one insists on objective truth, the more material the subjectivist has to object. Conversely, the objectivist is increasingly anxious in the face of the relativistic subjectivist, fearing that without purely objective claims, the world descends into anarchy and chaos. This is to say that both views are parasitic upon the other; to mix metaphors, the debate is like a snake eating its own tail. A philosophical paradigm, such as that embodied in the concept of a triadic sign, serves the church well in providing categories that show how this strong subjectivist/objectivist dichotomy should be abandoned in favor of a paradigm that transcends, while encompassing the legitimate concerns of both.

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The Relevance of Richness

For the past two years, I have taught an experimental course of my own design at CUP. It is entitled "Can Religion be Rational?" It explores the way in which believers of the so-called "Abrahamic" religions (though Christianity has pride of place) reason. It is not content, however, simply to present "healthy" modes of religious reasoning; it also explores when religion "goes bad." The course begins by problematizing religion by reading a selection from Richard Dawkins, one of the champions of the aggressive New Atheism, who objects to all religion on the grounds that it demands blind faith and claims that even moderate religion leads to violent extremism.[16] This context provides the students, most of whom tend to be from the nones and dones, with a popular and powerful critique of religion and gives voice to many of their concerns. The course then moves on to a series of case studies in which an instance of religious extremism is presented, such as the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) and the Islamic State (IS), and juxtaposes these with thinkers such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Fazlur Rahman. In each case, we examine examples of how they justify their beliefs in order to get a sense of how they reason to get data to determine if their reasoning is rational or not. The course then moves on to a theoretical element that provides the students with the tools to reflect upon the data presented in the case studies before repeating the exercise specifically regarding the role of Scripture in primarily Christian theology.

The structure of this course is based upon the understanding of a triadic sign as outlined above. It first recognizes and validates the concerns that the nones and dones bring to religion, understanding that their interpretations of reality arise from their experience and their habits of thought and action. What they see and hear regarding Christianity is simply different than what the Christian sees and hears. When Christians speak about the grace of God, many of the nones and dones do not hear it as at all comforting but rather as a story akin to a fairy tale designed to placate people who are mired in an irrelevant and irrational belief system. By looking into the reasoning of even extremists such as the WBC, they quickly come to realize that this perception does not reflect the rationality demonstrated there. They encounter new data and a new way of seeing the world by simply portraying how someone else thinks, and they see that even the WBC demonstrates a rational approach—*if* one accepts their premises. Bonhoeffer, too, is discovered to be far from weak-minded or irrational, and it is very apparent that the type of habitual thought processes he demonstrates are also rational, but in a much more complex and nuanced fashion than that of the WBC. The Westboro Baptists are comfortable only with a "literal" understanding of Scripture, where "literal" refers to whatever a text means to them on its face. Bonhoeffer is able to deal with the plain sense of Scripture, but he is also able to make subtle connections and engage in more figural or symbolic interpretation. The theory portion of the course, which explores issues related to a semiotic understanding of reality in much greater depth than I have been able to

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develop here, then provides an explanation of what is going on in their interpretation of the WBC and Bonhoeffer, and by extension, also in their own heads.

The net effect of this course has been relatively consistent. Most students generally come in either only tangentially interested in understanding religion or with outright hostility toward it, particularly Christianity. These same students have generally left with a deeper appreciation for and openness to religious thought, and many have expressed desires to learn more about what Christians believe, while others have expressed their desire to get involved again in the church in which they grew up.

The point of relating my experience with this course is to emphasize that it is formed around a semiotic approach to reality, particularly recognizing the role of the triadic sign in thought. It presents the nones and dones with patterns of thought and action with which they are unfamiliar, but which are incredibly rich and nuanced approaches to reality. Exploring these deeply produces in the students, even the skeptical ones, new habits of interpretation simply by observing how others reason. In general, I rarely have to deal with explicit intellectual objections about the reality of God, the trustworthiness of the Bible, the facticity of the resurrection, etc., in this course. The way these intellectual objections are typically formulated become largely irrelevant to the students' manner of thinking when approached with a semiotic model of understanding that takes into account the triadic sign. What is relevant is the way in which thinkers like Bonhoeffer, Luther, and others approach faith and their life with God. The students see not only that they demonstrate a reality-based approach (thereby taking into account the concerns of the apologist/objectivist) but that they also serve as exemplars of a powerfully attractive manner of living in this world and that their faith in Christ is part and parcel of such living (thereby taking into account the concerns of the anti-apologist/subjectivist). In short, the course attempts to make rich the experience of religion to those who have none, as well as to those who have spent a considerable amount of their spiritual resources in dismissing religion as shallow and unthinking. A richness that takes account of the depth of religious faith and connects it to real life cannot be easily dismissed. Richness is relevant, and a semiotic understanding helps one understand why.

> The communal life of the congregation is key to forming individuals who reflect the mind of Christ in their own lives to the point that they can productively interact with those who have no religion or those who are done with it.

This semiotic approach is not restricted to the classroom.[17] Individuals and congregations can model such an understanding in their interactions with the nones and dones as well. The point is to engage in a practice that gives people the opportunity to have new patterns of

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thinking inculcated in them, and this mostly takes place holistically, by totally engaging them in doing something that results in transformation. Indeed, the communal life of the congregation is key to forming individuals who reflect the mind of Christ in their own lives to the point that they can productively interact with those who have no religion or those who are done with it. Such is the case because habitual patterns of interpretation (Peirce's interpretant) are formed not in isolation but in community. So how do we become the type of community that forms this type of person? How do we participate as the body of Christ in forming the mind of Christ in our parishioners?[18]

While there is no single answer to these questions and no "silver bullet" that will reform congregational life, there are directions that can be taken that are more or less promising in helping to form the type of rich rationality that I describe. One approach is to be quite literally unapologetic about being who we are as Lutherans. It entails embracing the pattern of thought that has been handed down to us and living that out in new ways, given the changed cultural situation in which we find ourselves. By imbibing deeply from the Lutheran tradition, our habits of thought and action (interpretants) become so formed that we are able to perceive God's love (object) through the various signs He gives, such as water, bread, wine, brothers and sisters in Christ, etc. We then can act as living signs to the nones and dones because our words and deeds portray God's love and, through our relationships with them, forms the nones and dones to be able to perceive such love by creating new interpretants in them.

We then can act as living signs to the nones and dones because our words and deeds portray God's love and, through our relationships with them, forms the nones and dones to be able to perceive such love by creating new interpretants in them.

Perhaps the most visible and tangible aspect of such a reclamation of our tradition occurs via reaffirming a liturgical pattern of worship, one that feeds all the people from the very young to the very old. The liturgy is not just the work of the congregation; rather, it is better understood as the very breath of that congregation. It is done in response to what Christ has done. It is breathing out our sins and breathing in the Gospel; it is receiving God's gifts and returning our thanks.

The depth of Christian reflection that has gone into the liturgy is breathtaking and should not quickly be dismissed. It is richly biblical and rooted in a Christian identity, and it demonstrates to all present just who and what this Christian community is, what Christianity is all about. Too often, we run away from it because we think it is off-putting; but what is frequently overlooked is that, as the expression of so many Christians before us, it is deeply "authentic" and serves as an identity-marker of who we are. Just recently, a student came up to me in frustration. This

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student had recently visited a Catholic liturgical service as part of an assignment for a course I teach, and she was deeply impressed by the seriousness with which they took the liturgy. As the child of a wiccan and a Roman Catholic and firmly in the "spiritual but not religious" category, this student's frustration centered around why Christians would give up the richness of their heritage—a heritage that the student described as beautiful—for "Christianity-light." Instead of hiding their heritage, she wanted Christians to be more like who they are, not less in a bid for relevance.

My words above regarding the role of the liturgy can be easily misinterpreted. To clarify, the liturgy is one major element that forms people who are capable of living out the tradition faithfully in new circumstances; it is not the only one. Moreover, the role of the liturgy can and has been frequently misunderstood. It would be wrong to approach it in a type of *ex opere operato* fashion, as if merely performing it is sufficient. The idea of "do a good liturgy and they will come" or "it is all about faithfulness," to the exclusion of actively participating in God's mission, is deeply misguided. This is not to say that faithfulness is somehow secondary; it is to say that being faithful entails actively reaching out to the people in front of us and not just waiting for them to come to us.[19] One cannot avoid the responsibility to rightly engage the world with the Gospel, even if doing so makes the Church look quite different than it has in the past. The liturgy is one way to give Christians the resources to see the world with eyes and ears that are faithful to the tradition but also open to hearing the cries of those who struggle today and to be able to respond with the depth and richness of the Gospel message.

One cannot avoid the responsibility to rightly engage the world with the Gospel, even if doing so makes the Church look quite different than it has in the past.

Intentional cross-generational ministry within the congregation is another practice that reflects a semiotic approach to knowledge. Such a ministry focuses upon the entirety of the community by connecting each member with the other, from the oldest to the youngest. These connections have incredible benefits for the young in making them feel at home in the congregation, as well as for the old in giving them the opportunity to help and pass on what they know to a new generation. The young see how the world has not entirely changed from what it was in the past; and the old see how it is, in fact, quite different but not unrecognizable. These relationships highlight how the same world is in view (the objectivist pole), even as what stance one should take to that world (the subjectivist pole) is very much in play. By learning about the experience of the elderly, the younger people are exposed to new models for how they might approach their lives and address the contemporary challenge of the nones and dones. Getting to know people of different generations

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and their life experiences quickly makes it apparent that there is no one right way to handle any given situation; life is just too variable. Of course, this variability does not mean that it does not matter what you do. Far from it. There are better and worse ways of responding to life. This is to say that through these types of relationships, both the objectivist and the subjectivist ways of relating to the world are shown to be insufficient. What is portrayed is a better way to view the world by being faithful to the past, yet flexible enough to deal with the present. This approach helps to form individuals to think richly even if they do not know that formation is occurring.

By deliberately using a semiotic approach to thinking about ministry, the possibilities of outreach can be multiplied. It is my hope that these few examples from the classroom and from the congregation help to show the benefits of a semiotic understanding for planning the way forward in mission and to serve as models for how such ministry could occur. The point is that thinking semiotically helps one to focus intentionally on the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional formation of the Christian by insisting that it is this formation that will allow them to engage others with the Gospel fruitfully. This formation occurs not just through what is taught, but by what is caught through everyday practice. A semiotic approach helps Christians recognize the importance of publicly accessible evidence along with the quite rational objections the nones and dones bring to such evidence. It empowers Christians to handle this evidence by demonstrating a manner of thinking that is neither pandering to the concerns of the nones and dones nor a simple confrontation and refutation of positions. Rather, living and teaching in a manner that faithfully responds to evidence can help to demonstrate a new way of being in the world that might be seen to be attractive.

There is much more to say. I hope that this brief, thumbnail sketch of a different way of understanding the typical relationship between evidence and faith, objectivism and subjectivism, might open up creative, new ways of approaching a generation that has little use for the Church and finds the Gospel nearly incomprehensible. In short, we need to find new ways to share the Gospel in our relationships with others, particularly the nones and dones, that do not run down the well-worn paths that are so easily ignored as just more typical Christian boilerplate. Perhaps the impulse that has caused Pope Francis to take a very different public stance to such issues as homosexuality and divorce might serve as a tentative guide. For him, the teachings or the doctrine of Catholicism have not changed, but the recognition of the humanity and integrity of

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the other has begun to take center stage over their simple reassertion. Perhaps we, too, should take the lived experience of the nones and dones more seriously and recognize it for what it is—a challenge that goes to the very roots of how we know what we know. Perhaps we, like them, also need ears to hear.

Endnotes

[1] See http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godlessindixie/2015/03/27/the-nones-vs-the-dones/. There is considerable literature on the phenomenon of the "nones" and "dones," and further fleshing out of these categories beyond my brief comments is not the burden of this essay. For additional research-based information, see: Kaya Oakes, *The Nones are Alright: A New Generation of Believers, Seekers, and Those in Between* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015); Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People are Done with Church but not Their Faith* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2015); and Linda A. Mercadante, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For some easily-accessed analysis, see http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godlessindixie/2015/03/27/the-nones-vs-the-dones/; http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-briggs/nones-are-someones-in-vib_b_7314554.html; http://holysoup.com/2015/07/29/theyre-almost-done-with-church-and-more-conservative/; http://holysoup.com/2015/07/22/the-churchs-hidden-back-door/; http://www.amazon.com/Church-Refugees-Sociologists-reveal-people/dp/1470725924; http://thewartburgwatch.com/2015/06/22/the-dones-faithful-church-refugees-and-the-dechurched-project/; http://www.patheos.com/blogs/workcited/2015/06/how-to-really-understand-the-pewreport-church-refugees-by-josh-packard-and-ashleigh-hope/; https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/43600463-church-refugees-sociologists-reveal-why-the-dechurched-left-and-what-t.

[2] I do not say this by way of critique but by way of description. It is, of course, true of most people that they aspire to a certain set of ideals that are not currently actual in their lives.

[3] This is, of course, a not-so-veiled reference to the true offense of the Gospel, which is Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23). Rather than being offended at this, many young people are offended at Christianity for other reasons, real and perceived. This is the type of offense that Paul commands us to avoid in the same letter (1 Cor 10:32–33).

[4] While this manner of speaking may strike some reader's ears as discounting the role of the Spirit in conversion, such an interpretation misses the point. Speaking of the attractive character of a Christian's spiritual *habitus* is just to describe the enfleshed means that the Spirit uses to effect faith, no less than speaking of how water, bread, and wine are means that the Spirit uses to forgive sins and unite the believer with Christ.

[5] It is important to note that I am here speaking of how people might describe theoretically how they go about outreach. If I had more space, I would argue that most people who are sufficiently formed within the Lutheran tradition do not, in practice, follow a theoretical description that only focuses on apologetics or one that completely eschews giving evidence for what they believe in favor of a purely parochial proclamation. This is to say that there is a felicitous inconsistency (to borrow one of Pieper's best terms) between the way Lutherans actually practice outreach and the manner in which they describe what they do when they encounter nonbelievers.

[6] Deely is one of the most important living semioticians and has traced this history in great detail in many places. For perhaps his most comprehensive treatment, see John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the*

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Turn of the Twenty-First Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). Other related books include the first two of his "Postmodernity in Philosophy Poinsot Trilogy": *Augustine and Poinsot* (2009) and *Descartes and Poinsot* (2008), both published by the University of Scranton Press. The third volume, *Peirce and Poinsot*, is forthcoming.

[7] Peirce's thought has become increasingly popular during the second half of the twentieth century, though many still balk at its complexity. For a representative sampling of his thought, see Charles Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 1 (1867–1893)* and *Volume 2 (1893–1913)*, edited by Nathan Houser, Christian Kloesel, and the Peirce Project (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992 and 1998).

[8] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1958), 34, II:1.

[9] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (Chicago: Open Court Classics, 1972).

[10] For example, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakrvorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

[11] Not all Structuralists are caught up in this debate, as Paul Ricouer has taken structuralist insights in fascinating directions as found in the jointly-published work: André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. by David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[12] To finish this exercise, the representamen is the "stop" sign itself, and the object is the Department of Transportation's insistence that cars come to a state of zero forward kinetic energy at a particular intersection.

[13] John Warwick Montgomery, "Lutheran Theology and the Defense of Biblical Faith," in *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Newburgh, IN: Trinity Press, 1978), 152.

[14] J. Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934), 71.

[15] Mathematics may be the only human endeavor where true proof is possible.

[16] "But my point in this section is that even mild and moderate religion helps to provide the climate of faith in which extremism naturally flourishes." (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* [New York: Mariner Books, 2008], 303.)

[17] In fact, I would insist that most of our practice, when it is healthy, already reflects a semiotic understanding. This is because the way we interpret the world is best described via Peirce's triadic sign, and so we simply approach the world in this fashion. What is more difficult and where people frequently go wrong is in the description of what we do. Here is where the problem lies, and so it is one of my primary goals to help people to see that how we describe what we do does not match up well with what we actually do.

[18] Questions of this type need to serve as the starting point for congregations that seek to minister to an increasingly areligious population, not questions such as: "What programs can we create to bring in more people?" "How can we recover the way we were in the past?" "What will meet the felt needs of people?" "How can we make the Gospel relevant?" There are many other questions of this type, and all largely miss the point that we need to reform our own minds before we can hope to portray the mind of Christ to others.

[19] The semiotic model I develop above insists upon the idea that practice, what we do together during church, is part and parcel of the formation of the interpretant or how the individual sees the world. Therefore, practice is not something to be regarded as neutral. It situates one within the world and forms one to think Christianly.

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The Biblical Nature of Mission: God's Mission in Action

Eugene Bunkowske

Abstract: Professor Eugene Bunkowske, a founder of The Lutheran Society for Missiology, reviews the basic biblical characteristics of Christian mission. He shows how mission is a process, one that started with God and is ongoing. Mission is an expression of God's love for humanity; it shows His desire to bring all peoples to Himself, to live with Him for eternity. To do this He lowered Himself to become a part of the human context, using images, actions, and words relevant to human minds. This process goes on—we do not generally preach in Aramaic in a country, unless it is understood. Martin Luther contextualized the Word of God when he translated that Word into German. The process goes on. God became a human being to contextualize His love. Several basic biblical characteristics are reviewed in the article, and an illustration application is made to a specific context.

Introduction

Picture yourself in the one hundredth largest city in the United States, a Mecca of manufacturing and technology. If this city were blown off the map tonight, the technological infrastructure of the country would take a heavy hit. Imagine yourself in the shoes of Mason, an 18-year-old. He lives in that city with his parents, family, and friends.

Mason's father is a Christian engineer who has moved from the farm to the city, from the spiritual to the secular, and from manufacturing to technology. Mason's dad

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has done well financially, but Mason is not settled. He is searching for "the meaning and purpose of life." Mason spent his last summer in Mexico and came home in September, late for his first semester in college. People wonder about Mason, but his mother comforts him.

Mason was on a mission in Mexico. It became very much his personal mission. Now, in reflection, Mason wonders, "What will happen now that I am not there? Is the mission over? What is mission? Does it all depend on me?"

Mission is common in daily language. We hear of the mission of the Marriot, the mission of the military, and the mission of the church, even the mission of Mason. What does mission mean in the context of Christianity?

Mission as Movement, as Process

Mission starts with God. God was on a mission when He "created the heaven and the earth." Not only did God create, but He also ordered and organized a perfect set of relationships between Himself, humankind, and the non-human world (Gn 1:1–2:8). He did it to reflect the glory of His name (Ps 19:1).

When Satan rebelled in heaven, fell to earth, and brought deception and disharmony with him (Rev 12:7–9), things changed. Deception with temptation entered the earthly scene; rebellion and sin quickly climbed on board, followed by destruction of the perfect relationships among God, human beings, and the earth on which they live. Relationship destruction brought with it spiritual and physical separation between God and people (Genesis 3). It looked like God's mission of bringing glory to His name had ended in catastrophe.

God's perspective was different. He is a compassionate, merciful, patient, and forgiving God (Ps 86:15). He returned to the garden to continue His mission, to pick up the pieces, as it were, (Gn 3:8–9) and to promise the sending of a Savior (Gn 3:15) to open the way for renewed relationship (Rom 5:10–11).

God's mission is the golden thread throughout the Old and New Testament, as God sends Abram, blesses him, and promises that through him "every family on earth would be blessed" (Gn 12:1–3). This mission of God was continued through Isaac (Gn 26:4), Jacob (Gn 28:13–14), Joseph, and through the part of Abraham's family that was called the people of Israel (Ex 19:4–6; 1 Pt 2:9). Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, David and his family were key players in this progression during the next period of God's mission.

The New Testament spells out the promised salvation phase (Mt 1:20–21) of God's mission. In this phase, God made His promise "of crushing (Satan's) head" (Gn 3:15) and of "blessing every family on earth" through a descendent of Abraham (Gn 12:3). This happened as Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, came into the world as the second Adam through Mary from the line of David right back to

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Abraham (Mt 1:1–17).

As the second Adam, Jesus did not follow the destructive ways of the first Adam. He took the place of the first Adam and all of his descendants and fully resisted temptation (Mt 4:1–11). In addition, He freed them from the eternal death that is the result of sin (Rom 6:23) by living perfectly under God's standards for human beings (Rom 5:19; Is 53:4–5; Heb 2:14–15, 17) and by suffering and then dying for the sin of the world (1 Jn 1:7; 1 Pt 1:18–19). In this way Jesus, the Savior, removed the separation between God and people (Col 1:21–23) in order to draw them into union with God through Himself by faith (2 Cor 5:18–21; Gal 3:26–29; Eph 2:4–10).

He also continued to come to people in the garden of this world by seeking the lost (Lk 19:10). He did this by having compassion on people (Mt 9:35–38), blessing the children (Mk 10:13–16), proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom (Mt 4:23; 13; Mk 1:35–39), and forgiving sins (Lk 7:36–50; Mk 2:1–12). In addition to that, Jesus fed the hungry (Jn 6:1–14), healed the sick (Lk 17:11–19; Mk 7:31–37), cast out demons (Mt 8:14–18; Mk 5:1–20; 7:24–30), raised the dead (Lk 8:40–56), walked on water (Mk 6:45–51), and calmed the storm (Lk 8:22–25).

Jesus also gathered disciples (Mk 1:14–20; Mt 9:9–12), mentored and taught them (Mt 5–10; 13:36–43; 15–16), encouraged and developed their faith (Mt 9:1–10; 18:1–10), motivated and mentored prayer (Lk 11:1–13), and sent His disciples out to minister (Mt 10; Lk 10:1–23).

On Easter evening, Jesus helped His disciples understand the Scriptures. He told them that by His authority people will be told to turn to God and change the way they think and act so that their sins will be forgiven. This will be told to people from all nations, beginning in the city of Jerusalem, and "You are witnesses to these things" (Lk 24:44–48). On the same evening, Jesus also said to His disciples, "Peace be with you! As my Father has sent me so I am sending you." Later, just before His Ascension into heaven, Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you. Then you will be my witnesses to testify about me in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In bridging to the next phase of God's mission on earth, we remember the part that Jesus played. While He was on earth, Jesus carried God's mission forward by placing Himself under God's law to fulfill it perfectly and by paying for the wages of sin so that people could once again have eternal life with God. With His ascent into heaven, He passed the baton of God's mission, God's family business here on earth, to His disciples (Jn 20:21). They were to proclaim the message of restored relationship with God (2 Cor 5:11–6:2) in the place of Jesus. Jesus promised that the Father would send them the Spirit of Truth, who would teach them and help them carry out God's mission on earth (Jn 14:16–17, 26).

On Pentecost, the Spirit of God came in a very visible way through the wind and

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through the tongues of fire. He got all of the disciples present in that place, possibly as many as 120 (Acts 1:15) or even more (1 Cor 15:6), directly involved in God's mission. He gave them the power to speak in languages they had never learned and moved them to proclaim God's message, with the result that three thousand were converted in a single day (Acts 2:1–41). From that beginning, God's mission moved out to many places and peoples through the testimony of God's family members (Acts). God validated the message by doing miraculous signs (Acts 2:43) through His messengers and gave them courage to face all kinds of hardships, including death (Acts 7), for the sake of His name.

The Mission of God is firmly established and centered in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–13, 27–31), the family of God (Eph 2:19–22). It is an expression of faith flowing out of the gathered believers, the church (1 Tim 3:15) in each location.

The Mission of God is firmly established and centered in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–13, 27–31), the family of God (Eph 2:19–22). It is an expression of faith flowing out of the gathered believers, the church (1 Tim 3:15) in each location. The first believers functioned as a communal unit having a single purpose. They gathered to worship God each day. They built one another up and joyfully shared their lives and their faith so that every day more people were added to their group (Acts 2:46–47).

Mission Snapshots

The first snapshot focuses on the *where from* of mission, on God as the originator of the mission who started and sustains the mission through Jesus. From this perspective we can say that

> *Mission* is God's *creating* human beings in His image to have a perfect relationship with them. It is also His *determination* to rebuild relationship by bringing estranged humankind back to Himself in Christ (Gn 1:26–30; 2:7, 25; 3:8–24; 1 Tim 2:1–6, Gal 4:4–7, Jn 3:14–17; Lk 19:10; and 2 Cor 5:16–21, etc.).

The second snapshot focuses on the *communication* of the message as the means that God uses to advance His mission. From this perspective we can say that

> *Mission* is the divine Word in oral, written, and sacramental form, used by God to re-create unity and a harmonious working relationship between humankind and Himself. (Jn 1:1–14; Jn 3:16–21; Acts 2:38; Gal 3:27; Ti 3:5–7; Mt 26:26–28); Rom 1:16; Mt 27–28; Jn 14:1–3; Eph 2:8–10; Lk 24:46–47; 1 Jn 1:5–10; 2 Cor 5:1–6:2; Heb 11; Jn 14:15–21, 23; 15:26–27;

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> 16:5–15; Heb 13:20–21; etc.)

The third snapshot focuses on the *who is to be reached* of mission. It deals with restoring relationship with lost people through faith in Christ. From this perspective we can say that

> *Mission* is human beings being brought back into a harmonious relationship with God by moving from death to life. (Mt 9:35–38; Jn 3; Jn 4:1–42; 4:43–54; Rom 10:9–13; etc.)

The fourth snapshot deals with the *how is this done* dimension of mission. It lifts up the variety of ordinary means that God uses to carry forward His mission. From this perspective we can say that

> *Mission* is the study of how God communicates His Word for restoring relationships in a variety of contexts through His Church and through individual believers for meaningful understanding (Rom 10:8–17; Lk 24:13–49, 1 Pt 2:1–9; Acts 2:14–47; Acts 4:23–31; 2 Cor 5:11–21; and Acts 14:23–31, etc.).

An Integrating Mission Snapshot

In this integrating snapshot we place the four individual snapshots together in a holistic snapshot that gives us a still picture of the process that God has been carrying out since the beginning of time. From this perspective we can say that

> *Mission* is how the triune God through His Church (including individuals and gathered groups of Christians, past, present and future), in a variety of ways and through a variety of God-ordained and humanly developed institutions, communicates by His oral, written, and visual (sacramental) Word, the Law and Gospel message about human sin and God's grace in Jesus Christ for meaningful understanding to people in each and every condition and context of life, worldwide, in order that they receive forgiveness of sins, the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ, live for the praise of His glory, and are nurtured and equipped to join Him in His ongoing mission of making disciples of all peoples.

So there you are—about the same number of words as in the long Greek sentence in Romans 1:1–7. Some have said that this integrated snapshot is just too much. But how would you shorten it? Every reduction leaves a number of key concepts hidden or at least implicit.

If this longer integrating snapshot is too long it can be summarized as follows:

> *Mission* is how the triune God through His Church communicates His Word about human sin and God's grace in Jesus Christ for meaningful understanding.

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The Mission in Context

Mission is not an island. It is part of a conceptual configuration in which evangel, evangelism, evangelist, mission, and missions function together within the academic discipline of missiology. The short definitions that follow are included to set a more inclusive context for what follows.

Evangel (*euaggelion*) is the Gospel or Good News. It is proclamation. It is witness.[1]

Evangelism (*euaggelizesthai*) is Good News proclaimed with great enthusiasm and courage by its advocates, backed up by their own witness and experience.[2]

Evangelist (*euaggeliztas*) is an eager proclaimer, a positive Good News gossiper, who uses every legitimate rhetorical device to meaningfully communicate the message of God's forgiveness and love in Jesus Christ to people of every tribe, language, people, and nation (2 Cor 5:11; Acts 13:43; and Rev 7; 9).[3]

Mission is God's way of looking at mankind through the eyes of grace. It is God's desire to close the gap between Himself and humankind. It is God's intentionality and instrumentality in carrying out this great work of reconciling human beings to Himself. In the most basic sense, mission is *God's goal for all of missiology and theology*.

Missions are God's ways and works for restoring the relationship between Himself and human beings. These ways and works focus on the human activities that God does through Jesus Christ and through people and institutions to get His mission done.

Missiology is the scholarly discipline that focuses on people who are separated from God and features evangel, evangelism, evangelist, mission, and missions in an integrated context that draws heavily from theology, cultural anthropology, sociology, history, religious studies, area studies, research, and communication theory and practice. Missiology takes the study of God's Word and God's world very seriously. Its academic and research activities take a balanced approach to theology, application, theory, and practice.

Mission Applications

A clear understanding that mission is not foundationally Mason's mission, or my, or your mission, but that it is God's mission is strategic as we go on together in our study of God's means for mission. The challenge for each of us is openness to the mind of Christ. It focuses especially on God's mission-driven desire that "all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). It also includes

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an open willingness to be *God's chosen means* for getting the "means of grace" to the lost people of this world. We can do this properly only as we daily nurture ourselves and our fellow Christians with the Word of God and respond to the work of God's Spirit with active prayer, worship, witness, and service.

There certainly is a proper place for the church and for you and me as long as we realize that we are playing second fiddle to the lead fiddle, to our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been sent by the Father to "seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10). Your and my mission must always play second fiddle to, and totally imitate and fit in with, the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. The second and third chairs in the orchestra always take their lead from the first chair, from the lead player. So it is with believers, as they joyfully use every legitimate rhetorical and nonverbal skill, proficiency, aptitude, and competence that God has given in order to communicate the Gospel to each and every lost person for meaningful understanding.

Incidentally, a good number of those lost people live right next door to us on basically every street in your town and mine and in every part of the main streets and back streets in our world today. This means that God's mission is not just *over there* but *right here where I live*. It is His Mission, His work. He will do it. Yes He will use His church, His family members, and His individual believers; but they are only His means, His instrumentality, His agents for doing His mission.

The point is that Mason and you and I, yes every Christian, does have a purpose, a mission. Our purpose is to let people know the "Way, Truth, and Life" before their city is blown up or their life on earth is naturally over. Yes, each believer is a GOOD NEWS teller—one who has the privilege of telling others about the good and meaningful life with God in Jesus, the promised Christ and Savior. This life goes on through everything and anything in this world and the next.

A beautiful picture of our Christian life and purpose is painted in Hebrews 3:1, where we read, *"Brothers and sisters you are holy partners in a heavenly calling, so keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the apostle and chief priest about whom we make our testimony of faith"* (God's Word Translation). How does this purpose and privilege work itself out in your life?

Endnotes

[1] Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 48.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Eugene W. Bunkowske, Personal Communication, New Years, 1998.

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Scattering for Gathering

Victor Raj

Abstract: Scattering for Gathering is one of the numerous biblical paradigms for mission. In this brief essay, I summarize several conversations I have had with some church planters and pastors in India who began their ministry as catechists. Some of them already planted congregations before they entered the seminary for formal theological education and pastoral formation. While serving as pastors, these men encourage and empower gifted people and their families to reach out and plant new congregations. Patterned after the apostle Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 3:16–18), they believe that one person plants, another waters, and God gives the growth. God scatters His people wherever He will so that by His word He draws all people to Himself.

Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, the first Protestant missionary to India, was a loner. While studying at the seminary in Germany, Ziegenbalg had a vision to reach the people of India with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1706, he landed in Tharangambadi on the southeastern shores of India and began his ministry among the Tamil-speaking peoples in the region. Endorsement for his ministry from the mission board came a little later.

Six decades later, in 1761, pioneer English Baptist missionary, William Carey, followed Ziegenbalg and began a new mission in Bengal on the northeastern shores. Carey was labeled an "Enthusiast" for casting a vision for reaching out to people in faraway lands. Himself a tanner by trade, Carey would be joined by Joshua Marshman, a weaver, and William Ward, a printer and book seller. These three would make the missionary hall of fame, under the name "The Serampore Trio."

Missionaries were conversant in biblical languages and thoroughly trained in the theology of their respective denominations. They became experts in linguistics and

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were cognizant of India's religio-cultural and philosophical context, in which they would accumulate a lifetime of learning for teaching and communicating Christ boldly to various people groups of the nation. They translated Scripture into the vernaculars and dialogued intelligently with their Indian counterparts, experts in other religions, languages, and cultures. They trained people in making a living for themselves and to serve others in their neighborhood and the larger society. Support and good will from the respective Home Mission Societies followed.

Three centuries later, Gospel witnessing in India outside the church walls takes place through the life and service of Indian Christians: a vast number of laypeople with an unbridled testimony to the Lord by word of mouth. The apostolic paradigm that St. Paul posits in his Corinthian correspondence is alive and well in the twenty-first century: Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God causes His word to grow. The Lord keeps adding to the number of believers.

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The Sunday after Christmas 2015, I had the privilege of spending the afternoon with the presbyter of a congregation of the Church of South India (CSI) and his committee members, four miles west of my home in Trivandrum, India. This 450-family congregation is celebrating its centenary this year. The celebration is year-long, presenting evening lectures on a monthly basis to the congregation and in the neighboring towns, testimonies of highly accomplished Christians who grew up in the area. The congregation itself had been a "church plant," the fruit of the vision that the pioneers cast as the mantle of church leadership began to fall from the London Mission Society onto indigenous shoulders. Expatriate missionaries began to perceive the need for cultivating indigenous leadership and to equip them for raising future generations of Jesus-followers in India. The church that rises from the native soil would be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.

In September 1947, the Anglican, Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist missions operating in India came together to form the Church of South India by way of demonstrating their post-missionary organizational stability and for presenting a united witness of the Gospel of our Lord in a nation of diversity and plurality of religions and cultures. Similarly, in November 1970, the Church of North India was formed. Altogether, their membership today totals 5.5 million.

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The CSI congregation in my neighborhood has on its own deployed six missionaries and their families to different towns in central India, patterned after the Home Mission Society. These laypeople are supported with prayers and resources from the congregation. They engage the communities in which they are placed as Christ's witnesses. They learn the local language and get acclimated to the life and lifestyle of the people to whom they reach out at the grassroots level. Long term, they team up with other volunteer missionaries who work in the region to form new Christian communities and congregations. The pastor of the sending congregation himself had been a volunteer missionary before he enrolled for seminary education. Come May, he will be deployed to Andhra Pradesh to oversee church planting activities in the state.

Involvement in the various activities of the Home Mission Society is a strongly recommended prerequisite for enrolling in seminary education in the Indian churches. Prospective students will have shadowed evangelists and church planters as much as possible. Students come with a minimum four-year college education and an awareness of the society and culture in which they live and intend to serve. At the seminary, for the sake of building a biblical foundation for mission, students interact more with the history of Israel and the prophetic literature in the Old Testament. After seminary, they enter the diaconate and later work as probationers to qualify for ordination. In theory and in practice, planting churches is an integral part of pastoral formation in the Church of South India.

The India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), the LCMS's India partner, had also been innovative in planting congregations through laypeople during the church's formative years. What is now Concordia Theological Seminary Nagercoil first began as a Teacher Training Institute. Initially, a number of Tamil- and Malayalam-speaking nationals were trained there in the Lutheran way to serve as teachers and catechists. They would shadow expatriate missionaries and serve as evangelists and teachers in the villages where they would be placed. Lutheran teachers were deployed missionaries and evangelists, guided, mentored and supervised directly by expatriates. Teachers lived in the villages they were serving. After school, they visited families in the neighborhood and presented to them the Story of the Lord, inviting them and their families to join the faithful. School auditoriums became chapels during weekends. Lutheran teachers served as catechists, leading worship, preaching, and conducting weekly Bible studies. The Sacrament was celebrated when the ordained missionary was able to visit the site, usually within one to three months.

Already in 1951, the IELC based in the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu reached out to Mumbai in the northwest to serve primarily the Tamil- and Malayalam-speaking Lutherans who had moved away from home to benefit from the job opportunities in the metropolitan area. Targeting initially the diaspora, the church deployed two clergy, one speaking Malayalam and the other Tamil. They organized

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congregations in Mumbai and expanded the ministry among the native Hindi- and Marathi-speaking populations. The pastors would identify potential leaders for the church and catechize and train them for evangelism and church planting. Some leading men would be sent to the Nagercoil seminary to receive further training in the pastoral formation program.

The IELC's charitable institutions have been missionary outposts. Boarding schools for boys and girls, Lutheran schools for the deaf and the blind, college hostels, trade schools, health clinics, and hospitals that the IELC inherited from the Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission had built into them a deep sense of spirituality and a commitment to confess Christ boldly in a hostile environment. Their chaplains encouraged these establishments and their staff to present before the world around them a Christ-centered servanthood. The church body would deploy dedicated men and women to these institutions to serve as missionaries, empowering them to put to good use the various talents that God had invested in them. The men would initiate a Bible correspondence course and monitor Christian reading rooms in town. Other men would "pony express" Christian books and sell them and distribute Gospel tracts and Scripture portions. Women would shadow nurses and other healthcare workers, visiting the sick and the destitute in the neighborhood. Some of the men would enroll in the seminary's one-year Bible course and return to the mission field as certified catechists, while a select number of women would train as deaconesses and "Bible women." God has His way of spreading His Word that transcends human understanding.

God has His way of spreading His Word that transcends human understanding.

First established in 1926, my mother congregation had in twenty-five years birthed four new congregations within a ten-mile radius. Together they received pastoral care from one ordained clergyman assisted by one catechist and a Lutheran school teacher. In the 1970s, all of these congregations became independent, each one ready and able to call its own pastor and make the annual budget. One of these congregations planted a new (grand-)daughter church in a nearby village and raised enough money to buy property and build a brand-new church building. In the Indian context, church buildings are a visible testimony of the One who alone is worthy of the honor and worship of all people. In two generations, these five congregations together were blessed to raise ten pastors for the IELC.

Vacation Bible Schools have played their role in the formation of new Christian congregations. They show how God uses each member of the body of Christ for making Him known among those who do not yet know Him as their Savior. Growing out of VBS, Sunday School children of two Lutheran congregations in my neighborhood reached out to the non-Christians of their age and organized them as

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"Hindu Sunday School." Their weekly meetings merited the attention of adults. Within seven years, what began in a Christian family's front yard in 1967 attracted young adults and extended families and became a congregation. One can only cherish the thought that the Spirit blows wherever He wills.

Wherever the word of God is living and active, the enemies of the cross also surface. Congregations do not multiply today in the same way as they did a generation ago. Other religions have intentionally copied Christian outreach ideas and begun their own Sunday Schools, special programs for young adults, study groups on college campuses, and volunteer organizations for serving communities in various ways. A harvest for the Lord nevertheless awaits consummation. Some seeds fall on rocks and do not take root. Others fall on the wayside and are trampled on. Other seeds fall among thorns and are choked by thorns and thistles. Inasmuch as God sows the seed, He prepares the soil well for the seed to be received, take root, and bear much fruit. His Word never returns void. God scatters His people in order to gather everyone at His feet.

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Book Reviews

SUMMONED FROM THE MARGIN: Homecoming of an African. By Lamin Sanneh. Foreword by Kelefa Sanneh. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012. 281 + xx pages. Paperback. $ 24.00.

What does it take for a poor African villager to rise to the pinnacle of academia as the D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School and Professor of History at Yale University? Lamin Sanneh's autobiographical account *Summoned from the Margin* attempts to explain this and more, with intriguing thematic depth. Sanneh touches on all aspects of existence within the boundaries of his life experience. The unique nature of his background makes this book an invaluable testament of spiritual, sociological, and intellectual insights.

Sanneh's narrative is divided into three parts, each highlighting significant stages of his life journey. The first part addresses his childhood and transition into young adulthood. He grew up in the small village of Georgetown during the colonial era in the Gambia, as a member of the Mandinka tribe, observing Islamic principles as social norms. It is evident from his youth that Sanneh's tenacity for persisting against life's odds paved the way for his future. He taught himself to read and write from scraps on the street, and he also paid his way through his primary education after his father refused to. In high school, experiences with teachers and peers alike fueled his enquiring mind, especially in the area of faith. Eventually, Sanneh found his way to the city (Banjul), where he worked in various jobs and secretly struggled with profound dilemmas of faith. Raised as a Muslim, Sanneh put Christianity on trial, debating with himself about the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, amongst other principles of the faith. The climax of this searching resulted in his acceptance of Jesus, which he describes as feeling like "being born again" (102).

The second part of the story commences shortly after Sanneh's conversion to Christianity. He was whisked into a new chapter of life as an undergraduate student in Virginia. At first the United States—especially the significance and complications attached to race—puzzled and amazed him. He felt drawn to history and decided to major in it. Sanneh's studies enabled him to go globetrotting, during which he met peoples from various backgrounds. Subsequently, Islamic graduate studies in Britain made him realize that the West needed to understand "that Islam was a religion, but that it was also a state" (156). At this time Sanneh became involved with the Anglican church, and after graduation he went to Nigeria to work with the "Islam in Africa" project (IAP). A while later, he was back in England for a doctorate in African Studies, which led to more worldwide traveling for research and the writing of his first book.

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The final part of the story begins with Sanneh meeting his future wife, who at the time was a postgraduate student. After graduating, he found himself led towards an academic career, serving as a faculty member in various universities worldwide, contrary to his original plan of working with churches in Africa. While he had one of these jobs, Sanneh's first child, Kelefa, was born. His daughter Sia was born a few years later, when he was posted at a university in Scotland, where he gained the experience of being a local preacher. He also began to teach a course on African Christianity. Faced with instability in the British education system, Sanneh decided to take up an offer as a visiting member of faculty at Harvard University. There he further explored the differences between Christianity and Islam, focusing on the languages and translations of their scriptures. Sanneh even went on to write and publish a book on this topic. Eventually, Sanneh moved to become the chair in the field of World Christianity at Yale University. His children grew, he and his wife settled down, and he felt the urge to commit fully to a Christian congregation in order to obtain deeper spiritual fulfillment. Sanneh went through more soul searching about his Christian faith in comparison to the secular worldview. He finally found a church home in a Catholic parish. Sanneh ends this account with a discussion of his faith, both as a Muslim child and as a Christian adult, and how it transfigured over time.

The essence of Lamin Sanneh's narrative in *Summoned from the Margin* is brought to focus through the thematic components he employs. These major themes are religion (especially Muslim and Christian differences), cultures in various societies, politics, and the academy. But it is impossible to go through this book without being struck by how integral faith is to Sanneh's identity. Sanneh bluntly declares religion his "second nature," and this is apparent even from his childhood, with a personality naturally drawn to existential questions. Varying facets of religious application in societies are discussed. Religion, both in its traditional and in its more sophisticated form, is mentally linked to other social constructs. In Sanneh's childhood village, religion played more of a social rather than a spiritual function, fulfilling the role of social control and socialization. Quranic school was the means by which Muslim beliefs were reinforced from an early age. Most Africans during the period of colonization associated Christianity with colonialism and therefore distrusted the religion. The solution Sanneh offers for this problem is putting Africans in control their Christian faith. He believes "the embrace of the local name of God is a vital difference between Christianization and Islamization" (233). This key realization came as a defining point in his career, when he realized "Christianity is a form of indigenous empowerment by virtue of vernacular translation" (217), as opposed to Islam which sees the Qur'an as non-translatable. Sanneh was similarly inspired when he coined the term "World Christianity" to highlight Christianity's diversification into indigenous societies and cultures, and how attaining Christian unity would mean working with this understanding.

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The need for Christian unity arises from the growing numbers of Christian converts in Africa and third world countries worldwide, despite the fact that intellectually the faith is still concentrated in Europe, where it is in decline. Interfaith dialogue is discussed extensively in this book. Strikingly, Muslims were more willing to dialogue in depth than Christians in Sanneh's experience. It is also worth noting that, because of his Muslim upbringing, Sanneh never was accepted as a member of the church in his home country (Gambia). The inference here is that Christians are not as bold or daring as their Muslim counterparts in their interfaith relations and in gaining converts. Sanneh offers a key insight into the psychology behind conversion in the explanation that "Islam had not repelled" him, but "the Gospel had attracted" him (103).

Sanneh also addresses the complexity of tensions between the Western and Arabic worlds, with the grace and acuity of being a veteran of both worlds. In his focus on the Arabic countries, Sanneh does not neglect to bring up the difficulties faced by Arab Christians and even writes of the condemnation some pacifist Islamic leaders receive from their Muslim society.

The Catholic Church, as one might expect, is also examined thoroughly in this book. The pros and cons, as well as the history of the Roman Catholicism, are considered; but Sanneh ends with the affirmation that "Catholicism met my need for Christianity with a social, communal face" (268). A salient observation Sanneh makes is the need for higher moral standards amongst leaders of the church.

Despite religion being the book's most prevailing theme, culture, politics, and academics are driving stimuli throughout the narrative of *Summoned from the Margin*. The differences between Western and African culture are highlighted through Sanneh's description of his childhood in Gambia and his transition to the United States as a professor. In an African setting, society thrives on being connected, religion is used as a tool to enforce cultural beliefs, and kinship is based on materialistic profits. Women hold an underestimated influence over everyday life and ceremonies, and cultural values direct individual decisions. One example is his father's refusal to pay Sanneh's tuition fees for primary school—which his father associated with colonialism—so as to show solidarity with the indigenous lifestyle; yet Sanneh ended up going to school with his mother's support.

A polygamous home is a common feature of the African Muslim family; and, as Sanneh points out, it is quite a stressful state of affairs for all the family members, including the husband. Politics is a recurring motif in the commentary of the places Sanneh inhabits along his journey through life. Colonial rule, for example, and the ways in which African countries sought to progress after gaining sovereignty are both considered. Sanneh found that freedom without accountability resulted in a debilitating ailment in the post-colonial African nations. The potential for negative spillover effects of political decisions are exemplified in Sanneh's decision to move

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to America because of changes in the UK government's legislation, which destabilized higher education. Academics being Sanneh's forte, he simplifies the educational system, likening it to a polygamous family, with the various schools in a university being the wives and the subsequent departments their children. Sanneh also addresses racism in the United States. Even the academic field is not immune to racism, as Sanneh himself testifies of being the victim of racist comments and actions whilst in his position at Yale University.

It is highly recommended that everyone read *Summoned from the Margin* because it touches on all the key aspects of societies throughout the world. This book also attempts to provide a basis on which to better understand people of different cultures and faiths, and hopefully to attain world peace.

John Loum

PAUL, FOUNDER OF CHURCHES: A Study in Light of the Evidence in the Role of "Founder-Figures" in the Hellenistic Roman Period. By James Constantine Hanges. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012. 550 pages. Hardback. $195.

Sometime in the second or third century before Christ, a family of migrants from the Egyptian city of Memphis established a foreign cult on the turf of the venerable and sacred Greek community on the isle of Delos, at that time the most important center of the worship of Apollo. The invasive cult was that of Sarapis. The founder of this foreign cult was an Egyptian priest named Apollonios, who brought to Delos a brazen image of Sarapis along with the sacred traditions dealing with the worship of his god. The cult of Sarapis in Greece began as a very private family cult housed in a small rented apartment that served as the living quarters for Apollonios and his family. The sacred rituals of the Sarapis cult were passed on to Apollonius' son, and from his son to a grandson, also named Apollonios. By this time, the worship of Sarapis had grown to include members of the native population, and it thus became necessary for the members of the cult to purchase a parcel of land for the construction of a temple. Many inhabitants of Delos were opposed to the establishment of the cult. Through the civil courts they tried to impede the construction of the temple and the public celebration of its sacred rites. Healing miracles performed by the deity on behalf of a suppliant helped convince the courts to rule in favor of the new cult. Some years later, the cult and its temple were taken over by the state and integrated into religious life of the island.

The migration of Apollonios and his family was made possible by the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great and his generals. However, in good post-colonial fashion, the Greek conquest and subsequent colonization of Egypt did not result in the unilateral imposition of the Greek gods and their worship upon the Egyptians. The colonizers were themselves influenced by their encounter with the colonized, as exemplified by the story of the founding of the cult of Sarapis on Greek soil.

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In his investigation of Paul as a founder of Christ-worshiping communities within the Hellenic world, James Constantine Hanges deals extensively with the impact of migrants and their cults upon resident "native" populations. Using a good deal of social anthropology and post-colonial criticism, Hanges contends that the encounters between the colonizers and the colonized are never unidirectional expressions of cultural dominance, but are rather reciprocally dynamic and creative, constantly generating new cultural forms. More than half of Hanges' detailed investigations are devoted to a study of the histories and legends dealing with the founding of colonies, cities, temples, and religious communities in the Hellenistic world. The histories, inscriptions, and foundation legends chronicled by Hanges have led him in this tome of over five hundred pages to interpret the missionary work of the apostle Paul as that of the founding father of Christ-worshiping communities in the Hellenistic world. The thesis postulated by Hanges is that Paul's understanding of his vocation as a missionary and apostle to the Gentiles was profoundly influenced and guided not only by Israel's prophetic tradition, but also by Greek concepts dealing with the figure of the founder of colonies, cities, and religious communities.

In pursuit of his objectives, Hanges offers his readers new translations of and commentaries on a number of key texts in the study of Hellenistic religion. These texts include not only the story of founding the Delian cult of Sarapis, but also the story of the reformation of the house cult of Dionysius in Philadelphia and the revival of the Andaniam Mysteries in Messene by Mnasistratos. New cults could be introduced and established not only by priests such as Apollonios, but also by laymen. The slave Xanthos from Lycia was responsible for the establishment in Attica at Sounion of the cult of Men Tyrannos, the Phrygian god of the moon. Hanges's investigations illustrate how new cults and religions were often established in antiquity by the comings and goings of migrants, just as they are today, when migration has become one of the most important social, political, and religious issue of our times. Today, as in antiquity, migrants never come alone; they bring with them their deities, their traditions, and their cults.

In all of the cases of migrant cults investigated by Hanges, the migrants encountered opposition, both from the natives and local governments. This opposition came to a head when the new religion began to transition from being a cult of resident aliens celebrated in a private home or apartment to an institution that began to attract and incorporate into its celebrations members of the native population. Opposition was also engendered by the public exposure that took place when the members of the cult sought to construct a sanctuary open to the general public or to organize processions through the polis in honor of their deity. The opposition usually came from the leaders of the native cults, who feared the introduction of foreign ideas, rites, and practices in the polis, as well as a loss of income. In antiquity, as today, the maintenance of a cult could often be a highly profitable enterprise. According to Hanges, ancient historians and playwrights, such

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as Euripides, were able to capture in their histories and tragedies the opposition and bigotry directed against immigrants in the Greek world.

In most of the cases documented by Hanges, the invasive cult is eventually accepted, but only after its adaptation of some of the cultural forms and traditions of the native population. Such assimilation was, however, highly selective. Cultural elements of the dominating class were utilized by the dominated as tools of resistance in order to protect the identity of the colonized. Hanges reminds his reader that in most cultural encounters the dominated are in a state of psychological struggle against the dominators. Post-colonial studies indicate that the colonized are not simply empty vessels into which the new cultural values of the conquerors are poured. Cultural encounters are a two-way street in which both sides are challenged in ways that produce innovations and new self and group identities. There is, according to Hanges, no such thing as cultural purity or impermeability. Hanges states that all efforts to produce a cultural or ecclesiastic repristination are destined to end in failure, as happened in the revival of the Andaniam Mysteries. Cultural boundaries are altogether too fuzzy for repristination to work, either in ancient Greece or in the twenty-first century. Repristinizing individuals and groups unconsciously float back and forth over the boundaries that separate the idealized past and the present reality. Repristination, instead of recreating an ideal past, usually winds up by generating new cultural forms. In other words, no cultural form is pure; all cultural forms are hybrids.

Hanges avers that in order to defend themselves from their critics, the members of new religions would attempt to show that their sacred laws (*lex sacra*) were in agreement with the moral code of the native religions. Most cultic communities in the Hellenic world had written constitutions or bylaws that detailed the moral standards to which the members of the cult were to conform. These bylaws describe, for example, proper dress, hairstyles, sexual conduct, and the prohibition of magic. In many instances, a cult's written constitution was inscribed upon a stele at the entrance to the temple. Upon entering the sanctuary, the devotee placed his hand upon the stele to show his conformity to the bylaws. This common practice has led Hanges to believe that Paul's churches also had their constitutions or written bylaws. Hanges believes that one can discover how such bylaws are reflected in Paul's Corinthian correspondence. By following these written bylaws, the members of Paul's congregations could demonstrate to their critics that their cultic community was indeed a new creation. According the Hanges, the Greek word for church and the term "new creation" are in the authentic letters of Paul references to the local congregation and never to the Church Universal. The founding of a new cultic community is a new creation that concerns the apostle. The bringing into being of such a "new creation" involves "trans-culturation"—the choosing of elements of the old culture and the incorporation of the new. The thesis pursued by Hanges in his study is that Paul organized his churches in much the same way that other religious

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founders organized cult institutions dedicated to the worship of their imported deities. Paul's primary model was not the diaspora synagogue or a heavenly model revealed to him directly by the Holy Spirit, but rather a contextualization of the Hellenic model of the foundation of new cults.

It is the contention of Hanges that Paul's missionary strategy made use of a well-established cultural pattern that used the motif of the divine selection of the founder and the founder's role as conservator of tradition to validate the new cult's existence. The appropriation of this Greek convention by immigrant groups turns out to be one of the creative strategies in carrying the worship of the Lord to unknown regions. Thus, Paul's founding of churches conformed to a pattern well known in antiquity. Hanges, however, in disagreement with other scholars, insists that Paul was not the founder of the cult. The worship of Christ by communities of believers already existed when Paul received his call. Paul's mission was to transfer the cult across cultural boundaries and establish Christ-worshiping communities.

Hanges, Associate Professor of Comparative Religion at Miami University, Ohio, studied under Hans Dieter Betz at the University of Chicago. His treatise is by no means an easy read. Obscure technical terms abound; at least a third of his investigation consists of footnotes in rather small print. The price of the volume will most likely drive the potential reader to a well-stocked theological library, rather than to a bookstore. The author assumes that his readers are well versed in the area of comparative religions and especially in the cultural and religious history of ancient Greece and her colonies. He likewise assumes that his readers know something about the academic debates between the old History of Religions School and its detractors. On many issues, Hanges tends to think that the detractors have gone too far in trying to defend the uniqueness of Paul, his missionary methods, and his churches. Hanges's theoretical pendulum, for one, seems to be swinging back in the direction of understanding Paul in light of the Hellenistic context of his missionary endeavors. Hanges's very detailed, profound, and insightful treatise is worth studying both by historians interested in Hellenism and the Early Church and also by those involved in the cross-cultural communication of Christianity. His conclusions are bound to educate, challenge, and perhaps infuriate his readers.

My primary interest in this review has been based not so much on the study of antiquity or of Hellenism as on the implications of Hanges's theses for Christian mission today. For that reason, I would really have preferred that Hanges discuss the hundreds of Christian communities that were not founded by apostles like Paul, such as those established in Egypt, northern Africa, Babylon, or the northern Anatolian communities addressed in the First Epistle of St. Peter. Migrants must have been involved in the founding of these Christ-worshiping communities. Most of these founder figures were not apostles like Paul, but rather Spirit-filled laymen and women like Priscilla and Aquila who, like Apollonios and Xanthos, carried the worship of their God across cultural frontiers and founded new cultic communities.

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Perhaps more so than at any time in the past two thousand years, the fulfillment of the Great Commission will involve not only a mission to the migrants but a mission *by* the migrants that will impact and transform our own stagnant communities of faith.

Rudy Blank

THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN LUTHERAN EXPERIENCE IN 1950s JAPAN: Stepping Up to the Cold War Challenge. By Kate Allen and John E. Ingulsrud. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. 313 pages. Hardcover. $100.00.

At the outset it is helpful to identify the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC), which is the focus of this book. The ELC, established in 1917, was known until 1946 as the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NLCA). The NLCA had itself been formed from a merger of the Hauge Synod (established 1876), the Norwegian Synod (established 1853), and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (established 1890). In 1960, the ELC joined with the "old" American Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church to form the American Lutheran Church (ALC or sometimes TALC).

It is also useful to briefly review the historical background. In late 1945, following World War II, General Douglas McArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Power (SCAP), issued a call for missionaries to come to Japan. In the years following, missionaries arrived, first by the dozens and then by the hundreds. By 1950, there were about 1,500 missionaries representing many denominations. Though the war was over, the political situation in the Far East was far from stable. There was concern about the intentions of the Soviet Union. Concurrently, in 1949 the People's Republic of China was established, and in June 1950 the Korean War broke out. As a result, there was a concern about how long there would be a window of opportunity—probably ten years—to engage in outreach work in Japan.

And so, with a sense of urgency, like many other church bodies, the ELC responded by sending five missionaries in 1950. By 1955, "the ELC placed 46 missionaries (25 married couples and 21 single missionaries)" (25). As in the case of other denominations, some were missionaries who had been displaced from China.

Since many of these first missionaries were children of Norwegian immigrants, in chapter 2 the authors describe how these first arrivals adapted to life in the United States, particularly in what is called the Upper Midwest. A sign of assimilation was the decision to drop the word "Norwegian" from the name of the denomination (NALC), calling it rather the ELC.

Chapter 3 focuses on the emerging interest of those within the ELC to engage in mission activity, especially in distant lands, sparked largely by the stories shared by furloughing missionaries (102). There was a growing understanding that all

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Christians are called to be missionaries, either by personal involvement or by support of those sent.

Drawing from letters, memoirs, reports, periodicals, and a variety of other documents, as well as interviews, in chapters 4, 5, and 6, the authors describe the missionaries' "encounter" with Japan. The missionaries—and their spouses and children—attempted to communicate in a language very different from their own and also difficult to learn. They dealt with living in a culture that was not "European"—and showed few signs of becoming "Westernized." They tried to find ways to relate to the Japanese people that would open doors to sharing the Gospel. The response was slow in coming, and converts were few. These early missionaries to Japan were compelled to question the assumptions that undergirded approaches that other missionaries had employed earlier and elsewhere during the age of colonialism. By 1955, the missionaries were eager to develop new strategies. "Establishing an indigenous church that was self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing became an undisputed goal" (210).

Beginning in 1951, a new and effective means of outreach was the radio broadcast of "The Lutheran Hour," produced by the LCMS in and for Japan, consisting of drama, classical music, and devotions. Included was the offer of what proved to be a very successful Bible correspondence course. By 1955, most of the Lutheran mission entities in Japan embraced and supported this ministry. The authors write: "By far, the most successful way of promoting the Lutheran Church in Japan was the Lutheran Hour radiobroadcasts" (196).

In the final chapter, entitled "Interpreting the Experience," the authors seek to elicit lessons learned by the first missionaries to Japan and to point out their relevance for missionary endeavors today. Key is the fact the "enculturation or cultural integration is an inescapable issue for mission" (266).

The authors introduce the "Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity," proposed by Milton Bennet, in which a person moves through six stages, ending with "integration." The challenge facing the missionary is to broaden "the scope of enculturation while holding to a Christian identity" (270). Introducing the term "contested culture," the authors discuss the challenges faced in learning a different language and engaging in intercultural communication.

The authors then point out the significance of narrative as a way to discover meaning in one's life experiences. "The most common narrative frame is the *Bildungsroman,*" which "is a story with a trajectory to something positive" (275). The missionaries interviewed, though aware of many "should haves" and "shouldn't haves," ultimately did find meaning in what they did.

The next section deals with "the identities of consciousness" (279), that is, coming to grips with reality of a situation. It is to acknowledge that "a missionary can become the presence of God to others," in spite of shortcomings and failures

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(279). The authors conclude: "This kind of identity we suggest is a Christian response to the condition of liminality, to lost opportunities, and to demonstrate integrity, as well as to express communion with others" (279).

In the final section, the authors reflect on identifying with God's mission. Drawing from Bevans and Schroeder,[1] the authors conclude:

> What then are the implications for this newer post-Enlightenment thinking? First of all, those who had a strong sense of missionary call are no more privileged than those who felt called "as I am" or even those who felt it was "the thing to do." Second, if every Christian is seen to be a missionary, the "commissioning" is moved from a rite in the manner of ordination to the sacrament of baptism, for in that rite everyone is called to be a missionary (286).

It is this last chapter that every person considering becoming a missionary in a cross-cultural setting or preparing to do so should be encouraged, if not compelled, to read. The lessons learned from the experiences of those first ELC missionaries to Japan are relevant today.

On a more personal note: I am acquainted with many of the missionaries mentioned in the book, having met them in Japan; in fact, I know some of them quite well. In 1978, I had Olaf Hansen, the first ELC missionary in Japan, as a professor while I attended graduate school at Luther Seminary.

Reading the book compelled me to reread *The Japan Mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, a booklet (88 pages, 8½ x 11, single-spaced) written by Richard H. Meyer in 1996. He was one of the first LCMS missionaries assigned to work in Japan. He and his family arrived in Tokyo in December 1948, upon evacuation from China. It well describes the opportunities and challenges facing the LCMS missionaries during the 1950s. Noteworthy is the fact that their experiences parallel those of the ELC missionaries during that same time frame. This document, too, is worth reading.

One final comment: The authors, Kate Allen and John Ingulsrud, are a married couple. John is the son of Lars and Selma Ingulsrud, who arrived in Japan in 1952 as ELC missionaries. Kate and John relocated from China to Japan in the mid-1990s. Kate is professor in the School of Global Japanese Studies at Meiji University, and John is professor in the School of Humanities at Meisei University, both in Tokyo.

James J. Vehling, Missionary to Japan (1966–1979, 1986–1993)

Endnotes

[1] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. American Society of Missiology Series, no. 30 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 299.

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Sermon

I Will Build My Church

Matthew 16:13-18
Chapel Sermon by Rev. William Utech

MNS Collaborate Conference, St. Louis, MO
January 20, 2016

Goal: that the hearers believe more firmly that Jesus uses them to build His church.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"I will build my church," Jesus says. And from my rather short, yet very intense time as a Mission Executive, I've learned that we leaders in the church typically hear those words in one of two ways. Jesus promises, "I will build my church," and we hear that as freedom FROM God's Mission, or we hear that as freedom FOR God's Mission.

Those who hear it as freedom FROM God's Mission think, "Great! Jesus is promising to do it all! I'll preach the pure Word and correctly administer the Sacraments and if anything good comes from it, it will be ALL His doing! It's His promise, it's His Mission, it's His responsibility, there's nothing left for me to do . . ."

Those who hear these words as freedom FOR God's Mission think, "Great, I have been blessed with significance! I get to make a difference in eternal matters! I will invest the best I have in this promise, in this Mission, in my Heavenly Father's family business, and if anything good comes from it, it will be ALL His doing! It's His promise, it's His Mission, and WOOT! WOOT! I get to play a part in it!"

"I will build my church," Jesus says. How do you hear those words?

Tom Brown was born to be a church planter. After successfully planting one new congregation in Ham Lake, MN and another in Chaska, MN, he was called by

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one of our Minnesota South congregations to plant a brand-new congregation in St. Peter, MN—a community in which there is no LCMS presence whatsoever.

St. Peter is also the home of Gustavus Adolphus College, a large ELCA university that currently has an enrollment of almost 2,500 undergraduates. Gustavus Adolphus is the primary employer in St. Peter, MN, which has a population of only around 11,500.

St. Peter, much like Gustavus Adolphus itself, is outspokenly liberal in just about every way you can imagine, especially when it comes to the trendy topics. In this place, if you're not in favor of the newest, most non-traditional views of marriage, family, gender roles, and the like, you're simply not going to be a player in the community. Ever since my first visit to St. Peter, I could not shake the impression that a dark spiritual pall hung over that city and that it was a good thing that we were working to plant a truly confessional congregation in that place.

Then the problems started. . . The new church (that took the name River of Life Lutheran) started as a Bible study meeting in Tom's home. It soon outgrew that venue, however, and needed to find a larger space. Tom went to the area public schools, like many church planters will do, and asked if his new congregation could rent space there. Every single public school in St. Peter either refused to rent him room, or offered space to do so at such a ridiculously high rent that it made it impractical for the new congregation to sign a lease.

Tom went to the president of Gustavus Adolphus and asked if the new congregation could rent space there. The President told him no—twice! He said that Tom and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod were too narrow in matters of doctrine and practice to "fit" on that campus.

Tom finally found a place—a local museum—that would let him and River of Life in their back room. It was a space that could hold up to 60 people, and in six months, River of Life outgrew it. Also, in that time, the original deal for renting that facility shot from $50 per week to $500 per week.

But Tom is a church planter. He has a heart for lost people and a heart for the St. Peter community. And he's creative! One of the members of his congregation owns a flower shop, and so what did Tom do? He volunteered his time at the flower shop the entire week before Valentine's Day. Hundreds of people entered and exited that shop throughout the course of that week, and Tom met them all! And his new church continued to grow. Now they were up to 70 in worship and had hit a ceiling of sorts. There was no space in that town that they could afford to rent! No place for them to go!

But Tom is a church planter, and in his moving about the community he had gotten to know the young lady who was the director of the local Good Samaritan

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retirement community. He offered to be a chaplain for anybody in that facility that ever needed a pastor. Tom and this woman got to know, like, and trust each other.

Next door to this Good Samaritan retirement community sat a Good Samaritan forty-bed nursing home on seven acres of land. Good Samaritan was getting out of the nursing home business in St. Peter and was in the process of relocating the residents in that facility. The woman at the retirement center knew the building and lot would soon be going on sale; and so, all on her own, she contacted the Good Samaritan home office in Iowa and told them about Tom and about River of Life.

A month or so later, Tom got a phone call from the man who manages all of Good Samaritan's properties. He said he had heard about River of Life's need for a building. He said that the nursing home and the property it sat on had an assessed value of $1.6 million. He said he would sell it to Tom for $800,000. Tom gulped and then called me. I gulped too! It was being offered to us at well below market value, but there's no way we could saddle a new church of 70 people with an $800,000 mortgage and the upkeep and maintenance of a large building! We had to tell the man, "Thanks, but no thanks."

River of Life continued to limp along over the next number weeks, but because they had no space, they pretty much stopped growing. They were becoming disheartened and were beginning to lose momentum. Out of the blue, the Good Samaritan man phoned up Tom once again. He was willing to sell the building and lot to us for $300,000. Tom and I gulped in unison. This was something we had to pay attention to! So we called a meeting of members from the Minnesota South Missions Committee and Finance Committee and for three straight hours we pro-d and con-d this proposal half to death and in the end, I believe, consecrated common sense reigned. Even though it was tempting, there was no way we could saddle a congregation of 70 souls with a $300,000 mortgage.

Tom is a church planter. His heart was broken by this decision. He knew that if he didn't find space for River of Life to meet in soon the opportunity for the congregation to grow and flourish in that community would soon pass. So upset was he that he came to my next Missions Committee meeting and poured his heart out. Distraught over the idea of having to fold up the mission church and walk away, he stuck around after the meeting. That's when he and I and another colleague sat down, closed the office door, held hands and prayed that God would make a way for River of Life. We were all at our wits end. There were no next steps. There was no Plan B.

And then Tom got into his car and headed back to St. Peter. Twenty minutes later, I walked out of my office to see Tom Braun sitting in our waiting area. "What are you doing back here?" I asked. "If you want to pray some more, that's fine, but I think God heard us the first time."

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Tom said, "You need to sit down and listen to this." With that, he opened up and played a voicemail message that he had on his cell phone. It was the Good Samaritan property guy from Iowa. The Good Samaritan Board had just met and had decided to give the nursing home property in St. Peter to the Minnesota South District and River of Life Lutheran Church.

Two months later, River of Life held its first public worship service in its new building. One hundred seventy-five people showed up. The picture below is a picture from that event. It's captioned, "Jesus is building His church," and that's exactly what is happening.

Brothers and sisters, Tom is a church planter, and God used him to do this! Seeing this, knowing the full story behind it, having been personally involved in it, I am reminded that we are never, ever, in mission alone. Rather the Savior, who saves us from sin and secures our place as sons and daughters of the King, is the same Savior who honors us and blesses us by including us in the Family business of building His church. He used a church planter named Tom to do this. He will use you too.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

† † †

Jesus is building His church

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Lutheran Mission Matters Call for Papers
Issue on Science, Technology, and the Gospel—Nov. 2016

Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

The November 2016 issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* will discuss how and why science and technology affect the life and witness of the Christian Church. The issue will be a kind of "roundtable" where topics or viewpoints that may be difficult to discuss are faced with honesty, integrity, and faith. We invite you to take part in this important roundtable by submitting an article on a topic of your choice.

The mission of the Church today includes a witness that discerns and engages today's world in its most influential features. Science and technology certainly are among these features. Their impact on the global economy alone make them influential. But their reach into so many lives—in the home, in education, in healthcare, in agriculture, in communications, and in travel—means that their influence is pervasive and inescapable. They raise important questions for carrying out the Christian mission:

- How has this situation shaped the identity and purpose of the Church?
- "Science" and "religion" are often portrayed in conflict. How accurate is this picture? How does this picture (no matter how accurate) affect today's Christian mission?
- Evangelism and service go hand in hand. How have Christians used scientific findings and technological advances to show love through service and aid? What lessons might they have for us today?
- Advances in information technology are among today's most important developments. How do they affect the Church's life and witness? How might the Church apply them faithfully in her life and witness?

Please consider this critical theme and prayerfully consider contributing to our conversation on it. We would gladly discuss article ideas with you. And please alert anyone you think who might be interested. "Encountering Missions" and book reviews are also welcome. The submission deadline is August 31, 2016.

Thank you very much for considering this proposal. Kindly send your ideas and essays to Dr. Joel Okamoto, editor of the Science, Technology, and the Gospel issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* to okamotoj@csl.edu. You may also address your questions to the journal editor Victor Raj at rajv@csl.edu.

Cordially in Christ,
Joel P. Okamoto

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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 (http://lsfm.global). Click on the Publications link to view PDFs of previous issues for free.

Book reviews: LSFM also welcomes book reviews. Submit reviews of no more than 500 words. E-mail Dr. Joel Okamoto (okamotoj@csl.edu) if interested in writing a review.

Mission Statement

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.

Preparation and Submission

Length: Concise, clear articles are preferred. Manuscripts should not be more than 3,000–4,000 words although longer pieces may be assigned by the editor.

Content: Lutheran Mission Matters is committed to addressing both pastors and people and involving them in the theology and practice of mission. Use of terms or phrases in languages other than the language of the article itself is discouraged. The use of complex and long sentences is discouraged. Attention should be paid to paragraphing so that the article is easy to follow and appears inviting on the page.

Use of call-outs: Lutheran Mission Matters frequently uses call-outs to break up blocks of text on a page and to emphasize important points being made in the article. The author is invited to use Word's Text Highlight Color to suggest words or phrase that may be included in a call-out. The final decision will be made by the layout editor.

Format: Please submit articles in single spaced Times New Roman 10-point font with 0.25" paragraph indents.

Submission: Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to Professor Victor Raj, rajv@csl.edu. A submission requires that all material has been carefully read and properly noted and attributed. Articles that are inadequately documented will be returned for complete documentation. The author thereby assumes responsibility for any necessary legal permission for materials cited in the article. If the article has been previously published or presented in a public forum, please inform the editor of the details at the time the article is submitted.

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Additional Submission Information

Bio: Authors should provide, along with their submissions, an autobiographical description. Please write 2-3 sentences introducing yourself. Please include your title(s) you would like LMM to use, the form of your name you want to be known as. Tell your present position and/or your education or experience that qualifies you to write the article. If you have a head-shot photo that you would like to provide, we will try to use it. Please include the email address at which a respondent could reach you.

Abstract: Please provide up to a one-hundred-word synopsis of your article. The abstract will serve as the first paragraph to provide the reader with the basic intent and content of the article.

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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.

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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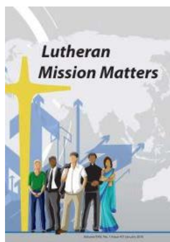

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